



Researcher Reflexivity in the Post-Positivism Paradigm: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

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Researcher reflexivity has become an important principle within the post-positivist paradigm because it enhances transparency, integrity, and the quality of scientific inquiry. This study aims to analyze and synthesize the development of research on researcher reflexivity within the post-positivist paradigm, focusing on its conceptual development, implementation practices, contributions to research quality, and challenges in its application. This study employed a qualitative research design using the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method based on the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. Relevant literature published between 2022 and 2026 was identified, selected, and analyzed through a thematic synthesis approach to explore patterns and emerging themes related to researcher reflexivity. The findings indicate that reflexivity has developed beyond a personal reflective process into a methodological strategy that strengthens research trustworthiness through credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. The study implies that integrating reflexivity practices systematically can support more transparent, accountable, and rigorous research processes. Furthermore, this synthesis provides a conceptual foundation for researchers and scholars to develop improved methodological frameworks that recognize the researcher's role in knowledge construction.

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INTRODUCTION

The development of science in the 21st century has driven a significant transformation in the paradigm of scientific research. Advances in information technology, the increasing complexity of social phenomena, and the demand for research capable of producing credible and contextual knowledge have changed how researchers understand the process of knowledge creation (Wainstein, 2026). Research is no longer viewed as an activity aimed solely at discovering

causal relationships through objective measurements, but rather as a process involving the interpretation of complex and dynamic realities. This change is increasingly evident with the development of various methodological approaches that seek to explain phenomena more comprehensively without neglecting the scientific principles underlying the research (Tracy, 2025). This situation demonstrates that the development of research methodology is influenced not only by advances in data analysis techniques but also by shifts in the philosophical paradigm underlying the process of acquiring and validating scientific knowledge.

For decades, the positivist paradigm has been the primary foundation for the development of scientific research because it offers a systematic, objective, and empirically evidence-based approach. This paradigm believes that reality is singular, objective, and observable independently of the researcher through rigorous scientific procedures. This assumption has given rise to various research methods that emphasize measurement, hypothesis testing, and generalization of findings as the primary indicators of research quality (Guttormsen & Moore, 2023). The contribution of positivism to the development of science is undeniable, as this paradigm has successfully established scientific standards that enhance the reliability and replicability of research across various disciplines (Kabak et al., 2024). However, developments in research in education and the social sciences demonstrate that not all phenomena can be adequately explained through a fully objective approach, as social reality is constantly influenced by context, experience, interactions, and the dynamics that involve humans as research subjects.

These limitations have led to the emergence of the post-positivism paradigm as a response to the assumption of absolute objectivity fostered by positivism. The post-positivism paradigm acknowledges the existence of objective reality but believes that this reality cannot be fully understood because every research process is influenced by human limitations, the researcher's perspective, and the surrounding research context (Karcher et al., 2024). Therefore, objectivity in post-positivism is seen as a goal that must be continuously pursued through transparent and systematic scientific procedures, rather than as a condition that can be achieved absolutely (Megheirkouni & Moir, 2023). This paradigm emphasizes the importance of using various strategies to minimize bias, such as triangulation, audit trails, peer debriefing, and documentation of the research process (Malterud, 2022). This shift demonstrates that research quality is determined not only by the accuracy of the methods used, but also by the researcher's ability to critically evaluate how their position, experiences, and assumptions influence the entire research process.

In this context, researcher reflexivity has developed as a key concept within the post-positivism paradigm. Reflexivity is understood as the process of critical awareness by researchers of values, beliefs, experiences, social positions, and methodological decisions that potentially influence the process of data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Goldberg & Allen, 2024). Unlike the positivist view, which seeks to position researchers as completely neutral observers, the post-positivism paradigm recognizes that researchers are part of the knowledge production process, and therefore, these influences need to be systematically identified, reflected upon, and managed (Verdecchia et al., 2023). Reflexivity is not intended to completely eliminate subjectivity, but rather as a scientific mechanism to increase the transparency, accountability, and credibility of research (Stalmeijer et al., 2024). Through the practice of reflexivity, researchers can explain how methodological decisions are made and how the interaction between the researcher and the research object influences the construction of the resulting findings.

The growing attention to reflexivity is reflected in the growing number of studies that include discussions of researcher positionality, reflexive journals, audit trails, and bias control strategies as part of their methodological reporting. These practices demonstrate an awareness that research quality is determined not only by the validity of instruments and the accuracy of data analysis, but also by the researcher's openness in explaining the reflection process undertaken during the research (Lange, 2022). However, the implementation of reflexivity in various studies still shows considerable diversity (Cena et al., 2024). Some studies only present reflexivity as a brief description of the researcher's background, while others integrate reflexivity comprehensively at every stage of the research (Harasym et al., 2024). These differences indicate a lack of a uniform understanding of the concept, dimensions, forms of implementation, and contributions of reflexivity within the post-positivist paradigm.

Numerous scholarly publications have discussed reflexivity from diverse perspectives, ranging from qualitative research, action research, ethnography, case studies, to mixed-method research. However, most studies still position reflexivity as part of a general discussion of methodology without conducting a synthesis that specifically maps the development of the concept of reflexivity within the post-positivist paradigm (Urbano et al., 2022). This situation has resulted in a scattered understanding of how reflexivity is conceptualized, applied, and contributes to improving research quality, which remains fragmented across various publications and has not been systematically integrated (Goñi, 2025). However, a synthesis of these findings is necessary to provide a comprehensive overview of the development of reflexivity as a fundamental principle in the post-positivist paradigm, as well as to identify research trends, knowledge gaps, and future directions for research development.

Based on these conditions, this study aims to conduct a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of the literature discussing researcher reflexivity within the post-positivist paradigm. This review focuses on identifying the development of the concept of reflexivity, its implementation in research, its contribution to improving research quality, and the challenges faced in its application. Through a synthesis of various studies published in reputable scientific journals, this study is expected to produce a more comprehensive conceptual understanding of researcher reflexivity within the post-positivist paradigm. In addition to enriching the repertoire of research methodology, the results of this study are also expected to serve as a reference for researchers in implementing reflexivity practices more systematically, thereby increasing transparency, credibility, and trust in scientific research results.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design using the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method to explore, interpret, and synthesize previous studies related to researcher reflexivity within the post-positivism paradigm. A qualitative approach was selected because the objective of this study was not to measure statistical relationships but to understand conceptual developments, methodological practices, implementation patterns, and the contribution of researcher reflexivity to research quality. The SLR method was conducted based on the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 guidelines to ensure a transparent, systematic, and reproducible review process in identifying, selecting, evaluating, and synthesizing relevant scientific literature (Goldberg & Allen, 2024).

The research was conducted through a literature-based study by accessing scientific publications from Google Scholar, EBSCO, GARUDA, and SINTA-indexed journals. These databases were selected because they provide broad access to peer-reviewed academic publications from international and national sources related to research methodology, educational research, and social science studies. The selection of these sources was based on their relevance in providing empirical and conceptual discussions regarding researcher reflexivity and post-positivist research practices. The literature search focused on articles published between 2022 and 2026 using a combination of keywords: ("researcher reflexivity" OR "reflexivity" OR "reflexive practice") AND ("post-positivism" OR "postpositivism" OR "post-positivist paradigm") AND ("research" OR "educational research" OR "social research") (Alatawi et al., 2023).

Data collection was conducted through a systematic article selection process consisting of identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion stages following the PRISMA 2020 framework. The inclusion criteria consisted of peer-

reviewed journal articles published between 2022 and 2026, available in full-text format, and explicitly discussing researcher reflexivity within the post-positivism paradigm. Books, conference proceedings, theses, dissertations, review articles, and irrelevant publications were excluded. The quality of the selected articles was assessed using the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) Critical Appraisal Checklist to evaluate methodological rigor before analysis (Kolaski et al., 2023). Data analysis was carried out using thematic synthesis, involving data condensation through article selection and coding, data reduction by categorizing important concepts and findings, data display through thematic mapping of reflexivity concepts and practices, and verification through interpretation and comparison of emerging themes. This process aimed to identify conceptual developments, implementation strategies, contributions, and challenges of researcher reflexivity within the post-positivism paradigm.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Conceptualizing Researcher Reflexivity in the Post-Positivism Paradigm

The results of the literature synthesis indicate that researcher reflexivity has developed into a fundamental concept within the post-positivism paradigm. Unlike the positivist paradigm, which positions the researcher as a completely objective observer separate from the research object, the post-positivism paradigm recognizes that the researcher is part of the knowledge production process (Stalmeijer et al., 2024). This involvement means that every research decision, from problem formulation and method selection to data collection and interpretation of results, is potentially influenced by the researcher's experiences, values, beliefs, and background. Therefore, reflexivity is understood as a process of critically evaluating the researcher's position so that this influence can be recognized, explained, and systematically managed (Foster, 2023). The synthesis of various studies shows that reflexivity is no longer viewed as a methodological complement but has become an integral part of building transparent, credible, and scientifically accountable research.

The development of the concept of reflexivity indicates a shift from an approach oriented toward acknowledging subjectivity to one that emphasizes the scientific management of subjectivity. The literature review demonstrates that reflexivity does not aim to eliminate the researcher's influence on the research, but rather to increase awareness of how that influence shapes the entire research process (Biagini, 2025). Thus, reflexivity functions as a self-monitoring mechanism that allows researchers to continuously evaluate assumptions, values, and methodological decisions (Mohler & Rudman, 2022). This process

helps generate more open interpretations of various possible meanings without neglecting the scientific principles underlying the research. This shift in perspective strengthens reflexivity's position as a key characteristic of the post-positivist paradigm, distinguishing it from the classical positivist paradigm.

The synthesis also shows that reflexivity has broader dimensions than simply researcher self-awareness. In various studies, reflexivity is associated with the researcher's ability to understand the relationship between personal identity, social position, professional experience, theoretical perspective, and the research context that influence the decision-making process (Braun & Clarke, 2024b). This awareness allows researchers to explain the rationale for their choice of research approach, data collection strategy, analysis techniques, and conclusion-drawing process more transparently (Trundle et al., 2025). Thus, reflexivity functions not only as a process of introspection but also as a mechanism for scientific documentation that demonstrates how knowledge is generated through the interaction between the researcher and the phenomenon being studied (Lim, 2023). This approach strengthens the argument that research quality is determined not only by the accuracy of the method, but also by the researcher's openness in explaining the thought processes and methodological considerations undertaken during the research.

Further literature synthesis indicates that reflexivity has become an important indicator in assessing the methodological quality of post-positivism research. Research that systematically applies reflexivity tends to provide a more comprehensive explanation of the research process than research that focuses solely on reporting technical procedures (Riazi et al., 2023). Transparency regarding the researcher's position allows readers to understand the context in which the data were generated and to evaluate the consistency between the research objectives, the methods used, and the interpretation of the results (O'Leary, 2025). This condition increases trust in the research results because readers gain a clear picture of the scientific process undertaken by the researcher. Based on the results of this synthesis, it is clear that reflexivity is not merely a philosophical concept within the post-positivism paradigm but has developed as a methodological strategy that strengthens the quality, transparency, and integrity of scientific research.

Researcher Reflexivity Practices in Post-Positivism Research

The results of the literature synthesis indicate that the implementation of researcher reflexivity in the post-positivism paradigm is no longer positioned as an incidental activity, but rather as a continuous process throughout all stages of the research (Lundberg et al., 2024). Reflexivity begins when the researcher formulates the research problem, considering how their experiences, academic

background, beliefs, and perspectives can influence their perspective on a phenomenon (Sukhera, 2022). This awareness continues throughout the research design selection, participant selection, instrument development, and data analysis and interpretation processes. Thus, reflexivity is not only undertaken at the end of the research as a form of evaluation, but becomes an integral part of the entire research process (Mkansi & Mkalipi, 2023). This approach demonstrates that the post-positivism paradigm positions the researcher as a scientific instrument who must continuously critically evaluate every methodological decision made.

One of the most common reflexivity practices found in various studies is the development of researcher positionality, or an explanation of the researcher's position on the phenomenon being studied. Through researcher positionality, the researcher describes the identity, professional experience, academic background, values, and relationships with participants that could potentially influence the research process (Pilcher & Cortazzi, 2023). This information provides readers with an overview of the context underlying decision-making during the research (Lim, 2024). This practice also helps clarify that data interpretations do not emerge neutrally but are influenced by the interaction between the researcher and the reality being studied. Therefore, presenting researcher positionality is seen as a form of methodological transparency that can enhance the credibility of research results.

In addition to explaining the researcher's positionality, various studies also implement reflexivity through the use of reflexive journals, or reflective notes compiled periodically throughout the research process. These notes document changes in understanding, methodological considerations, field challenges, and the rationale behind each decision made by the researcher. This practice allows researchers to track the development of their thinking and identify potential biases that arise during the research process (Maffezzoli et al., 2022). Furthermore, some studies complement the practice of reflexivity with audit trails, peer debriefings, and triangulation to ensure that the resulting interpretations have undergone adequate verification. The combination of these strategies demonstrates that reflexivity is not solely an individual activity but also involves external evaluation mechanisms to strengthen the quality of research.

The synthesis also shows that the implementation of reflexivity varies depending on the characteristics of the scientific field, the research design, and the complexity of the phenomenon being studied. Research in education and the social sciences tends to apply reflexivity more explicitly because the interaction between researchers and participants has a significant influence on the data collection and interpretation process. Conversely, in more quantitatively

oriented research, reflexivity is generally manifested through transparency in methodological decision-making, bias control, and detailed reporting of research procedures. Although the forms of implementation vary, all of the studies analyzed share the common view that reflexivity is an important mechanism for maintaining scientific integrity, increasing transparency in the research process, and ensuring that any findings are generated through a methodologically sound process.

The Contribution of Reflexivity to Research Trustworthiness

The results of the literature synthesis indicate that researcher reflexivity significantly contributes to strengthening trustworthiness in post-positivism research. Unlike the positivist paradigm, which emphasizes objectivity through variable control and rigorous measurement procedures, the post-positivism paradigm views objectivity as relative and therefore needs to be pursued through transparency in the research process (Kaur et al., 2025). In this context, reflexivity serves as a mechanism that enables researchers to identify and explain how personal assumptions, experiences, values, and perspectives influence each stage of the research (Jamieson et al., 2023). This awareness results in a more open research process, allowing readers to understand the basis for methodological decisions more comprehensively. Thus, reflexivity serves as an instrument that strengthens trust in research results by increasing transparency and scientific accountability.

The contribution of reflexivity is most evident in increasing credibility, or the level of trust in research results. The results of the synthesis indicate that studies that consistently apply reflexivity tend to provide more detailed descriptions of the data collection process, the relationship between researchers and participants, and the rationale behind each interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2024a). This transparency allows readers to assess whether research conclusions are truly based on the data obtained or influenced by the researcher's subjective assumptions (Timonen et al., 2024). Reflexivity also encourages researchers to continuously evaluate the consistency between the research objectives, the methods used, and the interpretations developed during the analysis process. Therefore, the higher the level of reflexivity applied, the greater the chance of the research producing credible and reliable findings.

In addition to enhancing credibility, reflexivity also contributes to the dependability and confirmability of the research. Documenting the reflection process, changes in methodological decisions, and the rationale behind each research step creates an audit trail that can be traced by other researchers (Agazu et al., 2025). This allows for critical evaluation of the research process, thereby enhancing the consistency and traceability of each research stage. At the same

time, reflexivity helps ensure that the resulting interpretations are based primarily on empirical evidence rather than the researcher's personal preferences (Olaghere, 2022). This mechanism strengthens confirmability because each conclusion can be traced back to supporting data, rather than solely derived from the researcher's subjective perspective.

The synthesis also shows that reflexivity contributes to increased transferability by presenting the research context more comprehensively. Researchers who systematically apply reflexivity generally provide detailed explanations of participant characteristics, the research setting, the interaction process during data collection, and contextual factors that influence the research results (Mahato, 2024). This information helps readers assess the applicability of the findings to other contexts with similar characteristics. Furthermore, reflexivity strengthens methodological integrity because every research decision is communicated openly and can be accounted for. Based on the results of this synthesis, it can be understood that reflexivity not only improves the quality of research reporting but also serves as a key strategy in building trustworthiness, an important characteristic of post-positivism research.

Implementation Challenges and Future Research Agenda

The literature synthesis indicates that although reflexivity has been recognized as a crucial element of the post-positivism paradigm, its implementation in research practice still faces various challenges. One major challenge is the lack of agreement on operational standards for reflexivity that can be consistently applied across research designs (Zhang & Bhattacharjee, 2025). Some researchers view reflexivity as a process of personal introspection sufficiently explained through a statement of the researcher's position, while others believe it must be systematically documented at every stage of the research (Belmoukari et al., 2023). These differing understandings contribute to the wide variation in the quality of reflexivity reporting across studies (Peñaloza et al., 2023). Consequently, readers often struggle to assess the extent to which reflexivity is truly applied throughout the research process.

Another challenge relates to researchers' limited ability to objectively identify and manage bias. Reflexivity requires a high level of critical awareness of the influence of personal experiences, values, backgrounds, and perspectives on the research process. However, not all researchers possess adequate reflective skills, resulting in the reflection process often becoming merely a formality in methodological reporting (Senanayake & Dean, 2025). This situation has the potential to diminish reflexivity's function as a bias-control mechanism and instead relegate it to administrative tasks without significantly contributing to research quality (Mutanana & Shoko, 2026). Therefore, strengthening methodological competence and reflective thinking skills is an aspect that requires attention in developing researcher capacity.

The synthesis also revealed that most studies still position reflexivity as part of qualitative research, while its implementation in quantitative and mixed methods research remains relatively limited. However, the post-positivism paradigm does not limit the application of reflexivity to a single research approach (Assem-Erhaze & Archibald, 2025). Transparency in methodological decision-making, bias control, and documentation of the research process remain essential across all research approaches to improve the quality of scientific findings (Cannavacciuolo et al., 2023). This gap indicates the need to develop a more adaptive reflexivity implementation model that can be applied proportionally to various research designs without compromising the methodological characteristics of each approach.

Based on the synthesis, future research agendas should focus on developing a more systematic conceptual framework and guidelines for implementing reflexivity that are easily applicable in various research contexts. Further research should also explore the relationship between researcher reflexivity and methodological quality, research decision-making, the use of digital technology, and the application of artificial intelligence in the scientific research process. Furthermore, empirical studies comparing reflexivity practices across various disciplines and methodological approaches are needed to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of its application. Thus, reflexivity has not only developed as a philosophical concept in the post-positivism paradigm, but also as a methodological practice that is able to strengthen the integrity, transparency, and credibility of scientific research in various scientific fields.

CONCLUSION

This Systematic Literature Review highlights that researcher reflexivity is not merely an introspective activity but a critical methodological strategy that strengthens the quality, transparency, and integrity of research within the post-positivist paradigm. The most important insight from this study is that acknowledging researchers' positionality, assumptions, experiences, and methodological decisions enables the production of more credible and accountable knowledge by enhancing research trustworthiness through credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. The main contribution of this study lies in providing a comprehensive conceptual synthesis of the development, implementation, and role of researcher reflexivity, thereby enriching methodological discussions and offering a foundation for researchers to integrate reflexive practices more systematically into scientific inquiry. However, this study is limited by its reliance on available published literature and the diversity of conceptualizations and reporting practices across previous

studies, which may affect the comprehensiveness of the synthesis. Future research is therefore encouraged to develop standardized reflexivity frameworks, investigate empirical applications of reflexive strategies across different disciplines and research designs, and examine how reflexivity practices can be integrated with emerging research methodologies to further enhance the transparency, rigor, and credibility of scientific research.

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