



Strategies for Developing Teacher Competence in the Era of Independent Learning: A Library Research in the Context of Indonesia

Resma Umar^{1*}, Kasmiyati², Isnada Waris Tasrim³

^{1,2,3}Universitas Muhammadiyah Palu, Indonesia

¹res78emma@gmail.com, ²author@author.com, ³isnadawt@uho.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

The Era of Independent Learning demands a major transformation in the field of education, particularly in enhancing teacher competence as the spearhead of curriculum implementation. The challenges faced by teachers today are not only related to understanding policy changes but also to their ability to implement contextual, student-centered, and character-based learning. This condition creates an urgent need for effective and sustainable strategies to develop teacher competence. This study aims to identify and analyze various strategies for developing teacher competence within the context of implementing the Independent Learning Curriculum in Indonesia. The research employs a qualitative approach using a literature review method. Data were collected through a review of various scientific journals, academic articles, and relevant educational policy documents. Data analysis was conducted using a descriptive-qualitative and interpretive approach, involving data reduction, presentation of key information, and thematic conclusion drawing. The results of the study show that teacher competence development strategies in the Independent Learning era include continuous professional training, mentoring through learning communities, utilization of digital platforms such as *Merdeka Mengajar*, and strengthening of school principal leadership. In addition, andragogical approaches and the integration of technology in learning are significant supporting factors. Teachers' active participation in programs such as *Guru Penggerak*, *Guru Belajar*, and communities for sharing best practices also plays a crucial role in improving teacher professionalism holistically. The conclusion of this research emphasizes that effective teacher development strategies must be collaborative, needs-based, and supported by responsive policies as well as a robust educational ecosystem. The involvement of the government, higher education institutions, and society is key to building a sustainable and adaptive teacher development system. This study provides both theoretical and practical contributions to the formulation of strategies for improving the quality of education in Indonesia.



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INTRODUCTION

The world of education is currently facing significant challenges due to global disruption and digital transformation. This demands a major shift in learning paradigms, particularly in Indonesia (Mukhlis, Janwari, et al., 2023; Mukhlis & Abdullah, 2025). In line with this, the government, through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), launched the "Merdeka Belajar" (Freedom to Learn) policy as a solution to improve the quality of national education.

The "Merdeka Belajar" policy grants autonomy to educational institutions and educators to design learning processes that align with students' needs and local contexts (Acevedo-Ortiz et al.,

2024; Song & Coppersmith, 2020). However, implementing this policy is not an easy task, as it requires highly competent teachers in pedagogical, professional, social, and personal aspects.

Field phenomena show that many teachers still face difficulties in understanding the essence of the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly in designing differentiated instruction, developing formative assessments, and applying student-centered, character-based learning approaches. This indicates an urgent need for sustainable teacher competence development.

According to Swartz et al. (2022), teachers have not fully understood the concept of learning evaluation as a vital part of the Merdeka Curriculum. They found that teachers need in-depth knowledge of planning, implementing, and following up on quality learning evaluations as part of enhancing their professional competence.

Beyond evaluation aspects, mastery of educational technology has become one of the main demands for teachers in this digital era (Mukhlis, 2025a; Mukhlis & Saidah, 2025). The Merdeka Belajar policy encourages the use of technology through platforms such as "Merdeka Mengajar", designed to support teacher self-development through independent training, inspirational videos, and teaching materials.

In practice, many teachers find training programs helpful, such as those reported by Jeyacheya & Hampton, (2020), which show that the "Guru Belajar dan Berbagi" program helps improve non-technical skills like creativity, communication, collaboration, and self-reflection. This program is one of the government's key initiatives that deserves systematic reinforcement.

However, a significant challenge remains: how to ensure that teacher competence development strategies are sustainable and accessible to all teachers, especially in 3T areas (frontier, outermost, and least developed regions). Without a clear strategy, equal quality in education will be hard to achieve.

Dagilene et al. (2020) & An et al. (2021) proposed a structured strategy for teacher competence development that includes offline training, mentoring, collaboration, role-model schools, digital platforms, and sharing best practices through action research. These strategies have been proven to enhance teacher readiness in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum.

The main issue of this study is the low level of preparedness among some teachers in responding to the learning transformation introduced by the Merdeka Curriculum (Ingram et al., 2025; Makhoulfi et al., 2023). Although many teachers have attended trainings administratively, classroom implementation remains suboptimal, particularly in differentiated instruction and authentic assessment.

Therefore, this research aims to identify and formulate effective strategies for contextual and sustainable teacher competence development to support the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in schools.

The primary goal of this article is to systematically describe various strategies to enhance teacher competence, whether through institutional (organizational), professional (community), or individual (self-reflection and self-training) approaches (Howard et al., 2021; Lyeonov et al., 2025). This study also aims to provide applicable policy recommendations.

This research is essential because it relates to the quality of human resources in education, which is a key factor in national education success (Loffeld et al., 2022; Panjaitan et al., 2020). Without competent and adaptive teachers, the educational transformation envisioned by Merdeka Belajar will not be effectively realized.

The results of this research are expected to provide practical contributions to multiple stakeholders. Central and regional governments can use the findings to design more targeted teacher development programs. Educational institutions and school principals can use them as a reference in developing internal capacity-building strategies.

For teachers, this research may serve as a tool for reflection and motivation for continuous professional growth. As for the community and parents, the benefit lies in the improvement of educational services that are more relevant to the needs of the times and children's potential.

Thus, the topic of teacher competence development strategies in the era of Merdeka Belajar is highly relevant and important to be studied scientifically. This study is expected to strengthen the role of teachers as agents of change and key drivers in realizing independent, meaningful, and equitable education.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with the library research method. A library research design was chosen because the research focuses on exploring and analyzing various written sources related to teacher competence development strategies in the era of *Merdeka Belajar* (Freedom to Learn) (Bednarek-Gilland, 2015; Gibton, 2015). The qualitative method allows the researcher to understand the meaning and context in depth based on narrative and descriptive data.

A descriptive qualitative approach is used to systematically and thoroughly explain concepts, policies, challenges, and strategies of teacher competence development based on the results of a literature review. This description provides a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study without manipulating variables, as is commonly done in quantitative research.

The research does not involve a physical location, as it is based on secondary data collection. However, administratively, the literature review activities were conducted in Pasangkayu Regency, West Sulawesi, in July 2025 (Borcsa & Rober, 2015; McNabb, 2015). All data searches were carried out both online and offline through libraries and academic databases.

The subjects of this library research are not individuals but written data sources such as national and international scientific journals, reference books, educational regulations, research reports, and scholarly articles (Hillman & Radel, 2018; Lutz & Knox, 2014). The selection of data sources is based on their relevance to the topic, credibility of the authors, and publication recency, especially between the years 2019 and 2025.

Data were collected through a literature search related to teacher competence development in the context of the *Merdeka Curriculum* (Firat, 2023; Hamada et al., 2024). Data sources were obtained from Google Scholar, DOAJ, GARUDA, and university journal portals with proper accreditation. Keywords used included: “*teacher competence*,” “*Merdeka Belajar*,” “*teacher professional development*,” and “*Merdeka Mengajar Platform*.”

In addition to academic journals, data were also obtained from relevant books on educational policy, official documents from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), and teacher training reports (Carreiras & Castro, 2012; Migdal, 2018). Each source was documented systematically using reference management tools such as Mendeley to facilitate citation and data processing.

The data analysis technique used in this study is content analysis, focusing on identifying the main themes across various reviewed sources. The researcher extracted key ideas, compared data across sources, and organized thematic patterns to formulate effective and relevant strategies for teacher competence development.

The analysis followed the Miles and Huberman model, consisting of three stages: (1) data reduction, filtering essential information from the literature; (2) data display, presenting data in tables, categories, and thematic explanations; and (3) conclusion drawing and verification, formulating strategic findings based on validated literature.

To ensure data validity, source triangulation was applied, comparing information from various types of documents and different authors (Iosifides, 2011; Longhofer et al., 2012). In addition,

cross-checking was conducted to ensure consistency and alignment between the collected data and the research objectives.

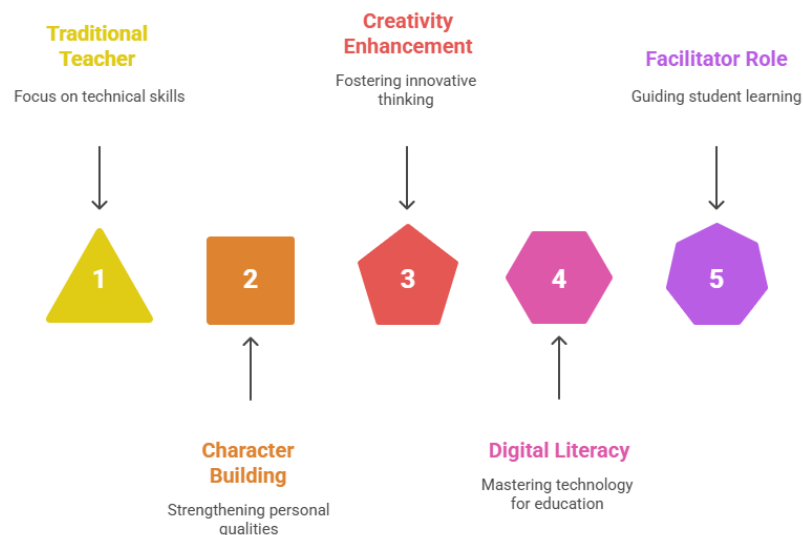
To further strengthen the validity of the analysis, the researcher conducted repeated reflections on the collected data and ensured that interpretations were unbiased (Ihnatenko et al., 2020; Leung, 2025). With these steps, this study aims to produce reliable findings and contribute both theoretically and practically to efforts in enhancing teacher competence in the *Merdeka Belajar* era.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The interpretation of the main findings in this study reveals that teacher competency development in the *Merdeka Belajar* (Freedom to Learn) era is not solely about improving technical abilities, but also about strengthening character, creativity, and digital literacy. This addresses the current needs of the education sector, which demands that teachers become facilitators and lifelong learners.

These findings align with Malcolm Knowles' theory of andragogy, which posits that adults learn most effectively when they are active participants in the learning process, draw upon their own experiences as learning resources, and engage in problem-solving activities. In the context of teachers, practice-based and reflective training is the ideal approach.

Teacher Competency Development



This research reinforces the findings of Sutrisno et al. (2022), who emphasized the need for comprehensive understanding by teachers in planning and implementing assessment strategies. However, this study expands the scope by highlighting the importance of digital platforms as tools for sustained competency transformation.

Additionally, this study enriches the work of Pawartani & Suciptaningsih (2024), which focused on workshops and mentoring as development strategies. It emphasizes instead the importance of professional learning communities and collaborative networks as effective platforms for teacher growth.

A significant contribution of this study lies in its emphasis on the use of the Platform Merdeka Mengajar as a primary instrument for accelerating teacher competence—an angle that has not been deeply explored in previous research.

The practical implication of this study is the need for adaptive and contextual teacher training designs that are not merely top-down, but involve teachers as central agents who explore and

determine their own developmental needs. Participation in practitioner communities also provides an organic avenue for improving educational quality.

This research also provides input for policymakers, particularly the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), to strengthen digital platforms and online training systems that go beyond content delivery to enable hands-on practice, feedback, and learning documentation.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that teacher competency development strategies require not only government support but also active involvement from the community and higher education institutions. Such collaboration may take the form of training partnerships, action research, and resource sharing.

Building a system of recognition and reward for teachers who actively engage in self-development and share best practices is equally important. Recognition serves to boost intrinsic motivation and fosters a culture of continuous learning within schools.

Nevertheless, this study is limited by its library research approach, which does not involve direct informants from the field. Consequently, its findings are theoretical and conceptual, although still relevant and applicable.

Future research is recommended to use field-based qualitative approaches, such as in-depth interviews or participatory observation with teachers, principals, and policymakers. This would provide a more comprehensive and contextual understanding of teacher development dynamics.

Ultimately, teacher development in the *Merdeka Belajar* era should aim to produce reflective, innovative, collaborative, and adaptive educators who are capable of responding to educational change (Mukhlis, Maryam, et al., 2023; Mukhlis et al., 2024). With the right strategies and robust support systems, teachers can become the central actors in delivering meaningful and transformative learning for students.

Therefore, strategies for developing teacher competencies in the *Merdeka Belajar* era must be viewed as a continuous process, supported by inclusive policies, educational technologies, and collaborative ecosystems that nurture a culture of lifelong learning within school environments.

Another emerging challenge is the digital skill gap between senior and younger teachers. Mulyanto & Yoenanto (2023) highlighted the importance of TPACK-based training (Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge) to bridge this gap and ensure that all teachers possess integrative digital teaching skills.

Additionally, Umami & Wahyudi (2025) showed that transformational leadership from school principals can enhance teacher motivation in adapting to curriculum changes. Principals who foster a shared vision and support teacher creativity have successfully built school cultures that are adaptive to the Merdeka Curriculum.

Overall, this study implies that teacher competence development strategies cannot be executed instantly; they must be cultivated through a sustainable and inclusive learning ecosystem (Mukhlis, Arifin, Ridwan, & Zulbaidah, 2025; Mukhlis, Arifin, Ridwan, Zulbaidah, et al., 2025). The government, schools, and educational communities must synergize to create learning environments that support teachers as lifelong learners.

This study found that teacher competence development strategies in the *Merdeka Belajar* (Freedom to Learn) era require a systematic, collaborative, and sustainable approach (Mukhlis, Suradi, et al., 2023; Mukhlis, 2025b). Based on literature analysis, there is a notable shift in the orientation of teacher training—from mere material delivery to strengthening teachers' capacities as reflective and adaptive learning facilitators.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that strategies for developing teacher competencies in the *Merdeka Belajar* (Freedom to Learn) era must be comprehensive, systematic, and adaptive to contemporary challenges. Teachers are not only expected to understand the curriculum content but also to manage contextual, creative, and character-oriented learning aligned with the *Pancasila Student Profile*. Training, mentoring, collaboration, and the use of technology through the *Merdeka Mengajar* platform are key components in supporting the continuous professional development of teachers.

The findings also indicate that the success of teacher competency development strategies is closely linked to transformational school leadership, support from educational communities, and ongoing evaluation. Effective strategies integrate technical-pedagogical approaches with the strengthening of teachers' social-emotional competencies. In addition, the integration of TPACK (Technological, Pedagogical, and Content Knowledge) is essential in addressing the challenges of digitalized learning.

This study reinforces the notion that teacher development must be grounded in the real needs of teachers in the field and carried out based on the principles of andragogy. Digital platforms such as *Merdeka Mengajar* have become promising instruments to support teachers' self-directed learning and to encourage the emergence of best practices that can be widely replicated. In this context, teachers are not merely policy implementers but agents of change in shaping meaningful and student-centered educational processes.

The implications of this study point to the need for more responsive education policies that are based on teacher needs. The government, higher education institutions, and the wider community must build strong synergy in supporting teacher professionalism in the *Merdeka Belajar* era. Further research is recommended to explore the long-term impact of these strategies on the quality of instruction and student learning outcomes.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in the preparation and publication of this article.

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