



## Synergy of Law and Education in the Protection of Contract Workers in Indonesia

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### Abstract

This study discusses the synergy between law and education in providing protection for contract workers in Indonesia. Contract workers are one of the labor groups that often face problems related to legal status, job uncertainty, and limitations in obtaining normative rights as stipulated in labor regulations. Although Law Number 13 of 2003 on Manpower and its derivative regulations have provided a legal framework, implementation in the field often shows that there are loopholes that weaken the position of contract workers. Therefore, an interdisciplinary approach is needed that integrates the legal and educational dimensions to provide more comprehensive protection. The research method used is normative legal research with a qualitative approach, through an examination of laws and regulations, doctrines, and labor practices, and enriched with educational studies that emphasize the importance of legal literacy for workers. The results of the study show that legal protection for contract workers has not been fully effective due to weak supervision, low understanding of workers about their rights, and the practice of contract abuse by employers. In this context, education plays an important role as an important instrument to increase the legal awareness of contract workers, both through formal and non-formal education, as well as legal and employment skills-based training. The conclusion of this study confirms that legal and educational synergy is a relevant strategy to strengthen the protection of contract workers. The law provides a binding normative framework, while education forms the awareness and empowerment of workers in demanding their rights. Thus, the combination of the two is expected to be able to realize social justice and improve the welfare of contract workers in Indonesia.

## I. INTRODUCTION

National development essentially aims to create community welfare through improving the quality of human resources and creating a productive work climate.(Ali, 2009) Labor is a strategic factor in realizing this goal because workers not only function as implementers of production activities, but also as development subjects whose dignity and rights must be protected.(Anggraini & Tukiman, 2022) In the context of industrial relations in Indonesia, the position of contract workers or known as Fixed-Time Work Agreements (PKWT) is one of the crucial issues. The existence of contract workers provides flexibility for the business world in dealing with global economic dynamics, but on the other hand opens up opportunities for vulnerability to workers' normative rights.

Normatively, the existence of contract workers has been regulated in Law Number 13 of 2003

concerning Manpower, which then underwent significant changes through Law Number 11 of 2020 concerning Job Creation and its derivative regulations. The regulation emphasizes that contract workers can only be used for certain types of work that are temporary or seasonal. But in practice, not a few companies are expanding the use of contract workers in jobs that should be permanent. As a result, many contract workers have experienced unilateral termination of employment, lost the opportunity to obtain severance pay, and experienced prolonged uncertainty of employment status. This condition shows that there is a gap between ideal legal norms and the reality of employment practices in the field (Rosifany, 2020).

In such a situation, education is present as an important element that synergizes with the law. Education does not only function to produce a technically competent workforce,(Wonggo, 2010)

but also equip them with legal awareness, an understanding of normative rights, as well as the ability to fight for protection for oneself. Low legal literacy among workers is often the main reason why contract workers are easily harmed. (Catur et al., 2020) Many workers do not understand the clauses of the signed contracts, do not know the limits of the legality of PKWT, and do not even know the complaint mechanism if their rights are violated. Thus, the issue of protecting contract workers is not only a legal issue, but also an educational issue.

Furthermore, adequate employment education is able to strengthen the capacity of workers to adapt to regulatory developments. Regulatory changes through the Omnibus Law, for example, present various new adjustments regarding employment relations, social security, and dispute resolution mechanisms. Without a good understanding, workers will remain in a weak position in negotiations with employers. In this context, educational institutions, both formal and non-formal, have the responsibility to organize employment law literacy programs, soft skills training on self-advocacy, and build a culture of legal awareness from an early age.

Legal and educational synergy in the protection of contract workers is also relevant when associated with Indonesia's human resource development agenda. The government through various policies always emphasizes the importance of improving the quality of human resources as a pillar of the nation's competitiveness. (Zaelani, 2019) However, the improvement of quality is not only limited to technical skills, but also includes aspects of legal knowledge, work ethics, and understanding of normative rights. A legally savvy worker will be better able to protect himself from exploitative practices and can contribute more optimally to healthy industrial relations (Syahrial, 2020).

In addition, the synergy of law and education provides a new perspective in an effort to strengthen labor regulations. Good regulations without the support of the awareness of the working community will be difficult to enforce effectively. Education is an instrument to accelerate the internalization of legal norms into the behavior of workers and entrepreneurs. (Isaac, 2016) For example, through a vocational education curriculum that includes labor law materials, training programs for labor unions, and legal counseling conducted in industrial estates. Thus, the protection of contract

workers does not only rely on law enforcement officials and labor supervisory agencies, but also on the active participation of knowledge-empowered workers.

The problem of protecting contract workers in Indonesia is increasingly complex with the presence of the digital economy phenomenon and *The Gig Economy*. (Yuniastuti, 2020) Many workers have "contract" or "partner" status in digital platforms without adequate legal protection. This is where the role of legal education becomes crucial so that the young generation who enter the digital job market is no longer trapped in exploitative work relationships. Legal knowledge taught since college or vocational training will be an important provision to face the reality of the increasingly flexible and uncertain world of work.

From the social side, the weak protection of contract workers has implications for increasing family economic uncertainty, reduced quality of life, and the widespread phenomenon of structural poverty. If contract workers are constantly in a vulnerable condition without clear protection, then the impact is felt not only by individuals, but also by the wider community. Therefore, a multidisciplinary approach is needed that combines legal and educational aspects as a comprehensive protection strategy.

Departing from the description above, a research entitled "Legal and Education Synergy in the Protection of Contract Workers in Indonesia" is important to answer some fundamental questions. First, how do the current labor law norms provide protection for contract workers? Second, what is the role of education in improving the legal literacy of contract workers so that they are able to understand and fight for their rights? Third, to what extent can the synergy of law and education be realized in practice, both through government policies, the role of educational institutions, and the initiatives of trade unions and civil society organizations?

This research is expected to make a theoretical and practical contribution. Theoretically, this study enriches the treasure of labor law studies by including an educational perspective as an instrument to support law enforcement. Practically, this research can provide concrete recommendations on strategies to increase legal literacy of contract workers, strengthen vocational education curriculum, and synergy between the government, the business world, and

educational institutions in creating a fair and sustainable work ecosystem.

Thus, the problem of protecting contract workers is not only a legalistic problem that must be answered by regulation alone, but also a problem of literacy, awareness, and social learning. Synergy between law and education will be the key to realizing fair, balanced, and dignified working relationships in Indonesia.

## **II. RESEARCH METHODS**

The type of research used in this scientific paper is normative legal research. Normative legal research, or often called doctrinal law research, focuses on the study of positive legal norms that apply in the Indonesian legal system. (Sonata, 2014)

The approach chosen is the statute approach and the conceptual approach. The legislative approach is used to analyze positive legal regulations that regulate employment, such as the 1945 Constitution, Law Number 13 of 2003 concerning Manpower, Law Number 11 of 2020 concerning Job Creation and its implementing regulations, and other derivative regulations. Meanwhile, a conceptual approach is used to examine legal ideas, principles, and doctrines related to the protection of contract workers, as well as their relationship with the role of labor law education as a means of increasing legal awareness and worker empowerment.

## **III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **A. Legal Arrangements regarding Contract Workers based on Laws and Regulations in Indonesia**

The main regulation regarding contract workers or Fixed-Time Work Agreements (PKWT) is contained in Law Number 13 of 2003 concerning Manpower, which then underwent fundamental changes through Law Number 11 of 2020 concerning Job Creation and is further regulated in Government Regulation as an implementing regulation. Normatively, PKWT is justified only for certain temporary work, such as work that is expected to be completed within a certain period of time, seasonal work, or work related to new and experimental products/activities (Davin, 2024). This norm framework is intended to prevent the abuse of

contracts from being used as a tool to avoid employers' long-term obligations to workers.

From the technical side of regulations, Government Regulation No. 35 of 2021 provides details on the types of work that can be regulated with PKWT, the time frame, the provisions for renewal/renewal, and the legal consequences if the agreement does not meet the formal and material requirements. Some implementing regulations set limits on the total duration of PKWT (as well as renewal conditions) and require an objective reason to choose PKWT over PKWTT (non-specific employment agreement). This kind of provision in principle places the burden on the employer to be able to prove that the work is really temporary.

However, at the practical level, there are significant implementation gaps. Many studies and empirical studies show that companies often use PKWT for work that is substantially fixed, a series of recurring contracts, multiple extensions, or "contract extensions" that in fact contain the characteristics of permanent employment. As a result, workers experience job uncertainty, limited access to social security and poor employment status when demanding normative rights. These academic findings indicate that there is a gap between legal norms and field practice, influenced by employers' economic incentives, weak supervision, and low workers' knowledge of their rights.

Juridically, if a PKWT does not meet the conditions specified by laws and regulations, for example, does not meet the definition of a certain job or an extension that exceeds the provisions, then the agreement has the potential to be declared for the sake of law as an Indefinite Time Work Agreement (PKWTT). This provision is intended as a preventive sanction to correct the abuse of PKWT. However, the application of the provision requires access to an effective dispute resolution mechanism so that workers can prove their claims (Nisa et al., 2023).

The dispute resolution mechanism is a key instrument in enforcing PKWT provisions. The Industrial Relations Court (PHI), which was established under Law No. 2 of 2004 concerning the Settlement of Industrial Relations Disputes, serves as a litigation forum for employment disputes including termination claims and rights disputes. Although this judicial framework exists, practice barriers such as cost, procedural complexity, length of process, and lack of access to information for contract workers often reduce the

effectiveness of law enforcement through litigation channels.

Further analysis shows three structural factors why the normative arrangements of PKWT have not fully protected contract workers. First, the definition and categories of jobs that can use PKWT are often interpreted loosely so as to make room for entrepreneurs. Second, the capacity of labor supervisors at the regional level is still limited, so proactive supervision of PKWT practices is weak (Hidayati & Dewi, 2025). Third, workers themselves are often unaware or do not dare to claim their rights because of the risk of losing their jobs. This combination of factors puts the legal protection of contract workers in a position that relies more on the courage to demand the rights and effectiveness of law enforcement mechanisms than on the mere existence of norms on paper. Departing from these findings, concrete efforts are needed: improving norms (more clearly PKWT criteria), increasing supervisory capacity, and facilitating access to dispute resolution for workers.

## **B. The Role of Education in Improving Legal Literacy and Contract Workers' Awareness of Their Rights**

Education, both formal (vocational/vocational) and non-formal (training, counseling, campaigns), plays a central role in shaping workers' capacity to understand and demand labor rights. Employment law literacy is not just about knowing the rules; it concerns the ability to analyze work situations, recognize violations, and know the available remediation channels (bipartite, mediation, PHI). Therefore, educational interventions should be designed to change behaviour and provide practical skills, rather than just normative information transfer (Dewi & Budiarta, 2022).

In terms of formality, the revitalization of national vocational education which is regulated through national policies (e.g. Presidential Regulation on the Revitalization of Vocational Education) opens up opportunities to include the literacy module of labor rights in the vocational curriculum and job training. By integrating employment materials (rights and obligations, types of employment agreements, dispute resolution mechanisms, and social security) into learning, vocational graduates will enter the job market with better knowledge and reduce their vulnerability to adverse contractual practices. For this reason, synchronization is needed between

curriculum makers, the business world, and the employment authority.

Non-formal and cross-sectoral initiatives have also been running, institutions such as BPJS Ketenagakerjaan and the Ministry of Manpower have conducted social security literacy programs and socialization of workers' rights in communities, vocational high schools, and job training. These programs, when implemented in a structured and sustainable manner, have the potential to increase contract workers' awareness of their rights (e.g., BPJS registration, wage rights, leave, PHI procedures). Several initiatives also target vocational high schools so that social security literacy becomes part of early education to enter the workforce.

Empirical evidence shows that when workers have better legal literacy, they tend to be more active in bipartite negotiations, demand compliance with employment agreements, and utilize dispute resolution mechanisms when necessary. Field studies have shown a positive correlation between education/socialization programs and workers' ability to enforce their rights, although this effect is also influenced by the context of the organization in which they work (whether there are unions or not), as well as the availability of access to legal aid. However, the effectiveness of educational programs is often limited by a one-way approach (lectures), incompatibility of the material with the local context, and a lack of follow-up. Therefore, literacy programs must be participatory, contextual, and equipped with empowerment services (e.g., legal aid clinics).

Practically, the recommended educational model includes: (1) the integration of employment modules in the vocational and vocational curriculum and BLK training; (2) routine socialization by the Manpower Office and BPJS at the sub-district/village level; (3) the establishment of an "employment law clinic" at vocational campuses that provide pro bono services; and (4) advocacy training for union administrators to become literacy agents in the workplace. These measures, if adopted comprehensively, will strengthen the bargaining position of contract workers and close the space for contract abuse by employers (Wibowo & Herawati, 2021).

### **C. Forms of Synergy between Law and Education to Provide Effective Protection for Contract Workers**

Synergy between legal aspects (norms and enforcement) and education (literacy and empowerment) is the key to answering the problem of contract worker protection as a whole. Conceptually, the law provides a framework of certainty and sanctions; Education ensures that legal subjects (workers) understand and are able to actualize these rights. Without harmonization of the two, protection tends to be formalistic and has no substantive impact.

Concrete forms of synergy must be multi-layered and cross-institutional. First, at the national policy level, there needs to be an integrative policy that requires the inclusion of employment literacy in vocational revitalization programs (Presidential Vocational Revitalization Regulation) and social security roadmaps (Presidential Decree on Social Security Roadmap), so that education and social security become part of one protection ecosystem. Such integrated policies make it less likely that education programs will run alone without any real impact on worker protection.

Second, at the implementation level, it is necessary to have a cooperation protocol between the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Manpower, BPJS, and the regional manpower office to carry out: (a) the development of joint modules; (b) training of trainers for vocational instructors (ToT); (c) structured outreach programs for contract workers in contract-intensive sectors; and (d) monitoring of integrated evaluation of literacy outcomes (e.g. BPJS registration rate, number of successful PHI cases, changes in contract patterns). Similar initiatives have begun to appear (collaboration between BPJS and the Coordinating Ministry for Human Development and Culture for literacy in vocational schools), but they need to be expanded and standardized.

Third, strengthening access to legal mechanisms must be accompanied by practical education: simulation of PHI trials, legal aid clinics on campuses/sub-districts, and materials on how to prepare contract evidence and supporting documents when filing a lawsuit. This approach reduces reliance on litigation processes that are often considered technical and daunting. In addition, labor supervisors need to receive pedagogical training so that the supervisory function is not only repressive but also

educational eg. Giving recommendations for contract improvement and counseling in the company.

Finally, the indicators of the success of legal-education synergy must be measured measurably: the reduction of repetitive PKWT practices for permanent employment, the increase in BPJS registration in the contract group, the increase in the number of successful bipartite settlements, and workers' perception of their ability to claim rights. If policy, education, and enforcement are implemented simultaneously and reinforce each other, protection for contract workers will change from mere normative certainty to substantive protection that is perceived in the field.

## **IV. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

### **A. Conclusion**

Based on the results of the research and discussions that have been carried out, several conclusions can be drawn as follows:

Contract workers or workers in Fixed-Time Work Agreements (PKWT) are expressly regulated in Law Number 13 of 2003 concerning Manpower, which was later amended through Law Number 11 of 2020 concerning Job Creation and its derivative regulations. The regulation in principle provides protection for contract workers by emphasizing the principles of legal certainty, protection of basic rights, and the principle of justice. However, practice in the field shows that there are still various problems, such as the misuse of PKWT by companies, weak supervision, and lack of understanding of workers' rights. This indicates that although regulations are in place, their implementation is not yet fully effective.

Education, especially in the form of legal education and legal literacy, has an important role in increasing contract workers' awareness of their rights and obligations. Through an educational approach, workers are able to understand more deeply about employment contracts, legal provisions, and labor dispute resolution mechanisms. Legal education can not only be done in the formal realm, but also through training, socialization, seminars, and community-based non-formal programs. With increased legal literacy, contract workers have a stronger bargaining position in dealing with employers and are able to protect themselves from unfair and exploitative practices.

The effectiveness of legal protection for contract workers requires synergy between the normative (legal) and educational (education) aspects. Laws without a good understanding of the subject matter will lose their effectiveness, while education without adequate regulatory support will find it difficult to have a real impact. Therefore, it is necessary to build a partnership pattern between the government, educational institutions, labor unions, and companies in an effort to build workers' legal awareness. This synergy can be realized through an educational curriculum that contains employment aspects, practical legal training in the work environment, and continuous legal counseling. Thus, the protection of contract workers is not only formal, but also substantive and able to respond to real needs in the field.

### B. Suggestions

Based on the results of the research, there are several things that need to be considered to strengthen legal protection for contract workers in Indonesia. The government should increase the effectiveness of existing regulations by tightening supervision over the implementation of fixed-time work agreements by companies, so that workers' rights can be optimally protected. On the other hand, educational institutions and labor unions need to be more active in improving legal literacy through curriculum, training, and socialization activities so that contract workers have full awareness of their rights and obligations. In addition, synergy between the government, the world of education, and companies is the main key in creating a fair and effective protection system, so that contract workers can work with a sense of security, protection, and prosperity.

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