TEACHING STYLES OF CREATIVITY, CONFORMITY, AND THE DYNAMICS OF SKEPTICISM-CREDULITY IN PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE

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Abstract	This study aims to investigate how teachers' instructional styles are formed and shift along a continuum from creative–transformational to conformist–adaptive and imitative, emphasizing the mediating role of epistemic orientation (skepticism vs. credulity) in pedagogical decision-making. Conducted at SDN Cisaat, Sukabumi, the study purposively selected eight active classroom teachers as subjects. The primary data consisted of teachers' instructional practices as demonstrated in authentic classroom contexts, supported by in-depth interview records and further substantiated with supplementary documents such as lesson plans (RPP/ATP) and teaching artifacts. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, structured classroom observations, and document analysis. The analysis employed van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenology—entailing holistic and selective reading, identification of significant statements, phenomenological reduction, thematic clustering, and distillation of essential meanings—further supported by open, axial, and selective coding, cross-case matrices, and analytic memos. The findings indicate that healthy skepticism fosters evidence-based teaching that is measurable and contextually adaptive, while credulity tends to rely on external legitimacy with minimal contextualization. Factors such as experience, education, digital access/attitudes, and policy supervision play important roles but are mediated by teachers' epistemic dispositions. Rigor was ensured through triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, and audit trails, with full ethical safeguards. This study positions skepticism–credulity as a mediator of shifts along the instructional continuum and recommends evidence-focused PLCs, reasoning- and impact-oriented supervision, and leadership that promotes responsible innovation, while calling for mixed-methods and cross-context research on learning outcomes.
Keywords	Creativity, Conformity, Epistemic skepticism-credulity, Phenomenology, Teaching Style

INTRODUCTION

Teachers' instructional style is one of the most decisive factors in the quality of education (Karoghlanian, 2024). Numerous studies show that differences in student learning outcomes are not only influenced by the curriculum (Marlina & Muharja, 2024) or school facilities (Hopland, 2019), but depend heavily on how teachers design, deliver, and reflect on classroom learning processes (Entwistle & Smith, 2002). In Indonesia, the urgency of this issue has grown since the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum and, more recently, the Merdeka Curriculum, which requires teachers to implement differentiated instruction and cultivate the Pancasila Student Profile (Taek, 2024). However, field realities indicate that most teachers still tend to rely on official templates or teaching modules provided by the government, and only a small portion actively modify instructional strategies creatively. This phenomenon raises fundamental questions about the dynamics between creativity and conformity in teachers' pedagogical practice.

Creativity in teaching is crucial to ensure learning that is relevant, adaptive, and meaningful for students (Cremin, 2017). Creative teachers are able to align content, methods, and assessment with the diverse needs and characteristics of their students (Lilly & Bramwell-Rejskind, 2004). On the other hand, conformity to educational standards and regulations is also necessary to maintain baseline quality and equity in education (Andronie & Andronie, 2014). The tension between creativity and conformity constitutes a persistent challenge in education. On one side, teachers are encouraged to innovate (Schleicher, 2015). On the other hand, they face regulations that are often interpreted rigidly, thereby constraining room for creativity (Lampel et al., 2011). As a result, many teachers opt for a middle path by imitating the teaching styles of their former teachers, whether consciously or unconsciously.

The phenomenon of imitating the teaching style of one's former teachers can be explained through the concept of the apprenticeship of observation (Borg, 2004), whereby prolonged experience as a student shapes mental scripts about how teaching "should" be done. Many novice teachers in Indonesia admit that they often mimic techniques, communication styles, and even jokes used by their past teachers (Alifia et al., 2022), even though today's contexts and student needs have changed. This intergenerational pedagogical transmission is not necessarily aligned with the demands of 21st-century education, which emphasize critical thinking, collaboration, and innovation. This gives rise to an important question: why do some teachers tend to question (be skeptical of) such pedagogical inheritances, while others accept them at face value (be credulous)?

Teachers' skeptical and credulous dispositions in pedagogy constitute epistemic dimensions that have received relatively little attention in educational research. Skeptical teachers tend to verify the validity of sources, reflect on personal assumptions, and remain open to revising their practices (Nägel et al., 2023). By contrast, credulous teachers more readily accept information or instructions without critical clarification (Wulan & Ilmiyah, 2022). In the digital era, where teachers are inundated with a wide array of online learning resources, videos, and educational social media content of highly variable quality, a skeptical stance becomes increasingly important to prevent the adoption of invalid or even misleading methods (Albaugh, 1997). In addition, governments often issue guidelines or teaching modules that encourage innovation (Katz, 2021), but without a critical stance, teachers may take such instructions at face value without adapting them to their own classroom contexts. As epistemic gatekeepers in the classroom, teachers play a central role in cultivating a climate of healthy, critical, and skeptical thinking among students.

In practice, teachers' instructional approaches exhibit substantial variation in methods, strategies, and interactions with students. Some teachers present authentic and innovative styles, skillfully integrating multiple instructional approaches to suit student needs and classroom contexts. They do not hesitate to experiment with new methods, adapt teaching materials, and foster dynamic, participatory learning environments. Such teachers are typically highly sensitive to change, reflective about their own practices, and willing to take pedagogical risks to improve learning quality. However, many teachers tend to follow templates or standard patterns provided by the government or educational institutions. They are more comfortable using ready-made instructional tools without extensive modification or adjustment, whether due to administrative demands, time constraints, workload, or concern about evaluations from supervisors. In some cases, teachers even carry out instructions or steps listed in official documents without a deep understanding of the purposes and essence of each stage of instruction (Ji & Naval, 2007).

Beyond template use, the tendency to imitate former teachers' instructional styles remains strong, especially among novices. This transmission often occurs without critical reflection, allowing legacy practices that may no longer fit contemporary needs to persist. This indicates that past experiences as students exert a powerful influence on shaping a teacher's instructional preferences and habits.

Amid these variations, teachers' skeptical and credulous dispositions become crucial factors influencing pedagogical choices and decision-making. Skeptical teachers tend to question the

effectiveness of offered templates or methods, engage in critical reflection on inherited practices, and remain open to innovation (Taylor & Lee, 2020). Conversely, credulous teachers more readily accept and implement templates, modules, or inherited practices with limited critical consideration (Harvey & Kamvounias, 2008). This disposition inclines them to be passive in developing their instructional style and less responsive to changes and emerging challenges in education.

Several concrete challenges at SDN Cisaat reinforce these dynamics. Differentiated instruction is inconsistently enacted, often narrowed to worksheet variation rather than grounded adjustments to learning goals, processes, and products. There is a prevailing dependence on RPP/ATP templates and centrally provided teaching modules, with limited localization to students' linguistic, cultural, and environmental contexts. Supervision and appraisal practices emphasize document completeness over pedagogical reasoning and impact on learning, reducing incentives for reflective experimentation. Digital literacy is uneven, and internet access is intermittent, facilitating uncritical adoption of widely circulated materials without quality checks.

Agustina et al. (2023) show that Indonesian scholarship on instructional style largely centers on typologies and policy compliance, with variation primarily attributed to administrative pressures. Riza & Andayani (2025) Find that policy adherence and supervisory structures foster homogenization of teaching strategies, prompting reliance on official modules rather than context-responsive adaptation. Zulfikar (2018) documents the predominance of inherited practice among novice teachers, consistent with Lortie (1975) primary account of the "apprenticeship of observation," whereby prolonged exposure as students forms durable scripts about how teaching "should" be done. Sihombing and Pongtuluran (2011) highlight the hierarchical cultural context in Indonesia, where questioning authority is often taboo, constraining teachers' critical stance; this aligns with the core theory on epistemic beliefs Hofer and Pintrich (1997), which shapes how educators appraise knowledge claims and instructional guidance. Explicit research on teachers' skepticism–credulity remains scarce despite its clear relevance to innovation quality and resilience to misinformation; foundational frameworks on reflective practice (Schön, 2017), evidence-informed professionalism, and adaptive expertise (Bransford et al., 2000) underscore skepticism as a professional virtue enabling disciplined inquiry and context-sensitive adaptation.

These studies do not unpack the internal mechanisms of pedagogical decision-making and do not position skepticism–credulity as a mediating filter through which policy, supervision, digital resources, and inherited practice shape instructional choices within a hierarchical culture. They also

under-theorize the linkage between epistemic beliefs (Hofer & Pintrich, 1997) and teacher movement along the creativity–conformity continuum, and rarely employ phenomenological methods to trace teachers' lived reasoning.

This study foregrounds skepticism–credulity as a mediating variable explaining movement along the instructional continuum; integrates hermeneutic phenomenology with cross-case thematic analysis to map teachers' pedagogical reasoning pathways (van Manen, 2016); and synthesizes primary theories—apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975), reflective practice (Schön, 2017), epistemic beliefs (Hofer & Pintrich, 1997), adaptive expertise (Bransford et al., 2000), and evidence-informed professionalism to explain why, under similar policy and supervisory pressures, some teachers remain procedural while others enact context-responsive, evidence-aligned innovation. The study translates this synthesis into context-sensitive recommendations: evidence-focused professional learning communities that cultivate critical appraisal, supervision centered on pedagogical reasoning and impact rather than format compliance, and instructional leadership that creates psychological safety for responsible innovation.

Accordingly, this study aims to explore the meanings of teachers' subjective experiences in constructing their instructional styles and to examine how skeptical and credulous dispositions mediate their decisions to innovate, follow templates, or emulate former teachers. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically and practically to teacher training, education policy design, and the fostering of a reflective professional culture that is both critical and adaptive in Indonesian schools.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design (Creswell, 2014). A qualitative approach was chosen because the study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' subjective experiences in constructing their teaching styles and how skeptical and credulous dispositions influence that process. A phenomenological design is used to elicit the essential meanings of teachers' experiences (Koirala, 2023), thereby enabling a holistic understanding of the internal dynamics (Hamou-Ljadj, 2007) that unfold in their pedagogical practice.

The research subjects are teachers actively teaching at SDN Cisaat, Sukabumi Regency. Participant selection criteria include having at least three years of teaching experience, representing

diverse educational backgrounds, and a willingness to engage actively in the research process. The number of participants was determined purposively, that is, selected intentionally (Subedi, 2021) based on relevance and the depth of information they could provide. In this study, there were 8 participants, a number aligned with the needs until the data reached saturation, or no new significant information was found.

The primary data collection technique is in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, with sufficient duration to probe participants' experiences, reflections, and perspectives comprehensively. In addition to interviews, data were gathered through observations of classroom instruction, conducted both directly and via video recordings, to capture the real-time dynamics of interaction and teachers' instructional styles. Document analysis—such as Lesson Plans (RPP) and teachers' reflective notes—was used as supporting data to enrich understanding of enacted pedagogical practices.

Beyond the researcher as the key instrument, auxiliary instruments included an interview guide developed from the study's focus, an observation sheet to record teachers' behaviors and interactions in class, and field notes containing the researcher's reflections throughout data collection. The interview guide was designed flexibly to accommodate the flow of conversation and each participant's unique experiences, while remaining anchored to core issues such as creativity, conformity, the inheritance of teaching styles, and skeptical and credulous dispositions.

The research procedure began with preparation, including instrument development, obtaining school permission, and participant selection. Data collection then proceeded through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and the gathering of relevant documents. Each interview was audio-recorded (with participants' consent) and transcribed verbatim. After data collection, phenomenological analysis was conducted following the stages developed by van Manen (Aguas, 2022): repeatedly reading the full transcripts, identifying significant statements, conducting data reduction, clustering into core themes, and distilling the essential meanings of participants' experiences.

To ensure data trustworthiness, the study implemented several techniques, including source triangulation (comparing data from interviews, observations, and documents), member checking (asking participants to verify the researcher's interpretations), and an audit trail (systematically documenting the entire research process for retraceability). Validity and reliability were reinforced through several operational strategies. Peer debriefing was carried out by inviting two senior

colleagues from the same district to review initial codes and thematic clusters; their feedback challenged early assumptions and led to refinement of categories, particularly in distinguishing between "adaptive" and "imitative" teaching practices. Critical reflection on researcher bias was conducted through a reflexive journal maintained after each classroom observation and interview, in which the researcher systematically noted personal expectations, potential over-identifications with certain participants, and adjustments in subsequent data collection.

Ethical safeguards were implemented in tangible ways. Before each observation, the researcher explained the purpose of the study to both teachers and students using age-appropriate language, ensuring transparency in the classroom setting. Written informed consent was obtained from all teachers, and verbal assent was secured from students, with parental permission facilitated by the school. To protect anonymity, pseudonyms were assigned to each teacher, and no school identifiers were included in analytic narratives; for example, lesson plan excerpts were paraphrased rather than reproduced verbatim when they could reveal identity. Participants were also given opportunities to review their interview transcripts and clarify or remove statements if they wished. One teacher chose to withhold a sensitive anecdote, which was respected and excluded from the final analysis.

Data analysis employed a hermeneutic phenomenology framework (van Manen) that was operationalized through four interrelated layers with explicit coding procedures (Fuster Guillen, 2019). First, immersion began with verbatim transcription of interviews and systematic expansion of observation field notes. During holistic and selective readings, the researcher highlighted recurring classroom events such as the repetition of government-provided modules without alteration, instances where teachers modified local examples in mathematics word problems, and moments of critical questioning about curriculum directives. Significant statements were flagged directly in the transcripts using margin codes. Second, phenomenological reduction was enacted by keeping a reflexive log that listed the researcher's assumptions and then consciously setting them aside during initial coding. Open coding produced bottom-up categories tied closely to teacher actions and reasoning; for instance, one teacher's comment that "I just follow the module because supervision focuses on compliance" was coded as conformist–policy driven, whereas another's rationale—"I searched YouTube for examples more relatable to my students"—was coded as creative–digital adaptation. Third, axial and selective coding connected discrete codes into cross-case matrices. For example, a pattern emerged where younger teachers with frequent digital

engagement combined skepticism of official textbooks with exploratory lesson modifications, positioning them toward the creative end of the continuum. Conversely, older teachers under stricter supervisory scrutiny tended to equate legitimacy with external mandates, clustering toward the conformist–imitative poles. Matrices explicitly mapped these relationships, showing how epistemic dispositions (skepticism vs. credulity) mediated the influence of experience, academic background, digital literacy, and supervisory practices. Fourth, hermeneutic interpretation distilled these clustered insights into essential propositions. One core meaning that emerged was: "When skepticism is balanced with contextual awareness, teachers move toward evidence-based, adaptive instruction; when credulity dominates, instructional choices narrow to compliance or imitation." Final interpretations were cross-checked with observed classroom episodes and with documentary evidence (annotated lesson plans, adapted exercises), ensuring that analytic claims reflected triangulated data rather than isolated sources.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Eight teachers from SDN 1 Cisaat participated in this study, consisting of five females and three males, with teaching experience ranging from 3 to 10 years. Most held a bachelor's degree in Primary School Teacher Education (PGSD), alongside several with bachelor's degrees in specific subject areas (Mathematics and Biology). This diversity matters because it shapes pedagogical practice: teachers with PGSD backgrounds tend to employ thematic approaches and demonstrate strong classroom management, whereas those with subject-specific backgrounds emphasize knowledge structure and conceptual reasoning. The characteristics of participants' teaching styles and epistemic orientations are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Participant Profile

Code	Grade/Subject	Years Teaching	Educational Background	Epistemic Orientation	Dominant Teaching Style
P1	Grade 1 / Thematic	8 years	Bachelor's in PGSD	Moderately skeptical	Modifies templates into games
P2	Grade 2 / Thematic	5 years	Bachelor's in PGSD	Credulous	Implements lesson plans exactly as official examples
P3	Grade 3 / Mathematics	10 years	Bachelor's in Mathematics Education	Highly skeptical	Designs small project-based learning
P4	Grade 4 / Science	8 years	Bachelor's in Biology Education	Credulous	Repeats their 1990s teacher's methods

P5	Grade 5 / Indonesian	3 years	Bachelor's in PGSD	Highly credulous	Imitates their elementary teacher and YouTube videos
P6	Grade 6 / Social Studies	10 years	Bachelor's in PGSD	Highly skeptical	Designs simple simulations and discussions
P7	Grade 3 / Thematic	10 years	Bachelor's in PGSD	Moderate	Combines templates with sensory improvisation
P8	Grade 4 / Mathematics	7 years	Bachelor's in Mathematics Education	Moderately skeptical	Group discussions and adaptation of Merdeka modules

Source: Observation and school-related documents

Table 1 shows a consistent-looking correlation between epistemic orientation and teaching style. Teachers with skeptical tendencies (P3 and P6) demonstrate creative practices—for example, small project-based designs (P3) and simulations/discussions (P6). By contrast, teachers with credulous tendencies (P2, P4, P5) are more likely to execute templates (official lesson plans), carry forward methods from their former teachers, or adopt popular materials such as YouTube videos without meaningful adaptation. The moderately skeptical group (P1, P8) and the moderate group (P7) occupy an in-between position: they still use the template sequence but insert improvisations, games, or sensory approaches for inclusive needs. More specifically, the following patterns emerge from Table 1.

1. P1 (Grade 1/Thematic, bachelor's in PGSD, moderately skeptical) modifies templates into games. This signals sensitivity to lower-grade characteristics—where concrete learning and fine–gross motor activities are crucial—while also showing caution: innovation is pursued but remains within the template frame.

2. P2 (Grade 2/Thematic, credulous) follows lesson plans exactly as per official exemplars. This reflects an orientation toward administrative safety and high trust in the authority of official documents rather than pedagogical trial-and-error.

3. P3 (Grade 3/Mathematics, highly skeptical) designs small projects. The skeptical stance appears to drive method verification and a willingness to experiment in a measured way.

4. P4 (Grade 4/Science, credulous) continues the methods of their 1990s teacher. This indicates a strong apprenticeship of observation: intergenerational transmission of practice with limited reflection on current contexts.

5. P5 (Grade 5/Indonesian, highly credulous) combines imitation of their own elementary teacher with YouTube videos. Credulity toward popular sources results in less selective content curation; classroom-specific adaptation is not prominent.

6. P6 (Grade 6/Social Studies, highly skeptical) designs simulations and discussions. This aligns with a skeptical orientation: checking the rationale of methods and selecting strategies that stimulate reasoning.

7. P7 (Grade 3/Thematic, moderate) combines templates and sensory improvisation, especially for inclusive needs. The pressure of differentiation pushes practice variation while still adhering to standard sequences.

8. P8 (Grade 4/Mathematics, moderately skeptical) uses group discussions and adapts Merdeka modules. This indicates integration of the latest policy with adaptive touches at the classroom level.

Before outlining each teacher's position on the instructional-style spectrum, it is important to emphasize that the dynamics of practice in this school are shaped by a tug-of-war between policy standardization (lesson-plan templates, supervision, and teaching modules) and the need to respond to student diversity. Teachers do not stand at the absolute poles of "compliant" or "creative"; they continually weigh administrative safety against pedagogical effectiveness, while epistemic stance—skeptical or credulous toward sources and habits—acts as a filter in micro-level classroom decisions. Hence, a continuum emerges, not a black-and-white dichotomy: when to adhere to the template, when to modify, and when to try a new approach.

At the creative end, teachers position the lesson plan as primarily a legal–administrative frame and enliven the classroom through projects, simulations, and discussions. P3 stresses, "I treat the lesson plan as an administrative fence; once in class, students need small projects so the concepts come alive," while P6 adds, "before adopting a new method, I check the source; if the rationale is strong, I try it through a simulation or discussion." These statements reflect healthy skepticism that drives evidence-informed practice and measured experimentation.

In the middle position, teachers follow the template but insert strategy variations contextualized to student characteristics. P1, who teaches lower grades, states, "I still use the template, but I turn it into simple games so first graders don't get bored." P7, who handles an inclusive class, affirms, "For inclusive students, I add sensory activities; the sequence is the same, but the content is adjusted." In line with adaptation to the Merdeka Curriculum, P8 notes, "I take

the core goals from the Merdeka module, then steer the discussion toward topics close to them." These three cases show productive compromise: procedural compliance is maintained while leaving small room for innovation.

At the imitative/conservative end, teachers tend to replicate official templates, senior teachers' practices, or popular materials without meaningful adaptation. P2 reveals, "If there's an official lesson-plan example used by other teachers, I just follow it so supervision is safe." P4 states, "My teacher's way is still relevant; structured lecturing is neat and easy to control." Meanwhile, P5 relies on popular sources: "viral YouTube materials I usually use directly, since students are already familiar." These statements illustrate credulity that prioritizes administrative safety and operational ease over pedagogical curation.

Thus, the continuum of teaching styles—from creative, to conformist-adaptive, to imitative—appears as a gradient shaped by classroom realities, institutional pressures, and, above all, each teacher's epistemic filter. Skepticism (as in P3 and P6) tends to associate with evidence-based innovation, whereas credulity (as in P2, P4, and P5) correlates with adopting templates or inherited practices without sufficient adjustment; moderate positions (P1, P7, P8) display compromise strategies that maintain compliance while enabling contextual adaptation.

Factors Influencing Style Selection

The analysis shows that teachers' choices of instructional style do not stand alone; they are shaped by accumulated experiences, educational background, access to and stance toward learning resources, and the policy–school climate. These four factors interweave and are filtered by each teacher's epistemic orientation.

First, teaching experience—especially memories of success or reprimand—guides practice preferences over time. Teachers who feel "successful" with established patterns tend to retain them. P4, for example, notes, "structured lecturing has always been neat and keeps the class controlled; I've used it for a long time and it's safe." Conversely, positive experiences with experimentation trigger ongoing creativity. P3 recounts, "The first time I tried small projects in math, students better understood fractions; since then, I've continued the project model." However, when innovation clashes with procedure, teachers tend to revert to conformity. P2 admits, "I once modified steps in the lesson plan, then during supervision I was told it 'didn't match the template'; since then I just follow the official example to be safe."

Second, educational background sharpens pedagogical focus. Teachers with PGSD backgrounds stand out for thematic approaches and classroom management in lower grades. P1 states, "First graders get bored quickly, so I turn the template into games; instruction still follows one theme, so the sequence is coherent." Meanwhile, subject-specific backgrounds correlate with a willingness to design conceptually reasoned activities. P6, who teaches Social Studies, emphasizes, "I usually use a market role-play simulation and cause–and–effect discussions; students learn concepts, not just memorize." P8 (mathematics) echoes this: "I take the goals from the Merdeka module, then focus the discussion on problem-solving strategies."

Third, access to and stance toward learning resources separate skeptical from credulous patterns. On the skeptical end, teachers filter materials before adopting them. P6 underscores, "if a method is going viral, I first check journals or official guidance; if the rationale isn't strong, I don't use it." P3 concurs: "The lesson plan is an administrative fence, but what happens in class must be evidence-based and contextual." On the credulous end, document authority or media popularity becomes the main anchor. P5 says, "If a YouTube topic is trending, I usually use it directly; students are already familiar." P2 adds, "If there's an official lesson-plan example used by others, that means it's safe for me."

Fourth, school policy and supervision mechanisms set perceived boundaries of practice. Rigid templates and supervisory rubrics reinforce conformity, especially for risk-averse teachers. P4 comments, "too much improvisation may not fit the supervision rubric." Conversely, leadership-provided discretion and a reflective culture open space for adaptation. P7—who teaches an inclusive class—notes, "the principal allows me to add sensory activities; the sequence stays the same, but I can adjust to students' needs." P8 reports similar support, "the key is achieving the objectives; my use of group discussion is fine as long as it aligns with the Merdeka Curriculum."

Overall, these four factors act like levers shifting teachers along the creative–conformist–imitative continuum. Experiences that validate innovation, backgrounds that strengthen conceptual reasoning, skeptical curation of sources, and leadership that grants discretion tend to move teachers toward creative, adaptive practice. Conversely, memories of success with established patterns, reliance on authoritative sources without verification, and rigid supervision strengthen conformist or imitative choices. The decisive filter remains each teacher's epistemic stance: when healthy skepticism is present, innovation is more likely to grow; when credulity dominates, procedural compliance becomes the "safest" choice.

The Role of Skeptical and Credulous Stances in Pedagogical Decision-Making

Findings indicate that epistemic stance acts as the primary filter directing how teachers translate policy, materials, and traditions into classroom action. At the skeptical end, teachers make evidence and contextual relevance prerequisites for adopting strategies; at the credulous end, teachers prioritize administrative safety and source authority, tending to replicate templates and popular practices without adequate adjustment.

On the skeptical spectrum, verification becomes routine prior to implementation. P6 emphasizes, "if there's a new, trending method, I first check references or official guidance; if its pedagogical rationale is strong and fits my class, I try it through simulations or discussions." P3 echoes this: "The lesson plan is an administrative fence, but classroom content must make sense in terms of evidence—I choose small projects so students grasp concepts rather than merely memorize." These statements show that skepticism drives evidence-based practice, phased trials, and alignment with student characteristics—pushing teachers toward creative, transformational styles.

In moderate positions—between skepticism and credulity—teachers maintain the template structure while opening safe micro-innovation space. P1 notes, "I still follow the template, but I turn it into simple games so first graders don't tire quickly." P8 adds, "I take the core aims from the Merdeka module; I adjust group discussions to topics close to them." This pattern reflects productive compromise: procedural compliance is maintained to satisfy supervision, but pedagogical decisions are filtered by considerations of rationality and classroom needs.

Conversely, on the credulous spectrum, the main considerations are source legitimacy and operational convenience. P2 states, "If there's an official example lesson plan used by other teachers, I'll follow it so supervision is safe." P5 admits, "I usually use viral YouTube materials directly because students are already familiar." Credulity in these two quotations appears to treat popularity or document authority as guarantees of fit, without adequate curation. P4 adds a transmission dimension: "my teacher's way is still relevant; structured lecturing is neat and easy to control," showing a tendency to accept legacy practices without reflecting on current contexts. This configuration steers teachers toward conformist or imitative styles with minimal innovation.

In sum, skeptical and credulous stances shape distinct pedagogical decision pathways. Skepticism—when paired with institutional support and access to trustworthy resources— encourages evidence appraisal, limited trials, and contextual adaptation, thereby enriching students'

learning experiences. Credulity—especially under rigid supervision and a school culture that emphasizes compliance—leads teachers to use templates, emulate senior practices, or adopt popular materials without validation. Thus, cultivating healthy skepticism—through evidence literacy, reflective professional learning communities, and clearly defined discretionary space—becomes key to shifting practice from procedural conformity toward responsible innovation.

Discussion

This study identifies a continuum of teaching styles—from creative-transformational, to conformist-adaptive, to imitative—with epistemic orientation (skepticism vs. credulity) as the primary mediator, alongside experience, educational background, access, and stance toward sources, and the policy and supervision climate. This pattern aligns with literature that frames teaching practice as the result of interactions between teachers' cognitive–epistemic dispositions and institutional structures, rather than mere technical competence (Fullan, 2007; Hallinger, 2011; Hoy & Miskel, 2013).

First, the positive relationship between epistemic skepticism and pedagogical creativity is strong. Teachers who emphasize verification and pedagogical rationality tend to conduct measured trials, contextualize strategies, and adopt evidence-informed approaches such as reasoned discussion, simulations, or small projects. These findings are consistent with reflective practice and evidence-informed teaching frameworks, which indicate that critical evaluation of sources correlates with higher-quality instructional decision-making and learning outcomes (Coe et al., 2020; Hattie, 2009; Schön, 2017; Timperley et al., 2007). Studies on teachers' evidence adoption likewise show that a skeptical orientation—understood as appraisal of validity and relevance—encourages the translation of research findings into contextualized practice (Brown & Zhang, 2017; Coldwell et al., 2017; Wyse et al., 2020).

Second, epistemic credulity is associated with a preference for external legitimacy (official templates, senior practices, or popular materials) and administrative safety, often with minimal contextual adjustment. This coheres with research on compliance pressures in rigid supervisory systems: when audit rubrics emphasize step-sequence format fidelity, teachers tend to minimize innovation risk and choose standardization (Fullan, 2007; Hoy & Miskel, 2013). In hierarchical school cultures, unexamined acceptance of pedagogical authority has also been reported to inhibit practice renewal and organizational learning (Hallinger, 2011; Sahlberg, 2011).

Third, the findings reinforce the concept of apprenticeship of observation, namely, the

durability of pedagogical scripts inherited from one's experiences as a student. Without reflective intervention, these scripts are replicated even as contexts change (Lortie, 1975; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981). Professional development that promotes evidence-based reflection can "deconstruct" and "reconstruct" these scripts to align with 21st-century competencies such as critical thinking and problem-solving (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Flores, 2001). Here, skepticism functions as a filtering mechanism that drives the recontextualization of practice, whereas credulity reinforces inheritance without modification (Biesta, 2007).

Fourth, educational background serves as capital that steers pedagogical focus, but its effectiveness is determined by epistemic disposition. Teachers with elementary-education backgrounds tend to be strong in thematic approaches and classroom management; those with subject-specific backgrounds often excel in conceptual reasoning. This pattern accords with research on pedagogical content knowledge and TPACK, which argues that mastery of content and pedagogy must be integrated with evidence appraisal and contextual adaptation (Coe et al., 2020; Kholid et al., 2023; Koehler et al., 2013). Without a reflective–critical frame, academic capital can revert to structured lecturing and standardized sequences (Hattie, 2009).

Fifth, policy and supervision shape the boundaries of practice as perceived by teachers. Instructional leadership that grants discretionary space, focuses on learning outcomes (goal-oriented), and strengthens professional learning communities increases the likelihood of adopting evidence-based strategies and measured innovation (Hord, 1997; Leithwood et al., 2006; Robinson, 2007; Stoll et al., 2006). Conversely, supervision that prioritizes format compliance over pedagogical rationale tends to foster uniformity that impedes differentiation and responsiveness to student needs (Fullan, 2007; Hallinger, 2011). In Indonesia, curriculum transitions that emphasize goals and flexibility—such as the direction of the Merdeka Curriculum—are more conducive to teacher creativity than highly document-centric approaches (Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

Sixth, access to and stance toward digital sources sharpen the distinction between evidence-based curation and raw adoption. In an information-rich ecosystem, source evaluation literacy—checking validity, reliability, and relevance—is a prerequisite for pedagogical integrity (Metzger & Flanagin, 2013; Wineburg & McGrew, 2019). The finding that critical curation correlates with more contextual strategies aligns with evidence that appraisal capacity enriches learning experiences and prevents overreliance on popular materials that do not always align with goals (Coe et al., 2020; Merchant, 2012).

Overall, this study advances the discourse on teaching styles by positioning the epistemic dimension as a mediating variable that explains teachers' movement along the creative–conformist–imitative continuum. Practical implications consistent with the literature include: cultivating healthy skepticism through evidence-based PLCs and reflective practice (Hord, 1997; Stoll et al., 2006), reformulating supervision to evaluate pedagogical rationale and impact on student learning rather than format compliance (Hallinger, 2011; Robinson, 2007), and strengthening leadership that provides discretionary space with accountability for outcomes (Fullan, 2007; Leithwood et al., 2006). With such an ecosystem, creativity becomes a responsible professional standard, not a deviation from the norm.

CONCLUSION

This study finds that teachers' instructional styles lie on a continuum—creative-transformational, conformist-adaptive, and imitative—shaped primarily by epistemic orientation: healthy skepticism versus credulity. Skepticism promotes evidence curation, measured experimentation, and contextual adaptation, yielding active, dialogic, reasoning-oriented learning; credulity prioritizes external legitimacy (official templates, traditions, popular materials) with minimal adaptation, reinforcing procedural conformity and dampening innovation. These effects interact with experience, academic background, access to and stance toward digital sources, and the school policy–supervision climate, which are amplified or muted by epistemic disposition. Conditions that emphasize learning outcomes, grant clear discretionary space, and foster evidence-based professional learning communities support responsible innovation, whereas rigid supervision and format-centric evaluation channel practice into "safe," less adaptive routines. Practically, interventions should cultivate skepticism via reflective practice and evidence-focused PLCs, redesign supervision/QA to center pedagogical rationale and impact over document compliance, and exercise leadership that couples discretion with accountability to learning goals. Theoretically, framing skepticism–credulity as a mediating variable explains movement along the continuum and complements activity-based typologies. Limitations include a small, single-school qualitative sample; future mixed-methods studies across diverse settings should test skepticism- and evidence-literacy interventions and link practice shifts to student outcomes to advance relevant, equitable, evidence-based innovation.

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