

# Teaching in Transition: Examining Teacher Adaptability and Pedagogical Change

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## Abstract:

The educational environment of today is defined by ongoing and accelerating change, which dictates that teachers have to constantly modify their teaching methods to suit the changing curricula, technological processes, and student requirements. This paper critically reviews the multidimensional aspects of teacher adaptability in the pedagogical changes context based on recent empirical studies in various educational systems such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Australia. The discussion examines the relationship between teaching experience, institutional demographics, and professional support system in the ability of educators to negotiate curriculum changes and instructional changeovers. The synthesis of the findings of several studies indicates that adaptability is not a predetermined quality but a dynamic ability that can be developed with the help of reflective practice, collaboration in professional learning communities, and specific institutional intervention. The paper claims that the psychological, organizational, and practical aspects of teacher adaptability are necessary to policymakers and educational leaders to initiate sustainable curricular reforms that can help educators to maintain their wellbeing and professional efficacy.

**Keywords:** Multidimensional, Pedagogical Changes, Indonesia, Malaysia, Australia

## Introduction

The world has seen unprecedented levels of change in educational systems due to the technological revolution, changes in pedagogical philosophies, changes in societal demands and unpredicted shocks like the global COVID-19 pandemic. It is in this dynamic environment that teachers find themselves in a very specific and conflicted role as both agents of instituted reforms and agents of innovation who must somehow make abstract learning structures into learning experiences. The ability of teachers to adjust their teaching methods, assessment techniques and professional roles to these reforms has become an important factor of quality and effectiveness of reforms. Teacher adaptability as cognitive, emotional, and behavioral ability to adapt successfully to new conditions and new needs is an important and yet underresearched aspect of educational policy discourse.

The importance of investigating teacher adaptability is not limited to the personal professional skill but to wider questions of educational equality, system viability and student achievement. The effects of teachers not being able to adjust to new curricular structures or pedagogical demands are not only an issue of personal stress and poor wellbeing but also a lack of consistency in implementation, lower quality of instruction, and eventually poor learning in students. On the other hand, highly adaptable teachers tend to be agents of innovation, coaches to others, and champions of substantive implementation of reforms. The paper is a step in taking a comprehensive look at the issue of teacher flexibility in the transitional education environment to synthesize the findings of the current research undertaken in various national contexts to explain the factors that help or hinder effective pedagogical change. The analysis will cover three mutually dependent dimensions, namely, the connection between teaching experience and the adaptability to the curriculum, the impact of institutional context and support structures on teacher adaptability, and the

psychological mechanisms that can be used to negotiate the process of professional change and retain their wellbeing and teaching efficiency.

### **Understanding Teacher Adaptability**

The academic conceptualization of teacher adaptability relies on various theoretical schools of thought that, together, shed new light on the cognitive, social, and contextual aspects of professional adaptation. The concept of pedagogical equilibrium is one of the most powerful models because it outlines the dynamic equilibrium that teachers have between the teaching practices and professional beliefs they have set and demands of the teaching environment. In the case of a major shift, be it in curriculum, technological introduction or outside interference, teachers are in a state of disequilibrium that is marked by uncertainty, confusion and professional perplexity. Although this state of disequilibrium is uncomfortable, it provides necessary conditions of professional learning and advancement since educators are forced to build new knowledge, skills, and pedagogical solutions to achieve functional balance.

The Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge model and the Technology Acceptance Model are two methods that can be used in complementary ways to conceptualize the concept of adaptability in a technological change and digital integration context. These models underline that an effective adaptation process must not only involve the acquisition of technical skills but instead involves the intricate combination of technological skills and pedagogical knowledge and subject matter knowledge. Before meaningful adoption can take place, teachers need to see new tools and methods as valuable and able to be used with their current professional identity and instructional objectives. Studies of teacher experience of blended learning during and after the pandemic show that initial resistance/anxiety can over time be replaced by confidence and understanding of pedagogical utility with the right support structures in place, which shows that adaptability is dynamic and developmental.

Another analytic theory that can be used to understand teacher adaptability is the Cultural-Historical Activity Theory which places individual adaptation in the context of larger systemic structures in which tools, rules, community norms and institutional differentiation of labor are part of complex systems of activity. In this sense, teacher adaptation exists never as an individual phenomenon, but rather is mediated by the educational materials, relationships and structural conditions of the educational environment. In exploring the ways in which teachers managed the two tensions of learning new online delivery systems and still maintained a fascinating inquiry-based teaching approach during the pandemic upheavals, researchers have recorded how epistemological beliefs about student engagement and assessment in teachers changed in response to the shifting system of activities, which showed that adaptability is not just the change of behavioral strategies but the very reevaluation of professional assumptions and practices.

### **Teaching Experience and Curriculum Adaptation**

The relationship between teaching experience and adaptability to curriculum change presents a nuanced and sometimes counterintuitive picture that challenges simplistic assumptions about veteran teacher resistance and novice teacher flexibility. Extensive research examining Indonesian teachers who have navigated multiple curriculum reforms, including the Competency-Based Curriculum, School-Based Curriculum, Curriculum 2013, and the Merdeka Curriculum, reveals significant patterns in how experience shapes adaptation capacity. While experienced teachers with more than ten years of service often possess deep pedagogical knowledge and established classroom management routines that provide valuable foundations for instruction, these same teachers frequently demonstrate adherence to structured curricula that creates difficulties when transitioning to modern, flexible frameworks emphasizing student-centered and differentiated approaches.

Conversely, younger teachers with three to five years of experience consistently demonstrate greater adaptability to new curricular frameworks, suggesting that professional flexibility may be more readily maintained earlier in careers before pedagogical habits become deeply entrenched. However, this finding should not be interpreted as evidence that experienced teachers are inherently less capable of adaptation but rather that the nature and demands of adaptation differ across career stages. Veteran teachers may require different forms of support, including opportunities to connect new approaches with their existing expertise, explicit acknowledgment of their accumulated professional knowledge, and gradual implementation timelines that allow for meaningful integration rather than wholesale replacement of established practices. The data revealing that while 78.9% of teachers effectively implement teaching according to curriculum requirements, only 29.6% can adequately prepare instructional materials, exposes a significant gap between curriculum planning and practical execution that affects teachers regardless of experience level and points to systemic rather than individual factors in adaptation capacity.

The persistence of this planning-implementation gap across experience levels suggests that teacher adaptability is constrained not only by individual willingness or skill but by the practical resources, time allocations, and institutional supports available for substantive curricular engagement. Teachers who demonstrate competence in material preparation but struggle with implementation (4.2%) and those unable to prepare materials yet successfully deliver lessons by relying on external resources (2.8%) represent distinct adaptation profiles that require differentiated professional development responses. These findings argue strongly against one-size-fits-all approaches to supporting teacher adaptation during curriculum transitions and instead advocate for diagnostic assessment of individual teacher needs followed by targeted intervention strategies that address specific gaps in knowledge, skill, or resource access.

### **Teacher Wellbeing and Psychological Adaptability**

The mental aspects of teacher adaptability do not only concern cognitive flexibility or behavioral change but go down to questions of professional identity, emotional regulation, and long-term wellbeing. Teacher shortage is one of the major issues facing schools around the world, and studies are showing that adaptability is a major psychological asset which can minimise teacher shortage by eliminating burnout and enhancing wellbeing. The qualitative investigation into the views of primary school teachers on the subject of adaptability will demonstrate the strong connections between adaptability and the success of classroom management and the psychological well-being of the teacher, who reports the effect of their adaptability capacity on their own professional performance and their personal satisfaction with their teaching role. In these studies, teachers found that there are four interrelated themes: Adaptability as part of the teaching practice, learning to become adaptable as an active developmental process, the connection between adaptability and organizational culture and a cyclical relationship between adaptability and teacher wellbeing.

The description of adaptability and wellbeing as a cyclical relationship has a great implication on the interpretation of teachers in pedagogical transitions. When teachers feel successful in adapting, their confidence and professional competence is boosted and wellbeing is increased to provide psychological resources to facilitate future adaptive efforts. On the other hand, adaptation efforts that do not succeed or are not sufficiently supported lead to the ensuing stress and lessened effectiveness, which may cause exhaustion of psychological resources, leaving the person vulnerable to burnout and minimizing the ability to continue with further adaptation. Such a cyclical effect is the idea that early intervention to help facilitate the successful initial adaptations experiences could have positive cascading effects, whereas early failure unattended may trigger negative spirals which are more difficult to reverse. The results also indicate that teachers can gain and enhance their adaptability in the process of being involved in reflective practices, which means that adaptability is not a predetermined characteristic but instead, it is a potential that can be

skillfully developed due to the proper professional activity and the organization of the educational institution.

Studies of the professional experiences of teachers in the pandemic reveal the emotional experience of the adaption process, starting with feelings of anxiety and resistance and gradually moving to the formation of confidence and eventually realizing the pedagogical potential of new methods. Educators indicated that they had acquired new ways and attitudes towards teaching that were indicative of the new education environment, and their practices had changed as they involved students in synchronous collaborative work and laboratory sessions, and constructed different formative and summative assessments practice. These results illustrate that effective adaptation entails not just technical adaptation but actual change of professional beliefs and practices that teachers come to own as manifestations of their sense of professional identity as opposed to externally imposed demands. The implication concerning a pedagogical transformation is obvious: to be sustainable in terms of adaptation, it is important to focus on the psychological experiences and professional meaning-making of teachers, rather than on their adherence to new demands.

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

The interpretation of the research results about teacher adaptability yields a number of valuable implications to the educational policymakers and institutional leaders that aim to make a successful change in the curriculum and do not compromise the wellbeing of teachers. One, identification of the fact that adaptability depends upon teaching experience in a systematic way implies that support strategies should be differentiated instead of having the same strategies of professional development. Specialized training opportunities are required to meet the needs of seasoned instructors that have to overcome the challenges of structured to flexible curriculum development as well as assist novice instructors to build up their background of pedagogical knowledge and adaptability. Knowledge transfer can be achieved by organized mentorship programs where teachers are matched according to their complementary strengths and collaborative relationships are formed to encourage further adaptation.

Second, the reported disparities between the capacity to plan the curriculum and the effectiveness of school implementation point to the fact that the reform efforts need to allocate sufficient resources to the implementation of practical resources as well as the conceptual professional training. Unless they have proper materials, time to plan and technical infrastructure, teachers cannot accommodate new curricular structures, whether they want to or not, and whether they can or not. The provision of context-sensitive resources considerations that take into consideration the diverse school demographics and current levels of capacity is necessary to ensure a fair curriculum implementation in the diverse learning institutions. The approach to curriculum reform in the form of phases, backed by institutional support and proper policy interventions, will ensure a stronger and more flexible teaching workforce compared to quick and homogenous timelines of curriculum implementation that overwhelm the adaptive capacities of teachers.

Third, the imperative significance of professional learning communities and conducive organizational cultures makes a case in favor of purposeful institutional investment in the institutional structures that facilitate teacher learning with and between each other in the transitional periods. School teachers have key functions to place disruption as a learning opportunity, to create time and space to practice reflection and to be an example of how to respond to change adaptively. More sophisticated pedagogical education that proceeds beyond the level of introduction to the tools and goes into more profound integration of the new practice into the current knowledge and professionalized identity of the teachers is required to ensure lasting change and not merely surface level response. Lastly, the concern of teacher wellbeing should be included in the list of the adaptation support strategies and not regarded as a separate issue since the

process of successful adaptation experiences is interconnected with the psychological resources that should be provided to sustain the process of professional development.

### Conclusion

Teacher adaptability represents a crucial yet complex factor in the success of educational reforms and the sustainability of pedagogical innovation. This examination of research from Indonesia, Malaysia, and Australia reveals that adaptability is shaped by teaching experience, institutional context, available support structures, and psychological dimensions that interact in dynamic and consequential ways. The evidence demonstrates that while newer teachers often exhibit greater flexibility in adopting unfamiliar curricular frameworks, experienced teachers possess valuable knowledge that can inform adaptation when appropriately recognized and supported. Institutional investment in robust infrastructure, targeted professional development, and collaborative learning communities emerges as essential for enabling teacher adaptation, while attention to teacher wellbeing is necessary for sustaining adaptive capacity over time. The conceptualization of adaptability as a developable capacity rather than a fixed trait offers hopeful directions for educational policy, suggesting that deliberate intervention can cultivate the adaptive teaching workforce necessary for navigating continued educational change. Future research should continue examining the longitudinal trajectories of teacher adaptation across multiple reform cycles while investigating the specific professional development approaches most effective for building adaptive capacity across varied teaching contexts and career stages.

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