

# A Policy Lens on Becoming a Teacher: A Longitudinal Diary Study of Novice Teacher Professional Identity Formation in Indonesia

Ulfah Alifia, Rezanti Putri Pramana, and Shintia Revina

## Abstract

The early years of a teacher's career are crucial to the formation of their professional identity—a complex process of reconciling their personal attributes with the demands of the profession. This study explores the identity formation of novice teachers in Indonesia and seeks to identify the various aspects that shape this process. Specifically, we examine how Indonesia's current teacher policy landscape affects novice teachers' perspectives on teaching and their profession. Through a longitudinal bimonthly diary study conducted over two years, we find that the novice teachers' stories about their identity development revolve around five themes: initial motivation to enter the profession, beliefs about teaching and the teaching profession, satisfaction with working conditions, perceptions about major challenges during the early years, and commitment to the teaching profession and career aspiration. Our findings show that individual teachers' personal attributes do influence the formation of their identities as teachers, but teacher policies and working conditions influence this process to a greater extent. Without support, novice teachers struggle to navigate the tension between their ideals, limited resources, and inconsistent teacher policies. These findings suggest it is necessary to redefine what it means to be a teacher by characterising the observable qualities of good teaching, linking them to student learning, and rectifying teacher policies in the Indonesian education system to be coherent with these characteristics.

**Keywords:** novice teacher, teacher professional identity, identity formation, teacher policy



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# 1. Introduction

This study explores the identity formation of novice teachers in Indonesia. Teacher identity formation is the complex process of reconciling the personal attributes of teachers with the demands of their profession (Pillen et al., 2013; Akkerman and Meijer, 2011; Beijaard et al., 2004), and we aim to identify the various aspects that shape this process. Specifically, we look at how Indonesia's current teacher policy landscape and the components that interact with these policies affect novice teachers' perspectives about teaching and their profession. It is worth noting that looking at teacher policies as a single factor that shapes teacher identity formation may lead us to overlook other factors independent of these policies that are essentially crucial for the teachers' formative years. Therefore, we take a unified approach to identifying the personal and professional sides of becoming and being a teacher.

This study is meant to provide evidence on how teacher policies in low- and middle-income countries such as Indonesia affect teachers' experiences and their perceptions of teaching and the teaching profession. Teachers' perceptions of both matters play a large role in shaping their behaviour and classroom practices. Consequently, understanding how teachers respond to the policies while they seek to thrive in the profession is imperative in examining what really works to improve learning. Moreover, as teachers improve the most early in their careers, and there is little evidence to suggest these improvements continue beyond their first three years of teaching (Rivkin et al., 2005), a closer examination of novice teachers' tensions and struggles during this phase is critical. For novice teachers, identity formation is, indeed, instrumental in guiding them towards their aspirations beyond their early teaching career (Pillen et al., 2013; Akkerman and Meijer, 2011).

Studies on the formation of novice teachers' professional identities in low- and middle-income country contexts reveal that teacher policies and working conditions affect teacher identity formation more than a teacher's personal attributes (Ruohotie-Lyhty et al., 2021; Ávalos and Valenzuela, 2016; Barrett, 2008; Bennell and Akyeamong, 2007; Akyeamong and Stephens, 2002). For example, Barret (2008) analysed interview and observation results of teachers who worked in remote, rural but accessible, and urban schools in Tanzania and reported that younger teachers often identify themselves as self-improvers and demand a model of professionalism that can protect them from low-pay working conditions. Barret shows that teacher policies and low pay often caused young teachers to be fretful, especially when they worked in a stifling environment. Barret further suggested that a better employment policy for teachers, such as the performance model of professionalism, could strengthen teacher accountability, thereby contributing to the establishment of a positive work culture in Tanzania's public school system. Another study by Ávalos and Valenzuela (2016) showed that the high attrition rate amongst novice teachers in Chile might be due to teachers' dissatisfaction with the school context and working conditions rather than their personal attributes. The study calculated accumulated new teacher attrition rates by year of entry into teaching and work cycle using ten-year data and found a high percentage (40 percent or more) of novice teachers leaving the profession within five years of being in the job. The study in the Chilean context argued that changes in professional satisfaction during the early years of teaching largely determine a teacher's decision to leave the profession—

even when their self-efficacy has improved. Among the working conditions that drove teachers to leave were sub-standard remuneration, lack of complementary benefits, and inadequate resources and school facilities. Similarly, in the Ghanaian context, Akyeampong and Stephens (2002) reported that a majority, nearly 80 percent, of novice teachers in their study cited poor service conditions as a major disincentive of teaching. Moreover, the Ghanaian novice teachers with higher socio-economic backgrounds expressed little desire to teach in primary schools, mainly because the job did not elevate their status and insufficient fringe benefits. These studies suggest that more research is needed to understand how policies affect novice teachers' notion of the teaching profession and how their early career experiences influence what they believe about teaching and the teaching profession.

Overall, lessons learned from the Indonesian novice teachers' case are valuable for the following reasons. First, the situation of novice teachers in Indonesia, to some extent, resembles the cases in low- and middle-income countries described above. The working conditions of new teachers are often unsatisfactory, and many teachers start their careers working informally as honorary teachers (Huang et al., 2020). However, unlike teachers in other contexts—such as Chilean teachers in Ávalos and Valenzuela (2016)—who decide to leave the profession when they lose hope, teacher attrition in Indonesia is relatively low (OECD/ADB, 2015). We hypothesise that the low attrition in Indonesia is not because teachers could manage to improve their working conditions nor reconcile their expectations with reality, but because teacher graduates may have fewer alternative employment opportunities available. Documenting these teachers' experiences as they navigate their early careers will provide us a better understanding of how to support the teachers to overcome the challenges they encounter during this period.

Second, Indonesia has made attempts to reform its teacher policies in recent decades. Some of the government's investments include doubling teacher pay and expanding teacher professional development opportunities (Revina et al., 2020; De Ree et al., 2017). However, the policies are not yet coherent. Despite repeated attempts to reform teacher performance, poor teaching quality persists because Indonesia's teacher policies were not designed to stimulate quality teaching (De Ree et al., 2017). The teacher allowance system is not linked to the evaluation of teacher performance. Eligibility for the allowance is based on teacher attendance or teaching hours, regardless of the quality of their instruction. One consequence of Indonesia's teaching quality issue is the flat and worsening learning reported by Beatty et al. (2021). Therefore, to explain how teacher policies influence teacher quality, it is important to understand how these policies affect teacher experience, especially early in their careers when teachers move in leaps and bounds to figure out what matters in teaching and the teaching profession.

Accordingly, this study will answer the following questions. First, what professional identities do novice teachers form during their first years of teaching? Second, what are the drivers that influence novice teachers' experiences and identity formation during their formative years? And how does teacher policy influence these teachers' experiences and identity formation? Here, teacher policy is defined as "the regulations and principles of action that shape and constrain who teachers are and what teachers do" (OECD, 2018, p.21). Teacher policies encompass several dimensions, such as teacher recruitment and selection, teacher development (preparation,

induction, training, professional learning, career development), assignment, compensation, and retention (OECD, 2018; Jackson et al., 2014; OECD, 2005).

Through a longitudinal bimonthly diary study conducted over two years, we involved sixteen novice teachers in an effort to study their professional identities. The teachers were primarily required to write prompted subject essays on a specific topic every two months, followed by phone interviews. The topics were also purposively selected following the stages the teachers were going through at the time. For example, in the first few topics, the teachers were prompted to tell a story about what motivated them to become teachers, their job search process, or workloads during their first semester of teaching. As the study progressed, the teachers were prompted to reflect upon their rewarding and challenging experiences or their future aspirations. This methodological decision is in line with previous studies (Gholami et al., 2021; Macías Villegas et al., 2020; Altan and Lane, 2018) that relied on narratives to reveal the formation of teacher professional identity within changing contexts.

Our findings show that individual teacher personal aspects (e.g., background, interest, passion) do influence teacher identity formation. However, teacher policies and working conditions influence novice teacher professional identity formation to a greater extent. The recruitment of public school teachers within the general civil service system and the dualism in pay structure between honorary and civil servant teachers are identified as major policies that affect novice teachers' perceptions of their own professional identities. Findings from the present study may shed light on the significance of key teacher policies in shaping the identity formed by novice teachers during their formative years. Thus, policymakers can identify which aspect(s) matters in the policies and make urgent strategic policy responses.

We structure the paper into seven sections. In the next section, we discuss various approaches used to explore teacher professional identities. The third section describes the research context. The fourth section provides an overview of the research methods. The fifth section presents our analysis of the teacher narratives that reveal the formation of novice teachers' professional identities over the years. The sixth section discusses a broader analysis of the ways in which features of teacher policies in Indonesia influence teacher identity development. In the last section, we reflect on the future direction of key teacher policies that can support novice teachers in navigating their formative years.

## **2. Exploring Teacher Professional Identity**

In the present study, we follow Sachs (2005) who defines teacher professional identity as a framework for teachers to construct their own ideas of "how to be", "how to act", and "how to understand" their work and their place in society. Thus, teacher identity is not limited to a set of competencies that a quality teacher must possess (Clarke, 2009). Teacher identity is consistently evolving (Chong and Low, 2008) and the formation does not end when a teacher enters school because it is a continuous loop (Olsen, 2008). Accordingly, teachers enter the profession already having an image of what a teacher is, whether conceived from implicit teaching theories or previous role-play experience (Flores and Day, 2006). In fact, teachers begin to form the

foundation of their professional identity during these early years through a series of negotiations of their initial beliefs and concepts of what constitutes a good teacher that largely impacts how teachers develop further throughout their careers. Moreover, before entering the profession, they had been exposed to various teaching approaches delivered by their teachers throughout their schooling. Azaria & Zamir's noted that that early career teachers in Israel began to construct their professional identity "with exposure to an exceptional teacher in the past". Thus, the formation of the idea of a "good teacher" may have started long before novice teachers enter the teaching profession.

On the one hand, professional identity development is the process of integrating teachers' personal attributes (e.g., knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, norms, and values) with the demands of the profession, including teaching standards and policies at the school or education system levels (Beijaard et al., 2004). In the context of a nation with a more dynamic geopolitical situation, the said variables are even more influential to teachers' professional identities (Ruohotie-Lyhty et al., 2021). Yet in a more advanced education system such as in Belgium, Schepens et al. (2009) found that the variables highly attributable to teacher identity include teachers' demographics, personality traits, and initial motivation to become a teacher. Individual characters and attributes indeed play as great a role as external factors in shaping a teacher's professional identity. Teachers also value their personal background and integrate it into their professional life (Tickle, 2000). This is in line with Beauchamp and Thomas (2009), who explained that playing the role of a teacher involves a lot of emotion, commitment, passion, and courage in teaching. Meanwhile, research on teachers conducted by psychologists tend to focus on the role of emotion, motivation, and fulfilment of basic needs through the chosen career path (e.g., Chong and Low, 2008). The early years of teaching are especially demanding because that is the period in which novice teachers are developing key competencies and shaping their professional identities (Mahmood, 2013). This approach is recognised for explaining how novice teachers balance conflict and align their pre-conceived beliefs about teachers and the less-than-ideal working conditions, which may even conflict with theoretical teacher knowledge or professional standards of teaching.

### 3. Research Context

To better understand our research design and findings, we provide a brief overview of the career trajectory of novice teachers in Indonesia, including their preparation, certification, and recruitment.

In Indonesia, education for prospective primary school teachers takes place in a four-year undergraduate programme hosted by a teacher training institution known as *Lembaga Pendidikan Tenaga Kependidikan* or LPTK. Upon completion of this programme, a graduate can apply for teaching positions in public or private schools. The central government oversees civil servant teacher recruitment for public schools; schools or district governments have no influence in the hiring process. To secure a civil servant teaching position, teacher candidates can apply to civil servant teacher vacancies posted annually along with other non-teaching civil servant positions. The civil servant recruitment schedule and procedures are the same for teacher candidates and other non-teaching candidates. But each civil servant applicant can only apply to one vacant



position. The teaching positions are only open to applicants with a Bachelor of Education degree in the subject for which they are applying. For each vacant teaching position, the school location has been predetermined. Candidates who apply to a teaching position will be sorted based on their scores on the general civil service aptitude test. Three candidates with the highest scores will be shortlisted and invited to the second round of the test to take written pedagogical and content knowledge tests. The one with the highest cumulative score will be automatically appointed as a probationary civil servant teacher to fill a vacant teaching position. Teachers who hold a teaching certificate will automatically earn a full score if they are shortlisted for the second round of the test. All probationary civil servants, including teachers, will undergo a “probationary” period for one year, then have their performance evaluated—but all candidates will be appointed regardless of the results. In other words, the teachers are virtually on track for lifelong tenure within the civil service system. The probationary period is mainly administrative and, in fact, all probationary civil servants are registered as state employees from their initial date of employment.

Many educators consider civil servant teacher recruitment to be the ideal route. In fact, most novice teachers start their careers in public school as honorary<sup>1</sup> teachers, recruited informally by schools which pay them considerably lower wages than the civil servant teachers (Huang et al., 2020). However, in practice, the civil servant teaching vacancies are not announced regularly, are infrequent, and follow the general civil service job opening system. The unclear schedule of civil servant hiring often leaves novice teachers with only two options while waiting for the civil servant opening. Either they can start as honorary teachers under informal arrangements in public schools, or they can secure teaching positions in private schools that carry out regular hiring processes. Unlike civil servant teachers who must take a series of tests to get the job, honorary teachers working in public schools are recruited casually by the school—often based solely on academic qualifications. In any case, many of these teachers enter the teaching profession with the hope to someday win civil service tenure. When they fail the civil servant selection, they will likely make multiple attempts to apply for the civil servant position until they are 35, the age limit for a civil servant applicant.

There is no direct link between honorary and civil servant status. Honorary teachers, including those with long years of service, still have to pass the civil servant selection to secure a permanent position in a public school. There is no continuation from a teacher’s previous honorary status to their civil service appointment. The probationary period for a newly appointed civil servant teacher starts upon their appointment. The time during which they served as an honorary teacher does not count as a probationary period. Huang et al. (2020) further mentioned that many teachers who failed the civil servant tests continue working informally for some more years. Suppose they are still unsuccessful in securing a civil servant position when they reach 35. In that case, they will remain honorary teachers until retirement (see Huang et al., 2020 for a more comprehensive discussion of the career trajectory of honorary teachers). With the implementation of the 2005

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<sup>1</sup> The literal equivalent of “*guru honorer*” in English is “honorary teachers”. We acknowledge that the term “honorary teachers” in this paper may be related to the existing research on contract teachers worldwide. In Indonesia, honorary teachers are employed under informal recruitment mechanisms and held to different employment standards from their civil servant counterparts, often without any formal contract.

Teacher Law, teachers who hold a bachelor's degree can acquire certification that leads to higher remuneration, thus earning double their base pay.

As of 2017, there are two routes to certification, both overseen by LPTKs. The two routes are professional teacher education programmes for novice teachers (fresh graduates and teachers with experience up to five years), known as PPG *Prajabatan* (pre-service teacher training), and programmes for teachers with more than five years of experience, known as PPG *dalam Jabatan* (in-service teacher training). In principle, most, if not all, novice teachers prefer to earn certification upon completion of their undergraduate programme due to the benefits that teaching certificate holders receive: certification allowances; a higher chance of passing the civil service selection than uncertified applicants; and higher social status as they will be regarded as "professional teachers." Most of the teachers who take part in PPG *Prajabatan* are honorary teachers or fresh graduates who have not taken up any formal employment. However, the seats available in the PPG *Prajabatan* are limited; thus, many teachers are left with the choice of joining the in-service teacher training, PPG *dalam Jabatan*, after five or more years of teaching. In fact, teacher participation in the in-service teacher training is assigned. Local education agencies normally have a list of honorary, civil servant, or private school teachers who can participate in PPG *dalam Jabatan* in a specific year. For example, in 2018, while roughly 101,000 teachers were appointed civil servants<sup>2</sup>, the allocation for the PPG *dalam Jabatan* training was only 317 seats. The number of seats for certification in the previous five years was more or less the same (Suryani, 2020). For a more comprehensive discussion of Indonesia's pre-service teacher training, see Yusrina et al. (forthcoming).

It is also widely recognised that the most concerning teacher policy in Indonesia relates to teacher welfare and employment status, particularly with regard to honorary teachers. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology estimates that 63% of public school teachers are civil servants and 36% are honorary (PDSPK Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2021). Widiarto (2020) showed that 97.65% of honorary teachers in public schools were uncertified. Approximately 13% of the uncertified honorary teachers earned 300,000 IDR per month (equivalent to \$20 per month), while the lowest salary for civil servant teachers was \$100 before additional allowance (Beatty et al., forthcoming).<sup>3</sup> This figure is at the lower end of the Java worker income range of 1,400,000 IDR to 3,200,000 IDR (\$98–\$225) (Statistics Indonesia, 2020). Some of the teachers participating in our study complained about their low pay; nevertheless, they opted to stay in the profession. Increasing teacher salaries, however, does not always correlate with an improvement in teaching quality. De Ree et al. (2017) revealed an inconvenient truth about the Indonesian government's policy of doubling the certified civil servant salary. The study found that the higher salary increased teachers' satisfaction, reduced the number of teachers having second

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<sup>2</sup> Civil servants here refer to probationary civil servants (CPNS) and contract-based government employees (PPPK).

<sup>3</sup> Base pay for civil servant teachers depends on experience and degree, ranging from 2.5 million IDR to 6 million IDR (\$205 to \$420). Meanwhile, the salaries for honorary teachers depend on the School Operational Assistance Fund (*Bantuan Operasional Sekolah/BOS*) received by each school, ranging from 100,000 IDR to 1.5 million IDR (\$10 to \$105).

jobs, and eased teachers' financial stress, but did not show a significant improvement in student learning.

## 4. Research Methods

### 4.1 Data Collection

Previous studies have used the narrative approach to study teacher professional identity (Macías Villegas et al., 2020; Altan and Lane, 2018; Gholami et al., 2021). Clandinin (2006) suggested that the narrative approach can potentially reveal the complexities involved in the formation of teacher professional identity. Ruohotie-Lyhty (2013) highlighted that by sharing their stories, teachers can identify critical events or experiences that may have affected their way of becoming. As the present study specifically explores the connection between teacher identity and teacher policy, we are interested in how the teachers themselves narrate their beliefs, emotions, or experiences and what functions they ascribe to the policy implementation at various levels in the narratives. As this is a narrative study, the causal relationship between policy features and teacher identity is beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, it is worth to note that unlike other narrative studies that often collected data at one point of time or were based on unstructured interviews, the data obtained in the present study is rather collected from a quite well thought-through, long-term, and structured approach.

We collected data from sixteen novice primary school teachers consisting of eight male and eight female teachers.<sup>4</sup> At the beginning of this study, the teachers had just graduated from pre-service teacher training at seven universities in Java, Indonesia's most populated island, and earned their teaching certificates. After graduating from teacher training, two teachers secured civil-servant positions in public schools, eight teachers worked as honorary teachers in public schools, five teachers worked in private schools, and one teacher was still looking for a teaching position<sup>5</sup>. At the end of the study, fourteen teachers secured civil servant positions, one teacher was still an honorary teacher<sup>6</sup>, and one teacher worked in a private school. All teachers had less than five years of teaching experience.

The novice teachers voluntarily participated in our two-year longitudinal study from February 2019 to December 2020. To protect the teachers' privacy, we informed them of all aspects of the research. We protected their personal identifiers, maintained ethical considerations associated with the data, and continued collecting data based on this privacy agreement. The teachers were allowed to withdraw at any time; however, they had previously agreed that we could use the

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<sup>4</sup> Female teachers in Indonesia account for roughly 61.5% of the teaching workforce (PDSPK Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2021).

<sup>5</sup> This teacher (Teacher 13) left the teaching profession in mid-2019 upon his failure to secure a civil servant position. He returned to work as a teacher in 2021 after passing the 2020 civil servant test. The narratives he wrote for this study were his reflections on his experience prior to 2019.

<sup>6</sup> The teacher's status as of December 2019 because he withdrew from our study that month.

materials they submitted prior to their withdrawal. All sixteen teachers participated in the first year of this study. Six teachers withdrew in the second year due to various reasons, as we had anticipated, given the study's length.

The teachers who participated in this study were required to write prompted subject essays every other month. There are a total of twelve topics which we later grouped into five main themes reflecting the novice teachers' experiences: initial motivation to enter the teaching profession, beliefs about teaching and the teaching profession, satisfaction with working conditions, major challenges encountered during the early years, and commitment to the teaching profession and career aspirations. We chose the twelve topics to reveal the teachers' responses to various dimensions influencing their perspectives on teaching and the teaching profession in their early years (the complete twelve topics are presented in the Appendix).

In the months when the teachers did not submit written narratives, we interviewed them by phone to elaborate on or clarify information in their essays. We recorded and transcribed all interviews. We used the interviews to clarify the narratives of the teachers' experiences as well as to build a dialogic relationship with them (Goodson and Ümarik, 2019). We understand that a narrative data collection must emphasise the dialogic interaction between the researcher and the participants to seek a mutual understanding and to ensure the narrator's voice is noticeable. In collecting data for this study, the dialogue was built through a process that took two years. During this time, we built trust and rapport with the participants.

## **4.2 Data Analysis**

We followed the methods described by Macías Villegas et al. (2020) that relied on Polkinghorne's paradigmatic analysis of narrative data in analysing the narratives. According to Polkinghorne (1995, p.13-14), paradigmatic analysis is a type of data analysis that "seeks to locate common themes or conceptual manifestations among the stories collected as data. ... [not only] to discover or describe categories that identify particular occurrences within the data but also to note relationships among the categories." Consequently, we analysed the narratives through the following five steps.

First, we read the teachers' written narratives to immerse ourselves in their stories. This first step allowed us to understand what they were saying. As Macías Villegas et al. (2020) noted, it is important for narrative researchers to connect with the data before making any interpretation. We then discussed emerging ideas in the teachers' narratives for each topic and determined the initial categories.

In the second step, we refined and expanded our initial categories and underlined the excerpts from each story that represented each category. We also developed a matrix to display the teachers' selected excerpts in each topic side by side, allowing us to condense the data and compare their stories. We re-coded the data in this matrix to identify patterns and discontinuities.

Then, in the third step, we analysed the teachers' responses from the phone survey. We compared each teacher's written narrative with their verbal narratives. In most cases, the teachers elaborated on their written stories during the phone interview.

In the next step, we read, discussed, and expanded on emerging categories based on the teachers' verbal narratives. We also identified features of self-reflection on the teachers' experiences that related to teacher policy implementation. For example, one teacher shared that her toughest challenge as a novice teacher was being seen as insignificant by students' parents because she was an honorary teacher. The complexity of teacher recruitment and the low remuneration she received as an honorary teacher in a public school influenced her self-esteem and confidence in teaching.

The last step was to triangulate our interpretations and in-depth discussions to determine the final categories. Each researcher in this study read a series of narratives from each of the sixteen teachers to find consistencies and inconsistencies within and across transcripts. At the end of the study, we asked the teachers to check our interpretations of their narrated experiences to give credibility to our study (Webster and Mertova, 2007).

It should be noted that this study, using diary or narrative as an approach, makes no claims to the generalizability of the findings. We did not aim to apply the narratives to represent novice teachers' experience generally. In other words, the multiple complexities narrated by the teachers in this study do not necessarily represent the population of novice teachers in Indonesia. As Li and Craig (2019) suggested, we leave it up to the readers to discover actionable truths in their own settings.

## **5. Narratives of Teacher Professional Identity**

In our analysis, we find that the stories related to identity development shared by the novice teachers revolve around five themes, and a teacher's story may contain narratives related to one or more themes. The themes are initial motivation to enter the profession, beliefs about teaching and the teaching profession, satisfaction with working conditions, perceptions about major challenges during the early years, and commitment to the teaching profession and career aspiration. The descriptions of narratives gathered from the teachers' essays and phone interviews are presented and summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1. Emerging Themes from the Teacher Narratives and Number of Teachers Mentioned in the Themes**

<b>Emerging Themes from the Teacher Narratives</b>	<b>Subthemes</b>	<b>Number of Teachers Mentioned the Themes/Subthemes</b>	<b>Examples of Narratives Mentioned by the Teachers</b>
<b>Initial Motivation to Enter the Teaching Profession</b>			
<b>(1) Intrinsic value of teaching</b>	Want to be a teacher since childhood	10	Being a teacher was my dream job since I was little. Seeing a teacher teaching in front of the class, when I was in kindergarten and primary schools, made me want to be like them. I was so impressed with the teaching profession that my friends and I often role-played teachers and students as a child. (Teacher 7)
	The teaching profession as a form of a good deed in Islam	6	One of the deeds that will remain with you in the hereafter, and the reward will continue to benefit you even after you die, is useful knowledge. This is in line with a teacher's job, teaching knowledge to students. If the knowledge taught to students is transferred to others, the more rewards a teacher will get. (Teachers 10)
<b>(2) Making social contributions</b>		11	As a primary school teacher, I dedicate my life for the future of this nation. (Teacher 1)
<b>(3) Advised by family members to pursue a teaching career</b>		10	Both my parents wanted me to become a teacher. I followed their wishes by taking the university entrance exam and majored in primary school teacher education at a university in East Java. Even though this was a forced choice, I was determined not to disappoint my parents. (Teacher 3)
<b>(4) The teaching profession as the last resort</b>		4	When I was a student, I always wanted to be a policeman, but I failed the test. So I decided to apply to a taxation major at a school governed by the Ministry of Finance. Also failed. Then, I took the entrance exam at a local university where I chose three majors. Education was the last major on that list. I thought that maybe it was my fate to be accepted in the teacher preparation programme. (Teacher 2)
<b>Beliefs about Teaching and the Teaching Profession: The Characteristics of a Good Teacher</b>			
<b>(1) Having intellectual excitement</b>	Being creative	10	A teacher must also have a high creative spirit because it will help them find various new learning models suitable for their class. This spirit will allow them to discover different sets of problem-solving related to students' problems ... A teacher's creativity will distinguish them from other teachers, which will make students eager to meet the subjects taught by the teacher. (Teacher 13)

Emerging Themes from the Teacher Narratives	Subthemes	Number of Teachers Mentioned the Themes/Subthemes	Examples of Narratives Mentioned by the Teachers
	Inspire and motivate students to think critically and learn actively	6	A teacher is called a good educator not because they can instruct students to answer all kinds of questions but because they can inspire students to pose questions that even the teacher themselves cannot answer. In other words, there is nothing special with a teacher instructing students to be just as smart as the teacher. A good teacher is one who can educate students to be much smarter and more critical than themselves. (Teacher 15)
<b>(2) Building interpersonal rapport with students</b>		9	A teacher must be a figure that students always miss and can position themselves as a teacher, sometimes as a friend or even best friend. That is the true nature of a professional teacher, and it is my big dream. (Teacher 11)
<b>(3) Having the commitment to teaching</b>		8	The ideal teacher figure has a passion for teaching and does not give up easily in doing something. The teacher's enthusiasm is a positive energy that will always motivate them to make their students successful. ... Teachers who do not have a passion for teaching will find their work tiring and boring. (Teacher 9)
<b>Beliefs about Teaching and the Teaching Profession: the Important Aspect of the Teaching Profession</b>			
<b>(1) The feeling of accomplishment</b>		10	There is a certain satisfaction in teaching and watching students succeed in mastering the subjects I teach. This inner satisfaction is sometimes a cure for the heart for earning small salary. (Teacher 16)
<b>(2) The opportunity to influence students</b>		10	I also want to share by "giving life" to future generations through education because I know all things can be lost, but the knowledge I impart, the good characters I form for the children, and the meaningful experiences I give to my students will surely remain within them, consciously or unconsciously. (Teacher 6)
<b>(3) The chance to learn continuously</b>		8	The best teachers are those who keep learning and persist in the process. (Teacher 6)
<b>(4) The benefit of being teacher</b>	Monetary benefit	3	Over time, other reasons and motives for becoming a teacher emerged in my heart. In addition to the reason "sufficient professional allowance", the desire to make my students excel indeed makes me happy. (Teacher 13)
	Non-material benefit	5	Being a civil servant teacher is almost every teacher's dream, myself included. In addition to a more decent salary, I wanted to become a civil servant because the position is more secure and recognized by the state. (Teacher 10)
<b>Challenges Novice Teachers Encounter during their Early Years</b>			
<b>(1) Feeling incompetent</b>		9	"I felt like a failed teacher during my first teaching experience. I could not handle the students who were in the first grade. I did not see any improvements in the students' abilities. Every day felt the same. As a novice teacher, I was a bit down. That first teaching experience makes me insecure whenever I get assigned to teach Grade 1." (Teacher 12)

Emerging Themes from the Teacher Narratives	Subthemes	Number of Teachers Mentioned the Themes/Subthemes	Examples of Narratives Mentioned by the Teachers
(2) Dilemma when dealing with individual needs		12	In my first year, I encountered some students who had difficulties in reading, writing, and counting. I felt challenged and so I looked for ways to assist them. I decided to give them additional lessons outside normal hours. I tried my best to make time for such lessons in the middle of other administrative works as I also helped preparing the school's financial reports. (Teacher 2)
(3) Building trust with parents		4	I never thought that parents would demand so much from a teacher. When I was in college, I did not think this kind of thing would happen. I had tried my best to be a good teacher, but parents never seemed to be satisfied with what I did. They wanted to know about their kids' learning and asked me different questions every day. Forty hours a week and it was so tiring and shocking. When I was in college, my fieldwork only required me to help the main teacher and it was a small class. Now, I have to teach more students. (Teacher 13)
(4) Maintaining professional relationship with senior colleagues		5	I realize that not everyone will support us when we are trying to be better. But because I heard unfavourable remarks from coworkers almost every day, I eventually became more reserved and rarely expressed my opinion during large meetings. (Teacher 6)
(5) Making curriculum choices		5	The curriculum requires us to teach using a thematic, integrated, approach. I understand that we need to provide students with contextual learning according to certain theme. But, in my district, the mid exam and final exam was conducted using the subject-based approach, not the integrated one. This brings confusion to my students. They were not tested in something that they were prepared. (Teacher 6)
(6) Overcoming resources barriers		5	To be honest, this is not what I imagined. I always thought that, after graduation, I would teach at a school with great facility and enthusiast colleagues. But, when I was deployed as a civil servant teacher in this school, I had no choices but accepting the assignment. So, I am here now and I just use what is available. (Teacher 9)
<b>Teacher Satisfaction with Working Conditions</b>			
(1) The journey to securing a job position	Passing the civil service exam on the first try	3	After completing PPG [ <i>Prajabatan</i> ], there was an opportunity to take the civil service test. I ventured to participate and prepared well in advance. During PPG I also kept myself busy preparing for the test [from July]. I thought that studying would be better in groups, so I decided to create a civil servant study group. Initially the group consisted of seven people preparing themselves regularly. We were busy working on questions and every Saturday and Sunday we gathered to discuss difficult questions and we did that until the test time in October. [...] We studied harder for the second and final test. Of the eighteen people [in my study group] who took the second test, fourteen passed, one of them was me. (Teachers 11)



Emerging Themes from the Teacher Narratives	Subthemes	Number of Teachers Mentioned the Themes/Subthemes	Examples of Narratives Mentioned by the Teachers
	Temporary being an honorary teacher awaiting the next civil service exam	8	After finishing my thesis, I got a job when I accidentally visited the house of one of the lecturers who happened to be the principal of a public primary schools in Malang. He offered me a job as an honorary teacher teaching first grade. I immediately agreed to the job, hoping that I would no longer be unemployed. Time passed until one semester. I was assigned as a class teacher and an administrative staff. After one academic year, a civil servant teacher was transferred to my school, which made me to work only as an administrative staff without teaching tasks. After completing the pre-service teacher training, I worked at another school, still as an honorary teacher. I took the job while waiting for an opening for the civil servant teacher position. (Teacher 1)
	Settled in a private school from the beginning	1	During a job interview, the school explained their vision and mission. To my surprise and beyond my expectation, the school turned out to have a clear vision and mission, and even shared the same view with me regarding education. That day, I passed other job vacancies and felt confident to work in this school. (Teacher 6)
<b>(2) Balancing the workload and professional development</b>	Assigned a managerial position	1	Shortly after working at this school, I was immediately assigned as the character curriculum staff because I was so dedicated to character [building]. (Teacher 11)
	Tasked with non-teaching responsibilities	9	My daily routine of being a new teacher is very hard because I am charged with various tasks. From the many hours of teaching, being the school operator to supervising extracurricular activities such as scouts, swimming, and others. (Teacher 13)
	School has an established induction and mentoring/coaching system	1	Developing potentials is very important for young teachers. At this school, I get directions from the principal or even a partner in class. Every morning begins with a pledge by the students, followed by a ceremony on Monday, Duha prayer on Tuesday, straight to learning every Wednesday because there are scouts that day, reading time on Thursday, and a joint pledge in the field on Friday. Every Monday when the children have finished school, the teachers hold a weekly meeting to make lesson plans, weekly info, and weekly assessments. (Teacher 5)
<b>Commitment to the Teaching Profession and Career Aspiration</b>			
<b>(1) Teacher attrition: Civil servant teacher as an ultimate goal</b>	From honorary teacher to civil servant teacher	7	I was working as an honorary teacher in a public primary school for about four years. During that time, I aspired to be a civil servant teacher devoted to the nation and state. Thank God I had just passed the civil service test. I hope I can carry this mandate well and be appointed as a full-fledged civil servant. (Teacher 7)

Emerging Themes from the Teacher Narratives	Subthemes	Number of Teachers Mentioned the Themes/Subthemes	Examples of Narratives Mentioned by the Teachers
	From private school teacher to civil servant teacher	5	[I would] still choose to become a civil servant teacher. First, it was my dream. Second, it's about the working hours ... In private schools, there are always extra working hours ... even if it's a good school. From my experience, even [working] in a mediocre private school is quite tough. [Meanwhile], ordinary civil servant teachers in public schools usually have shorter and flexible working hours. (Teacher 12)
<b>(2) Switching profession outside education field</b>		4	One year into working as an honorary teacher, I began to worry. My income from working as an honorary teacher was only enough to cover my transportation costs. That's when I started thinking about quitting teaching and trying to find another job. But it was not easy to stop teaching. I then had another idea, which was to open a tavern at home. That idea finally came. Unexpectedly, my business grew quite rapidly. At that time, I divided my time to work as an honorary teacher and run my business. (Teacher 9)
<b>(3) Future career aspiration</b>	Remain a teacher	6	Today, I only hope I can continue teaching at a school for the next ten years. I want to be a teacher who can develop children's potential and still provide general knowledge to them. (Teacher 7)
	Aim for leadership role/higher position	6	I have successfully passed the civil servant selection. There is no longer any reason to leave this profession. I changed my determination to no longer being a teacher, instead I will be the best teacher and one day become a principal. When that happens, I will change my determination again. I will become a head of an education agency. (Teacher 12)
	Pursue higher degree	4	In the next ten years, I really want to go to grad school studying basic education at a public university in Jakarta, then continue to a doctoral programme studying primary school teacher education until [I can be involved in] policymaking. I also hope to improve my career path after obtaining higher degree. I am now a junior superintendent, holding a low rank on the civil service ladder. I hope I can be a superintendent in ten years. In other words, I would have to get promoted every three years. By regulation, teachers can be promoted every two years provided they reach the required credit score. (Teacher 11)

## 5.1 Initial Motivation to Enter the Teaching Profession

Four major themes emerged from the teachers' narratives related to their initial motivation to enter the profession. They are the intrinsic value of teaching, contributing to society, family advice to pursue a teaching career, and the teaching profession as the last resort. The intrinsic value of teaching and making social contributions are the themes most often cited by the teachers as their initial motivation to become teachers.

Some of the teachers already knew at a young age that they wanted to be teachers. Many of them stated that they liked working with children or enjoyed teaching others from a young age, so they believed they could be good teachers. In addition to their passion, the teachers believed that teachers have a crucial role in Islam because being an educator is a form of good deed. Teacher 10 linked her motivation to become a teacher with her gender role as a woman. According to her, teaching is the perfect profession for a woman since it allows her to have more time with her family. "The second reason [I become a teacher] is because I'm a woman. As a woman, I am aware that in the end I have a role to take care of [my] family ... I want to do that role well, but on the other side, I also want to be an independent woman who have a career. Working as a teacher allows me to have more time for my family than a woman working in a private company."

Another motivation that underlied their decision to become a teacher was to contribute to the nation's education, including improving the quality of education in their respective districts. More than half of the teachers also admitted that their family members inspired them to become a teacher. The teachers were either encouraged to pursue the profession or motivated when they saw family members working as teachers.

However, a few teachers felt the teaching profession was not their top career choice. They entered teacher preparation programmes because they failed entrance exams for other university programmes or military academies, which they preferred. The teaching profession was their last resort, as described by Teacher 3, who said, "My dream was to become a businessman or a young executive. When I finally got accepted in a teacher preparation programme, I kept thinking about how monotonous it would be to be a primary school teacher, and I just could not imagine how I was supposed to like the job." (Teacher 3).

## 5.2 Beliefs about Teaching and the Teaching Profession

We classify this theme into two main themes: teachers' perceptions of the characteristics of a good teacher and teachers' beliefs about essential aspects of teaching and the teaching profession. Based on Lowman's concept of effective teaching, we classify three subthemes of the teachers' narratives on the ideal characteristics of a teacher (Lowman, 1995, cited in Samples and Copeland, 2013). The subthemes are having intellectual excitement, building interpersonal rapport, and being committed to teaching. Some teachers associate the criteria with the standard of teacher competence stated by the Indonesian government: pedagogical, professional, social, and personal competences.

Most teachers in our study agreed that a good teacher should master the subjects and have broad knowledge. According to some of the teachers, these qualifications would enable teachers to deliver lessons clearly and students to understand the lessons and stimulate students' curiosity. Although most teachers agreed that mastery of subjects is a must, they also believed that being a creative teacher is indispensable. In addition to being creative, the teachers mentioned being "able to inspire and motivate students to learn independently and actively, and think critically" as the ideal teacher criteria.

The ability to develop close rapport with students is also referred to as a criterion for a good teacher. Strong relationships with students will affect student learning, both academically and socio-emotionally. Likewise, teachers will be easily loved by their students. Teacher can bond with students by being their friend, understanding their characters, and respecting them.

The last criterion of a good teacher is a teacher's commitment and dedication to their profession. Half of the teachers in our study argued that great teachers have a passion for teaching and are aware of their responsibilities to the teaching profession. A passionate teacher is devoted and dedicated to their profession. The teachers in our study believed that an ideal teacher should have a strong sense of loyalty to their work and students. As narrated by Teachers 2 and 4, teachers who are dedicated to their profession will always think of ways to provide the best for their students.

In addition to the criteria for a good teacher, we explore aspects of the teaching profession that are regarded essential. The four subthemes identified in the teacher narratives include the opportunity to influence, the feeling of accomplishment, the chance to learn continuously, and the benefit of being a teacher. This study finds that a feeling of accomplishment is regarded as the most vital aspect of the teaching profession. Few of the teachers in our study viewed status, prestige, and financial benefit as important aspects of the profession.

The teachers also think that being a teacher provided them with a sense of self-fulfilment as it allowed them to realise their goal of becoming a teacher. Despite their dissatisfaction with the low pay, the teachers wanted to dedicate their lives to educating and guiding students to reach their dreams. Some did not seem to want to complain about salary because they do not teach only for financial gain, but for the joy and pride of triggering students' motivation and desire to learn.

For many teachers in our study, being able to inspire students was one of the most crucial aspects of being a teacher. They believe that it is part of their responsibility to instil moral values in students or develop students' characters. Therefore, a teacher should act as a role model for students so that students are inspired to learn their teachers' positive traits. "An ideal teacher can be an example and role model for their students. Teachers do not just tell their students to be good but must also have a good attitude. Teachers can show students their good traits." (Teacher 10).

Another aspect that affected the image of an ideal teacher in our respondents' minds was the image of teachers during their own education. Some respondents mentioned that they were influenced by their primary school teachers, while others were inspired by their secondary school teachers or university lecturers. This implies that the identities of the teachers in our study are also shaped by their own educational experiences. As teacher 14 commented, "I have admired my teacher in Grade 1, Mrs. N [anonymised], since I was little. She was cheery, enthusiastic, and calming. I felt all that [energy] every morning while I was in Grade 1. I was so happy meeting her every morning, with her beautiful and charming face ... Her persistence in cheering us to learn to read made it easy for us to learn letter by letter, word by word, sentence by sentence ... During my first year [of teaching], I tried to become an ideal teacher from [picturing] Mrs. N [anonymised]." (Teacher 14).

Another teacher shared “My favorite teacher was my primary school teacher ... In my opinion ... You know how teachers sometimes being inconsistent. They say things, but act not in line with what they said. For example, once they set rules but another time [when the students did break the rules], teachers somehow not applied the rules or punishment. They were often showing leniency [to the disobedient kids]. But my teacher was not like that ... [that teacher] was a firm and consistent person.” (Teacher 4).

The respondents argued that being a teacher allows them not only to develop students’ potential but also to shape students’ excellent character traits, such as discipline, honesty, and responsibility. The opportunity to influence students is inextricably linked to the previous theme, the feeling of accomplishment. Bringing a positive impact, such as improving student learning, is a great honour for them.

Given the dynamic nature of the profession in education, half of the teachers in our study concurred that teachers must constantly adapt to situations and be eager to learn new things. Some teachers also talked about how dealing with problems or challenges led them to adjust their views. The problems or challenges made them reflect on their experiences and learn from their mistakes.

Lastly, three teachers mentioned monetary benefits as an essential aspect of teaching. Nonetheless, their narratives were always followed by the assertion that monetary gain is not as significant as dedication to the teaching profession. They did, however, consider civil servant status to be more prestigious due to the job security and higher salary. Some of the honorary teachers acknowledged that their salary was insufficient and was not worth their tasks and duties. Nevertheless, they opted to stay in the profession because of their passion. They believed that one day they would be appointed as civil servants.

### ***Rethinking the Ideal Teacher***

In addition to the written narratives and phone interviews, we also asked the teachers to rate themselves on a 1–5 scale as to whether they had met the criteria for an ideal teacher.<sup>7</sup> In the first year of the study, the proportion of teachers who rated themselves “4” was higher (nine teachers) than in the second year (four teachers). The teachers who confidently ascribed themselves on the scale of “4” thought they had become the teacher they once admired. Having just graduated from PPG *Prajabatan* at the time, the teachers were confident. One teacher even assigned himself a perfect score (“5”) because he believed he had applied all the knowledge gained from the pre-service teacher training. He also received positive feedback from his students, students’ parents, colleagues, and principal. Those who rated themselves “3” thought that they still had a lot to learn as novice teachers, but they had tried their best.

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<sup>7</sup> We asked the teachers to rate themselves at the beginning of the study and after one year of teaching in school. We asked their perceptions on the statement “I am an ideal teacher. Now, I have become the teacher I once idolised”. The Likert scale was 5-point scale, with 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree.

Interestingly, after teaching for one year, some teachers reconsidered their assessment of themselves. More than half (of the twelve teachers<sup>8</sup>) consistently rated themselves on the same scale (either "3", "4", or "5"). The reason was the same: that as novice teachers, they needed to learn more. Some lowered their scores, but only one teacher raised the score by 1 point. The four teachers who lowered their ratings from "4" to "3" and from "3" to "2" said they realised they were less experienced as they had only been teaching for about a year at their current school. "I am still a beginner in becoming a teacher, so I have little experience. I still have a lot to learn." (Teacher 3). One teacher lowered her score because she felt she was not teaching optimally during the pandemic. Teacher 12, who lowered her score to "2", argued that she faced more challenging circumstances in teaching students at her current school, specifically motivating them to learn and have dreams. She felt guilty for not being the ideal teacher she envisioned to guide her students.

### 5.3 Challenges Novice Teachers Encounter in their Early Years

We identify six major challenges perceived by the novice teachers that relate to their professional identity development. The themes that emerged from the narratives are feelings of incompetence, tensions when dealing with individual differences, building trust with parents, maintaining professional relationships with colleagues, making curriculum choices, and overcoming resource barriers.

The teachers' feeling of incompetence is a theme that frequently emerged as a challenge during their early years. Despite having passed a four-year initial teacher education programme and another year of pre-service teacher training, more than half of the teachers in our study still reckoned they were incompetent. The teachers admitted that what they learned during their preparation years was insignificant. Some teachers realised that their lack of teaching experience in actual classroom settings contributed to the fear and nervousness they experienced in their initial years.

Many teachers described their experiences of resolving conflicts between the desired and actual support for students, particularly students with varying needs and abilities. The situation changed dramatically once they entered school when they were put in a real-life classroom environment, which was different from what is described in books or theory. Some teachers described how they struggled with managing their own emotions when handling student behavioral problems while at the same time having to focus on subjects. Unfortunately, schools were reported to provide little assistance in addressing issues related to students' needs and abilities. The school regulation sometimes limited the actions teachers could take to provide help for students.

Another challenge reported by our teachers was the difficulty of building trust with parents. A few teachers struggled to establish good relationships with parents. As stated by Teacher 13, "Trying to be a good teacher in the class doesn't seem enough because parents have many demands that they express every day through WhatsApp text. They always ask about [their children's] learning

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<sup>8</sup> The number of teachers remaining in the study when we did the phone interview.

progress every day. Unbelievable. When I was in college, I had never imagined [that I would face] something like this.”

Some parents had high expectations for their children's education as well as for teachers' performance. Some parents regarded the teachers as inexperienced and incompetent because of their young age. For some teachers, it was a recurring problem. According to the teachers who had been teaching for two years or more, at the start of every academic year, parents of new cohorts of students would have the same doubt towards them as young teachers. Developing positive relationships with parents took a lot of effort; therefore, the teachers hoped there was support for new teachers to help them handle the pressure.

In a similar vein, several teachers commented on their difficulties in maintaining professional relationships with senior teachers. Their senior colleagues often assigned them to complete common tasks that were supposed to be done in groups (e.g., preparing lesson plans or ICT-related tasks). The strong seniority culture respected in schools often left young teachers with no choice but to follow orders from their seniors and complete the tasks independently.

A few teachers also expressed their difficulties in making curriculum adjustments due to the inconsistencies between the national curriculum and assessment practices. Being a new teacher is challenging because they must figure out how to provide an optimal learning experience for their students while negotiating with unrealistic curriculum targets and incoherent assessments. There was also a story about the curriculum standards, which were overly prescriptive and undermined teachers' efforts to facilitate creative processes and student outcomes.

### **Box 1. Difficulties Teachers Face in Adapting to the School's Teaching Approach**

*“In the end, I did it my way”*

Teacher 5 used to work in a private school in Jakarta. With eight parallel classes for one grade at that school, all teachers had to follow the lesson plan exactly as written on paper. He said this was meant to ensure that all children taught by different teachers would receive the same lesson quality. With varying characteristics of students in each class, he thought that the uniformity of practice should have been avoided. Teachers should have more authority in deciding their modes of instruction.

He was confused and even questioned how to adapt to his school management's approach. He also doubted himself for teaching with that method and style. “This uniform teaching system hinders teacher's creativity, such as in using teaching aids or tools that work for their students. Sometimes, I just do it my own way,” he wrote.

The last challenge is resource constraints. The teachers voiced their concerns about inadequate resources provided by their schools, which limited their learning methods. During their time in college, the teachers were assigned to schools with adequate facilities. Now that they have to work as teachers, with a heavy workload and low salary, they cannot continue providing teaching aids by themselves.

## 5.4 Teacher Satisfaction with Working Conditions

When discussing teacher satisfaction, novice teachers talk not only about financial rewards and welfare but also about their job search process, which is related to job security, and their workload as new teachers. This section illustrates the story of each topic and how they relate to the teachers' satisfaction with their role as teachers.

Apart from the one teacher who immediately settled in a private school, the other fifteen teachers stated that their ultimate goal was to become civil servants, primarily because of the extremely low wages of other teaching positions. Furthermore, civil servant status is regarded as a more secure position. Novice teachers are willing to settle as temporary honorary teachers while waiting for another opportunity to take the civil service exam.

We find recruitment processes for private school teachers were more rigorous and relevant to assess novice teachers' competences. As competition for civil service positions was intense, all teachers in our study were willing to invest an additional year in the pre-service teacher training because having the certificate allows them to bypass one of the three stages of the civil service exam.

This long journey they had to undergo is partly why they were reluctant to leave the profession. The long and resource-draining process is part of the negotiations they had to endure to become the teacher they aspired to be. Securing a civil servant position would allow them to have jobs and financial security, which they believed would, in turn, give them more freedom and resources to become their ideal version of a good teacher.

### **Box 2. Job Preference is to be a Civil Servant Teacher**

**“It is only worth it if [I] work as a civil servant teacher”**

After graduating from the pre-service teacher training (PPG), Teacher 13 did not immediately look for a position as a teacher. Instead, he chose to run a small business with his friends to develop educational content for a website and create an educational app. He once worked as an honorary teacher in a private school but only lasted for six months. He resigned because his salary was not commensurate with his teaching workload. He then participated in PPG for one year.

For more than 1.5 years after graduating from PPG, Teacher 13 chose not to work as an honorary teacher. His last experience working in a private school traumatised him. He was also reluctant to be an honorary teacher in a public school because of the low pay. “The salary is unreasonable,” he said. Teacher 13 was only interested in becoming a civil servant teacher because [the job] would give him security and stability. Although he failed [in the civil servant selection test] multiple times, he kept taking it until he finally passed and got a position in 2020.

Based on the teachers' experiences, being recent graduates, especially from a teacher training programme, equates to being knowledgeable, professional, and tech-savvy. They were then entrusted with piles of tasks, especially those that required the use of computers. The teachers in our study who taught in public schools were generally burdened with administrative tasks that took precedence over teaching preparation. Consequently, the teachers could not prepare their



teaching optimally because it became a second priority. Meanwhile, private school teachers might not be burdened with extensive administrative tasks but were given the same responsibilities as other senior teachers. Teacher 12 recounted the time when she had to teach a total of fourteen subjects, in addition to undertaking other extra tasks, such as being extracurricular teacher and administering the Monday morning ceremony.

Despite being burdened with a myriad of tasks, some of which were not related to teaching, the teachers did not receive support such as proper induction or coaching. Of the sixteen novice teachers, only one received proper induction and coaching or mentoring support. The rest of the teachers had to take the initiative to ask for mentoring when they struggled to perform the assigned tasks.

## **5.5 Commitment to the Teaching Profession and Career Aspiration**

The majority of teachers in our study demonstrated their commitment to the teaching profession because it is their way of life. Most of them asserted that they would never leave the teaching profession. However, some mentioned their aspirations for a future career, like aiming for a higher position. We grouped three themes from the teachers' narratives covering their future career prospects—all relate to teacher attrition, career switching, and leadership roles.

Our findings show that none of the novice teachers ever intended to leave the field of education, even those who chose teaching as their last resort. They were only interested in changing their status from honorary to civil servant, which is more secure than being hired informally. Only one of the sixteen teachers worked in a private school until the end of our study. She had no desire to become a civil servant because her principles did not fit the public school environment. Before applying for a civil service position, many of our teachers began their careers as honorary or private school teachers. Early in our study, some of them failed the civil service exam but got the job in the second year. Teacher 13 decided to leave the teaching profession due to his unsuccessful attempt to pass the civil servant test in mid-2019. He re-entered the teaching profession a year later after successfully passed the civil service exam in 2020.

All teachers in our study asserted they did not want to work in fields other than education. Due to the low pay they earned, some honorary teachers had thought of looking for non-teaching jobs that offer higher salaries. Nonetheless, because teaching is their passion, they chose to stay in the profession. The teachers survived by working side jobs, such as offering extra tutoring and opening a small culinary business in addition to their primary teaching job. That being the case, these novice teachers' professional aspirations fall into one of three categories: remaining a teacher, aiming for a leadership post in the education system, or pursuing a higher degree. Most of these teachers still want to work as teachers within the next ten years, but some also hope to move up the career ladder in that time frame. To support the goal, a few teachers planned to pursue a master's degree.

## 6. How Does Policy Shape Teacher Identity Formation?

In this paper, we explore the formation of the professional identity of novice teachers in Indonesia and seek to understand how major teacher policies are significant in shaping the identity formed by the teachers. The significance of the teacher policies towards teacher' identities is, indeed, evident in the narratives. These include the policies on teacher preparation and professional standards, teacher recruitment, teacher induction, teacher compensation, and teacher career progression. We further identify the gaps between teaching as envisaged by teacher policies and the actual working conditions faced by teachers and seek explanations for these findings.

### 6.1 Teacher Preparation and Professional Standards

Some of the teachers participating in this study admitted that they felt incompetent to teach despite having completed four years of initial teacher preparation, one year of pre-service teacher training, and already obtaining a teaching certificate. They described how the curriculum and experience during the preparation programmes were inadequate to equip them with the necessary skills in actual classrooms. These admissions differed from their claims during their early months of teaching, where they identified themselves as ideal teachers. The claim most likely arose because they had just graduated from the pre-service teacher training. After undertaking teaching jobs for one year and a half, their views changed. Experiencing challenges and non-ideal working conditions made them realise that being knowledgeable with teaching theories—gained in college and pre-service teacher training—does not ensure effective teachers.

This situation is not unique to Indonesia. Previous studies have underlined that what teacher candidates learned and practiced in college classrooms—in a controlled environment without children present—is often substantially different from the reality of their first teaching assignments (Gujarati, 2012; Akyeampong et al., 2011). However, the fact that the teachers in the present study had obtained “professional” teacher status due to earning a teaching certificate created even more tension that frustrates some teachers—between their expectations of themselves professionally and their actual competencies.

Our observation of Indonesia's teacher professional standards indicates that they are not an essential quality for a teacher. Professional standards for teachers in Indonesia specify that a certified teacher—experienced or inexperienced—is competent in four areas: pedagogical skill, content knowledge, social skill, and personality traits. The teachers in our study acknowledged that they are still exploring what a teacher identity is in these areas and that it may take several more years for them to figure out how to become effective teachers. Indeed, the standards set competence goals without explicitly defining what competence means or differentiating levels of competence for teachers (basic, intermediate, or advanced) at different stages of their careers.

There is only one level of competence that teachers are required to meet: the basic minimum level. Even then, a large proportion of teachers fall below this level (Revina et al., 2020). And those who meet the basic minimum level, like the participants of the present study, are in fact not competent. Hence, as Revina et al. (2020, p.25) argued, “as long as the system does not focus on

learning, the ‘thin’ input standards, such as having a bachelor's degree (compared to ‘thick’ standard like competency-based performance), will be considered an adequate—though it is not—indicator of a professional teacher”. Because there are no standards defining levels of teacher competence, it is not surprising that the teacher preparation programmes fail to produce teachers with adequate knowledge and skills to teach effectively. OECD (2018) suggested that students with high performance or learning achievement are generally taught by effective teachers, while effective teachers can only be generated from a system with coherent teacher policies. Therefore, in order to achieve quality and effective teaching, the system must enhance the strong professional values of teachers (Sachs, 2005).

Furthermore, given the emphasis on the importance of developing teachers’ social skills and personality traits above their pedagogical and content knowledge, it is not surprising that most teachers hold beliefs that prioritise the development of children’s characters and personalities over their numeracy or literacy skills. This may explain the lack of improvement of Indonesian students’ numeracy learning over the past two decades, as reported by Beatty et al. (2021). Emphasising character education over the quality of teaching and learning is inseparable from Indonesia’s long history of education. Towaf (2016) and Kurniasih et al. (2018) explained that the national education philosophy is fundamentally comprehensive because it focuses on character building and learning. Yet, there is a tendency for policymakers to prioritise character building over student learning. Supplementary to character education, the national education philosophy also emphasises the notion of teachers as role models for students, which aligns with the findings of this study on the criteria of a good teacher. A study on teacher identity reconstruction in Javanese society supports our findings that a teacher is seen as an exemplary figure with a good reputation and is respected, not only in the Javanese community, but Indonesia in general (Shodiq and Syamsudin, 2019). Notwithstanding, most of our teachers conceptualised a “role model” as only a teacher with a good attitude, rather than seeing that being a “role model” encompasses attempts to improving student learning and character.

Using a different angle, the fact that some teachers chose to become teachers because they were rejected in other programmes indicates that they were not the best candidates, complicating teacher education programmes’ efforts in preparing good teachers. Good candidates may not want to enter a teacher preparation programme and prefer other jobs of higher status than teaching, as OECD (2018) and McEwan (1999) found. In contrast, teaching is a competitive career in some countries, such as Singapore and South Korea, where teachers have a higher status (Goodwin, 2012; Kang and Hong, 2008); thus, only the best teachers enter teacher preparation programmes. Goodwin (2012) described that the desired working conditions and high-quality teacher education programmes are the keys to the skillful teaching workforce in Singapore.

## **6.2 Teacher Recruitment and Employment Status**

On a related note, while rigorous recruitment has been acknowledged as one of the key policies to recruit good teachers (Pierskalla and Sacks, 2019), our analysis shows that teacher recruitment policies in Indonesia have contributed to a major source of hardship that every new teacher must experience. As our analysis shows, during the first years of teaching, rather than on improving

teaching skills to facilitate effective learning, many teachers had to focus on taking the civil service test that caused them anxiety and frustration, both as individuals and professionals. The exam that features patriotism and civil servant values to shortlist teacher candidates has pushed teachers to drill themselves to prepare to answer multiple-choice tests, whilst teaching skills and knowledge are insignificant aspects in this process.

Many of the teachers in this study were able to secure civil service tenure within two years of certification. In reality, many failing teachers stay in the profession, hoping that one day they would be promoted as civil servants without having to take the civil service exam, as was the case with past government regulations that exempted the exam for honorary teachers who had taught long enough. Teachers employed in public schools are not the best candidates. This observation is in agreement with Huang et al. (2020, p.23), who described that such an employment arrangement “has encouraged for individuals to stick with the profession rather than leave after several years of terrible salary; legal ambiguity as an employee in the education system; and demanding professional obligation to teach similar load to civil servant teachers.” Moreover, in Indonesia there is no continuation of the status from honorary to civil servant. Rather than utilising the honorary phase as a “curation” period, in which teachers with satisfactory performance during this phase are promoted to more permanent positions such as civil servants, the existing system is a mix of two completely separate modes of hiring—one to recruit honorary teachers and the other to recruit civil servant teachers. Consequently, teachers under such a system are likely to have expectations of the teaching profession that prizes civil service tenure above all other professional obligations to teaching.

### **6.3 Teacher Induction**

The lack of a supportive induction system during novice teachers’ initial years exacerbated the problems faced by these young teachers. They received minimal support which, if any, was limited to the orientation of administrative tasks. From their first day at school, the teachers—both honorary and civil servants—were given full responsibility as homeroom teachers and therefore had to specify all learning and non-learning activities for their students. Due to this lack of support, the teachers struggled on their own to make curriculum choices, build relationships with students’ parents, and meet their students’ various needs. Given that their teacher education did not prepare them adequately, the teachers were expected to solve the challenges individually.

Our findings echo previous studies that reported the inexistence of induction for novice teachers in developing countries. Kuranchie (2013) explained that most novice teachers in Ghana, for example, did not receive induction upon the assumption of their teaching assignments. Schools did not establish measures to ensure that essential steps in a teacher’s career are executed effectively. Ghana’s experience suggests that a comprehensive induction system that fosters professional learning communities through a network of supports is critical for retaining highly qualified teachers. This practice was remarkably different from that in developed economies. Moskowitz and Stephens (1997) described that two decades ago, developed countries, such as Australia, Japan, and New Zealand, provided promising teacher induction models that operate within a culture of shared responsibility and an environment where all professionals take active

roles in the acculturation and transition of new teachers. The programmes used multipronged sets of support strategies, including mentoring, modelling good practice, orientations, and in-service training, focusing on assisting rather than assessing new teachers. In Indonesia, the one-year probationary period for civil servant teachers that supposedly a learning year, instead requires them to focus on administrative matters, attendance, and discipline. In fact, the criteria to pass the probationary period are mainly administrative and not specifically related to the teaching profession. The performance evaluation of probationary civil servant candidates is the same for all professions nationwide.

There are at least two explanations for the lack of an orientation process for novice teachers, as we reported above. First, civil servant teachers assigned to public schools by the government are considered highly qualified since they successfully passed the civil service exam. Moreover, the teachers in this study had obtained teaching certificates after completing a four-year undergraduate teaching degree and were thus regarded as “professional” teachers. Schools may think that these teachers have undergone extensive preparation in the pre-service training, making induction unnecessary. The school may consider the teachers’ qualifications an asset, and assign some of them various roles despite their probationary status. Second, honorary teachers are hired to address staff shortage problems. For schools, staffing classrooms is already challenging, let alone assigning a mentor to assist every novice teacher adjusting to teaching. Formally, civil servant teachers must receive some sort of assistance from senior staff in their probationary year. However, senior teachers may think that such a task would increase their already heavy workload. Even if there were teaching-related mentorship for novice teachers, the principal usually provides them under the mandatory biennial supervisory activity.

#### **6.4 Teacher Pay and Career Structure**

The informal employment arrangements in public schools are less favourable for honorary teachers. Honorary teachers’ salaries come from the school budget, the School Operational Assistance Fund (*Bantuan Operasional Sekolah/BOS*), which schools receive directly from the central government. Honorary teachers usually earn very little wages. Gaduh et al. (2020) revealed that a civil servant teacher could receive a salary multiple times higher than that of an honorary teacher. In this study, we show that because of their informal status and low remuneration, honorary teachers in public schools often have to take on other jobs or extra teaching works within and outside schools to generate more income. All teachers in this study, both civil servants and honorary, are certified. However, novice teachers with honorary status are not entitled to certification allowance because they are not registered in the government system. They need several more years to meet the administrative requirements for non-civil-servant teachers set by the government in order to be eligible for the allowance. As a result, these honorary teachers have little time—even less than their civil servant counterparts—to focus on quality teaching or improving student learning. These teachers struggle to earn even a decent pay. Note that practically all teachers, honorary and civil servants, have the same teaching responsibilities. This unfortunate situation, in fact, results in some teachers experiencing unpleasant circumstances during their most precious years. It is disheartening that a few teachers in this study decided to

leave the teaching profession, as our study shows, to earn enough to live and that some have to join strikes just to demand decent pay from the school.

On the other hand, the financial benefits and access afforded by civil service tenure and the double income earned by certified teachers have motivated several teachers in this study to choose the teaching profession. The teaching profession becomes even more attractive for aspiring candidates. Civil service tenure for teaching positions is widely prized and contested because the job grants exclusive access to social prestige and lifelong financial security. Moreover, in the Indonesian civil service system, a well-performing civil servant teacher will receive the same remuneration package as those who perform poorly. Indonesian civil servant officers, including teachers, are traditionally promoted based on years of service, not performance. In this study, we find that the job stability offered by civil service tenure makes novice teachers, even when they do not perform, stay in the profession. This may also explain why teacher attrition in Indonesia is relatively low (OECD/ADB, 2015). This situation is concerning as Indonesian schools are crowded with uninspiring novice teachers working under a system that diminishes the importance of high-quality learning.

Furthermore, in the narratives, many novice teachers in this study discussed their aspirations to achieve progression into higher ranks of the civil servant ladder, rather than to improve their quality as educators. The fact that some teachers explicitly state they aspire to use their teaching career only as a stepping stone to get a more prestigious, high-paying, bureaucratic civil service position—such as school supervisor or head of an education agency—raises concerns about their lack of commitment to the teaching profession, and consequently to improve their quality as educators continuously. As Arif et al. (forthcoming) demonstrate, one does not necessarily need to have a good teaching track record to become the head of an education agency in many districts in Indonesia. In fact, the position is often filled by political supporters of regional heads rather than highly skilled officials.

Finally, while we discuss that major policies, such as teacher preparation programmes, recruitment, induction, compensation, and career progression shape the ways novice teachers perceive teaching and the teaching profession, it is worth noting that individual teachers' personal aspects (e.g., background, interest, passion) indeed influence their identity formation. Nevertheless, as this study shows, the teacher policies and working conditions influence the formation of the professional identity of novice teachers to a greater extent. Teachers in low-resource settings may be forced to negotiate with the system that fails to provide them with even the basic working conditions (Evans and Yuan, 2018). Our results confirm previous studies conducted in middle- and low-income country contexts on teacher identity formation. For instance, Ruohotie-Lyhty et al. (2021) demonstrated that Brazilian teachers' descriptions of teacher professional identity mainly revealed criticism of existing teaching practices or teachers' working conditions. The sociopolitical context in Brazil education system was believed to influence how teachers perceive teaching and the teaching profession. Likewise, Barrett (2008) in a study conducted in Tanzania shows that teacher policies, including teacher low compensation, made young teachers who were identified as hard-working teachers to feel frustrated, especially when they work in stifling environments. In Chile, novice teacher career trajectories were affected by

factors such as school conditions, personal satisfaction, and self-efficacy (Ávalos and Valenzuela, 2016). Principally, teachers in a country of rapid economic and social changes may be more concerned with learning to “play the game” and “fitting in” to develop a teaching career that satisfies both personal self and professional identity compared to settings with a stable and advanced economic state (Evans and Yuan, 2018).

## 7. Conclusion

This study follows the journey of novice teachers over two years and captures their evolution in defining professional development early in their careers. In describing the course of their early years of teaching, novice teachers emphasise their initial motivation, their beliefs about the profession, satisfaction with their working conditions, major challenges they experienced during their early years, and their commitment to the profession. These five themes define their early careers and in turn influence their “becoming a teacher” journey. Further development of these five themes, which narrate the internal and external domains, underlines that forming a teacher identity involves not only education and training, but also individual characteristics, backgrounds, and teacher policy coherence.

Teacher workforce in Indonesia lags behind in incentivising qualified candidates because it offers low pay and unclear career structure. Hence, as our study finds, novice teachers tend to enter the profession due to altruistic aspirations or because it was their last resort. The combination of the novice teachers’ initial motivations with the existing image of a teacher’s professional and cultural standards indicates that the teachers tend to construct their professional identity by becoming role models of good character for students rather than establishing a professional identity based on their students’ learning trajectories. As found in the previous literature (Chong and Low, 2008; Flores and Day, 2006), our study also shows that novice teachers carry their idealised teacher image that they plan to embody until the point at which they are challenged in the classroom, including reflecting upon their identity against their role-model teachers in the past. This teacher image is then negotiated when they enter the profession. This image negotiation occurs because of the tension between their ideal teacher image and teaching and their environmental conditions. Like other novice teachers in developing countries, early-career teachers in Indonesia struggle to implement their ideal teaching plans within limited resources and to forge trusting relations with colleagues and students’ parents. Learning-related challenges are mainly on deciding the pedagogy and curriculum, which they must navigate on their own. The state of the teacher workforce does not only affect teacher candidates but also teachers’ aspirations. Because they are trying to be both realistic and altruistic, novice teachers aim to be civil servant teachers. Accordingly, their professional development revolves around being a good civil servant rather than a good teacher because their induction and subsequent professional development aim not necessarily to enhance their competence but to climb the civil servant ladder. In summary, novice teachers’ early years on the job become a battleground as they try to navigate the tension between their ideals, limited resources, and inconsistent teacher policies while being unsupported and overworked.

This paper argues that there is a consistent mismatch between teacher policies and the support novice teachers need, and this mismatch hinders their development in the right direction. From recruitment to induction to professional development, these inconsistencies prevent the creation of the necessary enabling environment that early career teachers may find helpful to develop their professional identity. The failure of the existing system to improve teacher pay and career structure results in the lack of a competitive pool of candidates (Huang et al., 2020). Furthermore, the recruitment process for public school teachers cannot screen qualified individuals properly because the focus is more on being abiding civil servants than on qualified teachers. The cost of conducting civil servant tests has been estimated to be around 370 billion IDR (\$26 million). Therefore, it is important to ensure that a better recruitment process is put in place to screen out ineffective teachers. Some argued that given the current evidence on training and certification, the most cost-effective options for improving student learning outcome is to ensure effective screening mechanism is in place to produce quality teachers (Hanushek, 2011).

The vague professional standards that emphasise character development make it difficult for novice teachers to use them as the standard for their aspirations. Induction and professional development designs based on the current professional standard prove to be ineffective in bridging the differences of inherent beliefs and forming the image of a good teacher required in the current learning environment (Revina et al., 2020). Professional development, both pre-service and in-service trainings, has a great role in altering inherent teaching beliefs, which may benefit teachers' teaching practices (Roesken et al., 2011). Because teachers come into the profession with varying attributes, an effective teacher professional development programme should be able to incorporate individual characters with the current learning environment.

The early years are crucial to ensure whether a teacher's professional development progresses because it will affect the provision of quality educational services. Therefore, it is critical to support early career teachers as they develop their professional identity towards quality teaching. As this paper highlights, novice teachers' journeys are influenced by their personal traits and existing teacher policies. For novice teachers, professional development alone will not suffice. Due to their challenges and identity experimentation, novice teachers need safety to develop (Chubbuck et al., 2001). Creating a safe environment is therefore needed at all levels, from schools to policy formulation. As Chubbuck et al. (2001) argued, support for novice teachers should consider school and state resources—both at the district and national levels. Our findings also suggest it is necessary to redefine what it means to be a teacher and to rectify teacher policies to be coherent with each domain. Professional identity is an important component to take into account in the formulation of teacher policies, such as in defining the attributes of a teacher, providing quality teacher education programmes or cohesive employment policies. Teacher policies indeed influence the professional development of a teacher throughout their career. As teacher attrition in Indonesia is relatively low, their progression should not stop once they are appointed permanent teachers.



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## Appendix

The initial twelve topics are listed below. The prompted subjects sent to the teachers and the interviews were in Indonesian, the primary language used in the teachers' daily lives, including in teaching. The teachers were permitted to use formal and informal Indonesian in their writings to express and describe their thoughts and emotions more clearly. The reduced five themes emerged consistently in the twelve essay entries during the analysis, hence the contraction from twelve topics to five themes.

Journal 1	Journal 2	Journal 3	Journal 4	Journal 5	Journal 6
Motivation to become a teacher	Description of an ideal teacher (Including self assessment of their competence)	Job searching process	Workload, role and routines as new teacher	Early teaching experience	Challenges in teaching
Journal 7	Journal 8	Journal 9	Journal 10	Journal 11	Journal 12
Perception on teaching profession	Perception on school supports and current regulations on teachers	Self efficacy in teaching (Including self assessment of their competence – after one year)	Teacher learning community	Rethinking teaching profession	Future career aspiration