

Doctoral Dissertation

**Remote Area Teacher's Professional Development in Thematic Curriculum
Implementation: Case Study at East Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia**

(Summary)

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As an archipelago country, Indonesia still faces the problem of education equality. One of the reasons is the standardization of teacher quality. Remote area teachers are found to be low qualified compared to urban area teachers. Teachers need to participate in teacher professional development (TPD) programs to improve their qualifications by maintaining and growing their knowledge, skills, and practice. But unfortunately, teachers in remote areas have few opportunities to join teacher professional development programs. If the remote area has enough budget and the government holds TPD, can we solve the problem? We might consider giving suitable TPD programs for remote areas based on teachers' perceptions.

Indonesia has implemented the thematic curriculum for elementary schools since 2013. The thematic curriculum is an integrated learning method combining attitudes, skills, learning values, knowledge, and creative thinking from the different subjects into themes. The thematic curriculum was implemented to prepare the students to adapt to future work demands. It is designed based on external factors that consider technological development, social changes, and the globalization era. In other words, the thematic curriculum is made to make students can adapt to the era of globalization. However, this becomes a question when the thematic curriculum is implemented in remote areas. Therefore, I investigated the challenges remote area teachers experienced in implementing the thematic curriculum to local conditions.

Few studies explored TPD in remote areas by evaluating the TPD program but could not become the tendency of TPD in remote areas. Also, previous studies did not clarify the overall thematic curriculum implementation, especially in remote areas. Last, no study explored the TPD program for thematic curriculum, especially using the perspective of geopolitics and critical pedagogy. Therefore, I conducted this study to provide suggestions for remote area teachers' professional development by considering the remote area teacher's voices and remote area conditions in implementing the thematic curriculum.

The MoEC held an in-service PPG program as TPD to improve the implementation of the thematic curriculum. This current TPD is held online due to the pandemic, and selected teachers

from all Indonesia areas can participate. This study will investigate the strengths and weaknesses of in-service PPG for thematic curriculum by comparing the urban area and remote area teachers. I examine whether this in-service PPG program is suitable for the thematic curriculum implementation in urban and remote areas of Indonesia or only for urban areas.

This dissertation explores three research questions. RQ1, how do remote area teachers perceive their previous professional development before thematic curriculum implementation? RQ1 examines the differences in TPD problems in the previous curriculum experienced by remote area teachers. Previous researchers examined the problem of TPD in urban areas but less examined the TPD in remote areas.

RQ2, what are the challenges of thematic curriculum implementation in the remote area? The thematic curriculum emphasizes student competency as a learning goal. It could create different challenges in curriculum implementation between urban and remote areas. RQ2 aims to understand the need of remote area teachers for professional development in implementing the new curriculum.

And last, RQ3, is there any difference between the strengths and weaknesses in the current professional development (PPG) for urban and remote area teachers? I examined whether the current TPD program held by the MoEC for the thematic curriculum is suitable for remote area teachers.

This dissertation is classified into seven chapters. Chapter 1, Introduction: This chapter describes the dissertation background, research objectives, research questions, significance of the study, definition of terms, and dissertation structure. Chapter 2, Literatures Review, I pay attention to the following key variables in this dissertation: professional development, curriculum change, and thematic curriculum. Chapter 3, Indonesian Context, discusses the education system, thematic curriculum in Indonesia, history of TPD in Indonesia, and remote area education in Indonesia. Chapter 4, Methodology, I explain the procedural research methods. The contents of this chapter are contextual framework, research design, the context of the study, research participants, research instrument, data collection, and data analysis. In chapter 5, I describe the findings and discussion

according to the survey result for RQ1. In chapter 6, I explain the findings and discussion for RQ2. This chapter explores the remote area teacher's challenges with thematic curriculum implementation. Chapter 7 contains the findings and discussion for RQ3 by comparing the strengths and weaknesses of the PPG as the current TPD program between the urban and remote areas. Finally, the last Chapter 8 contains a summary of findings for all research questions and suggests a suitable TPD program for remote area teachers in Indonesia. I also refer to the limitations of this dissertation and present suggestions for further studies.

The dissertation adopted the mixed method by utilizing the quantitative and qualitative analysis with elementary teachers in the southernmost provinces of Indonesia, called East Nusa Tenggara (NTT). RQ1 adopted an explanatory mixed-method approach to understanding remote area teachers' overview of perception and their real story about the previous TPD they have participated in. I utilized questionnaires to 58 elementary teachers and a semi-structured interview with 20 teachers from Sabu Raijua regency, one of the remote areas in East Nusa Tenggara province. I used descriptive statistical and thematic analysis to analyze the data.

RQ2 was also conducted in Sabu Raijua. This study used the qualitative approach by utilizing semi-structured interviews and classroom observations with 20 teachers from 5 elementary schools to clarify the challenges of the thematic curriculum in the remote area. I used a thematic analysis approach to analyze the result of this study.

RQ3 used a triangulation mixed-method approach using the questionnaire, document analysis, semi-structured interview, and online observation. The study participants were the in-service teachers who participated in the current TPD program named in-service PPG from two universities in an urban and remote area. Remote University (R University) is located in East Nusa Tenggara province, and Urban University (U University) is in East Java province. This study's participants are 277 in-service teachers from R University and 34 in-service teachers from U University. I distributed teachers' sense of efficacy (TSES) and PAKEM questionnaires to in-service teachers before and after participating in the program. The result follows up through semi-structured interviews with the in-service teachers to get an in-depth explanation of in-service

PPG at R University and U University. I did the online observation for six months, 6 hours per day, to see the entire process of the PPG program. Paired T-Test using SPSS 25.0 was used to see the quantitative approach's result. And for the qualitative approach, I used thematic analysis.

This dissertation reveals the following results. Based on the questionnaire result for RQ1, teachers in remote areas believe that joining a professional development program could improve their competencies and careers. However, they do not fully understand the meaning of professional development, they just remember the definition by the government. Moreover, the interview result shows that lack of teacher preparation, motivation, and self-confidence are internal obstacles to professional development. They do not satisfy the training and prefer collaborative activity for their professional development. Besides, they claimed the challenges of the professional development program, such as the lack of facilities, limitation of time, and training material.

Regarding RQ2, this study found two main challenges in thematic curriculum implementation in remote areas. First is the lack of teachers' understanding of the curriculum. Remote area teachers perceived they could not see the advantages of implementing the thematic curriculum in the remote area because they did not feel the social changes in their environment. Meanwhile, the thematic curriculum aims to make students adapt to the social changes by providing contextual learning that can become a bridge between student learning in the school and their daily life. The second challenge is the lack of parental involvement. Parents and teachers must share the same goal to improve the thematic curriculum implementation.

Furthermore, for RQ3, the quantitative result shows that teachers' self-efficacy and PAKEM abilities scores improved after participating in the in-service PPG program in urban and remote areas. The result shows no significant difference in teachers' self-efficacy belief and PAKEM abilities between remote and urban areas. However, the qualitative result shows the differences; urban area teachers can create contextual learning better. Remote area teachers follow the model themes trained in the training program that is more suitable for urban area situations with no intention and could not create themes of the thematic curriculum which suit for remote areas.

Finally, this study recommends TPD program for thematic curriculum implementation for

remote area teachers need to focus more on practical training in creating contextual learning for students. Also, remote area TPD could give teachers time to discuss the sustainability of remote area development with local government, principals, and parents. They must share the same goals for sustainable development to select suitable themes and create the learning process to achieve the expected students' competency for improving remote area sustainable development.

Keywords: thematic curriculum, remote area, elementary school, teacher's professional development