

The Nobility of Teaching and Its Dilemma in Indonesia: Elementary School Teachers' Perspective

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This study aims to determine the perception of elementary school teachers about their work and how it impacts their professionalism and work as teacher. The analysis was carried out qualitatively. Data were collected through an open questionnaire and followed by interviews with several teachers who were considered as their representatives in a Focus Group Discussion (FGD). The results of the reading of the questionnaire and interview data were combined to understand the meaning and find categories until essential themes were found as research findings. This study found that elementary school teachers, both public and private, perceived their professions as teachers as good. They saw teaching as noble work. Many teachers were experiencing a dilemma in undergoing the profession as a teacher. This research implied that authorities in government and institutions have to provide a solution to the dilemmas faced by teachers in primary schools so that they have high enthusiasm for carrying out their profession as teachers in primary schools.

Key words: *Teaching, elementary school, teacher, the nobility of teaching.*

Introduction

Becoming a teacher in Indonesia is a difficult choice for some people because many consider that the teaching profession has a low salary, especially for elementary school teachers (Sulisworo et al., 2016). Even so, there are still many people who make the teaching profession as the primary choice. When choosing teaching as a profession, they have realised all its consequences and consider that salary is not the primary goal in education. Therefore when they asked their reasons for choosing teachers as a profession, several reasons emerge.

From a theological and religious perspective, teaching is a noble work. Almost all religions in the world see education as a worthy work and highly recommended to do. In Islam, for example, people who teach just one letter are rewarded with lots of praise (Kaandhlawi,

1982). In Christianity, teaching is also a noble work (Citra, 2017), likewise, in Hinduism (Narayan, 1989) and Buddhism (Kung, 1998). Therefore, many people enjoyed becoming teachers or teaching their knowledge to others honestly because of these theological and religious impulses.

In Indonesia, research on teachers' perceptions of teaching and how they view their profession has not been done much. There have been several studies on teaching excellence, but most are conceptual and theoretical, both from a theological and religious perspective (Astuti, 2011; Wahyuni, 2014). Research that explores directly the views of teachers on how they perceive their profession and what complaints they feel while being a teacher, receive less attention. Whereas in the field, there are a lot of problems related to their business as teachers and the dilemmas when they have to choose teaching as a profession (Wibowo, 2015), such as quality, welfare, and politic (Sulisworo et al., 2016).

Elementary school education is essential because it is a foundation for the formation of student character to step onto a higher level (Demirel et al., 2016). At this stage, education is directed more at character building (Siswono et al., 2017). If a child gets a good education in elementary school, that will be enough capital for him to enter the next level of education. Therefore paying attention to primary school education is vital for parents, the community, and the government.

If basic education is essential, primary school teachers are crucial. Elementary school students will not be suitable if good teachers do not educate them. If so, paying attention to the fate and condition of primary school teachers is a must for authorities (Thoonen et al., 2011). Their quality and performance must be improved to be able to teach well, because of the quality of good students produced from excellent teaching provided by good teachers. If this circulation is correct, it will build an active school (Creemers, 1994).

The teachers must have a good perception of their work because if they see the profession as good, they will carry out their duties with pleasure and excitement. After all, one's perception positively influences his behaviour (Berlyne, 1951) as well as vice versa (Allport, 1995). Therefore knowing one's understanding is essential to predict one's behaviour in carrying out their work (Powers & William, 1973). Knowing the perception of elementary school teachers about their work is critical to make authorised people able to take appropriate action to direct them towards better behaviour (Bruner & Leo, 1949).

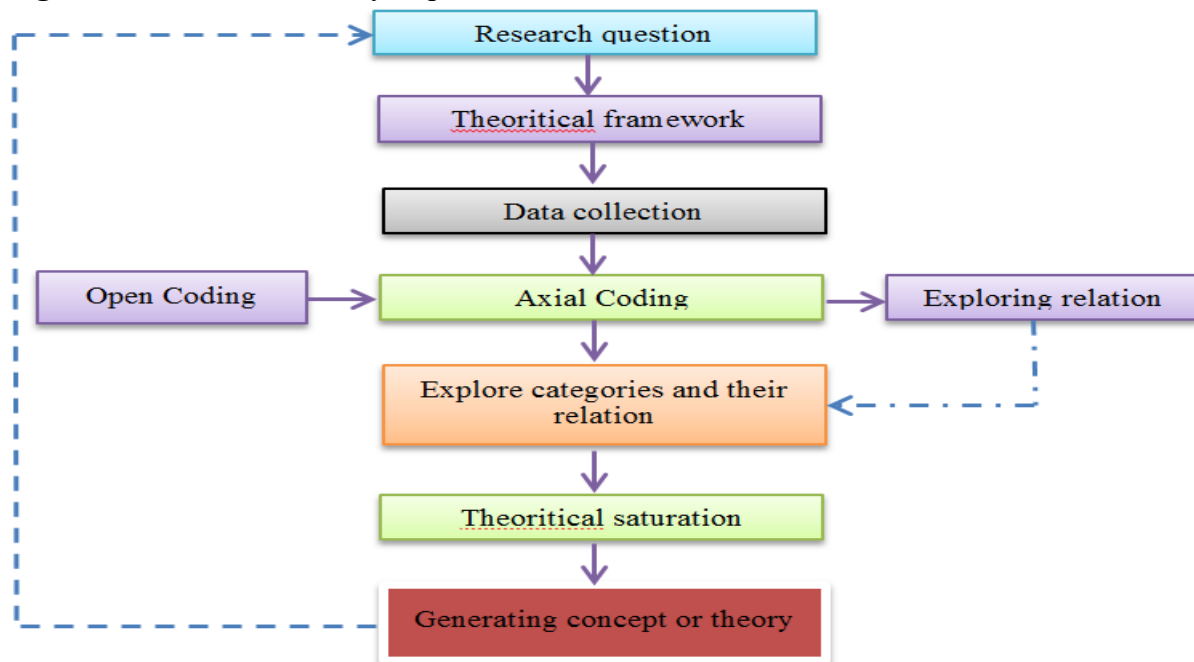
Knowing the value held by a person is also important because values affect his behaviour (Bruner & Goodman, 1947). Values will change the way, practice, and performance of a person at work (Blood, 1969). Even specific values, such as religious and social values, can become extraordinary energy for someone, both as a motivator and a filter in doing

something (Scheufele et al., 2009). Many studies have examined the relationship between values and behaviour (Schaubroeck et al., 2007), values, and performance (Collins et al., 2007), all of which confirm that values have a positive impact on a person's behaviour and performance at work.

Methodology

The study investigated the views of elementary school teachers on teaching values. The researcher asked them why did they choose teaching as their provision, what factors affect them to be serious in teaching provision. Will they change their teacher provision if they got another job better than teaching, and what should schools and government do to support their teaching provision better?

Figure 1. Research and analysis process



Participants

Participants in this research were elementary school teachers who study a master's program at the postgraduate of State Islamic University (UIN). Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang granted the scholarship by the government in 2016-2018 that contain twenty teachers; ten public teachers and ten private teachers. Their ages range from 25 to 40 years with tenure of 5 to 15 years.

They come from various elementary schools from different cities in Indonesia. They are representatives of the schools who proposed their teachers take part in a scholarship program to increase primary school teachers, which is held by the Indonesian government. Those who passed the test would be fully funded by the government to study at the master's level at designated institutions.

Data Collection

This research used a qualitative research approach. Data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire and interviews. To know their views on the topic, the researcher firstly distributed the open questionnaire to them to know briefly about it. After reading their responses on the questionnaires, the researcher chooses five elementary public school teachers and five private elementary school teachers to be interviewed to deepen the topics in the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) (Kitzinger, 1995). Participants talked, lasting between 15 to 20 minutes each. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and reviewed several times to ensure the completeness of the data.

Data Analysis

To analyse the data, the researcher followed the process suggested by Creswell (2009). Before analysing the data, the researcher transcribed all the data and read them several times to know the essential points of the answers. Coding for this study focused on any data relating to their opinion on teaching, especially the reason they chose the teaching provision and their seriousness in teaching by giving them any alternatives if there is another job better than education. After data were coded, the researcher developed themes relate to the topic (Chenail, 2012). The issues arising from the coding were placed under the appropriate framework heading, depending on their opinion on the teaching provision. The researcher also differed between the private and public teachers to know what factors support teachers to be consistent in the teaching provision. This point is important because we should know what steps must be done by schools and the government to support public and private teachers who continue teaching, especially in elementary schools.

Finding

After analysing the data, the researcher found essential themes which summarized in table 1. In general, the issues encountered by researchers were classified into three categories, namely (1) factors that encourage becoming a teacher, (2) the dilemma experienced during becoming a teacher, (3) their hopes for authorities to solve teacher problems in elementary school.

Factors to Motivate Being a Teacher

In the analysis of the questionnaire and interview data, the researchers found several essential themes related to the reasons they chose the teaching profession and their perceptions of the teaching profession. There is no significant difference between public and private teachers on this issue. The researcher found several essential factors that emerge from their answers, that encourage them to become a teacher, namely: theological factors, social factors, and psychological factors.

Table 1: The noble of teaching and it's dilemma

Elements	Teacher's responses
Why they are choosing the teaching provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theological factor ➤ Religious teaching ➤ Community values • Social factor ➤ Family ➤ Social status ➤ Teachers charismatic • Psychological factor ➤ Teaching is a dream ➤ Teaching is self-esteem ➤ Teaching is satisfaction ➤ Teaching is salvation ➤ Teaching is comfort
The dilemma to be elementary school teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low salary • Low social status • Family forces • No other choices
What should school and government do	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard salary and teachers welfare • Supporting teachers to improve • Facilitate teachers' need • Listening to teachers' voices

Theological Factor

The classical reason for teachers to choose to teach as their profession is because education is an honour. Almost all participants said that the teaching is noble and an honour. There was no difference between public and private teachers in responding to this question. When they asked the reason to choose teaching as provision, participant 2 and 4 said:

Teaching is an honored job and worthiness...the grant is not only in the world but also in the hereafter... (P.2)

I choose to be a teacher because teaching is an honorable profession... (P.4)

For them, the honour of teaching is not only in the world but also after the world. All participants in this research embrace Islamic religion and believe in God, so for them, teaching is a profession that is not only beneficial for them in the world alone but also hereafter. For this reason, one of the private teachers said:

*If not because of the honor of teaching, I have leave teaching for several years ago..." (P.1)
No profession more honor than teaching, so if not because of that honor, I can't stay longer to be a teacher... (P3)*

Teaching is glorious. That is the ultimate reason why people chose the teaching profession. Teaching is a job that can't be changed by another task, even if the school didn't pay them for their instruction. The nobility of teaching itself can make some teachers to be able to stay longer in teaching.

Some private elementary school teachers prefer to teach in elementary school because they see teaching as *jihad*. They argue preventing the generation from foolishness is the obligation of everybody to do. In the religious context, especially Islam, preparing a new generation to be a sound generation is the obligation of everyone, and that becomes the reason why some teachers are continuing teaching in elementary school with a low salary or without salary. They said:

I teach not because I hope the salary from school, but I just hope the mercy from God. Teaching is jihad and salvation. Even if the school doesn't pay me, I will do it.... (P.2)

Most teachers see teaching work as noble and taught by religion. Because all participants are Muslim, they see that Islam strongly emphasises the importance of teaching knowledge to others so that with this teaching, they base themselves as choosing teachers as professions. One participant said.

My religion teaches me that we should keep our generation from foolishness...who will care for them if not us. (P.4).

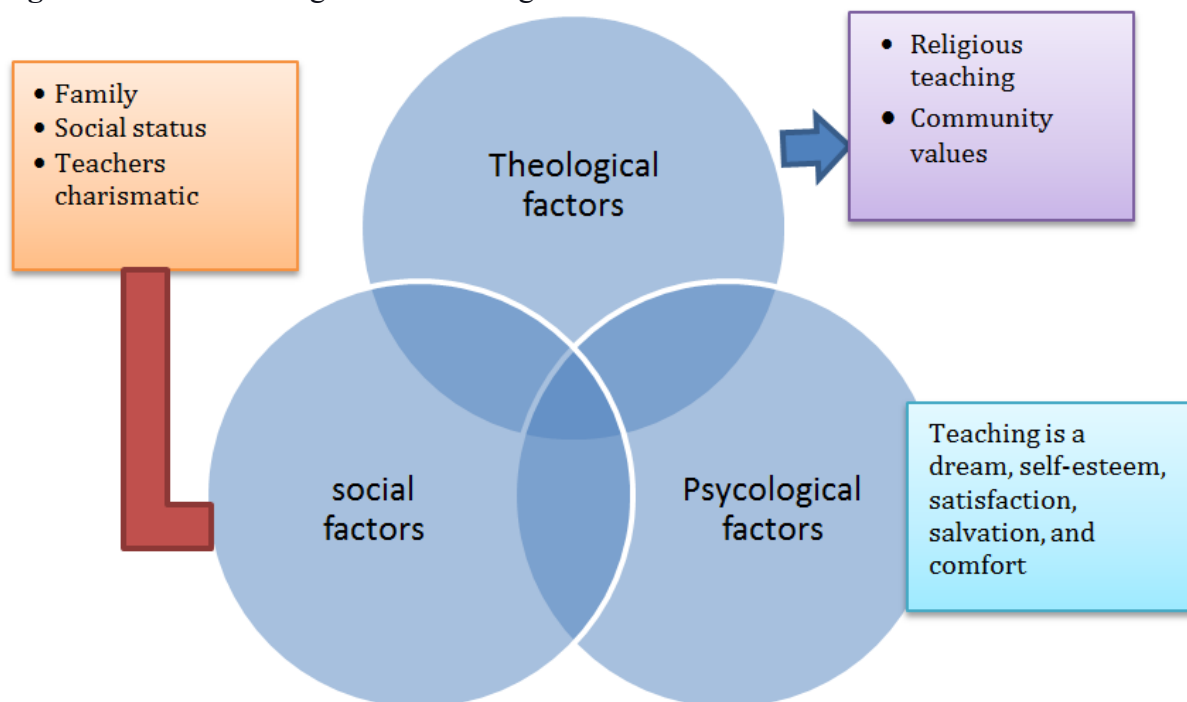
Some teachers are encouraged to become teachers because they carry out religious orders that teaching is worship and sacrifice. They must teach what they have to the next generation because they cannot leave them in ignorance.

Social Factor

Among elementary school teachers, some are interested in the teaching profession because of encouragement from the family. Because their parents became teachers, some of them wanted to become teachers like their parents. When they see their parents being able to live a comfortable and respectable life in society for being teachers, they want to be like their parents. They idolise their parents and finally want to be like them. In this case, one participant said:

I wanted to be a teacher because of my parents. I see my parents are patient, straightforward, and respected by the community for being a teacher. Because of that, I always idolised them and wanted to be like them. (P.5)

Figure 2. The motivating factors of being a teacher



Parents are an essential factor that drives some elementary school teachers to become teachers. Some become teachers because of their parents' wishes. They are directed by parents to become teachers and may continue their studies but in the teaching faculty. Among them said:

Initially, I was not interested in becoming a teacher. But because my parents wanted me to be a teacher, I had to follow his wishes. In fact, in the past, I was not allowed to continue my



studies except at the faculty of teaching. but now I am used to and living my profession as a teacher with enjoyment. (P.6)

My father and my mother are teachers. I see them teach students in their school with happiness. When they come home, sometimes, they still discussed their children, and I heard it. I think that was amazing, and I want to be like them... (P.3)

Some are interested in becoming teachers because they see the charisma of their teachers in high school. Seeing the teacher who is attractive, authoritative, and caring, causes some of them to idolise them and want to be like them. Therefore, they want to become a teacher like a teacher he/she admired. One participant said:

I am interested in becoming a teacher since I was studying at High School. I love seeing my charismatic teacher, behaves politely, is helpful, and is not arrogant. I idolized him, and I aspired to be like him to be a teacher. (P.8)

In my experience... when I was a student in elementary school, I saw my teachers teache me sincerely. They look pleased to help me, even out of school. That was inspired me that I want to be like them.... (P.6)

Among elementary school teachers interested in becoming teachers, are those that want to because of the social status of teachers in the community. Most teachers in their place get functional status in the city. They are respected and needed by the community in various social activities. Therefore, one elementary school teacher said:

I'm interested in becoming a teacher because of the proper social status of the teacher in the community. Maybe their salaries are mediocre, but their social status is high in mu community. Usually, they are respected and needed by them. If there are community activities, the teachers are always appreciated and placed in an honorable position. I think that's cool and I like it. (P.7)

Those are some social factors that encouraged teachers to be interested in becoming primary school teachers. Social factors become the factors that strongly encourage someone interested in becoming a teacher. Teacher behaviour at school, parents 'work as a teacher, parents' desire for their children to become teachers, and the good social status of teachers in the community, are the main attraction, making people who see them idolise them and want to be like them.

Psychological Factor

Some participants have another reason. They choose to teach because it was their dream from their childhood. When they saw their teacher in elementary school, teaching them with humility and care, it inspired them that teaching is noble and beautiful. In those times emerge in their heart the intention to be teachers. One of them said:

I was interested in becoming a teacher from childhood. Therefore, when playing with my friends, I often fight as a teacher in front, pretending to be a teacher, and teaching them. I like that role, and until now, I still like it. (P.10)

Doing the job happily is a crucial factor supporting the success of teaching in elementary school. If teachers feel comfortable teaching their students, they will do it seriously without any burden and pressure from others. That was the reason why some teachers chose teaching as their profession. By teaching, they can meet children and play together with them at school. That is the most beautiful time for them in their daily life. Some of the public elementary school teachers said:

Teaching is beautiful and happy because I like children, and to meet them in school is the best moment in my life... (P.9)

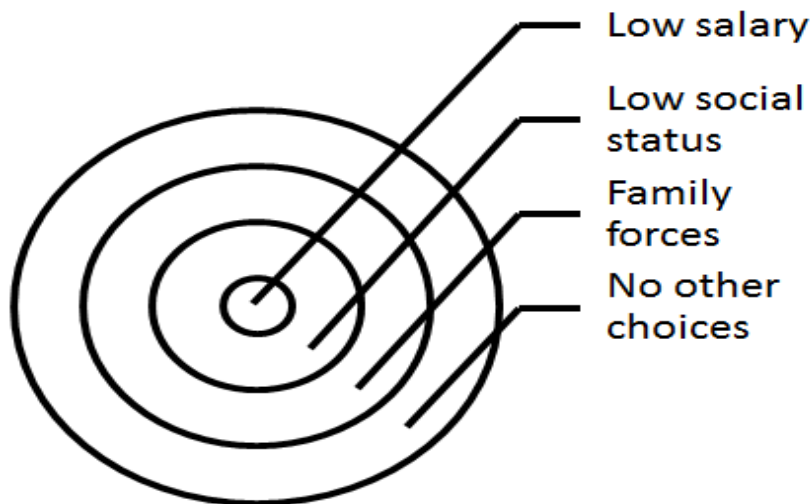
Some teachers feel comfortable teaching, especially when they see their children are able to do what they teach them. One of them said:

When I see my students grow up, and they can do their job step by step, that was a wonderful and most beautiful moment that I feel it... (P.6)

Some teachers are satisfied when they see that their students understand and carry out what they learn, so that it encourages them to continue teaching at school even if they only get a low salary. The explanations above show that psychological factors are important factors that encourage a person to become a teacher and even able to survive as a teacher in any situation.

Dilemma: Teaching as a Profession or Devotion?

Figure 3. A teacher's dilemma of being elementary school teachers



Many private elementary school teachers sometimes doubt about continuing teaching. They love teaching very much, but their salary from teaching is not enough to have a good life. They choose to teach as their profession because they don't have another choice to do another job. They have to continue teaching because of their bachelor certificate in education. They want to do another job outside of teaching, but they can't. If they do so, they have to open their own business privately. They can't bear teaching anymore because the salary of teaching in private elementary schools is too low and under the standard. Some of them said:

I don't know what I have to say...but it's real. I choose to teach because I don't have another choice to do. I like teaching and that was my passion. But sometimes I think to get another job to bear my family better. (P.10)

These quotes indicate that some teachers are choosing to teach because there is no way for them to do another job. They remain as elementary school teachers because they do not have other better jobs. If they had better choices, they would leave teaching and choose other, more prospective jobs.

Teaching is very nice, and I like it very much, but I have to be realistic. I need to have a settle job that support me and my family life... (P.8)

Although some say that whatever happens, they will not leave the profession as a teacher, even if the salary is small or not paid. For this group, they have to work again outside of school. Many teachers were online motorcycle taxi drivers, trading at the afternoon market, opening a shop or stall at home, with the consequence that they can't be concerned with

teaching at school and are not focused on teaching. Therefore it is not surprising that the quality of the primary education institutions that they manage is unsatisfactory, and even many are not qualified.

Some of my friends finally resigned from the teacher and chose another job that he thought was more promising. But life is a choice. He has the right to make his own choices. (P.5)

Many private teachers finally resigned to accept this bitter reality. On the one hand, they are proud to be teachers as a profession despite being given minimal wages by institutions, and on the other hand, they must give up their intention to serve.

We cannot continue like this. Indeed our religion teaches us to devote ourselves to spirituality and nation. Our faith also teaches us to spread our knowledge to the community. But the way is not like this (P.9).

I think teaching in a formal school is different from teaching in a mosque or a place to study the Qur'an. If you told to teach the Qur'an, even if not paid, that's okay. But if you train at school, you should be paid a decent salary (P10)

There are several problems faced by private elementary school teachers in Indonesia. Most of them are interested in becoming teachers for psychological and theological reasons, but because of economic factors, many of them have to choose between remaining being a teacher with minimal salaries or looking for another job that is better paid. Many of them also take the middle position, which is still teaching in elementary schools but only part-time and the rest of the time they use to do business outside of schools, such as trading or farming.

Supporting Elementary School Teachers

The elementary school teachers in the context of the study, believed that teaching is glorious, beautiful, and enjoyable. They loved it very much, and some of them will do it even if they don't have any salary from it. But besides this, some teachers feel in doubt when they have to face any problems related to their teaching provision. They proposed some suggestions to the institution and government to make some points: (1) improving teacher's welfare, (2) supporting teachers to improve, (3) facilitating teacher's need, and (4) listening teacher's voices.

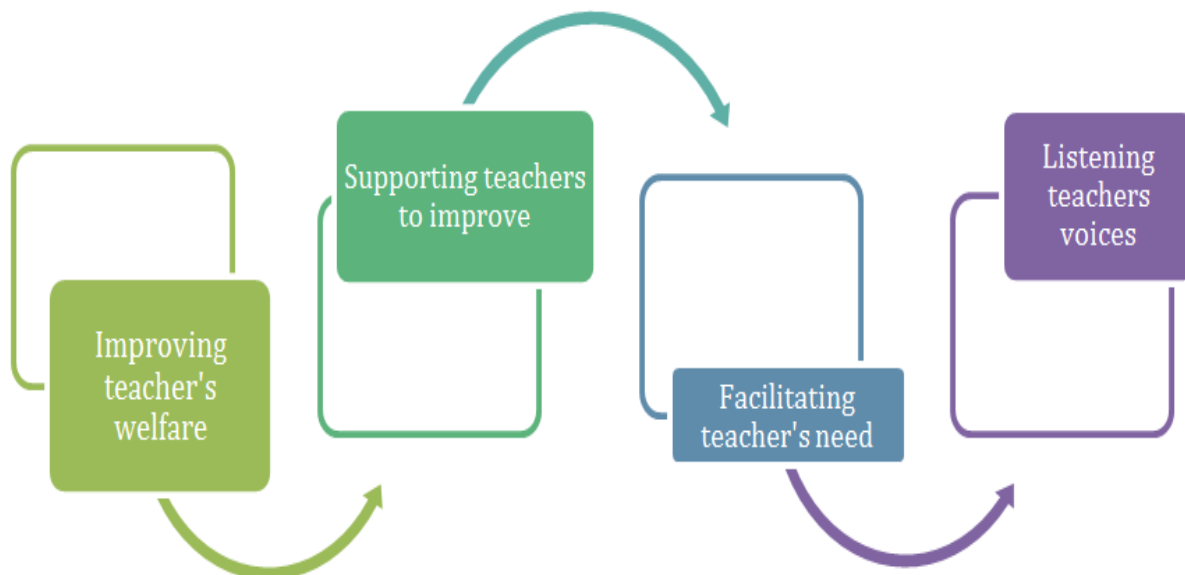
Most of the private elementary school teachers feel that the salary they got from school and government is sub-standard. This factor sometimes makes them struggle less to teach their students and when they find another job, it is better. One of the participants quotes:

I like teaching very much, but the salary I got from teaching is not enough to support my own life, even for my family... (P.7)

Most of the private school teachers have the same quotes at this point. Some of them have got a supportive salary from the government if they passed the examination of professional teachers. However, this favourable salary still does not cover all private school teachers in Indonesia. Only a few of them has been recognised as a professional teacher and got a supportive salary. One of them said:

The government has an excellent program in certifying teachers' professionalism, but it covers a few private teachers only. While vast numbers of us still have an unclear status... (P.4)

Figure 4. Steps of supporting elementary school teachers



Teacher's welfare became an essential issue in Indonesia because there are vast numbers of teachers—especially private teachers—who still demand the goodwill of the Indonesian government to give them the salary of certification.

Many teachers quoted that they face difficulties in improving their professionalism as teachers because they lack facilities in developing their abilities in implementing teacher's professionalism. One of them quoted,

We want to enhance our capabilities in teaching and doing the other skill relate to our job, but our difficulty is the lack of facilities that support us to do that... (P.6)

The complaint about the lack of facilities is indeed a popular complaint among elementary school teachers. They did not protest against the government but only wanted them to carry out their duties properly following the demands of the government. According to them, if the school facilities are fulfilled and complete, it will make it easier for them to carry out the tasks assigned to them, both related to school work and the government.

When the government orders us for implementing their program, likes the K-13 curriculum, for example, we can't do it well because our resources do not support to do that. We just wait for the support from the government, but sometimes our government has limitations also in facilitating us... (P.2)

Those quotes indicate that schools and governments have to improve their support toward the teachers' need to improve their abilities in implementing their job. As teachers, they need to renew their knowledge and repair their skills to do their job that supports community development.

Primary school teachers expect their voices to be heard by the authorities, at the institutional, regional, and national levels. During this time, they felt their voices had never been heard. Honorary teachers who have long been in elementary schools, both public and private, are not adequately valued by them. Institutions and governments expect their existence, but their fate is not heeded and their voices not heard. Some of them said.

We hope the government hears our complaints and understands our needs. We have served the country long enough, so we also want our fate to be taken care of by the authorities. (P.7)
This situation makes some of them lose hope to carry out their duties as professional teachers in primary schools. When the government hears the voices of elementary school teachers, they do not only mean accommodating their aspirations, but also trying to realise them in real program and work.

Discussion

Our findings illustrate that all teachers, both public and private, perceive teaching as a noble profession. They see that teaching is a good and honourable profession. This finding is in line with other writings that argue that education is a noble profession (Aguilar & Santos, 2018; Johnson, 2012; Sekar, 2017). However, some teachers experience a dilemma between what is ideal and the reality. Ideally, they assume that teaching is noble, and they want to remain being a teacher, because education for them is happy and comfortable. But the reality of life requires them to think more rationally when their income from teaching is not enough, that makes them tend to throw away the nobility of the teaching profession to other professions that are better financially. This fact is in line with what was voiced by Gargi (2014) who

invited people to restore the glory of teaching. According to him, the meagre salary of a teacher was the main factor that the younger generation avoided the teaching profession. They prefer jobs that generate more wages than teaching. As a result, only students who scored low were left to join teaching, while excellent students prefer the brightest careers. Angelista (2018) also found a dilemma in student-teacher perceptions of the teaching profession. On the one hand, they see teaching is a noble job, and on the other hand, they perceive negatively as related to salary, career, and work volume (Fareo, 2015). Some also regret that teaching is noble but not always professional, because many want to teach but do not make it as their primary profession (Keevy, 2009).

From the explanation above, the dilemma in the teaching profession between its excellent and low salary, is a global phenomenon which is not only faced by the Indonesian state, but almost all under-developing countries and also some developed countries experience it (Aguilar & Santos, 2018). The main problem that forms the basis of this dilemma is that the state or institution is unable to provide a standard salary or even more than other professions. If the teaching profession gets a standard salary or is higher than the wages of different occupations, the teaching profession will become a struggle, so that two goodnesses can become one, namely teaching as a noble and well-paid profession. Therefore, strengthening the teaching profession will not run well if it not followed by salary improvement. Even so, it does not rule out other factors, as suggested by the teachers - facilitating teachers to improve and hearing the teacher's voice – which can also improve teacher performance.

For public teachers, we may not see many complaints from them because, financially and socially, they benefit. Their salaries every month are enough above the Indonesian national minimum wage standard, and most of them also get an additional salary from the certification program. Socially, the status of public teachers is higher in the eyes of the Indonesian people than private teachers. With individual teachers, their fate is still caused for concern. Such conditions can lead to a teacher's low performance and low student achievement (Chasanah, 2015; Sari, 2016), and a little teacher welfare positively affects the low quality of Indonesian education (Al-Jawi, 2006; Normawati, 2014). Therefore, efforts to strengthen and empower teachers must be made to improve the quality and performance of teachers, which in turn will also improve the quality of student achievement (Asiatina, 2011).

Conclusion and Recommendation

Primary school teachers in Indonesia have many problems, especially problems relating to the welfare and quality of teachers. Some teachers teach in elementary schools because of the profession, other teachers teach because of dedication and others, because they have no other choice. Private teachers who have received a teacher certification program from the government will make teaching a profession. Still, those who have not received a certification



program will consider teaching as a service or devotion and the rest because they are forced to teach. What distinguishes the characteristics of primary school teachers in education is because of the status and the amount of salary they get each month.

The Indonesian government is obliged to improve the welfare of private and public teachers in primary schools, and to improve their motivation in teaching. Many studies have shown that employee wages have a positive effect on job satisfaction and employee performance (Lee and Elizabeth 1985; Sharma 2011). Therefore the problem of teacher welfare must receive serious attention from the government to improve the quality and performance of teachers in primary schools in Indonesia.

The nobility of teaching alone is not enough to make the primary motivation in improving performance. Indeed religious and social values can be factors that encourage a person's behaviour to persist in job performance (Blood 1969). Still, teacher welfare is an important, influential factor to performance (Singh and Loncar 2010). Besides, the government is also obliged to improve their quality. When the government launches new programs, they must be given to elementary school teachers immediately, both private and public. Government attention to public and private primary schools must be balanced. Because so far, private primary schools have received less attention from the government, especially from the aspect of improving the quality of teachers, except for advanced and quality private primary schools, which can improve the quality and welfare of their teachers independently.

For further research, it is recommended that researchers examine other themes relating to primary school teachers, especially those relating to issues about the relationship between teacher welfare and performance, the relationship between job satisfaction and teacher work performance and other related themes with the work productivity of elementary school teachers, both with qualitative and quantitative approaches.

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