Ethical Fragmentation and Public Moral Reasoning: Teachers, Religious Pluralism, and Kantian Evaluation in Indonesia

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Abstract: This study analyzes the ethical architecture of the teaching profession in Indonesia by examining how teacher ethics is governed and evaluated within a context of institutional and religious pluralism. It seeks to explain why teacher ethics has largely functioned as an instrument of professional governance rather than as a framework of public moral reasoning that supports teachers' moral agency. This study adopts a qualitative normative–philosophical approach, analyzing Indonesian education policy documents—particularly the Regulation of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology No. 67 of 2024—and codes of ethics issued by major teacher professional organizations (PGRI, IGI, PERGUNU, and Muhammadiyah). The analysis employs conceptual and argumentative methods, using Kantian ethics as an evaluative framework, while media-reported cases are referenced illustratively to contextualize normative tensions. The study identifies three central findings. First, teacher ethics in Indonesia is primarily framed in the language of compliance, discipline, and procedure, positioning ethics as a mechanism of professional governance. Second, the pluralism of organizational codes of ethics produces ethical fragmentation, whereby similar professional actions may be evaluated differently depending on institutional affiliation and adjudicative authority. Third, this configuration constrains teachers' moral agency by prioritizing administrative conformity over rational moral justification that is public and universal in character. The findings suggest that addressing ethical fragmentation in the teaching profession requires more than regulatory harmonization or procedural standardization. Instead, there is a need for a shared framework of public moral reasoning that enables plural religious and institutional ethics to be evaluated through consistent and publicly justifiable criteria. Such a framework has implications for education policy, professional ethical governance, and the cultivation of teachers as autonomous moral agents in plural societies. This study contributes to religious studies and professional ethics scholarship by reframing ethical fragmentation not as a technical governance problem but as a problem of public moral justification within plural moral traditions. By employing Kantian ethics as an evaluative lens rather than a prescriptive doctrine, the study offers an original conceptual contribution to debates on religious pluralism, professional ethics, and moral agency in highly regulated educational contexts such as Indonesia.

Keywords: Ethical fragmentation; moral agency; professional ethics; public moral reasoning; religious pluralism.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini menganalisis arsitektur etika profesi keguruan di Indonesia dengan menelaah bagaimana etika guru diatur dan dievaluasi dalam konteks pluralisme institusional dan keagamaan. Penelitian ini bertujuan menjelaskan mengapa etika guru selama ini lebih berfungsi sebagai instrumen tata kelola profesional daripada sebagai kerangka penalaran moral publik yang menopang agensi moral guru. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif normatif–filosofis dengan menganalisis dokumen kebijakan pendidikan di Indonesia—khususnya Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi Nomor 67 Tahun 2024—serta kode etik yang dikeluarkan oleh organisasi profesi guru utama (PGRI, IGI, PERGUNU, dan Muhammadiyah).

Analisis dilakukan melalui metode konseptual dan argumentatif dengan menggunakan etika Kantian sebagai kerangka evaluatif, sementara kasus-kasus yang diberitakan media digunakan secara ilustratif untuk mengontekstualisasikan ketegangan normatif. Penelitian ini mengidentifikasi tiga temuan utama. Pertama, etika keguruan di Indonesia terutama dibingkai dalam bahasa kepatuhan, disiplin, dan prosedur, sehingga etika berfungsi sebagai mekanisme tata kelola profesional. Kedua, pluralisme kode etik organisasi menghasilkan fragmentasi etika, di mana tindakan profesional yang serupa dapat dievaluasi secara berbeda bergantung pada afiliasi institusional dan otoritas adjudikatif. Ketiga, konfigurasi ini membatasi agensi moral guru dengan menempatkan kepatuhan administratif di atas justifikasi moral rasional yang bersifat publik dan universal. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa upaya mengatasi fragmentasi etika dalam profesi keguruan tidak cukup dilakukan melalui harmonisasi regulasi atau standardisasi prosedural semata. Sebaliknya, diperlukan suatu kerangka penalaran moral publik bersama yang memungkinkan etika keagamaan dan institusional yang plural dievaluasi melalui kriteria yang konsisten dan dapat dipertanggungjawabkan secara publik. Kerangka ini memiliki implikasi penting bagi kebijakan pendidikan, tata kelola etika profesional, serta penguatan guru sebagai agen moral yang otonom dalam masyarakat yang plural. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada kajian studi agama dan etika profesional dengan mereposisi fragmentasi etika bukan sebagai persoalan teknis tata kelola, melainkan sebagai persoalan justifikasi moral publik dalam konteks pluralitas tradisi moral. Dengan menggunakan etika Kantian sebagai lensa evaluatif, bukan sebagai doktrin normatif yang preskriptif, penelitian ini menawarkan kontribusi konseptual orisinal bagi perdebatan tentang pluralisme keagamaan, etika profesional, dan agensi moral dalam konteks pendidikan yang sangat terregulasi seperti Indonesia.

Kata kunci: Fragmentasi etika; agensi moral; etika profesional; penalaran moral publik; pluralisme keagamaan.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the teaching profession in Indonesia has faced increasingly complex ethical challenges, particularly alongside the intensification of digital spaces, the politicization of public discourse, and heightened ideological sensitivities in education (Kusanagi, 2022; Sulisworo, Nasir, & Maryani, 2016). The scale of this issue is substantial. According to the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education Data Portal Kemendikdasmen (2025), Indonesia had 4,598,518 teachers as of January 2026, making teaching one of the largest and most strategic professional groups in shaping civic values. Within an ecosystem of this magnitude, unclear ethical standards affect not only individual cases but also risk eroding the profession's moral cohesion and public trust in education as a normative practice—especially when ethical judgment becomes reduced to mere procedural compliance (Biesta, 2015; Burrell & MacIntyre, 1984; Carr, 2020).

This complexity becomes evident in several public incidents that generated ethical controversy. In February 2024, a teacher in West Sumatra was reported to local education authorities after reprimanding students who disseminated political disinformation through a class WhatsApp group. The teacher understood this action as part of a professional responsibility to safeguard the integrity of the learning environment and to cultivate students' critical reasoning. However, the professional organization to which the teacher belonged assessed the action as a violation of the code of ethics, citing procedural noncompliance and the potential breach of political neutrality (Talan, 2025). In another case occurring almost simultaneously in Central Java, a teacher faced a morally comparable situation—reprimanding students for spreading misleading political content in a digital learning space—but instead received public appreciation and an award from a different professional organization for demonstrating courage in upholding educational values and democratic citizenship (Kompas TV, 2024). These two incidents illustrate how similar professional actions, motivated by comparable ethical intentions, can receive opposed institutional judgments.

These contradictions cannot be understood merely as inconsistencies in the implementation of ethical codes; rather, they reflect a more fundamental normative problem within the Indonesian teaching profession (Lu & Lu, 2010). Structurally, teachers operate under multiple ethical codes independently formulated by different professional organizations, each with its own legal autonomy and normative legitimacy. The legal framework affirms this arrangement in Law No. 14 of 2005 on Teachers and Lecturers, Article 43(1), which stipulates that teacher codes of ethics are formulated by professional teacher organizations. While this provision aims to ensure professional autonomy and to respect normative diversity—including religious values—it simultaneously produces ethical pluralism without an accompanying mechanism of normative integration (Dillard & Brown, 2014). As a result, ethical judgments of teachers' actions no longer rest on publicly justifiable moral principles but instead depend on institutional affiliation. Under such conditions, fragmentation replaces consensus, and professional responsibility loses a shared normative anchor.

This situation reveals that the ethical problems of the teaching profession cannot be adequately understood as technical policy issues or as differences in organizational procedures (Kusanagi, 2022). What stands at stake is a more fundamental normative question: on what basis can professional actions be judged as "appropriate" or "wrong" when ethical standards differ and even contradict one another? If professional ethics operates solely as an internal organizational mechanism, professional morality risks being reduced to administrative compliance or institutional loyalty (Burrell & MacIntyre, 1984). Therefore, the profession requires a normative framework capable of functioning as a shared moral language—one that does not depend on institutional affiliation but can be rationally tested and publicly justified. At this point, moral philosophy—such as Kantian ethics—becomes relevant as an analytical tool rather than merely a theoretical background.

Studies of Kantian ethics occupy a central position in normative moral philosophy, particularly in discussions of the rational foundations of moral obligation, agent autonomy, and the universality of moral law. A substantial body of literature emphasizes that the core of Kantian ethics lies in the categorical imperative, which requires individuals to act only on maxims that they can rationally will as universal law (Hill, 2013; Timmermann, 2013; Westphal, 2020). Within this framework, morality does not derive from the consequences of actions or from social consensus, but from practical rationality that is public and trans-contextual. This principle of universalization positions Kantian ethics as one of the most influential moral theories in efforts to formulate normative standards that do not rely on subjective preferences, particular traditions, or institutional interests.

In a second strand, scholars have employed Kantian ethics as a normative foundation for the development of professional ethics, particularly in medicine, information technology, and business. Research in these fields shows that respect for human dignity and individual autonomy plays a crucial role in formulating professional codes of ethics that demand integrity, responsibility, and moral accountability (Byers, 2016; Heubel & Biller-Andorno, 2005; Payne & Thorpe, 2011). In this context, Kantian ethics functions as an evaluative framework that constrains the reduction of professional ethics to procedural compliance or utilitarian calculation, while affirming professionals as autonomous moral agents.

At the same time, the literature records several critiques of Kantian ethics, particularly accusations of rigidity and formalism when confronting the relational complexity of social practices. These critiques emerge prominently in applied ethics, including debates over extreme moral dilemmas such as the prohibition of lying and the handling of emergency situations (Dubbink, 2023; Rosen, 2009). Nevertheless, even within these critiques, scholars continue to recognize Kantian ethics as one of the most consistent frameworks for providing moral evaluation standards that do not depend on collective emotions, power negotiations, or institutional interests alone.

Beyond these debates, interdisciplinary studies demonstrate the flexibility of Kantian principles in contexts such as environmental ethics and economic coordination analysis, emphasizing the importance of generalization, reciprocity, and respect for non-instrumental value (Ballet & Jolivet, 2003; Brady & Svoboda, 2017). However, most of this scholarship focuses on Western contexts and specific professions, while the teaching profession in a society characterized by religious and institutional

pluralism—such as Indonesia—has received relatively limited attention. Moreover, the literature on professional ethical pluralism often stops at describing normative differences or advocating policy harmonization, without offering an adequate normative framework to test and bridge ethical conflicts across organizations. This gap motivates the present study.

While this article engages moral philosophy and professional governance, it is ultimately situated within religious studies because the "pluralism" at stake is not merely organizational but represents an institutionalized plurality of moral traditions shaped by religious publics. In the Indonesian context, teacher professional ethics is articulated through professional organizations whose normative vocabularies are often inseparable from religious ethical grammars and communal authority. Bodies such as PERGUNU[1] and Muhammadiyah[2] do not function only as professional associations; they operate as carriers of tradition-specific moral imaginaries—linking professional conduct to religiously grounded notions of virtue, discipline, communal responsibility, and institutional identity. Consequently, conflicts in ethical evaluation should be read not simply as procedural inconsistencies or policy implementation gaps, but as cross-tradition tensions over what counts as "right action" and legitimate moral authority in the public sphere of education. By foregrounding these competing moral grammars, the article frames teacher ethics as a site where religiously inflected moral reasoning is negotiated, contested, and governed, thereby placing the analysis in direct conversation with scholarship on lived religion, religious pluralism, and the public regulation of morality.

Accordingly, this article aims to analyze the fragmentation of professional ethics in the Indonesian teaching profession through a Kantian ethical lens. The article argues that the crisis of teacher professional ethics does not primarily result from weak regulation, but from the absence of a shared normative foundation capable of coordinating plural religious and institutional ethics. By positioning teachers as rational moral agents, Kantian ethics—through the principles of the categorical imperative, universalization, and moral duty—provides an evaluative framework for assessing professional actions based on justifications that can be willed as universal law (Hill, 2013; Kant & Sullivan, 1996; Westphal, 2020). Within this framework, state policies such as *Permendikbudristek* Regulation No. 67 of 2024 can function effectively only when supported by a philosophical foundation that allows ethical norms to be understood as moral obligations rather than merely administrative rules (Timmermann, 2013). In this way, the article repositions teacher professionalism as a moral vocation grounded in public ethical reasoning, while offering a theoretical contribution to debates on professional ethics and religious pluralism in Indonesia.

2.   Method

This study adopts a normative–philosophical approach (McArthur, 2005), by positioning ethics as the evaluative foundation for teacher professionalism within the context of Indonesian education policy. Rather than treating teachers as empirical actors whose behaviors or attitudes are measured, the unit of analysis in this study is the normative framework of teacher professional ethics as represented in state regulations and professional ethical discourse. The analysis focuses on how education policy normatively constructs teacher professionalism and how this construction can be examined and evaluated through a Kantian ethical perspective that emphasizes moral duty, agent autonomy, and public rationality.

In line with this focus, the research design is qualitative and theoretical, employing normative and conceptual analysis (Lune & Berg, 2017). This methodological choice reflects the study's aim, which does not seek to map empirical variations in teachers' ethical practices but instead to assess the consistency and moral justification of the ethical principles that underpin teacher professional ethics. In conditions of religious and institutional ethical pluralism, where ethical conflicts often arise not from the absence of rules but from divergent normative foundations, a philosophical approach provides a

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[1] Association of Nahdlatul Ulama Teachers, a teacher organization affiliated with Indonesia's largest Islamic organization

[2] Muhammadiyah, a major Islamic modernist organization in Indonesia that operates extensive educational institutions

more adequate means to examine the universality, coherence, and rationality of ethical principles than empirical approaches centered on describing attitudes or preferences.

The data sources for this study are textual and conceptual. The primary data consist of education policy documents, particularly *Permendikbudristek* Regulation No. 67 of 2024, as well as teacher ethics documents issued by PGRI[3], IGI[4], PERGUNU, and the teacher code of ethics of the Muhammadiyah organization. The study analyzes these documents as normative texts that contain moral assumptions about the roles, responsibilities, and ethical positioning of teachers. In addition, the study draws on classical and contemporary works in the Kantian ethical tradition—including texts by Immanuel Kant and secondary literature—that discuss the categorical imperative, moral autonomy, human dignity, and their critiques and developments in applied ethics. Literature on professional ethics and the philosophy of education also informs the analysis in order to enrich contextual understanding and to bridge dialogue between moral theory and policy practice.

The study collects data through a literature review and interpretive reading of these normative and philosophical texts (Maxwell, 2008). The analysis does not treat policy documents merely as administrative instruments; instead, it reads them as articulations of values and moral claims that shape the governance of the teaching profession. At the same time, the study selectively curates Kantian ethical literature to represent both its core principles and the critical debates surrounding them. This approach enables an analytical dialogue between policy texts and ethical theory, allowing regulation to be interpreted within a broader and more reflective normative framework.

The study conducts data analysis through conceptual–argumentative analysis carried out in several stages. First, it identifies the normative assumptions embedded in regulations and in teacher professional ethics discourse. Second, it analyzes these assumptions using key concepts in Kantian ethics, such as the categorical imperative, universalization, moral duty, and agent autonomy. Third, it uses the results of this analysis to assess the extent to which existing teacher professional ethics frameworks allow for rational moral justification that can be publicly defended. Accordingly, the analysis does not aim to formulate technical policy recommendations, but rather to provide a conceptual foundation for more reflective and coherent ethical deliberation in the governance of the teaching profession in Indonesia. Media-reported cases cited in this article are employed solely as illustrative examples to contextualize normative tensions identified in policy texts and professional codes of ethics; they are not treated as empirical case studies nor subjected to systematic empirical analysis.

3.   Results

Normative Architecture of Teacher Ethics in State Regulation

Permendikbudristek Regulation No. 67 of 2024 articulates a clear normative project: the state frames teachers not merely as implementers of instruction, but as ethical subjects whose professional conduct must be assessable, guided, and—when necessary—corrected through regulatory instruments. This framework operates along two simultaneous tracks. On the one hand, it formulates teachers' moral responsibilities in expansive terms; on the other hand, it delineates behavioral boundaries through administratively defined prohibitions. In the language of policy, ethics appears as a condition of "professionalism"—that is, as something that can be regulated, facilitated, and supervised—rather than solely as a reflective horizon for teachers' moral decision-making (Biesta, 2015; Carr, 2020).

The foundation of this ethical architecture first becomes visible in the expansion of the domain of teachers' moral responsibility. Article 8(1) of *Permendikbudristek* Regulation No. 67 of 2024 stipulates that the code of ethics must include moral responsibilities toward the profession, students, professional peers, parents or guardians, the community, and prevailing laws and regulations. This formulation is significant because it positions teacher ethics as a layered set of relations: not only pedagogical

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[3] PGRI (Persatuan Guru Republik Indonesia), the largest national teacher professional association
[4] IGI (Indonesian Teachers Association), a professional organization emphasizing pedagogical innovation and professional development

relationships within the classroom, but also institutional and public relationships. In other words, the regulation treats ethics as a system of *moral relations* that extends beyond "teaching competence" in a technical sense and views teachers as figures who carry moral legitimacy within a broader social space.

From this foundation of responsibility, the regulation constructs a set of general principles that function simultaneously as an "ethical compass" and as standards of professional propriety. Article 8(2) establishes minimum provisions, ranging from constitutional loyalty—teachers must be "faithful and obedient to *Pancasila* and the *UUD 1945*"—to relational dimensions such as maintaining professional relationships, solidarity, and empathy among colleagues. Other principles emphasize the pedagogical character of ethics: teachers must create learning environments that are "comfortable, safe, and enjoyable," act objectively and educationally, and ensure the "physical and psychological safety and health of students in relation to acts or forms of violence." Even the private sphere enters the ethical domain when teachers must "respect privacy" and show empathy toward the conditions of parents or guardians. At this point, ethics appears as a package of professional virtues codified through regulation and thus usable as both a measure of propriety and a basis for evaluation (Kusumaningrum, Sumarsono, & Gunawan, 2019; Riabova, Pogodin, Lubina, & Sablina, 2023; Sethy, 2018).

The most stringent face of regulation emerges when principles transform into prohibitions. Article 9 specifies prohibited acts that mark public-space neutrality and political compliance as sensitive centers of professional ethics. Teachers may not engage in actions that violate *Pancasila* and the *UUD 1945*; they may not participate in actions prohibited for civil society organizations; and—most explicitly—they may not engage in practical politics, transactional politics, or affiliate with political parties. Here, ethics operates as a preventive mechanism: rather than primarily guiding moral deliberation, it forecloses certain actions to protect professional boundaries from political contamination. The prohibition extends further into the administrative-institutional sphere through restrictions on "activities beyond one's function and authority" in matters related to teachers' professional duties. This latter formulation demonstrates a strong procedural character: ethical violations are understood not only as moral failings, but also as deviations from functional boundaries (Widiastuti, Munawati, Gustina, & Estriyanto, 2025).

This procedural character becomes even clearer when the regulation reveals its enforcement model through facilitation mechanisms directed at professional organizations. Article 11 provides that when public complaints arise and a professional organization is proven to have violated Article 9, the Minister may impose a "temporary suspension of facilitation" and/or a "termination of facilitation." This mechanism is significant because it shows that the state does not directly sanction individual teachers under this article, but instead governs the ethical ecosystem through incentives and control over facilitation granted to professional organizations. In line with the narrative of the Inspectorate General of the Ministry of Education (2025), the regulation frames this approach as support for professional organizations to play a strategic role in fostering teachers' competence, careers, and resilience amid change, repeatedly invoking terms such as "facilitation," "guidance," and "capacity strengthening." Ethics thus operates within a governance model: the state empowers professional organizations as channels of development while maintaining the gateway to sanctions through the withdrawal of facilitation.

When read as a normative text, a key finding of this regulation is the formation of a relatively consistent map of ethical domains. First, it emphasizes professional integrity and constitutional loyalty, including adherence to *Pancasila* and the *UUD 1945*, the maintenance of professional dignity, and the responsible execution of duties. Second, it underscores pedagogical relations and student safety, including safe learning environments, objectivity, respect, violence prevention, and student-centered orientation. Third, it defines neutrality and professional boundaries in the public sphere, including prohibitions on practical politics and party affiliation, as well as restrictions on actions beyond one's functional authority. A fourth domain, implicitly present and often a contemporary "site of conflict," concerns the digital sphere—not articulated as a separate article, but as the actual context in which these prohibitions and principles are tested, such as cases of disinformation in digital learning spaces. Across this map, the regulation exhibits a distinctive pattern: it operates predominantly in the language of

compliance, authority, and procedure, yet it still preserves vocabulary that opens space for moral consideration, particularly through idioms of exemplarity, empathy, respect for privacy, and student protection.

Finally, the ethical architecture of *Permendikbudristek* Regulation No. 67 of 2024 does not operate in a vacuum. It functions within a normative landscape that is plural from the outset, as Article 43(1) of Law No. 14 of 2005 on Teachers and Lecturers affirms that teacher codes of ethics are formulated by professional teacher organizations. Consequently, this state regulation appears simultaneously as an effort to organize that pluralism through minimum standards (Article 8) and clear lines of prohibition (Article 9), while preserving a governance design that relies on professional organizations (Article 11). It is at this point that the textual findings presented here provide the groundwork for assessing whether such "procedural standardization" suffices to unify professional ethics, or whether it instead requires a deeper normative foundation to avoid reducing ethics to mere administrative compliance (Biesta, 2015; Burrell & MacIntyre, 1984; Carr, 2020).

Ethical Fragmentation: Pluralism of Organizational Codes of Ethics and the Consequences for Evaluation

The subsequent findings indicate that the pluralism of teacher professional organizations in Indonesia produces not only a diversity of "ethical languages," but also distinct evaluative regimes: what counts as a violation, how violations are defined, and who holds the authority to adjudicate them. Within this landscape, professional ethics does not operate as a single shared moral horizon, but rather as a set of competing standards—often overlapping in general principles yet diverging in formulation, procedure, and evaluative authority. This pattern becomes evident when comparing the ethical documents of major organizations: the Indonesian Teacher Code of Ethics issued by PGRI–Depdiknas (2008), the IGI (2019) code of ethics, the moral guidelines of PERGUNU (2023), and the employment regulations and code of ethics of the Muhammadiyah organization (2017). These differences go beyond mere "nuance" and can generate divergent ethical judgments regarding events that appear morally similar (Payne & Thorpe, 2011).

At the level of principles, all documents appear to share a similar vocabulary, including professional dignity, exemplary conduct, responsibility toward students, and compliance with the law. However, this apparent similarity quickly gives way to divergent orientations when examined in terms of their respective "centers of gravity."

The PGRI Code of Ethics (PGRI, 2008) constructs ethics as a comprehensive relational order encompassing teacher–student, teacher–parent, teacher–colleague, teacher–community, teacher–government, and teacher–professional organization relations. It embeds ethical conduct within everyday pedagogical practice and articulates explicit prohibitions, such as maintaining student confidentiality, avoiding violence, refraining from exploiting professional relationships for personal gain, and upholding fairness while protecting student dignity. In this framework, ethics functions as a broad set of operational virtues while demanding intensive moral discipline in relational domains.

By contrast, the IGI (IGI, 2019) code of ethics adopts a more concise approach, emphasizing an ethos of being "independent, open, professional, and tolerant," rejecting bribery, and committing to quality improvement, with particular attention to avoiding hatred, obscenity, and violence. Because of its brevity, this formulation signals ethics as a general orientation rather than a detailed set of relational norms comparable to those articulated by PGRI.

PERGUNU formulates ethics as a "practical normative moral guide," explicitly anchored in Pancasila, the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia (UUD 1945), the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI), principles of tolerance, and the protection of students from sexual abuse, violence, and bullying (Lesmana, 2023). In this formulation, ethics is framed simultaneously as self-discipline and professional protection, articulated through moral vocabularies closely aligned with national discourse and child-protection frameworks.

Meanwhile, the Muhammadiyah documents (Dikdasmen PP Muhammadiyah, 2017) situate ethics within the organizational employment framework of the Muhammadiyah association, emphasizing being "Muhammadiyah in character," complying with organizational and governmental regulations,

safeguarding the organization's reputation, participating in organizational activities, and adhering to detailed work-discipline arrangements. Here, ethics binds tightly to institutional identity and internal governance rather than primarily to pedagogical relationships in the classroom.

In short, at the level of principles, pluralism does not automatically pose a problem. The problem arises when differences in ethical "centers" (pedagogical–relational orientation versus general virtue, national discipline, or institutional loyalty) shift evaluative parameters. The same action may be judged primarily as an issue of student dignity (PGRI), professional image and self-discipline (PERGUNU), general integrity (IGI), or institutional loyalty and organizational order (Muhammadiyah).

A further layer of fragmentation emerges in how ethics operates as a process. The 2008 PGRI framework provides a relatively clear procedural architecture: it classifies violations as minor, moderate, or severe, and assigns sanction recommendations to the Indonesian Teachers' Honor Council; it defines violations as deviations from the code of ethics and relevant legal provisions governing the profession (PGRI, 2008). This mechanism creates the appearance of a formal internal "ethical judiciary."

By contrast, the IGI materials present the code of ethics as a normative guide without emphasizing detailed adjudicative mechanisms (IGI, 2019). PERGUNU's available texts likewise function primarily as normative moral guidance and lists of responsibilities rather than as formal legal-sanction frameworks (Lesmana, 2023). In the Muhammadiyah context, procedures and sanctions attach closely to employment governance, including recruitment, appointment, performance evaluation, integrity pacts, and administrative organizational mechanisms (Dikdasmen PP Muhammadiyah, 2017). In this configuration, ethics can effectively "descend" into bureaucratic discipline rather than operate as moral evaluation alone. These procedural differences carry significant consequences: even when ethical principles sound similar, the evidentiary pathways, evaluative forums, and corrective instruments differ. At this point, ethics no longer concerns only "what is right," but also "who decides" and "through which procedures."

The third dimension involves the fragmentation of authority regarding which institutions possess legitimacy to adjudicate professional morality. PGRI centralizes ethical authority in its Honor Council (PGRI, 2008). Muhammadiyah locates authority within its organizational structure and the Majelis Dikdasmen that manages employment affairs (Dikdasmen PP Muhammadiyah, 2017). PERGUNU emphasizes moral guidance and teachers' self-discipline within the organizational framework (Lesmana, 2023). As evaluative authority disperses in this manner, ethical standards tend to shift from a public-rational orientation toward an institutional one, whereby the propriety of professional action increasingly depends on forum and affiliation. These differences in normative orientation, prohibitions, and adjudicative mechanisms across teacher professional organizations are summarized comparatively in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison of Normative Orientations and Ethical Mechanisms of Teacher Professional Ethics across Professional Organizations in Indonesia

Aspect	PGRI/Depdiknas 2008	IGI	PERGUNU	Muhammadiyah
Dominant ethical orientation	Comprehensive professional relations (teacher–student–parents–colleagues–community–government)	Concise professional ethos (integrity, learning, anti-violence)	Practical normative moral guidance (student protection, tolerance, discipline)	Ethics as employment discipline and organizational identity
Formulation of prohibitions	Detailed (confidentiality, violence,	General (avoid hatred/obscenity/violence, anti-bribery)	General–practical (gratification,	Organizational discipline and compliance

			protection from violence/bullying)	(rules, working hours, order)
Sanction mechanisms	Honor Council and classification of violations	Not prominent in available materials	Not prominent in available materials	Embedded in Muhammadiyah employment governance

The impact of this fragmentation becomes evident when school practices shift into public events and ethical judgments operate through multiple institutional forums whose logics do not always align. For example, the reporting of two teachers from SMAN 4 Tanjung Jabung Timur to PGRI and the Jambi Provincial Education Office illustrates how a single action—inviting students to deliver an oration within the school environment—can be interpreted simultaneously as a violation of the professional code of ethics, an تجاوز of educators' authority, and a potential violation of the Child Protection Law (Salimbai, 2025). Within this construction, ethics functions primarily as student protection and the safeguarding of professionalism, with evaluative authority resting on PGRI and regional education bureaucracy.

By contrast, in a case involving alleged sexual abuse by a primary school principal in Trenggalek, the local PGRI branch explicitly refused to provide legal assistance to the alleged perpetrator and fully deferred the process to the state, while affirming that the act constituted a serious violation of both the code of ethics and teachers' moral integrity (Sakti, 2023). Here, ethics operates as a mechanism of moral exclusion, as the professional organization draws a clear boundary between protecting the profession and rejecting conduct deemed ethically and legally deviant. A different pattern appears in the case of Sularno, a contract teacher who faced criminal prosecution for disciplining a student. In this case, PERGUNU West Java emphasized that the matter should first be resolved through the professional code of ethics before entering the criminal justice arena and called for state intervention to protect teachers from excessive criminalization (Luthfi, 2023).

These three cases do not aim to equate distinct types of incidents, but rather to demonstrate a single empirical pattern: within a fragmented ethical landscape, moral evaluations of teachers' actions shift according to the center of authority and ethical framework employed—whether child protection, professional discipline, or teacher protection. As a result, ethical evaluation becomes highly dependent on organizational affiliation, adjudicative forum, and dominant procedural logic. Consequently, pluralism in codes of ethics produces not only a diversity of principles, but also a diversity of evaluative pathways and decisions, rendering the ethical status of professional actions potentially affiliation-dependent rather than determined by a single moral horizon that can be jointly and publicly tested.

Kantian Entry Reading: Normative Tensions within the Architecture of Teacher Ethics

A cross-reading of *Permendikbudristek* Number 67 of 2024 and the codes of ethics of major teacher professional organizations—namely PGRI, IGI, PERGUNU, and the employment guidelines of Muhammadiyah—shows that the problem of teacher ethics in Indonesia does not stem from the absence of norms, but from normative ambiguities and conflicts that emerge amid dense regulation. All of these documents consistently include key terms such as neutrality, propriety, professionalism, exemplarity, and moral responsibility as ethical prerequisites of the teaching profession. However, within these texts, such terms generally appear without explicit evaluative criteria and without a uniform reasoning mechanism across professional organizations. In this configuration, ethical concepts function primarily as normative markers that direct compliance, rather than as principles that internally provide rational tests for moral judgment.

The first point of ambiguity appears in the relationship between pedagogical obligations and the demand for neutrality. On the one hand, state regulations and organizational codes of ethics position teachers as figures responsible for shaping students' character, critical reasoning, and civic competence through teaching practices and exemplarity. On the other hand, the same texts firmly assert prohibitions against teachers' involvement in practical politics and partisan affiliations. Tension arises

when certain pedagogical practices—such as discussing public issues, correcting disinformation, or facilitating civic discussion in learning spaces—can be read simultaneously as fulfilling educational responsibilities and as potential violations of the principle of neutrality. The regulations and codes of ethics analyzed do not provide adequate normative parameters to conceptually distinguish pedagogical actions grounded in public rationality from expressions of partisan politics. As a result, ethical judgment tends to shift from the moral reasons underlying an action to procedural readings of context and institutional position.

The second point of tension concerns the relationship between teachers' professional autonomy and bureaucratic discipline. Several professional codes of ethics—particularly those of PGRI and PERGUNU—explicitly position teachers as subjects who act on the basis of conscience, personal responsibility, and professional integrity. Yet within the framework of state regulation, professional ethics simultaneously operates in the language of compliance with functions, authority, and administrative governance. When ethical conflicts or gray areas arise, space for teachers' autonomous moral judgment appears to narrow under disciplinary mechanisms and institutional hierarchies. In this configuration, professional actions become easier to assess in terms of procedural conformity than moral justification, such that professionalism functions primarily as administrative compliance.

The third tension appears in the relationship between public moral standards and organizational loyalty. The pluralism of professional organizations' codes of ethics produces significant variation in the formulation of principles, evaluative procedures, and adjudicative authority. Professional actions that appear morally similar can receive different—even opposing—evaluations depending on a teacher's organizational affiliation and the forum of judgment. This fragmentation indicates that teacher professional ethics has not yet functioned as a single shared horizon of evaluation, but rather as a set of standards operating within frameworks of institutional loyalty. Under such conditions, ethical claims lose cross-contextual consistency and become difficult to justify uniformly before a broader public. These normative tensions are synthesized in Table 2, which maps the opposing normative poles and their observable ambiguities within the architecture of teacher ethics in Indonesia.

Table 2. Normative Points of Tension in the Architecture of Teacher Ethics in Indonesia

Point of Tension	Normative Pole 1	Normative Pole 2	Observable Form of Ambiguity
Pedagogical obligation vs. neutrality	Responsibility to shape students' character, critical reasoning, and civic competence through teaching and exemplarity	Prohibition of involvement in practical politics and partisan affiliation	Pedagogical practices (discussion of public issues, correction of disinformation, civic education) can be read simultaneously as educational actions and as potential violations of neutrality
Professional autonomy vs. bureaucratic discipline	Teachers as autonomous moral subjects acting on conscience, personal responsibility, and professional integrity	Ethics as compliance with functions, authority, and administrative governance	Space for autonomous moral judgment narrows when confronted with disciplinary mechanisms and institutional hierarchies
Public moral standards vs. organizational loyalty	Ethics as moral claims that should be publicly justifiable	Ethics as internal standards dependent on organizational affiliation and adjudicative forums	Similar professional actions receive different evaluations depending on the reference organization and judging authority

From a textual reading of state regulations and organizational codes of ethics, the study identifies several conceptual normative questions that the existing ethical frameworks do not explicitly address. First, on what grounds can a pedagogical action be judged morally legitimate when it intersects with sensitive public issues? Second, to what extent can teachers exercise moral autonomy when institutional procedures provide no clear guidance? Third, who holds legitimate authority to judge teachers' ethical actions, and by what criteria? Fourth, how can ethical judgments achieve consistency and public accountability within a landscape of plural professional organizations with non-uniform normative foundations?

Overall, these findings show that problems of teacher ethics in Indonesia operate at the level of internal normative tensions rather than merely at the level of rule compliance. When ethical terms circulate without evaluative criteria that can be tested across contexts, and when moral judgments depend on institutional affiliation, professional ethics tends to function as a regulatory mechanism rather than as a coherent framework of moral reasoning. At this point, the analysis indicates the need for an evaluative language capable of transcending institutional fragmentation—a finding that opens space for further normative analysis in the Discussion section.

As an initial marker of a normative framework relevant to these points of tension, the literature on Kantian ethics consistently situates morality within the domain of public reason, understood as the demand that norms or moral judgments be justifiable to all rational agents in a non-particularistic manner (Hill, 2013; O'Neill, 1990; Westphal, 2020). This brief reference is noted at the level of findings not as an analytical tool, but as an indication that the normative conflicts identified in state regulations and professional codes of ethics touch upon unresolved questions of public moral justification within the existing ethical architecture.

4. Discussion

This study examines the architecture of teacher ethics in Indonesia through a textual reading of Regulation of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Number 67 of 2024 and several codes of ethics issued by major teacher professional organizations. The findings show that the state frames teacher ethics primarily as an instrument of professional governance that can be regulated, supervised, and enforced procedurally, while professional organizations articulate ethics through diverse normative frameworks aligned with their respective institutional orientations. As a result, teacher ethics operates within a plural and fragmented landscape, not only at the level of principles but also in terms of evaluative procedures and adjudicative authority. From this reading, the study identifies three main normative points of tension: between pedagogical obligations and demands for neutrality, between teachers' professional autonomy and bureaucratic discipline, and between public moral standards and organizational loyalty. Overall, these findings indicate that the central problem of teacher ethics in Indonesia does not lie in the absence of norms, but in the ambiguity and fragmentation of ethical justification produced by dense regulation and institutional pluralism.

An examination of state regulations and professional codes of ethics reveals a consistent pattern: teacher ethics in Indonesia develops through minimal standards and administrative prohibitions that position teachers as subjects who can be assessed, guided, and corrected. At the level of the state, ethics takes the form of a governance instrument, as reflected in the delineation of moral responsibility, the specification of prohibitions—especially concerning neutrality in the public sphere—and enforcement mechanisms that rely on facilitation schemes for professional organizations. At the same time, the ethical landscape remains plural because teacher organizations produce codes of ethics with differing value emphases, levels of detail in prohibitions, and evaluative instruments. Consequently, the ethical space of teaching becomes normatively dense but not always coherent across organizations, making ethical judgments about similar actions potentially dependent on institutional affiliation and procedural pathways.

This ethical architecture develops because it responds to specific governance problems. The state manages education as a public sphere vulnerable to conflict, and therefore positions professional ethics primarily as a stabilization mechanism. In the context of post-reform democracy, intensified political

competition, identity polarization, and the expansion of digital spaces make schools susceptible to becoming arenas of discursive contestation (Ansor, 2016). As a result, the state tends to require ethical categories that are operationalizable, such as neutrality, constitutional compliance, functional boundaries, and observable behavioral indicators. The language of professionalism thus functions less as a process of cultivating virtue or moral wisdom and more as a policy language that enables ethics to attach to instruments of guidance, evaluation, and control. Within this framework, ethics becomes an administrative prerequisite for systemic order, aligning more closely with logics of compliance and risk mitigation than with open and reflective moral reasoning (Kusanagi, 2022).

At the same time, the state does not operate in a vacuum, because teacher professional ethics in Indonesia is historically and legally embedded in plural and autonomous professional organizations such as PGRI, IGI, PERGUNU, and Muhammadiyah. This pluralism generates two governance consequences. First, the state cannot easily impose a single ethical regime without undermining organizational autonomy, so a more feasible strategy involves establishing minimal standards and non-negotiable prohibitions in the public interest—such as bans on practical politics and partisan affiliation—while channeling professional development through organizations as intermediaries. Second, because each organization draws on distinct moral traditions, identity bases, and disciplinary mechanisms, professional ethics develops as a layered normative ecology. Some codes are comprehensive and legalistic, others are concise and ethos-based, others are normatively practical and protection-oriented, and others emphasize institutional discipline. Within such an ecology, teachers tend to read ethics as a compliance map—what is prohibited, who evaluates, which procedures apply, and what organizational consequences may follow—rather than as a capacity to openly test the moral reasons behind an action.

This configuration of state, professional organizations, and teachers also explains why the sharpest problems emerge in fluid and difficult-to-standardize domains, particularly digital spaces and sensitive public issues (Nugroho & Widiantoro, 2025). When terms such as propriety, exemplarity, neutrality, or professionalism lack consistent evaluative criteria across organizations, they function as flexible normative markers. These terms are strong enough to justify evaluation, yet vague enough to invite competing interpretations. In this context, teachers' agency occupies a tense position. On the one hand, teachers must act as moral exemplars and protectors of students' dignity; on the other hand, evaluative categories tend to be procedural and vulnerable to institutional readings. Professional ethics does not disappear, but instead shifts into a set of rules governing system safety. It shapes behavior that remains secure for the system while potentially narrowing teachers' moral deliberation when they face dilemmas that require reasoned judgment rather than mere compliance.

These findings do not reject Kantian ethics; rather, they show that the central problem of teacher ethics in Indonesia lies in the absence of Kantian prerequisites (Kant & Sullivan, 1996), within the regulatory architecture and its evaluative practices. These prerequisites include teachers' moral autonomy as judging agents, rational justification of norms before a plural public, and mechanisms for testing whether principles can be universalized beyond organizational affiliation. Within a Kantian horizon (Kant & Sullivan, 1996), codes of ethics cannot be understood merely as lists of prohibitions or administrative standards, because professional ethics requires agents to act on reasons that can be publicly justified. In this sense, the findings reinforce the Kantian claim that ethical professionalism cannot be reduced to rule compliance, but instead requires the cultivation of moral judgment, namely teachers' capacity to rationally and publicly assess normative conflicts. Without this capacity, ethics remains an instrument of governance rather than a moral practice genuinely owned and articulated by professional subjects.

These findings resonate with Kantian ethics literature that emphasizes practical rationality, agent autonomy, and the principle of universalization as foundations of public morality (Hill, 2013; Timmermann, 2013; Westphal, 2020), as well as with studies of professional ethics that reject the reduction of ethics to procedural compliance or utilitarian calculation (Byers, 2016; Heubel & Biller-Andorno, 2005; Payne & Thorpe, 2011). However, unlike these studies, which often focus on professions with relatively standardized and stable institutional contexts, this study shows that in Indonesian

teaching—characterized by plural professional organizations, ideological differentiation, and strong state regulatory intervention—ethical problems arise not from the absence of normative principles, but from the lack of publicly justifiable moral frameworks capable of crossing organizational boundaries. This constitutes the study's novelty. Rather than proposing harmonization of codes of ethics or normative recodification, the study demonstrates that fragmentation in teacher ethics is a structural problem rooted in a governance architecture that replaces ethical reasoning with compliance mechanisms. As a result, even principles that substantively align with Kantian ethics fail to function as universal and rationally defensible evaluative standards.

Historically, these findings can be read as a continuation of state–profession relations in Indonesia from the postcolonial era through the reform period, in which professional ethics has functioned primarily as an instrument of stabilization and governance normalization rather than as a site for cultivating autonomous moral subjects (Aspinall & Klinken van, 2011; Blunt, Turner, & Lindroth, 2012; Gaus, Sultan, & Basri, 2017). In education, the development of teacher ethics has accompanied state efforts to maintain bureaucratic neutrality, social cohesion, and institutional controllability amid decentralization and local pluralism. Studies of post-reform education policy show that teacher ethics and professionalism increasingly attach to agendas of quality improvement, certification, and regulatory compliance, rather than to strengthening teachers' moral deliberative capacities as rational agents (Effendi, Bafadal, Sudana, & Arifin, 2020; Handriadi, Rusdinal, & Hadiyant, 2024). Even in contexts of regional autonomy, such as Aceh, education policy adaptations continue to operate within frameworks of political stability and state normative control, reinforcing ethics as part of governance logic rather than public moral reflection (Jumaidi, Mustanir, Yusuf, & Sanusi, 2024).

Socially, this configuration produces a fragmented normative landscape in which teachers operate under multiple ethical regimes that do not always align. Educational decentralization and plural professional organizations open spaces for community participation and local authority, but in practice they often generate divergent ethical evaluation standards and concentrate adjudicative power in specific institutional actors (Parker & Raihani, 2011). Research shows that teachers frequently face ethical dilemmas, ranging from violence and harassment to administrative pressure, without consistent evaluative frameworks across organizations and without sufficient protection to act on their own moral judgments (Arifin & Fuad, 2021; Muhaimin, Hoogsteyns, Wicaksono, Utarini, & Willems, 2021). In such situations, actions deemed ethical in one institutional context may be questioned or sanctioned in another, not because of radically different substantive values, but due to differences in evaluative authority, disciplinary procedures, and normative legitimacy (Kusumaningrum et al., 2019).

Ideologically, these findings reflect a latent tension between ethics as an expression of public moral rationality and ethics as an instrument of institutional governance. Ethical language in regulations and professional codes—such as professionalism, propriety, exemplarity, and neutrality—more often functions as administratively binding normative markers than as moral principles subject to rational justification and universalization. Similar patterns appear in other professional sectors in Indonesia, including health, law, and business, where ethics becomes institutionalized through supervision, sanctions, and regulatory compliance, often accompanied by uneven application and weak foundations of public moral justification (Go & Benarkah, 2019; Gunawan, 2016; Kasuma, Bahar, & Tegnan, 2018). The study shows that when ethics reduces to a regulatory mechanism, teachers' moral autonomy diminishes, and the space for universalizing principles—as required by Kantian ethics—becomes constrained by organizational loyalty, bureaucratic procedures, and state administrative logic.

From a functional perspective, the study reveals that this plural and layered architecture of teacher ethics possesses important adaptive capacity. It allows professional organizations to express distinctive values and provides the state with instruments to maintain stability in a socio-politically diverse education system. However, its primary dysfunction lies in unanticipated normative effects, namely fragmented evaluation standards, moral uncertainty at the level of practice, and a tendency to reduce ethics to formal compliance rather than rational judgment. This pattern reflects broader problems in Indonesian professional governance, where institutional and normative fragmentation often generates ethical ambiguity in bureaucratic and professional practice (Claro, 2018). Studies of education and

professional governance show that plural normative frameworks—arising from institutional differentiation and decentralized authority—frequently weaken ethical coherence and reduce professionals' capacity to act as autonomous moral agents (Nasrudin et al., 2025). In this context, teachers do not occupy the position of moral subjects who weigh actions against universally testable principles, but rather of actors who must navigate overlapping norms under varying sanction risks, a condition similar to ethical fragmentation observed in Indonesian public bureaucracy (Nguitragool, 2012). Over time, these conditions erode public trust in the consistency of ethical judgment and weaken professional ethics as an independent source of moral legitimacy, separate from institutional power dynamics.

Based on the identified dysfunctions—fragmented evaluation standards, moral uncertainty in practice, and the reduction of ethics to formal compliance—relevant action plans cannot rely solely on administrative unification of codes of ethics or the addition of new regulations. The required policy intervention is conceptual and normative in nature, namely the repositioning of teacher ethics from an instrument of institutional governance toward a framework of public moral reasoning. At the policy level, this can be achieved by developing national ethical guidelines that do not merely enumerate prohibitions and obligations, but also provide criteria for rational justification of ethical principles. Such criteria would ensure that ethical judgments do not depend solely on procedures or organizational affiliation, but instead on moral reasons that can be publicly tested, for example through consistency checks, universalization tests, and respect for human dignity. At the level of professional organizations, ethical evaluation mechanisms need to incorporate deliberative spaces that allow teachers to justify their actions as moral agents rather than merely as objects of disciplinary enforcement. In this way, solutions to ethical fragmentation do not aim at normative uniformity that may reinforce administrative control, but at the formation of a shared moral language that restores public trust and enables organizational pluralism to operate within a coherent horizon of public rationality.

5. Conclusion

This study affirms that the problem of teacher ethics in Indonesia does not lie in the absence of norms or weak regulation, but in the way ethics is framed and operated within the architecture of educational governance. The findings show that teacher ethics develops primarily as an instrument of governance, marked by the language of compliance, procedure, and discipline, amid the pluralism of autonomous professional organizations' codes of ethics. This condition produces fragmentation at the level of principles, procedures, and evaluative authority, so that ethical evaluations of teachers' actions depend on institutional affiliation rather than on consistent public moral justification. As a result, teachers' moral autonomy diminishes, and professional ethics loses its capacity to function as a rational standard that can be tested across contexts.

In terms of scholarly contribution, this study offers a conceptual contribution by positioning Kantian ethics not as a normative doctrine to be directly applied, but as an evaluative lens for identifying the failure of public ethical prerequisites within regulations and professional codes of ethics. Unlike prior studies that emphasize policy harmonization or normative recodification, this study shows that the core problem lies in the absence of Kantian prerequisites—agents' moral autonomy, rational justification, and the universalization of principles—within the design of professional ethics. In doing so, the study extends the discourse on professional ethics by shifting the focus from what ethical rules exist to how ethics can be publicly justified by professional agents, and it enriches scholarship on teacher ethics in plural and highly regulated societies such as Indonesia.

This study has several limitations. First, the analysis focuses on regulatory texts and organizational codes of ethics, and therefore does not directly capture teachers' moral deliberation at the micro level of practice. Second, the use of media cases serves an illustrative purpose and does not constitute in-depth case studies, which limits empirical generalization. Third, the study employs a Kantian framework as an initial normative marker and does not compare it systematically with other ethical approaches such as care ethics or virtue ethics. Future research may extend these findings through ethnographic studies or in-depth interviews with teachers to explore how professional agents negotiate

ethical conflicts in everyday practice, and through more comprehensive theoretical dialogue between Kantian ethics and other normative approaches in order to formulate a more holistic and context-sensitive framework for teacher professional ethics.

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