





RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The description of meaningful work on male kindergarten teachers

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 Safira Aida Lunadevy<sup>1</sup>,  Ade Iva Murty<sup>2</sup>,  Endro Puspo Wiroko<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Psychology, Universitas Pancasila, The Special Capital Region of Jakarta, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup> Department of Psychology, Sampoerna University, The Special Capital Region of Jakarta, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup> Department of Psychology, Universitas Pancasila, The Special Capital Region of Jakarta, Indonesia

**Corresponding Author:**

Safira Aida Lunadevy (email: [safiraal13@gmail.com](mailto:safiraal13@gmail.com))

## ABSTRACT

The number of male kindergarten teachers is significantly lower than that of female kindergarten teachers, despite the fact that male teachers are paternal figures who will contribute to the development of students at school. This research aimed to determine the description of meaningful work among male kindergarten teachers. The subjects of this research were three male kindergarten class teachers with different work experiences. A qualitative approach with a case study design was used in this study. The data were obtained through interviews and analyzed from transcribing to interpreting the data. The research findings stated that all the main subjects had different images regarding how each felt their work was meaningful, especially in the aspect of psychological meaningfulness in work. In the aspect of meaning-making through work, all subjects could understand what could improve their qualities and how to understand themselves and their environment. Lastly, in the aspect of greater good motivations, each subject wanted to be helpful to the school stakeholders or even the family of themselves. This research concluded that the three main subjects generally had different images in making their work as kindergarten teachers meaningful. The research implications are that male kindergarten teachers hopefully can improve their performance, early childhood education units are expected to socialize with the public about the presence of male teachers in kindergartens, and the government is also expected to give more appreciation to kindergarten teachers.

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## INTRODUCTION

Work is considered a universal feature of human life, and people generally spend half of their lives at work (Svendsen, 2016). Work that is normatively or numerically dominated by only one gender is called gender-typed work. Gender-typed work means a work that is primarily associated with one gender, either numerically dominant in the work or the work requires specific attributes that are associated with one gender (Clarke, 2020). Scott and Marshall (in Short et al., 2013) claim that gender

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is a socially constructed difference between women and men that leads to the terms feminine and masculine. Therefore, social aspects of gender are still associated with many kinds of work.

Teaching is a complex job as it requires various knowledge and skills (Snowman & McCown, 2014). Teachers play an essential role for students in learning and playing while children are still at school. Male and female teachers have a significant role in children's education (Hayati et al., 2021). For that reason, male and female teachers are both needed by students because each has a meaningful role for children in education. In Indonesia, one job or work dominated by one gender, such as early childhood education teachers, is in the education field because women generally dominate them. Therefore, becoming a male early childhood teacher is rare (Seno et al., 2021).

One of the forms of early childhood education unit in the formal education sector is kindergarten (Dhieni et al., 2020). Kindergarten is one of the children's education levels at the age of 4 to 6 years in the formal sector that has been recognized by the government and listed in the Indonesian Law, Undang-Undang RI Nomor 20 Tahun 2003 (Mushlih et al., 2018). Joining kindergarten education is crucial for children because it is a place where children will prepare themselves before entering primary school and build children's character and personality (Bokings et al., 2013). Hence, kindergarten teachers are chosen to be the research subject because they have challenges, and kindergarten is the first formal education for children.

Based on *Data Pokok Pendidikan Semester Ganjil Tahun Ajaran 2023/2024* (the Basic Education Data for the odd semester of the 2023/2024 school year), the number of male kindergarten teachers in Indonesia is 2.995, while the number of female teachers reaches 176,116. Specifically, in Bogor City, the research location, only seven male teachers teach kindergarten out of 472 kindergarten teachers. Whereas previously, in June 2023, the data was obtained directly from Dinas Pendidikan Kota Bogor (the Bogor City Education Department), showing that the number of male kindergarten teachers in Bogor City still reached nine people, but the number has decreased. Unfortunately, only a few male kindergarten teachers can be found, even though one of their engagement roles is as a father figure at school, and the role of teachers plays an important role for children in education, particularly when children are still in the golden age phase.

Early childhood is in the golden age phase, so at this time, besides exploring the development and creativity aspect (Surya, 2018), stimulation must be obtained for children to develop all development aspects, especially in introducing gender identity and roles related to children's social development (Rofiah & Diana, 2022). During this period (golden age), children increase their understanding of others and ability to learn from others. In addition, children also learn extensively by observing other's behavior (Santrock, 2019).

According to Dagun, the figure of an early childhood teacher is considered a substitute for parental figures at home, the mother and father, so the presence of female and male teacher figures can be a role model for children and can teach children about the difference about gender roles that exist in the social environment (in Marlisa et al., 2020). Research conducted on male teachers at Aisyiah Bustanul Athfal 1 Ngawi Kindergarten showed that the role of male teachers gave benefits to the learning process inside and outside the classroom and was able to offer students support, protection, and attention (Putri et al., 2022).

The phenomenon of the lack of male teachers teaching in kindergartens is discussed in this study. According to Michie and Abraham (2004), preliminary qualitative pilot work, such as interviews, is important because it determines the nature or scope of a construct. Therefore, preliminary interviews were conducted to determine the construct by interviewing two preliminary subjects (PS), one-of-a-

kind male teachers in the kindergarten where they worked. The preliminary interviews with the two PSs showed that several constructs emerged: work orientation, job performance, and meaningful work, but the results were more directed towards the meaningful work construct.

Both PSs felt that their work as kindergarten teachers had a positive impact and created a pleasant atmosphere at school. PS1 said he was able to find out what his talents were and what surrounding environment was needed. PS1 felt that his choice to become a kindergarten teacher was right because PS1 felt happy when doing it, even though he initially received some negative responses from other stakeholders. Gradually, the parents of the students PS1 taught felt that their children were progressing well. PS1 said that at least his presence could give father figure assistance for his students.

Meanwhile, PS2 said that his goal in pursuing early childhood education was to instill good character in his students because he thought early childhood was an essential period for character development. In addition, PS2 also aimed to develop himself in speaking English and understanding children's characters during his work period in kindergarten, which he is already starting to feel. PS2 said that patience was a challenge as a kindergarten teacher, but he already knew how to cope with it and tried to use strategies his students liked while teaching.

For male teachers, having a career in early childhood education takes work (Seno et al., 2021). As professional educators, preschool teachers need teaching skills to carry out their tasks (Setiasih & Suminar, 2021). According to a study in Turkey conducted by Demirkasımoğlu and Taşkın (2019), male preschool teachers faced difficulties because they got negative responses from people around them. Furthermore, Mukhlis's (2019) study found that school stakeholders, including parents of students, rejected male teachers in kindergarten because they believed that childcare at home was usually dominated by mothers (women) and parents have never seen if there was teaching competence for early childhood on male teachers considered better than female teachers. In addition, society, in general, is more likely to leave childcare tasks to women because they are considered more suitable for providing education and childcare at the early childhood education level (Putri et al., 2022).

According to Bailey and Madden (2020), meaningful work has been proven in research if it played an important role for the individual concerned, the organization, and society. When people consider their work meaningful, they feel fulfilled and have a purpose, which positively affects psychological well-being (Yadav & Kumar, 2021). Steger et al. (2012) state that many people desire meaningful work. Many people want their work to mean something, career and job roles that are more than just earning a salary and spending time (Šverko & Vizek-Vidović in Steger et al., 2012). Meaningful work and happiness at work contributed to employee productivity and were the reasons for employees to stay in the workplace (Charles-Leija et al., 2023).

Meaningful work is defined as the value of work goals related to one's dreams and passions, specifically considered as work that can give meaning to what is done and create fulfillment in one's life (Chalofsky in Yadav & Kumar, 2021). Meaningful work is any work that is paid or not or is considered a job role that must be fulfilled by individuals believed to have meaning, purpose, and significance (Oades et al., 2017). Meaningful work also means to work that is significant and positive to a degree in the heart of an individual personally or meaningfulness, not just as any work that has meaning for people or is called meaning. Meaningful work has a positive valence that focuses on eudaimonics rather than hedonic (Steger et al., 2012).

Meaningful work has three aspects: psychological meaningfulness (PM) in work, meaning-making (MM) through work, and greater good (GG) motivations (Steger et al., 2012). Rosso et al. (in Steger et al. 2012) state that meaningful work is generally an individual's subjective experience and that what

they do has significance for the individual. According to Steger et al. (in Oades et al., 2017), in this aspect, in addition to being meaningful, individuals also feel that their work has points and goals that can be obtained or recognized in the organization. Steger and Dik (in Steger et al., 2012) say that this aspect describes the individual's understanding of self and the environment around the individual and the ease of personal growth. Steger et al. (in Oades et al., 2017) state that GG describes an individual's job as giving opportunities to benefit others or greater positive things, ranging from the work environment to a broader scope.

Job Characteristics Theory (JCT), a theory proposed by Hackman and Oldham (1976), is a model used to determine the conditions when individuals will be motivated (internal motivation) to be effective at work. JCT focuses on the psychological states that individuals must experience to develop behavior at work that comes from internal motivation, some job characteristics that produce some psychological states, and attributes in individuals that determine responses to complex and challenging work. The three psychological states that are the causal core of JCT are the meaningfulness of the work, responsibility for the outcomes of the work, and knowledge of the results of the work activities. So, three psychological states will lead to various positive effects.

Then, the results of a quantitative study involving kindergarten, elementary, middle, and high school teachers stated a positive, moderate, and significant relationship between meaningful work and job engagement. The result also showed that teachers' meaningful work level was high (Karataş & Özdemir, 2022). Then, a qualitative study of men enrolled in a Teacher Education Program at a university in New York City who were predominantly trained as secondary education teachers showed results that all subjects wished to continue teaching to make a social contribution and were motivated to pursue personal, meaningful work that contributed to social good (Bergey, 2021). A quantitative study used the variables meaningful work, resilience, work engagement, and job crafting behavior involving elementary school teachers as respondents showed a significant relationship between meaningful work and work engagement. It was found that meaningful work positively influences resilience through work engagement (positive attitude) and job crafting (behavior) (Van Wingerden & Poell, 2019).

This study aimed to look at the description of meaningful work on male kindergarten teachers because it was based on previous research. A quantitative study to determine the antecedents and outcomes of meaningful work in secondary school teachers showed that calling orientation, job design, and relations with coworkers were associated with meaningful work (Fouché et al., 2017). In Fouché's study, meaningful work was positively associated with self-rated performance and self-engagement and negatively associated with negative states such as burnout. Fouché et al. (2017) suggested that future research could use qualitative methods that examine teachers' meaningful work experiences and meaning-making related to their work. Based on the preliminary study by interviewing the subjects, the perspectives of male kindergarten teachers are generally small in proportion. Still, each PS has some skills that make them contribute more to their work and desire to be useful as a kindergarten teacher. Meaningfulness is widely considered a motivational attitude or perception (Bailey et al., 2019).

In this study, the meaningful work theory of Steger et al. (2012) is used because it refers to the theory used by Fouché et al.'s (2017) research, which is one of the bases for this research. In addition, the definition of meaningful work by Steger et al. (2012) is also not only related to how an individual's work is perceived as significant, positive, and purposeful, but the definition is also related to growth, namely how the work that individual does make that person experience growth. This article aims to explore how meaningful work looks for male kindergarten teachers.

## METHOD

A qualitative approach with a case study design was used in this research. According to Miller (2016), a qualitative approach is used to examine something that mainly focuses on studying the nature, quality, and meaning of individual experiences. The research was conducted to find out how male teachers' experiences while teaching in kindergarten make their work significant for them. Meanwhile, the case study design was chosen to deeply analyze the experiences of male teachers in kindergarten because it is considered a unique phenomenon.

The research subjects were obtained by using a purposive sampling technique by selecting subjects based on the fulfillment of certain characteristics to answer the research question; they were (1) male kindergarten teachers who male with different work experiences as teachers and (2) live and teach in kindergartens in Bogor City. Bogor City was chosen as the research location because, based on Aurelia's (2023) statement, it can be concluded that the Bogor City Government in 2018, 2019, 2021, 2022, and 2023 received the Kota Layak Anak (Child-friendly City) award different categories. Data collection on the main subjects was conducted from June 27 to July 9, 2023, with three meetings for each main research subject.

**Table 1.** Profile of main subject

Characteristics	MS 1	MS 2	MS 3
Gender	Male	Male	Male
Age	36 years old	46 years old	37 years old
Religion	Islam	Islam	Islam
Main occupation	Class teacher at a private Islamic kindergarten	Class teacher at a private kindergarten	Class teacher at a private kindergarten
Other work	Quran teacher at the mosque (volunteer)	Operator at private kindergarten and English teacher at Islamic Junior High School	Storyteller, speaker at events, teacher in the community and personally
Length of service (as kindergarten teacher)	4 years	13 years	12 years
Marriage Status	Married	Married	Married
Number of children	2 sons	3 daughters	-

An in-depth interview was used to collect data. The main subjects' interviews were conducted face-to-face, using a smartphone as a recorder and a note containing a list of questions that followed the interview guide. The data that had been obtained from the research subjects were analyzed with several steps following the order by Supratiknya (2015): (1) Transcribing the data into text form (Elo and Kyngas in Supratiknya, 2015); (2) Reading and learning the data transcripts repeatedly; (3) Coding; (4) Categorizing data; (5) Thematising data; (6) Interpreting data. Intracase analysis was done first before doing intercase analysis.

This study used data triangulation techniques by obtaining data from other sources besides the main research subjects, so each main subject recommended one of their colleagues to participate in the study. Data triangulation is a strategy for data credibility so that research data can reach trustworthiness. Colleagues were selected because they were considered to see often and know how the subject felt and experienced at work when carrying out their profession. Data collection from triangulation subjects (TS) was also obtained through interviews, but a TS was interviewed online due to problems with time. Before interviewing each subject, who participated in the study, the subjects were given informed consent verbally and in writing.

**Table 2.** Profile of the triangulation subject

Characteristics	TS 1	TS 2	TS 3
Gender	Female	Female	Female
Age	40 years old	38 years old	34 years old
Religion	Islam	Islam	Islam
Job	Kindergarten teacher	Housewife (just retired)	Kindergarten teacher
Relation with main subject	Colleague	Colleague	Colleague

## RESULT

### Psychological Meaningfulness in Work

MS 1 said that the nominal salary he earned as a kindergarten teacher was very much different or smaller than the salary he earned from his previous job in marketing. Therefore, MS 1 and his family adjusted their lifestyle to fit their current income.

*"Terus kalau sekarang tuh yang dirasain dari, kalau dari segi penghasilan yaa itu kan udah pasti jauh banget, udah pasti jauh banget, tapi kalau dari segi kenyamanan itu jauh lebih nyaman di sini..."* (So now what I feel from, in terms of income, it is far away, it is definitely far away, but in terms of comfort, it's much more comfortable here (as kindergarten teacher) **(N1.WC2-CI4a, 01 July 2023)**

*"...pasti gaji eee, kalau lihat dari nominal jauh lah yaa, di sini lebih kecil, jauh banget gitu..."* (... the salary eee, if I look at the nominal, it's much smaller here, it is far...) **(N1.WC2-CI4a, 01 July 2023)**

*"Ya kalau, cukup lah, alhamdulillah cukup karena yang pernah saya bilang waktu itu, dari penghasilan itu kan saya juga menyesuaikan dengan gaya hidup..."* (Yes, it's enough, alhamdulillah it's enough because as I said before, from income that I got, I also adjust to the lifestyle) **(N1.WC3-CI4a, 09 July 2023)**

MS 1 said that he perceived his job as a kindergarten teacher as a profession that was not in demand by many people; it could be the last choice, but it was a job with big responsibility.

*"Jadi menurut saya bukan, bukan profesi yang diminati banyak orang eeee, bisa jadi pilihan terakhir gitu, tapi sebetulnya ini pekerjaan yang tanggung jawabnya besar menurut saya, apalagi guru TK."* (So, in my opinion, it is not a profession that is in demand by many people, it could be the last choice, but it is actually a job with great responsibility, in my opinion, especially kindergarten teacher.) **(N1.WC2-CI7a, 01 July 2023)**

MS 1 said that teaching was a meaningful job for him. Although teaching was not his passion, he felt he could obtain many things from his current job.

*"Pasti, pasti sesuatu yang bermakna lah memang eee pertama kan memang ee memang bukan apa yang saya mau dan memang bukan passion-nya saya juga jauh dari sebelumnya. Pas kan bermaknanya karena oh ternyata eee, jadi guru anak usia dini tuh seru karena kita disuruh, buat saya kita juga belajar dari anak-anak gitu, belajar dari mereka. Karena belajar dari mereka tuh kita jadi eee mempunyai pengalaman menghadapi anak-anak yang beraneka ragam gitu yaa kayak tadi tuh karakter, macam-macam karakter....jadi apa yaa, jadi bisa eee mengajar sekaligus belajar dan bisa diaplikasi dari belajar, itu bisa diaplikasikan lagi bukan hanya untuk anak didik selanjutnya tapi untuk di rumah juga bisa, gitu."* (Definitely, it must be something meaningful, because first of all, it wasn't what I wanted and not my passion. It's meaningful because it turns out that being an early childhood teacher is fun, because we were asked, for me, we also learned from students, we



learned from them. Because learning from them, we had the experiences of dealing with many children, like the characters, various characters... so, what, so we could teach and learn at the same time and could be applied from learning, it could be applied further, not only for the next students, but also for my children at home.) (N1.WC3-CI7b, 09 July 2023)

*"Berarti kan tujuan saya di sini kan memperdalam ilmunya kan secara pengalaman di sekolah, secara ilmunya di kampus gitu kan pas kuliah eee, terus apa tadi, itu tujuannya kayak gitu."* (It meant that my goal here is to make deeper my knowledge in terms of experience at school and knowledge at college, right when I am at college, then what, that was the goal what I meant.) (N1.WC2-CI7c, 01 July 2023)

As a kindergarten teacher, MS 1 said that he had another goal. He wanted to be useful to many people, such as his students, parents of students, and his family.

*"...ya mencari setiap harinya tuh bagaimana caranya saya tuh bermanfaat buat anak-anak, gitu. Khususnya secara umum untuk orang tua, untuk keluarga gitu, khususnya sih untuk anak-anak yaa di tempat anak didik, gitu."* (I look for every day how I can be useful for students. Especially in general for parents, family and especially for students at school.) (N1.WC2-CI7c, 01 July 2023)

MS 2 said that he had a wife who worked. The subject's economic aspect was his weakness. Still, MS 2 had other incomes from the government because he had already obtained teaching certificate. However, he only got the additional income once every three months. MS 2 said his salary was considered relative when discussing whether it was sufficient.

*"Yang jadi kelemahan istri saya adalah kan ekonomi. Karena jomplang antara gaji yang dia terima dengan penghasilan yang saya terima. Tapi saya yakin dengan sertifikasi saya, inpassing saya, itu akan setara dengan istri saya gitu, walaupun dibayar 3 bulan sekali."* (My wife's weakness is economic. Because there is a gap between the income she receives and the income I receive. But I am sure that with my certification, my inpassing, it will be the same as my wife's, even though these are paid once every 3 months.) (N2.WC3-CI4a, 05 July 2023)

*"...hmmm hehehe bicara cukup ga cukup relatif..."* (...talking about enough or not enough is relative...) (N2.WC2-CI4a, 03 July 2023)

MS 2 considered his job as a kindergarten teacher as a mandate that must be carried out as well as possible by providing equal educational services to his students.

*"Fun aja lah, enjoy aja karena kembali ke motivasi pribadi kan, ini amanah yang disampaikan oleh orang tua... Bayangkan kalau anak didikmu adalah anak seorang presiden, 'apa yang harus dilakukan?', berarti harus melayani sebaik-baiknya kan, itu sama, semua anak saya layani dengan baik semampu kita ya..."* (I was just fun, just enjoyed it because it went back to personal motivation, right. This is a trust from the students' parents... Imagine, if your student is the child of a president, what will you do? It means you have to give them service as well as possible right, it's the same, I served all my students well as we can...) (N2.WC1-CI7a, 02 July 2023)

MS 2 said that being a kindergarten teacher is to build good personalities for their students, which means that teachers take responsibility for building students' personalities so that they have memorable school experiences. In addition, according to MS 2, the real teacher is when teachers find their own teaching style, but it will take time. MS 2 felt he already had his teaching style based on his knowledge and experience.

*"...intinya mah kita eee apa sih membentuk pribadi anak bangsa sehingga dia eee punya pengalaman hidup yang berkesan lah selama dia sekolah TK dengan gaya dan bimbingan kita"*

*karena masing-masing guru kan punya gaya dan cara mereka masing-masing.” (...the point is that we, what is it, building the personality of the nation's children so that they have memorable life experiences during kindergarten with our teaching style and guidance because each teacher has their own style and way.) (N2.WC1-CI7c, 02 July 2023)*

*“Beda-beda (gaya mengajar) dan itu butuh proses ketika seseorang guru itu pengen benar-benar pure jadi seorang guru akan ketemu juga gaya dia dan butuh waktu ya satu tahun dua tahun...” (Different (teaching styles) and it takes a process when a teacher wants to really be pure as a teacher, his or her style will also be found and it takes one year or two years...) (N2.WC1-CI7a, 02 July 2023)*

*“Gaya khas saya mengajar, saya dapatkan dari pengalaman demi pengalaman, ditambah dengan kemampuan serta ilmu pengajaran yang saya punya.” (I got my typical style of teaching from experience to experience, with the teaching skills and knowledge that I have.) (N2.WC1-CI6a, 02 July 2023)*

MS 2 said he worked as a kindergarten teacher because of calling and trust. Working as a kindergarten teacher was MS 2's passion, so he was willing and wanted to work hard as a kindergarten teacher.

*“Panggilan jiwa dan amanah yang harus dilaksanakan. Kalo kita nggak dengan passion, dengan niat, bahwa kita dapat amanah dari Yang Maha Kuasa yang pertama itu secara kelembagaan (A calling of the soul and trust that must be carried out. If we do this (teaching) with any passion and intention, that we got a mandate or trust from God, the first one was institutionally, (N2.WC1-CI7b, 02 July 2023) “kita nggak akan mungkin mau, nggak akan mungkin mau capek jadi guru TK. Dari mulai rapi begini, wangi, udah-udahannya kalau yang berantakan, berantakan. Kalau mau yang bau asem, bau asem keringet itu udah biasa, bukan guru TK kalau dari rapi ke rapi bukan guru TK.” (We would never want to be a kindergarten teacher, never wanted to be tired of being a kindergarten teacher. From starting to be neat like this and smelling good, eventually becoming messy, it will messy. There is also who smell bad, that's already a common thing. You are not a kindergarten teacher if you work from neat to neat, that's not a kindergarten teacher.) (N2.WC1-CI7a, 02 July 2023)*

MS 3 said that working as a true kindergarten teacher did not prioritize the interests of the world when it was seen from the salary earned. If he is already happy as a teacher, he looks for other income to fulfill his needs through jobs outside of being a kindergarten teacher.

*“Bulan pertama saya jadi guru TK. Gitu sih kalau pengalaman yang nggak akan saya lupakan. Pengalaman jadi guru TK tuh itu. Kayaknya mungkin ya Allah tuh pengen bilang gini ‘Kalau jadi guru, tapi guru yang bener itu lepasin dunianya yang kamu punya.’ gitu.” (My first month as a kindergarten teacher. That was an experience that I will never forget. That experience of being a kindergarten teacher. I thought maybe God wanted to say, 'If you become a teacher, but a true teacher, let go of the world things that you have.) (N3.WC1-CI4, 03 July 2023)*

*“Kalau jadi guru itu bahagia, yaudah cari uangnya di luar. Bonus jadi guru itu eee, gaji, itu bonus aja gitu. Ya yaudah, kalau berpikirnya kurang terus ya pasti kurang lah, saya kerja di manapun, kerja apapun pasti kurang sih.” (If being a teacher is happy, you can look for the money outside (another job). The bonus of being a teacher is salary, that's just a bonus. If you think it's less (in terms of income), it must be less, I work anywhere, any work must be less.) (N3.WC3-CI4a, 06 July 2023)*

MS 3 had his perspective on working as a kindergarten teacher. He felt it was his best decision because he had various work experiences outside the education field before becoming a teacher.



*"Ini keputusan terbaik saya dalam kerja selama, selama berapa tahun ke belakang."* (This was the best decision I have ever made over the past years.) (N3.WC1-CI7a, 03 July 2023)

MS 3 entered the early childhood field to contribute as a father figure for his students. This work was also meaningful because it changed his life path and helped him achieve better goals.

*"Kayaknya sekolah itu tempat buat saya yang cocok nih eee. Saya bisa eee, memberikan sumbangsih sosok ayah yang nggak ada di TK dan saya juga bisa merasakan gimana rasanya jadi bapak gitu..."* (I think school fitted me. I could contribute as father figure that did not exist at kindergarten and I could also know how it felt to be a father...) (N3.WC1-CI7a, 03 July 2023)

*"Pasti ya karena sangat sangat bermakna sekali yaa banyak ngerubah jalan hidup, banyak ngerubah tujuan hidup sih yang utama. Jadi semenjak jadi guru tuh tujuannya yaudah yang penting bisa bermanfaat aja buat orang lain gituuu."* (Definitely it was very, very meaningful, yes, it has changed the way of my life a lot, it has changed the purpose of my life. The main thing is the purpose of my life. Since I became a teacher, the important thing is that I can be useful for other people.) (N3.WC3-CI7b, 06 July 2023)

MS 3 felt that working as a kindergarten teacher was a hobby that got paid.

*"Ya senang-senang aja. Ini pekerjaan yang sangat menyenangkan. Kalau dibilang eeee pekerjaan menyenangkan atau pekerjaan pekerjaan hobi yang dibayar gitu."* (Yes, it's fun. It's a very fun job. It is called a fun work or a hobby that got paid.) (N3.WC1-CI7a, 03 July 2023)

One aspect of Meaningful Work is psychological meaningfulness in work, one of the themes in the research findings; the subjects have diverse subjective experiences regarding their work as kindergarten teachers. According to MS 1, his job was considered a profession that could have been more attractive to people and could have been the last choice, but it had great responsibilities. MS 1 said that the job as a kindergarten teacher was a medium through which to gain experience and knowledge. MS 1 also wanted to be useful to his students, the student's parents, and his family.

Meanwhile, according to MS 2, as a kindergarten teacher, it was a job considered a trust that must be carried out responsibly and adequately so that students could have memorable experiences at school. In addition, MS 2 thought that a real teacher was when someone already has their teaching style and MS 2 has felt such a thing. He already had a teaching style through the experience and knowledge he had gained. On the other hand, MS 3 said that his job as a kindergarten teacher was the best decision he made, the best job compared to his previous jobs, and the subject felt that his job was a paid hobby.

### Meaning-Making Through Work

MS 1 realized that his mental and emotional quality could improve during his time as a kindergarten teacher.

*"Kalau fisik sih eee memang nggak begitu ya karena di sini memang nggak ada, nggak ada apa, nggak ada kegiatan olahraga untuk guru, paling juga kalau lagi senam, ayo sama guru senam, tapi nggak, nggak yang rutin gitu... Tapi kalau yang lain-lain kayak misalnya eee, apa eee, mental ya mental otomatis, mental otomatis ya kayak semacam ke diri kitanya sendiri stabil..."* (Physically, that is not really, because here is not, what, here isn't exercise for teachers, there is only a gymnastic activity (for students), let us do the gymnastics with us, with the teacher. However, we do not do that as a routine activity... However, another aspect, for example, mentally, yes, mentally (has increased) automatically, mentally (has increased) automatically yes, it is like making ourselves stable...) (N1.WC3-CI7d, 09 July 2023)

*"...Terus parenting (kegiatan sekolah) itu kan kita wajib ikut, otomatis kita juga dapat ilmu juga gitu kalau untuk diri kitanya sih, kayak gitu, banyak banget pengaruhnya buat saya."* (Then parenting (school's event), it is something we are obliged to participate in, automatically we also get knowledge too for ourselves, like that, it has a lot of influence on me.) **(N1.WC3-CI7d, 09 July 2023)**

MS 1 felt he needed to be more expert in knowing what children needed, but this still required a lot of knowledge and experience.

*"Nah, kalau untuk memahami kebutuhan anak itu masih banyak, masih banyak belajar kalau untuk saya sendiri ya. Eee, walaupun eee, sedikitnya saya sudah bisa ngebaca 'Oh ini kayak gini anaknya.' 'Kayak gini harusnya nih kayak gini.'"* (Well, for understanding the needs of children, I still have to learn a lot about this. Although right now I could read, like 'This child is like this.' 'It should be like this.')

**(N1.WC3-CI7e, 09 July 2023)**

MS 1 could realize his interests and weaknesses, such as the subject preferred gross motor activities and disliked activities involving small objects. MS 1's preference for gross motor activities was also stated by TS 1.

*"...kayak apa eee, dalam kegiatan akademik saya tuh lebih suka yang eee, apa ke anak-anak tuh bergerak, kayak motorik kasar gitu dibanding yang kan kayak yang TS 1 tuh yang berkreasi perintilan bikin kecil-kecil."* (...like what, in academic activities I prefer what, activities that made students move or be active, like gross motor skills, compared to what TS 1 did, which was creating small details.) **(N1.WC3-CI7e, 9th July 2023)**

*"...maksudnya kalau ngobrol sendiri (dengan MS 1) sebagai teman, MS 1 maunya SOT (Seni Olah Tubuh). Olah tubuh kan eee, apa sih, motorik kasar kan, olahraga lah, kayak lompat, bersepeda, dan sebagainya."* (...I mean if we had a conversation (with MS 1) as work partners, MS 1 wanted to teach Body Art Activities. Body Art Activities is, what is it, activities involving gross motor, sports, like jumping, cycling, and so on.) **(T1.WC1-CI7e, 17th July 2023)**

TS 1 said that MS 1 could understand the child's feelings and knew how to deal with them, so the child's emotions improved.

*"Kalau MS 1 tuh cenderungnya ini ya apa sih, eee, selain verbal juga ke sentuhan, gitu....Jadi anak-anak justru lebih merasa nyaman ya ketika punya masalah, kemudian eee, dihadapinya dengan nasehat atau teguran dan juga sentuhan kita, misalnya apa didekati sambil dirangkul itu kan membuat anak lebih tenang ya..."* (For MS 1, he tended to what, besides verbal, he also touched, like that....So the student would feel more comfortable when they had problems, then, they were handled with advice or warning by him and also touch, for example, he approached the student while embracing the student, it made the student feel calmer...) **(T1.WC1-CI7e, 17 July 2023)**

Working as a kindergarten teacher has made MS 2 more patient and compassionate with children and better at understanding the characteristics of children in the early childhood phase.

*"Lebih sabar ya. Lebih sabar, lebih sayang sama anak. Lebih memahami lebih dalam mengenai eee, karakteristik terutama pra sekolah, 'Oh gini toh anak-anak yang usia TK. Oh gini toh perilaku anak-anak selain anak saya sendiri.'" (I am more patient, more patient, more having affection to students. More understanding of characteristics, especially pre-school students, like, 'I see, this is children of kindergarten age are.' 'Oh, this is how children behave other than my own child.'...)*

**(N2.WC3-CI7d, 05 July 2023)**

MS 2 said he could also develop operator skills while working at the kindergarten where he works.

*“Terutama operator ya, operator tuh banyak ilmu yang saya dapatkan yang Insya Allah luar biasa ilmu itu yang menjadi harta yang paling besar buat saya sekarang.... Itu yang tidak bisa ternilai dengan uang.”* (Especially as an operator, I have gained a lot of knowledge which, in syaa Allah, it has become the greatest treasure for me now.... That couldn't be valued with money.) **(N2.WC3-CI7d, 5th July 2023)**

In terms of teaching, MS 2 could understand his strengths and weaknesses, which made him know what to do when he got a particular task, such as whether he could do it alone or need help or discussion with other colleagues.

*“Misalkan kita bahas pembelajaran besok nih. Tema kendaraan kita bahas nih sama teman-teman dari mulai Senin, Selasa sampai dengan Jumat. Nah kan itu bagi-bagi, share ya. ‘Udah gini aja, eee, MS 2 kan IT ya, terus IT, Bahasa Inggrisnya juga oke. Ambil aja, nah selebihnya kita.’ Nah, kelebihan saya biasanya gini, kalau ibu-ibu kan lebih kreatif bikin-bikin craft ya.”* (For instance, we discussed tomorrow's (further) learning. We discussed the theme of vehicles with other colleagues on Monday, Tuesday, and Friday. We would be sharing, 'Let us do this. MS 2 is IT and will be in charge of IT. Your English is also okay. Just take it, and we will do the rest.' (said by a colleague). Well, my strengths are usually such things. Meanwhile, female teachers are more creative in making crafts.) **(N2.WC3-CI7e, 05 July 2023)**

*“Tapi kalau saya enggak ini, pas pada saatnya masih bingung ‘Mau bikin apa?’ ‘Oh, itu eee, tahu enggak lu eeee, mobil-mobilan dari bahan kardus?’ ‘Ntar dulu, ntar dulu, ntar dulu, perasaan pernah searching deh saya.’ Jadi kalau misalkan ini, ruang baca nih ‘Eceu, minta bantuan atuh’...”* (But if I was still confused, I asked 'What do we want to make? 'Do you know, toy cars made of cardboard?', 'Wait a minute, wait a minute, wait a minute, I've searched for it before.'. Another example, the reading room, 'Eceu, I am asking for your help'...) **(N2.WC3-CI7e, 05 July 2023)**

MS 2, as a teacher, could understand what was lacking and what was needed of his students, so it became an evaluation for MS 2 to be informed to the school principal.

*“Jadi TK itu akan ditanya ya,nggak semua saya juga. Kadang yang lebih ini ‘Gimana anak-anak?’ ‘Alhamdulillah.’ ‘Siapa yang mau.’ udah kan kita punya anak yang masing-masing punya kemampuan dan kita hafal ya. Kita sebutkan ‘Nih, Rara butuh buku cerita, anaknya begini ini.’”* (So kindergarten (teacher) will be asked, not only me. Sometimes the questions more like 'How are the students?' 'Alhamdulillah.' 'Who wants ...?' We have children who have their own abilities and we memorized them. We mentioned, like 'Here's, Rara needs a storybook, she is is like this.'...) **(N2.WC3-CI7d, 05 July 2023)**

MS 3 realized that his self-quality has improved greatly, from a physical aspect to a mindset, through his work as a kindergarten teacher.

*“Kalau dari fisik sih jelas banget ya, sebelum saya jadi guru tuh emang yang BB saya tuh, sekarang lebih sehat sih karena kan banyak bergerak ya sama anak-anak setiap hari, gitu.”* (Physically, it's very clear, before I became a teacher, my weight was so (heavier), now I'm healthier because I move a lot with the children every day) **(N3.WC3-CI7d, 06 July 2023)**

*“Jam tidur teratur gitu tuh kalau jadi guru tuh jam tidur lebih teratur.”* (So if you become a teacher, your sleeping hours will be regular, sleeping hours are more regular.) **(N3.WC3-CI7d, 06 July 2023)**

*“Alhamdulillah ya kalau nggak ada kegiatan, sabtu minggu libur gitu kesehatan mental sangat terjaga sekali, eee kesehatan secara mental sih bagus lah...”* (Alhamdulillah, yes, if there is no activities (at work), Saturday and Sunday will be off, mental health is very well maintained, mental health is good...) **(N3.WC3-CI7d, 06 July 2023)**

*“...secara eee, attitude juga namanya udah masuk mencemplungkan diri ke dunia pendidikan. Jadi, jadi menjaga sendiri sih cara berpakaian, cara bertutur kata sama semua orang, secapek apapun tuh berusaha buat ramah aja gitu.”* (...in terms of attitude, it means that you already entered yourself into the education field. So, I become taking care of myself, how I dress, how I speak to everyone, no matter how hard it is, I try to be friendly.) **(N3.WC3-C17d, 06 July 2023)**

*“Jadi lebih menjaga diri aja sih ya jadi guru tuh. Memang ya saya bilang itu tuh pilihan terbaik saya sih eee, mulai fisik, mental, attitude, semua berkembang, pola pikir jadi lebih positif aja gitu.”* (So, I become taking care of myself more as a teacher. Indeed, I said it was my best choice, starting physically, mentally, attitude, all aspects developed, the mindset is more positive) **(N3.WC3-C17d, 06 July 2023)**

MS 3 said that he is not required to carry out learning activities as planned because MS 3 is more concerned about the readiness and mood of his students. If the students are in a good mood by doing exercises at the beginning according to their wishes, it will be easier to follow the learning plan.

*“Di minggu-minggu terakhir memang masih ada tema yang belum selesai, tapi mau ngapain anak-anak nggak bisa diajak berbicara terus kita ngomong aja ngabisin tema juga nggak akan nyambung.”* (In the last weeks of school (before long holiday) there were still themes (of learning) that have not been completed, but what if the children couldn't be talked to and then we still talked about the theme? it won't connect.) **(N3.WC2-C17e, 05 July 2023)**

*“...buat saya ya mungkin kalau guru baru akan, akan textbook ya kalau di RPH nya menggambar, udah gambar, bagi-bagi. Kalo saya sih lebih senang ‘Kalian mau ngapain hari ini? mau gambar dulu atau main air dulu?’ ‘Main air.’ ‘Yaudah kita main air dulu.’ Soalnya problem hampir semua anak anak TK tuh penyesuaian di awal kan...”* (For me, perhaps the new teachers will be textbook. If the teaching plan were drawing, they would do that. Whereas I preferred to ask them 'What do you want to do today? Do you want to draw first or play with water first?' 'Play with the water.' 'Let's play with the water first.' The problem was that almost all kindergarten students needed to adaptation at the beginning ...) **(N3.WC1-C17e, 03 July 2023)**

*“Gitu sih. Kalau dalam kondisi siap sih kayaknya anak-anak kemudian jadi diajakin apa juga hayuk gitu. Jadi guru itu harus benar-benar ngertiin anak aja, benar-benar, benar student center gitu...”* (Like that. If they were in a ready condition, I thought the children wanted to be persuaded to do anything. So, the teacher must understand the children (students), it is totally student center ...) **(N3.WC1-C17e, 03 July 2023)**

TS 3 also explained that MS 3's learning style is explorative.

*“Gaya ngajarnya lebih ke gaya ngajarnya lebih eksplorasi ya kalau MS 3 tuh, lebih suka anak-anak eksplor apa gitu...”* (His teaching style is more like an exploratory teaching style, MS 3 is that kind of person, he preferred students to explore something...) **(T3.WC1-C16a, 13 July 2023)**

In the aspect of meaning-making through work, which is the second finding, all MSs said that they experienced various personal growth through their work, for instance, in terms of skills, physical aspects, knowledge, experience, emotional aspects, and social aspects. The three MSs could also understand their interests, strengths, and weaknesses. In addition, MSs also understood what was needed by the surrounding environment, such as what the needs of students were (although MS 1 felt that he still needed help understanding the needs of students), what parents needed, and what colleagues needed.

## Greater Good Motivations

MS 1 was motivated to be useful to others because it was an order in his religion. Therefore, working as a teacher was a medium that benefited others.

*“Kalau motivasi awalnya mah karena emang ada perintahnya, perintahnya kayak gitu, ‘sebaik-baiknya manusia yang bermanfaat untuk manusia lainnya.’ Gitu kan? itu dalilnya, kan ada haditsnya. Kalau motivasi awalnya itu. Kalau untuk karena pekerjaan ini eee, hanya media sih karena saya sekarang duduk di sini, gimana caranya melalui pekerjaan ini saya tidak hanya bermanfaat untuk anak-anak aja, gitu. Berarti kan saya juga punya anak, punya keluarga, terus hubungan saya mungkin kan hubungan saya bukan hanya dengan anak-anaknya (murid) saja kan, dengan orang tua, dengan masyarakat di sini umumnya gitu”* (The first motivation was because there is an order (from God), the order is like that, 'The best human being is useful for other people.' That's the evidence, there's a hadith. That was the first motivation. For this job, it's just a medium because I'm working here now, how I can do it (be useful) through this job, not only to benefit the students, like that. It means that I also have children, have a family, and then my relationship may not only be with the children (the students), but with the parents, with the community here in general.) **(N1.WC3-CI7g, 09 July 2023)**

MS 1 said there were many positive changes in the students he taught at school.

*“Kitanya juga tahu, dari anak yang awalnya nggak mau diam, gabisa duduk tenang, nggak tahu aturan gitu. Terus setelah beberapa bulan udah ngerti aturan, udah bisa duduk tenang, udah nggak teriak-teriak lagi kalau ngomong. Terus buat contoh juga sih buat anak karena kan contoh yang bagus juga buat anak eee, kalau kita pengen jadi orang yang bermanfaat, bermanfaat buat orang lain tapi kan kita harus ngelakukan hal baik, lebih baik dari orang lain kan harusnya.”* (We [himself] also knew, from student who initially didn't want to be quiet, couldn't sit in order, didn't know the rules. Then after a few months the student already understood the rules, can sit in order, didn't shout anymore when I talked. It also setted a role model for children because it's a good example for children. If we want to be a useful person, useful for others, so we have to do good things, better than others, we should.) **(N1.WC3-CI7f, 09 July 2023)**

MS 1 wanted to be useful to many people, including his students, the parents of students, and even his own family.

*“Setiap harinya tuh gimana caranya saya tuh bermanfaat buat anak-anak gitu khususnya secara umumnya untuk orang tua, untuk keluarga gitu, khususnya sih untuk anak-anak yaa di tempat anak didik gitu.”* (Every day, how I can be useful for students, especially in general for their parents, for my family, especially for students.) **(N1.WC2-CI7f, 01 July 2023)**

TS 1 said that MS 1 was reliable and always willing to help others.

*“Terusnya hmm, kalau dimintain tolong ya enggak pernah menolak. Artinya selalu siap untuk membantu. Pokoknya siapa aja yang merasa kesulitan, kemudian kita minta tolong, pasti dibantu, gitu.”* (If he were asked for help, he never refused. That meant he was always ready to help. When anyone had difficulty, then we asked for help, he would definitely help, like that) **(T1.WC1-CI7f, 17 July 2023)**

TS 1 said that she and other colleagues often asked MS 1 for help with many things.

*“Oh, kalau TS 1 mah, kalau TS 1 pribadi ya, hampir semua jenis. Apa ya, yang kita enggak bisa lakukan ya pasti minta tolong MS 1.. Misalnya nih, eee, ‘Pak MS 1, tolong geserin lemari dong.’*



*Pokoknya apa aja deh, apa aja. Bahkan kalau misalnya kerjaan bikin laporan apa, 'Pak MS 1, bantuin kita dong bikin laporan ini.'. Terus temen-temen yang lain apa ya yang suka minta tolong, ya enggak jauh dari ini sih sebelumnya, enggak jauh dari kebutuhan sekolah, gitu.”* (For TS 1, personally, yes, almost all kinds (kind of helps). For example, 'MS 1, please help to move the cupboard.' Anyway, anything, anything. Even if it was about making a report, 'Mr. MS 1, please help us to make this report'. Then what other colleagues usually asked for help, not far from this kind of things, not far about the school needs, like that.) **(T1.WC1-CI7f, 17 July 2023)**

MS 2 said that working as a teacher was morally responsible, so MS 2 wanted to create good students, and what had been taught in the subject could benefit students in the future.

*“...eee sebagai seorang guru yang memang ingin anak didiknya menghasilkan dan bermanfaat nanti di kemudian hari dianya, yang tanggung jawab moral kan saya.”* (...as a teacher who really want my students to be succeed and useful later in their life, I am the one who take the moral responsibility) **(N2.WC1-CI7f, 02 July 2023)**

Trust or mandate motivated MS 2 to do things that could benefit many school stakeholders, especially students.

*“Amanah. Itu adalah amanah. Dengan amanah itu kita bisa lebih maksimal melayani mereka (murid) sebagai anak-anak kita. Kalau nggak dari amanah. Karena kan melaksanakan amanah itu wajib.”* (A trust. It is a trust. With that trust, we can optimally treat them (students) as our children. If it is not from the trust. Because fulfilling the trust is an obligation) **(N2.WC3-CI7g, 05 July 2023)**

TS 2 also said that MS 2 usually contributed to giving many creative ideas in terms of discussions.

*“Kalau lebih banyak ide-ide dia juga kalau ini menonjol yang keluarin ide-ide, tapi kadang ada juga, kadang fleksibel juga sih, kadang ambil idenya saya atau ide teman kan pas rapat itu kita mau bikin apa nih misalkan dari barang bekas atau apa gitu. Tapi praktek-praktek kayaknya lebih ide MS 2 deh yang desain kreativitas mah.”* (He's the one of people who came up with the many ideas., but sometimes it was flexible too, sometimes we took my idea or other colleagues' ideas during the meeting when we wanted to make something, for example from recycle materials or something like that. But in practice, I think Mr. J's ideas were more creative in creative designs.) **(T2.WC1-CI7f, 07 July 2023)**

MS 3 felt that in his current job, which God himself chose, it was more beneficial to many people.

*“Eee sebelum-sebelumnya juga menyenangkan eee tapi mungkin Allah pengen saya lebih bermanfaat di sekolah daripada di luar gitu, tapi kalau di luar itu tantangannya pasti jauh lebih besar di luar itu.”* (Previously (in his previous jobs), it was also fun, but maybe Allah wanted me to be more useful at school than outside, but when it's outside, the challenges are definitely much bigger outside.) **(N3.WC2-CI7f, 05 July 2023)**

MS 3 said he was motivated to be useful to others because doing good is a good deed.

*“Saya tuh dulu baca bukunya ini nih “Pesan Guru” penulisnya DR. Aidh Al-Qarni, salah satu cuplikannya eee, apa footnote nyaa tuh gini eee ‘Kerjakanlah amal-amal kecil tapi berkesinambungan.’ intinya gitu lah, tetap berkelanjutan karena itu yang akan jadi eee, pijakan modal kedepannya.”* (I used to read this book "The teacher's Message" written by DR. Aidh Al-Qarni, one of the footnotes was, what the footnote was like eee 'Do small deeds, but sustainably.' The point was like that, keep doing deeds sustainably because that will be the basis of future assets.) **(N3.WC3-CI7g, 06 July 2023)**

According to TS 3, MS 3 greatly contributed to conveying his ideas.

*“Oh, dia termasuk yang banyak idenya, hahaha. Entah itu kegiatan di kelas atau kegiatan di sekolah, gitu.”* (He has a lot of ideas, hahaha. Whether it's activities in a class or activities at school, like that.) **(T3.WC1-CI7f, 13 July 2023)**

In the last aspect, namely greater good motivations, the third theme finding, approximately each MS had the same reason for wanting to benefit others. MS 1 was motivated to give benefits to others because it was an order from his religion, which is that the best people are those who give benefits to others. Meanwhile, MS 2 was motivated to benefit others because he felt that his job was a trust he must be responsible for, so it must be done as well as possible. Then, MS 3 said that his motivation was to benefit others because good deeds carried out sustainably will become a basis for the future.

### **Positive Work Environment**

MS 1 felt that he had just entered the early childhood education field, so he still needed to learn to do his job. However, his colleagues understood his condition by not insisting on MS 1 in his work but rather helping him.

*“...memang nggak langsung jadi guru kelas gitu ya, jadi dipaksa untuk belajar sendiri gitu dengan ngeliatin guru-guru lain gitu, cara ngajarnya kayak gini, gitu. Alhamdulillah guru-guru disini eee, banyak yang lebih secara nggak langsung ya nggak ‘gini gini gini’.”* (...I didn't immediately become a class teacher, so I was forced to learn on my own by looking at other colleagues about how to teach. Alhamdulillah, many colleagues here didn't say 'you have to do this, you have to do that'.) **(N1.WC1-CI6a, 27 June 2023)**

*“...Bu X (kepala sekolah di TK) itu juga tidak terlalu menuntut harus ini, gini gini dari awal tuh...cuma jelasin ‘Pak MS 1, aturan guru di sini tuh begini.’ ‘Jadi teknis aturan guru begini, guru harus masuk jam segini.’ Gitu lah.”* (...Mrs. X (the school principal) also didn't push me to do this or do this from the beginning, she just explained 'MS 1, the teacher rules here are like this.' 'So technically, the teacher rules are like this: the teacher must arrive at this time.' That is it.) **(N1.WC2-CI6a, 01 July 2023)**

*“...nah saya kan selalu lama ya kalau bikin perencanaan (rencana pembelajaran) gitu karena kan belum begitu hafal apa, langkah-langkahnya. Contohnya karena kan eee, waktu itu eee, apaa online kan beda lagi kan eee, perencanaannya (pembelajaran) gitu. Nah saya tuh pas lagi mepet-mepet waktu suka ada aja yang gini ‘Pak W belum selesai? sini saya bantuin.’”* (Well, I always take a long time to make plans (lesson plan) because I haven't really memorized what the steps are. For example, at that time eee, we taught by online so that was different, about the planning was like that. When I was almost close to deadline, there were colleagues who said, 'Mr. MS 1, you haven't finished yet? Let me help you'.) **(N1.WC3-CI6a, 09 July 2023)**

MS 1 also said that two senior certified teachers were giving some funds for MS 1 to go to college, but this was previously done for other teachers who attended college. In addition, two other teachers who received full scholarships during college also provided financial support to MS 1 for tuition fee.

*“...jadi gini, kan di sini tuh udah ada dua guru yang tersertifikasi. Nah biasanya kan sertifikasi itu eee, dapet tunjangan sertifikasi kan guru. Nah mungkin mereka eee, mungkin itu mengazamkan gitu...kalau sertifikasi ini nantinya sebagiannya pengen ngebantu guru yang mau kuliah lagi...”* (there are already two teachers who are certified. Usually, the certified teacher would get allowance from that certification...So maybe they (two certified teachers) already promised to themselves (for helping other teachers). This (the help) will partially help teachers who wanted to go to college...) **(N1.WC2-CI6a, 01 July 2023)**

*"...pas saya tuh ada dua orang yang kuliah di UT TS 1 sama Bu Y nah pas saya tuh, nah mereka di bantu, berdua. Nah, terus pas kebetulan mereka dapet beasiswa dari Pemkot...." (When I got to college, there were two people who studied at UT (the name of the university), Mrs. TS 1 and Mrs. Y; when it was my turn to study at college, they (Mrs. TS 1 and Mrs. Y) were helped by certified teachers, both. Then they got a scholarship from the city government...) (N1.WC2-Cl6a, 01 July 2023)*

*"...seneng sih seneng terharu TS 1 sama Bu Y tuh pas dapat beasiswa, ngebantuin gitu ke saya, 'Pak, ini buat biaya kuliahnya semester ini.'" (I was happy, I was touched by Mrs. TS 1 and Mrs. Y when they got the scholarship, they helped me, 'Sir, this is for the tuition fee this semester.')* (N1.WC2-Cl6a, 01 July 2023)

MS 3 said that he had a close friend at work. That friend became a discussion partner and a place to share ideas.

*"...iya hehehe jadi bikin kami lebih dekat aja secara latar belakang pengalaman sebelumnya dan memang eee, dia teman diskusi saya dari awal sih. Banyak ide banyak akal yang kita bicarakan buat ekskul ya itu sama Bu TS 3, kalau yang lain sih cukup jadi teman team kerja aja, menyenangkan sih." (...so, it just makes us closer in terms of background experience before and indeed, she has been my discussion partner since the beginning, anyway. Many of the ideas that we talked about for extracurricular activities with Mrs. TS 3. The other colleagues were just enough to be work team; it was fun.) (N3.WC2-Cl6a, 05 July 2023)*

MS 3 felt lucky to have a good working environment, where he talked about positive things when he got together with his colleagues. He also felt happy that there were times for him and his colleagues to go out together.

*"Senang sih disini eee beruntungnya dapat teman kerja yang kalau ngumpul tuh ngomongin ide bukan ngomongin gossip atau ngomongin hal-hal yang lain gitu. Kadang-kadang kita lagi main, terakhir ke Dufan nih, ke Dufan ada hiasan yang bagus 'Ih, kita kalau bikin-bikin begini.' Udah ada ide lagi main hehehe kayaknya udah satu frekuensi aja gitu. Main ke Jogja juga gitu 'Kalau bikin-bikin seru kali ya.' padahal kita lagi main, kerja mulu." (I am happy here, lucky to have colleagues like this; when we got together, we talked about ideas, not talked about gossip or other things. Sometimes we were playing somewhere, Dufan was the last time (we went out together), there was a nice decoration at Dufan, 'We should make something like this.' There was already an idea while outing. We're already in the same frequency. We also went to Jogja and said, 'If we make something like this one, it is will be fun.' Even though we were outing, we were working.) (N3.WC2-Cl6a, 05 July 2023)*

MS 3 felt that his work environment at the kindergarten where he worked could appreciate his ideas, unlike his previous workplace.

*"...saya justru pas saya mampu tuh bisa dihargai, bisa bermanfaat. Kalau mungkin saya bertahan kerja di swasta, mungkin tidak ada perlakuan yang saya terima. Saat ini sih orang-orang lebih menghargai kemampuan saya, orang-orang lebih mau mendengar apa yang saya bicarakan, ide-ide saya. Kalau di swasta kan mungkin saya nggak dapat..." (...when I was able to do so, I could be appreciated and be useful. If I had stayed in the private sector, I might not have received the treatment. At the moment, people value my abilities more, people are more willing to listen to what I said, my ideas. If I were in the private sector, maybe I wouldn't get that...) (N3.WC2-Cl7e, 05 July 2023)*

Another theme was found in MS 1 and MS 3 outside the meaningful work aspect. The theme is Positive Work Environment, one factor that made these two MSs feel comfortable with their work. In MS 1, he thought he was never pushed by his colleagues and the school's principal at work but instead was helped and guided. In addition, MS 1 also felt happy that he got support funding from his colleagues at kindergarten for tuition fees. Meanwhile, MS 3 felt that his work environment aligned with him, and the atmosphere was positive. MS 3 had close friends at work. He could discuss and share ideas with his colleagues and felt that his ideas at his current workplace could be appreciated.

## DISCUSSION

MS 1, MS 2, and MS 3 had many skills as kindergarten teachers; this was also recognized by the triangulation subjects (TS). Each main issue has its meaning regarding the profession of a kindergarten teacher, and the meaning given is related to their personal experiences. This finding is in line with Hackman and Oldham's Job Characteristics Theory (JCT) (1976), which states that one of the aspects is skill variety or various expertise that would contribute to the meaningfulness of the work.

Steger et al. (2012) said that meaningful work is considered to have positive significance and valence (meaningfulness), which is oriented towards growth and objectives. This theory follows the results of the study; all three MSs said that through their work as kindergarten teachers, they had their own goals or objectives, such as to seek knowledge and experience, to contribute as a father figure, and to be able to carry out the trust and create memorable memories on their students. Then, each MS 3 also felt that while working as a kindergarten teacher, each experienced increased personal growth, especially regarding knowledge and emotional aspects.

Previous research also stated that meaningful work contributed to productivity and was the reason for employees to stay in the workplace (Charles-Leija et al., 2023). This is in line with the result of the study that the MSs have been able to stay long enough to work at kindergarten; even two of them (MS 2 and MS 3) had more than ten years of experience as kindergarten teachers. According to Šverko and Vizek-Vidović (in Steger et al., 2012), many people wanted their work to mean something, which was more than just getting a salary and spending time. This is consistent with the study's findings; the MSs also felt that the salary earned as a kindergarten teacher was relatively small. However, the MSs continued to work as kindergarten teachers because many positive things could be achieved, so the salary was not the primary goal.

The results of Bergey's research (2021) showed that his research subjects, who were secondary education teachers, wanted to continue teaching because they wanted to make a social contribution and were motivated to pursue meaningful work personally that contributed to social good. Bergey's research also follows the study's finding: the MSs had a desire or will to be helpful to school stakeholders and their families.

The research has several weaknesses, and they are (1) There was a TS (triangulation subjects) who was interviewed online via Zoom, so there were frequent signal disruptions during the interview process; (2) Some interview locations were not conducive, such as school construction work near the interview area or many sounds of vehicles passing by because the interview was conducted next to the highway, so when the transcribing data was done it was pretty difficult; and (3) Due to the research subjects' busy schedules and/or school holidays, the interview times from one MS to another MS were too short (for instance, interviews were conducted two days in a row with the same MS) so that the preparation for the following interview was not optimal. Suggestions that can be given from the weaknesses of this study: (1) Interviews should be conducted face-to-face for all subjects to get a better result, (2) Before doing the interview, the researcher already has an agreement with the

research subject to do interviews in a conducive place and (3) Try to find the right time and have a few days break to better prepare for the following interview.

## CONCLUSION

The study explores the psychological meaning of work for kindergarten teachers, focusing on their experiences and personal background. The three MSs believe their work helps them develop self-growth, understand their strengths and weaknesses, and manage tasks beyond academic scope. They also aim to be useful to their students and their families. The implications of this study include improving the performance and enthusiasm of male kindergarten teachers, fostering trust in early childhood education units, and promoting appreciation for male teachers in terms of salary. The study provides methodological and practical advice, suggesting that early childhood schools should provide socialization about male teachers' importance and concrete examples. Future research should collect data from family members and focus on more comprehensive and diverse subjects.

## DECLARATION

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### Author contribution statement

Safira Aida Lunadevy led the research, including writing the introduction, methods, results, analysis, and conclusions. Ade Iva Murty assisted in interviewing research subjects. Endro Puspo Wiroko provided input related to the theoretical discussion, reviewed the results, and wrote the manuscript

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The data described in this article can be accessed by contacting the first author.

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The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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