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## Meaning in Work of Indonesian Teachers: A Phenomenological Research

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## Meaning in Work of Indonesian Teachers: A Phenomenological Research

### Abstract

The meaning in work is predicted to increase a person's commitment and quality. Teachers with high work commitment are the main predictors of the quality of learning and school organization, while those with low commitment and quality increases cases of teacher turnover. This research aims to explore how private teachers in Indonesia analyze meaning in work and its impact on their work commitment. The phenomenological approach was used in this study to explore the essence of the participants' experiences. Semi-structured interviews were carried out to collect data on 15 private primary and secondary school teachers in Indonesia that have worked for more than five years. The subjects were chosen based on their initial research, which has a high meaning in work. The results showed that the meaning in teachers work is formed because it is driven by (1) the feeling of having the opportunity to self-actualize, (2) pride of their work, and (3) high religious attitude. These three factors ultimately encourage teachers' commitment to work. The research recommends the importance of the principal's policy to support the formation of teacher meaning in work. Furthermore, teachers can also take advantage of these findings by maximizing antecedent factors to increase meaning in work.

### Keywords

Indonesian teacher, meaning in work, phenomenological research, teacher commitment

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## **Meaning in Work of Indonesian Teachers: A Phenomenological Research**

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### **Introduction**

The meaning in work is identified as an important factor in influencing the commitment and quality of one's work (Heintzleman et al., 2013; Sørensen et al., 2019; Suyatno et al., 2020; Trevisan et al., 2017). This has been supported by studies carried out in psychology, logotherapy, and mental health. The research carried out by Geldenhuys et al. (2014) showed that the meaning in teachers work is proven to play a significant role in achieving success. Furthermore, this is consistent with the research carried out by Maharaj and Schlechter (2007) which stated that a positive relationship exists between psychological meaning, job involvement, and organizational commitment. In this context, psychological meaningfulness predicts job involvement, and both factors are used to predict organizational commitment. In fact, according to Morrison et al. (2007) and Leape et al. (2009), the concept of meaning in work has been suggested as an approach to increase employee commitment and involvement. Commitment is a positive aspect of teaching (Madigan & Kim, 2021). According to Thien et al. (2014) teachers' professional motivation is maintained through work commitment, thereby making them more responsive to the dynamics of learning practices. It is also a strong predictor

of teacher professionalism, performance, and school quality (Dee et al., 2006; Hulpia et al., 2009). Ware and Kitsantas (2011) stated that teachers with low commitment tend to acquire more turnover. Furthermore, commitment is an important factor for success of an organization and its survival in difficult times (Bogler & Nir, 2015). Therefore, policymakers and organizational managers need to understand the processes involved in the emergence of meaning in working to determine the implementation of effective policies in the future. Knowing the reasons employees work helps them to understand the nature of their job and enjoy a better work experience (Dutton et al., 2006; Pattakos, 2009). This is relevant because the employees usually consider important aspects of their job (Chakofsky, 2010; Harpaz, 2002).

Preliminary studies have been carried out on meaning in work. For instance, Newman et al. (2018) examined the relationship between meaning in life and a person's well-being. Specifically, Newman's research aimed to examine the personal relationship between the existence of meaning in life, and welfare daily. The results showed that it was negatively related to existence and well-being. In contrast, daily pursuits were discovered to be positively related to the existence and well-being of people. Furthermore, the relationship between daily pursuits and well-being is mediated by the existence of meaning in life. Aglozo et al. (2019) carried out psychological research to investigate the relationship between spirituality and subjective well-being as well as to determine whether it was mediated by optimism and meaning in life. There an indirect relationship between spirituality and subjective well-being using SEM data analysis. Moreover, the mediating effect of meaning in life is statistically significant on subjective well-being. Several studies have been carried out on ways to improve the meaning of life through metaphors (Baldwin et al., 2018), as well as the relationship between its existence, self-esteem, and psychological stress (Barnett et al., 2019). Studies have also been conducted to determine the associations between adolescence, life satisfaction, and goals, including the meaning of life, and social support (Blau et al., 2019), the correlation between attention and meaning in life (Chu & Mak, 2020), and the relationship between meaning in life and physical health (Czekierda et al., 2017). Furthermore, Vohs et al. (2019) researched the fields of psychology, logotherapy, and mental health.

However, two important points discovered while examining the previous research map, led to this study. Firstly, research on the meaning of work is usually carried out in the fields of psychology, logotherapy, and mental health. Meanwhile, in the educational sector, it has not received much-needed attention. Secondly, research on the meaning of work is carried out with a quantitative approach based on participants' self-reports (Steger et al., 2013). The use of these approaches leaves work that needs to be further investigated. This gap is breached by analyzing this topic with a qualitative approach to obtain detailed insights based on the teachers' experiences, including complex analyzes from various perspectives, and unique school contexts (Creswell, 2013). Furthermore, it also provides opportunities for teachers, as well as serves as a data collection procedure that improves the views of research subjects which is represented by the results (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, this research aims to explore how do teachers find meaning in work and how does its meaning impact their work commitment? The subject of this study are private school teachers in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, that earn an income far below a decent standard of living, irrespective of that fact, they were known to be highly dedicated and committed to their work. This contradicts the results of previous studies, which stated that financial adequacy is one of the factors that enhances the meaning of life (Siwek et al., 2017). This phenomenon is interesting to analyze because it reveals the way and manner meaning in work is developed and its effect on work commitment in accordance with the participants' experiences.

## Literature Review

The concept of meaning in work was first developed by Frankl (1985). According to the study carried out by Frankl, it was reported that there are three actions of human orientation: meaning, power, and pleasure. Moreover, meaning in work is an extension of the first orientation, will meaning, and its pursuit is considered as a basic human motive (Frankl, 1985). Therefore, several studies show that the meaning of a person's life affects prosperity (Newman et al., 2018; Steger et al., 2006), physiological and spiritual well-being (Steger & Kashdan, 2009). On the contrary, some other studies linked it to life satisfaction (Steger et al., 2006; Steger & Kashdan, 2007; Steger et al., 2008), and happiness (Steger et al., 2009).

The concept of meaning in work has become a common topic in psychology, health, and logotherapy literature. Arnold et al. (2007) stated that it is regarded as a sense of purpose. Meanwhile, studies carried out in nursing science, Morrison et al. (2007) and Leape et al. (2009) suggest an approach to increase employee commitment and involvement. Morrison et al. (2007) further stated that meaning in work is regarded as part of employees' intrinsic motivation. Hicks and King (2009) conceptualized meaning as a subjective experience characterized by three aspects. Firstly, it requires a sense of purpose, which implies that a person's life and activities are directed towards an important goal (McDonald et al., 2012). Secondly, this metaphor involves the belief that one's existence is valuable or significance beyond the current moment (Steger et al., 2006). Thirdly, meaning implies coherence or completeness that makes life meaningful for individuals (Wong & Wong, 2012).

Meaning in life is illustrated in accordance with at least two dimensions. Firstly, the extent to which a person finds or experiences meaningful life (known as presence). Secondly, the extent to which a person searches for a meaningful life in accordance with Steger et al. (2006)'s research. Steger et al. (2013) further stated the sources and described the differences that are dependent on the participant's age, gender, culture, and other sample characteristics. These sources refer to certain aspects and areas of life that are meaningful to people. Several theories stated that it is ideal for people to draw meaning from many sources (McDonald et al., 2012). Meanwhile, Vohs et al. (2019) stated that these sources tend to be either positive or negative experiences. Fortunately, negative experiences stimulate understanding the way or manner the event fits into a broader narrative about oneself, relationships, and the world. Schnell (2009) reported that there are four sources of meaning in life, consisting of (1) self-transcendence (vertical- explicit religiosity, spirituality, and horizontal, social commitment, concurrent with nature, self-knowledge, health, generativity), (2) Self-actualization (challenge, individualism, strength, development, achievement, freedom, knowledge, creativity), (3) Orderliness (tradition, practicality, morality, reason), and (4) Well-being and connectedness (community, pleasure, love, comfort, care, harmony).

Lee's (2015) stated that there are four critical attributes of meaning in life, namely (1) the meaning of the work itself, (2) experiencing positive emotions at work, (3) Meaningful purpose and goals of work, and (4) working towards a meaningful existence.

### The Meaning from Work Itself

This first attribute is developed based on three aspects, namely significance, values, and work orientation (Lee, 2015). Besides, significance shows that people that find meaning in their work usually understand the importance of the job (Lair et al. 2008; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). Meaning in work causes them to regard their jobs as important. The second attribute is work value (Pattakos, 2009). This concept implies the way or manner people view their jobs and the expectation. The last attribute is work orientation, a concept that refers to the general work norms, representation, as well as certain beliefs (Rosso et al., 2010). These three attributes,

consist of work significance, value, and orientation, which shapes the perceptions and gives meaning to work (Lee, 2015).

### **Experiencing Positive Emotions at Work**

The second attribute of meaning in work is the need to experience positive emotions at work. There are three aspects that aids in the development of the first attribute, namely (1) individuals experiences meaning in work because of their job significance. Based on this regard, Rosso et al. (2010) reported that individuals experience meaning in work because they are passionate about their jobs. According to them, their job is not just a profession or a source of livelihood rather, it is regarded as a desire. Therefore, their work experience tends to be meaningful. (2) Someone that experiences meaning in work is usually regarded as valuable. They feel valued (Morrison et al., 2007). Finally, (3) they tend to experience self-fulfillment, thereby feeling satisfied with their work. Meaning in work, aids individuals to actualize meaningful values (Pattakos, 2004). Experience, self-esteem, and self-satisfaction are important aspects of meaning in work (Lee, 2015).

### **Meaningful Purpose and Goals of Work**

These attributes illustrate that the meaning of work is observed based on the various roles played by the employees in the workplace. Harpaz and Meshoulam (2010) stated that work objectives explain the reasons individuals get involved in work as well as their aim and objectives in the workplace. Meaning in work causes people to pursue their work goals. Work goals aid an individual to benefit from meaning in work (Harpaz & Meshoulam, 2010). Therefore, some important aspects are the work goals and objectives (Lee, 2015).

### **Work as a Part of Life Towards Meaningful Existence**

Lee (2015) stated that this fourth attribute is the impact of meaning in work on one's life, it shows personal reasons for existence and authentic self. This attribute goes through several stages as follows initially, meaning in work affects a person's life (Rosso et al., 2010). This means that its influence has expanded into the context of personal life (Lair et al., 2008). In accordance with this process, people start to feel the importance of work in relation to other domains of life (Rosso et al., 2010). Secondly, meaning in work causes employees to become aware of their meaningful existence, which is a fundamental purpose (Harpaz & Meshoulam, 2010). Meaning provides answers to the reason employees' work are important to them. Finally, those of them that experience meaning in work realize their true selves and experience self-development (Rosso et al., 2010). In addition, it helps individuals to recognize their identity, by discovering their true selves at work.

Although the topic of meaning in work has been widely discussed in psychology, logotherapy, and mental health, limited empirical research has been carried out in the field of education. The most relevant research related to this topic was carried out by Fourie and Deacon (2015) using a qualitative phenomenological design method. Data were collected from 20 secondary school teachers in Mpumalanga, Africa by determining their perception, conception, and achievement in work. Their findings showed that teachers conceptualize meaning in a work as goal by transferring knowledge and positively influencing students. Besides, Anthun and Innstrand (2016) examined the predictive value of job demands and resources on the meaning in work and organizational commitment of 3066 Norwegian university employees across three age groups, namely young, middle, and old. The data analysis results using multiple regression on survey data indicate that age predicts the level of

meaning in one's work, therefore, the older an employee, the higher the meaning in work. Suyatno et al. (2020) stated that the meaning in life of teachers is influenced by the variables of transcendence and self-actualization. This is in accordance with the research carried out by Lavy and Naama-Ghanayim (2020), which stated that the meaning in work mediates the teacher's concern for students.

Very few researchers have attempted to explore how teachers find meaning in work and how it impacts their teaching commitment. Moreover, this research has not tried to explore it qualitatively, except for the research carried out by Fourie and Deacon (2015). Therefore, meaning in work in the education science family remains an area that needs to be further investigated using qualitative methods such as IPA (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis) because it is related to understanding any phenomenon, from the participant's point of view. Therefore, considering these above points, this research seeks to explore the experiences of teachers in schools to determine meaning in work and how it affects their work commitment.

### **Research Questions**

How do teachers find meaning in work and how does its meaning impact their work commitment?

### **Purpose of the Research**

This research aims to explore the teachers' experiences in determining meaning in work including the impact on their work commitment.

### **The Role of Authors**

This research was carried out by five authors lecturing in the teacher training and education faculties. An inductive attitude was used to determine the research objectivity which indicated that all authors tried to put aside the perceptions and experiences to remain honest on the participants' experiences in describing the phenomenon (Yin, 2011). The first and second authors, consisting of the research designers, data collectors, and analyzers, are lecturers of qualitative research methods courses. The third, fourth, and fifth authors were involved in scheduling and transcribing interviews with participants and compiling the general report. Data collection was carried out after the research team received official approval from the Elementary and Secondary Education Council of Muhammadiyah at Yogyakarta Province as the agency supervising the participants' schools is in charge. Furthermore, to ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of the research, a draft of the manuscript was sent to the participants, and they all agreed with the results.

### **Methods**

An interpretative phenomenological approach was used as suggested by Smith et al. (2009). This approach is suitable because the research engages participants to reflect on the meaning of their experiences. It aims to explore the teachers' experiences in finding meaning and the manner, it impacts their work commitments. This research is part of a larger study that investigates the various variables affecting the teachers' meaning in life (Suyatno et al., 2020).

## **Participants**

Researchers selected the participants by using purposive sampling (Robson & McCartan, 2016; Springer, 2010). This research was carried out in Yogyakarta, a city in Indonesia known for its culture and an enormous number of students (Hasanah et al., 2019). Most of the people have a similar lifestyle with the Javanese culture, which tends to be religious and prioritizes social life (Hasanah & Supardi, 2020). Since the 19th century, there has been a massive reconciliation between Islamic values and Javanese culture. Therefore, the traditional Islamic culture is the dominant mode of religiosity in Java, especially Yogyakarta (Fauzi, 2012). In the traditional view, the teaching profession is highly regarded in society, irrespective of the fact that it does not generate a reasonable economic income (Baskin, 2007). This was based on the following criteria, namely (1) the teachers had at least 5 years working experience before the data for this study were collected. This criterion is important considering that previous studies stated that work experience affects a person's level of meaning in life (Krok, 2018; Orang et al., 2018). (2) The study also involves male and female teachers because most of the literature focuses on gender roles (Siwek et al., 2017). (3) The participants include a combination of private school teachers in various social contexts, ranging from poor to strong socioeconomic levels, to ensure a variety of different experiences are obtained.

## **Participant Description**

The subjects consist of 15 teachers from different private schools. Besides, five each were obtained from the elementary, junior, and senior high schools. In terms of gender, there are nine females (60%) and six males (40%), while the teacher's teaching experience was relatively between 5 to 15 years. Conversely, the average teaching experience was eight years and four months. In terms of education, six people reported that they had completed an undergraduate degree, four are graduates with a master's degree, while five currently completed their master's program. Based on the range of salaries collected, five people earned below one million rupiahs, eight earned between 1,000,000 to 2,000,000 rupiahs, and two earned above 2,000,000 rupiahs. This information shows that most of the teachers earned salaries that did not meet the stipulated standard of living.

## **Data Collection**

The data collection process was carried out by conducting a series of individual interviews. Each teacher participated in different interviews, ranging from one to two. The first interview was conducted by sending the guidelines to the participants via e-mail (Rania et al., 2021) with a maximum of two weeks given to provide answers to the questions. All participants returned their answers before the maximum time allotted. Before conducting the second phase of the interviews by telephone, the first and second authors read the entire 63 pages results to understand the overall data content. Then, the second phase of the interview was carried out by telephone with each session recorded after obtaining permission from the participants. The recordings were transcribed verbatim, with a code used for each participant to maintain anonymity. The interview protocol was guided by eight open questions. Subsequently, the names of the informants were written using initials (P1-P15) to maintain the anonymity of all teachers participating in this study, and as a fulfilment of social research ethics (American Psychological Association, 2017). The data collected through interviews were guided by eight questions as follows:



1. What are your reasons for choosing to work as a teacher?
2. What positive experiences have you had while carrying out your job as a teacher?
3. What does a job as a teacher mean to you?
4. In your opinion, what role does work play in your life?
5. The ways or manner they make their work meaningful?
6. What are the kinds of conditions you have experienced and found meaningful in work?
7. What are the impacts of meaning to work on your commitment?
8. What kind of support have you received from school, family, and colleagues in finding meaning in work?

## **Data Analysis**

An interpretative phenomenological analysis was used for in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of finding meaning in work experienced by private teachers in Indonesia. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2001) and Patton (2002), the essence of experience in phenomenological research has one or more features in common in relation to a particular phenomenon. The data analysis process was divided into three stages. The transcript was read first in its entirety, repeatedly, to gain an overall understanding of the data contents, highlight the important responses, and make margin notes. Key words and phrases representing participants' answers and potentially support the theme were highlighted. In the second stage, the coding was performed openly and sequentially. This process generated 72 codes. In the third stage, the codes were broken down and grouped together to form themes and subthemes based on participants' answers (Merriam & Tisdell, 2009). Many codes with similarities were combined to form themes and sub-themes, thereby reducing the number to 49. This process resulted in five themes and 14 sub-themes, namely the meaning of the work itself, which contains three sub-themes, namely, teaching is a noble profession, they are passionate about teaching, and teachers as torches for the community. The second theme is experiencing positive emotions at work which contains three sub-themes, namely support from those closest to them, got the opportunity to actualize, and become a useful person. The third theme is the purpose and meaningful work goals which are grouped into two sub-themes, namely become a teacher as part of worship and expecting Allah's blessing. The fourth theme is work as a part of life towards a meaningful existence which are grouped into three sub-themes, namely Allah gave them the best, sincerely carrying out their jobs, and expecting to be one of the people whose charity is not cut off. The fifth theme is the meaning of work leads to commitment at work which are grouped into three sub-themes, namely they are motivated to become a teacher with a good performance predicate, they are motivated to be professional, and the meaning of work fosters commitment. The results of data coding are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
Coding Data

No	Theme	Sub-theme	Theme building code
1	The meaning of the work itself	Teaching is a noble profession	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ It is noble profession in this world and the hereafter.</li> <li>○ It is a noble and good work</li> <li>○ Becoming a teacher is a way to improve yourself.</li> <li>○ Becoming a teacher is a way to get rid of yourself.</li> <li>○ Being a teacher means opening up the opportunity to share knowledge.</li> </ul>
		They are passionate about teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Becoming a teacher is a passion</li> <li>○ It is driven by inner motivation</li> <li>○ It is a loving profession</li> <li>○ It is the call of the heart</li> </ul>
		Teachers as torches for the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ It becomes a light to the community</li> <li>○ The teacher acts as a light to the students</li> <li>○ The teacher transmit knowledge</li> <li>○ Students find the right path</li> </ul>
2	Experiencing positive emotions at work	Support from those closest to them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Schools provide scholarships</li> <li>○ Colleagues always help</li> <li>○ Acquire support from partner</li> <li>○ The students are fun</li> </ul>
		Got the opportunity to actualize	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ acquire many opportunities to develop knowledge</li> <li>○ get educational scholarships</li> <li>○ send to be an outstanding teacher</li> <li>○ got an award</li> </ul>
		Become a useful person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Has the ability to transmit knowledge</li> <li>○ Students always remember me</li> <li>○ Acts as a mother to the students</li> <li>○ Successfully assisting problematic students</li> </ul>
3	The purpose and meaningful work goals	Become a teacher as part of worship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ As a profession as well as worship</li> <li>○ Get reward from Allah</li> <li>○ As <i>amal jariyah</i></li> </ul>
		Expecting Allah's blessing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ God's blessing be with you</li> <li>○ Intention to worship God</li> <li>○ God makes it easy</li> </ul>
4	Work as a part of life towards a meaningful existence	Allah gave them the best	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Becoming a teacher is the best to appreciate God</li> <li>○ God gave me the opportunity to be a teacher</li> <li>○ Thank God for giving the best way</li> </ul>
		Sincerely carrying out their jobs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Carrying out the work wholeheartedly</li> <li>○ Conducting the work as best as possible</li> <li>○ Carrying out the work sincerely</li> </ul>
		Expecting to be one of the people whose charity is not cut off	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Useful knowledge does not cut off the reward</li> <li>○ Share useful knowledge</li> </ul>
5	The meaning of work leads to	They are motivated to become a teacher with a good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Motivated to improve my quality</li> <li>○ Become a teacher with has a positive impact</li> </ul>

	commitment at work	performance predicate	○ Become a teacher with good work predicate
		They are motivated to be professional	○ Trying to be professional ○ Be better ○ Able to serve ○ Be useful
		The meaning of work fosters commitment	○ Building commitment ○ Understand that work is important ○ Committed to keep working

## Findings

This section presents the research findings in accordance with the themes generated in the data analysis process. Themes and sub-themes are elaborated along with relevant quotations from the transcript as supporting evidence. According to Cooper and Fleisher (2012), phenomenological research highlights the general elements of a phenomenon, and not individual experiences. Table 1 provides a view that is easy to read and understand by the reader. This study aims to explore how teachers find meaning in work and its impacts on their commitment. It was found that their experiences were quite diverse. The themes developed describe teachers' experiences in finding meaning at work involve, which involve the following five important points, namely the meaning of the work itself, experiencing positive emotions, the purpose and goals, work as a part of life towards existence, and the commitment.

### Theme 1: The Meaning of the Work Itself

The first theme from the teacher's experience in determining the meaning of work, which is supported by almost all participants (n=14). The participants stated that the meaning of work as a teacher to them is that it is a noble job. To become a teacher is a desire of the soul and a torch for the community.

#### 1.1 Teacher as a Noble Work

One of the meaningful sources for the participants was the perception that teaching is a noble job. Noble work in the Indonesian context is a job that is appreciated by the community due to its good impact. Therefore, working as a teacher in Indonesia is understood by the public as more than just a profession that brings in a salary, rather it is considered a noble mission, that educates people's lives. This is also reinforced by a popular that teachers are known as "unsung heroes." The participants reported that they were motivated to become teachers because it is a noble job. This is also supported by the view of some people in Yogyakarta and Indonesia in general that although the teaching profession does not generate sufficient income, it is a noble job in the view of society. Based on, an interview excerpt, P8 reported that "In their opinion, this is an extremely noble job both in this world and hereafter (P8, 2 to 3)." This data was corroborated by P1, through interviews where it was reported that:

The teaching job is noble and good considering that the knowledge gained in college is passed down to the students. Teachers face living beings (students) therefore they provide dynamic experiences, not statistical. However, stories that teach different things and offers diverse impressions are encountered daily. Conversely, dealing with inanimate objects sometimes tends to be boring. Currently, some of them are only able to work in the teaching field, excluding other professions. (P1, 29 to 35)

P1 stated that the glory of the teaching profession is the ability to spread knowledge to students. Furthermore, in contrast to other professions where one is faced with inanimate objects, teachers take care of students daily therefore in their view it is regarded as being noble. Meanwhile, P2 stated that the dignity of the teaching profession aids them to always improve and stabilize themselves to be perceived as role model by others:

This is a noble profession with difficult tasks and responsibilities. The task of being a teacher means a way of improving and establishing oneself to be perceived as a role model by others. In addition, working as a teacher means sharing useful opportunities with others. (P2, 12-16)

### ***1.2 Teacher as Passion***

The sub-theme of the teacher is passion, and this is also supported by the majority of the participants in this research. More than half of them (n=8) stated that being a teacher as a passion is an important source of meaning in work. This calling is an impulse from within a person to become something and it is also called passion. An individual's passion to become a teacher means that they are driven or motivated from within, without being influenced by external factors. This is usually manifested in the form of their love for the profession despite the poor income. This passion causes teachers to carry out their profession based on love, sincerity, and enthusiasm. In accordance with the interviews, P9 stated that:

At first, some of them wanted to become engineering majors because they did not want to be teachers. However, it turns out that this calling, and the charm to be a "mature teacher", continues to inspire them. They have been taught by several parents' admonitions that teaching is honorable, both in the classroom and the community as well. (P9, lines 6-12)

### ***1.3 Teachers as Torches for the Community***

The sub-theme of the teacher as a torch for the community was also mentioned by many participants. For instance, one-third (n=5) stated their experience as teachers act as a torch for the community. The word torch in Indonesian is understood as something that illuminates the darkness, such as a lamp. The meaning of the teacher as a torch for society is that they can transmit knowledge to students to finally discover the right path in life. A similar statement was reported by P9 which is as follows: "The teacher is perceived as a lamp, it is not just a job, rather a calling to enlighten everyone that they meet. They are directly ahead, always in front, as a "torch" for society" (P9, 117-119).

## **Theme 2: Experienced Positive Emotions at Work**

The second theme is experiencing positive emotions at work. Positive emotional experiences at work are developed in many ways. In data analysis, this was realized through, the support of those closest to them, including the opportunity to actualize self and become a useful person. 100% of participants (n=15) unanimously reported that experiencing positive emotions at work makes them feel it is meaningful.

## ***2.1 Support from the Closest People***

The participants stated that the positive experiences they had which shaped the meaning of their work was the support of those closest to them, including the principal, peers, and even their spouses. This sub-theme is built by the following codes, such as my partner supports me, the school provides scholarships, my colleagues always help, my students are fun, etc. Approximately, 80% of the participants (n=12) mentioned codes related to this sub-theme. P1 reported that one of the supports offered by school principals was the opportunity to continue their Masters' studies. "The support given to one of the participants by the school was the scholarship opportunity to continue with the Graduate program" (P1, 67-72). Meanwhile, for P7, the support of the closest person was obtained from their partners. "My wife is also a teacher, and the support is massive. We often discuss problems that occurred in our respective schools and get a lot of input and criticism from my wife" (P7, 159 to 165).

Similarly, in line with P1 and P7, P2 stated that the support received from the immediate environment was in the form of creating a comfortable atmosphere, which leads to the enthusiasm and motivation to work optimally:

School, family, and colleagues are the supporting factors in finding meaning in work. The support is provided in the form of creating a comfortable environment, which leads to the enthusiasm and motivation to enhance maximum abilities at work thereby positively contributing to the organization. (P2, 50-54)

P5 also felt the support of the closest people. The family condition that prioritizes education and colleagues' support each other in carrying out their duties are a source of positive emotions in the workplace:

Alhamdulillah's family prioritizes education because they understand its importance and direction. Therefore, in the family, the wife motivates and increases enthusiasm in teaching. Alhamdulillah also has unique and special colleagues that are members of the "PPK Mukarta Group" responsible for implementing programs in and outside the school. (P5, 235 - 241)

## ***2.2 Got the Opportunity to Self-Actualize***

More than half of the research participants (n=9) stated that self-actualization encouraged them to experience positive emotions at work. This is the process of being oneself and developing unique psychological traits and potentials. It is the highest human need. This sub-theme is formed from the following codes: gets many opportunities to develop knowledge, educational scholarships, leads in becoming an outstanding teacher, and gets awards. P2 stated that by becoming a teacher, they were opportune to develop their knowledge and abilities through training and education, and often received offers to collaborate with publishers: "I have many opportunities to develop my knowledge and abilities by participating in various training, and free education from agencies and foundations. I have been offered numerous collaborations with publishers to become the writer of subject books" (P2, 8 -10).

P5 had a similar experience. Self-actualization was obtained in the form of awards given by the Yogyakarta City Police for being outstanding teachers at the provincial level:

The IT-based Learning Innovation developed, aided teachers to become understanding at the BTKP provincial level. In 2019, they also received awards

from the Yogyakarta City Police as a teacher that is able to properly develop children's character in elementary schools. (P5, 56-73)

### ***2.3 Become a Useful Person***

All participants unanimously (n=15) agreed that being a useful person is a source of meaning in their work. This feeling arises, for example, when teachers can pass on their knowledge to students. "They are regarded as useful persons supposing they are able to pass on their knowledge to students" (P1, 18 to 20). There are some other instances such as teachers are always remembered by students even after they have graduated. P3 stated that "students always remember teacher even after graduation, as many send messages through WhatsApp, and led al Fitr alumni visit their homes" (P3, 10 to 14). Furthermore, P8 stated that being a useful person arises when they act as mothers to their students. "The ability to listen to their personal stories, as a mother, encourages them in school, to have the enthusiasm to study and causing them not to follow or imitate their parents' bad attitudes" (P8, 15 to 18). P9 had a similar experience because they were able to tutor children that were considered problematic by other teachers:

One special factor I realized at school was when I succeeded in tutoring children that all teachers regarded as problematic because their backgrounds were not harmonious. This causes the child to become unstable at puberty. My personal approach motivated them to learn and aided them to perceive the school as a place to vent. (P9, 94-99)

## **Theme 3: Meaningful Purpose and Goals of Work**

The third theme is the purpose and goal of meaningful work, which consists of 2 sub-themes, namely being a teacher is part of worship and hoping for God's blessing. Overall, this theme is supported by 75% (n=10) participants' statements.

### ***3.1 Become a Teacher as Part of Worship***

A total of 12 participants (80%) stated that they were teachers with a mission to worship God. The participants perceive this profession as a source of income and a means of worship. This view, for example, is influenced by the teacher's opinion that supposing the knowledge conveyed to the students are practiced, they are rewarded for their good work. Based on interviews, P5 stated that:

The task is regarded as a profession while the teacher is a worshiper. When teachers convey knowledge to students, then their reward is never interrupted as a charity. (P5, 11-13)

### ***3.2 Expecting Allah's Blessing***

According to more than half (n = 8) of the participants, the meaning of this profession is also developed, supposing they always hope to be pleased with God. This is because, for them, God's blessing is the highest goal in life which makes their work meaningful. P9 further stated that the initial intention to become a teacher was in the framework of being devoted to parents, because, from the beginning, their fathers suggested that they attended colleges of education. They are sure that a teaching profession is a form of devotion to their parents thereby attracting Allah's blessings:

Moreover, during the compilation of this thesis, my father suggested taking the Teaching Certificate IV program. Therefore, without thinking, as a "sin redeemer", I did not want to attend the Teacher Training Faculty however it was my last chance to "follow my fathers' advice." I am certain that God willing will accompany the lives of children, Insha'Allah they become successful people. Finally, I attended the Teaching Certificate IV lecture, at the Faculty of Education, and thank God, it strengthened my intention as teachers. (P9, 25-31)

Whereas for P8, they hoped to be worship Allah by carrying out the intended work: "The ability to worship Allah, starting with praying that God blesses and makes it easier for them to diligently carry out their duties which is to educate the children of this nation" (P8, 52-57).

#### **Theme 4: Work as a Part of Life Towards a meaningful Existence**

Furthermore, more than half of the participants (n=9) stated that working as a teacher leads them to a meaningful existence. They stated that working as a part of life towards a meaningful existence is proven by certain indicators. Allah aided them, to sincerely carry out their job, and they hoped to be one of those that their charity was not renounced.

##### ***4.1 Allah Gave Me the Best Way***

Fortunately, for some of the research participants (n=5), being a teacher is the best way to receive direct blessings from God. For instance, one of the participants did not want to become a teacher despite attending college. However, during the career process, the participant became a teacher and felt that it was the best way directed by God. This is illustrated in the P7's admission which stated that:

Initially, I did not dream of becoming a teacher, even though my mother was one. However, during the course of my study in the institution with my active participation in student organizations as well as also participating in various kinds of public speaking talent training, sharing knowledge, and having discussions, they started to develop an interest in the profession. This helped them to excel in the teaching profession. Irrespective of the fact that they did not dream of becoming teachers, God decided that after graduating from college they had the opportunity to become teachers. At the beginning of their experience in this profession, they taught English subject in school, and as time went on they enjoyed it and thanked God for directing them along the best way. (P7, 2-10)

##### ***4.2 Do Work with Sincerity***

A meaningful existence is also be achieved when people sincerely carry out their work. This concept is often defined as the intention for the sake of God, without expecting any reward from humans. In accordance with interview excerpts from P2, it was reported that:

I try my best when carrying out my job. I ensure every task, and responsibility associated with my job is carried out to the best of my knowledge to get maximum results. In carrying out my job, I try to respect each coworker,

familiarize myself with colleagues and sincerely carry out my work. (P2, 22-26)

#### ***4.3 Expecting to be One of the Groups Whose Charity is Not Cut Off***

Based on the participant's religious concept, this is one of the jobs that are not only oriented towards the economic aspect, rather it also brings good returns in the afterlife. P6 stated that meaning in work was developed based on the belief that teachers are bound to share their knowledge with others. Consequently, useful knowledge is one of the charities that have a reward:

I chose to become a teacher because I wanted others to benefit, and I always want to share my knowledge. Furthermore, I intend to belong to the category of people that their act of charity is rewarded (referring to the hadith of Muslim history: "when people die, their act of charity is cut off except for three cases namely, almsgiving, the knowledge shared, or a pious child."). (P6, 2-6)

### **Theme 5: The Meaning of Work Leads to Motivation and Commitment to Work**

All participants unanimously stated that the meaning in work formed had an impact on their motivation and commitment. This theme consists of three sub-themes, such as I am motivated to become a teacher with good performance predicate, work more professionally, and foster commitment.

#### ***5.1 I am Motivated to be a Teacher with a Good Performance Predicate***

The meaning of work experienced by the teacher causes them to develop a good predicate. Subsequently, good performance is manifested in the form of implementing innovative learning. P6 mentioned that:

I am always motivated to improve myself as a qualified teacher because I also want people to benefit from me. There is need to have a positive impact on my students and fellow teachers. I also need to possess a minimum level of good performance in my institution. (P6, 46-50)

P1 strengthens the opinion of P6 as follows: "There was a feeling that I had to possess good attitudes, actions, and performance, for example participating in innovative learning by preparing few moments before the teaching activities are carried out, thereby making good scenarios" (P1, 60-64).

#### ***5.2 There is Motivation to Work More Professionally***

The meaning of work also motivated teachers to be professional. P9 stated that this is realized by being able to serve students better, working in accordance with the main duties and functions of the teacher, and encouraging oneself to be useful to others:

The impact is certainly significant at work, including being professional, better, and able to serve, according to the main function of a teacher and one important aspect is to always encourage people to be useful to others, therefore there is a



need to continue to strive to be better, and *ojo jeleh tumindak apik* (don't get tired of doing good) because it eventually them. (P9, 202-206)

In accordance with the reports of P9, P2 and P8, it was stated that the meaning of work is generated to motivate these teachers to utilize their maximum abilities.

According to P2 the ability to find the meaning of work motivated teachers to keep working while exhibiting their best abilities and contributes to providing good and maximum results to the organization irrespective of the condition. (P2, 44-47)

Therefore, by discerning the meaning of work, they feel compelled to always teach and convey knowledge according to their abilities, because, they don't have the heart to see children drop out of school. (P8, 92-94)

### ***5.3 The Meaning of Work Fosters Commitment***

All participants (n=15) reported that the meaning of work fosters their commitment to work. P10 stated that work is important, therefore, it fosters its commitment: "My ability to understand that certain things need to be carried out in accordance with my job description, automatically build commitment. Therefore, I worked harder because understand its relevance, thereby fostering my commitment to work" (P10, 183-187).

The commitment emerged from the meaning of work realized by P1 that is committed to remaining loyal to serve at the school irrespective of the fact that P1 got a job elsewhere. Based on the interview excerpt, P1 stated that "The meaning in work makes them committed to continuing working at this school despite the job offers from other institutes" (P1, 60 to 64).

## **Discussion**

This research is unique because it involves an in-depth exploration of the way and manner teachers find meaning in their work and the impacts on work commitments. Meaning in work has been widely explored especially in the fields of psychology, logotherapy, and mental health. However, there is limited in-depth research on this topic in educational studies, especially those related to the development of teacher performance. Therefore, this research aims to explore the teachers' experiences in finding meaning in their work and commitment. It found five themes as follows: the meaning in the work itself, experiencing positive emotions, meaningful purposes, and goals, working as part of life towards an existence, and its impact on teacher work commitment. The first four themes are the antecedents of meaning in work and the last is the consequence as explained by Walker and Avant (2011). An antecedent is an incident that occurs before the formation of a concept. The antecedent of the meaning in work is the cognitive change of the person concerned. According to Pattakos (2004), one needs to shift the focus of attention from negative to positive before the formation of meaning in work, hence the person concerned can find new insights. Consequences are impacts due to the concept of formation (Walker & Avant, 2011).

The antecedent of meaning in work according to the teachers; experience shows their cognitive perspective in the eyes of the community. The passion associated with being a teacher actualizes potentials, and as a means of worshipping God. These antecedent aspects are integrated within the teacher; hence, a paradigm is formed in the cognitive meaning to work. It also helps teachers in Indonesia to counter negative perspectives, such as the low payment of those in private schools below a decent standard of living. Meanwhile, the consequences of the

formation of the meaning in working are that they are motivated to become good and professional teachers with increasing work commitment.

This research enriches insights acquired from preliminary studies related to the consequences of the meaning in teacher work. Kim et al. (2018) stated that the job meaning dimension predicts work satisfaction, career fulfillment, and organizational commitment. Similarly, Comin and Pauli (2018) stated that meaning in work affects motivation, work satisfaction and productivity. In the context of education, Lavy and Naama-Ghanayim (2020) stated that the teachers with higher meaning in work allow feel and express more concern for students. Meanwhile, based on the existing findings, only a few studies have been conducted in the context of education, which enrich the insight into the consequences of meaning in working on teacher commitment.

Previous studies have identified several strategies used in discovering meaning in work, for example, Lips-Wiersma and Wright (2012) stated that the strategy adopted by a person in finding a meaningful life is carried out based on two strategies, namely (1) considering the coherence between other peoples' life goals and (2) connecting inspiration and reality. These strategies have certain similarities with the experiences of the participants. However, the teachers adopted various strategies that had not been identified in existing literatures. This includes a sense of self-actualization (D'Souza, 2018), prosocial attitude (Kaur, 2009), and sincerity as a manifestation of the religious attitudes and behavior of the participants (Abu-alhaija, 2018).

The strategies adopted by the teachers in finding meaning in work are related to the four critical attributes proposed by Lee (2015) which include the meaning of work itself, experiencing positive emotions at work, meaningful work goals and objectives, and working as part of life to realize a meaningful existence. The first critical attribute proposed by Lee (2015) is the meaning of work itself. This attribute consists of three sub-attributes, namely work significance, values, and orientation. According to the participants, the meaning of work as a teacher is indicated by three indicators that are stated as follows, noble job, passion, and serves as a torch for the community. In relation to this research, it was explained that the teaching profession is regarded as a noble job based on its significance and relevance of the work. Conversely, the second sub-attribute is work value. The concept relates to peoples' views regarding their expectations from the work. These findings illustrate that passion is also one of the work values possessed. Meanwhile, the teacher as a torch for the community was used to illustrate the third sub-attribute, namely work orientation. They believe that teaching is not just an ordinary profession, rather it is regarded as a torch for the community. This is because of the cultural influence in the Javanese society that considers this profession as a noble job (Gunawan et al., 2020; Shodiq & Syamsudin, 2019). Therefore, teachers in Java are proud of their work.

The second critical attribute is experiencing positive emotions at work. The indicators of this attribute are shown by the support of people closest to them, and the opportunity for the students to benefit from them. The last two indicators are consistent with some previous studies (Chu & Mak, 2020; Rosso et al., 2010) which stated that experiencing positive emotions in the workplace is formed based on three processes. First, individuals experience meaning by placing significance in their work, in this case, the job as a teacher has led them to become the beneficiaries of others and at the same time allows them to experience self-actualization, thereby causing the work to become meaningful to them. Second, a teacher feels respected, and their experience is valuable (Morrison, 2007). Third, they experience self-actualization (Rosso et al., 2010). This causes the teachers to feel satisfied with their work, as well as actualize meaningful values (Pattakos, 2004). Meanwhile, the first indicator, namely positive emotions were obtained through the support of the closest people, although it has not been explained using Lee's four critical attributes (Lee, 2015). However, this indicator reinforces recent

findings which stated that in almost all cultures and age groups, relationships with family are a source of meaning in life (Glaw et al., 2017). Other sources include the relationship between humans (Hupkens et al., 2018). In addition, the meaning is derived from social interactions with other people (Mwilambwe-Tshilobo et al., 2019). The meaning of life is developed because it has a prosocial spirit with indicators of volunteering, sharing, and being beneficial to others (Klein, 2017). This is also related to the research carried out by Wardoyo et al. (2017) which stated that in Indonesia, this phase is categorized as collegial professionalism involving collaborative work which serves as the main indicator.

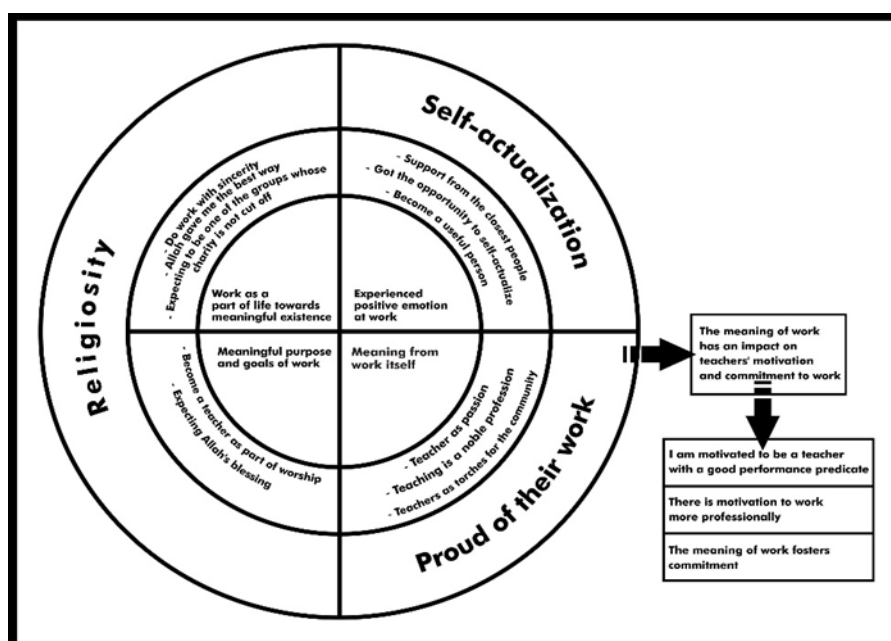
The third critical attribute is the purpose and meaningful work goals. This attribute explains the manner meaning in work is formed by determining the teacher wants and activities in the workplace. These results show that there are two important indicators of the intent and purpose of working, namely being a teacher as part of worship and expecting God's blessings. It provides relevant information such as, their highest work goals and objectives are not only oriented towards material things, rather, more importantly, it serves as a means of worship and the realization of God's blessings. Specifically, these findings are consistent with recent research which stated that the aspect of self-transcendence is a major predictor related to the meaning of one's life (Bernard et al., 2017; Pedersen et al., 2018). This transcendence is deeply influenced by the ideological forces that accompany one's mindset (Sutton & Douglas, 2020).

The final attribute is working as a part of life towards a meaningful existence. This sub-attribute explains the extension of this role to their personal life (Lair et al., 2008). Meaning in work makes a person aware of their meaningful existence (Harpaz & Meshoulam, 2010; Rosso et al., 2010) Furthermore, it explains the reason people feel important at work. In subsequent developments, this metaphor aids individuals to realize their original self (Morrison, 2007; Rosso et al., 2010). Apparently, when employees find their selves at work, they tend to have a greater existential meaning. The participants stated that working as a part of life towards a meaningful existence is developed when they feel that being a teacher is the best way of life proposed by God, they tend to sincerely carry out their work, as well as fulfil their hopes of becoming to one of the groups that God promises to reward. Therefore, these three indicators show that the meaningful existence of the participant is connected to all spiritual and transcendent factors. Therefore, this point reaffirms the religiosity aspect of this formation (Suyatno et al., 2020).

Based on the four critical attributes related to the meaning of work proposed by Lee (2015), a path that explains the way and manner, this metaphor, affects the teachers' commitment to their work was discovered. In accordance with the analysis of the individual statements, three essences related to the meaning of working in groups were stated as follows (1) Participants are motivated to become teachers with good performance predicate, (2) motivation causes them to be more professional, and (3) the meaning of work fosters commitment. In general, the findings in this section are consistent with previous studies which stated that the meaning of life is directly proportional to satisfaction (Blau et al., 2019), improves physical health (Czekierda et al., 2017), and focuses on more productive aspects (Ju, 2017). These findings also strengthen Steger's et al. (2006) theory stated that the meaning of work emerges from the existence of individual, and interpersonal meaningful work, including workplace characteristic predictors. However, this research produced an entirely different result from previous theories because the meaning of working in the participants is driven by a sense of self-actualization, prosocial attitude, and sincerity triggered by religiosity attitudes and beliefs. Furthermore, it shows that the participants put forward religiosity and psychological beliefs in constructing this metaphor, which in turn appears to be an attitude of commitment to work. The process of finding meaning in life that directly affects the teacher's commitment to school is shown in Figure 1.

Finally, the research found that the meaning in teacher work is formed because of the religiosity system. Therefore, they understand that work is not just a profession, rather it also acts as a source of life with spiritual values and a form of devotion to God with various dimensions. The religious value system influences the teacher's paradigm of the meaning in work which is seen from an economic point of view and as a form of devotion to God. In terms of the known dimensions, this finding confirms the opinion that teaching is considered a noble profession in Indonesia even though it is not directly proportional to the economic awards obtained (Baskin, 2007). The participants are private school teachers with a much lower welfare level. This increasingly shows that the religious system owned by the teachers is an antecedent of meaning in their work. Furthermore, they continue to show commitment and quality of work despite their inability to provide proper welfare from schools. In the context of developing countries such as Indonesia, where the government's ability to provide adequate welfare to teachers is still limited, this finding is a realistic choice for policy makers and education practitioners in developing teacher performance. Besides the aspects already known, this research also explains a new dimension of the source of the meaning in work for teachers, especially for the international community. There are very few studies outside Indonesia explaining the religiosity aspect as an antecedent of meaning in work. Some of the studies that identify antecedent factors of meaning in work, focus more on organizational support and one's personality (Akgunduz et al., 2018), age and work experience (Anthun & Innstrand, 2016), school transformational leadership (Arnold et al., 2007; Cleavenger & Munyon, 2013), the satisfaction of basic psychological and social needs (Clausen & Borg, 2011), connection, contribution, and recognition (Pavlish & Hunt, 2012), intrinsic satisfaction, sense of power, and authority (Person et al., 2016), educational demographics (Sharabi et al., 2019), and gender (MacIntosh et al., 2010). Other research identifies sources of authentic meaning which include the desire to make a difference at work (Pattakos & Dundon, 2017). However, none of these studies were conducted in the context of teachers. This research finding contributes to broadening insight into the antecedent factors of meaning in teacher work for the international community.

**Figure 1**  
*Meaning in Work of Indonesia Private Teachers*



This research is limited to the focus on the experience of teachers in private schools with a sample size of 15; hence the results cannot be generalized. Future authors tend to broaden their understanding of the experiences of teachers working in government-owned schools. Teachers in private and public schools differ, especially in terms of welfare level. Further research also need to be directed to understand their experiences in finding meaning in work by paying attention to demographic aspects, such as gender, work experience, and educational background to determine the similarities and differences in the same context. However, the results of this research have important implications on school principals, even though they directly help teachers to find meaning to promote policies that make it possible for teachers to increase meaning in work by providing support to teachers to achieve self-actualization and provide opportunities to carry out further research. Moreover, the teachers in this research stated that the meaning in work formed had an impact on their work commitment. Therefore, they can maximize their sources of meaning both in terms of the meaning of the work itself, experiencing positive emotions at work, the purpose and meaningful work goals, and work as a part of life towards a meaningful existence and as a trigger to increase their commitment and work quality, thereby reducing various problems.

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