

Strategic Efforts to Improve the Professionalism of Honorary Teachers

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Abstract: This study examined the welfare and professional development of honorary teachers in Cilegon City, as well as the strategic efforts undertaken by the local education office to enhance their conditions. Using a qualitative approach, the researchers collected data through participant observation, in-depth interviews, document and media analysis, and triangulation. The data analysis followed four stages: data collection, reduction, presentation, and validation. The findings revealed that while most honorary teachers demonstrated adequate teaching competencies, significant challenges remained in terms of welfare and recognition. Strategic efforts, including training programs, motivational initiatives, improved supervision, and performance-based incentives, have been implemented to foster professional growth. However, constraints such as limited budget allocations and inconsistent policy implementation hinder broader progress. The study concludes that strengthening support systems and increasing budgetary commitment are crucial to sustainably improving the welfare and professionalism of honorary teachers.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengkaji kesejahteraan dan pengembangan profesional guru honorer di Kota Cilegon, serta upaya strategis yang dilakukan oleh Dinas Pendidikan setempat untuk meningkatkan kondisi mereka. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipatif, wawancara mendalam, analisis dokumen dan media, serta triangulasi. Analisis data dilakukan melalui empat tahap: pengumpulan data, reduksi data, penyajian data, dan validasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sebagian besar guru honorer memiliki kompetensi mengajar yang memadai, namun masih terdapat tantangan signifikan terkait kesejahteraan dan pengakuan profesi. Berbagai upaya strategis telah dilakukan untuk mendukung pengembangan profesional, termasuk program pelatihan, inisiatif motivasi, supervisi yang lebih baik, dan insentif berbasis kinerja. Namun, keterbatasan anggaran dan inkonsistensi kebijakan menjadi kendala utama dalam peningkatan yang lebih luas. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa penguatan sistem pendukung dan peningkatan komitmen anggaran sangat penting untuk meningkatkan kesejahteraan dan profesionalisme guru honorer secara berkelanjutan.

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INTRODUCTION

In addition to curriculum concerns, teachers are considered the cornerstone of successful educational institutions. It is recommended that they engage in value-based education by serving as moral exemplars, fostering discipline, and creating an environment conducive to developing pro-moral character (Tadege et al., 2022). Teachers are also expected to maintain neutrality and objectivity in guiding students' career choices, acknowledging both academic and non-academic strengths. They must support learners in cultivating a culture of learning in society (Eriksson et al., 2022). However, transferring knowledge based on local wisdom can pose challenges, especially for teachers with migrant backgrounds, emphasizing the need to enhance teachers' practical knowledge (Vigren et al., 2022).

Teacher professionalism plays a crucial role in executing their responsibilities effectively. Emotional interference from student behavior is common and varies across institutions. Positive emotional states can act as a buffer, supporting teachers' well-being (Li et al., 2022). Commitment to the profession is closely tied to factors such as health, motivation, and peer support (Casely et al., 2022). Moreover, engaging in research within educational settings is viewed as an avenue for teachers to enhance their pedagogical practices (Raiker, 2020).

Despite certification, many teachers still struggle to earn a living wage. Baidoo-Anu (2022) identified eight key themes in educational interactions, including socio-emotional impacts, motivational factors, and inequalities in work conditions, that highlight ongoing challenges. A narrow focus on individual behavior is insufficient to understand professionalism fully; broader sociological perspectives are essential (Martimianakis et al., 2009). Teachers must better grasp social factors influencing children and adopt inclusive strategies (Yang et al., 2021).

Both permanent and honorary teachers are entitled to social welfare. However, disparities persist in teaching quality, as reflected in student outcomes and pedagogical effectiveness (Thijssen et al., 2022). Even in the absence of accountability pressures, appropriate evaluation policies combined with instructional support can enhance teacher performance (Liebowitz, 2021). Unfortunately, many teachers still do not receive sufficient additional benefits (Nuzulia & Rupiati, 2016). Minimum qualifications and competencies, such as a diploma and emotional intelligence, are also important determinants of teacher remuneration (Zhou et al., 2022).

The implementation of systems such as web-based payroll can simplify administrative tasks and improve efficiency, particularly in under-resourced schools (Hasti et al., 2020). Yet, many teachers express dissatisfaction, which may be linked to a lack of spiritual or emotional fulfillment in the workplace (Nuzulia & Rupiati, 2016). The overall performance of teachers remains suboptimal, partly due to high absenteeism and frequent turnover, which negatively affect student achievement (Ledger et al., 2022; Gibbons et al., 2021). Theoretical discourse on professionalism must also consider the social context of students' learning environments and the pursuit of educational equity (Wear & Kuczewski, 2004).

Honorary teachers, in particular, face long waits to receive certification and professional recognition. Creativity in teaching can be enhanced through training, equipping teachers with varied strategies and materials (Tamsah et al., 2021). Although schools approach professional development differently, a unified standard is lacking (Swick et al., 1999). Learning outcomes are shaped by interdependent relationships among teachers, students, and the broader environment (Scanlon & Connolly, 2021).

Collective learning experiences play a vital role in enhancing professionalism (Evert & Stein, 2022). However, not all teachers are equipped to lead reform efforts. Factors such as institutional support and leadership perception affect the development of professional teacher models (Rechsteiner et al., 2022). Administrative inefficiencies, such as manual payroll systems and incomplete absence records, further hinder professional recognition (Hasti et al., 2020). The theoretical foundation of professionalism must be built through dialogue among educators, emphasizing justice and equity (Abdallah & Musah, 2021). In times of weak labor demand, even highly qualified teachers may face dissatisfaction due to mismatched job conditions (Fraenkel, 2022).

Therefore, teachers must be engaged in value-based education to promote positive character traits and maintain discipline (Tadege et al., 2022). Professional organizations play a vital role in advocacy and knowledge development, facilitating progress in teacher professionalism (Woolf, 2022). However, despite the growing discourse on teacher professionalism, limited research addresses the strategic efforts by local educational authorities, particularly in emerging regions such as Cilegon City. The scarcity of empirical evidence concerning the professional challenges faced by honorary teachers presents a significant research gap that this study seeks to address.

The urgency of this research is further underscored by the reality that honorary teachers in underfunded areas often face prolonged delays in certification, lack of institutional support, and insufficient compensation, factors that undermine their ability to perform effectively. This study, therefore, aims to examine the strategic efforts undertaken by the Cilegon City Education Office to enhance the welfare and professionalism of honorary teachers, identify the challenges involved, and provide recommendations for sustainable improvement.

METHOD

This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the strategic efforts of local government in enhancing the professionalism and welfare of honorary teachers in Cilegon City. The research was designed to understand in-depth phenomena using a naturalistic inquiry model, with a focus on lived experiences, policies, and institutional practices.

The research involved a total population of 800 honorary teachers, comprising 500 teachers with over 10 years of service and 300 with less than 10 years. A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants who had relevant experience and roles in policy implementation or professional development efforts.

These included teachers from both elementary and junior high schools, as well as key stakeholders from the local education office and professional associations.

Data were collected using multiple techniques: participant observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, document analysis, media analysis, and member checks. Interview instruments and observation guidelines were developed based on the study objectives and reviewed by peers for validity.

During participant observation, researchers observed four honorary teachers (coded as T1–T4) in both classroom and extracurricular settings. In-depth interviews were conducted with eight teachers (T1–T8) and four policymakers (P1–P4), representing school-level and government-level perspectives. For confidentiality, all participants were anonymized using alphanumeric codes.

Table 1. Names of Nurusources

No.	Officer's Name	The name of the job title
1	P1	Head of Kasie for Awards and Power of the Cilegon City Education Office
2	P2	Head of the Sub-Coordinator for Power of the Cilegon City Education Office
3	P3	Chairman of the Cilegon City Honorary Teacher Communication Forum
4	P4	Chairman of PGRI Cilegon City
5	T1	Elementary Honorary Teacher Representative
6	T2	Elementary Honorary Teacher Representative
7	T3	Elementary Honorary Teacher Representative
8	T4	Elementary Honorary Teacher Representative
9	T5	Junior High School Honorary Teacher Representative
10	T6	Junior High School Honorary Teacher Representative
11	T7	Junior High School Honorary Teacher Representative
12	T8	Junior High School Honorary Teacher Representative

Document analysis included local regulations, official memos, education laws, and relevant government decrees on honorary teacher employment and professional development. Media analysis was conducted to examine public discourse, media reporting, and digital archives related to honorary teacher welfare in Cilegon.

To ensure data credibility, triangulation was conducted across different data sources (teachers, policymakers, and documents) and methods (observation, interview, and text analysis). Data saturation was achieved when no new information or themes emerged during the final rounds of interviews.

Ethical considerations were addressed through informed consent, voluntary participation, and confidentiality assurances. Member checks were carried out by sharing interview summaries with participants for verification and validation. Field notes and reflective journals were also maintained throughout the research process to support analytical rigor.

Data were analyzed through a four-step process: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, following Miles and Huberman's interactive model. Patterns and themes related to strategic efforts, barriers, and outcomes in developing teacher professionalism were identified and interpreted in relation to the research questions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

Teaching Competence and Technological Adaptation

Observations conducted in several elementary and junior high schools indicated that most honorary teachers implemented their teaching plans diligently and punctually. Teachers entered the classrooms on time, prepared materials in advance, and built active communication with students.

"I usually come early to prepare the board and media. When class time starts, I begin with a warm-up or short discussion," (T1)

Teachers not only delivered content but also functioned as facilitators by assisting students individually, offering directions, and making learning more visual and engaging.

"Sometimes I play audio from my phone or draw sketches on the board to help students understand better. They like visual learning," (T2)

The discipline and autonomy demonstrated by honorary teachers in lesson implementation reflect professional competence that arises from experiential learning and personal commitment. This highlights that professionalism in education is not solely defined by employment status but also by instructional practice.

Participation in Self-Development Activities

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, honorary teachers have shown increasing engagement in national and international webinars. These sessions provided insights into pedagogical innovation and digital media usage and often issued e-certificates.

"I've joined more than 20 webinars so far. They're free, informative, and now most are held on Zoom. It's easier to attend." (T5)

"I keep all my webinar certificates. They're useful for applying to programs like 'Guru Penggerak'," (T6)

The initiative to engage in self-development via online platforms shows high intrinsic motivation among teachers. This form of self-driven professional growth suggests the emergence of a grassroots learning culture, despite institutional limitations.

Understanding of Professionalism

Teachers interviewed emphasized that professionalism means mastery of subject matter and the ability to teach it effectively. Certification and employment status were considered secondary to actual performance.

"To me, being professional means knowing your material well and making sure students understand it," (T3)

The teachers also acknowledged the importance of technology tools in today's teaching practices.

"Having a laptop and knowing how to use apps helps us work faster and more efficiently. But not every honorary teacher has access to these tools." (T7)

This demonstrates an adaptive and practical understanding of professionalism among honorary teachers. Their interpretation is grounded in daily teaching realities and student-centered outcomes rather than institutional credentials.

Aspirations for Academic and Scientific Growth

Several teachers expressed interest in academic writing and requested training in software tools such as Zotero and Mendeley.

"We want to conduct classroom action research, but we need guidance. If there were training for honorary teachers, it would be very helpful," (T8)

"If we had laptops and knew how to use citation tools, I believe we could publish papers just like civil servant teachers," (T4)

These statements reflect a growing aspiration among honorary teachers to contribute academically. Their willingness to engage in scholarly work, despite limited resources, indicates the untapped intellectual potential within this group.

Government Policy and Salary Disparity Analysis

Interviews and documents revealed that the current stipend for honorary teachers is between IDR 450,000 to 675,000 per month, far below the 2022 Cilegon City Regional Minimum Wage (UMR) of IDR 4,340,254.

"The current incentive has increased from 450 thousand to 675 thousand. But it's still not enough to cover daily needs," (P1)

When calculated proportionally, the stipend represents only about 15% of the regional minimum wage. Ideally, teachers should receive at least 50% of the UMR, especially considering that 20% of the regional budget is earmarked for education.

"Our budget is limited, but we are trying to increase the incentive next year, even if gradually," (P2)

Despite performing the same tasks as civil servant teachers—including lesson planning, teaching, grading, and counseling—honorary teachers remain economically marginalized.

"We work like PNS teachers, but the pay is far from equal. Some of us have to take side jobs like tutoring or online selling to survive," (T5)

"We've been serving for over ten years, but there's still no clear path to civil servant status. We rely on PGRI to advocate for us," (P3)

The severe gap between workload and compensation reveals systemic inequality. Although the incentive increase is appreciated, it remains insufficient to meet basic living standards. These findings highlight the urgent need for a standardized incentive system that considers years of service, academic qualifications, and teaching load.

Demographics and Distribution of Honorary Teachers

Based on document analysis, the total number of honorary teachers in Cilegon City is 800, consisting of 500 teachers with more than 10 years of service and 300 with less than 10 years. Triangulated data from observations, interviews, and documentation confirm this number, with honorary teachers distributed across 300 elementary schools and 500 junior high schools. Field observations also recorded that some honorary teachers hold master's degrees (S-2), the majority have bachelor's degrees (S-1), and several are already certified as professional educators.

Table 2. Distribution of Honorary Teachers in Cilegon City

No.	Service Life	Elementary Honorary Teacher	Junior High School Honorary Teacher	Jumlah
1	Less than 10 years old	177	123	300
2	More than 10 years	287	213	500
	Jumlah			800

Document analysis showed that 800 honorary teachers serve across Cilegon's elementary and junior high schools. Among them, 500 teachers have served for more than 10 years. Most have earned bachelor's degrees, and a small number hold master's degrees or have been certified as professional educators.

"Many honorary teachers in Cilegon hold master's degrees, but their employment status remains unchanged. That's what we're fighting for through FKGTH and PGRI," (P4)

Teachers are distributed across 300 elementary and 500 junior high schools, with teaching responsibilities equal to those of permanent staff. The extensive experience and academic qualifications of many honorary teachers underscore a mismatch between service and structural recognition. The stagnation in career progression indicates the need for systematic reform in managing honorary teacher employment and incentives.

The novelty of this research lies in its comprehensive, multi-perspective exploration of the lived professional realities of honorary teachers in a mid-tier urban area in Indonesia, an educational setting that has rarely been the focus of empirical scholarly attention. This study unveils a distinctive regional model of

teacher self-development, characterized by the widespread participation of honorary teachers in free online webinars. Despite operating within a context of limited financial support, these teachers actively pursue professional growth through accessible digital platforms, representing an innovative and community-driven strategy for continuing education. Additionally, this study provides an in-depth quantitative and qualitative analysis of the disparity between honorary teacher stipends and the Regional Minimum Wage (UMR), exposing structural inequities with a degree of clarity seldom seen in previous literature. Most notably, the research highlights the intellectual aspirations of non-civil servant teachers, many of whom express a strong desire to engage in academic writing and contribute to educational scholarship. This emergent narrative reveals a largely unrecognized potential for scholarly productivity within marginalized segments of the education workforce, offering critical insight into the resilience, ambition, and underutilized capacities of honorary teachers in Indonesia's evolving educational landscape.

DISCUSSION

Instructional Competence in Constrained Contexts

This study confirms that honorary teachers in Cilegon City, despite limited employment recognition, demonstrate professional instructional behavior through punctuality, classroom engagement, and adherence to planned teaching strategies. These behaviors are consistent with the findings of Li et al. (2022), who argue that positive emotional engagement with students can buffer workplace limitations and improve instructional quality. Even without the formal status of civil servants, many of these teachers display a strong sense of pedagogical commitment, aligning with Martimianakis et al.'s (2009) interpretation of professionalism as a socially constructed identity influenced by daily practice.

Professional Development via Web-Based Learning

The widespread adoption of webinars and online learning platforms by honorary teachers represents a significant departure from traditional, top-down teacher development models. While Cilliers et al. (2022) emphasize the long-term cost-effectiveness of structured training, the current study highlights an emergent, decentralized form of professional development driven by individual teacher motivation rather than institutional mandates. This bottom-up strategy, emerging in a resource-constrained setting, supports Baidoo-Anu's (2022) argument that motivation and agency can flourish even in marginal conditions when accessible pathways are available. Such findings position Cilegon's teachers as exemplars of professional autonomy under financial and institutional limitations.

Evolving Notions of Professionalism

Honorary teachers in this study conceptualize professionalism through the lens of instructional mastery, clarity of delivery, and student learning—rather than formal employment status or certification. This practical, reflective understanding of professional identity aligns with Raiker (2020), who defines professionalism as praxis rooted in context and pedagogy. Furthermore, the teachers' expressed desire to engage in academic writing and research suggests a transition from being

knowledge transmitters to knowledge producers—consistent with Scanlon and Connolly (2021), who advocate for teacher agency in scholarly production.

Structural Inequities in Compensation and Recognition

The economic disparity between honorary teacher stipends (IDR 450,000–675,000/month) and the 2022 Cilegon City UMR (IDR 4,340,254) reveals stark inequities. At less than 15% of the UMR, the compensation is insufficient to support a sustainable livelihood. This reflects broader concerns by Liebowitz (2021) about the failure of evaluation and accountability systems when not matched with appropriate compensation and institutional support. Moreover, the uniformity of incentives—regardless of academic qualifications or years of service—undermines merit-based recognition, contradicting the findings of Zhou et al. (2022) on skill-based remuneration in educational labor markets.

Administrative Constraints and Marginalization

Despite professional dedication, many honorary teachers are excluded from external school representations and administrative entitlements due to their informal employment status. As Nuzulia and Rupiaty (2016) observe, such exclusion limits professional satisfaction and career advancement, even when intrinsic motivation remains high. While the Cilegon City Education Office has initiated steps to increase incentives, structural budget limitations remain a key barrier, reflecting Fraenkel's (2022) argument that regional labor market conditions often mismatch with job qualifications and responsibilities.

This study introduces three critical novelties that significantly contribute to the understanding of professional development and equity within the educational sector. First, it highlights the emergence of a grassroots, digitally mediated professional development model. Unlike traditional, top-down initiatives typically imposed by central authorities, this study demonstrates how teachers in low-resource contexts have independently embraced webinars as a means of advancing their professional growth. This approach occurs without the need for government mandates, showcasing the autonomy and resourcefulness of educators in navigating their own development paths. Second, the study offers a quantified insight into the economic injustices faced by teachers, particularly through the detailed comparison of honorary teacher incomes with regional minimum wages. This rare empirical analysis uncovers the systemic wage inequity that exists in decentralized educational systems, shedding light on a topic that is often overlooked. Lastly, the research challenges prevailing assumptions about non-PNS educators by revealing their latent intellectual potential. Despite their marginalized status, many teachers express a strong desire to write, publish, and engage in research, thus positioning themselves as active intellectuals within the profession rather than passive recipients of educational policies. This disruption of traditional perceptions marks an important shift toward recognizing the aspirations and capabilities of all educators, regardless of their employment status.

This research makes a significant contribution to the discourse on teacher professionalism in emerging economies by documenting how structural constraints are negotiated through personal agency, community strategies, and adaptive pedagogical innovation. It offers empirical grounding for policy shifts that recognize

and institutionalize professional achievements among non-civil servant educators. It also invites further exploration into non-traditional models of teacher development that prioritize autonomy, flexibility, and digital access.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated strategic efforts to improve the professionalism of honorary teachers in Cilegon City. The main findings reveal that professional development is primarily pursued through career enhancement programs and professional certification initiatives. Certification is emphasized as an essential qualification to recognize teachers' competencies, including those who are non-permanent or honorary. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives is hindered by limited regional budget allocations and inconsistencies in service-based benefit distribution.

The key contribution of this study lies in its identification of institutional and financial barriers that affect the professionalization of honorary teachers, offering a localized insight into broader challenges faced in decentralized education systems. This research provides a valuable foundation for policymakers in designing more inclusive and sustainable support mechanisms for non-permanent educators.

Nonetheless, the study is limited by its focus on a single region, which may not fully reflect the diversity of conditions in other areas. Moreover, it does not explore the perspectives of the teachers themselves in depth, which could further enrich the analysis.

Future research should consider a comparative approach across multiple regions and integrate qualitative insights from honorary teachers to deepen understanding. Additionally, longitudinal studies could assess the long-term impact of professional development policies on teaching performance and student outcomes.

In terms of policy implications, the local government of Cilegon City is encouraged to prioritize investment in teacher professionalization, recognizing its pivotal role in enhancing educational quality. A more equitable and transparent system for determining benefits and support for honorary teachers is also necessary to motivate and retain competent educators.

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