Guidelines for Developing Workplace Happiness among Private University Teachers in Bangkok

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Abstract

This study aims to synthesize and propose practical, evidence-based guidelines to enhance teachers' workplace happiness at private universities in Bangkok, Thailand. The research derives actionable strategies directly from open-ended suggestions in a large sample of teachers' responses. A qualitative approach was employed, using content analysis of responses to open-ended questions from a survey administered to 400 teachers at private universities in Bangkok. The questions were designed to identify the most significant drivers of happiness, the primary obstacles encountered, and practical recommendations for institutional improvement. The analysis of 400 responses revealed that the most crucial factors for happiness are intrinsic and social: "creating value for students" (19.68%) and "positive workplace relationships" (18.64%). Conversely, the primary obstacles are structural: "excessive workload and administrative tasks" (24.59%) and "compensation that is incongruent with the workload" (20.00%). The key recommendations provided by the teachers included "reducing unnecessary workloads" (16.57%), "providing additional skill development training" (14.53%), and "increasing opportunities for additional income" (13.66%). Based on these direct insights from 400 teachers, a five-point framework of actionable guidelines is proposed for university administrators. The recommendations focus on: 1) reviewing workload structures, 2) improving compensation, 3) fostering a positive culture, 4) recognizing the value of the teaching role, and 5) providing relevant training. This study offers a targeted, data-driven policy framework for institutions seeking to improve teacher well-being, motivation, and retention.

Keywords: Workplace Happiness, Private University, Teachers

Introduction

In the contemporary landscape of global higher education, universities operate within an intensely competitive environment. The pressures of globalization, technological advancement, and shifting economic demands compel institutions to innovate to maintain relevance and achieve a distinguished reputation. While infrastructure and technology are visible markers of progress, the ultimate success and sustainability of any academic institution are fundamentally anchored in its human capital. In this context, teachers are not merely employees; they are the core drivers of knowledge creation, pedagogical excellence, and institutional innovation. Their well-being and happiness at work are, therefore, not peripheral concerns but central determinants of educational quality (Lacy & Sheehan, 1997).

The quality and motivation of teachers directly correlate with an institution's ability to produce high-quality graduates and impactful research (Herzberg, 1966). However, private universities in Thailand are currently facing a significant challenge: a high turnover rate among academic staff (Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2019). This phenomenon is symptomatic of deeper underlying problems affecting their professional lives (Chapman & Hutcheson, 1982). Many teachers are confronted with escalating workloads that extend far beyond teaching, including intense pressure to produce research outputs to meet stringent quality assurance criteria (Khamkhong, 2018).

This mounting pressure is often compounded by a perception that their compensation is inadequate relative to their heavy workload and professional dedication (Pitanuwat, 2013; Santhong, 2020). This mismatch between contribution and reward not only affects their financial well-being but also erodes their sense of value and recognition, leading to burnout, decreased motivation, and the decision to leave (Chapman & Hutcheson, 1982). The consequences are far-reaching, impacting student learning, research continuity, and the university's academic reputation. Therefore, understanding the multifaceted nature of workplace happiness is of paramount importance for institutional stability and growth (Khamkhong, 2018).

This study addresses this critical issue by moving beyond simply identifying problems to systematically developing a solution-oriented framework. It conceptualizes workplace happiness as a multidimensional construct influenced by several key factors (Pitanuwat, 2013). The main idea of this research is to investigate the relationship between five core components—1) Nature of Work (Herzberg, 1966), 2) Workplace Relationships (Sarros & Sarros, 1992), 3) Compensation & Benefits (Herzberg, 1966), 4) Organizational Satisfaction (Lacy & Sheehan, 1997), and 5) Organizational Commitment (Chapman & Hutcheson, 1982)—and the overall workplace happiness of teachers. By developing and validating a model based on these variables, this study aims to provide an evidence-based foundation for administrators and policymakers to formulate effective strategies that enhance teacher well-being, motivation, and retention.

Objectives

1. To identify the principal drivers that contribute to workplace happiness from the perspectives of teachers in Thai private universities.

2. To explore the primary obstacles and challenges that detract from their workplace happiness.

3. To propose a set of actionable, evidence-based guidelines for university administrators aimed at improving teacher well-being, motivation, and retention.

Methodology

This study utilized qualitative data derived from a larger survey research project to synthesize practical guidelines for enhancing teacher happiness. The methodology focused on analyzing the direct perspectives of the target group.

1. Population and Sample

The target population for the study consisted of all full-time lecturers at 16 private universities in Bangkok, totaling 5,343 individuals. The sample group comprised 400 lecturers from 16 private universities in Bangkok. The sample size was calculated using Yamane's formula to ensure statistical significance at a 95% confidence level. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure the sample was representative of the different institutions.

2. Data Collection

Data were collected through a series of open-ended questions embedded within a larger survey. These questions were specifically designed to elicit participants' direct insights on three key areas 1) The most significant drivers of their workplace happiness. 2) The primary obstacles they face. And 3) Their practical recommendations for institutional improvement.

3. Data Analysis

The method of analysis was qualitative content analysis. The textual responses from the 400 participants were systematically coded, categorized, and analyzed to identify recurring themes and key suggestions. Frequencies and percentages were then used to quantify the prominence of each theme, providing an evidence-based foundation for the resulting guidelines.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is built upon the understanding that Workplace Happiness among private university teachers is a complex outcome influenced by a dynamic interplay of various factors. This framework posits that both Intrinsic Motivators and Extrinsic/Structural Factors contribute significantly to teachers' overall job satisfaction and well-being. When these factors are aligned positively, workplace happiness is fostered; conversely, when negative structural conditions or a lack of intrinsic fulfillment are present, happiness is diminished, leading to perceived Obstacles. The ultimate goal of this research is to translate these identified factors and obstacles into practical Actionable Guidelines for university administrators.

1. Input Factors (Independent Variables)
   o Intrinsic: These are internal drivers related to a teacher's personal fulfillment and purpose. Your abstract highlights "creating value for students" as a primary example. This category encompasses aspects such as job meaning, personal growth, a sense of accomplishment, and positive social interaction.
   o Extrinsic: These are external conditions and organizational elements that impact a teacher's work environment. Your abstract highlights "positive workplace relationships" as a key driver of happiness, while "excessive workload and administrative tasks" and "compensation incongruent with workload" are major obstacles. This category includes workload management, compensation and benefits, career development opportunities, supportive leadership, recognition, and organizational culture.
2. Mediating/Moderating Factors (Contextual)
   o Workplace Environment & Culture: The overall atmosphere, communication styles, support systems, and values within the university play a crucial role in how teachers perceive and experience their daily work. Positive workplace relationships thrive in a supportive culture.
   o Teacher Perceptions & Experiences: Each teacher's individual interpretation of their work, their institution's policies, and their interactions shapes their happiness levels. This is where the subjective "obstacles" are identified.
3. Outcome (Dependent Variable)
   o Workplace Happiness: This is the central outcome variable, defined as the overall positive emotional state, satisfaction, and well-being experienced by

teachers in their professional role. It reflects both job satisfaction and a sense of fulfillment.

4. Research Process and Output
    o   Identification of Key Drivers & Obstacles: Through qualitative data collection (open-ended survey responses), the research identifies specific factors that enhance happiness and specific challenges that hinder it.
    o   Formulation of Actionable Guidelines: Based on the identified drivers and obstacles, and critically, the direct recommendations from teachers, the study develops a set of practical, evidence-based guidelines for university administrators. These guidelines serve as direct interventions to improve input and contextual factors, thereby enhancing workplace happiness.

In essence, the framework illustrates a feedback loop: understanding the current state of teacher happiness (influenced by intrinsic and extrinsic factors, and hindered by obstacles) leads to specific recommendations that, when implemented, are expected to improve the very factors that contribute to happiness.
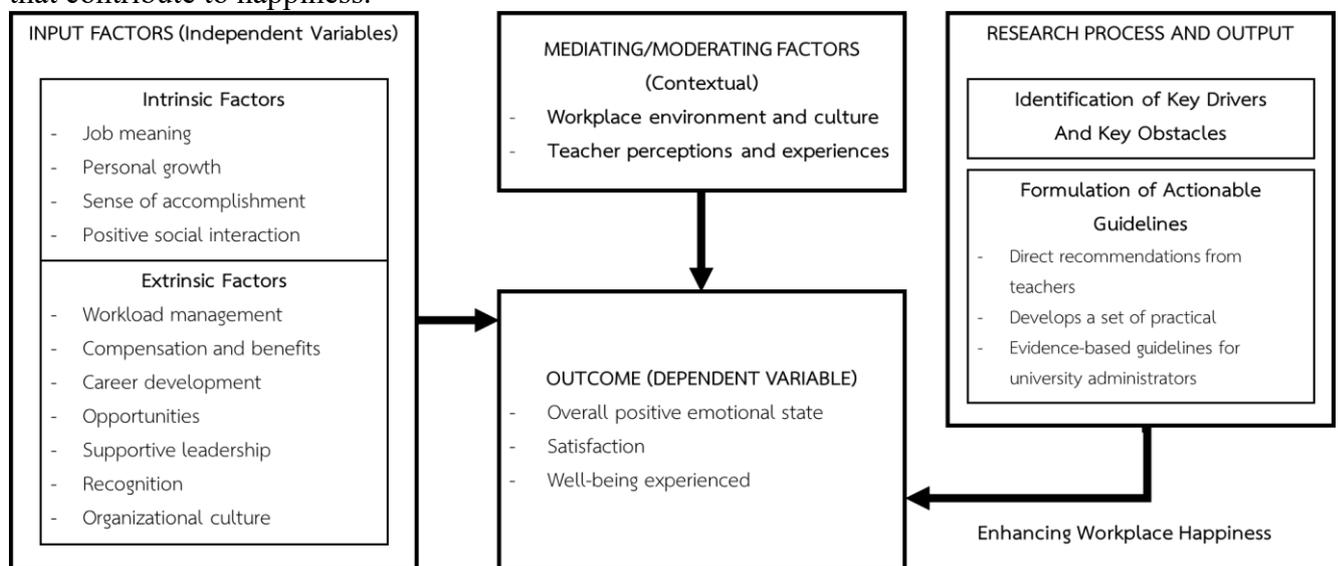
Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Results

This section presents the findings from an analysis of open-ended responses collected from a sample of 400 teachers at private universities in Bangkok. Using content analysis, these direct reflections and experiences were synthesized to provide a clearer picture of the tension between the ideological drivers of happiness and the structural obstacles that faculty currently face.

1. Profile of Research Participants

The demographic data of the 400 respondents are presented in the table below. The sample is predominantly female (53.8%), with the largest age group being 30-39 years (28.3%). Many of the participants hold a Doctoral Degree (73.0%) and serve as Lecturers (66.5%).

Table 1 Profile of Research Participants

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	215	53.8
	Male	181	45.2

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
	Other	4	1
Age	30 - 39 years	113	28.3
	40 - 49 years	102	25.5
	50 - 59 years	74	18.5
	Other (Below 30 or 60+)	111	27.7
Education	Doctoral Degree	292	73
	Master's Degree	108	27
Academic Position	Lecturer	266	66.5
	Assistant Professor	80	20
	Associate Professor	36	9
	Other (e.g., Professor)	18	4.5
Work Experience	Less than 5 years	105	26.3
	5 - 10 years	118	29.5
	11 - 20 years	112	28
	More than 20 years	65	16.2

2. Key Drivers and The Meaning of Work

The analysis strongly confirms that the most significant drivers of teacher happiness stem from social and psychological dimensions, aligning with recent research that emphasizes the importance of Quality of Work Life (QWL) and social support.

- Creating Value for Students (19.68%): This was the most frequently mentioned factor and represents the core of happiness in the teaching profession. Seeing student success and development acts as a powerful "psychic reward," capable of compensating for dissatisfaction in other areas. This reflects the principle of "Motivators" in Herzberg's theory, which posits that true happiness arises directly from the content of the work itself.
- Positive Relationships and Atmosphere (Combined 37.28%): The next most cited factors were a "good workplace atmosphere" and "good colleagues and supervisors" (18.64% each). This finding not only confirms that humans are social beings but also indicates that in the high-stress context of academia, a "social safety net" is essential. A supportive environment functions as a "buffer," mitigating the impact of stress and other pressures, which aligns with the research of Salas-Vallina & Alegre (2018), who found that support from colleagues and supervisors is a key factor leading to the happiness of academics.

2. Structural Obstacles and Current Challenges

Conversely, the main obstacles undermining happiness were all structural and policy-related issues, reflecting the challenges that Thai higher education institutions are currently facing.

- Work Overload (24.59%): "Excessive teaching and administrative workload" was clearly identified as the number one obstacle. This condition not only causes physical fatigue but also leads to burnout, a major issue in the Thai

academic world. Recent studies have shown that workload is directly correlated with emotional exhaustion. Work overload also diminishes the time teachers can spend on activities that bring them happiness, such as mentoring students or their own professional development.

- Perceived Inequity of Compensation (20.00%): "Compensation not aligned with workload" is a classic yet persistent problem. While salary may not be a direct source of happiness, the "feeling of being fairly compensated" is a crucial Hygiene Factor. When absent, it leads to severe dissatisfaction and is a primary cause of turnover, especially in a high-cost-of-living city like Bangkok.

- Pressure from Research Demands (17.03%): The pressure to produce research reflects a shift in the higher education system towards more tangible metrics, which can create role conflict for teachers who see their primary duty as teaching.

### 3. Policy Recommendations from the Teachers' Voice

The suggestions gathered from the 400 teachers provide valuable, evidence-based insights for administrators to shape policy.

- Reduce Unnecessary Workloads (16.57%): This recommendation reflects a desire for the organization to review work processes and eliminate non-value-added tasks, thereby returning time to the core mission of teachers.

- Provide Skill Development Training (14.53%): Amid rapid change, teachers recognize the need for upskilling/reskilling, whether in digital technology or research writing, which aligns with global trends in higher education personnel development.

- Increase Opportunities for Additional Income (13.66%): This is a creative solution to the compensation issue, suggesting that institutions can help improve financial security by supporting channels for income generation based on expertise, such as academic services or external research grants.

The key findings of this study can be effectively conceptualized through the Reservoir of Teacher Happiness model. This model visualizes overall teacher happiness as the water level within a central reservoir, dynamically influenced by both positive inflows and detrimental outflows. The primary inflows that replenish this reservoir are identified as the intrinsic satisfaction derived from creating value for students and the crucial social support from positive workplace relationships and atmosphere. These factors act as the main sources of happiness and well-being.

Conversely, the reservoir is persistently drained by significant outflows, representing structural obstacles inherent in the work environment. The most substantial identified leaks are excessive workload (Work Overload) and a perceived inequity in compensation, along with pressures from research demands, all of which significantly reduce teachers' happiness levels.

Consequently, the policy recommendations derived from the teachers' suggestions function as essential "repair tools". Strategies such as reducing unnecessary workloads and increasing opportunities for additional income directly address these major leaks. Furthermore, providing relevant skill-development training strengthens the overall reservoir, enhancing teachers' capacity to manage pressures and maintain their well-being. In essence, the model illustrates that sustaining teacher happiness requires a dual focus: institutions must actively mitigate the structural outflows while simultaneously nurturing the positive inflows.
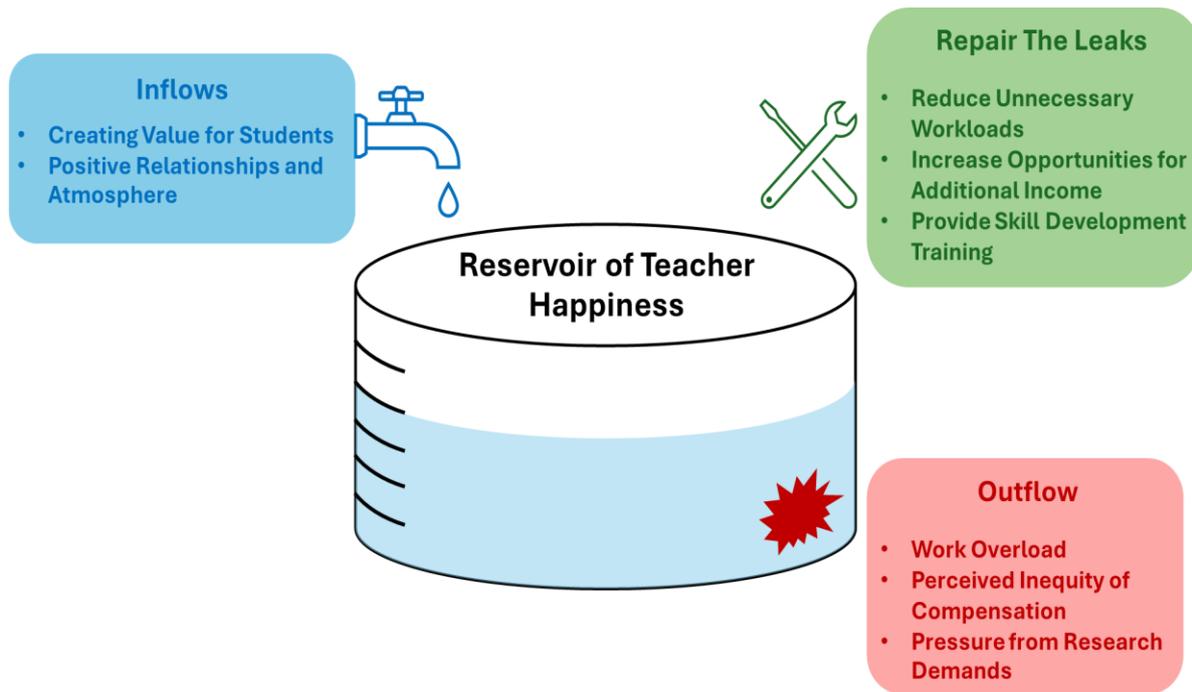
Figure 2 Reservoir of Teacher Happiness Model

Discussion

This study aimed to develop practical guidelines to enhance teachers' workplace happiness at Thai private universities by analyzing their direct perspectives. The findings reveal a significant tension between the powerful intrinsic and social drivers of happiness and the considerable structural obstacles that undermine it. This discussion will interpret these findings, link them to established theories, and provide a clear rationale for the resulting recommendations.

1. The results present a clear paradox: teachers derive their greatest happiness from the core mission of their profession—"creating value for students"—yet they are simultaneously impeded by structural issues like "excessive workload." This finding strongly aligns with Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory. The sense of purpose and achievement from helping students acts as a powerful Motivator, providing deep, intrinsic satisfaction. However, this is constantly challenged by poor Hygiene Factors, such as overwhelming administrative tasks and unfair compensation, which are major sources of dissatisfaction. The data suggests that for many teachers, their professional life is a constant balancing act between the passion that drives them and the pressures that drain them.

2. A striking finding is the dual role of workplace relationships. "Positive relationships" were identified as a key driver of happiness, second only to helping students. Furthermore, when faced with obstacles, teachers' primary coping mechanism was to "talk to colleagues or supervisors." This demonstrates that relationships are not merely a "nice-to-have" element but a foundational pillar of both well-being and resilience in the academic environment. This aligns with the findings of Salas-Vallina & Alegre (2018), who highlighted the critical role of social support in academic happiness. A positive social culture acts as both a source of daily joy and a crucial buffer against stress and burnout.

3. The obstacles identified by the 400 teachers—workload, compensation, and research pressure—are not individual problems but systemic issues. Similarly, their recommendations—reducing workloads, providing training, and increasing income opportunities—call for structural solutions. This provides a clear mandate for university administrators: improving

teacher happiness cannot be achieved through superficial initiatives. It requires a fundamental re-evaluation of institutional policies and resource allocation. The high frequency of these suggestions underscores an urgent need for change that addresses the root causes of dissatisfaction.

4. The findings from this study directly inform the proposed guidelines. The fact that an "excessive workload" is the top obstacle makes the recommendation to "review and improve workload structures" the logical first step. The concerns over unfair pay directly lead to the guideline to "enhance compensation." The critical dual role of relationships supports the recommendation to "foster a positive organizational culture." Finally, the core happiness driver of "creating value for students" and the need for new skills justify the guidelines to "recognize the value of the teaching role" and "provide relevant training." This ensures that the proposed solutions are not based on assumptions, but are directly grounded in the expressed needs and experiences of the teachers themselves.

New knowledge

The most significant new knowledge from this study is the synthesis of these two forces. The "Teacher Happiness Equation" demonstrates that to effectively enhance well-being, the most critical strategy is not to try and "add" more happiness, but to remove the institutional friction that acts as the brakes systematically. The teachers' passion is already a powerful engine; the institution's primary role should be to clear the path for it to run smoothly.

This framework contributes to society by providing university administrators and policymakers with a clear, data-driven, and practical diagnostic tool. It shifts the focus from abstract satisfaction metrics to concrete, actionable areas for improvement: workload management, fair compensation policies, and fostering a supportive culture. By implementing these evidence-based guidelines, institutions can improve teacher well-being, reduce costly turnover, and, most importantly, enhance the quality of teaching. This, in turn, directly contributes to producing higher-quality graduates who will drive the future of society.

Recommendations

1. Recommendations for Applying Research Findings

- Adopt a Holistic, Ecosystem-Based Approach: Since the findings show that happiness is a unified construct, university administrators should move away from isolated, piecemeal solutions. Instead, they should foster a positive "ecosystem of happiness," recognizing that an improvement in one area (e.g., workplace relationships) will have a significant positive impact on others (e.g., tolerance for workload).

- Prioritize Workload Reduction and Process Re-engineering: Given that "excessive workload" was identified as the primary obstacle to happiness, institutions should conduct a systematic review of administrative and teaching responsibilities. The goal should be to eliminate non-value-added tasks and streamline processes, thereby freeing up teachers' time and energy to focus on their core, happiness-driving mission: teaching and mentoring students.

- Foster a Culture of Support and Recognition: As workplace relationships were identified as both a key driver of happiness and the primary coping mechanism, institutions should actively invest in building a supportive and collegial culture. Furthermore, formal systems should be developed to recognize and celebrate the value of teaching excellence, not just research output, to reinforce the most powerful intrinsic motivator for teachers.

- Address Compensation with Fairness and Opportunity: To combat the dissatisfaction with compensation, a two-pronged approach is recommended.

First, review salary structures to ensure they are perceived as fair and equitable in relation to the workload. Second, create and support institutional channels for teachers to earn additional income through their expertise, such as academic service projects or external research grants.

2. Recommendations for Future Research

- Comparative Studies: Future research should conduct comparative analyses to test whether the holistic model of happiness holds true across different academic contexts, such as public versus private universities, or between different national and cultural settings.

- Longitudinal Research: A longitudinal study that tracks the happiness of a cohort of academics over several years would provide invaluable insights into how well-being fluctuates in response to career progression, policy changes, and other institutional dynamics.

- In-Depth Qualitative Exploration: Further in-depth qualitative research is needed to explore the lived experience of "holistic happiness." Narrative and phenomenological studies could provide a deeper understanding of how academics perceive the interplay between the different components of their professional lives.

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