



Empowering Teachers Through Continuous Professional Development: How an Empowerment-Oriented School Culture Strengthens Teacher Professionalism?

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ABSTRACT

Purpose - This study addresses this gap by examining how an empowerment-oriented school culture strengthens teacher professionalism through CPD in public junior high schools.

Methodology - This study employed a qualitative, multi-site case study design across three public junior high schools (SMPN 1, SMPN 3, and SMPN 4 Marabahan) in South Kalimantan, Indonesia. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with principals and teachers, nonparticipant observations of CPD practices, and document analysis of school policies and professional development programs. Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's interactive model, involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, with single-site and cross-site thematic analysis to identify patterns and contextual variations.

Findings - An empowerment-oriented school culture—characterized by shared values, participatory decision-making, collegial trust, and psychological safety—acts as a key mediating mechanism between CPD and teacher professionalism. When teachers are actively involved in designing and implementing CPD, professional development shifts from isolated training activities to embedded learning practices. This condition enhances teachers' professional agency, reflective practice, instructional innovation, and collaborative learning through professional learning communities, peer mentoring, and reflective supervision.

Contribution - This study contributes to the literature by positioning empowerment-oriented school culture as an active mediator linking CPD to teacher professionalism. The findings suggest that empowering school environments is essential for fostering meaningful, context-responsive, and sustainable professional development.

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INTRODUCTION

Teacher professionalism is widely recognized as a critical determinant of educational quality and student learning outcomes. Numerous international studies demonstrate that teachers' pedagogical competence, commitment, and professional agency significantly influence student achievement and school effectiveness (Snoek, 2021). Data from the OECD indicate that countries with strong professional development systems report higher levels of teacher efficacy and instructional quality (Visone et al., 2022). However, teacher professionalism does not develop automatically; it requires continuous learning opportunities embedded within supportive organizational cultures. In many education systems, professional development remains fragmented, episodic, and disconnected from teachers' real classroom needs. As a result, teachers often perceive professional development as an administrative obligation rather than a meaningful learning process (Ozga & Lawn, 2017).

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) has emerged as a central strategy for sustaining teacher professionalism in dynamic educational contexts. UNESCO reports that teachers who engage in ongoing, collaborative CPD demonstrate higher adaptability to curriculum reforms and technological change (Murray et al., 2023). Despite this evidence, CPD implementation in many schools is still dominated by short-term workshops with limited follow-up. Studies show that less than 40% of teachers in developing regions experience CPD that includes reflective practice or peer collaboration (Kitto et al., 2018; Nooruddin & Bhamani, 2019; Valdmann et al., 2017). This gap highlights the need for CPD models that are not only continuous but also empowering and context-sensitive. Without empowerment, CPD risks becoming procedural rather than transformational.

Teacher empowerment is increasingly viewed as a foundational condition for meaningful professional growth. Empowered teachers are more likely to exercise professional judgment, innovate in instruction, and commit to school improvement initiatives (Andreev et al., 2020). Quantitative evidence from a large-scale study by Faizuddin et al. (2022) shows that empowerment-oriented leadership accounts for approximately 27–30% of variance in teacher commitment and professional engagement. Empowerment involves granting teachers autonomy, participation in decision-making, and access to professional learning resources. When teachers feel trusted and valued, they are more willing to invest in continuous improvement. Thus, empowerment is not merely a leadership style but a cultural condition that shapes professional behavior (Dagnev Kelkay, 2020).

An empowerment-oriented school culture plays a pivotal role in translating CPD into improved professionalism. School culture influences how teachers perceive change, collaboration, and learning within their institutions. Schools characterized by collaborative professionalism outperform those driven by compliance-based accountability (Jensen & Iannone, 2018). Teachers working in collaborative cultures are 1.8 times more likely to engage in sustained professional learning activities. Such cultures promote shared responsibility, collective efficacy, and reflective dialogue (Bove et al., 2018; Dagnev Kelkay, 2020). Therefore, CPD must be embedded within an empowerment-oriented culture to produce lasting professional impact.

In the Indonesian context, challenges related to teacher professionalism remain evident, particularly in public junior high schools outside major urban centers. National data from the Ministry of Education show that only 48% of junior high school teachers regularly participate in structured CPD activities aligned with instructional improvement (Faizuddin et al., 2022). Moreover, disparities in access to mentoring, digital learning, and collaborative forums persist across regions. These conditions limit teachers' opportunities to develop professionally in meaningful ways. Consequently, there is an urgent need to explore CPD models that empower teachers within their specific socio-cultural and organizational contexts (Peleman et al., 2018; Valdmann et al., 2017).

Empowerment-based CPD represents an alternative approach that integrates professional learning with teacher agency and school culture. Rather than positioning teachers as passive recipients of training, empowerment-based CPD places them at the center of professional growth processes. Teacher-driven CPD leads to higher relevance, motivation, and transfer of learning into classroom practice (Vadivel et al., 2021). Quantitative evidence further indicates that schools adopting empowerment-based professional learning

models experience higher instructional consistency and teacher retention rates (McChesney & Aldridge, 2021; “Navigating Continual Progress: Insights into Teacher Professional Development in Uzbekistan,” 2023). This approach aligns CPD with teachers' lived experiences and professional identities. As such, empowerment-based CPD has strong potential to sustainably strengthen teacher professionalism.

School culture functions as the mediating mechanism through which empowerment-based CPD influences professional practice. An empowerment-oriented culture encourages openness, trust, and shared leadership, enabling teachers to learn from one another. Studies indicate that teachers in psychologically safe environments are 2.3 times more likely to experiment with innovative teaching strategies (Karlberg & Bezzina, 2022). In contrast, hierarchical and punitive cultures suppress initiative and professional risk-taking. Therefore, understanding how school culture supports or constrains empowerment is essential for effective CPD design. Empowerment-oriented cultures transform CPD from an event into an ongoing professional journey (Fairman et al., 2022; Kit et al., 2023).

Despite growing literature on teacher empowerment and CPD, empirical studies that explicitly link empowerment-oriented school culture with teacher professionalism remain limited, particularly in Southeast Asian contexts. Most existing research focuses either on leadership practices or CPD structures in isolation. There is insufficient evidence explaining how empowerment operates as a cultural force shaping professional learning processes (Imants & Van der Wal, 2020). Moreover, multi-case qualitative studies that capture contextual variations across schools are still scarce. Addressing this gap is crucial for developing CPD models that are both theoretically grounded and practically applicable.

Despite the growing international consensus on the importance of CPD and teacher empowerment, existing studies have not sufficiently articulated how empowerment-oriented school culture functions as a mediating mechanism that transforms CPD into sustained teacher professionalism, particularly in non-Western and developing contexts. Much of the current literature treats CPD as a technical intervention or focuses narrowly on leadership behaviors, leaving the cultural processes that enable or constrain teacher empowerment underexplored (Dagnev Kelkay, 2020; Faizuddin et al., 2022; Rich et al., 2021; Shonhe, 2020; Zhang et al., 2021). This gap is especially evident in Indonesia, where CPD policies are nationally mandated but locally enacted within highly diverse socio-cultural, organizational, and resource conditions. Public junior high schools outside metropolitan areas face distinct challenges related to hierarchical governance, limited professional autonomy, and uneven access to collaborative learning structures—factors that are rarely captured in dominant CPD models (Faizuddin et al., 2022; Nooruddin & Bhamani, 2019). There is limited empirical evidence explaining why similar CPD programs yield different professional outcomes across schools. This study argues that these differences are rooted in variations in school culture, particularly the extent to which empowerment is embedded in everyday professional interactions. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine how an empowerment-oriented school culture mediates the relationship between Continuous Professional Development and teacher professionalism in Indonesian public junior high schools, to generate a contextually grounded and empirically informed Empowerment-Based CPD framework. Therefore, this study is guided by the following research questions:

- 1) How is an empowerment-oriented school culture manifested in the implementation of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) in public junior high schools?
- 2) In what ways does teacher empowerment within CPD processes contribute to the strengthening of teacher professionalism?
- 3) How does an empowerment-oriented school culture mediate the relationship between Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and teacher professionalism?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research examines teacher professional development in public junior high schools (SMPN) in Barito Kuala Regency using a qualitative descriptive design. The study is oriented toward understanding and interpreting professional practices as they naturally unfold within school environments (Silverman,

2016). Rather than testing variables, the research documents and interprets real conditions related to teacher professionalism, particularly how school principals shape professional growth through leadership practices, empowerment strategies, and internal quality assurance mechanisms. The investigation was conducted at SMPN 1, SMPN 3, and SMPN 4 Marabahan, selected to represent diverse organizational contexts within the district. The central aim of the study is to generate empirically grounded insights into how professional development is enacted in schools and how these practices can inform the development of a contextually relevant and effective professional development model. The findings are intended to provide practical and theoretical contributions for teachers, school leaders, and education policymakers.

Key Informants

The identification of key participants in this research was guided by the study's objectives and carried out through a purposive, yet adaptive, sampling strategy supported by snowball sampling. Participants were drawn from multiple stakeholder groups, including education supervisors from the Barito Kuala Education Office, school principals, and teachers from SMPN 1, SMPN 3, and SMPN 4 Marabahan. The size and composition of the participant group were not predetermined but evolved throughout the research process in response to data saturation and analytical needs. Data collection captured participants' viewpoints, professional actions, and authentic experiences related to teacher professional development. The analytical process examined existing conditions, targeted improvements, implicit beliefs, and strategic directions shaping professional learning.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Key Informants

No.	Informant Group	Number of Informants	Institutional	Professional Role	Years of Experience	Main Contribution to Data
1	Education Supervisors	2	Barito Kuala Education Office	School supervision and policy oversight	>15 years	Policy perspectives, CPD regulation, and system-level support
2	School Principals	3	SMPN 1, SMPN 3, SMPN 4 Marabahan	Instructional and managerial leadership	10-20 years	Leadership practices, school culture, and CPD management
3	Senior Teachers	6	SMPN 1, SMPN 3, SMPN 4 Marabahan	Subject teachers and CPD facilitators	>10 years	Professional learning experiences, peer collaboration, and mentoring
4	Junior Teachers	6	SMPN 1, SMPN 3, SMPN 4 Marabahan	Classroom teachers	3-9 years	CPD participation, empowerment experiences, and instructional practices
Total		17				

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection in this study employed a multimethod qualitative approach consisting of observations, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and document analysis. These methods were deliberately integrated to capture the complexity of empowerment-oriented school culture and its role in strengthening teacher professionalism through Continuous Professional Development (CPD). Data collection in this study employed an integrated multimethod strategy comprising nonparticipant observations, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and systematic document analysis to ensure methodological rigor.

Observations focused on teachers' instructional practices and principals' managerial and leadership activities related to professional development. They were conducted through multiple school visits, with each session lasting approximately 60–90 minutes to capture routine teaching, CPD-related meetings, and collaborative professional learning activities. All observational data were carefully documented using detailed field notes and, where permitted, visual records to support accuracy and cross-site comparison. Interviews were conducted with school principals and selected teachers using semi-structured, in-depth protocols, with each interview lasting between 45 and 75 minutes and, when necessary, carried out in multiple rounds to deepen analytical insight. The interviews explored participants' experiences with CPD, perceptions of empowerment, professional autonomy, decision-making processes, and the role of school culture in shaping professional growth. Document analysis complemented these methods by examining teacher professional profiles, CPD plans, professional learning records, school development documents, internal policies, supervision reports, and official regulations, enabling triangulation and verification of consistency between formal policies and enacted empowerment-oriented practices (Flick, 2022).

Research Stages

This study was conducted through three interconnected phases—orientation, exploration, and member checking—designed to ensure methodological rigor and to capture the dynamics of an empowerment-oriented school culture in strengthening teacher professionalism through Continuous Professional Development (CPD). Each phase was structured to support a deep, contextual, and trustworthy understanding of how empowerment is embedded in school practices and professional learning processes.

- a) The orientation phase focused on developing an initial understanding of the research context, refining the focus on empowerment-oriented CPD, and preparing observation and interview instruments aligned with the study's objectives. During this phase, the researcher established formal communication with key stakeholders, including representatives of the Education Office and school communities, to gain insight into institutional norms, cultural values, and CPD structures. This early engagement allowed the researcher to familiarize themselves with the schools' socio-organizational environment, ensuring sensitivity to cultural practices related to teacher empowerment. The orientation stage was essential for sharpening the analytical lens, minimizing researcher bias, and aligning data collection strategies with the study's emphasis on school culture and professionalism.
- b) The exploration phase represented the core stage of data generation, during which in-depth interviews, direct observations, and document analysis were conducted to examine how empowerment-oriented school culture is enacted through CPD practices. Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously, with data being continuously organized, condensed, and interpreted to identify emerging patterns related to teacher agency, collaboration, and professional growth. Triangulation across methods and data sources was systematically applied to enhance analytical depth and credibility. Ongoing reflection and preliminary interpretation enabled the researcher to adapt data-collection strategies to field conditions, yielding a nuanced understanding of how CPD functions as an empowering process across different school contexts.
- c) The member-checking phase was conducted alongside the exploration process to ensure the credibility and authenticity of the findings. Data interpretations derived from interviews, observations, and document analysis were shared with participants for confirmation and clarification. When discrepancies or ambiguities were identified, follow-up discussions and additional interviews were conducted to refine understanding. Validation was further strengthened through triangulation with other knowledgeable informants involved in CPD implementation. This process ensured that the researcher's interpretations accurately reflected participants' lived experiences and perspectives, thereby reinforcing the trustworthiness of the findings and grounding conclusions about empowerment-oriented school culture and teacher professionalism in empirical realities (Silverman, 2016).

Instruments

Data collection in this study was supported by several research instruments, namely interview protocols, observation formats, and documentation checklists. The interview protocols functioned as guiding frameworks to ensure that conversations with informants remained focused and aligned with the research objectives. Observation formats were employed to systematically capture teachers' activities, interactions, and professional behaviors within instructional and managerial contexts (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). To enhance accuracy, field notes and photographic records were used to document classroom practices and leadership activities related to teacher professionalism. Documentation checklists facilitated the collection and examination of formal records, including teacher background information, professional development plans, and reports on school programs. The combined use of these instruments enabled the researcher to gather rich, credible, and comprehensive data. Well-defined instruments also ensured that the research process was carried out in a structured, consistent, and methodologically controlled manner.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using a descriptive-analytical approach grounded in Miles and Huberman's interactive model, comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. This analytical process was applied at two interconnected levels—single-site and cross-site—to capture how empowerment-oriented school culture operates within Continuous Professional Development (CPD) practices across SMPN 1, SMPN 3, and SMPN 4 Marabahan. At the single-site level, data from interviews, observations, and document analysis were systematically categorized, condensed, and organized to identify recurring themes related to teacher empowerment, collaborative professional learning, and cultural support for professionalism. This stage enabled an in-depth understanding of how CPD was enacted within each school's unique cultural and organizational context.

Cross-site analysis was then conducted to compare and integrate findings across the three schools, allowing the researcher to identify shared patterns, variations, and relational dynamics in the ways empowerment-oriented school culture mediates the impact of CPD on teacher professionalism. Through inductive analysis, provisional theoretical insights were developed regarding how teacher agency, collective norms, and leadership-supported empowerment contribute to sustained professional growth (Takona, 2024). Analytical emphasis was placed on uncovering contextual meanings rather than imposing predefined categories, ensuring that interpretations emerged from participants' lived experiences and institutional realities.

Data Validity Testing

Data trustworthiness in this study was ensured through four interrelated criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was strengthened through prolonged engagement in empowerment-oriented school settings, enabling an in-depth understanding of how Continuous Professional Development (CPD) practices are embedded within school culture and influence teacher professionalism. Systematic triangulation across data sources, methods, and timeframes was employed to capture diverse perspectives on teacher empowerment. At the same time, member-checking procedures enabled principals and teachers to verify the accuracy and authenticity of the findings regarding professional learning experiences.

Data trustworthiness in this study was ensured through the principles of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was achieved through prolonged engagement in empowerment-oriented school settings, systematic triangulation of data sources, methods, and time, and member checking with principals and teachers to confirm the accuracy of interpretations related to CPD and teacher professionalism (Flick, 2022). Transferability was supported by rich, contextual descriptions of how CPD and an empowerment-oriented school culture were enacted, enabling readers to assess the relevance of the findings to other educational contexts. Dependability was maintained through methodological

transparency and external reviews by supervisors or independent parties, ensuring consistency in research procedures and analytical processes. Confirmability was strengthened by grounding all findings in empirical evidence drawn from interviews, observations, and documents, thereby minimizing researcher bias.

FINDINGS

The results of this multi-site case study illustrate how strategic leadership and empowerment-oriented practices shape the implementation of Empowerment-Based Continuous Professional Development (E-CPD) and strengthen teacher professionalism across three public junior high schools in Barito Kuala Regency: SMPN 1 Marabahan, SMPN 3 Marabahan, and SMPN 4 Marabahan. The following graphical representations synthesize the qualitative findings by visually comparing how an empowerment-oriented school culture mediates the relationship between Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and teacher professionalism across the three cases. Rather than listing data descriptively, the graphs highlight comparative patterns and contextual variations in leadership practices, CPD design, and school climate that support professional learning. Key dimensions illustrated include empowerment-oriented leadership, teacher participation in CPD, collaborative learning structures, and cultural conditions that foster professional agency. Presenting the findings in graphical form allows for more precise identification of cross-school similarities and differences, strengthening cross-case analysis. Each graph is grounded in triangulated data from interviews, observations, and document analysis, ensuring that the visualizations accurately reflect the empirical dynamics linking school culture, CPD, and teacher professionalism.

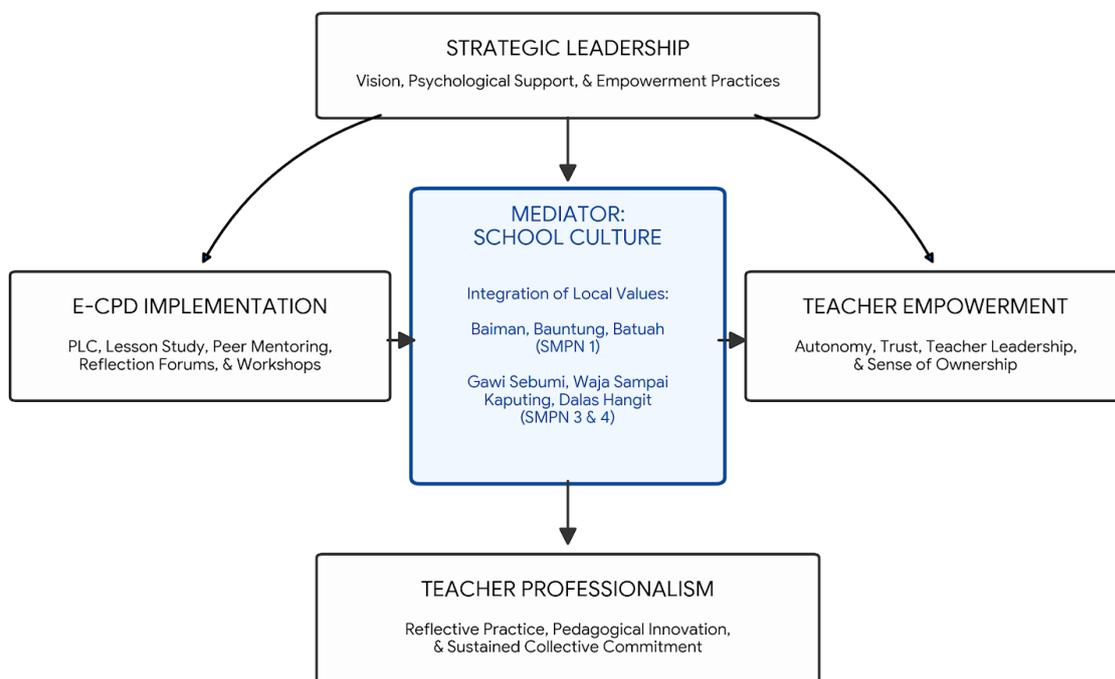


Figure 1. Graphical representations synthesize the qualitative findings

Figure 1 presents graphical representations that synthesize the qualitative findings across the three case schools, illustrating overarching patterns in empowerment-oriented leadership, CPD implementation, and the development of teacher professionalism. The visualizations provide an initial analytical overview, highlighting similarities and contrasts in how school culture shapes teachers' engagement with continuous professional learning. While the figure captures these relationships at a general level, a more detailed, structured comparison is needed to explain how empowerment operates as a mediating mechanism within each school context. Building on the patterns identified in Figure 1, Table 1 further clarifies the mediating role of an empowerment-oriented school culture in linking CPD to the strengthening of teacher professionalism. Rather than conceptualizing CPD as a linear intervention with direct outcomes, the table

shows that its effectiveness is strongly conditioned by cultural factors embedded in schools. Through a comparative lens, the table illustrates how local values, leadership approaches, and patterns of professional interaction create enabling environments for teachers to internalize CPD meaningfully. This presentation underscores school culture as a structural and relational force that sustains professional learning over time. Moreover, the table allows for the identification of both shared practices and context-specific strategies that support effective CPD enactment across the three schools. As such, the table provides an empirical foundation for the subsequent discussion and interpretation of the research findings.

Table 1. Research Findings by School: Empowerment-Oriented School Culture, CPD, and Teacher Professionalism

Research Aspect	SMPN 1 Marabahan	SMPN 3 Marabahan	SMPN 4 Marabahan
Manifestation of an Empowerment-Oriented School Culture in CPD Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - School culture is grounded in local values (<i>baiman, bauntung, batuah</i>) integrated into daily routines and CPD activities. - CPD is framed as collective learning rather than individual obligation. - Principals promote psychological safety during reflection and supervision. - Teachers are encouraged to discuss challenges and learning needs openly. - Collegial relationships are strengthened through routine reflection forums. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - School culture emphasizes <i>gawi sebumi</i> and <i>waja sampai kaputing</i> as foundations for commitment and perseverance in CPD. - CPD is embedded within collaborative norms such as MGMP and PLC activities. - Open communication between principals and teachers supports reflective dialogue. - CPD discussions focus on shared problem-solving rather than evaluation. - Teachers experience CPD as part of the school's collective identity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - School culture integrates <i>gawi sebumi, Dalas Hangit, and Mun Manyarah Kada</i> to foster resilience and teamwork. - CPD is normalized through lesson study and peer mentoring routines. - A "safe-to-learn" culture allows teachers to experiment without fear of failure. - Reflection and innovation are valued as cultural norms. - CPD is perceived as continuous and embedded in everyday practice.
Teacher Empowerment within CPD Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teachers are empowered to identify CPD needs through self-reflection and peer discussion. - Autonomy is given to design learning innovations and classroom-based projects. - Senior teachers act as mentors, strengthening professional confidence. - Teachers lead internal workshops and share best practices. - Empowerment enhances teachers' sense of ownership and responsibility. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teachers actively participate in planning CPD agendas and learning pathways. - Autonomy is provided in designing teaching modules, assessments, and innovations. - Dialogic supervision supports reflective professionalism. - Teachers are empowered based on individual strengths and expertise. - CPD strengthens professional identity and collaborative competence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teachers are empowered through team-based innovation and collaborative inquiry. - Regular discussion spaces support peer learning and professional dialogue. - Teachers feel trusted to lead CPD initiatives and classroom experimentation. - Empowerment fosters confidence to adopt new pedagogical approaches. - Professional growth is experienced as both individual and collective.

Research Aspect	SMPN 1 Marabahan	SMPN 3 Marabahan	SMPN 4 Marabahan
Mediating Role of Empowerment-Oriented School Culture between CPD and Teacher Professionalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - School culture translates CPD activities into sustained professional behavior. - Cultural norms of trust and recognition motivate long-term engagement in CPD. - CPD outcomes are reinforced through shared values and collegial support. - Professionalism is strengthened as a collective commitment. - CPD is aligned with the school vision and quality assurance systems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Empowerment-oriented culture bridges CPD learning with daily instructional practice. - Teachers apply CPD outcomes more consistently due to collaborative norms. - Motivation and professionalism are sustained through supportive relationships. - CPD aligns with shared school goals and reflective culture. - Professional growth is embedded in school routines. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - School culture mediates CPD by encouraging innovation and reflective practice. - Cultural support ensures CPD leads to instructional improvement. - Professionalism is reinforced through shared responsibility and teamwork. - CPD is linked to improved student learning and school improvement goals. - Culture sustains professionalism beyond formal training activities.
Impact on Teacher Professionalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased reflective practice and instructional confidence. - Stronger commitment to continuous learning. - Enhanced collaboration and professional responsibility. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improved professional autonomy and engagement. - Stronger alignment between CPD and classroom practice. - Development of collaborative professionalism. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Higher levels of innovation and pedagogical experimentation. - Strong professional identity grounded in shared values. - Sustained commitment to professional growth.

The findings summarized in the table indicate that all three schools exhibit strong characteristics of empowerment-oriented school cultures, though these characteristics manifest in contextually distinct ways. SMPN 1 Marabahan emphasizes integrating local values, such as *baiman*, *bauntung*, and *batuah*, to foster teachers' professional commitment through CPD activities. In contrast, SMPN 3 Marabahan foregrounds the philosophies of *gawi sebumi* and *waja sampai kaputing* as ethical foundations for collective professionalism and perseverance. SMPN 4 Marabahan integrates religious values, discipline, and innovation as central elements of its professional culture. These variations illustrate that empowerment-oriented cultures are not uniform but are shaped by local traditions and institutional histories. Despite these differences, all schools conceptualize CPD as a shared learning process rather than a purely administrative requirement.

RQ1. Manifestations of an Empowerment-Oriented School Culture in the Implementation of Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

The findings reveal that an empowerment-oriented school culture is strongly evident in how Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is conceptualized and enacted across SMPN 1, SMPN 3, and SMPN 4 Marabahan. In all three schools, CPD is framed as a shared professional responsibility rather than a top-down administrative requirement. School leaders consistently articulated values of trust, collegiality, and shared ownership as the cultural foundation of professional learning.

“CPD becomes meaningful when teachers feel trusted as professionals, not treated as program executors” (SV1).

This orientation reshaped CPD into a continuous, reflective process embedded in daily school life. As a result, teachers perceived professional learning as part of their professional identity rather than an external obligation. An empowerment-oriented culture was further evident in the participatory processes used to plan and implement CPD activities. Teachers were actively involved in identifying professional learning needs based on classroom challenges and student learning outcomes.

"We always start CPD planning by listening to teachers' reflections from their teaching experiences" (P3).

This approach encouraged teachers to openly and collaboratively articulate their developmental goals. Teachers reported that such involvement increased their sense of ownership and responsibility toward CPD outcomes.

"When we design CPD together, we feel more committed to improving our teaching practices" (T3).

Collaboration emerged as a defining feature of the empowerment-oriented school culture supporting CPD. All three schools institutionalized collaborative structures such as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), lesson study cycles, and subject-based discussion forums. These spaces enabled teachers to share instructional challenges, analyze student work, and co-develop pedagogical solutions.

"We learn from each other openly because the culture here supports growth, not judgment." (T1)

This collaborative climate reduced professional isolation and strengthened teachers' collective efficacy. Consequently, CPD functioned as a social learning process grounded in shared professional inquiry. Leadership practices played a crucial role in reinforcing an empowerment-oriented culture by granting teachers autonomy and encouraging instructional innovation. Principals across the three schools emphasized facilitative leadership rather than directive control in CPD implementation. The principal of SMPN 4 Marabahan (P4) remarked,

"I give teachers space to experiment because professionalism grows through practice and reflection" (P4)

Teachers confirmed that this autonomy increased their confidence to try new teaching strategies and engage in reflective dialogue.

"Knowing the principal trusts us makes us braver in improving our teaching." (T4)

Such leadership practices cultivated psychological safety, which is essential for professional learning. Recognition of teacher expertise further strengthened the manifestation of an empowerment-oriented culture within CPD. Teachers with specific competencies were appointed as internal facilitators, mentors, or coordinators of professional learning activities.

"Teachers who are trusted as CPD facilitators show stronger professional commitment and leadership." (SV2)

This recognition validated teachers' professional knowledge and reinforced peer learning dynamics. Teachers perceived these roles as affirmations of their professionalism rather than additional administrative burdens. As a result, CPD evolved into a reciprocal process of learning and contribution.

RQ2. Contributions of Teacher Empowerment within CPD Processes to the Strengthening of Teacher Professionalism

The findings indicate that teacher empowerment within CPD processes significantly strengthens teacher professionalism by enhancing teachers' sense of agency and professional ownership. Across SMPN 1, SMPN 3, and SMPN 4 Marabahan, teachers were not merely participants in CPD activities but active decision-makers and co-designers of professional learning. This empowerment was evident in teachers' involvement in identifying instructional challenges, setting learning priorities, and determining appropriate CPD strategies.

"When teachers are involved from the beginning, CPD stops being symbolic and becomes professional learning." (SV1)

Teachers reported feeling more responsible for improving instructional quality because CPD reflected their real classroom needs. As a result, professionalism was understood not only as compliance with standards but as reflective and purposeful practice. Empowerment within CPD also strengthened teacher professionalism by fostering reflective practice and continuous self-improvement. Teachers in all three schools were encouraged to evaluate their own teaching through peer observation, reflective journals, and lesson study discussions.

"We are trusted to reflect honestly on our teaching, not to be judged but to grow." (T1)

This reflective autonomy enabled teachers to analyze their pedagogical choices and learning outcomes critically. Principals emphasized that reflection was a professional responsibility rather than an administrative demand. Consequently, teachers demonstrated increased awareness of instructional quality and student learning needs, reinforcing professionalism as an internalized commitment. Another important contribution of teacher empowerment within CPD was the development of professional confidence and instructional initiative. Teachers reported that autonomy in selecting CPD themes and methods increased their confidence to experiment with new pedagogical approaches.

"Professionalism grows when teachers are confident enough to try, revise, and improve their practices." (P4)

"Makes us feel capable and trusted as professionals." (T4)

Empowerment reduced fear of failure and encouraged innovation in classroom instruction. This confidence translated into more adaptive teaching practices and a stronger professional identity. Teacher empowerment also strengthened professionalism by promoting collaborative expertise rather than individual competition. CPD activities were designed to encourage peer learning, mentoring, and shared problem-solving.

"We feel professional when we learn together and help each other improve." (T3)

Empowerment enabled teachers to contribute their expertise openly and to learn from colleagues without hierarchical barriers. Principals supported this by appointing teachers as internal facilitators or mentors based on competence rather than solely on seniority. These practices reinforced professionalism as a collective responsibility and shared expertise. The findings further show that empowerment within CPD enhanced teachers' commitment to ethical and professional standards. Teachers perceived empowerment as a moral trust that required accountability and integrity.

"Empowered teachers tend to show stronger discipline and commitment because they feel trusted." (SV2)

Teachers reported being more punctual, prepared, and responsible in their instructional duties as a result of empowerment. Professionalism was thus strengthened through intrinsic motivation rather than external supervision. This moral dimension of empowerment reinforced professional values such as responsibility, dedication, and continuous improvement.

RQ3. The Mediating Role of an Empowerment-Oriented School Culture in Linking Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and Teacher Professionalism

The findings reveal that an empowerment-oriented school culture serves as a mediating factor, transforming Continuous Professional Development (CPD) from a formal program into a lived professional practice that strengthens teacher professionalism. Across SMPN 1, SMPN 3, and SMPN 4 Marabahan, CPD activities were embedded within daily school routines through shared norms of trust, collaboration, and mutual respect. Rather than functioning as isolated training events, CPD was integrated into reflective dialogue, peer learning, and collective problem-solving.

"CPD works effectively only when the school culture supports openness and professional trust." (SV1)

Teachers perceived CPD as relevant because the cultural environment encouraged them to apply learning without fear of criticism. This cultural mediation ensured that CPD directly influenced professional attitudes and instructional behavior. An empowerment-oriented culture mediated the CPD-professionalism

relationship by fostering psychological safety, enabling teachers to internalize professional learning. Teachers consistently reported feeling safe to share challenges, admit instructional difficulties, and seek feedback from colleagues.

"Here, CPD is not about showing who is best, but about learning together without feeling judged." (T4)

Principals reinforced this culture by emphasizing growth-oriented supervision rather than evaluative control.

"Mistakes are part of professional learning, not a reason for punishment." (P4)

This safe cultural climate enabled CPD knowledge to be translated into practice, strengthening professionalism through reflective improvement. The mediating role of empowerment-oriented culture was also evident in how CPD content was collectively interpreted and adapted to contextual needs. Teachers were encouraged to discuss CPD materials collaboratively and modify them to suit classroom realities.

"What we learn in CPD becomes meaningful after we discuss it together and adjust it to our students." (T1)

This shared meaning-making process bridged the gap between CPD theory and professional practice. Principals facilitated these discussions through structured reflection sessions and informal collegial exchanges. As a result, CPD was not perceived as externally imposed but as culturally embedded professional knowledge. Empowerment-oriented culture further mediated CPD's impact by reinforcing professional norms and shared values. Local philosophical values such as *baiman*, *gawi sebumi*, and *kayuh baimbai* were consistently linked to professionalism, collaboration, and responsibility.

"Our local values remind teachers that professionalism is about integrity and collective commitment." (P3)

These values shaped how teachers approached CPD, emphasizing moral responsibility and service-oriented professionalism. Teachers internalized CPD outcomes as part of their professional identity rather than as mere technical competencies. Culture thus acted as a moral lens that deepened CPD's influence on professionalism. The findings also show that an empowerment-oriented culture mediated CPD by sustaining professional motivation over time. Teachers reported that cultural support—such as recognition, encouragement, and collegial appreciation—helped maintain their engagement in continuous learning.

"Even when CPD is demanding, the support from colleagues keeps us motivated." (T2)

Principals reinforced motivation through symbolic recognition and inclusive communication. Document analysis revealed regular acknowledgment of teacher contributions in meetings and school publications. This sustained motivation ensured that CPD outcomes were maintained and reinforced as professional habits.

DISCUSSION

RQ1. Manifestations of an Empowerment-Oriented School Culture in the Implementation of Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

The results demonstrate that an empowerment-oriented school culture manifests in CPD implementation through shared values, participatory decision-making, collaborative learning structures, supportive leadership, and recognition of teacher expertise. These elements collectively transformed CPD into a culturally embedded process aligned with teachers' professional identities (Sancar et al., 2021). Teachers found CPD to be relevant, meaningful, and empowering, which strengthened their motivation for continuous improvement. The findings suggest that school culture plays a mediating role in determining how CPD is enacted and experienced (Kjaer et al., 2017). Without such a culture, CPD risks becoming procedural rather than transformative. Thus, empowerment-oriented school culture emerges as a foundational condition for effective CPD implementation.

The findings of this study reinforce the argument that empowerment-oriented school culture is a critical determinant of effective CPD implementation. When CPD is embedded within a culture that values trust, collaboration, and teacher agency, professional learning becomes sustainable and impactful. Professional

development is most effective when supported by organizational cultures that promote collective learning and reflective practice (Fairman et al., 2022; Tanang & Abu, 2014; Vangrieken et al., 2017). The results demonstrate that empowerment-oriented culture provides both the emotional and structural conditions necessary for continuous professional growth. Teachers' active engagement in CPD reflects a shift from compliance-based participation to intrinsic professional motivation. Thus, culture acts as a catalyst, transforming CPD from an activity into a professional norm (Peleman et al., 2018; "School-Based Continuous Professional Development (CPD): Practices and Challenges," 2019).

The participatory nature of CPD planning observed across the three schools aligns with existing literature on teacher empowerment and professionalism. By involving teachers in identifying learning needs and designing CPD activities, schools recognize teachers as knowledgeable professionals capable of directing their own development. This finding is consistent with Avalos (2017), who emphasizes that teacher-driven professional development enhances relevance, ownership, and instructional impact. Participation in decision-making strengthens teachers' sense of responsibility for both individual and collective improvement. Moreover, such practices align with the concept of professional agency, where teachers actively shape their professional trajectories. Consequently, empowerment-oriented culture mediates the effectiveness of CPD by fostering professional ownership (Khokhotva & Elexpuru Albizuri, 2020).

Leadership practices identified in this study further illustrate how an empowerment-oriented culture is sustained and institutionalized. Principals who adopt facilitative and trust-based leadership styles create psychologically safe environments that encourage experimentation and reflection. This finding resonates with McChesney, who highlights that empowering leadership enhances teacher confidence and professional commitment (McChesney & Aldridge, 2021). By granting autonomy and reframing mistakes as learning opportunities, leaders reinforce a growth-oriented professional culture. Such leadership practices ensure that CPD is not perceived as evaluative or punitive. Instead, CPD becomes a supportive process aligned with long-term professional learning goals.

RQ2. Contributions of Teacher Empowerment within CPD Processes to the Strengthening of Teacher Professionalism

The findings affirm that teacher empowerment within CPD processes plays a pivotal role in strengthening teacher professionalism by fostering professional agency and ownership. When teachers are actively involved in designing and directing their professional learning, CPD becomes meaningful and sustainable. Teacher-driven professional development enhances relevance, motivation, and long-term impact (Kit et al., 2023). Empowerment shifts professionalism from compliance-based behavior to self-directed growth (Rich et al., 2021). The study demonstrates that agency is not an abstract concept but a practical outcome of participatory CPD structures.

The emphasis on reflective practice as an outcome of empowerment supports Darling-Schipper's assertion that professional learning is most effective when teachers are trusted to critically examine their own practice (Schipper et al., 2020). Empowered teachers in this study engaged in reflection as a professional habit rather than an imposed requirement. Reflection enabled teachers to connect CPD content with classroom realities, strengthening instructional decision-making. This process reinforces professionalism as adaptive expertise rather than routine performance. Thus, empowerment serves as a bridge between CPD activities and authentic professional growth (Vangrieken et al., 2017; Whitworth & Chiu, 2015).

The findings related to confidence and innovation resonate with Schipper, who emphasizes that empowering leadership and learning environments enhance teachers' self-efficacy (Schipper et al., 2020). Empowered teachers were more willing to take instructional risks and engage in pedagogical experimentation. This confidence is a critical dimension of professionalism in dynamic educational contexts. By reducing fear of failure, empowerment-oriented CPD fosters a growth mindset among teachers.

Consequently, professionalism becomes associated with learning and improvement rather than perfection (Bir et al., 2014; Vadivel et al., 2021).

RQ3. The Mediating Role of an Empowerment-Oriented School Culture in Linking Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and Teacher Professionalism

The findings confirm that an empowerment-oriented school culture functions as a critical mediating mechanism between CPD and teacher professionalism. Rather than CPD directly producing professional outcomes, culture shapes how teachers engage with, internalize, and apply professional learning. This supports Bie et al.'s argument that organizational culture determines how formal structures are translated into practice. In this study, empowerment-oriented norms transformed CPD from a technical intervention into a professional learning process (Bir et al., 2014). Culture, therefore, serves as an interpretive filter that strengthens CPD's effectiveness.

Psychological safety emerged as a key cultural mediator, aligning with Edmondson's (2018) work on learning organizations. Teachers were able to experiment, reflect, and seek feedback because the cultural environment normalized learning from mistakes (Roberts, 2020; Vangrieken et al., 2017). This condition enabled CPD to enhance professionalism through deep reflection and adaptive practice. Without such safety, CPD knowledge may remain unused or superficially applied (Fairman et al., 2022). The study reinforces the idea that professionalism flourishes in cultures that value learning over compliance.

The role of shared values in mediating CPD outcomes supports the concept of professional capital (Zhang et al., 2021). Local philosophical values provided a moral foundation that linked CPD participation to professional responsibility and collective commitment. These values strengthened the ethical dimension of professionalism, ensuring that CPD influenced not only skills but also professional dispositions (Kjaer et al., 2017). Culture thus enriched CPD by embedding it within teachers' moral and social identities (Kjaer et al., 2017). This finding highlights the importance of culturally grounded professional learning.

The study also aligns with Srinivasacharlu's (2019) assertion that sustained professional learning depends on systemic and cultural coherence. An empowerment-oriented culture aligned CPD with the school vision, collaborative norms, and distributed leadership structures. This coherence ensured that CPD outcomes were reinforced through daily practice and collective accountability. Culture sustained professionalism beyond the duration of formal CPD activities (Kit et al., 2023). As such, an empowerment-oriented culture acts as an infrastructure for continuous professional growth.

Finally, the findings extend existing CPD literature by positioning empowerment-oriented culture as an active mediator rather than a passive context. While previous studies often treat culture as a background factor, this research demonstrates its dynamic role in shaping professional learning outcomes. The results suggest that strengthening teacher professionalism requires simultaneous attention to CPD design and cultural empowerment. Strategic efforts to build trust, collaboration, and shared leadership are therefore essential. In conclusion, empowerment-oriented school culture is a decisive factor in ensuring that CPD leads to meaningful and sustainable teacher professionalism.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that an empowerment-oriented school culture plays a decisive mediating role in strengthening the relationship between Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and teacher professionalism in public junior high schools. The findings show that CPD is most effective when embedded in cultures characterized by trust, shared values, collaboration, and teacher agency, enabling teachers to internalize professional learning as part of their professional identity rather than as an external obligation. Across the three case schools, empowerment was reflected in participatory leadership, collegial learning structures, and culturally grounded professional practices that enhanced motivation, reflective practice, and professional commitment. This study extends the understanding of CPD by positioning school culture as a critical relational and cultural context that shapes how professional learning is enacted and sustained. The

cross-case analysis highlights that effective CPD is not a standardized program but a socially constructed process influenced by leadership dynamics and local values, offering a contextually grounded empowerment-based CPD model relevant to the Indonesian education system. However, the qualitative multi-site design limits the generalizability of the findings beyond similar contexts. Future research should employ mixed-methods or longitudinal approaches and comparative studies across regions and school levels to examine the long-term effects of empowerment-oriented CPD on teacher performance and student learning outcomes.

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