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Teacher satisfaction and well-being: Insights from higher education institutions

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Abstract

We already know that leaders play a significant role in the academic success of students, as well as their happiness and well-being. Recent studies have suggested a 12% performance increase when investments are made in initiatives that enhance teachers' happiness. However, dedicated literature on GCC higher education faculty satisfaction and psychological well-being remains limited. This systematic review addresses that gap and provides a synthesis of empirical evidence regarding the factors influencing teacher satisfaction, happiness, and overall well-being at GCC universities. The review emphasizes that ensuring career satisfaction is not solely a personal responsibility but also an institutional strategic imperative, which can impact institutional sustainability, retention, and educational innovation positively or negatively. A systematic search following PRISMA methodology across four databases (2013–2023) identified six relevant studies ($n = 1508$). Methodological quality was assessed using the Quality Assessment Tool for Studies with Diverse Designs (QATSDD), with six studies rated as medium quality and one as high quality. While compensation and collegial support were consistently regarded as core contributors to satisfaction, the lack of standardization in study focus and quality limited the robustness of definitive regional conclusions. The search methodology favored studies utilizing quantitative measures of satisfaction, burnout, and emotional well-being, with data primarily from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, covering a range of faculty demographics from English language instructors to early-career academics.

Keywords: Faculty happiness, Gulf cooperation council (GCC), Higher education, Job satisfaction, Teacher well-being.

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1. Introduction

Two important pillars of educational quality are teacher satisfaction and well-being. Teacher motivation and well-being are key drivers of educational quality in higher education, where teachers not only play a fundamental role for the students they teach but also for the institution they work in, by contributing to institutional development and improving research productivity. The notion of well-being, often derived from the Aristotelian notion of eudaimonia, goes beyond simple happiness, providing a more comprehensive dual understanding of life satisfaction as well as emotional health and

personal accomplishment. Arora [1] notes that happiness should come from one's daily tasks and personal life, and this concept is increasingly used to promote happiness in professional domains such as education.

Teachers perform their duties for both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. Although financial incentives are essential for motivation, the theory of job satisfaction indicates that non-financial rewards such as recognition at the workplace, independence, and career progression are significant determinants of job satisfaction [2]. Empirical data shows that teachers who report higher levels of satisfaction are more productive, resilient, innovative, and committed to the long-term goals of the institution. Conversely, emotional exhaustion and job-related stress have also been linked to reduced teaching quality and student achievement [3].

This is particularly evidenced in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region. For instance, the World Bank [4] has named the Middle East as suffering persistent educational shortfalls, including declining levels of academic quality despite increasing investment, misalignment of graduates' skills with the skills needed in the labor market, and low retention of qualified teaching staff. The contextual challenges in which teachers are expected to work are compounded by sociocultural expectations, institutional rigidity, and limited support structures, which have contributed to teacher dissatisfaction and high turnover [5, 6].

While there is growing attention to the extent of faculty well-being across the world, there has been little systematic investigation into university instructor satisfaction in GCC countries. This study seeks to address this gap by reviewing existing empirical literature to determine the potential factors impacting the happiness, well-being, and job satisfaction of faculty in higher education institutions in the region [7].

Beyond these institutional problems are multiple individual and cultural issues that further complicate notions of job satisfaction in higher education, falling under the umbrella of well-being. In places like the GCC, where higher education systems are changing rapidly, educators are often called to wade through fluid KPIs, higher student expectations, and, in some cases, inflexible administrative structures. If there are co-sponsoring systems present around, this will intensify psychological stress due to these pressures. Many GCC universities also employ a significant proportion of expatriate teaching staff, which introduces complexity to faculty satisfaction on a transnational level, as cultural adjustment and job security can impact emotional well-being. So, too, has leadership — specifically, the extent to which management practices are transparent, inclusive, and communicative — which has surfaced in a handful of studies as being a driver of morale and motivation.

Faculty who are heard and empowered in the decision-making process are more likely to describe their experiences in the role as positive. The urgency for purpose-built well-being initiatives to address the unique needs of different educational environments is heightened as institutions increasingly acknowledge the correlation between faculty happiness and student success. This review helps to fill that need by providing a systematic identification of central trends, themes, and gaps in the literature about faculty satisfaction in the context of the GCC.

2. Methods

2.1. Search Strategy

To guarantee transparency, rigor, and replicability in the selection and analysis of studies, this systematic study followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework [8]. The main aim was to extract empirical studies examining the determinants of teacher happiness, job satisfaction, and general well-being in higher education facilities across the GCC. The literature search was limited to studies written in English and published between 1 January 2013 and 31 June 2023 to retrieve the most pertinent and recent evidence.

This review utilized four electronic academic databases: PubMed, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, and PsycInfo. They were selected because they encompass a broad spectrum of interdisciplinary scholarly literature in education, psychology, and social sciences.

Manual searching was also performed from high-impact journals and open-access sources, especially those within the domain of educational psychology and teacher growth. To strengthen the robustness of the search, bibliographic tracking was used to identify relevant studies that were cited within the selected articles [9]. To improve the search process, we deliberately sought diversity in the types of institutions (e.g., public, private, and for-profit universities) and educators (e.g., full-time faculty, language instructors, early-career academics) we included. This strategic breadth was intended to promote a well-rounded understanding of teacher well-being across distinct operational and socio-cultural contexts.

Regional education journals and journals that featured GCC-related research in their past works were also favored in the manual journal search. This offsets some of the database limitations, including inconsistent indexing of Arabic and hybrid institutions. Additionally, synonyms and semantic variants of happiness (e.g., satisfaction, fulfilment, engagement) were piloted and tested during queries to enhance sensitivity and to ensure that nuanced language did not result in missed studies. Consultation with a librarian specializing in GCC education research allowed for iterative refinements of the strategy, further enhancing the validity and comprehensiveness of the literature retrieved.

The search terms were constructed with an emphasis on accuracy and coverage and used Boolean operators (AND/OR). Some of the key terms used were: "Teacher Happiness," "Job Satisfaction," "Well-being OR Wellbeing," "Determinants of Teacher Satisfaction," and "Higher Education in GCC." The country-specific filters (UK, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain) were applied to every term individually to localize the search. The systematic multi-staged approach ensured a wide net to capture relevant studies across institutions, disciplines, and nations.

2.2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria were well-defined in order to suit the study's purpose. Studies meeting the following criteria were eligible:

- Utilized quantitative empirical approaches;

- Covered faculty members from higher education institutions in countries of the GCC;
- Focus: Teacher happiness, job satisfaction, or well-being overall;
- Published in the English language, peer-reviewed;
- Reported adequate data on sample demographics, outcome and methods.
- We excluded studies that met any of the following:
 - Theoretical or conceptual in nature with no empirical data;
 - Working in primary or secondary education environments;
 - Focused on intervention strategies, not descriptive correlates;
 - Correlated well-being to unrelated health outcomes (e.g., COVID-19), the data without contextualizing it within teaching roles;
- Were not peer-reviewed, were not available as full-text, or were editorials, letters, reviews, or conference abstracts.

The inclusion criteria were also driven by principles of methodological transparency. Only studies explicitly providing in-depth information on sampling methods, data collection tools, and statistical analysis techniques were included. This was critical for allowing an objective evaluation of internal validity and reproducibility. Furthermore, in demarcating higher education from secondary or vocational education, the institutional accreditation and degree-awarding status were cross-referenced at the screening stage.

Studies that reported teacher satisfaction but only as a qualitative theme rather than an actual quantitative outcome, such as a well-being index score or job satisfaction score, were markedly excluded to ensure analysis coherence. To reduce bias derived from other factors such as interventions (in this context, training programmes or workplace modifications) which could credibly inflate reported satisfaction outcomes, this decision relates only to the exclusion of certain intervention studies. This clearly defined demarcation allowed the final sample to comprise strong and comparable investigations available for systematic synthesis.

2.3. Selection of Studies and Data Extraction

Titles and abstracts were screened for initial eligibility by two independent reviewers. Studies fulfilling inclusion criteria or with potential relevance were screened in full text. Consensus discussions were used to resolve discrepancies, and when necessary, a third reviewer arbitrated the final decision. A structured, pre-tested template was utilized for data extraction to maintain consistency. Extracted variables included:

- Name(s) of author(s) and publication year
- Country and institution type (public/private)
- Design and methods of the study
- Size of the study and the demographics of the participants
- Measurement tools (ex., Maslach Burnout Inventory, PERMA profiler)
- Primary results and statistical analyses
- Determined satisfaction and well-being predictors
- Authors' indicated limitations

To ensure data consistency among reviewers, the extraction form was piloted on three randomly selected articles prior to the full extraction process. This pilot used operational definitions of key constructs such as "job satisfaction" and "emotional well-being" to allow consistent application of terms.

Thematic grouping during synthesis was enabled by developing a coding schema to categorize influencing factors (e.g., institutional culture, interpersonal relationships, and financial incentives). Where appropriate, authors were contacted for clarification of missing data or ambiguous terminology, especially in cases where the institutional classification was not clear or where participant roles needed further clarification. This approach allowed for greater comparability across study contexts and ensured both reliability and interpretability of the extracted datasets.

2.4. Quality Assessment

The Quality Assessment Tool for Studies with Diverse Designs (QATSDD) was used to assess methodological rigor [10]. It is a well-known tool used in qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods studies. In this review, 14 of the 16 QATSDD (Quality Assessment Tool for Complex Interventions) criteria were applied, with two criteria specifically related to qualitative research. Each criterion was scored using a 4-point Likert scale (0 = not at all, 3 = completely), and a percentage score was calculated relative to the maximum possible score. Studies scoring 80% or higher were classified as high quality, those between 50% and 80% as medium quality, and those below 50% as low quality. This process was conducted independently by two reviewers, and disagreements were discussed until consensus was reached.

2.5. Data Synthesis

After assessing quality, thematic synthesis was conducted utilising an inductive approach from the six-phase model [11]. That is, it explored patterns, concepts, and categories relevant to teacher well-being and job satisfaction across studies. An effort was made to capture both perspectives that were common as well as those that were contextually unique to the GCC educational ecologies. This enabled a systematic yet flexible categorization of results, as well as comparison between studies and the discovery of knowledge gaps.

3. Results

3.1. Search Strategy

The search was conducted across four academic databases, including PubMed, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, and PsycInfo. A total of 558 articles were retrieved. After removing 101 duplicates, 457 abstracts and titles were screened. Of these, 342 records were excluded because they did not meet the inclusion criteria, leaving 115 full-text articles assessed for eligibility. Subsequently, 110 articles were excluded, resulting in five studies remaining. Due to limited literature directly relevant to the present study, two additional articles were identified through backward reference searching and manual bibliography screening. The final count of included studies was seven. These studies were published between January 2013 and June 2023, including the works of Agha [12]. The selection and exclusion process was designed in line with the PRISMA framework and is presented visually in Figure 1.

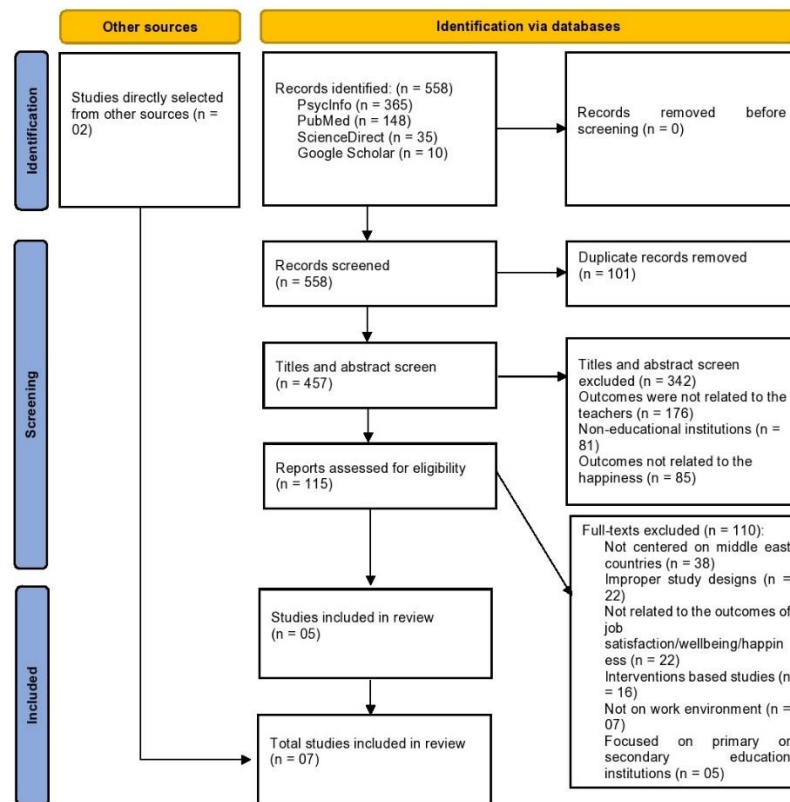


Figure 1.
Study flow diagram representing search and screening process.

3.2. Quality Assessment and Baseline Characteristics in Included Studies

The 7 studies reviewed in this systematic review were evaluated for quality and the key methodological features of the research were appraised using the Quality Assessment Tool for Studies with Diverse Designs (QATSDD) [10]. Of the total, six were rated medium quality, and one was rated high quality. Scoring categories assessed the clarity of frameworks, the congruence between questions and methods, the rigor of data collection and analysis, the justification of sampling, and reporting transparency with respect to strengths and limitations.

There were consistently low scores for some quality indicators across the seven studies. Many papers, for example, did not take care in exploiting patient recruitment procedures, did not justify sample size, or did not provide sufficient information about the reliability and validity of the measurement tools used. User engagement in the research process, including participant input into study design or tool development, was largely lacking. In addition, though the majority of studies defined their objectives clearly and employed appropriate analytical techniques, all but a few of them restricted discussions of their methodological shortcomings, which diluted the interpretive power of their results.

Alzahrani [13] (50% based on QATSDD scoring). Although this study articulated its specific aims and justified the selection of data collection and analysis methods applied, the study fell short in providing clear details on participant recruitment, justification of sample size, and validation of instruments.

Alqarni [14] received a slightly higher 59.5% score, bolstered by explicit reporting of purposes and analytic practicalities, despite this study also suffering from a lack of methodological clarity in sampling and user engagement. The maximal score of 90.5% was given to Alemu and Pyktina [15], which provided comprehensive consideration of research design, including explicit theory, adequate sample description, adequate measures, and a good analysis-method fit. They were also some of the few that included user perspectives and critically reflected on study limitations.

Jawabri et al. [16] and Asan and Wirba [17] achieved both 57.1%. Although these studies outlined their objectives and applied coherent analytical approaches, they did not offer detailed recruitment numbers or adequately assess the

merits and pitfalls of their designs with respect to each other. Jawabri [18] performed similarly with a score of 52.4%, with major gaps in limitations and no user engagement. Agha [12] displayed comparatively higher methodological consistency and transparency, at 69%, with clear reporting of data collection and reasonable correlation between research questions and analysis procedures.

The studies used a variety of research designs. Out of the seven studies, one study used a cross-sectional survey [14] and five studies used quantitative empirical methods, and one study used a non-experimental correlational design [15]. The selection was limited to institutions in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Oman. Another study [19] expanded its scope by covering more GCC countries, while two articles compared public [16] and private [18] universities in the UAE specifically. The seven studies represented a total sample size of 1,508, including 45.6% females.

A quantitative study has been conducted by Alzahrani [13] on 129 English language instructors at Saudi universities; the sample varied with respect to academic rank, culture, and years of experience (4 to 15 years). Emotional exhaustion (EE), depersonalization (DE), and personal accomplishment (PA) were assessed using the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). Scores for personal accomplishment were high, hours of emotional weariness were moderate, but scores for depersonalization were low, indicating an overall healthy professional engagement. Yet, due to the specificity of the sample, English as a second language instructors in Saudi colleges, the results were not fully generalizable.

Using a cross-sectional design [14] investigated job satisfaction among 53 English language instructors at King Khalid University, where women represented 64% of the sample. They had teaching experience ranging from 1 to 33 years, with ages between 25 and 56 years. The study relied on both the PERMA-Profil and the Perceived Stress Scale, and it concluded that women, in this study, scored higher in terms of well-being. A strong positive correlation was observed between physical health and wellness, and an inverse correlation was found between stress scores and wellness. Indeed, the context of one institution and the cross-sectional nature of the data prevented causal inference.

Non-experimental correlational study design was utilized by Alemu and Pyktina [15] to investigate the satisfaction of faculty members at GCC institutions. A sample of 139 professors was surveyed, comprising both expatriate and local academics. Of these, 36% were female, and 43% were employed by the government, 43% in private for-profit institutions, and 14% in nonprofit institutions. Faculty members were asked about their intentions to remain in academia, how they allocate their time among teaching, research, and service, and their perceptions of working conditions. The study found an acceptable model fit ($R^2 = 0.710$, $F(1,123) = 60.255$, $p < 0.005$), indicating that collegiality, competitive compensation, fair treatment, and geographic preference influence job satisfaction. Although the study had advantages over prior research, including a larger sample size, reliance on outdated faculty contact information may have introduced sampling bias.

Jawabri et al. [16] examined differences in faculty satisfaction between UAE public and private universities. A total of three hundred and fifty academic staff aged between 41–50 (37% female) with work experience varying between 2–5 years were surveyed in the study. Through a structured, close-ended questionnaire, the authors found higher satisfaction in multiple dimensions across private institutions, in particular, career development, role expectations, and work-life balance. However, limitations in sample size and regional focus limited the generalizability of the findings.

Separately, Jawabri [18] studied satisfaction among 212 academic staff from 15 private universities in the UAE, of which 40% were women. Ten internal and external job satisfaction factors were evaluated using a 5-point Likert scale tool. Overall, the study confirmed high levels of satisfaction for variables reflecting opportunities for advancement, peer and supervisor support, and high levels of dissatisfaction regarding the environment around reward and recognition. Limitations were not clearly reported.

Asan and Wirba [17] conducted their study using 30 academic staff members from the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. They used Spector [20] job Satisfaction Questionnaire to assess attitudes toward nine facets of job satisfaction, including pay, fringe benefits, supervisor competence, and communication. Diversity of responses along these dimensions was uncovered, but the generalizability of this study was limited by a small sample size and regional skew. Lastly, Agha [12] studied 625 faculty members in Oman, specifically examining the relationship between work-life balance and job satisfaction. Three key dimensions of work-life relationships, including harmony, advancement, and interference, were identified within the study, which also highlighted the importance of balancing personal and professional life across the domains of job and teaching satisfaction. The study's findings were timely, but it did not consider broader institutional or demographic issues.

3.3. Findings Related to Teacher Happiness in GCC Higher Education Institutions

Initial findings: There is considerable heterogeneity in teacher happiness and job satisfaction across higher education institutions in the Middle East, especially within GCC countries. As with each study, these concepts were analyzed from different perspectives including emotional well-being and institutional support but several common themes emerged. The findings were grouped by theme based on these recurrent patterns, which are detailed in the subsections below.

3.3.1. Generic Factors Influencing Teacher Happiness

Teacher happiness is a multidimensional construct influenced by complex and interlocking personal, professional, and contextual factors. At its core is job satisfaction, often associated with fairness in the workplace, collegial relationships, and a nurturing professional environment. Across the included studies, themes such as interpersonal harmony, inclusive leadership, and supportive peers and supervisors were found to significantly influence positive emotional and psychological outcomes for faculty members [21].

Work-life balance is another key element of teacher happiness. Studies consistently find the disruptive relationship between work and personal life to be a key factor in well-being, whether from job obligations crowding out personal time

or personal commitments detracting from work performance. The stress from these immediate and peripheral imbalances can significantly erode a teacher's emotional resilience and overall sense of accomplishment.

Emotional well-being was also emphasized as a cause of and a result of job satisfaction. Teachers who had access to emotional resources, such as empathy from peers or mental health resources, reported higher well-being scores. On the other hand, experiences of emotional depletion and occupational stress, particularly in the absence of adequate remedies, were linked to feelings of burnout and disengagement.

Compensation and career advancement were also mentioned repeatedly as fundamental to workplace satisfaction. Faculty were drawn to incentive-based salaries and the potential for advancement and acknowledgment of their contributions. On the other hand, awards and recognition were not without negative consequences, particularly when seen as insufficient or inequitable. Recognition practices become a source of disillusionment rather than motivation in such circumstances [22]. Taken together, these findings suggest that institutions are well served by taking a holistic view of faculty satisfaction, one that engages the emotional, interpersonal, and structural aspects of academic life.

3.3.2. Well-Being of English Language Teachers

Most of the studies reviewed were conducted with faculty members across multiple disciplines, while two focused specifically on English language instructors in Saudi Arabia. Given this context, these instructors provided particular interpretations of faculty well-being within a complex linguistic and cultural environment. In the first of these studies, the participants exhibited notably high levels of personal accomplishment and low levels of depersonalization. Conclusion: The results indicate that English language faculty in Saudi institutions are satisfied, motivated, and hold a favorable attitude towards their work. However, many individuals' emotional exhaustion scores suggested they were also experiencing severe fatigue, stress, and work overload. These findings imply a dual experience: on one hand, these teachers may feel a sense of achievement in their roles, yet on the other hand, this same sense of accomplishment may deplete their emotional reserves due to systematic concerns and heavy workloads [23].

The second one focused on the factors that specifically affect English language teachers' job satisfaction and psychological well-being. However, one of the most striking findings obtained was a gender-related disparity, as female teachers reported a higher level of psychological well-being than male teachers. On top of that, the research found that well-being has a strong inverse relationship with stress, meaning anxiety significantly erodes mental health. The findings contrasted with physical health, which correlated positively with well-being, underscoring the interaction between mental and physical states. Regression analysis showed that teachers in better physical health or experiencing lower stress levels also reported higher overall subjective well-being. The study also highlighted that many language teachers face heavy teaching loads and financial pressures that can undermine those benefits. The workload is high, and professional expectations are apparently rigid, establishing a lifestyle that may harm long-term wellness ultimately [24].

3.3.3. Comparison of Teacher Happiness in Public and Private Universities

Conducted in the United Arab Emirates, two studies offered direct comparative insights into the job satisfaction of public versus private university teachers. The results suggested a trend towards dissimilarity in satisfaction among academic staff, with academics in private institutions proving to be more satisfied with their work life and professional standing [25]. A number of factors contributed to the differences in levels of satisfaction. Teachers at private institutions reported more opportunities for career advancement, higher levels of administrative support, and greater autonomy in their work. Other factors included more equitable appraisal processes, increased accountability, and opportunities for professional development. Private university faculty also mentioned improved interpersonal relationships, such as collegial support and acknowledgment from senior leadership, as reasons for satisfaction. Additional factors such as wages, the prospect of variety in daily job tasks, and opportunities to utilize personal skills contributed to the relatively positive outlook of private sector educators [26].

While public and private university teachers had similar levels of discontent regarding other working conditions, the context was different in only one aspect: the number of hours worked.

Both cohorts reported long working hours, indicating that workload intensity is a sector-wide problem, not simply an attribute of institution type. Although public university participants reported some level of satisfaction, overall their ratings were statistically lower than those of their private university peers. Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning that both studies were conducted in the UAE only, implying that the results are not necessarily generalizable to all GCC countries [27].

3.3.4. Teachers' well-being and Gender

Interestingly, gender proved to be a relevant factor in understanding faculty well-being and job satisfaction in the UAE context. Both studies conducted address gender differences that tend to present a consistent pattern: teachers practicing in private institutions, regardless of sex, reported greater satisfaction than teachers in public institutions [28]. But when looking at responses through a gendered lens, more complex dynamics emerged. Both identified a plethora of factors impacting teacher well-being, including access to opportunities for advancement, scope of role, leadership support, variety of tasks, rewards, recognition, and compensation. All these reasons contributed to the high satisfaction statistics in private universities. However, there were gender differences in perceptions of institutional support and professional development, with women being more likely to actively pursue opportunities for advancement and to respond more positively to collaborative work environments.

The one metric that showed no difference between groups, once again, was hours worked. Faculty from both public and private institutions reported overworking, demonstrating the prevalence of the issue in academic labor practices. While private university educators tended to express greater overall satisfaction, this was somewhat moderated for male

respondents, who appeared to be more affected by workload demands. Yet these insights are narrow in their potential. The two studies were carried out only in the UAE, and their results cannot be generalized as a gender-based phenomenon across the wider GCC region. The gender associations and relationships reported in these studies may have been influenced by cultural, institutional, and policy-related factors specific to the UAE [29, 30].

4. Discussion

This systematic review aimed to synthesize the existing literature related to determinants of teacher happiness, satisfaction, and well-being in higher education institutions in GCC nations. Seven empirical studies addressed different elements of faculty satisfaction from various institutional perspectives. Noting the methodological diversity, several themes emerged around the effects of gender, the experiences of English language teachers, the distinction between public and private university contexts, and common predictors of satisfaction. However, given the small number of studies and their geographic and methodological limitations, these findings should be interpreted with caution and underscore the need for further research.

The most consistently cited determinant of teacher satisfaction from all of the studies reviewed was remuneration.

Salary and financial compensation are emphasized in the evaluations of teacher well-being: a required minimum for economic stability in professional life. However, the role of financial payoffs appears more complex. Basic financial needs are met, and supportive relationships at work, along with opportunities for professional development, become more significant for subjective well-being. This supports Ahuvia [31] argument that when material needs are satisfied, meaning and support at the workplace become more important in contributing to life satisfaction. Similarly, Thomson et al. [32] found that income has an impact on mental health and well-being, but once basic needs are met, the effects diminish and adhere to the Absolute Theory, which states that higher income yields lower returns on increasing subjective well-being. It makes sense, then, that for educators at GCC universities, collegiality, emotional support, and institutional recognition can significantly influence perceived happiness, provided, of course, their financial needs are met.

Diener et al. [33] also illustrate this idea that emotional and relational factors are the foundational aspects of well-being after meeting subsistence levels. Of the nonpay factors, positive relationships with peers and supervisors had particular salience. In almost all studies, there was a main emphasis on providing interpersonal support as a facilitator to a healthy work environment. These findings are consistent with the broader literature on job satisfaction, in which such factors as collegiality, access to mentorship, and supportive leadership have been associated with higher morale and engagement and reduced burnout. Institutions that promote a culture of inclusion, transparency, and collaborative engagement seem better able to shield faculty from stressors such as workload pressure and emotional exhaustion.

This relational dynamic was particularly salient for English language instructors, a subgroup that was addressed in two of the studies included in this synthesis. Overall, English language faculty reported high levels of professional fulfillment, as demonstrated by their high scores on personal accomplishment measures. They were low in depersonalization, suggesting that they had not become detached from their students or their professional identity. Despite these benefits, high emotional exhaustion scores highlighted the burdens of workload and systemic expectations [34, 35]. About 6 months of data indicate that teaching fosters job satisfaction, provides emotional support, and promotes professional engagement; however, these benefits may come at the expense of emotional well-being and could lead to escalating conditions that may not be sustainable.

The specificity of the samples English faculty in Saudi Arabia, despite these insights, comes with important limitations. It is difficult to generalize these findings as there are no comparative data for other disciplines or for English teachers in other GCC countries. Given the small sample sizes and geographic concentration, the call for broader comparative research that considers well-being across academic disciplines, professional roles, and national contexts is also warranted.

Institutional type, public versus private universities, also came up as an important theme. Jawabri [18] and Jawabri et al. [16] found greater job satisfaction among faculty at private institutions, which was a consistent trend. This was due to several organizational features, including higher career mobility, better recognition mechanisms, fewer bureaucratic constraints, and more responsive administrative support. This research is in line with Ayub [25] revealed that the private university staff in Pakistan were also more satisfied compared to the public sector staff. Similar findings were reported from a United States-based study by Khalid et al. [36] reported greater workplace happiness for teachers in private schools, highlighting, among other things, the benefits of greater autonomy and institutional responsiveness.

Even as this pattern emerges year after year, with educators in private universities reporting higher satisfaction compared to their peers in public institutions, the underlying reasons behind these statistics remain woefully underexplored. The studies thus far contribute to the suspicion that workload, recognition, and institutional climate may become definitive factors, but the few comparative studies do not allow for solid conclusions. This chapter also highlights that future research needs to examine these institutional differences in greater depth, using mixed-methods approaches and cross-national samples.

Dimensions of faculty well-being related to gender add another layer of complexity. Some studies showed female faculty with higher well-being scores, while others could not find any difference or found them evenly balanced. This discrepancy highlights the need for better- and more granular- data. The sex gap in satisfaction may be a symptom of different experiences with workplace dynamics, leadership engagement, or cultural expectations. However, in the absence of targeted gender-based comparative studies, it is uncertain if these differences are systemic or context-specific [37].

Similarly, these lingering uncertainties highlight broader methodological limitations noted in this review. Most of the studies were performed in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, with studies from the rest of the GCC countries being scarce. Sample sizes also differed tremendously, and multiple studies focused on specific institutions or academic disciplines. Such a narrow scope greatly restricts the findings of the initial research. In addition, the use of different instruments the

Maslach Burnout Inventory, the PERMA Profiler, and many others, created inconsistency in the way teacher happiness and well-being were defined and measured. This heterogeneity makes cross-study comparison and synthesis challenging.

Finally, although some studies have attempted to explore multifactorial effects on teacher satisfaction, others have focused on single or a few variables, including gender or institution type. The lack of a common framework or standard measurement tool across studies renders it challenging to determine which factors exert the most substantial or durable effects on teacher well-being. Inconsistent measurement results hinder the ability to make generalizable conclusions about faculty happiness: future research should be based on standard, validated measures of faculty happiness employed across diverse academic settings.

A major concern is the overall moderate quality of most included studies. Results based on QATSDD assessment showed that five out of seven studies scored around 50%–60%, indicating underdeveloped methodological transparency, limited validation of the tool, and reporting of limitations. Although these studies offer valuable information, the quality gaps at the study level weaken the validity of the conclusions they offer. Consequently, the current evidence base is inadequate for formulating conclusive policy or institutional recommendations. We encourage future research to provide more stringent criteria of design and reporting, such as justification of samples, clearer theoretical underpinning, and acknowledgment of limitations.

With a view to advancing this field, several recommendations can be proposed. First, future research should include greater regional diversity among research locations and participants from all six nations in the GCC. Multicentric studies involving large populations would provide the statistical power and diversity necessary to identify more stable and consistent trends. Second, comparative studies across disciplines and academic ranks are essential to understand the nuanced experiences of diverse faculty cohorts. Finally, longitudinal studies could offer more insights into how job satisfaction and well-being evolve over time in response to institutional, personal, or policy changes.

In conclusion, this review brought together developing evidence regarding the attributes that govern faculty satisfaction within GCC higher education institutions. It recognized core themes of compensation, emotional support, institutional type, gender, and discipline-specific stressors. Disruptive saccadic eye movements seek to replace the existing knowledge base with greater scope, methodological rigor, and improved quality of studies. We need a more coordinated, evidence-based research agenda to better understand and inform meaningful interventions to support teacher well-being throughout the region.

5. Conclusion

This systematic review examined the different factors that affect the well-being and satisfaction of teachers in higher education institutions in the GCC. Although the number and breadth of available studies were limited, the findings, recurring themes were apparent. Compensation and positive relationships with colleagues and supervisors were other common factors associated with teacher happiness. Faculty working in private universities expressed higher levels of satisfaction compared to their public faculty counterparts, most likely due to greater possibilities for advancement, recognition, and support from institutions. English language teaching professionals demonstrated a combination of high professional commitment to well-being and emotional toll, with variances in well-being attributed to gender, which were identified but remain unclear. However, the relatively small sample sizes and geographic focus chiefly on Saudi Arabia and the UAE limit the generalizability across the wider GCC region. Further, more methodologically rigorous research is necessary to build further understanding and to inform policy efforts around faculty work-life and well-being across the Gulf.

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