



## The Meaning of Work for Indonesian Professional Teacher in Vocational Education: A Phenomenological Research

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<b>Article History</b>  <b>Article Submission</b> 25 September 2022 <b>Revised Submission</b> 28 October 2022 <b>Article Accepted</b> 08 November 2022	<b>Abstract</b>  Research on the meaning of work for professional teachers in vocational education is still rare. This study fills that void by exploring the experiences of vocational teachers who have received awards as professional teachers and outstanding teachers. This study aims to find the concepts of the meaning of work for professional teachers while carrying out their professional duties. A purposive sampling technique was used to determine 11 (eleven) vocational teachers as informants. Semi-structured interviews carried out data mining. Interview transcripts were analyzed using NVivo-12 with the stages of open coding, axial coding, and generic coding based on inductive themes. The study findings reveal 5 (five) themes: (1) helping students achieve future goals, (2) achieving important goals, (3) obtaining happiness and life satisfaction, (4) being valuable as a field of worship, and (5) aiming to develop their knowledge.  <b>Keywords:</b> Happiness and Satisfaction; Meaning of Work; Worship; Vocational Teacher
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## Introduction

Some problems arise because the orientation of being a teacher is not a calling factor, not even an important choice, as is the situation of teachers in Indonesia. Most of them are not enthusiastic, have low motivation, have an impact on the service function in learning that is not optimal and their involvement in self-development activities do not go well (Bogler & Nir, 2014; Čulibrk et al., 2018). On the other hand, choosing to be safe and not making a real contribution to educational problems. This phenomenon is detrimental to many parties, including students as the future generation, and adds to the number of new problems in the education sector. This study constructs the experience of vocational teachers in working and finding meaning and impact on their work and life.

## Literature Review

Based on the literature study, the definition of work is a person's goal to work and understanding of the work done (Pignault & Houssemand, 2021; Wrzesniewski, 2003). The meaning of work consists of the characteristics (attributes) of individuals in working significantly, a description of their work, and how important the work is in their lives (Ardichvili & Kuchinke, 2009). Another study described as a set of values, beliefs, attitudes, and expectations that people have about work (Gaggiotti, 2006). Furthermore, the meaning is obtained after producing or doing something to the work in the context of life. The meaning of work is a form of individual appreciation for meeting economic needs by carrying out work activities in the work environment. So, what is meant by work is the individual's perspective to get involved, produce something, and feel a positive impact.

Qualitative studies on the meaning of work for teachers have been discussed at various levels of preliminary school, secondary school, and general school (Suyatno et al., 2021) (Demirkasimoglu, 2015) but at the vocational school level and involving qualified informants has not been discussed. On the other hand, theories and concepts about professional teachers apply to all teachers and there are contrasting gradations at the implementation stage. Of course, vocational teachers have different characteristics from general teachers, for example, in the perspective of education, the goal is to prepare them for work, entrepreneurship, and continuing that must be mastered by teachers, but not for general teachers. This qualitative research aims to explore the meaning of work for vocational teachers.

## Method

The qualitative research design was decided as the best strategy for phenomena involving the nature of psychology and philosophy (Huberman & Miles, 1983) in exploring the meaning of working through the experience of professional teachers in vocational education. The phenomenological approach is used to understand the meaning of working during a career as a professional teacher. Their experiences with proven high performance are important to reveal, how they view their work beyond the habits of teachers in general.

The research was conducted on vocational education teachers in the province of Yogyakarta in 2022 because of the cultural aspects, the inherent student city awards, and the quality of teachers with high-performance standards. A purposive sampling technique was applied in selecting vocational teachers and decided as informants. The criteria for determining informants based on academic qualifications are a Bachelor of Education or diploma IV, a working period of not less than 5 years (Ward & King, 2017), a professional certificate, and having received an award as a vocational teacher who excels in the last 5 (five) years. A total of 11 (eleven) informants were selected and contributed to this study classified based on the field of teaching, gender, age, and work experience (Siwek et al., 2017).

Table 1. Demographic details of 11 informants

Informants (pseudonyms)	Field of teaching	Gender	Age	Work experience
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Informants (pseudonyms)	Field of teaching	Gender	Age	Work experience
Atun (In)	Productive	Female	42	16 years
Betty (In)	Productive	Female	45	20 years
Dwi (In)	Productive	Female	49	22 years
Eko (Im)	Adaptive	Male	47	23 years
Hadi (Im)	Adaptive	Male	43	19 years
Ika (In)	Adaptive	Female	35	11 years
Indayatmi (In)	Productive	Female	45	24 years
Marzuli (In)	Productive	Male	51	23 years
Ula (Im)	Productive	Female	51	26 years
Unggun (Im)	Productive	Male	42	9 years
Yulia (Im)	Productive	Female	51	27 years

Notes: in is indigenous teacher and Im is immigration teachers

Data were collected from January to July 2022 from 10 (ten) vocational schools with public status and 1 (one) vocational school with private status in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews consisting of 8 (eight) open-ended questions. All interviews were recorded by digital voice and made notes (memos) on important events. The collected data was transcribed and re-checked by the vocational teacher to ensure the suitability of the conversation content.

The steps taken are reviewing the literature on the meaning of work for teachers. The results of the literature study become the basis for determining in developing research questions. In addition, several questions have been adjusted to the context of vocational education. Specifically, the questions asked by the teacher include: (1) the meaning of work for you and the purpose of working as a teacher in vocational education, (2) what makes you meaningful in your work and gain status as a professional teacher? (3) What activities did you do while you were a teacher that was meaningful, (4) How did you maintain meaning in your work?

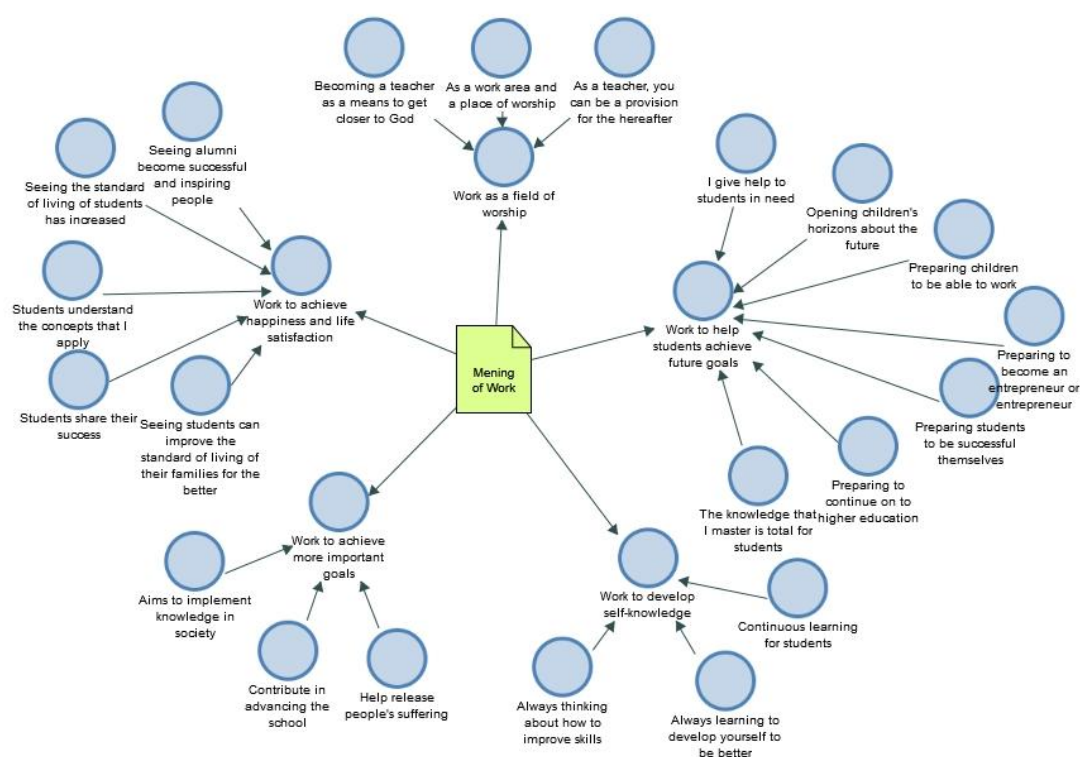


Figure 1. Meaning of work for vocational teachers

Thematic analysis is applied to identify, evaluate and generate themes revealed by informants (Galloway & Jenkins, 2005). The initial stage is reading each transcript repeatedly, noting any codes that appear. The second stage groups the codes into the appropriate theme. The researcher discusses the relationship between the code and the theme by reviewing the previous questions. To facilitate the coding and categorization of data using the NVivo 12 program. The findings from the data analysis are presented in Figure 1.

## Results

Vocational teachers express their experiences, namely the reasons for teaching, involvement in school development, self-development to keep learning, the desire to share and promote change in society, and the reasons and impacts of work are constructions of meaning.

### *Work to help students achieve future goals*

Among the 11 informants, 5 (five) female vocational teachers stated that work was meaningful because of the desire to help students achieve their goals in the future. Vocational teachers provide insight into future work and make them successful in life. For Ika (in), a teacher must be able to imagine the situation experienced by students and how they will work in the future.

*"Then I hope that the teachers can also open their horizons, can open up the children's horizons so that they have a view about their future that is related to their work later. What does he want to be in the future? we can take the child's shadow there. The professional teacher helps his students to become people to become successful themselves. The professional teacher helps his students to find themselves who are successful, and who care about themselves and their environment. Cares about the future, cares about the progress of the region". [Ika, (in)]*

In addition to insight, vocational teachers, also assist their students in preparing the abilities, skills, and characters needed to work, continue and become entrepreneurs. Students must be able to prove "what can I do" not just "what have I learned". That way, vocational teachers must understand the work for their students and how to teach these competencies (link and match).

*"... For this vocational teacher, it is necessary to link and match with the industry because it will prepare graduates or children who must be able to work, be entrepreneurs, and continue to college. In my opinion, a professional teacher can think of for his students 24 hours. Thinking about how to create graduates that can BMW (work, continue, entrepreneurship) by equipping our graduates with competencies and children, he can say what can I do? Didn't I learn what? If I can do anything, then he will convey it". [Ula (in)]*

According to Betty (in), to become entrepreneurs, students must cultivate character values, namely honesty, courtesy, confidence, and communication skills. And also learning that involves elements of entrepreneurship by involving projects with other vocational teachers to play a role in the same project. For example, making nata de coco as a productive teacher in collaboration with mathematics teachers for material calculations and sales, and physics teachers in processing processes involving temperature and viscosity.

*"Because if you go to vocational school, soft skills are the best. In addition to soft skills, there is also a child's ability to communicate. Now that's also important so that not only the child is honest and polite, but shy and so on, we have to show up, right? So, the child must have self-confidence, the ability to communicate, and the ability to negotiate becomes more complex. If in high school. Because the goal of children to go to school in SMK is later to continue. But more on how he will become an entrepreneur or become an entrepreneur, to work elsewhere. So, more educating him on soft skills should be prioritized, not only knowledge, and skills but attitudes". [Indayatmi (in)]*

### *Work to achieve more important goals*

Working as a vocational teacher is felt to be meaningful because of their contribution to activities at school and in the community. A total of 4 (four) vocational teachers shared their experiences. They have goals that are more important than just working for a paycheck. They contribute to the quality of school institutions and involvement in the team cohesiveness that Yulia (im) does. By taking these actions, the quality of schools will increase, graduates can work in the business and industrial world, and the community has a high level of trust.

*"I always tell my co-workers that it's not just the principal's job to advance the school, it's the job of all of us. My colleagues say that I am someone who can create cohesiveness in school. I want to make this school better than other schools, especially the one in Bantul. Our graduates get 100% in the business world and the industrial world. This school is accepted by the community and this school is the first choice". [Yulia (im)]*

Work becomes meaningful if you implement the knowledge you have for other people and society. For example, Indayatmi (in) experienced as a productive teacher in Chemistry, faced problems regarding wedding activities on the furniture that used a lot of crust and dirt that was difficult to clean. As a vocational teacher, Indayatmi (in) suggested soaking with the Sitrusur solution. In different cases, the plant does not bear fruit. So, Indayatmi (in) provides a solution for ideally applying NPK fertilizer and good fertilizer spacing. For the community, vocational teachers are seen as having knowledge. With the experience experienced, vocational teachers feel that their work is more meaningful.

*"Usually, we are in WhatsApp's first. Ma'am tomorrow, yes, this resource person is about this "Oh yes". Sometimes we just have to speed up a day to make Powerpoint make the material. So, in the eyes of society, a teacher can do everything. Examples of simple applications for example in, because we are chemists, yes. Sometimes our application in society is that our knowledge is useful. For example, when someone has a celebration, the glass is dirty and has crusts. They are confused that this can no longer be used. We can apply our knowledge. Oh, there's only Sitrusur. The crusty glass was soaked in Sitrusur, what is it called and rubbed for a while, and it was like new again. They finally found out how come my mother knew. You have to ask, oh, the chemist. For example, in the community, we also see, for example, they plant this. Why won't this bear fruit? Then we must be able to provide solutions. Oh, ma'am, you were given an NPK, then that's the distance between NPK. The NPK's function is like this, they are applied, and they can eventually change. So, society is that if a teacher is considered, all knowledge must know that that's why we have to study and learn". [Indayatmi (in)]*

The meaning of work is a way of letting go of the sufferings of society experienced in one of the areas in Yogyakarta with a high poverty rate. The teacher was moved to help solve regional problems. Informants carry out various activities for underprivileged communities by learning tutoring for free and teaching entrepreneurship methods that are brought directly from experts.

*"Apart from opening free tutoring, I also started to develop entrepreneurship in orphanages and other school activities. I motivate students to be able to stand on their own feet. I hope that after leaving the orphanage, my students will use the experiences they have gained during the training with me to become entrepreneurs. For that, I need support from teachers and the community, so I started to conduct free training to facilitate elementary, middle, and vocational school teachers to help with sustainable professional programs. I try to open my horizons and invite teachers to seriously fight for the progress of students. So that in the future they do not become victims of outsourcing and become a burden for Gunung Kidul (GK) Regency as unemployed. Thank God my tutoring participants this year reached 250 students from 10 vocational schools in GK. Many students are inspired and start to care about their future. They also began to think about the future of their village. Awareness of learning, entrepreneurship, community, and fighting for their dreams has started to appear". [Ika (in)]*

*Work to achieve happiness and life satisfaction*

The meaning of work, namely preparing students for success, having a good career and

experiencing changes, and improving the standard of living of their families is the life satisfaction of vocational teachers and achieving happiness. A total of 4 (four) informants expressed their experience of being a vocational teacher was meaningful. Atun (in) feels happy when he sees students can carry out their assignments well. The thing that makes students happy is that students understand the concepts that have been implemented.

*“At that time the child could carry out my duties and be right and good. That's what I enjoy the most. A satisfaction if the child understands the concept that I apply. ... can't test. Well, I like that. I'm most happy”. [Atun (in)]*

For Unggun (im), seeing students come from underprivileged families and be able to succeed, have a better life and raise their younger siblings to go to school is a satisfaction in itself. This incident reminds me of my childhood in the same position.

*“When I first became a teacher, I also saw that there was a certain satisfaction in seeing children who come from families who could not afford to be successful, their lives could be better, and being able to raise their younger siblings to go to school, there was a certain satisfaction there”. [Unggun (Im)]*

#### *Work as a field of worship*

Working as a teacher apart from working is also a field of worship. For them, being a vocational teacher brings them closer to God. Being a teacher can be for the world and the hereafter. Because every giving competence to students is valuable as a charity. However, the intention must be for Allah SWT.

*“But if I don't like the teacher, it's not me, you know. But if I'm a teacher myself, it's actually good, good. Because he can the world hereafter. Bismillah can be a provision in the grave. So, who doesn't like being a teacher? I really like being a teacher. Because bismillah I teach sewing can be provisions in the grave. Because when children practice our competence, then the finger flows to us. Even though we're dead. So, there's nothing I don't like about being a teacher. But bismillah the intention is for Allah”. [Hadi (Im)]*

#### *Work to develop self-knowledge*

Work becomes a goal to develop oneself for the better according to the changing era. Activities carried out include participating in various education and training, and conducting research published in journals.

*“As a young teacher, learning continues to be the basis that must be carried out in order to develop yourself for the better. This is so that the potential that exists in us can develop to the fullest. Because teachers are required not only to stop at comfortable conditions but must develop themselves according to the demands of the times”. [Marzuli (In)]*

### **Discussion**

Their experience of working and finding meaning is beneficial to students. The research notes they do work as a way of helping prepare for a child's future. Vocational education has three goals after graduation: work, continuing to higher education, and entrepreneurship (Arifin et al., 2020; Kholifah et al., 2021) for professional vocational teachers, to prepare them to achieve these goals. Considering the expanding number of graduates and limited recruitment, they equip them with competence, ability, and character to work and even bring in experts to provide training. In addition, linking entrepreneurship in it and integrating with teachers of interrelated subjects during the learning process. Thus, strengthening the concept of entrepreneurship in various disciplines.

Their experience in finding the meaning of work is obtained through higher importance (Harpaz & Meshoulam, 2010; Rosso et al., 2010). This phenomenon reinforces that being a teacher is not limited to teaching or prioritizing personal interests, but also involving oneself in school development through various internalization and externalization activities. In addition, they participate in activities for the wider community. They carry out activities outside of their jobs but in accordance with scientific disciplines and share more widely.

The meaning of work is felt by most vocational teachers such as satisfaction, pleasure, and happiness to see what has been done gives results (Chu & Mak, 2019; Morrison et al., 2007; Seligman, 2011). They are happy when the concept of learning is given to students and students master these competencies. They feel satisfied when they see their students succeed and inspire their younger siblings, improve their family's standard of living and allow their younger siblings to experience education. For them to teach and make them successful is happiness.

Working as a teacher is worth worship is an important meaning for them (Suyatno et al., 2021). In addition to working, they get charity for their hereafter. Working as a way to get closer to God and what is conveyed to students is believed to be an invaluable charity. They also feel the meaning of doing self-development (Hatt et al., 2007) to always be updated following changes. This is done so as not to be left behind in transferring competence. For them, being a teacher must equip students with the skills of the future and not just those that are needed in the industry. Because changes in the industry are very fast and the knowledge learned today may not necessarily be useful in the future.

The findings in this study describe that the dominant female vocational teacher in the meaning of work is to help students achieve goals and contribute to broader goals. Meanwhile, male vocational teachers dominate the meaning of work, namely feeling happy, satisfied, and happy being a teacher, having worship values, and updating in self-development.

### **Conclusion**

Phenomenological studies exploring the meaning of work for vocational teachers were found. Vocational teachers find meaning in work. Most of them aim to produce quality students. They want students to be able to work, continue and be entrepreneurial. Entrepreneurship is the most discussed by vocational teachers because it can improve the economy of the community and the region. But providing insight into the future is a concept of awareness built by students. Furthermore, their involvement in school activities and outside of school becomes a reinforcement in improving self-quality. Vocational teachers in Indonesia are not only focused on teaching activities but are involved in school programs and applying knowledge to the community. Work becomes meaningful if the learning is accepted and students succeed. Some teachers work as a way to worship. To maintain competence and teach up-to-date students, teachers always improve their quality by participating in various training educations and being involved in organizations. In short, work becomes meaningful if teachers are not limited to playing a teaching role but actively participate in various activities in schools, organizations, communities, and communities and involve religious roles.

### **Acknowledgement**

The research reported in this publication is supported by the Ministry of Research and Technology/National Research and Innovation Agency, Indonesia, through the Research of Doctoral Dissertation (PDD) Grant Program with Research Contract ID: 127/E5/PG02.00.PT/2022

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