

EXPLORING HAPPINESS IN THE WORKPLACE AMONG SCHOOL TEACHERS: AN ORGANIZATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE**EKSPLORASI KEBAHAGIAAN DI TEMPAT KERJA PADA GURU DALAM PERSPEKTIF PSIKOLOGI ORGANISASI****Arina Nur Hikmah^{1*}, Rosita Endang Kusmaryani², Clayton Michael Fonceca³**Faculty of Psychology, Yogyakarta State University, Indonesia^{1,2}P.G. & Research Department of Social Work, Sacred Heart College, India³

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ABSTRACT

Teachers' happiness at work remains underexplored within a phenomenological framework, particularly regarding how teachers interpret happiness in their everyday professional lives. This study aims to address this gap by examining the construction of teachers' lived experiences of happiness at work. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with three junior high school teachers with a minimum of two years of teaching experience. Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's analysis model to ensure systematic, consistent, and credible interpretation of participants' experiences. The findings reveal that teachers' happiness at work is shaped by three interrelated conceptual clusters: meaning-oriented factors (such as personal meaning, purpose, motivation, and subjective perceptions of happiness), relational factors (including social support, collegial relationships, enthusiasm, and emotional engagement), and organizational factors (encompassing career development opportunities, job satisfaction, challenges and coping strategies, as well as perceptions of an ideal organizational environment). Overall, the study highlights that teachers' happiness at work is a multidimensional and subjective construct, predominantly grounded in meaningful work, a supportive workplace, and positive social relationships rather than material conditions.

Keywords: *happiness at work; organizational psychology; phenomenology; teachers***ABSTRAK**

Kebahagiaan kerja guru masih relatif kurang dieksplorasi secara mendalam melalui pendekatan fenomenologis, khususnya terkait bagaimana guru memaknai kebahagiaan dalam praktik profesional sehari-hari. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengisi kesenjangan tersebut dengan memahami konstruksi pengalaman kebahagiaan kerja guru dari perspektif subjektif mereka. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif fenomenologis dengan analisis data Miles dan Huberman, melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur terhadap tiga guru SMP dengan masa kerja minimal dua tahun. Data dikumpulkan untuk memastikan eksplorasi fenomena yang sistematis dan konsisten. Hasil penelitian mengidentifikasi tujuh tema inti yang selanjutnya terkonsolidasi ke dalam tiga kluster konseptual, yaitu orientasi makna (makna, tujuan, motivasi, serta persepsi kebahagiaan kerja), relasional (dukungan sosial, hubungan kerja, antusiasme, dan keterlibatan emosional), serta organisasional (kesempatan pengembangan karier, kesejahteraan kerja, tantangan dan strategi coping, serta persepsi terhadap organisasi ideal). Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa kebahagiaan kerja guru merupakan konstruksi

multidimensional yang dibentuk oleh interaksi faktor personal, sosial, dan organisasional, dengan sumber kebahagiaan yang lebih dominan berasal dari makna kerja, lingkungan kerja yang mendukung dan relasi sosial yang bermakna dibandingkan aspek material semata.

Kata Kunci: fenomenologi; guru; kebahagiaan kerja; psikologi organisasi

INTRODUCTION

Happiness at work refers to individuals' subjective evaluation of their work-related experiences, encompassing affective states, job satisfaction, and perceived quality of working life. Prior studies have consistently demonstrated that happiness at work is associated with higher productivity, creativity, organizational commitment, and psychological well-being, while also reducing stress-related health risks (Wesarat et al., 2015). Happiness at work has been shown to contribute to increased employee productivity, creativity, and commitment. In addition, workplace happiness also supports the creation of better teamwork and is able to reduce the risk of health problems due to work stress (Pecino et al., 2019; Nithya, 2025). Various theories have explained the mechanism for the formation of happiness in the workplace. Several theoretical frameworks have been used to explain the formation of happiness at work. The Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) model highlights the role of balancing job demands and available resources in fostering work engagement and preventing burnout (Mudrak et al., 2017; Pecino et al., 2019). Social Exchange Theory emphasizes reciprocal relationships between employees and organizations as a foundation for positive work-related emotions (Nithya, 2025), while the Broaden-and-Build Theory explains how positive emotions expand individuals' cognitive and behavioral repertoires, contributing to sustainable psychological resources. Together, these perspectives position happiness at work as an outcome of both structural conditions and relational processes within organizations.

Happiness has long been discussed within educational discourse, influenced by philosophical, cultural, and social values. In contemporary educational contexts, a shift from survival-oriented values toward self-expression and positive education underscores the growing importance of happiness as a core dimension of educational work environments (Gilyazova et al., 2024). For teachers, happiness is closely linked to positive social relationships, recognition, and constructive feedback, which foster

emotional well-being and professional motivation (Kun & Szabó, A., 2017). Teacher happiness not only supports individual well-being but also contributes to students' academic performance, motivation, and psychological development (Vale, 2025). In addition, the perception of gratitude for organizational facilities and services are also dimensions that affect the happiness of educators (Othman, 2019).

Happiness at work also plays an important role in increasing job satisfaction and organizational commitment among educators, which in turn can increase the effectiveness of the learning process in schools (Gyeltshen & Beri, 2018; Qamar et al., 2024). However, behind the importance of this happiness, there is a big problem faced by many teachers, especially honorary teachers, namely work fatigue and stress that can reduce their job satisfaction and well-being. Teacher burnout is one of the main factors affecting teaching effectiveness, which can ultimately negatively impact student learning outcomes (Liu & Xie, 2025).

International evidence further indicates that teachers generally report high levels of happiness and commitment to their profession. Data from the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) show that the majority of teachers would choose the profession again and perceive teaching as a meaningful social contribution (OECD, 2025). These findings highlight the intrinsic value teachers attach to their work, while also suggesting cross-national variations in perceived social recognition. Research on happiness at work in certain professional groups, especially the education sector and developing countries, is still limited (Gray et al., 2019; Sharma & Dhiman, 2025).

The reality shows that many teachers still face a range of challenges, from financial constraints and heavy workloads to inadequate access to training and skills development. The welfare of teachers is directly proportional to the motivation and effectiveness of teaching. Teachers who feel valued will be more enthusiastic about their work, allowing them to create a fun and inspiring teaching and learning experience for students. Improving the welfare of teachers is not only the responsibility of the government, but also requires support from schools and the local community. Schools can create an inclusive and collaborative work culture, and local communities can play a role by valuing and supporting educational programs in their neighborhoods. Teacher happiness improves the learning process, increases student motivation, and improves learning outcomes (UNESA, 2025).

Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that teachers' happiness is associated with higher instructional quality, stronger teacher–student relationships, and more supportive classroom climates. Teachers who experience positive emotional states are better equipped to manage stress, maintain engagement, and foster students' motivation and well-being, thereby contributing to more effective and sustainable learning environments (Clarker, 2025).

Previous research has emphasized the relationship between happiness at work, job satisfaction, organizational support, and teachers' mental health in various educational contexts (Sudibjo & Manihuruk, 2022; Prasetyo et al., 2025). First, the relationship between happiness at work and teachers' mental health in Indonesia is still inconsistent, and the role of job satisfaction as a mediator needs to be further researched (Sudibjo & Manihuruk, 2022). Second, teachers' quality of work life, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, shows the difference between expectations and reality, but this aspect has not been explored in depth (Fakhri et al., 2021). Third, the relationship between work stress and happiness at work, as well as the effectiveness of coping strategies, also requires additional research (Prasetyo et al., 2025).

However, the majority of the quantitative research still focuses on the relationship between variables and has not explored teachers' subjective experiences in depth, so understanding of how teachers in Indonesia interpret happiness in daily professional practice is still limited. This is important considering that preliminary findings show that aspects of happiness at work are strongly influenced by factors such as work quality of life, work stress, and school leadership (Hasanati et al., 2025; Prasetyo et al., 2022).

Although research on happiness at work among teachers has expanded, most existing studies remain predominantly quantitative and focus on variable relationships such as job satisfaction, organizational support, and work stress. As a result, teachers' subjective interpretations of happiness in their everyday professional lives—particularly within the Indonesian context—remain underexplored. Preliminary findings indicate that happiness at work is shaped by quality of work life, leadership dynamics, and emotional demands; however, little is known about how teachers themselves construct the meaning of happiness through lived experience. To date, phenomenological investigations that capture Indonesian teachers' personal narratives of happiness and unhappiness at work are largely absent. Addressing this gap is essential, as

phenomenology allows for a deeper understanding of happiness as a subjective, contextual, and meaning-laden experience that cannot be fully captured through quantitative measures alone (Koopman, 2017).

By focusing on teachers' personal experiences, phenomenology allows researchers to distinguish between the perception and reality of happiness, as well as understand the meaning they give to work. This approach is particularly relevant because the experience of happiness at work is complex and closely related to self-perception of work, workplace conditions, and personal values, as well as emotional-social interactions (Handayani et al., 2023; Bhatia & Mohsin, 2020). Happiness is vague, subjective, and not easy to measure. This perspective suggests that happiness is often undervalued due to the dominance of measurable performance indicators (Andy McHugh, 2024).

This research not only fills the empirical gap in Indonesia, but also provides a theoretical contribution in the form of a new conceptual understanding of the construction of teachers' happiness at work. The phenomenon of happiness at work experienced by teachers needs to be studied more deeply, especially in the context of their personal experiences, understanding the meaning and how to respond to events. Based on these considerations, this study aims to explore how school teachers experience and construct happiness at work through a phenomenological lens. By focusing on teachers' lived experiences, this research seeks to contribute a contextual and experiential understanding of happiness at work within the field of organizational psychology.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach grounded in the philosophical tradition of phenomenology, which seeks to understand individuals' lived experiences from a first-person perspective. This approach is particularly appropriate for exploring complex human experiences and social phenomena, as it emphasizes depth of meaning and the essence of participants' subjective experiences (Freeman, 2020; Kuchinke, 2023).

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews designed to explore participants' lived experiences of happiness at work in depth. An interview guide containing key questions was developed to ensure consistency across interviews, while

still allowing flexibility for probing and follow-up questions based on participants' responses. This format enabled participants to narrate their experiences freely and facilitated the collection of rich, contextualized data (Kallio et al., 2016; Thille et al., 2021).

In this study, happiness at work is conceptualized as a positive psychological state experienced during work activities, characterized by positive emotions, a sense of competence, and motivation to engage in constructive behavior. This concept encompasses both hedonic experiences (pleasure and positive affect) and eudaimonic experiences oriented toward meaning, growth, and autonomy. Consistent with the Happiness at Work (HAW) model proposed by Salas-Vallina (2021), happiness at work is understood to comprise three core dimensions: job satisfaction, affective organizational commitment, and work engagement.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, targeting individuals with direct experience and in-depth knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation. In line with phenomenological principles, the number of participants was determined by data saturation, defined as the point at which no new themes emerged from the data. A total of three teachers participated in this study. Participants met the following inclusion criteria: (1) full-time employment as a teacher and (2) a minimum of two years of teaching experience. Eligible participants were contacted individually, and interviews were scheduled online via Zoom to accommodate participants' availability.

All interviews were conducted ethically, with careful consideration of participants' convenience and adherence to principles of confidentiality. Prior to data collection, participants were informed about the study objectives, procedures, and their rights, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. The detailed characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Participant Characteristics*

Profile	Participants		
	L	K	N
Education	Bachelor degree	Bachelor degree	Bachelor degree
Gender	Female	Female	Female
Duration of Current Employment (years)	2	2	2
Teaching field	Guidance & counseling	Physics, science, and mathematics	Indonesian language
School level	Junior High School	Junior High School	Junior High School
School Management Type	Public school	Foundation for Education, Da'wah and Social Affairs	Islamic boarding school foundation

Prior to participation, all participants provided informed consent after receiving a detailed explanation of the study's objectives and procedures. Interviews were conducted individually, beginning with an explanation of the interview purpose, followed by guided questions. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission to ensure accuracy. The researcher served as the primary research instrument, supported by an interview guide and audio-recording devices to facilitate the production of accurate verbatim transcripts.

Data analysis followed the qualitative analytic framework proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994), which consists of three interconnected processes: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data reduction involved selecting, simplifying, and organizing interview transcripts to identify meaningful units. Data were then displayed in tables to facilitate interpretation, followed by conclusion drawing and verification through iterative reflection, member checking, and peer discussion.

The phenomenological analysis comprised three main stages: (1) identification of initial meaning units through transcription and repeated reading; (2) thematic grouping by summarizing and abstracting meaning units into sub-themes and overarching themes; and (3) interpretive synthesis, involving reflection on themes in relation to existing literature and phenomenological foundations to achieve a comprehensive understanding of participants' lived experiences (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004).

RESULTS

This study explores teachers' lived experiences of happiness at work. The analysis identified seven core themes that represent how teachers experience, interpret, and construct happiness in their professional lives: (1) meaning, purpose, and work motivation; (2) social support, relationships, and work environment; (3) enthusiasm, involvement, and emotional meaning in work; (4) career development opportunities and perceptions of work-related welfare; (5) challenges, obstacles, and coping strategies; (6) perceptions of the ideal organization and expectations for improvement; and (7) perceptions of happiness at work. These themes were further integrated into broader conceptual understandings of teachers' happiness at work.

1. Meaning, Purpose and Motivation for Work

Sub-theme *Teaching as a Moral Calling*. Mrs. L interpreted teaching as a "noble task" aimed at guiding students toward knowledge and character development. Similarly, Mrs. N described teaching as a "call of the heart" that could not be measured in material terms. Although Mrs. K did not initially aspire to become a teacher, her engagement in teaching practice led to a reconstruction of meaning, in which teaching was understood as shaping students' character and moral values. From a phenomenological perspective, these experiences indicate that teaching is lived as a moral calling grounded in eudaimonic meaning rather than hedonic satisfaction or external rewards.

Sub-theme *Reconstruction of Meaning Through Lived Experience*. Mrs. K's narrative illustrates how the meaning of teaching emerged through lived experience rather than pre-existing intention. The meaning of work shifted from merely delivering subject matter to shaping human character through sustained interaction with students. Phenomenologically, this finding suggests that the meaning of teachers' work is not static but continuously constituted through everyday practice and social interaction.

Sub-theme *Relational Meaning and Emotional Labor*. Mrs. N emphasized emotional closeness with students, describing relationships that resembled parent-child bonds. Understanding students' personal and family backgrounds was perceived as an integral part of her role as a teacher. This experience reflects

relational meaning, in which happiness and motivation arise from emotional involvement, empathy, and care. Teacher–student relationships thus become a central space where emotional labor, affection, and professional identity intersect.

Overall, participants’ experiences indicate that meaning, purpose, and motivation in teaching are constructed through the integration of moral values, emotional relationships, and reflective engagement with daily practice. Teaching is experienced not merely as an occupation but as a space for self-formation, social contribution, and the realization of personal vocation.

2. Social Support, Relationships and Work Environment

Sub-theme *Experiencing the Workplace as a “Family-like” Space*. Mrs. L and Mrs. K described their work environments as comfortable, harmonious, and family-like, emphasizing collegial support, cooperative relationships, and a warm school atmosphere. Informal interactions and shared activities strengthened feelings of belonging and reduced hierarchical distance. These experiences indicate that happiness at work is lived through a sense of social closeness and emotional familiarity within the workplace.

Sub-theme *Support as Emotional Safety and Reduced Work Pressure*. Social support was experienced as emotional safety, enabling open communication, humor, and relaxed interactions without fear of judgment. The absence of excessive pressure allowed teachers to engage more authentically in their roles. From a phenomenological perspective, emotional safety functions as a protective condition that buffers occupational stress and sustains well-being.

Sub-theme *Institutional Support as Recognition and Professional Validation*. Institutional support, such as access to training, seminars, and leadership guidance, was perceived as professional recognition and validation. These opportunities reinforced teachers’ sense of competence and professional worth, extending support beyond emotional warmth to include career-related affirmation.

Collectively, these findings show that social and institutional support play a central role in shaping teachers’ happiness at work by fostering emotional security, professional recognition, and a collaborative work environment.

3. Passion, Enthusiasm, Involvement and Emotional Meaning in Work

Sub-theme *Flow and Emotional Engagement as Sources of Happiness at Work*. Mrs. L and Mrs. N described moments of intense enthusiasm and deep emotional engagement when interacting with students, particularly during counseling sessions or harmonious learning processes. These moments were characterized by a loss of time awareness and a sense of being fully absorbed in the activity, reflecting experiences commonly associated with flow. In contrast, Mrs. K experienced flow more situationally, such as during effective teaching or science practicums, rather than as a sustained emotional attachment to the profession. Phenomenologically, happiness at work is lived as absorption in meaningful activity, where emotional engagement emerges when teachers perceive their actions as effective and impactful.

Sub-theme *Feeling Valued and Successful as Emotional Reinforcement*. Feelings of happiness and enthusiasm were reinforced when teachers perceived their efforts as recognized and meaningful. Mrs. K emphasized moments when students listened attentively, demonstrated positive behavior, or expressed gratitude, which affirmed her sense of being valued and effective. Similar experiences were reported by Mrs. L and Mrs. N, particularly when students showed personal growth or behavioral change. These forms of recognition function as emotional reinforcement, sustaining enthusiasm and strengthening teachers' sense of professional competence.

Sub-theme *Divergent Forms of Emotional Attachment and Work Involvement*. The participants demonstrated distinct patterns of emotional attachment and work involvement. Mrs. N exhibited strong and enduring emotional bonds with students, colleagues, and the institution, describing teaching as a lifelong calling and way of life. Mrs. L also showed strong emotional engagement, particularly in relation to her counseling role. In contrast, Mrs. K deliberately maintained emotional distance from the institution, framing teaching as a professional role with clear boundaries, despite deriving enjoyment from successful teaching outcomes. These differences indicate that happiness at work can be experienced through multiple modes of involvement, ranging from deep affective commitment to task-focused professional engagement.

Overall, happiness at work in this theme emerged as a dynamic interplay between passion, emotional engagement, and meaningful interaction with students. Experiences of flow, recognition, and emotional connection generated psychological

energy that sustained teachers' involvement in their work. However, the depth and form of this involvement varied across individuals, shaped by personal values, role orientation, and boundaries between work and self. These findings highlight that passion and emotional meaning are not uniform experiences but are subjectively constructed through teachers' interpretations of their professional roles and relationships.

4. Career Development Opportunities, Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction with Work Welfare

Sub-theme *Constructive Job Satisfaction and Realistic Career Orientation*. Mrs. L described a relatively stable and constructive form of job satisfaction, grounded in the alignment between her work, personal interests, and professional values. Although she acknowledged that income and welfare could still be improved, she perceived her compensation as generally adequate. Access to training, learning resources, and career opportunities reinforced her motivation and optimism regarding long-term professional growth. From a phenomenological perspective, happiness at work emerged from a sense of fairness, developmental opportunity, and institutional support that enabled future-oriented professional hope.

Sub-theme *Ambivalent Satisfaction: Growth Opportunities amid Workload and Welfare Strain*. Mrs. K expressed an ambivalent experience characterized by simultaneous satisfaction and dissatisfaction. While she valued the learning opportunities and open career pathways provided by the school, she reported high stress related to heavy workloads, administrative demands, and a perceived mismatch between her personality and the teaching role. Dissatisfaction with work-related welfare was particularly salient, as her salary was perceived as disproportionate to the effort and responsibility involved. This experience reflects happiness at work as a fragile and tension-filled condition, shaped by the imbalance between job demands and perceived rewards.

Sub-theme *Value-Based Satisfaction and Self-Reflective Dissatisfaction*. Mrs. N's job satisfaction was primarily rooted in value-based considerations rather than material outcomes. She emphasized sincerity, a sense of calling, and continuous self-improvement as central to her professional experience. While she reported moderate

satisfaction with work-related welfare, dissatisfaction was directed inward, particularly when student engagement varied across classes. Career development opportunities were perceived as available but procedurally slow due to bureaucratic structures. Phenomenologically, dissatisfaction functioned as a reflective mechanism for self-evaluation and growth rather than as a trigger for withdrawal.

Across participants, happiness at work was shaped by the interaction between career development opportunities, perceptions of work-related welfare, and personal value orientations. While access to professional growth and institutional support sustained engagement, long-term well-being depended on the perceived balance between job demands and rewards. These findings indicate that job satisfaction among teachers is not determined solely by financial factors but is constructed through the alignment of values, institutional conditions, and subjective interpretations of fairness and growth.

5. Challenges, Obstacles in Work and Coping Strategies to Deal

Sub-theme *Workload Pressure and Problem-Focused Coping*. Mrs. L experienced workload pressure primarily related to her responsibilities as a counseling teacher. She managed these demands through problem-focused coping strategies, including time management, structured communication, and cognitive reframing. These strategies enabled her to maintain a sense of control over her tasks and integrate work demands into daily routines. Phenomenologically, challenges were experienced as manageable when accompanied by perceived control, allowing happiness at work to be sustained despite high workload demands.

Sub-theme *Emotional Labor, Role Misfit, and Emotion-Focused Coping*. Mrs. K reported multiple stressors, including emotional labor, administrative overload, challenging student behavior, and a perceived mismatch between her introverted personality and the teaching role. These pressures were intensified by dissatisfaction with work-related welfare. Her coping strategies were predominantly emotion-focused, involving emotional suppression, professional distancing, patience, avoidance of interpersonal conflict, and self-reward activities outside of work. Work was experienced as emotionally exhausting, with coping functioning primarily as a

means of endurance rather than transformation. In this context, happiness at work was lived as conditional and fragile.

Sub-theme *Meaning-Centered Coping and Self-Regulation*. Mrs. N emphasized meaning-centered coping strategies rooted in sincerity, enjoyment of teaching, and intentional self-regulation of emotions. Challenges such as low student motivation or relational difficulties were interpreted not as threats but as opportunities to shape classroom climate through personal attitude and emotional management. From a phenomenological perspective, stressors were integrated into a meaningful life project, allowing happiness at work to emerge through moral orientation and psychological coherence between self and professional role.

Across participants, coping strategies varied along a continuum from problem-focused, to emotion-focused, and meaning-centered approaches. These differences indicate that teacher happiness is not determined by the absence of challenges but by how individuals interpret, regulate, and integrate work-related stressors into their lived experience. Coping strategies were shaped by personal dispositions, organizational conditions, and available support, ultimately influencing teachers' capacity to sustain well-being and remain engaged in their professional roles.

6. Perceptions About the Ideal Organization, Expectations and Suggestions for Improvement

Sub-theme *Perceived Organizational Justice and Recognition*. Mrs. L emphasized fairness, transparency, appreciation of performance, and attention to teachers' welfare as defining characteristics of an ideal organization. Similarly, Mrs. K highlighted the importance of being heard, respected, and receiving constructive feedback, particularly when mistakes occur. These experiences indicate that happiness at work is closely linked to perceptions of organizational justice and recognition. Phenomenologically, an ideal organization is lived as a moral space in which teachers experience dignity, fairness, and acknowledgment beyond their functional roles.

Sub-theme *Human-Centered Management and Emotional Safety*. Mrs. K described the ideal organization as one that recognizes teachers as individuals with emotional demands both within and beyond the workplace. She emphasized the need for

empathetic leadership, private and respectful feedback, improved welfare, and clearer student discipline to reduce emotional strain. Mrs. L similarly highlighted the importance of supportive leadership and collective encouragement among teachers. From a phenomenological perspective, happiness at work is grounded in psychological safety, where teachers feel emotionally acknowledged and protected from excessive pressure, enabling sustained engagement and well-being.

Sub-theme *Relational Respect, Role Clarity, and Self-Driven Professionalism*. Mrs. N emphasized mutual respect, openness to diverse opinions, and clarity of professional roles as core features of an ideal organization. She viewed professional quality as emerging from personal responsibility and self-awareness rather than external pressure alone. Suggestions for improvement focused on humility, collegial understanding, and shared purpose. These experiences suggest that an ideal organization is lived as a coherent relational system, where happiness emerges from alignment between personal values, role expectations, and collective goals.

Overall, perceptions of the ideal organization were shaped by participants' daily work experiences and reflected a shared emphasis on fairness, respect, and human-centered leadership. Teachers envisioned an organizational environment that balances clear structures with emotional sensitivity, allowing professional development without excessive pressure. These findings indicate that happiness at work is constructed not only through formal policies but also through relational and moral climates that affirm teachers as whole persons within the organization.

7. Perceptions of Happiness at Work

The perception of happiness at work of the three participants reflects a combination of harmonious social relationships, a sense of competence in teaching, and the ability to separate emotional aspects from professional responsibilities.

Sub-theme *Relational Harmony as the Lived Experience of Happiness*. Mrs. L and Mrs. K associated happiness at work with harmonious social relationships characterized by mutual support, respect, and the absence of interpersonal conflict. Mrs. L described happiness as emerging from collegial appreciation and a positive school atmosphere that enabled meaningful contribution to students' development. Similarly, Mrs. K emphasized cooperative students and non-hostile collegial

relationships as central to feeling happy at work. These experiences indicate that happiness is lived as relational ease and emotional calm, allowing teachers to engage in their roles without persistent interpersonal strain.

Sub-theme *Competence, Contribution, and Functional Fulfillment*. Happiness at work was also experienced through a sense of competence and meaningful contribution. Mrs. L and Mrs. K described feelings of satisfaction and gratitude when they perceived their teaching efforts as effective and beneficial to students. These moments reinforced a sense of functional fulfillment, where happiness emerged from the awareness of being capable, useful, and able to complete professional responsibilities successfully. From a phenomenological perspective, happiness was grounded in eudaimonic well-being associated with contribution and role effectiveness.

Sub-theme *Boundary Management Between Happiness and Professionalism*. Mrs. N articulated a clear distinction between happiness and professionalism. While happiness was supported by positive relationships with students, colleagues, and leadership, professionalism was described as a moral obligation that persisted regardless of emotional state. She emphasized the importance of emotional regulation to ensure that personal feelings did not interfere with professional responsibilities. These experiences suggest that happiness and professionalism coexist as distinct but complementary modes of being at work, with emotional self-regulation functioning as a key mechanism for maintaining role stability.

Overall, participants perceived happiness at work as a balanced state characterized by relational harmony, functional competence, and emotional regulation. Happiness was not understood as constant pleasure, but as an experiential condition sustained through supportive social relationships, opportunities for meaningful contribution, and the ability to manage emotional boundaries within professional roles. As a lived experience, teacher happiness emerged as relationally grounded, context-dependent, and actively maintained through everyday professional practice.

These findings provide a phenomenological foundation for understanding teacher happiness at work, which is further examined in relation to existing literature in the following discussion section.

DISCUSSION

This study demonstrates that teachers' happiness at work emerges as a multidimensional construct shaped primarily by organizational and relational conditions rather than isolated individual factors. Consistent with prior research, supportive leadership, positive work environments, fair compensation, and opportunities for professional growth constitute a structural foundation for happiness at work (Yap & Badri, 2020; Costa & Oliveira, 2025). The present findings reinforce the central role of organizational culture and social relations in shaping teachers' lived experiences of happiness.

Relational quality and social recognition function as key affective mechanisms sustaining teachers' happiness at work. Collegial support, positive interpersonal relationships, and constructive feedback enhance emotional engagement and intrinsic motivation (Kun & Szabó, 2017; Alshurideh et al., 2023). From a phenomenological perspective, these findings support the view that happiness is not merely an individual emotional state but is socially constructed through everyday relational experiences within the workplace.

Organizational support and career-related resources play a decisive role in sustaining teachers' happiness at work. Opportunities for professional development and career advancement are consistently associated with higher levels of job satisfaction and engagement (Zheng, 2022; Malik, 2025). Conversely, income instability, excessive workload, and work-life imbalance—particularly among honorary teachers—undermine well-being and contribute to emotional exhaustion (Murniarti et al., 2020; Zakaria et al., 2021). These findings align with Ho-Thi et al. (2025), emphasizing that institutional conditions exert a stronger influence on teacher happiness than individual attributes alone.

Happiness at work has broader implications for teacher performance, organizational effectiveness, and educational quality. Higher levels of happiness are associated with improved mental health, reduced burnout, stronger organizational commitment, and increased professional engagement (Gray et al., 2019; Singh, 2023; Sumathi, 2025). These outcomes highlight the importance of organizational strategies that support psychological well-being, as teacher happiness indirectly contributes to more effective and sustainable educational processes.

Teacher happiness functions as a pivotal psychological resource linking teacher well-being, instructional quality, and student outcomes. Consistent with educational psychology literature, teachers who experience higher levels of happiness demonstrate greater professional fulfillment and capacity to create supportive learning environments (Sudibjo & Manihuruk, 2022; Rahmi, 2024). This positive affective state not only enhances teachers' performance but also fosters students' engagement, motivation, and psychological well-being.

Teachers' happiness is deeply embedded in socio-cultural and contextual conditions rather than being solely an individual psychological experience. Cultural norms, social values, and perceptions of professional recognition shape how teachers interpret their work and derive happiness from it. Evidence from collectivist contexts suggests that relational harmony and social contribution play a more prominent role in shaping happiness than material rewards alone (Huang et al., 2024; Dyachenko & Trunov, 2024). These findings underscore the importance of contextualizing teacher happiness within broader cultural and institutional frameworks.

Personal psychological resources interact with demographic and contextual factors to produce differentiated experiences of happiness at work. Attributes such as optimism, self-efficacy, and emotional intelligence contribute to job satisfaction (Sünbül & Gördesli, 2021; Peláez-Fernández et al., 2021), yet these resources operate unevenly across demographic groups. Differences related to gender and age further reinforce the view that happiness at work is a situated and relational experience rather than a uniform outcome of similar working conditions.

This study contributes to a critical rethinking of happiness at work beyond instrumental and normative organizational frameworks. While dominant literature often conceptualizes happiness as a manageable organizational outcome achieved through engagement and satisfaction initiatives (Singh et al., 2023; Vakeel et al., 2023), such approaches risk obscuring structural inequalities and framing happiness as a moral obligation. From a phenomenological perspective, happiness and dissatisfaction are both meaningful expressions of teachers' lived experiences, reflecting their responses to organizational justice, relational quality, and contextual constraints. Recognizing this complexity allows for a more nuanced and humane understanding of teacher happiness.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

This study provides a phenomenological understanding of teachers' happiness at work by foregrounding their lived experiences and personal narratives. The findings demonstrate that happiness at work is constructed through the dynamic interaction of meaningful work, supportive social relationships, organizational conditions, and teachers' capacity for emotional regulation. Rather than being a static or purely affective state, happiness emerged as a contextual, relational, and actively maintained experience shaped by daily professional practice.

By capturing teachers' subjective interpretations, this study extends existing literature by highlighting happiness at work as a multidimensional phenomenon grounded in moral meaning, relational harmony, professional competence, and coping processes. These findings reinforce the value of phenomenological approaches in organizational psychology, particularly in uncovering dimensions of happiness that are often overlooked in variable-centered quantitative research.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that schools should move beyond performance-driven and incentive-based approaches toward more holistic strategies that prioritize supportive work environments, human-centered leadership, and sustainable teacher well-being systems. Creating psychologically safe climates, ensuring fair workload distribution, and providing meaningful professional development opportunities are essential for sustaining teachers' happiness and engagement.

At the cultural level, this study highlights that in collectivist educational contexts, happiness at work is deeply embedded in relational harmony, moral calling, and social contribution. Therefore, organizational practices should be culturally sensitive and acknowledge teachers not only as employees but also as moral and relational actors within the educational system.

From a policy perspective, teacher happiness should be recognized as a systemic outcome influenced by structural conditions, including welfare policies, administrative demands, and career pathways. Policies aimed at improving educational quality should thus integrate teacher well-being as a central component rather than treating it as an individual responsibility.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The small number of participants and their relatively homogeneous cultural background limit the

transferability of the findings across diverse educational contexts in Indonesia. In addition, the focus on junior high school teachers restricts the applicability of the findings to other educational levels, such as early childhood education and higher education.

Future research is encouraged to involve larger and more diverse samples across regions, school types, and educational levels to capture a broader range of lived experiences. Further phenomenological or mixed-methods studies may also deepen understanding of how organizational structures, cultural values, and policy contexts interact in shaping teachers' happiness at work.

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