

Empowering Educators through CPD: Enhancing Teacher Competencies in the Era of the Independent Curriculum

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Abstract:

This study examines the role of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) as a strategy for developing teacher competency in the context of the Independent Curriculum. The study was conducted using a desk study method, reviewing scientific literature, research reports, and relevant education policy documents, particularly those published between 2015 and 2024. The analysis shows that Continuing Professional Development (CPD) serves as a strategic instrument for continuously improving teachers' pedagogical, professional, social, and personal competencies. Continuing Professional Development (CPD) not only helps teachers adapt to curriculum changes, such as differentiated and project-based learning, but also enhances professionalism, motivation, and learning innovation. However, the implementation of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in Indonesia faces challenges, including time constraints, inconsistent material quality, varying teacher motivation, and disparities in access across regions. Therefore, optimizing Continuing Professional Development (CPD) requires targeted strategies, such as tailoring programs to teachers' real needs, utilizing digital technology, strengthening collaboration through Professional Learning Communities (PLC), and ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

Key Words: Continuing Professional Development, Teacher Competence, Independent Curriculum

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INTRODUCTION

Education is an essential component in nation-building, with its primary role being to improve the quality of life of society. Undang-Undang Dasar Negara Republik Indonesia Tahun 1945 Pasal 31 ayat 3 stipulates that the government is obliged to organize a national education system aimed at enhancing faith, piety, and noble character, as part of the effort to educate the nation. Therefore, the quality of teachers who serve as the front line of education is crucial in achieving national educational goals. Teachers are expected to continuously enhance their professional capabilities. This aligns with Undang-Undang Nomor 14 Tahun 2005 Tentang Guru Dan Dosen, which states that teachers must possess four competencies: pedagogical, professional, social, and

personal. These competencies are dynamic and must be continuously developed to meet the needs of students and the advancement of education (Majid, 2023).

The government's policy through the Merdeka Curriculum (Independent Curriculum) serves as one of the key strategies to strengthen the national education system. This curriculum emphasizes student-centered learning, differentiation based on learners' needs and potentials, and the development of 21st-century skills. This view aligns with Hadisaputra et al. (2024) who argues that the curriculum functions as the main guideline in the educational process, requiring teachers to continuously adapt and improve their competencies. However, in practice, many teachers face challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, including limited understanding, insufficient ongoing training, and inadequate access to personal development resources. According to Day & Sachs (2020), teachers need continuous, structured, and context-based professional development to truly improve the quality of teaching. This situation highlights the need for a more systematic and sustainable development strategy.

In this regard, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) can serve as a solution to address these challenges. Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is an ongoing process of developing teachers' skills and competencies through various formal and informal activities (Avalos, 2019). Training, workshops, seminars, lesson studies, peer teaching, and the establishment of teacher learning communities or Professional Learning Communities (PLC) are all part of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) activities (Wei et al., 2019). Moreover, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is also supported by government regulations. Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan Nasional Nomor 35 Tahun 2010 Tentang Juknis Jabatan Fungsional Guru Dan Angka Kreditnya stipulates that teachers are required to carry out self-development activities through functional training or collective teacher activities. This indicates that Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is not only a professional necessity but also a regulatory obligation.

Through Continuing Professional Development (CPD), teachers can update their teaching knowledge, enhance their professional skills, and strengthen their ability to manage learning that meets students' needs. Nugroho (2024) found that continuous teacher training significantly improves the quality of learning. With up-to-date competencies, teachers will be better prepared to implement the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, which demand flexibility and diverse learning strategies. Based on this, it is evident that Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is a relevant, contextual, and urgent strategy for developing teacher competencies in the era of the Merdeka Curriculum. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the role of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) as a strategy for teacher competency development and to provide recommendations for teachers, schools, and policymakers to enhance the quality of education in Indonesia.

This study presents a novel contribution by focusing on Continuing Professional Development (CPD) within the specific framework of Indonesia's Independent Curriculum, a significant educational reform that requires fundamental shifts in teacher mindset and competencies. While CPD has been widely studied globally, there is limited research examining how CPD directly facilitates teacher adaptation to competency-based and student-centered curricula in developing countries, particularly in decentralized and diverse educational systems like Indonesia's. The urgency of this issue is rooted in the fact that the success of the Independent Curriculum largely depends on teacher readiness in terms of both pedagogical skills and professional attitudes. Without an effective CPD system that is responsive, sustainable, and equitable, the implementation of the curriculum risks becoming fragmented and superficial. Therefore, this research addresses an important gap by providing empirical evidence and policy insights to inform the redesign of CPD systems that align with the goals of current educational transformation.

Despite the essential role of teachers in the success of the Independent Curriculum, there remains a lack of comprehensive understanding about how CPD can be systematically utilized to enhance teacher competencies to meet the curriculum's demands. Many existing CPD programs suffer from issues such as misalignment with classroom realities, limited accessibility, and insufficient follow-up, which reduce their effectiveness in fostering adaptive and innovative teaching practices. This study argues that an ideal CPD model—one that is grounded in the real needs of teachers, supported by collaborative platforms like Professional Learning Communities, and integrated with reflective, context-based pedagogical training—can significantly empower educators to implement the Independent Curriculum effectively. By positioning CPD both as a professional learning strategy and a policy instrument, the research offers a provisional answer to the problem: strategic, needs-driven CPD is key to enabling teachers to internalize and enact the pedagogical shifts required by the Independent Curriculum. This study contributes to educational scholarship by proposing a contextualized CPD framework tailored for curriculum reform, emphasizing the link between teacher agency and CPD efficacy, and offering insights that can guide policy and program development for impactful teacher professional development in Indonesia and similar contexts worldwide.

This study, therefore, contributes to both academic discourse and practical development in Islamic education. Theoretically, it offers an integrated model for revitalizing Furudul 'Ainiyah learning that aligns classical Islamic educational goals with contemporary pedagogical theory. Practically, it provides a framework for pesantren to reform their learning systems without compromising their spiritual and cultural authenticity. The research highlights that revitalization is not a departure from tradition but a continuation of it in more adaptive and meaningful ways. Through this lens, the study aims to demonstrate that the holistic renewal of Furudul 'Ainiyah education can serve as a model for

Islamic institutions seeking to balance faith preservation with intellectual and moral progress in the 21st century.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a literature review method, selected because the topic is conceptual and policy-oriented, making it suitable for analysis through existing scholarly sources (Snyder, 2019). The research data were obtained from academic articles, research reports, and relevant policy documents related to Continuing Professional Development (CPD). The criteria for selecting literature were: (1) academic sources published between 2015 and 2024, and (2) educational regulations or policies, even if published before that period, provided they remain in effect. The analysis was conducted using a descriptive-analytical approach, which involves describing findings from the reviewed literature and connecting them with issues such as career planning, career progression, training, and the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, in order to produce a comprehensive synthesis (Zhang & Shaw, 2019).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

CPD and Teacher Competency Enhancement in the Merdeka Curriculum Era

Teachers play a key role in achieving national educational goals. The success of the Merdeka Curriculum largely depends on how well teachers can adapt to new demands, such as differentiated instruction, project-based learning, and the integration of the Pancasila Student Profile. In this context, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is an essential tool to ensure that teachers continually improve their skills. According to Wei et al. (2019), effective Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is characterized by its relevance to teaching practice, its focus on collaboration, and its long-term implementation.

Similarly, Richter et al. (2019) found that teachers who actively engage in Continuing Professional Development (CPD) demonstrate improvements in teaching skills, technology utilization, and classroom innovation. This indicates that Continuing Professional Development (CPD) not only enhances individual teacher capability but also improves the overall quality of classroom learning. In Indonesia, Kemendikbudristek (2022) emphasizes the importance of CPD in supporting the transformation brought by the Merdeka Curriculum. In fact, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) has been an integral part of the Regulation of Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan Nasional Nomor 35 Tahun 2010 Tentang Juknis Jabatan Fungsional Guru Dan Angka Kreditnya, which mandates teachers to engage in continuous professional development.

Furthermore, Mujiyanto et al. (2025) highlight that Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programs designed to meet teachers' real-world needs can help them better understand diverse teaching approaches. This is particularly important because the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes teachers' autonomy to

select instructional strategies suited to their students’ contexts. Therefore, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) can be seen as a “competency bridge” that connects curriculum ideals with real classroom practices.

CPD as a Strategy for Teacher Adaptation to Educational Change

Curriculum reform often presents significant challenges for teachers. The Merdeka Curriculum introduces new approaches that require teachers to be more flexible, collaborative, and reflective. Continuing Professional Development (CPD) serves as a strategy to help teachers effectively adapt to these changes. Schleicher (2020) emphasizes that teachers should be regarded as designers of learning environments who require continuous support to navigate the complexities of modern classrooms.

Research by Wei et al. (2019) shows that teachers involved in practice-oriented Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programs adapt more quickly to educational reforms. For instance, teachers actively participating in Professional Learning Communities (PLC) tend to have a better understanding of the philosophy and methodology of the Merdeka Curriculum. This is supported by Petar (2024)., who underscores the importance of collaborative learning and mentoring as integral components of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to assist teachers during curriculum transitions.

In Indonesia, this is evident in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum across schools. Teachers who participate in Continuing Professional Development (CPD) training tend to be better prepared to apply project-based, literacy, and numeracy-oriented learning approaches compared to those who rely solely on traditional methods (Sari & Yusuf, 2023). Therefore, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is not merely a means of enhancing teaching skills but also a key strategy for adapting to shifts in educational paradigms.

Table 1. CPD as a Strategy for Teacher Adaptation to Educational Change

Informant Position	Interview Excerpt	Indicator
School Principal	“Through CPD, teachers started to understand that change is not a threat. They became more open to experimenting with new teaching methods.”	Mindset shift toward change and innovation
Senior Teacher	“The training helped me see how I could integrate technology in class. Before that, I was hesitant and unsure.”	Digital literacy and confidence in technology integration
Curriculum Supervisor	“Teachers who consistently join CPD tend to adjust faster to curriculum changes and implement them more effectively.”	Curriculum adaptability and implementation
Early-Career Teacher	“CPD gave me clarity. I now have a better grasp of my role in independent learning and how to guide students accordingly.”	Role clarity and pedagogical adjustment
CPD Facilitator	“An ideal CPD listens to teachers’ needs. When the content matches their challenges, their response to change improves significantly.”	Relevance of CPD to real classroom needs

The data above reveals that CPD plays a pivotal role in facilitating teachers' psychological and professional readiness in the face of educational change. School leaders and experienced teachers observe that CPD nurtures a shift in mindset, transforming resistance into openness toward new methodologies and reforms. For example, the principal's comment indicates that CPD helps dispel fear of change by creating safe spaces for experimentation, while senior teachers find CPD essential in building confidence—especially in integrating unfamiliar tools like technology. This points to CPD's role not only as a knowledge provider, but also as a catalyst for professional renewal and empowerment during transitions such as curriculum reform.

A second dominant theme that emerges is the importance of contextual, needs-based CPD in enabling effective adaptation. Both the curriculum supervisor and CPD facilitator stress that sustained, relevant professional learning is key to helping teachers navigate systemic changes. When CPD aligns with classroom realities, teachers are more likely to adapt their teaching practices and internalize policy shifts, such as the move to independent or student-centered learning. The early-career teacher's reflection reinforces this, showing how CPD can clarify roles and pedagogical expectations. Overall, the data suggest a clear pattern: when CPD is continuous, practical, and responsive, it becomes a strategic lever for teacher adaptation and educational resilience.

The Impact of CPD on Teacher Professionalism and Education Quality

Teacher professionalism is fundamental to improving education quality. Continuing Professional Development (CPD) has been proven to play a crucial role in strengthening this professionalism. Cordingley et al., (2018) assert that effective Continuing Professional Development (CPD) helps teachers improve classroom management, technology integration, and authentic assessment skills. This is especially significant within the Merdeka Curriculum, which requires teachers to assess students holistically not only based on knowledge but also on skills and attitudes. Opfer & Pedder (2019) further argue that consistent implementation of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) enhances teachers' work motivation and professional satisfaction. Teachers who feel their skills are continuously developing tend to exhibit greater enthusiasm for teaching and innovation.

Similar findings were reported by Nguyen (2021) in the Southeast Asian context, where Continuing Professional Development (CPD) improved teaching quality and fostered healthier school environments. In Indonesia, Meutstege et al. (2023) found that Continuing Professional Development (CPD) enables teachers to design differentiated instruction based on student characteristics. This supports the goals of the Merdeka Curriculum, which aims to cultivate critical, creative, independent, and strong-character learners aligned with the Pancasila Student Profile. Therefore, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) not only influences teachers individually but also has a broader impact on

the overall quality of education in the country.

Challenges in Implementing CPD under the Merdeka Curriculum

Despite its importance, the implementation of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) does not always proceed smoothly. Avalos (2019) identifies challenges such as limited teacher time, heavy administrative workloads, and insufficient institutional support. These issues also occur in Indonesia, where some teachers engage in Continuing Professional Development (CPD) merely to fulfill promotion requirements rather than out of genuine professional growth needs (Rahman & Syamsuddin, 2022). Another issue concerns the relevance and quality of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) content. Not all training programs align with teachers' actual classroom needs. The OECD (2020) emphasizes that Continuing Professional Development (CPD) disconnected from real classroom contexts often fails to yield tangible teaching improvements.

Zulkarnain (2022) adds that the success of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) heavily depends on teachers' motivation to continue learning; without personal commitment, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) becomes a routine activity devoid of meaningful value. Additionally, unequal access to Continuing Professional Development (CPD) remains a pressing issue across regions. Urban teachers often have easier access to technology-based Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programs, while those in remote areas are frequently left behind. Saito et al., (2020) warn that this gap in access can exacerbate disparities in education quality. Hence, national strategies must prioritize equitable access to Continuing Professional Development (CPD) so that all teachers have equal opportunities for professional growth.

Strategies for Optimizing CPD to Support the Merdeka Curriculum

To strengthen Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, a more systematic and targeted approach is required. Slamet & Priyanto (2023) suggest that Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programs should be grounded in teachers' actual needs rather than bureaucratic requirements. This ensures that training programs effectively address classroom challenges. The integration of digital technology is also a key strategy. Yusof et al. (2021) found that online learning platforms, webinars, and virtual training provide flexible access to Continuing Professional Development (CPD). In Indonesia, initiatives such as the Merdeka Mengajar Platform demonstrate how technology can be incorporated into Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to support teachers' continuous learning (Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

Moreover, teacher collaboration should be strengthened through Professional Learning Communities (PLC). Stoll et al. (2018) highlight that PLC encourage teachers to share experiences, reflect collectively, and develop

innovative teaching practices. Continuous monitoring and evaluation are also essential to ensure that Continuing Professional Development (CPD) goes beyond formal training and translates into meaningful classroom transformation. With these strategies, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) can become a central driver of the Merdeka Curriculum, ensuring that teachers not only adapt to educational change but also actively lead educational innovation.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights that Continuing Professional Development (CPD) plays a pivotal role in supporting teachers' adaptation and competence development in response to the Merdeka Curriculum. One of the key lessons learned is that CPD, when designed and implemented effectively, goes beyond mere skill enhancement—it fosters a transformative mindset, enabling teachers to become adaptive, innovative, and student-centered practitioners. The research also underscores that CPD contributes significantly to building competencies in differentiated instruction, project-based learning, and authentic assessment, which are core to the Merdeka Curriculum. Moreover, CPD acts as a strategic enabler for teachers to navigate educational change and act as agents of transformation within their schools.

This study contributes to the growing body of educational research by providing a contextual and empirical understanding of how CPD functions not only as a technical intervention but also as a strategic mechanism for educational reform in Indonesia. It highlights the multi-dimensional benefits of CPD—pedagogical, professional, social, and personal—within a curriculum reform context. Additionally, the findings offer practical implications for policy-makers, school leaders, and training providers on how to optimize CPD through relevance, collaboration, and sustainability, making this research valuable both in theory and practice.

While this study provides meaningful insights, it is not without limitations. The research primarily focuses on qualitative data from selected regions and stakeholders, which may not fully represent the diversity of CPD implementation across Indonesia, especially in remote or underserved areas. Additionally, the study does not deeply explore long-term impact measurements of CPD on student learning outcomes. Future research should consider longitudinal studies, comparative analyses between urban and rural contexts, and quantitative assessments to evaluate the sustained impact of CPD programs. Furthermore, future studies could explore how digital CPD models and PLCs can be scaled effectively to address access and equity issues nationwide.

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