

**Teaching on the margins: An exploration of teachers' lived experiences,
identity and agency in public-private partnership schools in Pakistan**

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1. Introduction

Over the decades, while progress has been made in universalizing the right to education, education systems worldwide are still struggling to provide quality education, address equity concerns, train and retain qualified teachers. In response, governments have increasingly turned towards education public-private partnerships (ePPPs), as part of a broader reform agenda to leverage private finance and management practices, driven by New Public Management (NPM) logics into public schooling systems (Patrinos et al., 2009; Ginsburg, 2012; Robertson & Verger, 2012). Support for PPPs is underscored by the belief that the private sector is inherently more efficient, cost-effective, and accountable than the state, especially in delivering “quality education for all” (Bano, 2008; Verger & Moschetti, 2017).

However, the cost-saving and efficiency logics that govern the private sector have critical implications when applied to the provision of public services. In the case of teachers this may include outsourcing, contractual hiring, lower salaries, performance-based incentives, increased surveillance, de-unionizing, overall leading to a de-professionalization of the teaching profession (Ball & Youdell, 2008). This is especially problematic given that teachers are the single most important school related factor affecting students’ learning outcomes.

The precarious working conditions that PPPs tend to create not only affect teachers’ working conditions but also their professional identities, sense of agency, and day-to-day lived experiences. In the context of these reforms, Stephen Ball (2003) says, “The novelty of this epidemic of reform is that it does not simply change what people, as educators, scholars, and researchers do, it changes who they are.”

1.1. Problem Statement

In Pakistan, ePPP programs have been the cornerstone of government education policy at both the federal and provincial levels to meet the earlier Education for All (EFA) and current SDG 4 goals (Ansari, 2024; Rind & Shah, 2022; Bano, 2008). In 2024, the provincial government in Punjab launched one of the largest ePPP programs in the country which was met with widespread protests

and strikes by government teachers and their unions as it posed a direct threat to their livelihoods. The program was contentious enough that it was challenged in one of the country's high courts as violating the constitutional provision for free education (Sheikh, 2024). However, the case was dismissed and the program has continued to expand with another one launched targeting public schools in urban areas, just as government teachers continue to resist it (Shirazi, 2026). This rapid expansion without addressing and exploring its effects on a key stakeholder (teachers) emphasizes the need for research such as this study to understand how teachers experience working conditions in PPP schools, how it affects their identity and what avenues do they have within the school apparatus to practise agency.

It is important here to make the distinction that the teachers who are protesting these programs, are government teachers, inducted into service through the civil service program and so receive regulated salaries, permanent contracts and benefits such as pensions. When PPP programs are introduced, these teachers are either displaced or replaced. These government teachers are not the same teachers who get inducted into these programs, instead the PPP programs usually hire teachers from the private sector whose salary and other contract conditions fall out of the government's regulatory purview. This research focuses on exploring the experiences of the latter as a way to understand what it is about these programs that makes those outside of them resist them so strongly.

While there is a body of literature on ePPPs most of it is focused on understanding the effects of ePPP programs on students' learning outcomes, equity and access. Relatively little of this literature focuses on teachers, specifically in the context of the Global South. Additionally, most of this literature focuses more on the policy implications and outputs of PPPs in the context of students. And although the literature does acknowledge the issue of teachers' working conditions, it does not engage with the implications of these for the profession as a whole or what Stephen J. Ball (2003) calls, "the teacher's soul" (p.217).

1.2. Research objectives and question

Based on this, the study has four main objectives:

1. Examine how the working conditions produced by PPP programs in Pakistan are experienced by the teachers who work within them.
2. Understand how these working conditions and experiences shape teachers' professional identities.
3. Identify and analyse the forms of agency teachers exercise in navigating their working conditions.
4. Expand the literature on PPPs by contributing teacher-centered, qualitative research on the effects of PPPs from a Global South context.

These objectives are pursued by using New Public Management (NPM) as the theoretical lens through which the study understands the working conditions in PPP schools and the way teachers are affected by and respond to them, while the four conceptual tools used are: working conditions, lived experience, identity and agency. This study specifically focuses on agency because in much of the literature on privatization and its effects on education, teachers are framed as victims or passive recipients of policy and reform. However, given how teachers have historically mobilized, this is not necessarily reflective of their realities, which is why, beyond experiences and identity formation, this study also focuses on how teachers engage with and navigate around these reforms. Based on this, the main research question is:

How do working conditions in PPP schools in Pakistan shape teachers' lived experiences and professional identities, and how do teachers use their agency to navigate these conditions?

1.3. Structure of the thesis

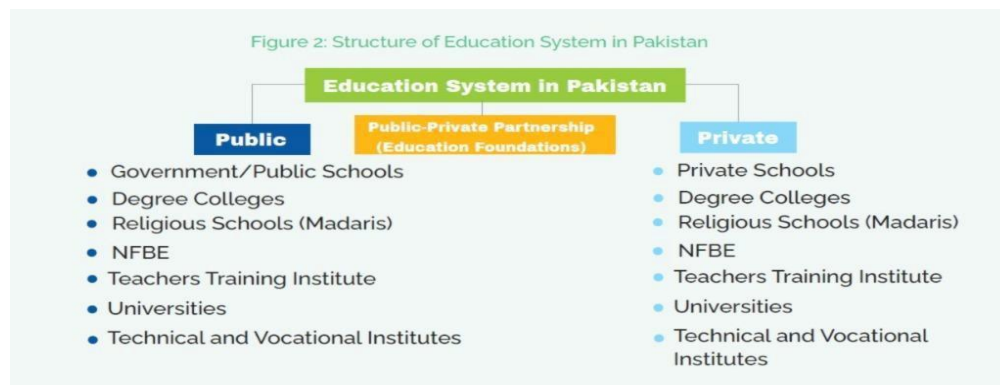
The thesis is structured as follows: Chapter 2 sets out the Pakistani education policy context, situating the study within the recent expansion of education PPPs. Chapter 3 develops the theoretical framework, establishing NPM as the lens through which the study understands teachers' working conditions and their subjective effects. Chapter 4 develops the conceptual framework, defining the four concepts: working conditions, lived experience, identity, and agency and the

relationships between them. Chapter 5 reviews the literature on teachers in PPP arrangements and establishes the gap the study addresses. Chapter 6 sets out the methodology including the data analysis process. Chapter 7 presents the findings across four themes. Chapter 8 discusses these findings in context with the literature and Chapter 9 draws out the study's contribution, before the conclusion reflects on the study's implications and limitations.

2. Context

2.1. Pakistan's Education System

There are currently 26 million OOSC in the country, and the learning poverty rate is 21% higher than the average for the South Asia region (PES, 2024; World Bank, 2024). Additionally, Pakistan's education system is deeply unequal, with research showing greater inequality based on geographic location, household income, and gender (Rind & Malik, 2023). The public education system specifically has been characterized by mismanagement, lack of funding and resources, leading to a parallel private education system emerging, which is financed and managed by various entities, including for-profit organizations, NGOs, international development organizations, and religious groups.



Source: Pakistan Education Statistics Report (PES), 2024

Due to debt servicing, double-digit inflation, and high military spending, Pakistan has struggled to divert funding into the education sector. Currently, Pakistan spends only 1.5% of its GDP on education, which is below the globally recommended figure of 4-6% (PES, 2024). Faced with these challenges, the state has focused on leveraging private sector finance and expertise into the public sector as a solution (Caleiro, 2023; Bano, 2008). This has allowed PPP programs to thrive as a dominant policy instrument to the extent that PPP schools have a category of their own within official government documents, as the figure above shows.

2.2. PPPs in Pakistan

Before 2010, education was a federal subject in Pakistan, with administrative, financial, and curriculum-related decision-making taking place in the Center. This caused substantial issues as education policies enacted at the national level, when transferred to the provinces, were unable to meet the diversity of local social, financial, and linguistic needs. In 2010, changes in the constitution occurred that both held the state responsible for the provision of education and made it easier for the provinces to direct their own education policy (Barón et al., 2023, p. 23).

The 18th amendment was passed which devolved education from a federally administered subject to a provincial one. Decentralization gave provinces more autonomy over fund allocation and decision-making on how to manage the specific set of challenges faced by education in their regions. Under Article 25-A the state was made responsible for the provision of free and compulsory education to children between 5 and 16 years old.

Against this backdrop, since 2010, provinces such as Punjab and Sindh (where the geographical sites of this study are based) have institutionalized PPPs in their education systems through foundations like the Punjab Education Foundation, Sindh Education Foundation, etc (Rind and Shah, 2022). Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), though more recently, has made a similar contentious move towards PPPs by outsourcing 4000 government schools to private operators (Yousafzai, 2025). While PPP programs exist in Balochistan too, the geography of the region, and supply and demand side constraints mean that these are small-scale and fragmented.

2.3. PPP Modalities

Within the broader landscape of PPP modalities in education, which range from infrastructure partnerships to industry partnerships, this study focuses specifically on PPPs for the delivery of core schooling services. Verger and Moschetti (2017) identify this type of PPP as being “at the center of the education for development agenda” (p. 04). Under this PPP model, the state contracts private entities to deliver education through different modes and at varying levels.

The most common PPP programs in Pakistan operate on either the voucher model, subsidised private education, or private operation of public schools. A few examples are the Education

Voucher Scheme (EVS) and the New School Program (NSP) in Punjab, and the Foundation Assisted Schools (FAS) program, which has been operational in Sindh and Punjab since 2005. While the EVS program offers students in poverty-dense areas tuition redemption vouchers, the FAS program provides subsidies to existing private schools for student enrollment, and under the NSP, the government partners with entrepreneurs and NGOs to establish schools in areas with no government school nearby.

All three of the above programs were established before 2010; however, as Pakistan's education woes persisted and the establishment of the SDGs in 2015 created additional pressure, a new PPP modality emerged loosely structured around the Charter School models prevalent in Global North states like the United States. Under this new modality, the state outsources the complete management of government schools to private operators. Initially, NGOs were the preferred operators for this model because their non-profit status aligned with the state's local and international commitments to providing free education. Additionally, their existing community presence, such as the The Citizens Foundation's (TCF) flagship schools¹ reduced setup costs, and international development actors such as the World Bank and ADB actively promoted NGO involvement as a way to soften the neoliberal privatisation optics (Bano, 2008).

While the state retains ownership and control over the curriculum of these schools, all other operations are contracted out under performance-based agreements. Subsidies are also tied to meeting KPIs such as student performance in annual quality assurance tests (QAT). This model is distinct from the voucher and subsidy-based models discussed before because, within this, the private operators are accountable to the state while also being directly in control of the day-to-day operations of the school including teacher hiring, contracts and salaries. Built on NPM logics, this system creates unequal power dynamics because, despite state involvement in these programs at the macro-level, it does not extend to teacher contracts or the day-to-day school management. Additionally, compared to the charter school systems of the Global North, the frameworks regulating these schools are severely underdeveloped, the per-child subsidies are low, and the operators are not necessarily education specialists.

¹ TCF is a prominent non-profit in Pakistan that works to provide quality education to children in low-resource contexts. Its Flagship schools are purpose built campuses completely owned, and operated by TCF to provide high-quality subsidized education to underprivileged children.

In 2015, Sindh introduced the Education Management Organisation (EMO) program, which was developed by the newly established PPP node in the School Education and Literacy Department (SELD). Under this program, schools are contracted out through a competitive bidding process, while the government retains the land and buildings. The operators include NGOs, higher education institutes and established private school chains. Interestingly, the EMO program was built on Sindh's adopt-a-school program (AASP) from 1998, which followed a lighter-touch model in which the government facilitated organisations in improving government schools rather than fully outsourcing their management. Both my fieldwork sites in Sindh operate under the EMO program.

Parallel to the EMO program in Sindh, Punjab launched the Public-School Support Programme (PSSP) in 2016 through the PEF, in which it announced the transfer of 5000 failing primary schools to private operators, most of them NGOs.

2.4. **The PSRP**

In 2024, the prime minister declared an education emergency across Pakistan (The Nation, 2024). Following this, Punjab, with the largest number of OOSC children, launched the Public School Reorganisation Program (PSRP) (ARY News, 2024). The PSRP is the largest and most recent expression of the PPP modality discussed above, with 13, 219 schools to be outsourced across three phases (Sheikh, 2024; Punjab Education Foundation, 2024). Operators are given a nominal per-child subsidy of 650 PKR, which is less than half of the government's per-child expenditure (Gabol, 2024). Teacher salaries also fall well below the minimum wage as they are hired privately under the discretion of the operators and not contracted through the government.

Additionally, while NGOs were the initial and dominant operators under other programs in Sindh and Punjab, under the PSRP, slowly, other operators such as ed-tech firms, education chains and private individuals are also being given limited opportunities (Punjab Education Foundation, 2024). This signals a shift towards for-profit logic, especially since the PSRP does not restrict the operators from charging school fees.

Given this context, when the PSRP was announced, it heralded criticisms from several different sectors but teachers were the loudest since they were also one of the most affected groups. The

Punjab Teachers Association, the Punjab Educators Association, and the Secondary School Teachers Association came together to form the Grand Teachers Alliance, which shut down schools across the country (Shirazi, 2024). They cited concerns about salary cuts, mass layoffs, job insecurity and the quasi-privatisation of education, stating, “We reject the Punjab government’s outsourcing plan as it wants to privatise the schools and put students and teachers in trouble” (Yasin, 2024). Beyond just a reaction to the PSRP, teachers’ resistance is also a direct response to what teachers understand these reforms to mean for their professional lives and job security.

2.5. **Conclusion**

Pakistan’s education system is significantly more complex than the above framing; however, this chapter provides a comprehensive overview of how PPPs have developed and expanded within this system. More specifically, it has shown how NGO-managed public schools operating under performance-based PPP contracts have become the most prevalent and analytically significant PPP arrangement in Punjab and Sindh, and thus the site of this research. Finally, this chapter highlights how the evolution of these programs is informed by the logics of NPM, which directly shape the conditions under which teachers work.

3. **Theoretical Framework**

3.1. **New Public Management (NPM)**

Hood (1991) introduced the term New Public Management to describe a cluster of administrative reform doctrines characterized by performance targets, output-based controls, disaggregation of public-sector units, the introduction of contracting, cost-effectiveness and the adoption of private-sector management styles. The emergence of partnerships between the public and private sectors, as a third way of conceptualizing governance following the failure of the free-market policies of the 80s, coincided with the carrying over of NPM practices to the public sector to make public services more business-like (Languille, 2018; Ball & Youdell, 2008).

The underlying assumption behind both PPPs as a governance model and the NPM approach is that the state is not efficient nor capable enough to manage public service delivery on its own which is why partnerships with the private sector, and NPM strategies are necessary (Robertson & Verger, 2012). Within the education sector, this dynamic became visible in the late 2000s as donors and governments expressed concerns about how the focus on universal access to primary education had sidelined questions of quality. Given the scale of the challenge these concerns presented, the private sector, with its focus on efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and innovation, was framed as a more competent alternative than the state in addressing them (Languille, 2018).

This overlap between NPM and PPPs is itself worth characterizing because PPP programs can exist without NPM elements; however, given the neoliberal underpinnings of both, they tend to manifest together. Wilkins et al. (2024) account for this by describing NPM and governance models such as PPPs as independent 'rationalities' that come together to "mutually support each other's aspirations" (p. 363). In the case of Pakistan, the manifestation of this joint rationality can be seen in the language and policy configuration of programs like the PSRP, which are framed as targeting 'under-performing schools', 'inefficient resource management', and as a 'cost-saving measure'.

3.2. NPM as a Theoretical Framework

Within this study, NPM is theorized as producing the structural conditions that exist within PPP schools in Pakistan, while also shaping teachers' subjectivities through its pressures on performativity, accountability, and efficiency etc., While NPM reform starts at the macro-level as a change in the management and processes of school systems, it has direct implications for those who receive these reforms at the micro-level.

While not extensively, existing literature on NPM is starting to capture how it affects teachers' working conditions, materially and relationally. To begin with, school management becomes decentralized and localized, leading to schools and their performances being viewed as representations of individual units, rather than a system. Teachers are the most affected by these reforms because, as the primary factor that impacts student and school outcomes, they must reprioritize and change the way they work to accommodate new managerial practices and meet performance targets. Research conducted by Ball and Youdell (2008) on privatisation in and of education shows how the need to “manage” schools under NPM policies leads to a re-culturing of schools wherein, for school managers, it is not important that passionate teachers make a difference in their classrooms, but rather how the school as an individual unit succeeds in meeting performance targets set nationally or district-wise. This creates a culture in which teachers are increasingly evaluated, surveilled, forced into adopting singular teaching pedagogies, and have their knowledge base eroded. Leading to a de-professionalization of the teaching workforce, further exacerbated by the introduction of what Ball and Youdell refer to as “skill mix”, a shift away from a fully qualified teaching staff toward the use of unqualified or contract-based teachers with lower pay and fewer protections.

Beyond the structural dimensions, as previously stated, NPM also reconfigures teachers' subjective experiences. Ball (2003) describes both managerialism and performativity as policy technologies that force teachers to open themselves up to both external and internal regulation in response to targets, indicators, and evaluations. This forces them to set aside personal beliefs about what it might mean to be an ‘effective teacher’ and instead ‘live an existence of calculations’ regarding their performance, pedagogical freedom, and skills. This in effect means that the changes NPM produces in school culture and management practices do not stay at the structural level but enter

how teachers evaluate themselves, what they value about their work, and what they understand teaching to be. It is not just then that in PPP schools, teachers experience contractual precarity or lower salaries; rather, the logics of NPM also reshape how they experience their everyday work, and how they view themselves as professionals.

4. **Conceptual Framework**

4.1. **Working Conditions**

Working conditions in this study are understood as the institutional, contractual, and organisational conditions under which teachers work including their work environment, wages, access to union participation, and job security (Zancajo et al., 2021; Koning, 2018; Falkensjö & Olsson, 2022). The structural drivers of these conditions in PPP schools are discussed in the previous chapter on NPM, and the empirical literature on what they look like in practice is reviewed in Chapter 5. Because these conditions vary across organisational settings and contractual arrangements, this study allows participants to narrate and define working conditions in the specific ways that they experience them rather than predefining them in advance.

4.2. **Lived Experience**

Lived experience, as a conceptual tool, is frequently used in research across the social sciences. However, the context in which it is used, how it is used, and to what end often vary. The primary reason for this is that lived experience is a complex concept that resists definition. In a study analysing 6 years of British Sociological Association journal articles containing ‘lived experience’, Jones (2025) demonstrates how lived experience is enacted differently across multiple sociological domains and research. He argues that because the concept is so vaguely defined, it acts as an effective placeholder for complex, context-dependent realities. Within this framework, lived experience in research becomes a means for researchers to explore how individuals and groups engage with different social and political processes in their lives.

Similarly, in the context of teachers, lived experience tends to be a broad concept that not only covers how teachers experience the objective conditions of their everyday lives, but also the subjective dimensions of these conditions. In this study, lived experience refers to the affective, relational, and interpretive dimensions of how teachers make sense of their working conditions in PPP schools, essentially not just what teachers experience, but also how they engage with these conditions, process and derive meanings from them.

The consideration of an affective and relational dimension to lived experience is important because teaching is a profession that requires consistent emotional engagement and relationship building

with the whole school ecosystem (students, parents, community, management). As Zembylas (2005) argues, emotions are an inextricable dimension of teachers' professional lives. He pushes the idea that emotions are not just psychological states, but rather they are socially and politically constituted experiences that are shaped by what he terms "emotional regimes." According to Zembylas, these regimes are the normative rules embedded within school culture that govern what teachers can feel and express.

This view of emotion as both produced by and productive of social and institutional conditions is important for this study, because teachers' affective responses to their working lives are often tied up with what their workplace allows them to feel, say, or articulate out loud.

4.3. **Identity**

Postmodern approaches to identity conceptualize teacher identity as an ongoing dialogical process (Poole, 2020; Kelchtermans, 2005). In Nicole Mockler's (2011) paper on understanding teacher identity as a practical and political tool, she argues that teachers' professional identity is formed in and through the narratives that form the 'fabric' of teachers' lives. She further explains that teachers' identities are distinct from their 'role', which might include delivering lectures, student assessments etc., Instead, their identity is who they feel they are, e.g., mentor, advocate, etc., and this power to redefine their identity based on their feelings and beliefs about themselves is an important tool in engaging with reform.

Kelchtermans (2005) makes a related argument, which is instrumental in the analysis of this study: teachers' emotional responses to reform are not simply responses to the demands placed on them, but reflections of how those demands threaten their self-understanding or constructed sense of professional identity. Within NPM models, where teachers are highly managed and surveilled (Ball & Youdell, 2008), pressures to deliver scripted lesson plans or be constantly evaluated do not just change what teachers do. Rather, it challenges how teachers understand themselves to be, which activates feelings of doubt, anxiety or guilt that are produced more by structural factors rather than pathological ones.

A teacher might experience constant pressures to "perform" in PPP schools, creating a lived experience of being constantly evaluated, of anxiety and stress, which may contribute to a shift in

their identity. They may not feel like an effective or motivated educator anymore, but instead like a replaceable worker. In this context, then, lived experiences are the feelings and emotions that teachers go through as they experience their working conditions, while identity is what these emotions shape their conceptualizations of themselves to be, ineffective, unmotivated.

4.4. **Agency**

The literature on teachers and policy enactment often tends to frame teachers as passive recipients of policy with limited agency over their own profession lives. However, this research resists that framing by constituting a broader conceptualization of agency that accounts for agency in structurally constrained conditions.

Biesta, Priestly and Robinson (2015) developed an ecological approach in which agency is conceptualized as something that is ‘achieved rather than possessed.’ Agency emerges through teachers’ active engagement with the contexts and conditions within which they work rather than as inherent traits or capacities they bring with them. The ecological view of agency is built on the interplay between agentic capacity, which are teachers’ inherent self-beliefs, values etc, and agentic spaces, which are the contextual conditions, such as role expectations, that govern how teachers can employ these beliefs (Guoyuan, 2020).

Biesta et al (2015) also add a temporal dimension to agency which acknowledges that agency operates across time, drawing on past experiences, present conditions and future goals. This temporal framing of agency is especially relevant to this research as teachers' decisions to work or stay at a school and/or investments in their professional identities are built on combinations of past realities, future goals and current lived experiences.

In their research on policy work in schools, Ball et al (2011) have put forward a typology of policy actors who respond to and interact with policy in different ways. Within this typology, teachers are seen as agentic beings: policy actors who play a crucial role in translating, advocating for or resisting reforms through their everyday practice. Additionally, they make an interesting observation which feeds into Biesta et al’s (2015) framing of ecological agency which is that policy technologies and their ‘authoritative interpretations’ also do not apply uniformly across schools so “teachers are subjected differently and act differently” (Ball et al, 2011). Junior/new teachers in a

school might experience policy very differently from older experienced ones and thus may also respond differently in accordance with their own conceptualization of their agency.

For this study, agency is understood to be broad and malleable. It includes action-oriented forms such as voice in decision making, pedagogical autonomy, collective action etc., but also more discursive forms of agency that engage with *how* teachers narrate themselves and their working conditions. This is especially important in qualitative-interview based research such as this study wherein how teachers reframe, defer or manage what they say or do not say is as substantive as the action-oriented forms.

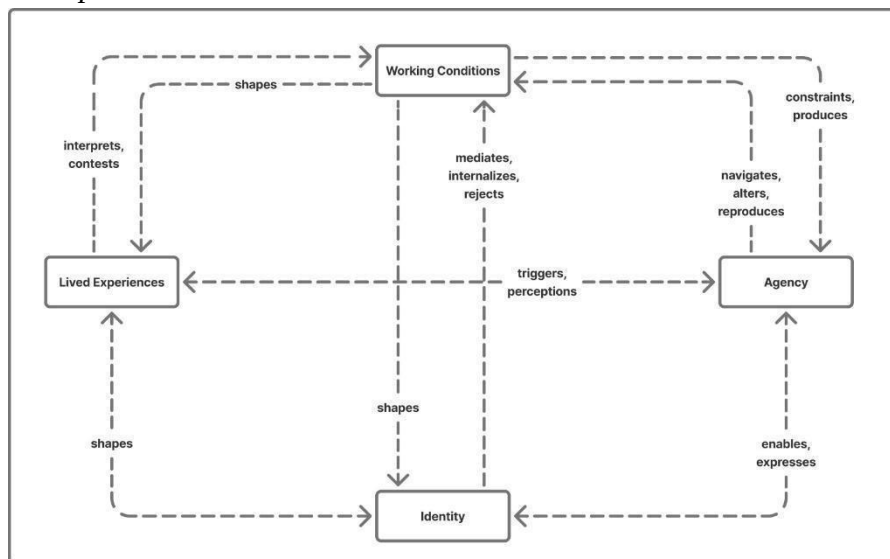
4.5. **Connecting the Concepts**

The research question driving this study asks, “How do working conditions in PPP schools in Pakistan shape teachers’ lived experiences and professional identities, and how do teachers use their agency to navigate these conditions?” The research question streamlines these relationships in that conditions shape experience and identity while agency is a tool they use to navigate and in effect alter these conditions. The conceptual framework, however, addresses these relationships more recursively.

Working conditions to a certain extent are the pre-existing structures that govern a school and what teachers receive *as is* when they join a school. However, these conditions are not static, rather they are contested, altered and translated depending on how teachers interact with them. And this act of interaction is driven by the very subjective ways in which teachers experience these conditions and perceive themselves in relation to them. For example, as the findings chapters will explore, teachers in this study draw their sense of professional worth from different sources such as financial compensation, others from student appreciation, relational rewards, or pursuit of a passion and these different perceptions produce markedly different lived experiences of the same material conditions.

Agency also is complicated by the other three concepts because as Biesta et al (2015) establish, agency is something teachers *achieve not receive*. Within this context, agency is not just something teachers use to navigate their working conditions, but rather something they build in response to their working conditions.

Diagram 1
Conceptual Framework



This diagram shows how the four concepts operate as a complex recursive system with each shaping and being shaped by the other with descriptive verbs explaining what these effects look like. Working conditions which are considered as the main influencing factor themselves are contested and translated through teachers' own interpretations and agentic capacity. So while the research question looks at how working conditions shape lived experience and identity and through it teachers' agency in responding to their conditions, it is also open to the idea that working conditions themselves are affected by the other three concepts in different ways.

5. Literature Review

5.1. The PPP Literature Landscape

There is a growing body of literature on PPPs in education that can be classified into three broad categories. Within these categories, most of the literature either focuses on Global North contexts or uses a primarily western lens to analyze and evaluate PPP programs in the Global South. Also

worth noting is that a significant body of this literature is produced by organizations like the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, or through OECD/FCDO/USAID funded projects which have a vested interest in championing PPPs (Languille, 2018).

Table 1
Categorization of PPP Literature

Category	Clusters around
Policy Development and Spread	How PPP models have emerged, been classified and spread across countries, including the political, ideological, and international-organization drivers behind their adoption. (Patrinos & Barrera-Osorio, 2009; Verger & Moschetti, 2016; Languille 2018)
Outcomes and Equity Impacts	The empirical literature on how PPPs affect access/enrollment, learning outcomes, school choice, and educational equity. (Amjad & Macleod, 2014; Ansari 2024; Rind & Shah, 2022)
Governance, Accountability, and Regulation	How PPPs are governed, what regulatory frameworks exist or are proposed, and how accountability is structured in these arrangements (Zancajo et al 2021; Adamson & Taneja, 2025; Roberston & Verger, 2012)

Much of the research in the above categories is not focused on teachers, however, where teachers do appear substantively in the PPP literature (especially in categories 2 & 3), it is primarily through the lens of working conditions.

5.2. Teachers in the PPP Literature: Working Conditions

Before getting into how the literature frames teachers in PPPs, it is worth flagging that much of this literature is not specifically about PPPs or teachers in PPPs. Rather, it is literature on the privatization of education and its effects on teachers with working conditions in PPPs being folded in as one manifestation of privatization. To an extent, this is understandable given that many PPP programs follow the cost-cutting, efficiency models of LFPs. However, given that PPPs are framed as different to privatization due to the partnership angel (Robertson & Verger, 2012; Languille, 2018), it is worth flagging how there are no studies specifically investigating what these partnerships mean in the context of teachers working conditions and experiences.

In recent years, critique on the social and educational inequity dimensions of ePPPs has grown to include teachers' employment conditions. Specifically, they highlight how cost-efficiency imperatives in PPP programs depress teachers' wages, employ underqualified teachers, offer only short-term contracts and restrict unionization (Zancajo et al, 2021; Koning, 2018; Afridi, 2018; Adamson & Taneja, 2025; Ball & Youdell, 2008). This has led to calls for the adoption of a human rights-based approach to assessing PPPs which does not just focus on equity and access concerns for students but also the implications for teachers (Zancajo et al, 2021; Koning 2018).

While not extensively, the literature is also starting to acknowledge the affective dimensions of PPPs on working conditions with Zancajo et al (2021) noting how these dynamics are, "...problematic in terms of teacher wellbeing (which suffers because of lower salaries, lower job security, limited bargaining power, a less stable and collegial work environment, etc.) ... (p.56)" Locatelli (2019) also makes a similar move by discussing how the lack of job security and exclusion from benefits, creates precarity for teachers due to which they experience constant stress and fears of losing their job; affecting their ability to take part in the "social dialogue" of the schools which includes participation in unions and collective bargaining.

Ball and Youdell (2008) are a bit more explicit with this framing by specifically highlighting how privatization in and of education leads to drastic changes in the professional lives of teachers. They show how teachers, as one of the major costs and conduits of education delivery, become the main target when it comes to both cost and productive efficiency. According to them, private providers that operate under NPM logics force teachers to work under increasingly tightly managed schools where they have to follow scripted lesson plans, "teach to the test", and be constantly evaluated based on their performance.

While the works of Koning, Locatelli and Zancajo et al raise questions around how PPPs can be regulated to fulfil states' obligations to teachers in terms of better working conditions, Ball and Youdell go further, directly acknowledging how teachers' very professional lives and identities are altered by the re-culturing of PPP schools under NPM logics. However, the research lacks in telling us exactly what these alterations in teachers' professional lives and identities entail.

The most relevant body of work regarding this is Ball's paper on teachers and performativity under education reform, which without using the terminology of NPM, captures how various facets of it,

such as institutional devolution and performance evaluations, are rapidly ‘reforming’ teachers into the image of the institutes for which they work. This type of research helps put the findings of this study into perspective of how NPM shapes teachers’ lives.

5.3. **The Pakistani Context**

In Pakistan specifically, the literature on PPPs is sparse and the work that does exist focuses more on the effects of PPPs on student learning outcomes, and equity than on other stakeholders such as teachers.

The most significant qualitative study is Afridi’s (2017) doctoral research on female teachers in low-fee private schools, some of which are under a PPP arrangement, such as an education voucher scheme (EVS) or a student-fee subsidy. Her study draws on interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) to examine teachers’ career trajectories, working conditions, and gendered labor market dynamics. While her findings shed light on teachers’ structural/objective conditions in these settings, her analytical framework centers more on teachers’ professional development and place in the labor market rather than on *how* teachers construct their professional identities and interpret these experiences.

Afridi’s (2018), Oxfam report on World Bank-funded PPP schools in Pakistan, documented that 57 percent of teachers in sampled schools had a grade 12 qualification or lower, and about half of the schools reported receiving no teacher training from PEF in the past five years. However, its main focus is equity and quality of education for students while teachers are mainly a data source. Other Pakistani research stops short of the subjective dimensions in similar ways. An evaluation of an education voucher scheme (EVS) in Lahore, Punjab, focuses on its effect on improving access for low-income families (Ansari, 2012), while a realist study of EMOs in Sindh by Rind and Shah (2022) explores the effects of PPPs on improving access and ensuring quality and equity. Even when research like the Oxfam report or Rind and Shah’s study includes teachers through FGDs/interviews, the focus of discussion is school-level dynamics rather than the teachers’ experiences.

Additionally, Pakistan does not yet have the kind of teacher-agency literature that has emerged in some other countries: Chile, for example, where union action and resistance to privatization reform

have led to policies focused on improving working conditions and equalizing teachers' status across the public and private sectors (Zancajo et al., 2021). One reason for this gap is that decades of bans on union in Pakistan has meant that union action is often limited and fragmented. Secondly, perhaps our narrow conceptualizations of resistance to only include action-oriented forms has meant that other acts of resistance by teachers go unnoticed and unacknowledged. This study tries to account for this gap in the literature by engaging empirically with how teachers frame their own agency.

5.4. **The Gap and How this Study Addresses it**

As stated in the introduction chapter, the literature on PPPs is lacking across 4 main areas. Firstly, most of the studies are based in the Global North where the emergence and logics governing ePPPs are distinctly different from the Global South. For example ePPP programs in 'developed' countries like the USA emerged to address issues of school choice and increase competition, while in countries like Pakistan, they were propagated by international organizations (IOs) such as the World Bank for the sake of development (Roberston & Verger, 2012; Languille, 2018). Secondly, the research that does exist is dominated by a narrow, outcome-based approach centered on the policy outputs of ePPPs such as test scores, access, and enrollment (Zancajo et al, 2021) overlooking stakeholders such as teachers. Thirdly, when the literature does focus on teachers, it does so by documenting their working conditions from the outside without engaging with the subjective dimensions of their work. This leaves a critical gap in our understanding of how this reform enacted at the macro-level is *felt* at the micro-level. Fourthly, there is very little literature emerging from Pakistan specifically which focuses on how teachers conceptualize and practice agency within schools.

Accounting for these gaps, especially within the context of the recent boom in privatization in and of education across the Global South with PPPs as a primary policy instrument, this study interpretatively engages with 10 teachers in NGO-operated PPP schools in Pakistan. Specifically, it focuses on how teachers narrate their own experiences, what meaning they derive from it and how they themselves frame the effects of NPM-led PPP arrangements on their working lives. It also investigates how teachers use agency to navigate their working conditions to try to capture what their practice of agency looks like.

6. **Methodology**

6.1. **Study Design**

As established in the literature review chapter, given the dearth of literature on teachers' experiences under PPP regimes, this is an exploratory study which seeks to understand teachers' meaning-making processes and narratives about their own professional lives. The focus here is not on gathering quantitative data, but rather on understanding in depth how teachers in PPP schools in Pakistan experience, interpret, and negotiate their working conditions.

The research is built on a small n- interpretive qualitative study design with a purposively diversified sample across multiple organizational sites. The interpretivist approach is supported by semi-structured interviews as the main data collection tool. This approach allows for the prioritization of subjective meanings and how teachers construct and interpret their social realities within PPP structures. This is especially relevant in the context of NPM, where policy reforms might be enacted, experienced and interpreted differently depending on individual circumstances, institutional contexts and socio-cultural variances.

6.2. **Positionality**

Given the qualitative and reflexive nature of this study, my positionality played a significant part in how the research was designed and the findings interpreted. My interest in teachers, and specifically teachers in PPP schools stemmed from my own prior experience of working as a researcher at an NGO that ran both PPP and low-fee-private schools. Considering that literature and documentation on the mechanics behind teachers' working conditions in PPP schools in Pakistan is practically absent, several of my assumptions about working conditions, specifically the application of NPM as the main theoretical framework are driven by my own prior observations and research at this NGO. I have tried to account for this bias by testing it against what teachers report rather than reading it into their accounts.

My background as a Pakistani and native Urdu speaker assisted me in understanding the context within which certain honorifics or verbal cues were used and applying these in the translation of the interviews. Additionally, my identity as a Muslim helped me interpret the relevance of the religious invocation used by teachers as discussed in theme four.

Insider-outsider dynamics also shaped how teachers engaged with me. Most of the teachers were educated at public institutes, worked and lived in villages on the outskirts of Kasur and Karachi, and were from low to middle income backgrounds. While we shared the same national identity and a common language, my background, specifically studying, living and working in the urban center, fluent in English and now studying at a foreign university, placed me as an outsider, and specifically as someone there to evaluate them.

Despite clarifying that I was a student conducting my masters research, teachers brought these evaluative dynamics into the interviews. Some asked for the interview guide beforehand to prepare, others asked for feedback at the end or questioned whether I had come from the government or the NGO's head office. While I did my best to address these concerns at the start of each interview, I do believe that these dynamics affected how teachers' framed their experiences and identity in the moment. I have tried to account for this in the reflexive memo and log while coding my interviews.

6.3. Data Collection Methods

6.3.1. Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were selected as the primary data collection tool because they align with the study's interpretivist approach and focus on teachers' meaning-making processes. They enable exploration of both objective aspects of teachers' working environments, such as contract type and workload, and how these affect the subjective dimensions of their work which may include their sense of self-efficacy, autonomy, fulfillment. While engaging with these topics, the semi-structured interviews also create space for themes to emerge or for participants to highlight topics and issues that are important to them.

6.3.2. Instruments

The initial data collection plan for this study consisted of three instruments. The first instrument was a document analysis focused on evaluating government policies and NGO documents related to teacher hiring, evaluation, management, etc., The second and primary data collection instrument consisted of one-on-one semi-structured interviews with teachers, while the third one included group interviews with teachers to see if teachers had a collective identity and agency within the PPP school, or if this was broken down to the individual level.

The first instrument had to be replaced with a contextual review as the NGOs showed significant resistance to sharing any internal documents or insights on internal processes, while the government has no publicly available documents specific to PPP teachers' labour rights or working conditions. Instead, in preparation for the fieldwork, a contextual review of media reporting of teachers' and unions' responses to the launch of programs like the PSRP was conducted. While not a formal analytical instrument, this helped identify themes and issues that teachers felt strongly about, such as salary cuts, lay-offs, and performance reviews, which then informed the development of the interview guide.

The third instrument of the original design (group interviews) was removed due to logistical constraints. Most schools in the sample employed only three to four teachers, making it impractical to release all staff simultaneously without disrupting student learning. In addition, interview procedures lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes, and both management and teachers were unwilling to allocate further time during school hours. Conducting sessions after school was also not feasible due to commuting and scheduling limitations.

Given these constraints, the study prioritised in-depth, individual interviews informed by a contextual review.

6.4. Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to bring together a sample that consisted of 10 teachers from 5 schools that came under 3 different NGOs. NGO-operated PPP schools constitute the most prevalent PPP modality in Pakistan and are often justified by policymakers as preferable due to their non-profit status and private sector expertise. As intermediaries between the state and private

managerial practices, NGO run PPP schools provide an analytically relevant site for examining how NPM-driven reform logics are operationalised and translated into teachers' everyday working conditions.

Potential organisations were initially identified through publicly available information, including organisational websites and documents outlining their involvement in PPP programs. Several NGOs were contacted, and access was secured with three operators: one large, established PPP operator (Green), one NGO that worked primarily in health and disaster relief (Blue) but also managed some schools under a PPP program, and one smaller, less prominent NGO (Red) that was identified through participant referral.

Two of the NGOs were contacted and recruited through cold emails and calls at the contact information provided on their websites while prior work with one organisation facilitated access to schools but not in participant selection within schools.

Including PPP schools under different types of management created a more diversified sample which captured variations in management practices/ethos and allowed the analysis to explore how these affect teacher experiences. Specifically, schools managed by Blue operate within a slightly different PPP modality in which the PPP operator retains some existing government staff under government contracts so that government- and NGO-contracted teachers work side by side under the same roof but on entirely different terms.

6.5. **Participants**

While institutional variation provides a more diverse sample, the primary unit of analysis is the teacher. Two teachers were interviewed at each of the five schools, and all of the participants were female, not by design but reflective of the gendered composition of these workplaces, where teaching staff are predominantly women. As the research focuses on capturing a range of lived experiences, the participant selection criteria were intentionally broad. Teachers were required to have worked at their current school for a minimum of six months and in the education sector for at least one year. This criterion was designed to ensure that participants had sufficient exposure to the school's management practices and were meaningfully integrated into the teaching community.

However, despite prior communication, on the days of the interviews, in two of the five schools, one of the two participants had not yet completed six months at the institution. In some cases, this was due to high staff turnover or limited teacher availability. In most cases, the administration was transparent about sending in teachers who were available/could be spared at the time, reflecting practical constraints.

Additionally, while I had initially intended to interview only teachers employed by the PPP operators, when I went to the Blue schools and found out about the government contracted teachers, I chose to interview one of them at each school. This provided me with an unexpected opportunity to capture how teacher experiences may differ within the same workplace but different contract terms.

A summary of participant characteristics is provided in Table 2.

Table 2
Participants Profiles

Participant	School	Years Teaching	Time at School	Age Range	Location	Contracted by Government/NGO
NB	Blue	1.5	3 months	27	Karachi	Government
MB	Blue	15	4.5 years	40	Karachi	NGO
SG	Green	4	8 months	35	Kasur	NGO
RG	Green	7	1 year	28	Kasur	NGO
AR	Red	8	3 months	26	Kasur	NGO
YR	Red	14+	10 years	41+	Kasur	NGO
OB	Blue	6	4 years	28	Karachi	NGO
PB	Blue	10	6 years	48	Karachi	Government

QG	Green	8	8 years	26	Kasur	NGO
BG	Green	15	8 years	50	Kasur	NGO

6.6. Data Collection Process

The fieldwork was carried out between October and December 2025, in the provinces of Punjab and Sindh. Two school visits were conducted in villages on the outskirts of Karachi, Sindh, and the other three in villages on the outskirts of Kasur, Punjab. Each interview lasted between 20 and 45 minutes.

Interviews were audio-recorded using a digital recording software on a phone and securely stored on a Google Drive accessible only to the researcher. During the interviews, I also attempted to make notes of any somatic changes when teachers responded to certain questions or while narrating certain experiences.

6.7. Interview Guide

The interview guide was designed in English and then translated into Urdu, the local language, and the language in which the interviews were conducted.² The four key concepts underpinning this have been integrated into the guide through four separate sections, with an additional fifth section that collects demographic information. While the questions are arranged in a set structure, apart from starting the interviews with the demographics section, the structure was not always followed, allowing the interview flow to be directed by participant responses.

The key concepts were operationalised through open-ended and reflective prompts that explored specific dimensions of each concept, such as job security, compensation and managerial oversight for working conditions and meaning-making, emotional states, and related dimensions, for lived

² A more detailed explanation for the language usage/switching in this study is explained in the linguistic method section. ³ The operationalization matrix for all 4 concepts, including their dimensions and indicators, is provided in Appendix A.

experience.³ The guide included narrative questions, such as “What is a typical day at work like for you?” to help participants structure their accounts of their day-to-day experiences.

Follow-up questions and probes were also used to explore relevant themes as they emerged, such as asking teachers whether they felt their opinions/feedback were acted on. If they responded negatively, they were then probed on how they navigated those constraints or how they felt about them. These probes were particularly helpful in exploring how teachers understood and negotiated constraints, linking directly to questions of agency and lived experience.

6.8. Data Preparation

Identifying information, participant name and organisation were removed before transcriptions and replaced with an alphabet indicating the participant's name, a dash, followed by a colour showing the organisation, e.g. Y_Red (YR)

6.9. Language and Translation

As a postcolonial nation-state, language in Pakistan is a contentious and confusing topic. While there are 70+ languages and dialects spoken in the country, the state only recognizes two languages: Urdu, the national language, and English, an official language. As the lingua franca, Urdu is spoken and understood by most people in the country (Parekh, 2022). However, English fluency is mostly limited to those studying/working at elite private institutions, which is why I made the deliberate choice not to conduct any interviews in English as it would restrict teachers' ability to articulate what they wanted to say. Additionally, as the language of the Quran, specific Arabic phrases and words are consistent throughout everyday conversations to invoke certain feelings.

Given this context, I developed a hybrid approach to interview conduction, transcription, translation, and analysis. The interviews were conducted and transcribed in Urdu, and then I translated the transcripts into English. However, in these translations, I kept certain Urdu/Arabic terms as is to retain the depth of what they conveyed, such as Alhamdulillah (praise be to Allah) or ikhlaqi farz (moral/ethical responsibility). I coded my interviews in English; however,

throughout this process, I kept moving between the English and Urdu transcripts to ensure I was capturing the meaning and nuance of what was being said. The analysis was also written in English.

Regarding grammar, I made certain choices to avoid confusion, such as in the Subcontinent, it is common for adults, especially older ones, to refer to themselves in the plural ‘hum,’ which is ‘we’ instead of ‘mai,’ which is ‘I’. This is honorific grammar that denotes humility, and/or is used when people want to distance the individual from the narrative of what is being said. This persisted through my interviews too, due to which I have chosen to use the singular form, ‘me’ or ‘I’, unless teachers were speaking specifically about the collective.

6.10. **Data Analysis Plan**

The data were analysed using a semi-deductive approach informed by reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis combines inductive coding that allows new meanings and patterns to emerge from teachers’ narratives with deductive coding, guided by sensitising concepts derived from the study’s conceptual framework. Given the relatively small sample size (n=10), coding was conducted manually to enable deeper engagement with the data. This approach is consistent with reflexive thematic analysis, which emphasises the active and interpretive role of the researcher in knowledge production rather than reliance on software (Pearson et al., 2025).

Before beginning coding, I created a four-domain codebook³ using the four sensitizing concepts from the conceptual framework and contextual review. Working conditions, lived experience, identity, agency, were operationalised as four coding domains, each containing multiple deductive sub-codes (5–7 per domain) built around the dimensions from the operationalization matrix. Accounting for the somatic notes made during the interviews, and other paralinguistic registers that showed up during the transcription process, I also created a paralinguistic log. This was important to do as these paralinguistic registers were capturing aspects of teachers' feelings and thoughts that words necessarily could not.

The first stage of analysis began during transcription and translating, where repeated listening led to familiarization with the data and initial identification of codes that would fully capture certain concepts across different languages. In the second stage, I did two passes of coding; in the first

³ Excerpts from the codebook including the paralinguistic log, inductive pass and deductive pass are added in Appendix B.

pass, I did open, inductive line-by-line coding in the participants own language naming codes as short descriptive phrases or in-vivo expressions (for example, "household work as burden" or "we make ourselves happy by hoping"). At this stage, no cross-interview/case coding occurred.

Each inductive code is logged once under the inductive codes tab in the codebook.

For the second phase, using the codebook, inductive codes were mapped to the four- deductive domains. Codes that fitted within a domain were assigned the relevant deductive sub-code, codes that spanned two domains were double coded with a designated primary code; and codes that did not map on to any of the four domains were marked UNHOUSED and logged as independent candidate themes. Ordering the first pass inductively and second deductively ensured that the deductive framework analyzed the data without directing it, essentially allowing teacher narratives to identify themes and patterns rather than forcing them within a pre-existing framework.

Following the two coding phases, candidate themes were developed by clustering codes across the whole dataset (based on Braun & Clarke's stages 4-5) while noting if patterns varied across participants based on contract type, union knowledge, years of work experience etc.,

6.11. **Ethics**

Under University of Bremen policy, an IRB was not required, however, a letter was issued from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona authorizing the research. Additionally, I developed a consent form in both English and Urdu, which outlined the purpose of the research, participants' rights, including the right to withdraw from the interview, the right to withdraw from the study, and the right to anonymity. Data storage and who would have access to the interviews were also included in the form, along with the researcher's and thesis supervisor's contact information. Additionally, all the conditions within the form were also communicated to the participants verbally before they signed the form, and oral consent for the recording itself was obtained from the teachers at the start of the interview recording.

6.12. **Limitations**

Limitations regarding the design of this study, and workarounds have been discussed in the instruments section. Beyond this, one of the greatest limitations of this study was the physical sites at which the interviews were conducted.

While school staff such as the principal and area coordinators were very cooperative and welcoming when I visited the schools, there seemed to be a layer of distrust the school management seemed to have towards an outsider speaking to their teachers. This was evidenced by an organization asking me for an interview guide before granting site access.

In another school, a coordinator from the head office had been assigned to accompany me during the visit; he and the principal initially insisted on sitting in on the interviews but eventually relented. However, they continually interfered by leaving the door open and sitting within earshot of the discussion. I chose not to visit the second school under this organization due to the level of managerial interference during the first visit.

While I do believe the conversations with teachers would have been a lot more open and candid if the interviews were held at a more neutral site, the fact that teachers openly expressed grievances and mentioned the support of their principal, usually the only member of management on site except in the aforementioned case, in these challenges, I do not believe they were significantly restrained in expressing their opinions to me. However, I still account for this bias in my readings of the data.

7. **Findings**

7.1. **Theme 1: Lived experience as a coexistence of dualities**

In trying to understand how working conditions shape lived experiences, the interviews surfaced two distinct but parallel typologies across which teachers experienced their day-to-day professional lives. Teachers framed working conditions as both a source of stress and/or disappointment and a source of fulfillment. The feelings of stress/disappointment tended to cluster

around: material conditions (pay, contract, salary deductions), and institutional pressures (evaluations, observations, lesson planning). While the fulfillment derived from working conditions clustered around: relational engagement (with students, colleagues, community), recognition (appreciation, awards, being seen by leadership), professional development (specifically through access to trainings) and vocational fulfillment (teaching at one's old school, pursuing their passion, moral purpose).

I think what is notable here is that the fulfillment register is not a means to offset the stress/disappointment register—something that is used to compensate for the material inadequacies. Rather, it is actively and collectively constructed to fulfill dimensions of teachers' professional, and relational self. QG is an interesting representation of this because she has been at the Green school for the past 8 years, and mentions she has had better options but chooses to stay here. Her lived experience inhabits clearly across these two distinct registers: she expresses joy and pride at being able to assist students or someone when they require support; and she expresses disappointment and a “bad” feeling knowing she has worked so hard at the school only to be paid significantly below the minimum wage.

1. **QG_T52:** *Sometimes children can't bring lunch etc., so ma'am, I, or some teacher arranges it, and that is a very proud moment for us — that we are able to do something for someone.*
 - a. **QG_T76:** *It feels bad [awkward laugh] — look, it does happen. It's been 8 years for me here now, since 2017. Anyone who asks — "You're still only on 25,000?" At home, in the family too they ask. You've been serving in one institution for 8-9 years, your qualification is also fine. They say you should go somewhere better than this — but that's our decision, that we don't go.*
So when anyone hears about the salary, or we think about it, there's a little bit of a bad feeling — but... alhamdulillah.

The expression of pride at being able to help someone does not occur as a counterweight to when she is discussing her salary, rather it is in response to being asked what her best and worst experiences at work have been.

Similarly, throughout the interviews, teachers followed this trend where they responded to questions about their material conditions with a range of negative emotions. However, these

feelings never slipped into their framings of how they found the relational and professional environment at the school. In fact, across the sample, teachers spoke about the school environment as a collective endeavor that came from 1) the teachers, 2) school leadership, 3) school management, and 4) students.

NB articulated the collective construction more explicitly by stating how the school environment is a multi-party endeavor and not made in isolation of other stakeholders within the school.

2. **NB_T51:** *The school environment doesn't change because of one teacher. First and foremost, the principal plays a very important role — how they carry the teachers forward, what they prioritise. The work environment comes from both sides. The student-teacher relationship needs to be good, and the teacher-principal relationship also needs to be good — then the environment becomes excellent, so that you can share your problems with your principal without fear.*

When probed and asked what it was that made this environment positive, they highlighted key factors such as having a good relationship with other teachers, being friendly with students, working together, and having access to professional development. YR specifically mentions the support the staff offers each other, and how this good environment is the cause of her staying at the school for so long.

3. **RNK_T33:** *How would you describe the work environment at this school?*

YR_T34: *To sum it up — it's very good.... We carry our big burdens together; we live like a family. If someone comes to school having had a difficult morning at home, whoever needs sympathy, we provide it for each other — whether it's me, the principal, or any other teacher.*

- a. **YR_T106:** *I have a good environment here, which is why I've been here for ten years...*

Training and the subsequent learning from it also dominates teachers' narratives as a source of fulfillment. This opportunity to learn is an unexpected bonus of the PPP arrangement, fulfilling teachers' want for professional development.

4. **BG_T70:** *At that time I didn't know much details about this school — what kind of institution it is etc. For one, it was near my home, so I thought I should go here. But when I came here, after some time passed, I realised that you get to learn a lot at this school, they conduct very good trainings. I didn't come here thinking about that first.*

Parallely, teachers express a host of complex feelings around the material, and institutional pressures of work. While teachers spoke willingly and at length about what parts of work made them feel fulfilled, when it came to aspects that created negative affect, their responses were a lot more guarded and resigned.

For example, when I probed SG on discussing how she felt about not receiving benefits that the administration had said they would, she expressed a confusing range of emotions ranging from discontentment to resignation.

5. **SG_T76:** *[Laughs] Obviously, when a person works at an organisation, they do wonder whether they'll get it [benefits] or not. But we make ourselves happy by thinking — maybe we will get it, that's a good thing. And if we don't get it, well — we're still teaching. What else can we do beyond that? Every organisation has its own rules and policies, and I don't have enough information about this to know what they will or won't do. What we expect is — inshallah, they will give it.*

She does not compensate for this lack of benefits with a positive facet about the workplace, rather, she just defers it to organisational rules and policies. For the same register, OB articulated how the point of contention was not that they were overworked but rather that they were overworked and underpaid.

6. **OB_T64:** *...Sometimes we are kept sitting till 3 o'clock, sometimes till 4. We have to finish our own work and leave. We have to look at every single thing ourselves — the school work, dealing with parents, looking at every single thing of the children, the daily diary, the work, etc. And then, in the midst of 100 children if I'm just one — see for yourself, and on top of that they give such a small salary.*

Across this sample, what emerges is that teachers do not just focus on the material or institutional aspects of work, but more so on how it fulfills them relationally, and professionally.

Additionally, the difference in how teachers narrate their experiences of both registers points to the effort that teachers put into managing the more complex dimensions of their work, which is explored in themes 3 and 4.

7.2. **Theme 2: Identity is internally developed and externally validated**

On average, teachers across the sample had been in the profession for around 8 to 9 years thus giving them enough time to formulate distinct identities and conceptualizations of what it means to be a teacher. However, interestingly, experience had very little to do with how teachers perceived their own professional identities and effectiveness.

When teachers were asked what constitutes a ‘good teacher’, they had definitive but varied conceptualizations of this. For example, when asked, what makes a good teacher, AR emphasized the need for the teacher to provide Islamic guidance to students, pushing the idea that teachers are not just there to teach the curriculum but also lead the moral and spiritual development of students.

1. **AR_T95:** *Having a degree is essential — we can't negate that — but alongside it, there are other things that are also necessary. Like providing Islamic guidance to children; the children learn from us and depend on us. Things like giving Islamic talks, teaching children management, teaching them to work together. And maintaining unity.*

When the same question was asked from YR, she started off very confidently by stating how teachers should have both relational qualities such as being a good listener and certain management skills such as lesson planning. However when asked about her own effectiveness, her tone shifts dramatically, from confident to uncertain, and she then reverts the question to the researcher, suggesting that the verdict on her effectiveness is not hers to give. What matters is not whether the researcher is qualified to assess her, but that the determination of her effectiveness comes externally.

2. **YR_T76:** *[starts in a low, uncertain voice] Yes... [then loudly and more confidently] I guarantee that I am a good teacher. At the end of this interview, I'm going to ask you — after talking to me, how did it feel? I have that right too.*

SG initially gave a more guarded response, every teacher is good, but when pressed to name the specific qualities she shares a strikingly restrictive definition: a good teacher "...should be so perfect, that while working, she can do excellent work with no problems in anything." [SG_T88]. Right after putting forward this definition, when she is asked if she sees herself as an effective teacher, she resists answering, and when she does, she also reverts the question to an external observer.

3. **RNK_T89:** *And do you think you are an effective teacher?*

[Long pause, starts laughing and shrugs shoulders]

RNK_T90: *Do you feel that you have a positive impact on your students' learning? In that sense, do you think you are an effective teacher?*

SG_T91: *We're trying to become good — but whether we are or not, I can't say. [Laughs frankly] Whoever observes me can tell what I'm like.*

RG adds a relational dimension to teacher identity, stating how good teachers are those that build strong relationships with their students. And just like SG, YR, and AR when asked how she sees herself, she shares an instance of how after an observation she was appreciated by the principal and her students thus validating her effectiveness.

4. **RG_T95:** *Yes, effective — because when ma'am did my observation, my COF — she had everyone clap for me. The clapping made me feel that my observation went well. Two days later I got the feedback that it had gone very well — but the clapping that happened for me made me so happy. And next time when ma'am observes me, I'll do even better.*

However, this is followed by this narrative of trying to do better in the next observation. RG's account points towards a recurring trend across the sample which is that teachers irrespective of their experience are entrenched in this narrative that their skills and capabilities are in a continuous process of development. And perhaps that is why they place so much value in access to professional development through training as discussed in theme 1.

PB is another surprising case. With over a decade of work experience and the title of senior teacher, she might be expected to claim effectiveness more readily than her less experienced colleagues. Instead, she refuses the label and defers it to a more qualified ‘other’.

5. **RNK_T109:** *And do you think you are an effective teacher?*

PB_T110: *No, there's still a lot left. I think alhamdulillah I'm going correctly, but I think — if there is some more qualified person than me, they should tell me that you have to do this thing like this, etc. I want to be better than this.*

This persistent trend, where teachers are unable to reconcile their conceptualization of a good teacher and their own place in that definition and instead defer that determination to an outsider adds to this notion that the internal work of constructing what a good teacher is belongs to them; but the external work of validating whether they meet that definition does not.

Additionally, this external validation extends beyond formal evaluations to the wider social milieu in which the teachers live and work. Teachers tend to draw their sense of their professional self not from an internal locus, but from how they are recognized by their community. For example, OB describes a transformation in how she sees herself as a teacher which is rooted in external validation that comes from the community’s recognition of her.

6. **RNK_T97:** *And after working at this school, has the way you see yourself as a teacher changed?*

OB_T98: *Yes, absolutely. Alhamdulillah, I have received a lot of respect now — for instance, everyone says, "She is the ECE teacher." I have a name now.*

A similar, yet more complicated dynamic emerges in YR’s narrative where her social standing stems from being misrecognized as a government teacher. This recognition does not depend on her actual position as a contractual teacher in a PPP school but rather on the community’s misrecognition of it.

7. **YR_T80:** *The best thing is that the community here doesn't know this is a private school under an NGO — they think it's a government school. The most respected thing for me is that everyone greets me thinking I am a government teacher.*

This theme is important in that it shows that beyond the assumption that identity is shaped by working conditions alone, it is also shaped by other factors within the fabric of teachers' lives. Working conditions in the school, particularly evaluations and observations, create a system in which teachers defer identity validation to those they see as more qualified. But identity validation also comes from outside the school entirely, from the social community in which teachers live.

7.3. **Theme 3: Agency as a bounded construct**

In discussing working conditions and teachers' agency in negotiating, resisting or adapting to them, one of the more surprising findings was that the majority of teachers did not know what the purpose of a teachers' union was. Only NB and PB, as government teachers, clearly knew what teachers' unions were and only PB acknowledged being a member of one. Other teachers misunderstood unions to mean "unity" or "coordination" between teachers as they worked within a school. They did not perceive unions as bodies that operated outside of the school and management hierarchy.

1. **RNK_T25:** *Do you know what a teachers' union is?*

AR_T26: *Yes, it's about working together.*

RNK_T27: *No, I mean something like an organisation where teachers come together to work for their rights?*

AR_T28: *Yes, like when we discuss things together in our teachers' meetings. When there's something that isn't clear to us, we discuss it together.*

Teachers like MB and OB, who had seen union led action take place in their school by the government teachers, thought that unions were bodies that non-government (private) teachers could not join or create.

2. **MB_T18:** *Yes, I've heard of it, but I've never been part of one.*

RNK_T19: *Why have you not joined a teachers' union?*

MB_T20: *They don't exist in the private sector, do they? [sounds confused] No, I haven't thought about it at this time — because I was giving my time to school, and after that I have children and home, and I give them time.*

However, this constraint on action-oriented agency through union participation does not mean that teachers do not practice agency through other means and forms. It is just their ability to act autonomously is restricted to certain areas only. Teachers had a say in school level decisions such as the color of the paint, lesson delivery, or control over *how* they managed their workload (i.e. taking work home, refusing extra tasks).

In other areas such as salaries, changes in school timings etc., they were not involved in the policy making process, however, they still tried to practise agency by navigating it on their own terms. This included raising concerns about salaries to their area coordinator and principal, questioning why a certain policy was introduced and taking their time adjusting to it.

3. **YR_T92:** *Yes, we talk about it if something seems against us. But ten days later we usually realise the value of it and that it was better for us. We don't accept things immediately or without thinking, but with the passage of time...*

RNK_T93: *Can you give an example?*

YR_T94: *Our issues are mostly about time. The government school hours are set, but we're required to come 15 minutes earlier — so we'd tell the principal that other schools aren't doing this. But then we also know we want to stay here, so we accept it. And eventually the time management works itself out.*

...When we complained, they said: whoever finds this acceptable can stay, otherwise you can go.

In situations like these, while the practice of agency starts with contestation and negotiation, it ends up with teachers having to adjust or adapt to the circumstances. What complicates this further is that most teachers did not believe in challenging policies introduced by the PPP operators. They believed that anyone who had the authority to make policy would know what they were doing and even if it inconveniently or negatively affected teachers, the onus was on teachers to adjust to it rather than call it out for being wrong.

4. **BG_T160:** *Those who make the change(s) have more mind (knowledge) than us, so they'd think only good or better. They'd think better than us.*

RNK_T161: *Why do you feel this?*

BG_162: *Those who are running such a big institution, it's obvious they have a big mind — that's why they're able to do so much.*

BG's account is the most explicit in showing how this hierarchy is internalized. However, this acceptance of the authority of the PPP operators is not necessarily fully accepted. In fact, through paralinguistic cues, teachers do seem to struggle to justify why the policy does not account for their opinions.

5. **SG_T82:** *But if you look at it, when an organisation runs, it runs according to policy. And in that policy, we can't give an opinion, because policy comes from above. Our opinion doesn't carry and won't carry weight in it. Because obviously, the policy — whatever they've made — they've thought it through. [Pause] It's done with careful thought, whatever they've done. [Pause] Their experience is greater than ours... [pause, sounds uncertain] perhaps. [Long pause]*

SG's response and similar cues in BG, RG, OB, ARs narratives shows how agency operates discursively in the gap between *what* is said and *how* it is said. Initially, it seems that she is endorsing policy and the authority behind it, however the pauses, silence and use of 'perhaps' at the end seems to convey that she is not fully convinced about what she herself is saying. RG's account shows a similar negotiation, however, a bit more explicitly where the acceptance of orders from above is parallel to a claim to be heard.

6. **RG_T127:** *We ask ma'am: what is this new rule, what's its purpose? Ma'am says: these are orders from above. She says: this is how it has to be done. Sometimes we tell ma'am: we should also be heard.*

Additionally, when teachers raised concerns around issues such as salaries or contracts, they did not directly hold the PPP operator accountable. Instead they offered excuses on the operators behalf such as budget constraints or government interference as the cause of their temporary contracts.

7. **MB_T82:** *We spoke to our management about this too — and so far no response has come. Pretty much all of us teachers were saying it — our ma'am was also saying it on our behalf, and our project manager had also said it — but I think at their upper level, the issue is funding.*

What is apparent from the findings is that adaptation is the dominant mode of agency with some negotiation and very little resistance in the traditional sense.

7.4. **Theme 4: Religion as a resolution of complex feelings**

Religious invocation plays a central role in teachers' accounts. Narratives of their daily routine routinely opened with recitation of the Quran, morning prayer, or delivering an Islamic lecture in class as a self-assigned responsibility, and recurred whenever teachers expressed gratitude, as PB does about her salary. This is partly unsurprising in Pakistan, where words like *Inshallah* (God willing) and *Alhamdulillah* (all praise is due to God) are common in everyday speech as sincere expressions of faith.

1. **RG_T55:** *By the grace of God, my day goes very well. I plan at night — in the morning when I wake up, after prayers and reading the Quran, I have to see to the house.*
2. **PB_T62:** *But alhamdulillah, a teacher's salary nowadays is quite good.*

What was of note, however, was that teachers also invoked religion at terser moments, when they appeared to be struggling to articulate a grievance. OB, for instance, voices a grievance about the salary gap between government and EMO (PPP) teachers and a wish to be in a different position, then immediately frames her salary as God-given, and therefore something she is content with.

3. **OB_T57:** *We [EMO teachers] do this much work, and they [government teachers] are getting salaries in the lakhs. So sometimes the mind goes there — I wish we were in government too. [Follows up quickly] But alhamdulillah, whatever has been given, Allah has given it — I am happy.*

Strikingly, in these moments, religious invocation appears to resolve, for the teachers themselves, issues the administration cannot or will not. Notably, management also responds in the same register, whether deliberately or not, to manage discontent. When BG's colleagues brought their fears about the school being reclaimed to the principal, the precarity was not addressed but placed in God's hands; and when MB's raised salary and infrastructure concerns, an "Inshallah" appears to have closed the conversation and left them waiting, a deferment MB then reproduces herself.

4. **BG_T78:** *Ma'am had said just pray, that Allah will make things better.*

5. **MB_T50:** *We've spoken to our management about this — both in terms of the infrastructure and in terms of inflation — asking them to look again at our salaries. They have told us: inshallah. So we are waiting.*

- a. **MB_T111–112:** *I do feel it. I wish — may Allah increase our salary.*

Religious invocation does not belong to any single theme but cuts across all of them: QG closing her account of grief over her salary with *alhamdulillah*; PB deferring judgement of her own effectiveness with "alhamdulillah, I am going correctly"; OB framing the community's recognition as a blessing. Religion here operates as a way of living, a way of being, and a way of resolving, with the last becoming a means through which teachers adapt to conditions they cannot change.

8. Discussion

8.1. Precarity relative to what?

Before delving into a discussion on the themes, I want to flag an observation from the fieldwork, interviews and subsequent coding that complicates how the findings should be interpreted. The literature on PPPs, and this study itself tends to frame teacher conditions within PPP schools as a move into precarity indicated by the lower pay, temporary contracts, diminished protections. And, for most teachers in this sample, that framing holds. However, what we need to account for is that none of the teachers in this sample arrived at their current conditions from a common starting point or background so for some, the comparison is not a loss of security but a move into a different form of precarity.

In RG's case, she had worked at her school as a privately contracted teacher while it was still run by the government and continued there after it was handed to the PPP operator. Her conditions did not deteriorate, instead they improved. Under Green, she received her salary consistently through the summer break, and was entitled to maternity leave, neither of which she received as a privately contracted teacher under government management. For RG, the PPP arrangement was not a shift

into precarity but an improvement on a baseline that was already precarious. Her case actually points to the notion that precarity in teaching is not unique to PPP arrangements but rather, persistent across teachers who do not have the protection of unions and permanent contracts (such as teachers in low-fee-private schools). This matters in the context of how we understand the rest of the findings because teachers experience their present conditions relative to where they have come from.

Across the sample, teachers' trajectories varied. SG had previously taught at a school run by a different PPP operator where she had to follow pre-made lesson plans while at her current school, she learned how to make her own planners and experienced this as a gain in pedagogical autonomy. This is not a difference between the government and a PPP operator but rather between one PPP operator and another. AR left a private school whose environment she found difficult and so she arrived at her current position by choice. BG came from a background where training was not available at all which made her value training at Green more. A teacher who experiences her PPP school as an improvement in some other dimension of her life, for example an all-woman workplace in the case of YR, would narrate her working life differently from one who experiences it as an increase in precarity.

These differing starting points or backgrounds do not change the material facts of teachers' conditions, all of which are real. But they shape how those conditions are experienced and internalized by teachers thus we should be careful in how we interpret teachers' accounts. One of the most significant of these baselines is gender. For a workforce that is almost entirely female, working in settings where the alternative is usually staying at home, the PPP school represents an improvement along a dimension that the literature does not measure at all. Since this baseline shapes how teachers assess their material conditions so consistently across the sample, I will discuss it within the context of the overall findings later on in this chapter.

8.2. **Teacher narratives in reconceptualising lived experience, and identity**

From the findings, one of the first things that becomes apparent is that teachers' narrations of how they experience their working conditions are distinctly different from how the literature frames them. When teachers were given the opportunity to narrate their own experiences, their narratives were dominated by descriptions of their work as deeply fulfilling, giving them a sense of purpose,

creating relational closeness with their students and pride in contributing to their communities. The material grievances are there, but they are secondary in how teachers frame their own lives. To teachers in this sample, working conditions are not just salaries and contracts but also aspects such as access to training, and a good work environment. These specific dimensions of working conditions at the PPP schools are what have positively contributed to their lives, and through them they have felt empowered to contribute to the lives of their students and communities.

In this case, it isn't just working conditions that are shaping lived experiences, but lived experience, specifically teachers' own meaning-making processes, which is contributing to how they interpret their working conditions. In the context of the literature, this flags what the research gap already highlighted, that by not including teachers' own voices in describing their working conditions, the literature loses out on capturing a crucial aspect of teachers' lives. For example, even when teachers discuss negative affect, they do not frame it as the literature does in terms of low salaries or precarity making them feel demotivated or eroding their self-efficacy (Zancajo, 2021; Locatelli, 2019), rather they frame it in terms of an 'effort-reward' gap in which they do not feel adequately compensated for the amount of effort they put in.

Similarly, when teachers discuss fears around the PPP schools being taken back by the government after the end of the contract, it is not because they will lose their jobs, but that they will lose the years of effort they have put into building the school and the community within and around it.

QG_T64: *Yes, previously we were scared because — this school will go, then what will we do? We had other opportunities for jobs too, but I didn't take them. We've put in so much effort here, so we want to work here only — we maintained this school and it'll go to someone else, where will our students and our efforts go?*

Additionally, teacher narratives also contest the idea that NPM logics in schools lead to de-professionalization and de-skilling of the teaching workforce (Ball & Youdell, 2008). In fact, teachers' discuss how due to the availability of training, feedback mechanisms and good school leadership, their professional identity has strengthened and they feel more skilled than before. Evidenced by OB sharing how she is enrolled in an ECE course and is known in the school and community as the "ECE teacher". So while Ball & Youdell's argument holds up in that these schools hire teachers with lesser qualifications or experiences, as seen by how QG started working

there without a proper qualification; it breaks down when at the level of teachers' professional identity and capability in how they narrate it– a finding worth acknowledging.

Even things such as lesson planning, which they do frame as a source of extra workload, is also seen as making them more capable teachers. In fact, it is quite interesting how teachers discuss evaluative mechanisms such as observations. They tend to look forward to them not only because it rewards them with appreciation, but also because it gives them the chance to show their development and learn of areas for improvement. This doesn't negate the presence of stress leading up to an evaluation, but rather, that the reward from the evaluation, offsets the stress.

In effect, this shows how the teachers have a strong sense of who they are, and their capabilities, however this internal identity is not self-sustaining but reliant on external validation. This takes us back to the conceptual framework in that identity is not something teachers' possess but rather something they achieve and even re-achieve through the relational environment provided by the PPP arrangement. And, perhaps, as the agency discussion argues, this why they are reluctant to contest an arrangement that confirms their sense of self.

8.3. The reconfiguration of agency

The background to this study highlighted how there had been widespread teacher resistance to PPP reforms such as the mobilization of the Grand Teachers Alliance against the PSRP, which raised the question about what it is about these reforms that elicits such a strong reaction from teachers. The findings from this study regarding agency, answers that question. The participants' lack of union awareness and resignation to adverse policies, makes it that teachers within the PPP arrangement do not have access to the same conditions to resist policy as those outside of it. This is especially relevant when we realize that the goal of the PPP arrangement is to shift away from the union aware, resistance engaged teachers to privately contracted ones for whom the vocabulary of unionization or collective action does not even exist.

Drawing on Biesta et al's (2015) ecological framing of agency, this is not just a constraint on teachers' agentic capacity but also on their agentic spaces i.e. the conditions through which they can mobilize their capacities to resist or negotiate. In effect, the PPP arrangement that produces teachers' precarious conditions, also closes the channels through which these conditions might be

contested. While teachers are able to recognize that they are paid below the minimum wage, and that their remuneration is not equivalent to their effort; they are unable to hold the entity responsible for it accountable, and instead make excuses for it as discussed in theme 3. One reason for this is practical constraints in that as YR stated, they will be told to leave. But secondly and with wider structural implications regarding the nature of PPP arrangements is that teachers have been inducted so deeply into the organizational mission that they filter their grievances through it.

However, just because the channel to contest these conditions through action-oriented forms of agency is closed off, it does not mean that teachers lose all agency. In fact, teachers' responses in theme 3, specifically RG, SG and MB show that teachers' practice discursive forms of agency in how they respond to questions about their agency. The paralinguistic cues of pausing, uncertain tone, assertion of how they question a policy even if they do not outright protest against it shows that within the agentic space available to them, teachers do try to resist and negotiate policies. Even the choices teachers' make such as choosing to stay despite having better options or voicing their objection to a policy is a practice of agency and should be acknowledged as such.

Taking us back to the conceptual framework, this shows that while working conditions do constrain agency in these schools, teachers' agentic capacities, built through their lived experiences, and identity, assist them in resisting and negotiating them.

8.4. The gendered dimension of teachers' work

Teachers' work at the PPP schools reshaped their positions and sense of worth in their personal and domestic lives. While discussed before in terms of how teachers' perceptions were changed in their community due to their work at the PPP schools, it did not account for the gendered dimensions of this. Across the sample, teachers narrated their work not only as a job but as something that altered who they were able to be at home and in their communities. And in a low-resource rural context where there is a dearth of opportunities for women, this plays a critical role in how teachers value their professional lives at these schools despite the low salaries and precarious contracts.

Teachers described how the professional skills they gained through their work helped them become more capable in managing their own children's education.

1. **MB_T96:** *A great deal of change is visible. Because when I was teaching before, I was unmarried and I didn't have as much knowledge. Coming here, teaching, and the trainings, online sessions, these have benefited me enormously. I am now personally looking after my own children's education and academic affairs. I get a great sense of peace from being capable of this.*
2. **YR_T38:** *Since coming here, I've become capable of teaching my own children too. If I had stayed home after doing my masters, I wouldn't even have known my children's syllabus.*

This isn't just a case of a professional skill proving useful at home, but rather, it is work granting teachers a recognized and valued identity of capable mother, educated woman and role model, in a context where the alternative would be to be just a housewife. This is most explicit in MB's account of why she began teaching and in RG's, where she frames working as something she owes her children.

3. **MB_T62:** *...teaching is very important in our family... So my father was very keen: now your children are grown up and going to school — give your morning hours to teaching. You've learned so much — now deliver that to others. That's the first reason: my father. Otherwise it would have been the same worn-out life — staying home, working, washing dishes. [Starts laughing here, almost embarrassed.]*
4. **RG_T81:** *No, I never feel like leaving here — I don't want to leave Green... Our children see us going out to work and feel so happy. I think that if I sit at home and quit, it will have a bad effect on them.*

This contrast between teaching and “the same worn-out life” of staying home is described by the teachers rather than being a notion imposed on them by the study. However, what this account reveals is that for a predominantly female workforce in a rural, low opportunity setting, the PPP school provides something the literature on working conditions does not account for: a social identity that carries value beyond the workplace and what teachers experience as a source of standing, capability and in MB's words, “peace”. While Afridi's doctoral research documents the gendered labour market dynamics of this workforce and their career trajectories, it does not account for how teachers themselves construct identity and interpret these experiences. This finding not

only adds that interpretive context, but also shows how teachers narrate the work as remaking their gendered identity and that this narrative is partly why the work is valued despite its material precarity.

Following on from the earlier section on precarity, the gendered dimension is one of the baselines through which we should interpret teachers' experiences. A teacher for whom the work creates a respectable identity and a degree of autonomy she would otherwise not have, will weigh her material conditions differently from how the literature, considering a different baseline, assumes she will. This reinforces the notion in the conceptual framework that working conditions do not directly affect teachers, but rather, are filtered through teachers' meaning making processes, and for a significant part of this sample, that meaning is gendered.

9. **Contribution and Conclusion**

This study set out to understand how working conditions in PPP schools in Pakistan shape teachers' lived experiences and professional identities, and how teachers use their agency to navigate them. It found that the relationship is neither direct nor singular. Teachers experience their conditions across two coexisting registers of stress and fulfilment; they construct their professional identities internally while deferring validation to external loci; they practise agency in bounded, largely discursive forms; and they draw on religious invocation to resolve what institutional channels leave unaddressed. Working conditions, in short, do not act on teachers directly but are filtered through the meaning teachers make of them.

Based on this, the study makes several contributions. Most centrally, it brings teachers' own meaning-making into a PPP literature that has largely documented their conditions from the outside, and in doing so reconceptualises working conditions themselves as extending beyond salary and contract to training, environment and relational autonomy. It shows that teachers hold a strong internal sense of professional self that still depends on external recognition to be sustained, emphasizing the role of acknowledgement in how teachers understand themselves. It challenges the assumption that teachers who are not visibly protesting are not resisting, highlighting evidence of agency in discursive and individual forms, and shows that PPP arrangements do not only impose material precarity but reconfigure the very spaces through which precarity might be contested. Finally, it shows that for a predominantly female workforce in low-resource and opportunity settings, the school gives a socially sanctioned identity and standing beyond the workplace which

is a significant reason for why the work is valued despite its precarity, and a dimension the literature does not consider.

These findings should be considered alongside the study's limitations, discussed in the methodology chapter, specifically that the sample is small, and the sites of the interview are not neutral..These make this an exploratory study whose findings raise questions rather than give clear answers. Two specific future research avenues have emerged. The first is gender: the gendered dimension aspect is only partially captured here and given its significance it should be explored and analyzed further. The second is methodological in that the gap between how the literature frames these teachers and how they narrate themselves suggests that future research in this area should be built on frameworks from teachers' own accounts.

This thesis began with Ball's (2003) claim that the reforms reshaping education do not simply change what educators do, they change who they are. The teachers in this study are a reflection of that, but a somewhat blurry one. They are remade by the conditions under which they work, not necessarily in line with the literature, but they are also actively engaged in meaning-making, identity construction and creating a livable working life within those conditions. This does not negate the exploitative material conditions that NPM driven PPP reforms subjects teachers to, but provides us with a more complex understanding of what actually goes on inside the lives of teachers.

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Appendix A

Table A1
Operationalization Matrix

Concept	Dimension	Indicator
Working Conditions	• job security • compensation • managerial oversight	• permanent/temporary above/below minimum wage • benefits frequency of evaluations, observation procedures etc
Lived Experiences	• coping strategies • meaning making • emotional states • perceived precarity	• compliance, over-performance • narratives about purpose of work etc • expression of uncertainty, instability
Identity	• self-concept • professional • value/status self-efficacy • moral purpose	• how they define themselves • references to respect/lack of from parents, management etc • statements about their abilities to help students • narratives about why they teach, fulfillment vs job
Agency	• control over classroom decisions • participation in school-level decisions • strategic adaptation • resistance/compliance	• ability to adapt lessons, modify curriculum, adjust pedagogy • involvement in meetings, discussions, committees • creative workarounds, informal negotiations • expressions of resistance, strict compliance, discontentment etc

Appendix B

Includes excerpts from the codebook showing how different stages of the coding process were carried out.

Table B1*Paralinguistic Log Excerpt*

PARALINGUISTIC & INVOLUNTARY REGISTER LOG					
PL-ID	Participant	Excerpt ID	Register type	What was said / happening around it	The topic it clusters around
				answers via awards and collective maintenance.	
PL-19	QG	QG_T76	LAUGH (awkward)	laughter at the point of admitting an unwanted feeling.	discussion on salary
PL-20	QG	QG_T76	PAUSE (through ellipsis)	QG breaks before alhamdulillah, marking the religious closure as effortful rather than automatic.	discussion on salary
PL-21	QG	QG_T78	SOMATIC	voice becomes subdued reflecting disappointment and disagreement with policy but also resignation.	discussion on bringing up salary grievance to management
PL-22	QG	QG_T79	PAUSE	pauses and hesitates before discussing organizational issues.	Not receiving increment
PL-23	QG	QG_T83-86	LAUGHS	laughter at the point of admitting an unwanted feeling.	when having to take work home
PL-24	AR	AR_T49-50	SOMATIC	uncertainty of tone when saying she likes school environment	on school environment
PL-25	AR	AR_T63	SOMATIC	voice gets low when admitting precarity via a temporary contract	contract conditions
PL-26	NB	NB_T22	SOMATIC	hesitancy when admitting to involvement in union action	unions
PL-27	NB	NB_T26-28	SOMATIC	Agitation when discussing union membership as a	unions

Table B2*Inductive Pass Excerpt*

INDUCTIVE CODES

IN-ID	Inductive code (in vivo / descriptive)	First seen (Excerpt ID)	Times seen	Maps to domain (Pass 2)	UNHOUSE D?	Notes / candidate theme
	B)Adoption of neutrality					
IN-37	Duty-as-sealing ('ikhlaqi farz')	BG_T20	1	IDENTITY		Work perceived beyond material returns to relational and spiritual factors/ this should fall under lived experience/identity as a finding
IN-38	Comparison class sets satisfaction	BG/YR	2	LIVED EXPERIENCE		LE-4
IN-39	Spiritual resignation as third position	MB/BG/YR	3	LIVED EXPERIENCE		LE-5
IN-40	salary deduction- due to previous allowance	QG_T13-T14		WORKING CONDITION		WC-2
IN-41	started career at organization	QG_T32		IDENTITY		Work perceived beyond material returns to relational and spiritual factors/ this should fall under lived experience/identity as a finding
IN-42	Mental lock on home life	QG_T34		LIVED EXPERIENCE		LE-1
IN-43	A)tiredness at end of day	QG_T36	4	LIVED EXPERIENCE		LE-1
IN-44	B)composure in front of students	QG_T36		LIVED EXPERIENCE		LE-2

Table B3
Deductive Pass Excerpt

DEDUCTIVE CODEBOOK

Domain	Code ID	Code Name	Definition
WORKING CONDITIONS	WC-5	Managerial oversight & accountability	Observations (TCT/QAT), inspections, evaluation cadence, feedback mechanisms, performance metrics.
LIVED EXPERIENCE	LE-3	Precarity as felt experience	The emotional texture of insecure pay or contract, anxiety, ache, resignation, "it is felt", as distinct from the facts
IDENTITY	ID-1	Self-efficacy: externally vs internally validated	Whether the teacher's sense of being good or effective rests on external appreciation or observation, or on internal conviction.
AGENCY	AG-3	Coping, endurance & "inshallah-patience"	Strategies for living with conditions — patience, reframing, gratitude, deferral, choosing to stay; agency exercised as endurance rather than resistance.
AGENCY	AG-5	Collective action & union	Awareness of unions or associations