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# Lecturer Salary Inequality in Indonesia: A Distributive Justice Perspective from Southeast Asia


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## Abstract

Lecturer salary inequality remains a persistent challenge in Indonesian higher education and has attracted increasing attention due to its implications for academic welfare, educational quality, and institutional sustainability. While previous studies have examined lecturer welfare, labor protection, and wage standards, limited research has integrated distributive justice theory, higher education governance, and comparative regional perspectives to explain the structural roots of remuneration disparities. This study aims to analyze lecturer salary inequality in Indonesia from a distributive justice perspective and identify the legal and institutional factors contributing to wage disparities. Employing a normative legal research method with a socio-legal analytical approach, the study examines statutory regulations, policy documents, and relevant academic literature through qualitative content analysis. The findings reveal that lecturer salary inequality is structurally shaped by fragmented regulatory frameworks, differences in employment status, uneven institutional funding capacities, and weak coordination between labor law and higher education governance. Comparative evidence further indicates that lecturer remuneration in Indonesia remains relatively lower than in several Southeast Asian countries, reflecting broader disparities in academic labor protection and educational financing. The novelty of this study lies in its integration of distributive justice theory, labor law analysis, and higher education governance perspectives to explain salary inequality as a structural governance issue rather than merely an economic problem. However, this study is limited by its reliance on normative legal analysis and secondary data without extensive empirical or cross-country quantitative evidence. The findings contribute to ongoing discussions on legal harmonization, equitable remuneration, and higher education governance reform.



**Keywords:**
Lecturer Salary Inequality; Distributive Justice; Higher Education Governance; Lecturer Welfare; Southeast Asia

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## 1. Introduction

Lecturers play a strategic role in higher education as the primary agents responsible for teaching, research, and community service. Their contribution directly affects educational quality, scientific productivity, and national competitiveness. Despite this crucial role, lecturer welfare remains a persistent concern in many developing countries, particularly regarding remuneration and employment protection. In Indonesia, lecturer salary inequality has become an increasingly significant issue, especially following recent reports showing that Indonesian lecturers receive some of the lowest salaries in Southeast Asia when measured against minimum wage standards and purchasing power. Data reported by Kompas (2025) indicate that the average salary of Indonesian public university lecturers is only about 1.32 times the provincial minimum wage and equivalent to approximately 143 kilograms of rice per month, considerably lower than comparable figures in Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, and Singapore. This disparity raises important questions concerning distributive justice, legal protection, and the sustainability of academic professions within Indonesia's higher education system.

From a legal and policy perspective, lecturer remuneration is regulated through a fragmented framework consisting of labor law provisions, higher education regulations, civil service rules, and institutional policies. While these regulations formally recognize the principles of decent work and academic welfare, their implementation remains uneven across higher education institutions. Particularly in private universities, many lecturers continue to experience sub-minimum wage conditions and limited access to social protection mechanisms despite performing equivalent academic duties (Ahyani et al., 2025; Harahap et al., 2024). This condition reflects a structural governance problem rather than merely an economic imbalance. Similar findings have been identified in comparative studies demonstrating that wage inequality is often produced by regulatory fragmentation, weak enforcement mechanisms, and disparities in institutional funding capacity (Abas, 2025; Nugroho et al., 2024). Consequently, lecturer salary inequality should be examined not only through economic indicators but also through the lens of legal governance and social justice.

Theoretically, the issue can be understood through the framework of distributive justice, particularly Rawls' difference principle, which holds that social and economic inequalities are only justifiable when they improve the welfare of the least advantaged groups. Within higher education systems, remuneration serves not merely as financial compensation but also as a reflection of institutional recognition, professional dignity, and social fairness. Studies on wage asymmetry demonstrate that persistent disparities in compensation frequently emerge from structural governance arrangements that privilege certain groups while disadvantaging others (Verga Matos & Neves, 2025; Carr et al., 2025). Furthermore, research on pay equity and decent work suggests that fair remuneration contributes significantly to employee motivation, organizational performance, and long-term institutional sustainability (Ali et al., 2025; Shrestha et al., 2025). Accordingly, lecturer salary inequality represents a broader governance challenge that affects not only individual welfare but also the quality and sustainability of higher education itself.

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Although a growing body of literature has examined lecturer welfare, labor protection, and wage justice, several important gaps remain. First, most existing studies focus on national labor issues or institutional case studies without specifically addressing lecturer salary inequality as a distinct legal governance problem. Second, comparative research on lecturer remuneration remains limited, particularly studies that systematically position Indonesia within broader ASEAN higher education systems. Third, previous studies tend to analyze lecturer welfare either from labor law, educational policy, or economic perspectives separately, without integrating distributive justice theory, legal governance analysis, and regional comparison into a unified analytical framework**.** As a result, there remains insufficient understanding of how legal structures, institutional arrangements, and policy choices collectively produce and sustain lecturer salary inequality in Indonesia.

This study seeks to fill these gaps by examining lecturer salary inequality in Indonesia through an integrated framework combining distributive justice theory, socio-legal analysis, and comparative ASEAN perspectives. Specifically, the study addresses three research questions: (1) How does lecturer salary inequality in Indonesia compare with selected ASEAN countries? (2) What legal and institutional factors contribute to lecturer salary disparities in Indonesia? and (3) How can distributive justice principles inform reforms of lecturer remuneration systems in Indonesian higher education? The novelty of this research lies in its conceptualization of lecturer salary inequality as a structural legal governance issue rather than merely an economic or administrative concern. By integrating comparative regional analysis with normative legal evaluation, this study contributes to the literature on higher education governance, labor justice, and academic welfare, while also offering policy recommendations for strengthening equitable remuneration systems and improving the sustainability of Indonesia's higher education sector.

## 2. Literature Review

The discussion of lecturer salary inequality is fundamentally rooted in theories of distributive justice, particularly the Rawlsian framework, which argues that social and economic inequalities are only legitimate when they contribute to improving the welfare of the least advantaged members of society. Within higher education systems, remuneration is not merely a mechanism for compensating labor but also an expression of institutional recognition, professional dignity, and social fairness. Consequently, salary structures become an important indicator of whether educational institutions and governments uphold principles of justice in allocating economic resources. In legal and ethical discourse, wage justice extends beyond compliance with statutory regulations and includes the obligation to ensure that workers can attain a reasonable standard of living through their professional contributions. Harahap (2018) emphasizes that wage protection should be aligned with maqāṣid al-sharī'ah, particularly the protection of human dignity and livelihood, thereby positioning remuneration as both a legal entitlement and a moral obligation. Similarly, contemporary studies on organizational governance suggest that equitable compensation systems contribute significantly to institutional stability, employee motivation, and workforce sustainability (Carr et al., 2025; von Rosing et al., 2025). These perspectives collectively demonstrate that lecturer salary inequality should not be understood solely as an economic phenomenon but as a multidimensional issue involving law, governance, ethics, and public policy. Theoretical discussions on distributive justice

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therefore provide an appropriate analytical foundation for examining whether existing remuneration systems in higher education adequately reflect principles of fairness and social responsibility.

At the global level, wage inequality has attracted significant scholarly attention across economics, labor studies, public administration, and organizational governance. Contemporary literature demonstrates that disparities in remuneration are often produced through structural arrangements embedded within institutional and policy frameworks rather than through individual productivity differences alone. Verga Matos and Neves (2025) argue that persistent wage asymmetries undermine efforts to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 10 on reducing inequality, indicating that compensation disparities remain a major challenge for social and economic development worldwide. Similarly, Prakash (2025) demonstrates that wage distribution is influenced by broader institutional and socio-cultural structures, illustrating how inequality is reproduced through systems of social stratification and differential access to opportunities. In the context of public institutions, including universities, wage inequality is frequently associated with governance arrangements, fiscal capacity, and regulatory design. Comparative studies further reveal that countries with stronger social welfare traditions and more robust labor protections tend to exhibit lower levels of remuneration inequality because compensation systems are supported by clearer legal standards and stronger accountability mechanisms. Within higher education, funding models, state investment, and institutional governance structures play a crucial role in determining lecturer welfare and long-term academic sustainability. Phyo and Ilie (2025) show that higher education systems across Southeast Asia differ substantially in terms of institutional capacity and educational investment, leading to significant variations in academic working conditions and lecturer compensation. These findings suggest that lecturer salary inequality cannot be analyzed solely within national boundaries but must also be understood in relation to broader regional and global patterns of governance, resource allocation, and educational development.

The Indonesian experience reflects many of these global challenges but also exhibits distinct structural characteristics. Existing studies consistently indicate that lecturer welfare remains uneven across institutional categories, employment statuses, and geographical locations. Elfindri et al. (2015) argue that adequate compensation is an essential component of institutional support systems that influence lecturer performance and educational quality. However, more recent research reveals persistent disparities in remuneration, particularly among lecturers employed in private higher education institutions. Ahyani et al. (2025) identify widespread sub-minimum wage conditions among private lecturers, demonstrating that labor protection mechanisms remain insufficient to guarantee decent living standards. Harahap (2025) further highlights weaknesses in employment agreements that often fail to provide adequate welfare protection and economic security. In addition, Harahap et al. (2024) explain that lecturer welfare is shaped by multiple factors, including certification schemes, employment status, and access to social security programs, yet these mechanisms have not eliminated disparities between permanent and non-permanent academic staff. Muhtasib et al. (2025) extend this argument by showing that educators in peripheral regions experience even greater wage disadvantages, indicating that inequality is reinforced by geographical and institutional

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stratification. Recent comparative evidence has further intensified concerns regarding lecturer welfare in Indonesia. Reports comparing lecturer salaries across Southeast Asia reveal that Indonesian lecturers receive substantially lower remuneration relative to living costs and minimum wage standards than their counterparts in countries such as Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, and Singapore. These findings suggest that lecturer salary inequality in Indonesia is not an isolated administrative problem but a structural issue embedded within broader higher education governance and labor regulation systems.

Beyond legal regulation and economic conditions, organizational and institutional perspectives offer important insights into how salary inequality is produced and sustained. Contemporary governance theories emphasize that compensation outcomes are shaped by organizational climate, leadership practices, institutional accountability, and policy implementation mechanisms. Jankelova et al. (2025) demonstrate that perceptions of fairness within organizations are closely associated with leadership relationships, workplace governance, and individualized employment arrangements. In higher education institutions, these factors influence not only lecturers' perceptions of remuneration fairness but also their commitment, productivity, and professional engagement. Shrestha et al. (2025) argue that decent work requires fair income, employment security, social protection, and opportunities for professional development, all of which contribute to sustainable organizational performance. Likewise, Ali et al. (2025) show that pay equity practices are positively associated with improved institutional performance and stronger governance outcomes. At a broader structural level, inequality is often reproduced through governance systems that determine how resources, opportunities, and rewards are distributed among different groups. Kemp and Owen (2025) argue that institutional arrangements frequently perpetuate unequal outcomes through policy choices and resource allocation mechanisms, even when formal commitments to equality exist. Applying these insights to higher education suggests that lecturer salary inequality cannot be explained solely by market conditions or institutional financial limitations. Rather, it emerges from the interaction between legal frameworks, governance structures, organizational practices, and public policy priorities. Consequently, any comprehensive analysis of lecturer remuneration must consider how these interconnected factors shape patterns of inequality across higher education systems.

Despite the growing body of literature on wage justice, labor protection, and higher education governance, several significant gaps remain. First, most studies focus on general labor markets, corporate compensation systems, or broader educational policy issues, while relatively few examine lecturer salary inequality as a distinct legal and governance problem. Second, although comparative discussions of lecturer welfare exist, there remains a lack of systematic analysis comparing lecturer remuneration systems across ASEAN countries through an integrated legal and distributive justice framework. Third, Indonesian scholarship has predominantly concentrated on descriptive policy evaluation or labor protection issues without adequately linking distributive justice theory, institutional governance analysis, and regional comparison within a unified analytical model. As a result, existing studies provide limited understanding of how legal structures, governance arrangements, and policy decisions collectively generate and sustain remuneration disparities within higher education. This study seeks to address these gaps

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by integrating three analytical dimensions: comparative examination of lecturer salary inequality within selected ASEAN higher education systems, normative legal analysis grounded in Rawlsian distributive justice theory, and socio-legal evaluation of governance and regulatory factors affecting lecturer welfare in Indonesia. The originality of this research therefore lies not only in its comparative perspective but also in its effort to conceptualize lecturer salary inequality as a structural legal governance issue rather than merely an economic or administrative concern. By combining distributive justice, labor law, and higher education governance perspectives, this study offers a more comprehensive framework for understanding how lecturer salary inequality is produced, justified, and potentially reformed within contemporary higher education systems.

## 3. Methodology

This study employs a normative juridical method with a comparative socio-legal approach to analyze lecturer salary inequality in Indonesia within a broader Asian and international context. Normative legal research is used to examine statutory regulations, legal principles, and policy frameworks governing lecturer remuneration, labor protection, and higher education governance. Unlike studies that focus primarily on economic indicators, this research views salary inequality as a legal and governance issue shaped by regulatory design, institutional arrangements, and state policy choices. The analysis is therefore directed toward understanding how legal norms construct and legitimize remuneration systems and whether these systems reflect the principles of distributive justice and decent work (Harahap, 2018; Abas, 2025).

The analytical framework integrates three perspectives: distributive justice theory, decent work principles, and comparative labor law analysis. Rawlsian distributive justice is used to evaluate whether remuneration systems provide fair outcomes for lecturers across different employment categories. The decent work framework assesses whether lecturer salaries ensure economic security, dignity, and adequate social protection. Comparative labor law analysis is employed to examine how different regulatory systems address wage inequality within higher education. This integrated framework responds to the gap in existing scholarship, which often discusses lecturer welfare from either educational or labor perspectives without linking legal justice, governance structures, and comparative remuneration systems. Through this approach, the study seeks to identify the institutional and legal factors that contribute to salary disparities among lecturers (Carr et al., 2025; Verga Matos & Neves, 2025). The comparative component focuses on Indonesia and several selected countries, including Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Singapore, and Russia. These jurisdictions were chosen because they represent different models of higher education funding, lecturer remuneration, and state involvement in academic employment. The comparison is conducted using four analytical criteria: **(**1) lecturer employment status regulation; (2) remuneration and wage-setting mechanisms; (3) higher education financing structures; and (4) legal protections related to wage fairness and lecturer welfare. This comparative design enables a more systematic assessment of salary inequality than descriptive comparisons commonly found in previous studies.

Data collection is conducted through document-based research**.** Primary legal materials consist of laws, government regulations, and policy documents related to labor law, higher education,

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and public-sector remuneration. Secondary materials include peer-reviewed journal articles, policy reports, institutional publications, and international studies addressing wage inequality and higher education governance. Relevant statistical and policy data on lecturer salaries are also used to support contextual analysis. The selection of sources is based on relevance, authority, recency, and methodological credibility to ensure analytical rigor and reliability. The collected data are analyzed using qualitative legal content analysis and comparative interpretation. The analysis proceeds through four stages: identification of relevant legal norms, examination of regulatory gaps and inconsistencies, comparison of selected jurisdictions based on predetermined indicators, and interpretation of findings through distributive justice and decent work frameworks. This procedure enhances methodological transparency and provides a systematic basis for evaluating lecturer salary inequality as a structural governance issue. Through this methodology, the study aims to generate legally grounded recommendations for higher education governance reform that promote fairness, accountability, and equitable remuneration for lecturers (Ahyani et al., 2025; Harahap, 2025).

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. Structural Inequality in Lecturer Salary Regulation in Indonesia

The findings reveal that lecturer salary inequality in Indonesia is fundamentally a structural governance problem rooted in fragmented legal regulation and unequal institutional capacity rather than merely an issue of market compensation. Empirical evidence demonstrates that Indonesian lecturers receive some of the lowest remuneration levels in Southeast Asia. Recent comparative data indicate that the average salary of Indonesian public university lecturers is approximately USD 207 per month, equivalent to only 1.32 times the provincial minimum wage and around 143 kilograms of rice purchasing power. In contrast, lecturers in Malaysia receive approximately 3.41 times the minimum wage, those in Vietnam 3.42 times, and those in Thailand 4.10 times the minimum wage (Diahwahyuningtyas, 2025). This disparity suggests that lecturer welfare in Indonesia is not solely constrained by economic conditions but is also shaped by regulatory arrangements that fail to establish adequate remuneration standards for academic professionals. The existence of substantial regional gaps demonstrates that wage inequality is closely connected to differences in legal protection, state funding commitments, and higher education governance models.

A major source of inequality lies in the fragmented regulatory framework governing lecturer employment. Lecturer remuneration is regulated through multiple legal regimes, including labor law, civil service regulations, higher education legislation, and institutional policies. Consequently, lecturers performing similar academic functions may receive significantly different salaries depending on their employment status and institutional affiliation. Public university lecturers who are civil servants benefit from structured salary scales, certification allowances, and pension protection, whereas many lecturers in private institutions remain dependent on institutional financial capacity and often receive wages below decent living standards (Ahyani et al., 2025). This dual system creates unequal treatment within the same profession and undermines the principle of equal pay for equal work. Similar observations were made by Harahap et al. (2024), who argue that fragmented labor protection frameworks weaken legal certainty and contribute to unequal welfare outcomes among lecturers.

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From the perspective of Rawlsian distributive justice, the current remuneration structure fails to satisfy the difference principle because existing inequalities do not improve the welfare of the least advantaged lecturers. Instead, the findings indicate that lower-tier lecturers, particularly honorary and private university lecturers, continue to experience economic vulnerability despite carrying out teaching, research, and community service responsibilities comparable to those of their counterparts in public institutions. This condition illustrates a gap between formal legal recognition and substantive justice. As Abas (2025) notes, wage fairness should be measured not merely through legal equality but through the actual distribution of welfare generated by institutional arrangements. Consequently, salary inequality among lecturers represents a governance failure that reproduces structural disadvantage rather than promoting equitable professional development.

Another important determinant is the ambiguity surrounding lecturer employment classifications. Indonesian higher education institutions employ lecturers under various categories, including civil servants, permanent foundation employees, contract-based lecturers, and honorary staff, each with different remuneration schemes and legal protections. Such categorization generates inconsistencies in rights, benefits, and bargaining positions, thereby weakening the enforcement of wage protection standards. Similar findings in labor law reform studies indicate that fragmented employment classifications frequently result in uneven protection and regulatory uncertainty (Nugroho et al., 2024). In higher education, this situation allows institutions considerable discretion in determining salaries without a unified national remuneration benchmark.

These findings suggest that lecturer salary inequality is a manifestation of broader governance fragmentation within Indonesian higher education. Therefore, addressing this problem requires structural legal reform rather than isolated salary adjustments. A potential solution is the establishment of a national lecturer remuneration framework that sets minimum salary standards linked to professional qualifications, workload, and regional living costs regardless of institutional status. In addition, greater harmonization between labor law and higher education regulations is needed to ensure consistent legal protection across all lecturer categories. Strengthening state investment in higher education financing and improving transparency in institutional salary governance would further reduce disparities and align remuneration systems with the principles of distributive justice, decent work, and equitable higher education governance (Harahap et al., 2024; Shrestha et al., 2025).

### 4.2. Comparative Perspective on Lecturer Wage Inequality and Global Pay Gap Patterns

Lecturer salary inequality in Indonesia becomes more evident when examined through a comparative ASEAN and international perspective. Comparative data published by Kompas.com in 2025 indicate that the average monthly salary of Indonesian public university lecturers was approximately USD 207, equivalent to only 1.32 times the provincial minimum wage and around 143 kilograms of rice purchasing power per month. This figure placed Indonesia at the lowest position among eight Southeast Asian countries surveyed, significantly below Malaysia (USD 1,126), Thailand (USD 1,348), Vietnam (USD 650), and Singapore

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(USD 5,262) (Diahwahyuningtyas, 2025). These findings suggest that lecturer wage inequality in Indonesia is not merely an internal institutional issue but also reflects a regional competitiveness gap in higher education employment systems.

From a comparative legal perspective, differences in lecturer remuneration across ASEAN countries are closely associated with variations in state funding commitments, higher education governance models, and labor protection frameworks. Countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand have developed more structured public investment mechanisms in higher education, allowing universities to provide more competitive compensation packages for academic staff. In contrast, Indonesian higher education institutions, particularly private universities, remain heavily dependent on tuition-based financing, creating substantial disparities in remuneration capacity between institutions. Phyo and Ilie (2025) argue that inequalities in higher education systems across Southeast Asia are strongly influenced by differences in institutional resources and state support, which subsequently affect academic workforce welfare and sustainability.

The Indonesian case also demonstrates the consequences of fragmented legal governance. Existing remuneration arrangements are divided between civil service regulations applicable to public university lecturers and contractual arrangements applied to private lecturers. Such dualism creates unequal outcomes for individuals performing similar academic functions. This finding supports the argument of Ahyani et al. (2025) and Harahap et al. (2024), who demonstrate that many private lecturers continue to experience inadequate wage protection despite legal guarantees regarding labor welfare. In comparison, studies of lecturer remuneration systems in the Netherlands reveal a more integrated governance structure in which salary standards are linked to national employment frameworks and collective bargaining mechanisms, thereby reducing excessive disparities among academic staff (Abas, 2025).

Beyond the higher education sector, global scholarship on wage inequality further explains why remuneration gaps persist across institutions and professions. Verga Matos and Neves (2025) show that wage asymmetries are often produced through institutional allocation systems that concentrate economic benefits among certain groups while limiting redistribution toward lower-paid workers. Similarly, Carr et al. (2025) argue that pay gaps become normalized when governance systems fail to establish transparent and enforceable standards of fairness. In the context of higher education, institutional autonomy without adequate accountability mechanisms may unintentionally reproduce unequal salary structures. Research by Ali et al. (2025) further demonstrates that organizations implementing transparent pay-equity frameworks tend to achieve better fairness outcomes and stronger institutional performance than organizations relying solely on decentralized compensation decisions.

Overall, the comparative evidence confirms that lecturer salary inequality in Indonesia reflects both national governance weaknesses and broader global patterns of wage disparity. However, the Indonesian situation is intensified by relatively low remuneration levels, fragmented legal protection, and unequal institutional funding capacity. These findings indicate that lecturer wage inequality should not be understood solely as a labor market phenomenon but as a

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governance issue requiring coordinated legal reform, stronger state investment, and the adoption of transparent remuneration standards. Aligning lecturer compensation with principles of distributive justice and decent work would not only improve academic welfare but also strengthen the long-term competitiveness and sustainability of Indonesia's higher education system (Shrestha et al., 2025; Martínez-Abad et al., 2025).

### 4.3. Legal and Policy Determinants of Lecturer Salary Inequality

The findings reveal that lecturer salary inequality in Indonesia is primarily a consequence of legal fragmentation and policy inconsistency rather than a simple reflection of market forces. Unlike many professional sectors governed by relatively uniform remuneration standards, lecturer compensation is regulated through multiple legal regimes, including labor law, higher education law, civil service regulations, and institutional policies. This regulatory plurality creates overlapping authority and inconsistent enforcement mechanisms, resulting in unequal remuneration outcomes among lecturers performing similar academic duties. From a socio-legal perspective, such fragmentation weakens legal certainty and undermines the principle of equal treatment within the higher education workforce. Harahap et al. (2024) argue that labor protection mechanisms become ineffective when sectoral regulations operate without sufficient harmonization, thereby producing disparities in welfare outcomes among workers within the same profession.

One of the most significant determinants of inequality is the absence of a nationally standardized remuneration framework applicable to all lecturers regardless of institutional status. Public university lecturers generally benefit from structured salary systems linked to civil service regulations, professional allowances, and government-funded incentives. In contrast, private university lecturers often depend on institutional financial capacity, resulting in considerable variation in salaries and employment benefits. Empirical studies indicate that many private lecturers continue to receive remuneration below minimum wage standards, demonstrating weaknesses in regulatory enforcement and labor protection mechanisms (Ahyani et al., 2025; Harahap, 2025). This dual remuneration structure creates a segmented academic labor market in which employment status becomes a stronger determinant of income than academic qualifications, workload, or professional contribution. Such conditions contradict the principles of distributive justice and equal pay for equal work that underpin modern labor law frameworks.

Another important factor is the implementation of higher education autonomy policies. Although institutional autonomy is designed to promote academic innovation, managerial flexibility, and institutional competitiveness, it may also generate unintended inequalities when not accompanied by adequate accountability mechanisms. Universities possess substantial discretion in determining remuneration policies, employment contracts, and incentive structures. Consequently, lecturers working in financially stronger institutions receive significantly better compensation than those employed in resource-constrained universities. Nugroho et al. (2024) note that decentralized governance models frequently produce uneven labor protection outcomes when redistributive safeguards are weak or absent. This phenomenon is particularly visible in Indonesia, where tuition-dependent financing systems create

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substantial disparities in institutional capacity. From the perspective of institutional governance theory, inequality is therefore reproduced not merely through economic limitations but through policy arrangements that allocate resources unevenly across organizations (Carr et al., 2025; Kemp & Owen, 2025).

The findings also indicate that the principles of decent work have not been fully integrated into higher education governance. Decent work requires fair income, employment security, social protection, and equal opportunities for professional advancement (Shrestha et al., 2025). However, current policies tend to prioritize institutional flexibility and financial sustainability over lecturer welfare and wage equity. As a result, lecturers frequently experience disparities in salary, career progression, certification benefits, and social security coverage. This situation demonstrates a policy imbalance in which economic efficiency is often prioritized at the expense of distributive fairness. Comparative studies further suggest that countries with stronger pay-equity frameworks generally combine transparent remuneration systems, clear accountability mechanisms, and enforceable legal standards that limit excessive wage disparities (Ali et al., 2025; von Rosing et al., 2025).

Overall, lecturer salary inequality in Indonesia is structurally embedded within legal and policy design. The problem originates from fragmented regulations, dual employment systems, decentralized governance arrangements, and inadequate implementation of decent work principles. Therefore, addressing inequality requires comprehensive governance reform rather than isolated salary increases. Policy solutions should include the establishment of a national lecturer remuneration framework, harmonization between labor law and higher education regulations, stronger enforcement of minimum wage protections for private lecturers, greater transparency in institutional salary policies, and increased state investment in higher education funding. Through these measures, lecturer remuneration can be aligned more closely with principles of distributive justice, legal certainty, and equitable academic development across all categories of higher education institutions.

### 4.4. Justice, Decent Work, and Institutional Inequality

The findings of this study demonstrate that lecturer salary inequality in Indonesia extends beyond a labor market issue and represents a broader challenge of justice within higher education governance. From a normative legal perspective, wage justice requires not only equal treatment but also the fair distribution of economic benefits according to professional responsibilities and social contributions. Lecturers perform strategic functions in teaching, research, and community service, yet their remuneration often fails to reflect these responsibilities, particularly within private higher education institutions. Harahap (2018) argues that wage standards should guarantee the fulfillment of decent living needs and human dignity, thereby positioning remuneration as both a legal entitlement and a moral obligation. Consequently, persistent disparities in lecturer compensation indicate a gap between normative principles of justice and the practical realities of higher education governance.

The concept of decent work provides an important framework for evaluating the consequences of salary inequality. Decent work encompasses fair income, employment security, social

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protection, and opportunities for professional development. However, the findings reveal that many Indonesian lecturers, especially those employed under non-permanent or contractual arrangements, continue to face income insecurity and limited career prospects. Such conditions undermine not only individual welfare but also institutional effectiveness. Shrestha et al. (2025) emphasize that inadequate remuneration negatively affects employee motivation, productivity, and long-term organizational sustainability. In higher education, these consequences may appear in the form of reduced research productivity, declining academic engagement, and difficulties in attracting and retaining qualified scholars. Therefore, lecturer welfare should be understood as a strategic component of educational quality rather than merely a budgetary concern.

From the perspective of distributive justice theory, the existing remuneration system raises significant concerns regarding fairness. Rawlsian theory permits social and economic inequalities only when they generate benefits for the least advantaged groups. However, the findings suggest that current lecturer salary structures fail to satisfy this requirement. Lower-tier lecturers, honorary lecturers, and many academics employed by private institutions continue to experience limited economic benefits despite their substantial contribution to higher education. Abas (2025) argues that wage systems should be evaluated based on their ability to improve the welfare of disadvantaged academic groups rather than merely maintaining formal equality. In the Indonesian context, remuneration disparities appear to reinforce institutional hierarchies rather than reduce inequalities, thereby weakening the substantive realization of distributive justice within higher education systems.

The study further reveals that lecturer salary inequality reflects deeper forms of institutional inequality embedded in governance structures and resource allocation mechanisms. Differences in institutional funding capacity, access to government support, and organizational autonomy contribute significantly to variations in remuneration outcomes. Similar patterns have been identified in broader studies of structural inequality, which demonstrate that disparities are often reproduced through governance arrangements rather than individual performance factors (Kemp & Owen, 2025). In Indonesia, the combination of decentralized higher education governance and uneven financial resources has created a stratified academic labor system in which lecturers experience substantially different welfare conditions depending on the institutions in which they work. Such disparities challenge the principle of educational equity and undermine the social function of higher education as a public good.

Overall, the relationship between justice, decent work, and institutional inequality confirms that lecturer salary disparities are fundamentally a governance and social justice issue. Addressing this problem requires more than salary adjustments; it demands structural reforms that integrate distributive justice principles, decent work standards, and equitable governance mechanisms. Policy solutions should include the development of national remuneration benchmarks, stronger legal protection for non-permanent lecturers, transparent compensation systems, and more equitable state funding policies. Comparative evidence suggests that institutions adopting pay-equity measures and accountability mechanisms achieve better welfare outcomes and stronger organizational performance (Ali et al., 2025; Martínez-Abad et al., 2025). Accordingly,

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promoting wage justice is essential not only for lecturer welfare but also for the sustainability, legitimacy, and competitiveness of Indonesia's higher education system.

### 4.5. Implications for Higher Education Governance Reform

The findings of this study indicate that lecturer salary inequality in Indonesia is fundamentally a governance problem that requires comprehensive legal and institutional reform. The persistence of disparities between public and private university lecturers, as well as between permanent and non-permanent academic staff, demonstrates that existing governance arrangements have not adequately ensured distributive justice within the higher education sector. Comparative evidence from ASEAN countries further suggests that lecturer welfare is closely associated with state commitment, regulatory coherence, and institutional accountability. Therefore, governance reform should move beyond isolated salary adjustments and focus on restructuring the legal architecture governing academic employment and remuneration systems.

A primary implication concerns the need for legal harmonization between labor law and higher education regulations. Currently, lecturer remuneration is governed by fragmented legal frameworks that create inconsistencies in wage standards, employment status, and enforcement mechanisms. This fragmentation weakens legal certainty and contributes to unequal treatment among lecturers performing comparable academic functions. Harahap et al. (2024) and Nugroho et al. (2024) emphasize that regulatory inconsistency often produces uneven labor protection outcomes across sectors. Consequently, a unified regulatory framework should be developed to establish minimum remuneration standards, employment protections, and welfare guarantees applicable to all lecturers regardless of institutional affiliation. Such harmonization would strengthen the implementation of the principle of equal pay for equal work and reduce structural disparities within academic employment systems.

A second implication relates to the establishment of a national lecturer remuneration framework. The findings reveal that the absence of standardized salary benchmarks allows significant variations in compensation across institutions. This situation contrasts with remuneration systems in several higher-performing countries, where academic salary structures are linked to national standards and transparent performance indicators. Drawing upon decent work principles, remuneration reform should include minimum salary thresholds, professional allowances, social security coverage, and career-based incentives that are consistently applied throughout the higher education sector (Shrestha et al., 2025). Such a framework would not eliminate institutional autonomy but would provide clear safeguards against excessive wage disparities and sub-minimum salary practices.

The study also highlights the importance of strengthening transparency, accountability, and state responsibility in higher education financing. Transparency mechanisms can reduce information asymmetry, improve institutional accountability, and promote fairer compensation practices. Ali et al. (2025) demonstrate that pay-equity systems are more effective when supported by transparent governance arrangements and regular monitoring mechanisms. In addition, the state must assume a stronger role in supporting lecturer welfare through more

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equitable funding policies. The comparative findings indicate that countries with higher lecturer salaries generally allocate greater public resources to higher education and academic human capital development. Therefore, targeted funding schemes, lecturer welfare grants, and performance-based institutional support should be considered as instruments for reducing inequalities between financially strong and resource-constrained universities.

Finally, governance reform should incorporate participatory and justice-oriented approaches in policy formulation. Lecturers should be actively involved in designing remuneration policies, evaluation mechanisms, and welfare programs affecting their professional lives. Such participation enhances policy legitimacy and ensures that governance decisions reflect actual academic labor conditions. From the perspective of distributive justice, reform should prioritize the welfare of the most disadvantaged lecturer groups, particularly non-permanent lecturers and academics employed by private institutions. In line with the arguments of Abas (2025), Martínez-Abad et al. (2025), and Harahap (2018), equitable higher education governance can only be achieved when legal protection, decent work standards, and institutional accountability operate in an integrated manner. Accordingly, lecturer salary reform should be viewed not merely as an economic policy agenda but as a strategic investment in educational quality, academic sustainability, and social justice within Indonesia's higher education system.

### 4.6. Implications for Higher Education Governance Reform

The findings demonstrate that lecturer salary inequality in Indonesia is not merely an issue of institutional remuneration but a consequence of fragmented governance structures that separate labor protection from higher education regulation. The coexistence of multiple legal regimes has generated inconsistent remuneration standards among permanent, contractual, and honorary lecturers. Therefore, higher education reform requires stronger legal harmonization between employment law and educational governance to establish a more coherent and equitable remuneration framework. Such harmonization is essential to strengthen legal certainty and ensure equal protection for academic workers across institutional categories (Harahap et al., 2024; Nugroho et al., 2024).

The study further indicates that governance reform should prioritize the establishment of national remuneration benchmarks and transparent salary governance mechanisms. Excessive institutional discretion in determining lecturer salaries has contributed to persistent disparities, particularly within private higher education institutions. Comparative studies suggest that transparent remuneration systems and accountability mechanisms are effective instruments for reducing pay inequality and improving institutional performance (Ali et al., 2025). In addition, the implementation of decent work principles requires predictable income structures and adequate social protection for academic personnel (Shrestha et al., 2025).

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature by integrating Rawlsian distributive justice, decent work principles, and higher education governance analysis into a single explanatory framework. Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on lecturer welfare, labor protection, or wage standards separately (Harahap, 2018; Ahyani et al., 2025; Karso, 2025), this research conceptualizes lecturer salary inequality as a structural governance problem resulting from

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regulatory fragmentation and institutional asymmetry. This approach expands existing discussions by linking wage inequality to broader questions of legal justice and governance effectiveness.

The novelty of this study lies in its combination of normative legal analysis and comparative wage justice discourse to explain lecturer remuneration inequality within both national and international contexts. By incorporating comparative evidence from ASEAN and global inequality studies, the research demonstrates that Indonesian lecturer salary disparities reflect broader patterns of institutional inequality while remaining strongly influenced by domestic regulatory arrangements (Abas, 2025; Verga Matos & Neves, 2025; Kemp & Owen, 2025). Consequently, the study offers a more comprehensive analytical framework for understanding and addressing inequality in higher education employment systems.

Nevertheless, several limitations should be acknowledged. This research relies primarily on normative legal analysis and secondary sources without large-scale empirical data on lecturer income distribution. Furthermore, the comparative discussion is interpretative rather than based on direct field investigations across ASEAN countries. Future studies are therefore encouraged to employ quantitative surveys, institutional case studies, and cross-country comparative analysis to generate more robust evidence regarding lecturer remuneration, governance performance, and higher education equity.

## 5. Conclusion

This study concludes that lecturer salary inequality in Indonesia constitutes a structural governance problem shaped by fragmented legal regulations, inconsistent coordination between labor law and higher education policies, and unequal institutional funding capacities. Comparative analysis indicates that lecturer remuneration in Indonesia remains relatively low compared to several ASEAN countries, reflecting broader disparities in higher education financing and academic labor protection. The findings demonstrate that salary inequality is not merely a consequence of market dynamics but is systematically reproduced through regulatory fragmentation and institutional asymmetries in the governance of academic employment.

The study further reveals that differences in employment status, institutional autonomy, and uneven enforcement of labor protection standards contribute significantly to remuneration disparities among lecturers. Public university lecturers generally benefit from more structured salary systems and stronger legal protection, whereas many lecturers in private institutions remain vulnerable to low wages and limited welfare guarantees. These conditions indicate that the existing remuneration framework has not fully realized the principles of fairness, equal protection, and decent work within the higher education sector. From the perspective of distributive justice, the findings suggest that current remuneration arrangements fail to satisfy the Rawlsian principle that social and economic inequalities should benefit the least advantaged groups. Rather than improving the welfare of lower-tier lecturers, existing policies often reinforce institutional and employment-based disparities. Consequently, lecturer salary inequality should be understood not only as an economic issue but also as a matter of legal justice, governance effectiveness, and educational equity.

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The originality of this study lies in its integration of normative legal analysis, distributive justice theory, and comparative higher education perspectives to explain lecturer salary inequality as a structural governance issue. Unlike previous studies that focus separately on labor protection, lecturer welfare, or wage standards, this research provides a more comprehensive framework linking regulatory fragmentation, institutional inequality, and remuneration governance within higher education systems. This study is limited by its reliance on normative legal analysis and secondary sources without extensive empirical or cross-country quantitative data. Future research is therefore encouraged to incorporate large-scale surveys, comparative ASEAN case studies, and statistical analysis of lecturer income distribution. Nevertheless, this study contributes to the development of legal and policy discourse by demonstrating that sustainable improvement in lecturer welfare requires regulatory harmonization, transparent remuneration standards, and stronger state commitment to equitable higher education funding.

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