Unveiling The Excellence: Socio-Cultural Perspectives on the Impact of Teacher Certification Program For Male Teachers In Indonesian Islamic Kindergartens

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ABSTRACT

There is a crucial importance to the quality of teachers in education, which necessitates strategies to ensure their competence. It is for this reason that teacher certification is utilized in Indonesia. In spite of the fact that existing research highlights its personal and pedagogical benefits, the socio-cultural dimensions of the initiative have yet to be adequately explored. Using sociocultural theory, this study conducted qualitative interviews with eight male teachers from Islamic kindergartens in four provinces in Indonesia. The analysis of these teachers revealed the following impact: certification increased their income, enhanced their institutional image within the community, provided opportunities for colleagues to share certification experiences, increased motivation to improve performance, and cultivated a spirit of collectivism by sharing certification benefits with non-certified colleagues. In addition to shedding light on income's pivotal significance in individuals' lives, the certification program served as a cultural tool, power dynamics might be impacted by the certification program, and the program contributed to strengthening community values. As a result of this research, future studies may examine the program's long-term effects on teachers and the community in general, as well as its influence on power dynamics and cultural context.

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Introduction

Much research has established the undeniable impact of teachers in education, which extends far beyond the concept of instruction alone. Besides delivering content, teachers can serve as mentors, motivators, and guides, shaping attitudes, inspiring curiosity, and nurturing a student's emotional and social well-being, which to a certain extent emphasizes the unquestionable link between teacher quality and educational success (Cochran-Smith, 2003; Hopkins & Stern, 1996; Lasley et al., 2006; Mandal, 2022; Snoek, 2021; Speer & Elnicki, 1999; Strøm & Falch, 2020; Yusuf, 2005). Consequently, ensuring the quality of our teachers is imperative.

There may be varying perspectives and debates regarding specific methods for achieving this objective, i.e., maintaining teacher quality. However, implementing teacher certification programs represents a prominent effort towards this goal. Teacher certification programs are widely recognized as playing a vital role in shaping the educational landscape. Many research studies revealed the impact of such programs, shedding light on their multifaceted impact. While it is crucial to recognize that teacher quality is not the sole determinant in educational service (Cochran-Smith, 2003; De Talancé, 2017; Hess, 2005; Kent, 2004; Malek & Mishra, 2016; Riadi et al., 2022; Stewart, 2011), research consistently confirms that teachers have a significant influence on the quality of educational processes and services within educational institutions, although this influence fluctuates from time to time and is influenced by the teachers' role (Abraham, 2023; Buddin & Zamarro, 2009; Datnow, 2020; Dirsa et al., 2022; Goldhaber & Brewer, 2000; Iqbal et al., 2018; Laczko-Kerr, 2002; Livingston, 2016; Muhammadiah et al., 2022; Rockoff, 2004; Vasilachi et al., 2021; Zimmerman, 2000).

It is also noteworthy that the same phenomenon has also been observed at the early childhood education level, where a teacher certification program has been implemented to establish eligibility criteria for individuals occupying teaching positions within educational facilities (McCollum et al., 1989). It has been argued that teacher certification programs play a crucial role in ensuring teachers are qualified and well-prepared to provide high-quality services to young children (Croninger et al., 2007; Saracho & Spodek, 2007), a positive effect on children's academic gains (Hooper, 2018), and a need to determine eligibility criteria for teaching special education children (Garrett & Kelley, 2000).

In Indonesia, as stipulated by the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture Number 137 of 2017, Article 24 Paragraph 1, early childhood educators are recognized as professional workers. Their responsibilities include planning and implementing the learning process, assessing learning outcomes, evaluating children's progress, and providing guidance, training, care, and protection for children (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2014; Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology, 2022)

The Indonesian government mandates that professional teachers must hold an educator certificate, which can be obtained through a designated certification program (Government of the Republic of Indonesia, 2013). To ensure excellence in teaching across all educational levels, the Ministry of Education and Culture has initiated a comprehensive certification program. This rigorous series of assessments meticulously evaluates the skills, knowledge, and teaching abilities of educators, ranging from those involved in early childhood education to those engaged in higher learning (World Bank, 2015).

Some studies have examined teacher certification programs' impact on students' learning outcomes and teachers' performance in Indonesia. As discussed by Kusumawardhani (2017), there is little evidence that certified teachers positively influence student learning outcomes or teacher performance. This suggests that there may be a significant gap between the intended goals of teacher certification programs and their actual impact in the Indonesian educational context. In support of this viewpoint, Fahmi et. al. (2011) emphasize that teacher certification has not been shown to impact student achievement significantly. The certification program may have contributed to an increase in teachers' living standards. Still, Fahmi maintains that its primary objective to improve the quality of education as evidenced by improved student performance has not been effectively achieved. Additionally, Siswandoko and Suryadi (2013) suggest that there has been insufficient progress for teaching competency in Indonesia as a result of teacher certification. According to Siswandoko, the certification system does not accurately reflect the actual competencies of teachers, highlighting potential discrepancies between the certification criteria and the genuine capabilities of teachers.

Compared with earlier perspectives, some studies demonstrated a more hopeful outlook regarding the impact of kindergarten teacher certification programs, emphasizing positive outcomes across various dimensions. Ree et al (2012) contend that the Indonesian certification program has played a key role in enhancing the income levels of Indonesian teachers, making the teaching profession financially attractive. It appears that there has been a real improvement in the economic status of educators, which could contribute to the overall attractiveness of the teaching profession.

As demonstrated in a study by Hakim et al. (2018) A noteworthy aspect of teacher certification emerges as it elevates the dignity of teachers. It is posited that the certification program will enhance societal respect for educators, recognizing their crucial contribution to society. Teachers can benefit from this elevation of dignity personally and on a broader scale within the community.

Suratman's (2020) perspective reinforces these positive narratives, emphasizing that teacher certification results in a financial upturn and has a positive effect on teachers' performance. Considering these dual benefits, there appears to be a potential

synergy between financial incentives and enhanced professional capabilities, further highlighting the multifaceted impact of teacher certification.

This optimistic perspective was contributed to by Amalia & Saraswati (2018), who asserted that certification enhances both teachers' incomes and their abilities. In addition to underlining the potential allure of the teaching profession, the dual enhancement in financial compensation and professional skills also suggests a holistic approach to teacher development through certification.

There appears to be a consensus that Amalia & Saraswati (2018) and Nurhattati et. al (2020) proposed a nuanced perspective, emphasizing the positive impact of certification on teacher performance. Observation of the certification results by Nurhattati et.al (2020) suggests that teachers have improved their ability to plan and implement effective learning experiences, effectively manage classrooms, and assess students' progress. There is a nuanced relationship between teacher certification and the enhancement of key pedagogical skills, which is highlighted by this nuanced perspective.

So, while some studies express reservations about the efficacy of teacher certification programs in Indonesia, these contrasting perspectives by Ree, et.al. (2012), Hakim, et. al. (2018), Suratman's (2020), Amalia & Saraswati (2018) Nurhattati et.al. (2020), Rifa'i (2021) and Sholihah et.al. (2020) underscore the potential positive impacts. These include improved income levels, increased societal recognition, enhanced teacher dignity, and positive effects on both financial and professional dimensions, collectively contributing to the broader goals of teacher certification programs in Indonesia.

Concerning the impact of certification programs on early childhood education, there appears to be a predominant focus on increasing incomes and improving teachers' competencies. The importance of these aspects cannot be overstated; however, there is a noticeable void in exploring the socio-cultural dimensions of teacher certification. In settings such as Indonesian Islamic kindergartens, the dominant narratives leave out the intricate interplay between cultural contexts, social dynamics, and the experiences of certified teachers.

A critical revaluation of the current literature is warranted in light of this gap in the literature, which calls for scholars to examine the impact of teacher certification in the context of sociocultural dimensions. In doing so, we can understand how cultural influences shape the professional identities, teaching practices, and overall experiences of male teachers in Islamic kindergartens. To capture the multifaceted nature of teacher development in diverse educational settings, it is essential to understand the sociocultural aspects of certification benefits.

By refocusing attention on the socio-cultural consequences of certification programs, this study seeks to address this gap. This study aims to understand how this program contributes not only to economic and pedagogical dimensions but also to a broader socio-cultural context that teachers occupy. In addition, this nuanced

examination will contribute to our understanding of how certification impacts teachers' career development in Indonesia's Islamic kindergartens.

There is a relatively limited amount of literature on applying socio-cultural theory to investigate the experiences of male teachers in Islamic kindergartens participating in certification programs. Accordingly, the primary purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of male teachers of Indonesian Islamic kindergartens who participated in certification programs using a sociocultural framework. In this regard, the research question that guides this study is the following:

"What are the perceived impact of the certification program for male teachers in Islamic kindergartens in Indonesia within the socio-cultural context?"

The present study explores the experience of male teachers in Islamic kindergarten in Indonesia participated in the teacher certification program, more specifically its impact , from the lens of socio cultural theory. The significance of this study lies in its potential to unveil the experiences of gender specific participant, in the certain setting using specific framework. In terms of gender issues, this study is unique because it involves male teachers in Indonesian who participate in teacher certification program. This is extensive as the teaching occupation in this educational setting addresses a gender imbalance, where education of young children is often perceived as women's area (Cameron, 2001, 2006; Cameron et al., 2001; Cameron & Moss, 2007; Sumsion, 2000), which represent the 'most gender segregated profession worldwide' (Rohrmann, 2020) and Sumsion (2005) called it 'one of the most gender-skewed of all occupations' (p.109).

By examining the experiences of male teachers in certification programs, this study illuminates the challenges they face and how their journeys might differ from those of their female counterparts. This valuable insight can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of gender dynamics within teacher training, ultimately leading to fairer rules and practices that promote equal opportunities for all genders. Secondly, this study focuses on Islamic Kindergarten (Raudlatul Athfal) as the setting where the participants are affiliated. By concentrating on male teachers within this specific context, the study investigates how they navigate the intersection of gender roles, religious values, and educational practices. Understanding the narratives of male teachers in Islamic kindergartens is crucial for creating inclusive and culturally responsive educational environments that uphold both Islamic teachings and gender equity.

Lastly, in terms of the theoretical framework, this study recognizes that individuals' views are shaped by the social and cultural contexts in which they operate or that surround them. The sociocultural theoretical lens allows researchers to explore how gender norms and cultural expectations might influence male teachers' views, perspectives, and experiences of participating in the certification program.

Method

To conduct this empirical study, a qualitative approach was used. This approach aimed at gaining a profound understanding of their insights and was chosen for its suitability in capturing the essence of lived experiences (Creswell, 2007; Denzin, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Gray, 2004; Silverman, 2000). This approach becomes particularly pertinent when investigating subjective phenomena, such as the perceptions of teachers toward certification programs.

The methodological decision to employ interviews as the primary mode of data collection was driven by the intention to foster meaningful and in-depth conversations with the participants (Fontana & Frey, 2005; Griffee, 2005; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Opdenakker, 2006). Interviews, as a qualitative instrument, facilitate dynamic and flexible exchanges that extend beyond the confines of predetermined survey questions, allowing for the emergence of unexpected insights. This approach is well-suited for exploring the complexities of teachers' perceptions of certification programs, where depth of understanding takes precedence (Brinkmann, 2017; Fontana & Prokos, 2007).

The criteria for participant selection in this study encompassed male teachers actively engaged in teaching within Islamic kindergartens (Raudlatul Athfal) who had completed the teacher certification program. The first contact with potential participants was established through some key informants, who extended invitations to participate in the interview process. Following this, the individual was allowed to determine whether he was willing to participate in the study, thereby exercising their right to decide. Thirteen prospective participants were identified and agreed to participate in the study. However, some cancellations, constraints, and unforeseen personal factors led to only eight male teachers from Islamic kindergartens in Banten, Central Java, West Java, and East Java being interviewed. Fatah, Gagah, Herman, Iwan, Jauhari, Qulyubi, Rohman, and Udin were anonymous participants who provided a distinctive perspective, offering their unique context when dealing with certification programs in the Indonesian educational landscape.

The selection of interview venues was left to the discretion of the participants, predominantly taking place either in their respective schools or residences. This decision was intentional, designed to create a comfortable and familiar setting conducive to open and candid conversations. Negotiations regarding interview times were a collaborative effort, recognizing the participants' busy schedules and ensuring a convenient and conducive environment for meaningful discussions.

Regarding the duration of teaching experience, the participants presented a diverse range of perspectives, with teaching tenures spanning from 2 to 19 years. All eight participants were married, reflecting a demographic characteristic that may influence their views on the teacher certification program. Furthermore, with the

explicit permission of the participants, the interviews were recorded, allowing for accurate and comprehensive documentation of the conversations.

In this report, all participants' names were anonymous. The anonimity was used in this regard to ethically guarantee that confidentiality is protected (Vainio, 2013) and the unknown use of the data in the future (Moore, 2012)or potentially put participants at risk and harm (Wiles et al., 2008). Accordingly, no one will be able to identify the participants' profiles.

The analysis process, rooted in qualitative traditions involved data reduction, where interview recordings were transcribed and condensed for easier analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Lichtman, 2013). This led to the identification of key themes and patterns (Morse, 1994; Thorne, 2000). The data display phase aimed to present these findings meaningfully, facilitating interpretation and analysis. Throughout, the socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) lens guided the exploration, examining how social and cultural situation influenced teachers' perceptions and decisions.

Throughout the research process, socio-cultural theory served as a foundational lens, informing both data collection and analysis strategies. This approach ensured that the teachers' narratives were not merely interpreted in isolation, but rather understood within the broader context of the socio-cultural environment that shaped their perceptions. For instance, careful attention was paid to how community expectations exerted pressure on certified teachers to demonstrate improved performance relative to their uncertified peers. The subsequent analysis phase involved a rigorous examination of how cultural beliefs and prevailing social norms influenced the teachers' initial decision to partake in the certification program. Ultimately, the data presentation aimed to elucidate the intricate tapestry of perspectives held by these male teachers regarding the impact and significance of the certification program.

Regarding the theoretical framework, the researcher used Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory as a guide to the study. According to this theory, social and cultural context significantly influence how humans develop and learn. Vygotsky's concept that our thinking is shaped by our social interactions and culture, especially language, provides a great way to explore what these teachers experience (Vygotsky et al., 2012). Additionally, Burr's (2015) social constructionism was also applied, claiming that what we know and believe depends on the context around us - our social and cultural surroundings. It is in line with Vygotsky's idea that our thinking is not solely a personal endeavor; rather, it is influenced by how we interact with others. Furthermore, Berger and Luckmann's social construction of reality was applied, demonstrating how individuals are actively shaped by societal norms and structures in shaping their perceptions and meanings.

Taking into account cultural dimensions, Hofstede's (1984) cultural dimensions theory is integrated to explore how cultural values affect male teachers' perceptions and

experiences. In this framework, we explore the cultural dimensions that shape societal norms and have an impact on the interpretation and understanding of certification programs. Taking into account the interconnected nature of social interactions and cultural contexts, based on Vygotsky (1978), Burr's (2015) and Hofstede's (1984), the study seeks to provide nuanced insights into how sociocultural dynamics shape Islamic kindergarten teachers' experiences with the certification process in Indonesia.

Results

Several recurring themes emerged amongst the male Islamic kindergarten teachers participating in this study, offering valuable insights into their shared perspectives and experiences. Notably, regarding the perceived impact of the teacher certification program, participants expressed the following:

Certification as an income booster

When being asked their opinion briefly about impact of certification program, all participants in this study acknowledged that certification program has brought about a noticeable increase in their income. This financial benefit was a common thread among their responses, highlighting the tangible impact of the certification program. Participants expressed their view as below:

I won't deny that certification program clearly boosts my income. I don't really care if people perceived me being materialistic or money oriented person.

(Fatah, a teacher in Central Java)

My feelings after certification are relieved. We don't have to worry about doing side jobs anymore for earning additional income like I did before. The household matters are secure. Before certification, as a husband I used to be stressed a lot. Now, thankfully, it's safe to say things are more stable.

(Gagah, a teacher in Central Java)

Due to the certification incentive, I feel more at ease. There's an additional income, even if it doesn't come every month. But, you know, we have the certainty of some income.

(Herman, a teacher in East Java)

Basically, you know, there's a right, there's a duty. Or the other way around, there's a duty, there's a right. We've fulfilled our duty, which is complying with the regulations for professional teachers through certification. After that, our data is in, and if we then receive an allowance, I mean, after we pass certification, then we have a right. Every three months, there's something going into our accounts.

(Iwan, a teacher in East Java)

Well, our income does increase concretely. That's what the government wants. We work hard, and the government thinks about our rights. I'm just grateful, our income is increasing.

(Jauhari, teacher in East Java)

I don't mean to brag when I say that before certification program I felt very content with what God has given me. I didn't feel materialistically deprived. But I also have to be grateful for the blessings that after certification, there indeed is an increase in income.

(Qulyubi, a teacher in West)

The prevalent theme across the provided testimonials revolves around a notable increase in income attributed to the teacher certification program. Teachers consistently express a tangible improvement in their financial circumstances following certification, highlighting a distinct pattern of positive economic impact. Gagah articulates a sense of relief, emphasizing that the certification program has alleviated concerns about the need for additional income through side jobs. This sentiment is echoed by Iwan, who underscores the added financial security provided by the certification incentive, even if the disbursement is not on a monthly basis. The sense of reassurance is further emphasized by Jauhari, who humorously remarks on the regularity of income entering their accounts every three months, thanks to the certification incentive provided by government. The common pattern is underscored by the shared belief that the certification program directly contributes to increased income. Teachers view the program as a means of financial stability and a recognition of their professional dedication. The testimonials collectively paint a picture of tangible and concrete financial benefits resulting from the teacher certification initiative, reinforcing the positive impact on educators' economic well-being.

Improvement of the institution's image

The Malay organization that serves as a forum for the aspirations of the Malay community is MABM (*Majlis Adat Budaya Melayu*). This organization has a role in preserving Malay culture in Indonesia, including the Malay community's art, regional culture, traditions, and customs.

In addition to the commonly mentioned concept of income increase by the majority of participants, a few participants have expressed a unique perspective on the impact and benefits of the certification program. Gagah, a participant in Central Java, acknowldged that certification program increased their institution's profile among community.

We accepted the fact that our income does increase with certification. However, it's not just about that. I've noticed that once a significant number of our teachers are certified, the public perception of our institution improves dramatically. Our institution's image is enhanced, we're seen as more professional, and the community's trust in us grows. I frequently hear people inquiring about the number of our teachers who haven't yet accomplished their bachelor degrees, and how many have already received certification. These factors are often used as benchmarks to evaluate our institution.

(Gagah, a teacher in West Java)

From the above view, it has become clear that teacher certification not only impacts individual income among teacher themselves but also plays a significant role in shaping public perception of their institution. As the number of certified teachers within their organization increases, they observed a marked improvement in their image. The community perceives them as more professional and places greater trust in their capabilities. In fact, they often encountered individuals who directly inquire about the

rate of certified teachers on their staff and the proportion still pursuing their bachelor's degrees. These factors have become key benchmarks used to evaluate their institution.

The demand for better performance increased

Udin, a teacher residing in a rural area of Banten, has observed that the certification process is being utilized by school principals as a means to demand enhanced performance from certified teachers. He articulated this viewpoint as follows:

Now, since we were certified the school principal has a reason to encourage, and even slightly give more pressure on, us to improve our performance. Ultimately, we were demanded to be more disciplined, more creative, be a role model, even better in some fundamental issues. There are no more excuses, for instance, we asked to take leave the school earlier for tending to the fields, had to go to the market, or similar activities that we used to do frequently in the past before being certified. Back then, the school principal didn't prohibit it because he knew it was necessary for us to seek additional income through outside teaching. Now, as our income increased due to certification, it's considered that we don't necessarily have to push ourselves to look for extra income elsewhere. So, when the principal asks for our commitment, we can only comply.

(Udin, a teacher in Banten)

From the above quote It indicated that principal required that certified teachers showing stronger dedication and total commitment to the profession. In essence, it seems that the certification not only signified a personal achievement but also triggered a transformation in the expectations placed upon certified teachers. The principal's encouragement was coupled with a nuanced form of pressure, urging certified teachers to elevate their performance, embody discipline and creativity, and set an exemplary standard in various dimensions of their professional roles. Furthermore, the principal has discontinued certain privileges and conveniences that were previously afforded to the teachers, which are no longer considered acceptable or permissible.

Chance to share knowledge and experience

Again, another unique impact of certification stated by Iwan. He said:

The positive side is clear, sir.. an increase in income... and everyone knows that..hahaha. But what I feel from it... in this district, there are many teachers who are not yet certified. That's why we who are already certified are often asked to share experiences, invited to IGRA forums or have informal chats with many principals and RA teachers asking how to get the teachers certified as soon as possible. This is also a blessing.. we can share knowledge, right?.

(Iwan, a teacher in East Java)

While the increased income associated with teacher certification undoubtedly holds merit, the interviewees identified additional positive experiences. Within their district, where a significant portion of teachersremain uncertified, individuals who have achieved certification have discovered themselves in a unique position to contribute to their colleagues' professional development. These certified teachers are frequently invited to forums organized by the IGRA (association of kindergarten teachers) and

engage in informal discussions with school principal and other teachers, all focused on a singular objective: expediting the certification process for their peers. This role, beyond the inherent satisfaction of knowledge sharing, fosters a commendable sense of community and collective progress within the district. As the interviewee aptly expressed, it is indeed a "blessing" to witness and participate in such collaborative efforts.

Being certified generated additional task

Being a certified teacher also created a dilemma for them. Herman narrated his story after being certified.

For us, as kindergarten teachers, getting certified really boosts our income, no doubt about it. But, you know, there's a catch. Once certified, we can only teach in a class with a minimum of 15 students. It's not easy, especially for us in the village. It's tough to find a lot of students. That's why the school principal is asking us to help promote the school to potential parents so that they enroll their children here. The hope is to meet the minimum target. It's a bit of a dilemma for us. After getting certified, we end up with extra responsibilities. But if we don't get that many students, we have to move to another school that meets the regulations. It's a hassle. Imagine moving to another school when our certification is under the name of this institution. Ethically, it doesn't seem right. So, in the end, we just have to comply with the school principal's instructions.

(Herman, a teacher in East Java)

The above situation emerged due to governemnt regulation that certified tecahers have to teach in a clas with certain number of students. Otherwise, they have to move to different educational institution which fulfiled the provision. This adds a layer of complexity, as moving to another school implies leaving an institution where our certification is associated with its name—an action that may be perceived as ethically questionable. Consequently, despite the challenges and ethical considerations, we find ourselves obliged to comply with the instructions provided by the school principal.

Practice of sharing income to uncertified colleagues

The following narrative is embedded within the dialogue between a researcher and Rohman, a teacher from West Java:

I'm happy that my financial situation has improved with the certification allowance. However, there's something even more important, which is that I can do something for my colleagues who are not yet certified. In our institution, we have agreed that a certain percentage of each disbursed certification allowance will be deducted, collected, and then distributed to other teacher friends who are not yet certified. After all, we're all teaching together. So, we share.

(Rohman, a teacher in West Java)

From Rohman's story it indicated that there is a profound sense of satisfaction that envelops this individual, stemming from the improvement in their financial situation due to the certification allowance. Yet, they believe there is a matter of even greater importance. This revolves around the opportunity they have to assist their uncertified colleagues. In their institution, an agreement has been established which

stipulates that a specific percentage of each disbursed certification allowance will be deducted. This deducted sum is then gathered and later distributed among their fellow teachers who are yet to be certified.

Discussions

Immersing ourselves in the experiences of male teachers at Islamic kindergartens in Indonesia, the interview data unveiled recurrent themes reflecting the interplay between cultural influences and personal views on the impact of a teacher certification program. To unlock the deeper meaning woven within these themes, we turned to the invaluable lens of socio-cultural theory. This framework illuminates how cultural contexts shape individual perspectives, offering an insightful perspective on the experiences these teachers shared.

Income as a pivotal aspect in individual's life

Malays have a tradition of local wisdom values , the basis for forming MABM. In local wisdom, the behavior and character of a community can usually be explored ,(Kartikawangi 2017; Mergel 2012).

The recent study exploring the experiences of male teachers in Islamic kindergartens following their participation in a certification program revealed a diverse range of perspectives on its impact. While individual experiences varied, a common thread emerged: the significant improvement in income. All participants (Fatah, Gagah, Herman, Iwan, Jauhari, Qulyubi, Rohman, and Udin) expressed similar strong claim that the program led to tangible financial benefits, ultimately addressing their prior financial concerns. This shared narrative suggests that the increased income may have served as a prominent motivator, prompting them to pursue and complete the program. This finding alligned with the previous studies conducted by Ree, et.al. (2012), Hakim, et. al. (2018), Suratman (2020), Amalia & Saraswati (2018), Nurhattati et.al. (2020), Rifa'i (2021) and Sholihah et.al. (2020). However, socio cultural theory facilitated this empirical inquiry to unpack the finding which in fact presenting more than the discourse of income raise among male teachers in Islamic kindergarten.

This societal emphasis forms a fundamental lens through which the participants perceive the certification program, internalizing it not only as a pathway for professional advancement but also as a cultural tool for enhancing their economic well-being. This shared understanding constructs a socio-culturally constructed reality where financial stability becomes an inherent component of personal and professional success. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory sheds light on this internalization process. Influenced by societal values, the teachers view the certification program not only as a professional advancement opportunity but also as a culturally sanctioned instrument for achieving the societal expectation of stability. This shared understanding fosters a reality where financial security becomes an integral element of their perceived success

narrative, both personally and professionally. Further insights are gleaned from Burr's (2015) social constructionism, which emphasizes the context-dependent nature of knowledge and beliefs. The collective focus on improved income constructs a shared reality where the certification program is perceived as a tangible means to address financial concerns within their specific cultural and professional context.

The similar perception among participants regarding the positive impact of certification on the teachers' income aligns with the deeply ingrained cultural understanding in certain community that financial stability represents a cornerstone of well-being and success (Ahituv & Lerman, 2011; Haider, 2001). Some studies evidently proved that income has something to do with marriage stability (Burgess et al., 2003; Cutright, 1971) and more importantly for men in a family it has very crucial factor about their dignity in their community (Thébaud, 2010). In short, it can be perceived that income is very important factor for participants' life.

Certification as cultural tool

As mentioned erlier by Gagah that certification positively influenced the community's perception of the institution suggests a deeper connection between individual experiences and the broader sociocultural context. The shared understanding among teachers that certification enhances the institution's image highlights the sociocultural significance attached to educational qualifications within their community. Makarychev (2020) suggests that there is growing trend of understanding culture as an instrument, the historical and ongoing instrumentalization of the arts, to promote core values and goals of society.

Certification became an instrument in this regard. Moreover, the finidng revealed that the institution is not merely a physical space for educational activities; it becomes a social entity embedded in a network of relationships and shared meanings. The positive reception of a certified teaching staff signifies a cultural valuation of educational qualifications as markers of professionalism and competence. The community's reliance on the number of certified teachers as a benchmark for evaluating the institution points to the socio-cultural importance assigned to formal recognition in the form of certification. In the realm of socio-cultural theory, the impact of teacher certification extends beyond individual benefits to the realm of community perception and institutional standing.

As teachers acquire certification, the community tends to view the educational institution more favorably, attributing a heightened level of professionalism. This positive perception contributes to increased trust within the community. The theory suggests that the certification process not only shapes the individual teacher's professional identity but also molds the collective identity of the institution within the socio-cultural context. This aligns with Vygotsky's (1978; 2012) sociocultural theory,

emphasizing the role of social factors in cognitive development. In this context, the certification of teachers serves as a cultural tool that influences the community's construction of meaning and understanding of educational institutions, emphasizing the interconnectedness of individual and communal development within a cultural framework.

Power dynamic within certification

Malays have a tradition of local wisdom values , the basis for forming MABM. In local wisdom, the behavior and character of a community can usually be explored ,(Kartikawangi 2017; Mergel 2012).

The findings of the present study also represents power relation. On the one hand, Iwan claimed that as certified teacher he frequently accepted invitation to share their knowledge and experience of succeeding to pass the certification program. It indicated that his professional identity has improved. When teachers become certified, they are recognized by their colleagues, school administrators, and other stakeholders as experts in their field. To some extent, he posses a power position that made him deserved of recognition and respect. they were perceived as having stronger professional identity than those who have not yet certified.

On the other hand, some cases positioned certified teachers in less power position when, as Udin stated, school principal strongly asked them to show better performance at work and, based on Herman's story that, they were asked to take part in promoting school to recruit prospective students due to the provision of the limited number of students. The both explanations indicated that certified teachers possessed good bargaining position. However, findings also reported that there was a time when certified teachers dealing with opposite situation, which means teachers became less powerful. The notion about expected work performance, to be more dedicated, more disciplined, constructed by principals towards certified teachers indicated that power dynamics existed.

This findings suggest a potential shift in power dynamics within the early childhood education setting, particularly between certified teachers and the school principal. Certification, serving as a marker of professional achievement, may have empowered the principal to set higher expectations and exert greater influence on teachers' professional conduct. This translates to a justifiable rationale for the principal to encourage and, perhaps, apply pressure on teachers to elevate their performance. Furthermore, the narrative presented by Herman, ateacher in East Java, highlights another potential source of disempowerment for certified teachers: their mandatory participation in school promotion campaigns aimed at attracting more students. This obligation leaves them with little choice but to comply, suggesting a shift in power

dynamics where certification may not necessarily translate to increased autonomy or influence.

The above narration indicated that there was a contestation of power behind certification program. It is indeed that the concept of power in communities is complex and dynamic, with decision-making arenas representing a range of interests that can shift and change (Hyman et al., 2001). From the above description power shift existed among certified teachers. sometimes they were powerful, but at the sametime they were powerless. According to Foucault (2002), power is not a thing that one possesses, but rather a force that operates within social relationships. Power dynamics are thus constantly negotiated and contested within social structures. This can be seen in the ways in which power is distributed across different social identities, such as gender, race, and class. In the context of teacher certification in the present study, power was not a static entity which indicates the existence of power dynamics and authority. They play an important role in shaping teacher expectations and behaviors; on the one hand they are regarded as powerful figure, but on another occasiuon they have no choice to make decision unless obeying the instruction from upper figures.

Teacher certification and community values

Another notable finding from the present study was certification has enabled male teachers to share income to non certified teachers, as narrated by Rohman. It is important to recognize that the act of sharing was not solely about financial support. It represented a deeper bond of trust and solidarity among the teachers. It sent a message that they were in this together, supporting each other's growth and professional development. This fostered a sense of belonging and encouraged collaboration, potentially leading to a more supportive and enriching work environment for everyone. The teachers view themselves not as isolated individuals, but as part of a collective, united by the shared experience of being teachers. This interconnectedness is rooted in their shared goal of providing quality education. In the school where community values of collaboration and mutual support are manifested through an agreement where certified teachers share their incentives and allowances with uncertified colleagues. This practice underscores a collective responsibility for the well-being of all educators, regardless of certification status. It reflects a commitment to fairness, unity, and a shared pursuit of educational goals, fostering a cooperative and supportive atmosphere within the school community.

In Hofstede's (1984) cultural dimensions theory, collectivism refers to the degree to which individuals in a society prioritize the needs and goals of the group over their own individual needs and goals. In contrast, individualism describes societies where individuals prioritize their own personal ambitions and achievements. The notion of collectivism is deeply incorporated among Indonesians as they have concept that called sama rata, sama rasa. The concept of "Sama Rata, Sama Rasa" is a significant part of

Indonesian culture and society which represents 'mutual enjoyment' (Swaningrum, 2023) among community members. The main message of the concept is that as we work together, so we should enjoy this sweat and sour together (Imelda, 2002).

The practice of sharing financial incentives with non-certified colleagues can be understood as a manifestation of this culture of sharing. It reflects the social relationships and collective practices that are formed within the workplace, where colleagues are seen as part of a community with shared values and interests. This is consistent with the socio-cultural perspective that emphasizes the importance of social relationships and collective practices in shaping individual behavior and values (Vygotsky, 1978). In this regard, sharing has become the common value implemented among community where people live. The considerable impact of community norms and values in shaping individual behavior has been extensively studied across various cultural settings. Community norms and values indeed influence people's behavior (Mackie, 2009; Wiessner, 2005). These values, which are usually derived from personal ideals, act as an internal moral compass, orienting individuals to their world. They reflect a sense of connection to a community and can refer to shared beliefs held by individuals in a social group or specific geographical location (Anheier, 2020). Norms are shared values within a group that exert social pressure to believe or act in ways consistent with these shared priorities. The collective values of a community play a pivotal role in molding local regulations, influencing interpersonal interactions, and guiding the behavior of its members (Burke & Young, 2011). Notably, these shared values are not static and can evolve over time, reflecting the collective decisions made by the community members (Wray-Lake et al., 2014).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the certification program for male teachers in Islamic kindergartens, when viewed through the lens of socio-cultural theory, has multifaceted implications. One of the most prevalent discourses relates to the increased income that the certification brings and the enhanced livelihood and economic benefits. As the certification serves as a cultural tool, the upliftment is financial and socio-cultural. It elevates teachers' social standing and recognition within their communities by validating their professional competencies. Moreover, the certification process promotes a contestation of power within the organization. Based on the particular context among the various actors, the role of a certified teacher can be viewed in both a powerful and powerless manner. As a final point, the certification program contributes to strengthening community values. It enhances a sense of unity and shared purpose among certified teachers within the community, therefore reinforcing collective values and solidarity.

Future research will be able to build on the findings from this study, thus allowing for a more comprehensive examination of the lasting impact of the certification

programs. An ongoing longitudinal study may be undertaken in the future in order to understand better the effects of this program on teachers' professional development, their income stability, and the quality of education provided in both public and Islamic kindergartens. Comparing the performance of certified and non-certified teachers would allow us to identify the tangible impact that the program has on teaching practices, student outcomes, and community perceptions.

Further, the current study only covers the Java context and it would be interesting to investigate how the certification program interacts with different cultural contexts. Other regions of Indonesia, such as Sumatera, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, or other cultural contexts could be included in future empirical studies. Taking this into consideration will assist in determining whether the program's effects are similar across different regions or if they are influenced by cultural differences. Last but not least, research could address policy implications, providing guidelines for policymakers on how to optimize the certification program so that it maximizes its benefits for teachers, students, and the greater community. By developing these recommendations, we hope to build upon existing research and enhance understanding of the socio-cultural effects of certification programs.

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