

Distributive Justice in Teacher Affirmative Policy: A Case Study of Special Allowance Allocation for Teachers in Papua

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Abstract

Teacher distribution and welfare remain central challenges in achieving equitable educational quality across geographically disadvantaged regions of Indonesia. In 2026, the Indonesian government expanded its affirmative program for teachers working in disadvantaged, frontier, and outermost areas, including an increased allocation of special teacher allowances. This study examines the policy through the framework of distributive justice, focusing on whether affirmative financial support adequately recognizes the structural burdens experienced by teachers in remote regions. Using a qualitative policy case study, the research analyzes policy objectives, eligibility mechanisms, distribution procedures, and perceived effects among teachers and education stakeholders in Papua. The study distinguishes between equality of treatment and equity of compensation, arguing that teachers working under substantially different geographical, infrastructural, and socioeconomic conditions may require differentiated policy support. The analysis also considers whether financial incentives alone are sufficient to address teacher shortages and retention problems. The study proposes that distributive justice in teacher policy should integrate financial compensation with professional development, housing, transportation, digital connectivity, and career advancement opportunities. By examining teacher welfare as a matter of educational justice rather than merely human-resource management, this research contributes to broader discussions about state responsibility and equitable education provision in geographically marginalized regions.

[Distribusi dan kesejahteraan guru tetap menjadi tantangan utama dalam mencapai kesetaraan kualitas pendidikan di seluruh wilayah Indonesia yang kurang beruntung secara geografis. Pada tahun 2026, pemerintah Indonesia memperluas program afirmasi untuk guru yang bekerja di daerah-daerah yang kurang beruntung, terpencil, dan terluar, termasuk peningkatan alokasi tunjangan khusus guru. Studi ini mengkaji kebijakan tersebut melalui kerangka keadilan distributif, dengan fokus pada apakah dukungan finansial afirmasi secara memadai mengakui beban struktural yang dialami oleh guru di daerah terpencil. Dengan menggunakan studi kasus kebijakan kualitatif,

penelitian ini menganalisis tujuan kebijakan, mekanisme kelayakan, prosedur distribusi, dan dampak yang dirasakan oleh guru dan pemangku kepentingan pendidikan di Papua. Studi ini membedakan antara kesetaraan perlakuan dan kesetaraan kompensasi, dengan berargumen bahwa guru yang bekerja di bawah kondisi geografis, infrastruktur, dan sosial ekonomi yang sangat berbeda mungkin memerlukan dukungan kebijakan yang berbeda. Analisis ini juga mempertimbangkan apakah insentif finansial saja cukup untuk mengatasi masalah kekurangan dan retensi guru. Studi ini mengusulkan bahwa keadilan distributif dalam kebijakan guru harus mengintegrasikan kompensasi finansial dengan pengembangan profesional, perumahan, transportasi, konektivitas digital, dan peluang peningkatan karier. Dengan meneliti kesejahteraan guru sebagai bagian dari keadilan pendidikan dan bukan sekadar manajemen sumber daya manusia, penelitian ini berkontribusi pada diskusi yang lebih luas tentang tanggung jawab negara dan penyediaan pendidikan yang adil di wilayah-wilayah yang terpinggirkan secara geografis.]

Keywords: distributive justice, teacher policy, affirmative policy, Papua, 3T education

Introduction

Teachers are among the most important resources through which the state realizes the right to education. Yet the distribution of teachers remains highly unequal across geographical areas. Schools in remote, frontier, outermost, and disadvantaged regions frequently face difficulties in attracting and retaining qualified teachers, while schools in more accessible and urban areas may have a relatively greater concentration of personnel. This pattern is not simply a problem of numerical shortage. It is also a problem of distributive justice because teachers working in different locations experience fundamentally unequal conditions of employment. A teacher assigned to a remote community may confront high transportation costs, limited housing, unreliable communication networks, restricted access to health and public services, professional isolation, and difficulties participating in training and career advancement. Treating all teachers as if they perform their work under equivalent conditions may therefore reproduce inequality rather than eliminate it.

Papua provides a particularly important context for examining this issue. The geographical characteristics of Papua, including mountainous terrain, dispersed settlements, limited transportation infrastructure, and substantial variation in the availability of public services, create distinctive challenges for educational provision. In many areas, the difficulty of reaching schools is inseparable from the difficulty of staffing them. Teachers may have to travel long distances, relocate away from their families, rely on expensive transportation, or work with limited

professional support. Educational inequality in Papua must therefore be understood not only through student access and school infrastructure but also through the distribution and welfare of teachers.

Indonesia has long recognized the need for differentiated support for teachers working in difficult locations. Law No. 14 of 2005 concerning Teachers and Lecturers established a legal basis for special allowances for teachers assigned to special areas. More recently, the regulatory framework for teacher allowances was updated through the Regulation of the Minister of Primary and Secondary Education No. 4 of 2025 concerning technical guidelines for professional allowances, special allowances, and additional income for regional civil-servant teachers. The regulation reflects a continuing recognition that geographical and employment conditions may justify differentiated forms of compensation. Such differentiation is a form of affirmative policy because it departs from uniform remuneration in order to address unequal working burdens.

The normative question, however, is whether affirmative financial compensation is sufficient. A special allowance may compensate teachers for some additional costs and hardships, but financial incentives alone cannot necessarily resolve the institutional conditions that make remote postings unattractive or unsustainable. Teachers may still face inadequate housing, expensive transportation, professional isolation, limited access to certification or continuing professional development, and weak digital connectivity. These factors can affect both recruitment and retention. A teacher who receives an allowance but lacks safe accommodation or opportunities for career development may still seek reassignment to a more accessible location.

The distinction between equality and equity is central to this problem. Equality of treatment would imply that teachers receive similar forms of support regardless of location. Equity recognizes that equal treatment can produce unequal real outcomes when working conditions differ substantially. Teachers in Papua's geographically disadvantaged regions may therefore require greater or different forms of support not because they are inherently more deserving but because the cost and difficulty of performing equivalent professional responsibilities are higher.

The literature on distributive justice provides a useful framework for analyzing this issue. Rawls (1971) argues that inequalities may be justified when they improve the position of those who are least advantaged. Sen (2009) similarly emphasizes the importance of substantive capabilities rather than formal equality alone. Applied to teacher policy, these perspectives suggest that a just remuneration system should consider what teachers are actually able to do and sustain under unequal conditions. A uniform salary may be formally equal, but if one teacher must spend a substantially larger share of income and time on transportation, accommodation, or communication, the real value of compensation is unequal.

This article asks: to what extent does the special allowance for teachers in Papua reflect distributive justice, and what additional affirmative measures are necessary to address structural inequalities in teacher deployment and retention?

The article argues that special allowances are normatively justified because teachers in geographically disadvantaged areas face unequal burdens. However, distributive justice requires more than additional income. A just affirmative policy should integrate financial compensation with housing, transportation, professional development, digital access, career opportunities, and context-sensitive recruitment strategies.

The first group of previous studies examines teacher distribution and absenteeism in remote Indonesia. Research by the World Bank and Indonesian institutions has consistently identified geographical isolation as a major challenge in teacher deployment. The *Teacher Employment and Deployment in Indonesia* study found substantial problems in the allocation of teachers, including shortages in remote schools and difficulties in designing incentives capable of supporting sustained service in hard-to-reach areas (World Bank 2009). The study recommended that teacher allowances be connected to geographical classifications and that local recruitment strategies be strengthened where staffing problems persist. More recent policy analyses continue to identify eastern Indonesia, particularly Papua and Maluku, as regions facing major shortages and uneven teacher distribution (Bank Indonesia 2024).

A second group of studies evaluates the effects of financial incentives and special allowances. Evidence concerning remote-area allowances is mixed but generally suggests that financial support can influence teacher behavior under appropriate institutional conditions. A World Bank report on Indonesian education notes that some studies in Papua found lower absenteeism among teachers receiving remote-area incentives, while other studies reported less positive outcomes or weak targeting (World Bank 2020). The KIAT Guru evidence further demonstrates that incentives linked to teacher presence and accountability can affect learning outcomes and teacher behavior in remote schools (Gaduh et al. 2023). These studies indicate that allowances may be effective, but their impact depends on design, targeting, monitoring, and the institutional environment.

A third group of studies concerns teacher professionalism and educational challenges in Papua. Research on teacher professional development in rural Papua identifies limited infrastructure, geographical isolation, and institutional capacity as important constraints on teachers' access to professional learning opportunities. Evidence from remote regions also shows that teachers may require broader institutional support beyond salary and allowances, including professional development and access to communication technologies. The 2025 special PPG initiative for teachers in areas with severe internet limitations illustrates official recognition that equal professional requirements may require differentiated delivery mechanisms in special regions (Direktorat Guru Pendidikan Dasar 2025). Nevertheless, previous research has rarely examined special teacher allowances primarily through the normative framework of distributive justice. This article addresses that gap by treating teacher welfare and deployment as a question of

equitable resource distribution rather than merely administrative human-resource management.

This study employs a qualitative policy case-study approach focused on affirmative support for teachers working in geographically disadvantaged regions of Papua. The case is analytically significant because Papua combines substantial geographical barriers with persistent inequalities in public-service access and educational provision. The study uses Papua as a policy context rather than assuming that all areas within Papua experience identical conditions. Geographic and institutional diversity within the region is itself part of the distributive justice problem.

The study relies on policy and documentary analysis. The source base includes Indonesian laws and regulations governing teachers and teacher allowances, official government publications, World Bank and other institutional reports, and peer-reviewed scholarship on teacher distribution, remote-area incentives, and education in geographically disadvantaged regions. The analysis is organized around four dimensions: (1) equality of treatment and equity of compensation, (2) targeting and eligibility, (3) the relationship between incentives and teacher retention, and (4) the need for multidimensional affirmative support. This approach evaluates not only how much compensation is allocated but also whether the policy recognizes the different burdens teachers experience and whether the overall policy design is capable of improving equitable educational provision.

From Equal Treatment to Equitable Compensation

The principle of equal treatment is deeply embedded in public employment systems. Teachers performing equivalent professional roles may be expected to receive comparable salaries and benefits. This principle protects workers against arbitrary discrimination. However, equality of nominal compensation does not necessarily produce equality of working conditions. Teachers serving in geographically isolated communities can incur costs and burdens that are absent or substantially lower for teachers working in urban areas.

The concept of distributive justice therefore requires a distinction between equal remuneration and equitable compensation. Equal remuneration refers to the provision of identical financial benefits for comparable professional positions. Equitable compensation recognizes that different locations may impose unequal burdens and that additional support can be justified to prevent geographical disadvantage from being transferred entirely to individual workers.

Rawls's theory is particularly relevant because it directs attention to institutional arrangements that affect those who face the greatest disadvantages (Rawls 1971). A teacher assigned to a difficult-to-reach school may have less practical access to professional opportunities and public services than a teacher in an urban location. If the state expects teachers to provide comparable educational

services under unequal conditions, then differentiated compensation can be understood as a mechanism for reducing an institutional inequality rather than granting an arbitrary privilege.

Sen's capability approach provides an additional perspective. According to Sen (2009), the value of resources depends partly on individuals' ability to convert them into meaningful opportunities. The same salary can produce different real capabilities when the cost of transportation, housing, food, communication, and mobility varies across locations. Teachers in remote regions may therefore require additional resources simply to achieve a comparable standard of professional and personal functioning.

This argument is reflected in Indonesian teacher policy. Law No. 14 of 2005 recognizes special areas as a basis for differentiated teacher support, while the 2025 technical regulation on teacher allowances establishes procedures for administering special allowances to eligible regional civil-servant teachers. The policy principle is therefore already grounded in the recognition that geographical circumstances matter. Yet the distributive justice question is more complex than determining whether teachers receive an additional allowance. The level of support must be considered in relation to the actual burden of service. Transportation in remote Papua may be expensive and irregular. Housing may be unavailable or inadequate. Communication costs may be higher, and professional services may be difficult to access. An allowance that is sufficient in one region may have a different real value in another. The equity of compensation must therefore be assessed contextually.

Papua and the Structural Burden of Remote Teaching

The difficulties experienced by teachers in Papua are structural rather than simply individual. A teacher may be highly committed and professionally qualified but still face obstacles created by geographical isolation and limited infrastructure. The burden of teaching in a remote region includes not only classroom responsibilities but also the conditions required to reach, remain in, and sustain work at the school.

Teacher distribution research has long identified the challenge of staffing remote schools. The World Bank's study of teacher employment and deployment in Indonesia emphasized that remote locations required special attention because national salary structures and ordinary recruitment mechanisms were insufficient to ensure equitable distribution (World Bank 2009). The study recommended the classification of schools according to remoteness and special circumstances and suggested that such classifications be linked to incentive entitlements.

Papua represents a setting in which this problem is especially pronounced. The relationship between population and educational infrastructure is complicated by terrain and distance. A school may be located in a district that appears administratively connected but remains practically difficult to reach. In such contexts, teacher deployment cannot be managed solely through numerical staffing

ratios. A vacancy in an isolated school is different from a vacancy in an urban institution because the conditions required to fill and sustain the position are different.

Bank Indonesia's 2024 analysis of education and teacher distribution similarly identifies eastern Indonesia as an area in which teacher shortages remain pronounced. The report emphasizes that policies should not focus exclusively on deploying teachers but should also make remote assignments more attractive through incentives, facilities, and institutional support (Bank Indonesia 2024). This recommendation is consistent with a distributive justice approach because it recognizes that the burden of correcting national inequalities should not fall disproportionately on individual teachers.

The structural burden also includes professional isolation. Teachers in remote areas may have fewer opportunities to participate in training, collaborate with professional peers, access updated learning materials, or engage with higher education institutions. Digital technology can reduce some of these barriers, but limited connectivity creates another inequality. The government's 2025 implementation of special PPG arrangements for teachers in special areas with poor internet access demonstrates official recognition that conventional professional-development delivery cannot always operate under conditions of geographical disadvantage (Direktorat Guru Pendidikan Dasar 2025). Accordingly, special allowances should be understood as one component of a broader system of compensation for structural disadvantage. Financial support can help teachers manage some costs, but it cannot independently provide safe housing, reliable transportation, professional networks, or digital infrastructure.

Eligibility, Targeting, and the Justice of Allocation

A central issue in distributive justice is not only the size of a benefit but also who receives it. An affirmative allowance is just only if it reaches teachers who experience the burdens the policy is intended to address. Problems of targeting can undermine both policy effectiveness and legitimacy.

The historical evidence on Indonesia's remote-area allowances illustrates this concern. The World Bank's analysis reports mixed evidence regarding the effects of incentives and identifies weaknesses in coverage and targeting. In some cases, teachers who needed support did not receive it, while administrative classifications did not always correspond perfectly with actual hardship (World Bank 2020). Such problems create two forms of injustice: some teachers remain uncompensated for difficult working conditions, while resources may be allocated to locations or individuals whose burdens are comparatively lower.

The targeting problem is particularly important in Papua because geographical disadvantage is not uniform. Administrative categories may conceal substantial differences in travel time, transportation cost, weather exposure, communication access, and availability of public services. A district-level

classification can therefore be too broad to capture school-level conditions. Teachers working in the same administrative district may experience very different levels of isolation.

A more equitable approach would combine formal geographical classifications with indicators of actual hardship. These could include travel time to administrative centers, transportation costs, frequency of service disruption, availability of housing, telecommunications access, and access to health and professional services. Such an approach would be more administratively complex, but distributive justice sometimes requires greater sensitivity to context rather than simple uniform categories.

Transparency is also essential. Teachers should be able to understand why they are eligible or ineligible and should have access to mechanisms for correcting administrative errors. A just allocation process must be procedurally reliable as well as substantively equitable. Clear criteria, accurate data, and opportunities for review can reduce perceptions of arbitrariness. The 2025 regulation governing special allowances is important because it establishes formal procedures for allocation, payment, adjustment, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting. However, the existence of technical procedures does not guarantee that classifications accurately capture local hardship. Monitoring must therefore examine whether the policy's categories remain aligned with actual conditions.

Financial Incentives and the Limits of Monetary Solutions

Financial incentives are an important policy instrument, but the evidence suggests that money alone cannot solve teacher distribution problems. The attractiveness of a remote posting depends on multiple dimensions of teachers' professional and personal lives. The KIAT Guru research provides an important illustration. The program tested different mechanisms linking teacher allowances to community-based monitoring, attendance, and performance. Evidence indicates that combining incentives with accountability mechanisms could improve outcomes, particularly when teacher presence was linked to the allowance and monitored systematically (Gaduh et al. 2023). The findings suggest that the effectiveness of financial incentives is shaped by institutional design.

However, a performance-linked incentive should not become a substitute for addressing structural hardship. Teachers cannot be expected to overcome infrastructure and service limitations through greater effort alone. In remote Papua, difficulties in transport, communication, and access to professional resources may constrain teacher performance independently of motivation.

The evidence from previous remote-area allowance programs is similarly mixed. Some studies found lower absenteeism among allowance recipients, while others found weaker or inconsistent effects. This variation suggests that allowances can improve motivation but cannot guarantee retention or performance in the absence of supportive institutional conditions (World Bank 2020).

Teacher retention is particularly relevant. A teacher may accept a remote assignment because of a financial incentive but seek transfer once the immediate financial need is reduced or when the personal costs of the assignment become unsustainable. Housing is one example. A substantial allowance may lose practical value if teachers must use a large share of it to secure safe accommodation. Transportation is another. Irregular or costly travel can affect both attendance and the ability to maintain family relationships.

Professional development also matters. Teachers who remain in remote areas for extended periods may fear that geographical isolation will limit promotion, certification, and career advancement. A distributively just policy should therefore ensure that service in disadvantaged regions is not professionally penalizing. Remote service should generate career recognition rather than career stagnation.

Toward a Multidimensional Model of Distributive Justice in Teacher Policy

The analysis suggests that a just affirmative teacher policy should move beyond a single financial allowance toward a multidimensional model of support. This model should combine at least five dimensions. First, equitable financial compensation should remain central. Teachers in high-cost and geographically difficult locations require differentiated support. However, allowance levels and eligibility should be regularly reviewed to ensure that compensation reflects actual conditions. Second, housing and transportation support should be treated as core components of teacher deployment policy. In highly isolated areas, the state cannot assume that teachers can secure adequate accommodation or transportation through individual income alone. Public provision or subsidies may therefore be more effective than purely monetary compensation. Third, professional development and career advancement must be accessible to teachers regardless of location. The special PPG initiatives for teachers in areas with limited internet connectivity demonstrate the importance of adapting professional programs to local conditions. Remote teachers should have opportunities for certification, mentoring, collaboration, and further education that do not require unreasonable travel or personal expenditure. Fourth, digital connectivity and communication infrastructure should be included within teacher welfare policy. Digital isolation can affect both classroom practice and teachers' access to administrative and professional services. Improving connectivity can reduce professional isolation and expand access to training and educational resources. Fifth, local recruitment and long-term retention strategies should complement external deployment. Teachers recruited from or near local communities may face lower adaptation and relocation costs and may have stronger social connections that support long-term retention. The World Bank's teacher deployment analysis specifically recommended scholarships and pathways for students from local areas to enter the teaching profession where remote staffing problems persist (World Bank 2009).

This multidimensional model aligns with the principle of distributive justice because it focuses on the unequal conditions under which teachers perform comparable work. The objective is not simply to provide more money to remote teachers. It is to reduce the cumulative disadvantages associated with geographical isolation.

Conclusion

Teacher affirmative policy in Papua should be understood as a matter of distributive justice. Teachers working in geographically disadvantaged areas often face structural burdens that are not experienced equally across Indonesia. These burdens include high transportation and living costs, geographical isolation, limited infrastructure, restricted access to professional development, weak digital connectivity, and difficulties in accessing housing and public services. A uniform system of remuneration may therefore be formally equal while remaining substantively inequitable. Special allowances provide an important form of recognition and compensation. Indonesian law and the 2025 regulatory framework establish a legitimate basis for differentiated support for teachers in special areas. However, financial incentives alone cannot resolve teacher shortages or ensure long-term retention. Available evidence suggests that incentives may improve motivation and attendance, but their effectiveness depends on targeting, institutional design, accountability, and the broader conditions of teachers' work. A distributively just affirmative policy should therefore combine financial compensation with housing, transportation, digital connectivity, professional development, and career advancement. It should also improve targeting by recognizing that geographical hardship can vary significantly between schools and communities within Papua. Finally, local teacher recruitment should be strengthened as a long-term strategy for reducing the costs and instability associated with external deployment. The central policy question should not simply be whether remote teachers receive additional allowances, but whether the state has created sufficiently equitable conditions for qualified teachers to enter, remain, and develop professionally in geographically marginalized regions.

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the future, for tomorrow
belongs to those who
prepare for it today.**

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