



Exploring the Disconnect: Indonesian Teachers' Professional Development Choices and the 'Merdeka Mengajar' Platform

Elsa Masriani*¹, Nanda Abqari Haeny²

* elsamasriani@unp.ac.id

¹ Faculty of Education, Padang State University, Padang, Indonesia

² PPM Subulussalam, Padang Pariaman, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

This study investigated Indonesian teachers' engagement in continuous professional development (CPD). The participants were the non-users of the newly established online professional development platform designed by the Indonesian government called the "Merdeka Mengajar" Platform. The study investigates teachers' engagement with CPD, perception of government CPD programs, and teachers' perception of the Merdeka Mengajar platform, as well as their reason for not using it. There were ten teachers participated in this study. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews via the online meeting platform, Zoom. The study is situated in Indonesia, and the participants come from rural and urban areas. The interview transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006). The result showed that, even though the participant came from different backgrounds, they have the same focus in CPD, that is, on pedagogical knowledge. Teachers are not using the platform because of no urgency, lack of content and availability of other sources.

Keywords: Merdeka Mengajar Platform, Teacher CPD, Thematic Analysis.

INTRODUCTION

In general, professional development is necessary educational action taken by individuals to enhance their professional capacity (Mizell, 2010; Masruroh, 2010). This definition also applies to teachers, which is called teacher professional development. In Indonesia, the prospective teachers are trained in their universities to prepare them with pedagogical theory and knowledge (Stahl et al., 2016). Teachers' pre-service training in Indonesia is done through four years of education in a teaching program or by taking a pre-service preparation class. Those two educational programs have become the requirement to start a career as a teacher (Margi, 2013; Surya, 2014). Teachers' professional development should be done continuously (Mukan et al., 2019) as they have to prepare their students to compete globally (Padillo et al., 2021; Hofman and Dijkstra, 2010). CPD strategies include "formal, structured seminars on in-service days to everyday, informal hallway discussions with other teachers, workshops, local and national conferences, college courses, special institutes, and so on." (Desimone, 2011. p68).

Kwakman (2003) divided teachers' professional development strategies into four categories. The first category is reading, which includes reading subject matter literature, professional journals, and newspapers. The second strategy is experimenting; it is when the teacher starts experimenting with new teaching methods and plans the lesson independently. The third category is reflecting; it can be the reflections from the supervisor's feedback or the student's feedback. The last category is collaborating; it can be in the form of informal collaboration, such as discussion with colleagues and formal actions, e.g., joining the teacher committee. The presented category from Kwakman (2003) will help to identify the strategies used by the participant in this research. These categories are used to categorise the participants' strategies as they come from different backgrounds. Thus, the categorisation seems to be helpful in analysing phase.

The research on teachers' professional development shows that CPD models are varied and have their own purpose. Kennedy (2005) illustrates three purposes of CPD based on teachers' professional autonomy. The first purpose is transmitting the knowledge where the teacher has a passive role as a learner, for example, the training model CPD. The second category is transitional, where the teacher has the chance to upgrade themselves by fulfilling the set standard or having one on one coaching. The last category is transformative, which involves the change in focus of the CPD program, for example, the focus on teachers to subjects; the activity can be an action research model or transformative model. This categorisation shows that teachers' professional development should meet the teacher's needs, not one activity that can resolve all the teaching problems (Al-Bargi, 2021). It is more of a context-specific activity.

McMillan et al. (2016) divided teachers' motivation into three levels; personal motivation, school support and system wide. Personal motivation includes teachers' personal achievement and teachers' background knowledge (McMillan et al. 2016). Botham (2018) argues that the intrinsic factor is the primary motivator that makes teachers engage in CPD programs. In addition to Mc Millan's (2016) personal motivation, Zhang et al. (2021) added that teachers' belief in learning is an intrinsic factor that affects teacher participation in CDP. Teachers who emphasise the learning in students and subject matter are highly involved in CPD activities (De Vries et al.,2013).

Three significant studies were discovered regarding the model of CPD that positively impacts teacher professionalism. The first model is the continuously monitored CPD (Anwar et al. 2016). it is found that the one-year-long CPD improves teachers' ability (Anwar et al. 2016). This finding shows that the sense of mandatory makes teachers have to improve themselves. The second model of CPD is blended learning from Dwiyoogo and Cholifah (2016); it is effective in improving teachers' engagement in CPD as it removes the distance barrier that previously made teachers unlikely to participate in CPD. As mentioned earlier, there were disadvantaged teachers that unable to participate in CPD due to the distance barrier; blended learning is believed to help solve the problem. The last model is online CPD. Patahuddin and Logan (2019) studied the use of Facebook platform for teachers' CPD. This model of CPD allowed teachers from around Indonesia to contribute; this research found that teachers improve their pedagogical and content knowledge through sharing with other teachers Patahuddin and Logan (2019). However, this only help certain teachers especially teachers that are familiar with the platform.

The research about teachers' perception of CPD in Indonesia is very limited. There are two studies found regarding teachers' perceptions. The first study by Lestari et al. (2017) found that teachers have limited knowledge about CPD. This study informs that teacher understanding of CPD is still low, impacting how they engage with professional development

programs. The second study is regarding teachers' perception of government CPD programs. Teachers in Indonesia consider the government CPD program as problem-solving media (Al Rasyid, 2017). The government program that was mentioned is KKG (more in section 2.2.2). In this forum, the teachers can meet with fellow teachers from the same subject and discuss the problem they face in the classroom. This limited literature regarding teacher perception has become the reason for conducting this research.

Indonesian government created the first online professional development platform called Merdeka Mengajar. Merdeka Mengajar (translated in English as liberate teaching) is a professional development platform designed by the Indonesian government that focuses on improving teachers' professional development. The platform is available for teachers that have been registered in a national database. Even though the platform is made available for all teachers, statistics show that the number of teachers who download the platform is yet low. Only one-third of the total teacher registered in Indonesia download the Merdeka Mengajar platform (Dapo Kemdikbud, 2022). McAleavy et al. (2018) mentioned that promising technology alone is insufficient to support teachers' online professional development in developing countries. Other factors such as ICT access, participants' ICT skills, support, and incentives (Gaible and Burns, 2005) should be put into consideration.

The low engagement of CPD contradicts the previous studies that show the significant demand for CPD for Indonesian teachers (Rahyasih et al., 2020). The Indonesian government designs many CPDs (Pangestika and Alfarisa, 2015); however, limited research has been found on teachers' needs in the Indonesian context. Reti (1980) stated that teacher educators must identify the teacher's needs in training. This research is intended to fill the gap in analysing teachers' needs by exploring the non-user perspective regarding the platform. This research investigates the non-user engagement in continuous professional development, their perception of the Merdeka Mengajar platform, and their reason for not using it.

METHOD

The approach taken in this research is interpretivism. Crotty (1998, p67) defined interpretivism as the approach that focuses on interpreting the social world that is 'culturally derived' and 'historically situated'. The interpretivist sees the world as subjective to the individual, and each individual has their own interpretation of what they experience (Darlaston-Jones, 2007). The interpretivism approach highlights the personal subjective perception and multiple realities (Rehman and Alharthi, 2016). In line with the interpretivism research position, an online one-to-one interview was carried out to accommodate the research need that requires in-depth insight into participants' perceptions and experience of CPD and the platform.

The qualitative method was adopted to help the researcher, in a more profound manner, investigate participants' internal perceptions and how their external surroundings affected their decision. Thanh and Thanh (2015, p. 24) stated that the qualitative method is appropriate for the interpretivism approach that focuses on the 'experiences, understandings and perceptions of the observed participants'. Emanating from the fact that many teachers are not engaging in online professional development, this research wants to explore teachers' perceptions regarding the Merdeka mengajar platform. The factors that affected teacher decisions, such as engagement with online or offline CPD and engagement with government-designed CPD programs, are also explored to create a robust rationalisation.

The data were collected from the ninth of June until the twenty-six of June 2022, with total participants of ten Indonesian teachers. The teachers were Indonesian teachers who teach at the junior and senior high school levels in Indonesia. The participants were the non-

user of the platform, defined as teachers who 1) have heard about the 'Merdeka Mengajar' platform but are not using it or 2) teachers who tried to use the 'Merdeka Mengajar' platform once and decided not to use it. The participants were selected through a purposive sampling method where the researcher looks for a particular characteristic from the participant (Morse, 2011) that is the non-user of the Merdeka mengajar platform.

The interview transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis is the process of 'finding the pattern' of the collected data to be reported as a research result (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79). This analysis method is in line with the research position taken in this study. The research position that focuses on multiple interpretations will be appropriately matched with the thematic analysis method, which does not require the researcher to have a prior theoretical background while analysing the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Several repeated codes were identified during the initial coding. The codes are grouped to answer the research questions: teacher engagement with general CPD and government CPD programs, teachers' perception and reason for an opt-out from the Merdeka Mengajar platform. From the codes, six themes were identified, and each code has sub-themes. The pattern of codes suggested the significant relation between the themes.

There are six themes that arise from the analysis process:

1. Issues that make teachers engage with CPD
2. Engagement with CPD
3. PPG Program
4. Other government CPD Programs
5. Perception to Merdeka Mengajar
6. The decision to not use the platform

The relation of the themes with research questions and its' sub-themes are shown in the table below:

Research Question	Themes	Sub Themes	Codes
How do the non-users of the 'Merdeka Mengajar' platform engage in online or offline continuous professional development, and what are their reasons to choose a particular professional development strategy?	Issues that make teachers engage with CPD	Students related	Lack of Motivation
			Student Ability
		Teaching related	Planning
	Engagement with CPD	Informal Offline discussion	Delivery Method
			Discussion with teachers in school
			Discussion with teachers across school
			Discussion with friends in college
		Mandatory offline Formal forum	MGMP Forum
			KKG Forum
		Online platform as communication tools	Whatsapp Chat group

		Material searching Online	Youtube
		Printed material searching	Google
What are the non-user perceptions of the government's teacher professional development programs, and how do they engage with them?	PPG Program	Strong knowledge of the program structure	Textbooks
		Sufficient information about the incentives	12 Moths program Lesson Plan making, effective teaching
		Positive attitude about the program	Sertifikat Pendidik (Teaching qualification certificate)
	Other government CPD Programs	Less knowledge	Perceived the program as beneficial Shows Intention to join Obtained limited information
How do non-users perceive the 'Merdeka Mengajar' platform as a professional development tool, and why did they decide not to use it?	Perception to Merdeka Mengajar	Unwilling to comment	Has not been socialized yet
		Perceived as a platform for teacher	Haven't explore the app Features in the platform is designed to help teacher
	Decision to not use the platform	Availability other sources	Textbooks, Online material
		Incomplete content	Focus on certain subjects (Math and English)
		No Urgency	No direct command to use the app
		Infrastructure	Limited electronic devices

Table 1. Themes

The close data analysis shows the relation between the themes. The root of the themes is the problem faced in the classroom. This theme affects how teachers engage in offline and online CPD, and government CPD programs the engagement with the CPDs affects teachers' decision to use the Merdeka Mengajar platform.



Figure 1. Relationships between themes

Discussion

From the interview, it was found that teachers focused on improving their pedagogical knowledge. Castle (2006) stated that the pedagogical aspect emphasises student improvement. The discussions teachers have with peers informally or in the formal forum mainly discuss effective learning. The reason behind that is that the most mentioned teaching-related problem by the teacher is students' motivation. This finding confirms the study by Marx et al. (1998) that said teachers tend to look for professional development related to their 'knowledge and belief'. In this case, teachers acknowledge that the problem they should solve is related to students' motivation; thus, in their professional development effort, teachers also seek information that helps them improve students' motivation.

The result showed that the PPG program dominated teachers' knowledge of CDP. This finding is in line with the previous research that stated teachers have insufficient knowledge about government CPD programs (Lestari et al., 2017). The reasons teachers understand the program and demonstrate the intention to join are because of the incentives and the benefit. For the incentives, the government provide the teacher with teaching certification that will benefit them during the civil servant test. In Indonesia, working as a civil servant is a goal of teachers (Ruswandi, 2018) because it provides them with a fixed salary every month and got a retirement fund from the government when they are no longer working. In addition, for teachers who are already entitled as civil servants, the teaching certification also benefits them to get the certification fee. This might be one of the government's efforts to adjust teacher salaries and workload (Mustafa, 2007), aiming to improve teacher well-being.

The second reason is the benefit in teaching practices. Almost all teachers believed that the program has an impact on teacher pedagogical competency. These findings align with previous research that stated PPG program positively improves teacher performance, especially in teaching competency (Daud et al. 2020). One teacher from a rural area believes that the PPG program is beneficial, but the learning they got from the program cannot be implemented due to infrastructure constraints in the school. For example, the teacher was trained to make interactive learning media using PowerPoint. However, they were unable to practice it in class because they had no projector to present the slides.

Participants shared three reasons for not utilising the Merdeka Mengajar platform; the

availability of other sources, incomplete content and no urgency. The first reason is the availability of other sources. This finding relates to the CPD strategies preferred by the participant that mainly focus on pedagogical aspects. Teachers focus on searching for engaging media to motivate their students in the learning process, which they can find on social media platforms. Thus, they feel no need to use the government's online CPD platform even though it offers more than learning materials.

The second reason is the incomplete content. This result is in line with previous research regarding the CPD that only focuses on specific subjects (Agustina and Susanto, 2017; Widayanti et al., 2020). The participants who have already explored the program find that some of their subject matter material is unavailable, which requires them to look for other sources. The last reason is that teachers feel there is no urgency for utilising the platform as there is no direct order to ask them to use it. This finding is in line with the study by Sujianto (2014), which found that teachers are unlikely to participate in CPD because there is no command to do so. In addition, Anwar et al. (2016) stated that the teachers are more encouraged to improve their capacity where there is a sense of mandatory on the program. Overall, the findings do not prove the previous study that stated the main reason for opting out from online platforms because of accessibility, time restrictions and workload (Kastawi and Yuliejantiningih, 2019; Sellen, 2016)

CONCLUSION

This study has found that teachers only focus on one aspect of professionalism to improve in practising CPD. Further research hopefully focuses on how teachers can have holistic CPD that improves not only pedagogical knowledge but also content and technological knowledge, considering today's rapidly changing world. The teacher perception and needs of CDP have already been presented in this study so, the future research is expected to design the inclusive CPD for teachers based on their needs

REFERENCES

- Agustina, N. and Susanto, R., 2017. Persepsi Guru Terhadap Pengembangan Profesionalisme Melalui Pelatihan Media Pembelajaran Berbasis Edmodo (Teachers' Perceptions of Professional Development Through Edmodo-Based Learning Media Training). In *Prosiding Seminar Nasional Pendidikan Teknik Informatika* (Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 44-48).
- Botham, K.A. (2018). An analysis of the factors that affect engagement of Higher Education teachers with an institutional professional development scheme. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 55(2), 176-189..
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), 77-101..
- Castle, K. (2006). Autonomy through pedagogical research. *Teaching and teacher education*, 22(8), 1094-1103..
- Crotty, M.J., 1998. The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process. *The foundations of social research*, pp.1-256.
- Desimone, L.M. (2011). A primer on effective professional development. *Phi delta kappan*,

92(6), 68-71..

Direktorat Sekolah Dasar. 2021. Merdeka Belajar(Freedom to Learn). Retrieved from

Dwiyogo, W.D. and Cholifah, P.S., 2016. Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for Physical Education Teacher in Elementary School through Blended Learning. In International Conference on Education (ICE2) 2018: Education and Innovation in Science in the Digital Era (pp. 948-955).

Gaible, E. and Burns, M. (2005). Using Technology to Train Teachers: Appropriate Uses of ICT for Teacher Professional Development in Developing Countries. Online Submission..

Hofman, R.H. and Dijkstra, B.J. (2010). Effective teacher professionalization in networks?. Teaching and Teacher education, 26(4), 1031-1040..

Kennedy, A., 2005. Models of continuing professional development: A framework for analysis. Journal of in-service education, 31(2), pp.235-250.

Kwakman, K. (2003). Factors affecting teachers' participation in professional learning activities. Teaching and teacher education, 19(2), 149-170..

Leksono, S.M., Rustaman, N. and Redjeki, S. (2013). Kemampuan profesional guru biologi dalam memahami dan merancang model pembelajaran konservasi biodiversitas di SMA (Professional ability of biology teachers in understanding and designing biodiversity conservation learning models in high school). Cakrawala Pendidikan, 3(3)..

Makarim, N. (2022). Merdeka Belajar Episode 15: Kurikulum Merdeka dan Platform Merdeka Mengajar(Merdeka Belajar Episode 15: Merdeka Curriculum and Merdeka Mengajar Platform) [Video]. YouTube.

Margi, I.K. (2013). Program Pendidikan Profesi Guru Prajabatan Dalam Perspektif Darwinisme Sosial (Pre-service Teacher Professional Education Program In The Perspective Of Social Darwinism). Jurnal Pendidikan dan Pengajaran, 46(1)..

Marx, R.W., Blumenfeld, P.C., Krajcik, J.S. and Soloway, E. (1998). New technologies for teacher professional development. Teaching and teacher education, 14(1), 33-52..

Masruroh, F. (2010). Dampak Sertifikasi Sebagai Program Peningkatan Profesionalisme Guru Terhadap Kesejahteraan dan Kinerja Guru (The Impact of Certification as a Program to Improve Teacher Professionalism on Teacher Welfare and Performance). Progresiva, 4(1), p.162397..

McAleavy, T., Hall-Chen, A., Horrocks, S. and Riggall, A. (2018). Technology-Supported Professional Development for Teachers: Lessons from Developing Countries. Education Development Trust. Highbridge House, 16-18 Duke Street, Reading Berkshire, England RG1 4RU, United Kingdom..

McMillan, D.J., McConnell, B. and O'Sullivan, H. (2016). Continuing professional development—why bother? Perceptions and motivations of teachers in Ireland.



- Professional development in education, 42(1), 150-167..
- Mizell, H. (2010). Why Professional Development Matters. Learning Forward. 504 South Locust Street, Oxford, OH 45056..
- Mukan, N., Yaremko, H., Kozlovskiy, Y., Ortynskiy, V. and Isayeva, O. (2019) "TEACHERS' CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: AUSTRALIAN EXPERIENCE", *Advanced Education*, 6(12), pp. 105–113. doi: 10.20535/2410-8286.166606.
- OECD (2018). Education GPS Indonesia : PISA Report. Retrieved from
- Padillo, G.G., Manguilimotan, R.P., Capuno, R.G. and Espina, R.C. (2021). Professional development activities and teacher performance. *International Journal of Education and Practice*, 9(3), 497-506..
- Panrb (2022). Visi, misi presiden dan wakil presiden RI (Vision, mission of the president and vice president of the Republic of Indonesia). Retrieved from
- Patahuddin, S.M. and Logan, T. (2019). Facebook as a mechanism for informal teacher professional learning in Indonesia. *Teacher Development*, 23(1), 101-120..
- Pusat penilaian Pendidikan (2019). Laporan Hasil Ujian Nasional : Capaian Nasional (National Examination Result Report: National Achievements). Retrieved from
- Rahmat, A., Amprasto, A., Riandi, R., Saefudin, S. and Sutarno, N. (2011). Profil program continuous professional development (CPD) guru biologi di wilayah jawa barat dalam upaya meningkatkan kualitas profesi (Profile of the continuous professional development (CPD) program for biology teachers in the West Java region in an effort to improve the quality of the profession). *Jurnal Pengajaran MIPA*, 16(1), 155-163..
- Rahyasih, Y., Hartini, N. and Syarifah, L.S. (2020). Pengembangan keprofesian berkelanjutan: Sebuah analisis kebutuhan pelatihan karya tulis ilmiah bagi guru (Continuous professional development: An analysis of the need for training scientific papers for teachers). *Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan*, 20(1), 136-144..
- Sekretariat GTK (2022). Platform Merdeka Mengajar Dukung Guru Menerapkan Kurikulum Merdeka (The Independent Teaching Platform Supports Teachers to Implement the Independent Curriculum). Retrieved from : Accessed on [10 August 2022]
- Sujianto, S. (2014). Professionalism Sustainable Development/Continuing professionalism Development (CPD) Master Certified Teachers in SMK Rumpun Teknologi in Malang. *Jurnal Pendidikan Sains*, 1(2), 159-170..
- Thanh, N.C. and Thanh, T.T. (2015). The interconnection between interpretivist paradigm and qualitative methods in education. *American journal of educational science*, 1(2), 24-27..