

Exploring Teachers' Happiness: A Scoping Review

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Abstract: *Happiness is an umbrella term that encompasses a range of positive emotions and feelings, such as joy, contentment, satisfaction, and fulfilment. In education, teacher happiness is largely associated with job satisfaction, which helps in creating a positive classroom environment. Despite the fundamental role teachers play, there exists a persistent and concerning issue surrounding the overall happiness and well-being of teachers. A substantial knowledge gap exists in understanding factors contributing to teacher happiness and their impact. This not only affects the mental health and job satisfaction of teachers, but also has broader implications for student learning outcomes and the overall efficiency of the education system. Thus, the main purpose of this scoping review served to explore current available literature on teacher happiness, which aims to assist in creating a supportive environment that fosters teacher happiness and, consequently, enhances the quality of education. For this view, the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) standards were applied, with the utilization of these four databases: ERIC, Google Scholar, ProQuest, and SCOPUS. 14 studies were found to be suitable and were selected accordingly. The findings conclude that teacher happiness led to increased performance and productivity, student engagement, higher retention rate, and better overall mental health.*

Keywords: Happiness; Teacher Happiness; Well-Being; Job Satisfaction

1. Introduction

Promoting mental health in education is essential to help both students and teachers thrive academically and emotionally. This is crucial for creating a supportive and conducive learning environment (Yang et al., 2019), where not only students enjoy being in school, but the teachers are happy there as well. Lyubomirsky (2008) characterises happiness as contentment, positive well-being, and taking life as good, meaningful and worthwhile. The question is, how many teachers truly feel like this while teaching in the classroom? Teachers are supposed to bring joy to the classroom and be fun, and are even required to teach about happiness explicitly. Nonetheless, how many are truly experiencing it in their teaching life? This question leads to an apparent lack of empirical data. Zhang & Zhang (2023) pointed out that teacher emotions remains a relatively underrepresented field, while there is a statistical dearth on teachers' mental health (Ismail et al., 2023).

On the global front, teachers are experiencing burnout and therefore expressed turnover intent in recent years (Amzat et al, 2021; Agyapong et al., 2022), with factors relating to challenging working conditions leading to occupational stress and work-family conflict. This in turn affects their work-life balance (Rajendran et al., 2020). Ever since the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers worldwide were presented with additional challenges like adapting to remote teaching and managing hybrid classrooms, on top of dealing with the overall toll of the situation. As teachers' emotions have received less attention than students during this time (Panadero et al., 2022), it is crucial to provide ongoing support and recognition for teachers as the situation evolves and schools continue to adapt progressively.

Learning is often facilitated by learner's positive attitudes about their teacher, and how students perceive their teachers have a marked effect on their learning process (Zhang & Zhang, 2023). A happy teacher often translates to a more engaged, motivated, and supported learning environment. Since teachers play a vital role in nurturing students and are entrusted to foster their well-being, it is thus crucial to boost teacher happiness. Being exploratory in nature, this scoping review crucially aims to identify current available research in discovering teacher happiness and its facets, with the intention of gaining valuable insights to help teachers and stakeholders alike.

2. Methodology

This scoping review utilised the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR). It was employed as PRISMA-ScR serves as a valuable tool that enhances the quality, transparency, and consistency of reporting in scoping reviews (Tricco et al., 2018). This scoping review was also conducted based on the adaptation of Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) methodological framework, which included the following steps: 1) identifying research questions, 2) identifying relevant studies, 3) selecting relevant studies, 4) charting the data, and 5) collating, summarising, and reporting the results, as seen in Figure 1 below.

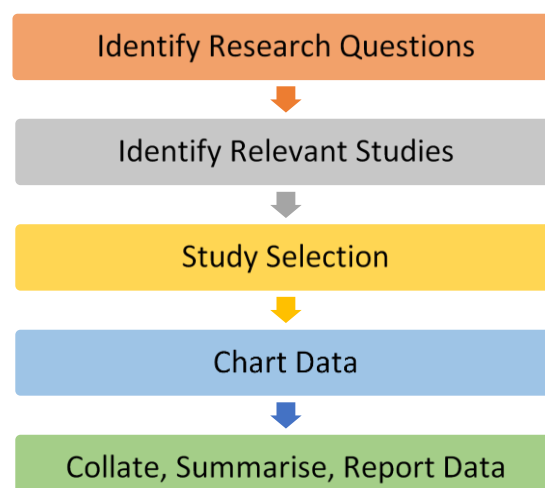


Figure 1: Arksey & O'Malley's (2005) adapted methodological framework

2.1 Identifying Research Questions

Although studies on teacher happiness is steadily gaining traction in the field of education, there is still limited literature resources on the topic. Therefore, the research question addressed for this review was, "What is observed from the existing literature about teacher happiness?"

This question served as a guide for subsequent research in this study. Table 1 summarises the underlying research questions and research objectives derived from the PCC framework. This framework functions as a tool that helps researchers to formulate clear and focused research questions by breaking down the inquiry into three key components, namely Population, Concept, and Context, as tabled below:

Table 1: Research questions formed based on the PCC (Population/ Concept/ Context) framework

Research Questions		Research Objectives	
1.	How is the research focused on teacher happiness distributed?	1.	To explore the distribution of research conducted on teacher happiness within the last five years.
2.	What are the design types of the studies related to teacher happiness?	2.	To identify the main types of research design used in studies related to teacher happiness.
3.	What are the purposes and topics for which teacher happiness are developed?	3.	To identify purposes and topics most frequently investigated in the studies about teacher happiness.
4.	What are the elements of teacher happiness researched into by past studies?	4.	To identify the elements of teacher happiness being researched into by past studies.
5.	What are the findings of past studies on teacher happiness?	5.	To summarise the findings of past studies on research pertaining to teacher happiness.

2.2 Identifying Relevant Studies

The relevant studies were found using search strings and keywords in four online databases: Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), Google Scholar, ProQuest, and SCOPUS.

Table 2: Search string

Search Directory	Search String/ Keyword
ERIC Google Scholar ProQuest SCOPUS	teacher AND (happiness OR “teacher happiness”) AND (well-being OR “job satisfaction”)

2.3 Study Selection

Articles which were published within the past five years of 2023 were selected to be included in this scoping review, with the criteria of being written in English and readily available as full texts. The focus was also on teachers and happiness, with non-related topics excluded from the scoping review. A summary of the study’s inclusion and exclusion criteria are provided in Table 3, as follows:

Table 3: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
1. Articles published from 2019-2023	1. Articles published before 2019
2. English language	2. Non-English languages
3. Focus on teachers	3. Not related to teachers
4. Focus on happiness	4. Not related to happiness
5. Journal articles (with full text)	5. Full text not attained

2.4 Charting the Data

After excluding the irrelevant papers, duplicate entries were removed before assessing the remaining papers. They are then further evaluated for eligibility based on their titles and

abstracts. The eligible articles were then charted in a Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) diagram based on the established criteria in Table 3.

2.5 Collating, Summarising, and Reporting the Results

The data mapping process was carried out by including the following in the chart: article title, author/s, year of publication, country of origin, study design, topic, setting, target group, focus elements, purpose of study, and significant findings. These are then analysed in further detail to ensure adherence to the pre-determined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Key findings were finalised from the chart and reported accordingly, with appropriate revisions. The findings were then compiled and presented in a report.

3. Results

The search identified 247 studies through four selected databases: ERIC, Google Scholar, ProQuest, and SCOPUS. 84 titles were found from ERIC, 49 from Google Scholar, 63 from ProQuest, and 51 from SCOPUS accordingly. 5 duplicates were removed, leaving a remainder of 242 articles, which were then screened by title and abstract. After evaluating the available data, 11 articles were excluded for various reasons such as focusing on school administrators and university lecturers, as well as on early childhood education, gender differences, emotion in the classroom, and mainly focusing on students or pupils instead. The remaining 14 studies were selected to be included and discussed in this scoping review, as seen in Table 4.

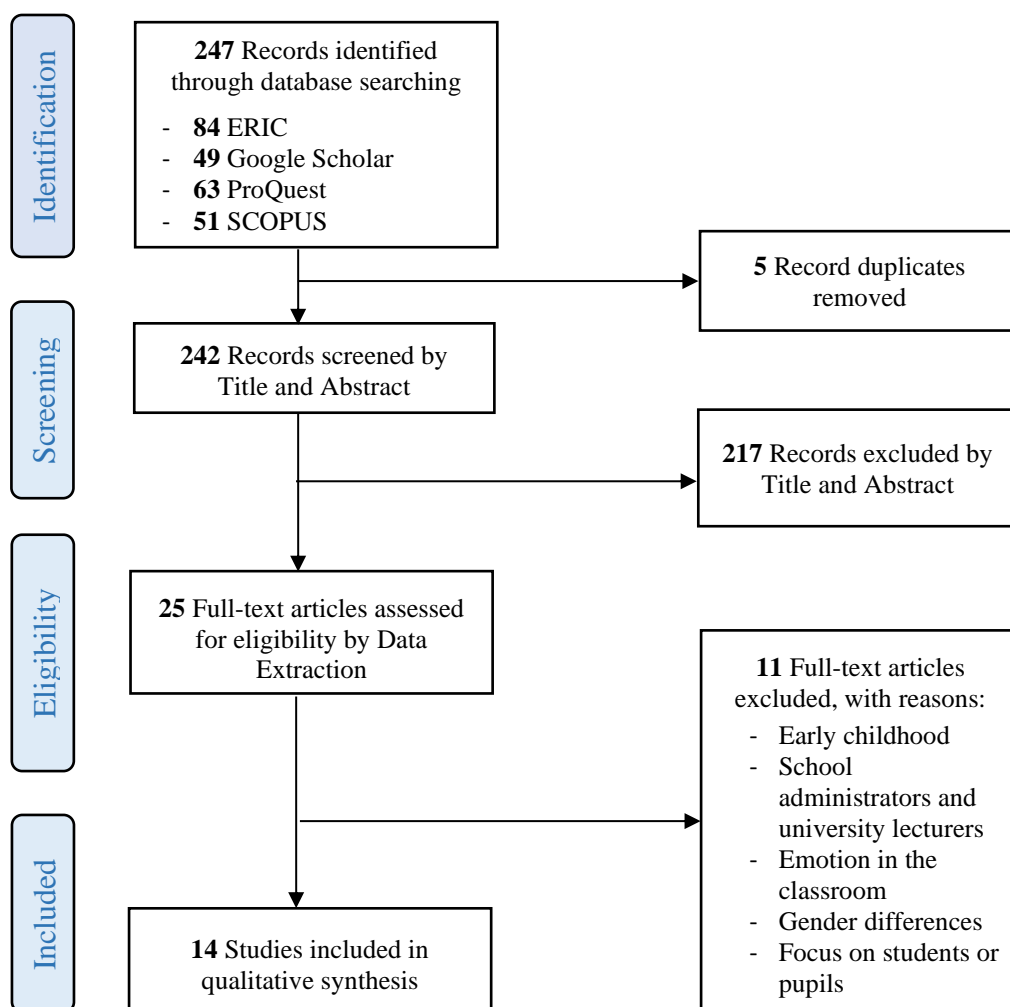


Figure 2: Flow diagram of the scoping review

Table 4: Characteristics of included studies

Author(s)/ Country	Research Design	Elements	Purpose	Findings
Abuaqel (2019) USA	Qualitative - interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High performing teachers (HPT) - Positive emotion - Negative emotion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To understand positive and negative emotions of High Performing Teachers (HPT) through their experiences at work and home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Positive experiences such as relaxing time at home and spending time with family members made teachers happy - Anxiety, inappropriate interactions with others at worksite, and financial issues are the main negative experiences that impact teachers' performance
Al-Bataineh et al. (2020) Jordan	Quantitative Survey (Questionnaire)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - School happiness - Teacher autonomy - Teaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To investigate the level and correlation of school happiness and teacher autonomy among a sample of Jordanian teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Results showed a positive and statistically significant correlation between school happiness and teacher autonomy
Cisneros et al. (2020) Peru	Qualitative – interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teacher happiness - Reflection - Tranquillity - Hermenutical phenomenology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To describe, analyse, and interpret the essence of the experience lived by teachers of the specialties of History and Geography in Huanca Sancos 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Individual and group meanings such as happiness, reflection, satisfaction, and tranquillity are discovered – the happiness of the teacher is actually the source of all pedagogical transformation
D'Sa et al. (2023) Uganda	Qualitative – interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Occupational well-being - Wellbeing - Uganda - Teacher - Refugee - Settlement - Low-resource 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To understand how Ugandan teachers define well-being and describe/ prioritise the factors influencing this well-being 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The teachers describe well-being as economic, social, emotional, and physical health - 5 emergent themes: teaching methods, learning community, external motivation, interpersonal skills, internal skills, and beliefs
Fairbairn & Gillespie (2022) United States & India	Qualitative – Comparative case study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Happiness - Fulfilment - Job satisfaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To better understand what kinds of activities enhanced teachers' happiness with and fulfilment in their work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Two themes emerged: (1) being true to yourself, and (2) making an impact. - Third theme emerged only for Indian participants: (3) connection with students
Granziera & Perera (2019) Australia	Quantitative Survey (Questionnaire – pre and post)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teacher self-efficacy - Teacher engagement - Job satisfaction - Social cognitive theory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To examine a social cognitive reciprocal-effects model linking teachers' self-efficacy beliefs, engagement, and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teacher self-efficacy and work engagement were reciprocally linked over time - Teacher work engagement and job

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher beliefs 	satisfaction directly and indirectly	satisfaction were also linked over time
Li et al. (2022) Taiwan	Quantitative – Micro-longitudinal study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher well-being Academic emotions Student disruptive behaviour Student engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To investigate the links between student lesson-specific behaviour, teachers' lesson-specific emotions, daily, and personal general well-being of primary school teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student behaviour predicts teachers' lesson-specific emotions Teacher's lesson-specific positive emotions predict teachers' well-being, suggesting positive emotions can be a protective factor for teachers
Lim et al. (2022) Malaysia	Quantitative Survey (Questionnaire)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determinants of happiness Primary school teachers Ordered logit model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To examine the level of happiness of primary school teachers in Malaysia and its determinants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The teachers are happy with life but with substantial variance. Aspiration is found to be an important determinant of happiness
Mbonea et al. (2021) Tanzania	Quantitative Survey (Questionnaire)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Job satisfaction Job security Social stimulation Promotion Recognition & Appreciation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To investigate factors affecting job satisfaction level for secondary school teachers in Lushoto district, Tanga region, in Tanzania 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secondary school teachers were affected by job satisfaction factors which are: pay, social simulation, opportunity for promotion, job condition, and job security
Merida et al. (2022) Spain	Quantitative Survey (Questionnaire)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emotional intelligence facets Perceived stress Happiness Teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To investigate which emotional intelligence (EI) facets were the most predictive in explaining subjective happiness above perceived stress for teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All four EI facets correlated significantly with each other EI were positively and significantly associated with subjective happiness Perceived stress was negatively associated with happiness scores
Ulukan & Ulukan (2021) Turkey	Quantitative Survey (Questionnaire)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Psychological resilience Patience Happiness Physical education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To examine the relationship among psychological resilience, patience, and happiness levels of physical education teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a moderate positive relationship between PE teachers' psychological resilience, patience, and happiness levels Psychological resilience and patience levels are a significant predictor of happiness.
Weiland (2021) USA	Qualitative - Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher well-being Positive psychology Teacher perceptions Burnout 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To explore the experiences of practising teachers in navigating the demands of the profession, and how these contributed to their conceptualisation of teacher well-being 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The exploration revealed the powerful role of relationships with leaders and colleagues, and impact of emotional work

White (2023) USA	Quantitative Survey (Questionnaire)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Happiness in education - Resilience - Retention - Happy teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To analyse how teacher happiness is related to resilience and retention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Significant positive correlation between teacher happiness and resilience - Positive connections were also found between happiness and school culture and climate
Yeh & Barrington (2023) England	Qualitative – Case study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Positive psychology interventions - Teacher wellbeing - Teacher professional development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To investigate teacher experiences on PPIs (positive psychology interventions) and the impact on their well-being in professional and personal contexts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Practising PPIs enhanced teachers' wellbeing multidimensionally and produced positive impacts on others.

3.1 Past Studies Distribution

All the fourteen studies were published between 2019 and 2023, as shown in Table 4, with a total of five articles published in Asia: Fairbairn & Gillespie (2022), Li et al. (2022), Lim et al. (2022), Al-Bataineh et al. (2020), and Ulukan & Ulukan (2021). It is noted that the latter two studies are from the Arab countries of Jordan and Turkey respectively. A total of four studies were conducted in the United States of America, namely Abuaqel (2019), Fairbairn & Gillespie (2022), Weiland (2021), and White (2023). This is followed by two studies from South America (Peru and Spain), and another two from the African continent (Uganda and Tanzania). For the distribution of studies by year, two studies were published in 2019, two in 2020, three studies in 2021, and the highest number of articles were published in 2022 (n=4), with the remaining three studies published in 2023.

3.2 Research Design Used

A total of eight studies applied the quantitative design using surveys (Al-Bataineh et al., 2020; Granziera & Perera, 2019; Li et al., 2022; Lim et al., 2022; Mbonea et al., 2021; Merida et al., 2022; Ulukan & Ulukan, 2021; White, 2023), whereas six studies utilised the qualitative research design (Abuaqel, 2019; Cisneros et al., 2020; D'Sa et al., 2023; Fairbairn & Gillespie, 2022; Weiland, 2021; Yeh & Barrington, 2023).

Among the eight quantitative studies above, six of them used questionnaires, with one (Li et al., 2022) using a micro-longitudinal approach (i.e. lesson-specific, day, and teacher-level questionnaire), and one (Granziera & Perera, 2019) employing both pre- and post-questionnaires (four months after the initial measurement). For the six qualitative studies on the other hand, four employed semi-structured interviews to collect data, while two were case studies (Fairbairn & Gillespie, 2022; Yeh & Barrington, 2023). Only Cisneros et al. (2020) employed a conversational style using testimony cards and personal anecdotes to collect data.

3.3 Purposes of the Study

There were generally two directions that the qualitative studies go with their purpose. Four studies were exploratory in nature, focusing on the teachers' experiences and how it affected their happiness (Abuaqel, 2019; Cisneros et al., 2020; Weiland, 2021; Yeh & Barrington, 2023). The other two qualitative studies focused on factors influencing (D'Sa et al., 2023) and activities enhancing teacher happiness and well-being (Fairbairn & Gillespie, 2022). The latter was also investigated in two of the quantitative studies, which focused on factors and

determinants of teacher happiness (Lim et al., 2022; Mbonea et al., 2021). Six of the remaining studies were more relational - examining teacher happiness with (i) autonomy (Al-Bataineh et al., 2020); (ii) resilience (Ulukan & Ulukan, 2021; White, 2023); (iii) self-efficacy and engagement (Granziera & Perera, 2019); (iv) students' behaviour and teacher emotions (Li et al., 2022); as well as (v) emotional intelligence (EI) and stress (Merida et al., 2022).

3.4 Elements of the Study

The studies in this review were on teacher happiness, encompassing teacher well-being, satisfaction, and fulfilment as well. Based on these, the elements present can be divided into internal and external factors. For internal factors, traits such as positivity, self-efficacy, beliefs, EI, resilience, and patience were present (Abuaqel, 2019; Li et al., 2022; Granziera & Perera, 2019; Merida et al., 2022; Yeh & Barrington, 2023; Ulukan & Ulukan, 2021; White, 2023). Others include job satisfaction, engagement, reflection, and tranquillity (Fairbairn & Gillespie, 2022; Granziera & Perera, 2019; Cisneros et al., 2020). Two studies touched upon negative aspects pertaining stress (Merida et al., 2022) and burnout (Weiland, 2021). For external factors, there were three studies that were related to the following: students' behaviour (Li et al., 2022), professional development (Yeh & Barrington, 2023), and one study on job security, social stimulation, promotion, as well as recognition and appreciation (Mbonea et al., 2021).

3.5 Findings of the Study

Based on the findings of this review, nine studies reported results on teacher happiness and their personal construct - pertaining peace, beliefs, purpose, self-efficacy, resilience, and emotional intelligence (EI) (Cisneros et al., 2020; D'Sa et al., 2023; Fairbairn & Gillespie, 2022; Lim et al., 2022; Granziera & Perera, 2019; Ulukan & Ulukan, 2021; White, 2023; Merida et al., 2022; Yeh & Barrington, 2023). This is followed by seven studies which reported the influence of workplace environment and culture towards teacher happiness (Abuaqel, 2019; Al-Bataineh et al., 2020; D'Sa et al., 2023; Granziera & Perera, 2019; Mbonea et al., 2021; Weiland, 2021; White, 2023). An equal number of studies (n=2) both touched upon external factors concerning money (Abuaqel, 2019; Mbonea et al., 2021) and relationship with students inside and outside the classroom (Fairbairn & Gillespie, 2022; Li et al., 2022).

4. Discussion

Through this scoping review, various factors influencing teachers' happiness were looked into, including the teachers' experiences inside and outside the classroom affecting them. Interestingly, these studies leaned heavily either towards the metacognition aspects of teacher happiness, or relational aspects instead, with a single study touching upon basic needs that teachers need in order to achieve a sense of fulfilment. The following figure visualises this summary:

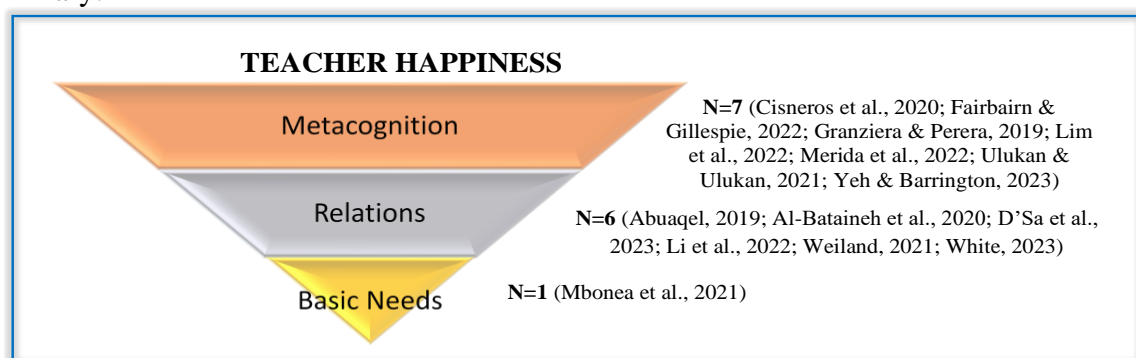


Figure 3: Inverted pyramid diagram of the themes present in the 14 studies

From the diagram, the researchers surmise that the teacher first needs to be fulfilled in terms of pay, promotion, job condition, and job security. These were the factors which were emphasised in Mbenea et al.'s (2021) study, which was conducted in Tanzania, East Africa. This does not necessarily show that other developing countries around the world are not facing similar issues (as Abaquel's 2019 study in the US found that financial issues do impact teachers' performance). Rather, the quality of the relationship that teachers have with others in their surrounding affected their happiness more than their desire to secure basic needs.

This is supported by the six following studies which include teachers' relationships with their leaders and colleagues (Weiland, 2021), school culture, climate and community (White, 2023; Al-Bataineh et al., 2020; D'Sa et al., 2023); familial relationships outside of work (Abaquel, 2019); and student behaviour (Li et al., 2022).

As all these requirements were factored in, the key to happiness it seems, is for teachers to "make an impact" while "being true to oneself" (Fairbairn & Gillespie, 2022). This is mirrored by Granziera & Perera's (2019) findings on teachers' self-efficacy being in direct proportion to their level of job satisfaction, and Lim et al.'s (2022) argument that aspiration is part of human achievement - that teachers with high aspirations are happier. Now when teachers have already attained that level of happiness, they are more conscious about being an active participant in affecting others positively as well. In other words, teachers become happier when they help other teachers to be happy too, and they do that by building a positive environment for and with others as well.

5. Conclusion

Teachers are frontliners in the field of education; if they are to provide the best service for the future generation, their well-being needs to be prioritised. The findings from this scoping review show that happy teachers are self-aware; they know and practise emotional intelligence (EI) strategies and positive psychology interventions (PPI). Both are likened to functioning as an 'armour', shielding oneself from the worst parts of teaching while at the same time building resilience and character.

Another aspect is that some level of altruism is needed. Teaching is at its core, a noble, giving profession. Research found that happy teachers have a clear sense of purpose in life (as an educator) and knows that what they are doing are important. As agents of change, they are internally driven to influence not only students, but the people around them. And this in turn fulfils them with happiness and satisfaction.

It is also interesting to note that in this review, only one study mentioned the role of physical health in teacher's happiness (see D'Sa et al.'s, 2023 study done in Uganda). This gap may be an appealing one to address for future studies, which may be further extended to developed countries as well – Are happy teachers also healthy teachers, both mentally and physically?

Another gap that is worth exploring is the role of religion towards teacher happiness. This is found in the Malaysian study by Lim et al. (2022), where they found that teachers derive more happiness from religiosity (i.e. strength in religion, and acceptance and respect for other religions). Thus, examining the influence of religious identity on teacher happiness and perceptions of their role as an educator might be of great value for future research in revealing connections between personal faith and professional being.

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