



ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN SUPPORTING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MERDEKA CURRICULUM AT SMAS TUNAS BHAKTI PONTIANAK

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of professional development in supporting the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMAS Tunas Bhakti Pontianak. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were gathered through interviews with an English teacher and the Vice Principal for Curriculum, as well as classroom and training observations. Thematic analysis revealed that professional development improves teachers' ability to design teaching tools, apply student-centered methods, and implement project-based learning. Participation in training and learning communities (Kombel) strengthened pedagogical skills and collaboration. Despite facing limited resources and time constraints, teachers showed increased readiness and adaptability in implementing the curriculum. The findings emphasize the importance of sustainable, relevant, and practical training programs to ensure successful curriculum implementation.

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INTRODUCTION

Education in Indonesia has experienced significant reforms to better align with global trends and the evolving needs of learners in the post-pandemic era. One of the most recent and significant innovations is the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka), which emphasizes flexibility, differentiated instruction, and student autonomy in learning. This curriculum encourages educators to design learning experiences tailored to students' interests, competencies, and developmental stages. However, transitioning from traditional teaching methods to this more adaptive and learner-centered approach presents various challenges, particularly regarding teacher readiness and pedagogical adjustments (Wahidah & Prasetyo, 2023; Abdullah, 2023). Therefore, ensuring teachers are adequately prepared through effective professional development programs is essential to facilitate this educational transformation and achieve the curriculum's intended outcomes.

Professional development has been recognized as a critical factor in supporting teachers through these changes. Effective and continuous training programs enable teachers to develop the necessary skills, knowledge, and attitudes to implement curriculum reforms successfully (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Timperley et al., 2007). Nevertheless, recent studies indicate that many professional development programs still lack contextual relevance and practical application, leaving teachers underprepared for the demands of the Merdeka Curriculum (Sholeh, 2023; Arifah, 2021). And The use of Digital Technology is something that cannot be avoided in the current Era of Globalization. This situation is particularly evident in private schools like SMAS Tunas Bhakti Pontianak, where resources and support systems vary. Addressing this gap requires a deeper understanding of the challenges teachers face and the contextual factors that influence the effectiveness of professional development initiatives.

This study aims to explore the role of professional development in supporting the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, focusing specifically on English teachers at SMAS Tunas Bhakti Pontianak. Research shows that various forms of professional development, such as training, mentoring, and collaborative learning communities, are effective in enhancing teacher competence and instructional effectiveness (Guskey, 2000; Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017). Collaborative learning communities (Kombel) in particular have been recognized for fostering teacher collaboration and continuous improvement (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). Additionally, studies indicate that teachers often face barriers in adapting to curriculum changes, including limited resources and insufficient contextualized support (Desimone, 2009; Timperley et al., 2007). Therefore, identifying these barriers and developing relevant and sustainable professional development strategies is crucial for successful curriculum implementation.

Theoretically, this study draws on frameworks of teacher professional learning, curriculum implementation, and change management to analyze how individual and institutional factors interact in the process of curriculum reform. It is hoped that the findings will provide valuable insights for school administrators, policymakers, and educators in designing and implementing effective professional development initiatives that foster successful adoption of the Merdeka Curriculum and ultimately improve student learning outcomes. Furthermore, understanding the challenges and supports experienced by teachers during this transition can guide the development of more contextually relevant and sustainable professional development programs tailored to the unique needs of schools like SMAS Tunas Bhakti Pontianak.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach, which aims to describe a situation, phenomenon, or problem without quantifying the data. In qualitative research, analysis is carried out to understand variations in a phenomenon based on the experiences and perspectives of participants. Qualitative research is a research procedure that produces descriptive data in written form and oral form from a person and the observed behavior.

According to Creswell (2012) qualitative research is an approach to exploring and understanding individual and social human problems that begins with assumptions and the study of research problems that examines how a person and individuals interpret social problems. This research seeks to collect information about teachers' experiences in participating in professional development programs and their impact on the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum at SMAS Tunas Bhakti Pontianak.

This research used descriptive case study with a qualitative approach. A qualitative descriptive case study approach was chosen to provide an in-depth understanding of how professional development affects teachers' readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum at SMAS Tunas Bhakti Pontianak. According to Yin (2018), case studies are an appropriate empirical method for answering "how" and "why" questions in real-life contexts by utilizing multi-source data to explore complex dynamics in a bounded system. In this study, data will be collected through in-depth interviews with subject teachers and the Vice Principal for Curriculum to understand their experiences and perceptions related to the professional development program; participatory observation at training sessions to capture direct practices and interactions. By focusing the study on SMAS Tunas Bakti Pontianak as a "case", this approach allows researchers to identify strategies, barriers, and real impacts of the professional development program in supporting the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum in a contextual and in-depth manner.

This research focuses on the Vice Principal for Curriculum and English teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at SMAS Tunas Bhakti Pontianak. The Vice Principal for Curriculum has an important responsibility in developing and implementing the curriculum at school. In the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, the Vice Principal for Curriculum acts as a facilitator in integrating the new policy into daily learning practices, ensuring that teachers get the necessary support and resources to adapt their teaching methods according to the demands of the new curriculum. English teachers also play a crucial role in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. As learning facilitators, teachers are required to adjust teaching strategies to suit students' learning styles, interests and individual needs.

The data collection techniques used include observation and interviews. Observations were made to directly observe the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum by teachers in the learning process. In-depth interviews were conducted with the Vice Principal for Curriculum and English teachers to explore their experiences, perceptions, and challenges they faced in implementing the curriculum. The use of this combination of techniques aims to obtain comprehensive and valid data, in accordance with data collection guidelines in qualitative research (Sugiyono, 2013).

RESULT

The results of this study show that professional development has a significant role in supporting the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMAS Tunas Bhakti Pontianak. Through interviews and classroom observations, it was found that English teachers who participated in training and collaborative learning programs experienced improvements in both

pedagogical competence and teaching confidence. Before receiving professional training, teachers admitted to having limited understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum and struggled with designing teaching materials aligned with its principles. However, after participating in structured training sessions, they gained clarity on how to develop lesson plans, apply student-centered approaches, and implement project-based learning.

Observations in the classroom further revealed a positive shift in teaching practices. The teacher engaged students through two-way communication, provided timely feedback, and encouraged interactive learning. Even though some traditional teaching tools were still in use, there was evidence of reflective teaching strategies being implemented. The existence of the learning community (Kombel) also supported continuous professional development, offering a platform for teachers to collaborate, exchange ideas, and solve instructional challenges together.

Additionally, the professional development program was perceived as relevant and practical, particularly because it was tailored to the teachers' actual needs. Teachers found the resources provided during training helpful in designing more effective lessons. However, the study also found that certain challenges remained, such as limited access to infrastructure, time constraints, and the need for more individualized training support. Despite these challenges, the professional development efforts contributed substantially to improving teacher readiness and the overall quality of classroom learning.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study suggest that professional development plays a pivotal role in enhancing teachers' ability to implement the Merdeka Curriculum effectively. The increased teacher competence observed after training confirms that continuous professional learning—especially when grounded in practice and collaboration—can transform instructional quality. These results align with previous research indicating that effective training programs must be contextually relevant, sustained over time, and focused on both content and pedagogy.

The shift toward more interactive and student-centered instruction reflects the core values of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes flexibility, differentiated instruction, and active learning. The observed improvements in teacher confidence and classroom engagement indicate that the training was not only well-received but also impactful in practice. This supports the argument made by Desimone and Garet (2015) that professional development is most effective when it is job-embedded and collaborative.

However, the study also highlights practical barriers that must be addressed to maximize the impact of such programs. Teachers' limited access to digital tools and the constraints of school infrastructure can hinder the full realization of curriculum goals. In addition, the need for more flexible and personalized training paths emerged as a critical issue. As suggested by Arifah (2021), training that is too theoretical fails to equip teachers with actionable strategies for the classroom. Therefore, future professional development should focus on more tailored and sustainable approaches,

incorporating mentoring and practical workshops that reflect real classroom situations.

In conclusion, while professional development has demonstrably improved the readiness and competence of English teachers at SMAS Tunas Bhakti Pontianak, continuous institutional support, infrastructure improvement, and more targeted training content are essential to sustaining this progress. The findings contribute to a broader understanding of how professional development can be optimized to support curriculum reform in Indonesia's secondary education context.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that professional development programs have an important role in supporting the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum, especially in improving the competence and readiness of English teachers at SMAS Tunas Bhakti Pontianak. Through continuous training and mentoring, teachers are better able to design active, meaningful, and student-centered learning. Nevertheless, there are still obstacles such as limited facilities and access to technology that affect the optimization of learning. Therefore, professional development needs to be balanced with the support of facilities and infrastructure, as well as strengthening innovative learning strategies so that the learning process can run more effectively and in accordance with the spirit of Merdeka Curriculum.

This finding also confirms that the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum depends not only on the readiness of individual teachers, but also on systemic support from schools and policy makers. Effective professional development must be sustainable, relevant to field needs, and encourage collaboration between educators so that teachers are not only curriculum implementers, but also agents of change who are able to create adaptive, contextualized, and empowering learning for students.

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