



Sources of happiness of non-SPED teachers teaching learners with disabilities and their learning experiences in inclusive classrooms

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the lived experiences of non-SPED teachers teaching learners with disabilities to identify the sources of happiness that sustain their well-being and instructional engagement in inclusive classrooms. Using a descriptive phenomenological design, eight non-SPED teachers from public schools in Vintar I District participated in semi-structured interviews and completed open-ended questionnaires, which were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. The findings revealed four major sources of happiness—emotional connection with learners, professional growth and competence, social and institutional support, and meaning and purpose in teaching—which collectively fostered motivation, resilience, instructional commitment, and positive classroom environments. The results highlight that teacher happiness serves as a vital psychological resource in inclusive education and underscore the need for strengthened professional development, supportive leadership, and psychosocial support systems to sustain effective, meaningful inclusive teaching.

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Introduction

Inclusive education has become a central policy direction in the Philippine educational system, requiring regular classroom teachers to educate learners with diverse needs, including those with disabilities. In practice, non-SPED teachers are often assigned to inclusive classrooms despite limited preparation in special education pedagogy, behavioral management, and individualized instruction. Consequently, much of the existing research has emphasized teacher stress, burnout, and instructional difficulty in inclusive settings.

However, this deficit-oriented focus provides only a partial understanding of teachers' lived experiences. Despite the challenges, many non-SPED teachers continue to demonstrate commitment, emotional

investment, and professional growth in inclusive classrooms. What sustains them is not well understood. Teacher happiness is increasingly recognized as a key determinant of motivation, classroom climate, instructional quality, and teacher retention. Understanding what makes non-SPED teachers happy when teaching learners with disabilities is, therefore, not merely an emotional inquiry but a pedagogical and policy concern. Identifying these sources of happiness provides insight into how teachers remain engaged, resilient, and effective despite the demands of inclusion.

This study addresses a critical gap in Philippine and international literature by exploring teacher happiness as a lived experience among non-SPED teachers working with learners with disabilities in a rural public-school context.

Literature review

This chapter presents a synthesis of related literature and studies that provide theoretical and empirical support for the present research. It discusses the sources of happiness among non-SPED teachers teaching learners with disabilities, including emotional connection with learners, professional growth, social and institutional support, and a sense of meaning and purpose in inclusive education.

Teacher happiness and well-being in education

Teacher happiness has emerged as a central construct in contemporary educational psychology due to its strong influence on instructional quality, professional commitment, and student learning outcomes (Karakasidou et al., 2025; Spiess et al., 2025). Rather than being defined merely as the absence of stress or burnout, teacher happiness is conceptualized as a multidimensional psychological state encompassing emotional well-being, work engagement, and a sense of meaning and accomplishment (PERMA Model, n.d.; Wu, 2024). Within the framework of positive psychology, teachers who experience joy, purpose, and professional fulfillment demonstrate greater resilience, motivation, and instructional effectiveness, particularly in emotionally demanding teaching contexts (Karakasidou et al., 2025).

Empirical studies consistently show that teacher happiness contributes to improved classroom climate, stronger teacher–student relationships, and greater instructional enthusiasm (Pandia & Sembiring, 2025; Spiess et al., 2025). Positive emotional states have been shown to broaden teachers’ cognitive and behavioral repertoires, enabling them to implement flexible teaching strategies, regulate stress, and respond empathically to diverse learners (Wu, 2024). Consequently, teacher happiness is increasingly recognized not as an individual emotional outcome but as a critical psychological resource that sustains high-quality teaching and learning in complex classroom environments.

Inclusive education and the role of non-SPED teachers

Inclusive education has substantially reshaped the responsibilities of regular classroom teachers, positioning non-SPED teachers as primary facilitators of learning for students with disabilities (Savira et al., 2024; Macapaz et al., 2024). In many educational systems, particularly in developing contexts, these teachers are assigned to inclusive classrooms without adequate preparation in special education pedagogy, behavior management, or individualized instruction. As a result, previous research has largely framed inclusion as a source of professional stress, emotional exhaustion, and role conflict for non-SPED teachers (Cailo et al., 2025; Wu, 2024).

However, recent scholarship has begun to challenge this deficit-based narrative by highlighting the positive psychological dimensions of inclusive teaching. Studies show that when non-SPED teachers are emotionally supported and professionally empowered, inclusion becomes a context for pedagogical innovation, identity development, and personal meaning (Savira et al., 2024; Wu, 2024). Teachers who perceive themselves as making a difference in the lives of learners with disabilities report stronger professional commitment and higher levels of work-related happiness (Macapaz et al., 2024).

Emotional connection and teacher–student relationships

Emotional connection with learners represents one of the strongest and most consistent predictors of teacher happiness in inclusive classrooms (Karakasidou et al., 2025; Spiess et al., 2025). Educational relationship theory posits that caring, trust, and emotional attunement between teachers and students enhance both cognitive engagement and socio-emotional development, particularly among vulnerable learners (Wu, 2024). In inclusive settings, where learners may experience communication difficulties, behavioral challenges, or social exclusion, emotional bonding becomes a powerful source of relational reward for teachers.

Empirical research indicates that teachers who establish meaningful relationships with learners with disabilities experience greater job satisfaction, emotional fulfillment, and professional pride (Savira et al., 2024; Wu, 2024). Observing student progress—even in small or incremental forms—generates feelings of joy, hope, and accomplishment, reinforcing teachers’ intrinsic motivation (Karakasidou et al., 2025). These emotional rewards serve as psychological buffers against stress and enhance teachers’ sense of purpose within inclusive environments (Spiess et al., 2025).

Professional growth, self-efficacy, and happiness

Professional competence and self-efficacy are critical psychological mechanisms through which inclusive teaching contributes to teacher happiness (Wu, 2024; Macapaz et al., 2024). According to self-efficacy theory, teachers derive satisfaction and motivation from perceiving themselves as capable of meeting instructional challenges and producing meaningful student outcomes. In inclusive classrooms, non-SPED teachers are required to adapt materials, develop new strategies, and solve complex learning problems, all of which promote professional growth when adequate support is present (Savira et al., 2024).

Research on teacher development shows that inclusive teaching enhances pedagogical creativity, reflective practice, and instructional flexibility (Karakasidou et al., 2025). As teachers acquire new skills and witness the positive effects of their efforts on learners with disabilities, their confidence and professional identity strengthen, contributing to sustained work-related happiness (Spiess et al., 2025). Thus, professional growth transforms the demands of inclusion into psychologically rewarding experiences rather than sources of discouragement (Wu, 2024).

Social and institutional support

Teacher happiness is also deeply embedded within the social and organizational ecology of schools (Pandia & Sembiring, 2025; Cailo et al., 2025). Supportive leadership, collegial collaboration, and institutional recognition create conditions that protect teachers from emotional exhaustion and promote

well-being. In inclusive classrooms, where instructional and emotional demands are elevated, teachers rely heavily on peer networks and administrative encouragement to sustain their engagement (Savira et al., 2024).

Organizational psychology research demonstrates that teachers who feel valued and supported exhibit greater resilience, stronger professional commitment, and lower burnout (Spiess et al., 2025). For non-SPED teachers, access to guidance, teamwork, and recognition not only reduces stress but also enhances their sense of belonging and professional satisfaction (Wu, 2024; Cailo et al., 2025).

Meaning, purpose, and inclusive teaching

Beyond emotional and professional rewards, meaning and purpose constitute a deeper foundation of teacher happiness (PERMA Model, n.d.; Savira et al., 2024). Theories of meaningful work propose that individuals experience well-being when their efforts contribute to socially valuable and morally significant goals. Teaching learners with disabilities enables teachers to experience compassion, advocacy, and social contribution, thereby strengthening their sense of professional purpose (Wu, 2024). Many teachers view inclusive education as an expression of social justice and human dignity (Savira et al., 2024). The belief that one is helping marginalized learners succeed generates a meaning-based happiness that sustains commitment even under challenging conditions (Karakasidou et al., 2025).

Statement of the problem

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of non-SPED teachers teaching learners with disabilities, with particular focus on their sources of happiness and how these influence their teaching practice. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the sources of happiness of non-SPED teachers teaching learners with disabilities?
2. How do these sources of happiness influence their teaching–learning experiences in inclusive classrooms?

Methodology

This chapter presented the research design, sources of data, including the study locale, population, and sampling; data-gathering instrument; and data analysis, including its ethical standards.

Locale of the study

The study was conducted in public schools in Vintar I District, Ilocos Norte, Philippines, where inclusive education is implemented, and non-SPED teachers face challenges in teaching learners with disabilities. These schools were chosen for their diverse student population and ongoing support programs for learners with special needs, providing a suitable context to explore the sources of happiness and lived experiences of non-SPED teachers in inclusive classrooms.

Population and sampling

The non-SPED teachers handling learners with disabilities were purposively selected from Vintar I

District. Inclusion criteria required that participants (a) be regular education teachers without formal SPED specialization, and (b) have at least one year of experience teaching learners with disabilities. This sample size ensured thematic saturation and rich narrative data.

Data-gathering instrument

Data were gathered using semi-structured interview guides and open-ended questionnaires. The instruments focused on teachers' emotional experiences, classroom interactions, challenges, sources of motivation, support systems, and professional fulfillment in inclusive teaching.

Data-gathering procedure

Data were collected over three weeks through face-to-face and online interviews. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim. Each session lasted 30–45 minutes; transcripts were reviewed by participants (member checking) and cross-examined against field notes for triangulation; all digital files were stored on password-protected devices; and pseudonyms were used to maintain anonymity.

Data analysis tool

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework: (1) data familiarization, (2) initial coding, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. NVivo qualitative data-analysis software facilitated systematic coding, retrieval of coded segments, and organization of themes. Credibility was enhanced through member checking, where preliminary interpretations were shared with participants for verification, and inter-coder reliability, achieved by having a second independent researcher code a subset of transcripts and resolve discrepancies through discussion.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Divine Word College of Laoag–Graduate School of Education. Participants provided informed consent before data collection, ensuring voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw at any stage. All identifying information was anonymized to protect participant privacy.

Presentation and analysis of results

This section presents the collected data and corresponding analyses to address the study's research questions.

Problem 1: What are the sources of happiness of non-SPED teachers teaching learners with disabilities?

Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis, four interrelated sources of happiness were identified: **(1) Relational Fulfillment with Learners, (2) Professional Growth and Teaching Efficacy, (3) Institutional and Collegial Support, and (4) Meaning-Driven Professional Identity.** These themes reflect how emotional, professional, social, and existential dimensions of teaching interact to sustain non-SPED teachers in inclusive classrooms.

Table 1. Revised themes, categories, and representative statements on sources of happiness

Theme	Analytic category	Representative statements
Relational fulfillment with learners	Observing learner progress Emotional connection and trust	“When I see my student finally read or smile because they understood the lesson, I feel truly happy.” “They show so much trust and affection; that makes me feel fulfilled as a teacher.”
Professional growth and teaching efficacy	Developing adaptive strategies Experiencing professional success	“Teaching them forced me to become more creative and flexible.” “Every small improvement feels like a big professional victory.”
Institutional and collegial support	Peer collaboration Supportive leadership	“My co-teachers help me a lot, and that makes teaching easier and happier.” “Our principal always encourages us, and that motivates me.”
Meaning-driven professional identity	Sense of vocational calling Perceived social impact	“I feel that this is my mission—to help these children succeed.” “Knowing I make an impact in their lives makes all the hardships worth it.”

Source: Rubio (2026)

The findings indicate that teacher happiness is not a single emotional state but a multidimensional experience shaped by relationships, competence, support, and purpose.

First, relational fulfillment with learners emerged as the strongest source of happiness. Teachers derived deep emotional satisfaction from seeing learners with disabilities make progress and from developing trusting relationships. These emotionally rich interactions transformed classroom challenges into moments of joy, meaning, and affirmation of their professional role, a pattern widely documented in research showing that positive teacher–student relationships are among the strongest predictors of teacher well-being, motivation, and commitment in inclusive classrooms (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Klassen et al., 2012; Spilt, Koomen, & Thijs, 2011; Wu, 2024; Karakasidou et al., 2025). Studies in inclusive education further demonstrate that witnessing even small developmental gains among learners with disabilities generates pride, hope, and professional fulfillment, which counteract stress and strengthen teachers’ emotional attachment to their work (Avramidis & Norwich, 2010; Savira et al., 2024; Florian & Spratt, 2013).

Second, professional growth and teaching efficacy functioned as a critical psychological reward. Teachers felt happy when they became more creative, flexible, and effective in meeting diverse learning needs. Successfully adapting instruction and witnessing learner improvement strengthened their confidence and professional self-worth, turning difficulty into a source of pride rather than frustration, a

pattern strongly supported by self-efficacy theory and empirical research showing that teachers who perceive themselves as competent and effective experience greater job satisfaction, motivation, and emotional well-being (Bandura, 1997; Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). In inclusive classrooms, developing adaptive strategies and observing positive student responses has been shown to increase teachers' professional confidence and instructional commitment, even in high-demand contexts (Sharma, Forlin, & Loreman, 2008; Savira et al., 2024; Wu, 2024). Research further indicates that such mastery experiences are among the most powerful sources of teacher happiness because they validate teachers' professional identity and sense of competence (Karakasidou et al., 2025; Spiess et al., 2025).

Third, institutional and collegial support served as an emotional and practical buffer against stress. Encouragement from school leaders and collaboration with colleagues reduced feelings of isolation and increased teachers' sense of belonging. This supportive environment allowed teachers to sustain motivation and maintain positive emotional engagement with their work, a pattern widely documented in teacher well-being and inclusive education research, which shows that supportive leadership, collegial trust, and professional collaboration significantly reduce emotional exhaustion and enhance job satisfaction and commitment (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017, 2020; Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012; Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018). In inclusive school contexts, teachers who receive administrative backing and peer assistance are better able to manage diverse learner needs and maintain emotional resilience, leading to higher levels of engagement and instructional persistence (Forlin, 2010; Ainscow & Miles, 2008; Savolainen et al., 2022). Such supportive environments create a sense of professional security that enables teachers to view challenges as shared responsibilities rather than personal burdens, thereby sustaining happiness and long-term commitment (Day & Gu, 2014; Roffey, 2012).

Finally, meaning-driven professional identity anchored teachers' happiness more deeply. Viewing inclusive teaching as a mission or calling enabled teachers to frame hardships as worthwhile and emotionally meaningful. The belief that they were making a difference in the lives of vulnerable learners gave their work moral and psychological significance, reinforcing long-term commitment to inclusive education. This aligns with Frankl's (1963) theory that meaning is a primary source of human resilience and with research showing that teachers who perceive their work as purposeful experience greater well-being, motivation, and persistence despite adversity (Day & Gu, 2014; Parker, Martin, Colmar, & Liem, 2012; Seligman, 2011). In inclusive education contexts, purpose-driven teachers are more likely to sustain emotional engagement, commitment, and ethical responsibility toward learners with disabilities (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Ainscow, 2020; Savolainen et al., 2022), making meaning and moral purpose central foundations of teacher happiness and professional endurance.

Problem 2. How do these sources of happiness influence their teaching-learning experiences in inclusive classrooms?

Analysis of the interview data revealed that teacher happiness functions not only as an emotional state but as a **powerful psychological and pedagogical resource** that shapes how teachers teach, relate, and persist in inclusive classrooms. Five interrelated outcome domains were identified: **(1) Sustained Professional Motivation, (2) Supportive and Inclusive Classroom Climate, (3) Enhanced**

Instructional Quality, (4) Psychological Resilience and Work Sustainability, and (5) Meaningful and Purpose-Driven Teaching–Learning Processes.

Table 2. Revised themes, analytic categories, and representative statements on the influence of happiness on teaching–learning experiences

Theme	Analytic category	Representative statements
Sustained professional motivation	Emotional energy for teaching Commitment to learners Persistence in instruction	“When I feel happy because my students are improving, I become more excited to come to class and teach them.” “Even when it’s hard, my happiness from seeing their progress keeps me going.” “I don’t give up easily because I feel fulfilled when they learn something new.”
Supportive and inclusive classroom climate	Warm teacher–student relationships Learner engagement and cooperation Reduced behavioral tension	“Because I feel emotionally connected to them, my classroom becomes more peaceful and supportive.” “They become more cooperative when they feel that I genuinely care about them.” “When I teach with a happy heart, the students also become calmer.”
Enhanced instructional quality	Creative and adaptive teaching Patient and responsive instruction Stronger instructional effort	“My happiness motivates me to find better and more creative ways to teach them.” “I adjust my lessons more patiently because I enjoy seeing them learn.” “Since I feel fulfilled, I put more effort into planning and teaching.”
Psychological resilience and work sustainability	Emotional stability Stress regulation Protection from burnout	“Even when I feel tired, my happiness helps me stay emotionally strong.” “The joy I get from my students helps me handle stress better.” “I don’t feel like quitting because teaching them makes me happy.”
Meaningful and purpose-driven teaching–learning process	Sense of professional purpose Professional fulfillment Belief in inclusive education	“Knowing that I am helping them grow gives deeper meaning to my teaching.” “I feel that my work is important, especially for these learners.” “Their small achievements make me feel that inclusive education really works.”

Source: Rubio (2026)

The first outcome domain, sustained professional motivation, shows that happiness serves as an internal source of emotional energy that drives commitment and perseverance in inclusive teaching. Teachers who experience joy from student progress become more willing to persist despite difficulties, maintaining high levels of engagement and instructional effort in inclusive classrooms. This is consistent with the broaden-and-build theory, which explains that positive emotions such as joy and satisfaction expand individuals' cognitive and motivational resources, enabling greater persistence and problem-solving (Fredrickson, 2001; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). Empirical studies further demonstrate that teacher well-being and positive affect are strongly associated with work engagement, instructional commitment, and resilience, particularly in demanding teaching contexts (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006; Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012; Klassen et al., 2013). In inclusive classrooms, positive emotional experiences derived from learner progress help sustain teachers' motivation and willingness to invest effort in adapting instruction for students with disabilities (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Sharma, Loreman, & Forlin, 2012).

The second domain, supportive and inclusive classroom climate, demonstrates that teacher happiness directly shapes classroom relationships. Emotionally fulfilled teachers are more likely to cultivate warmth, trust, and emotional safety, thereby reducing behavioral tension and increasing learner cooperation. This aligns with the prosocial classroom model, which posits that teachers' emotional well-being enhances their capacity for empathy, emotional regulation, and supportive interactions with students (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Empirical studies show that teachers' positive affect and well-being are significantly associated with improved classroom climate, stronger teacher-student relationships, and fewer disruptive behaviors (Aldrup et al., 2018; Spilt, Koomen, & Thijs, 2011; Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Elbertson, & Salovey, 2012). In inclusive classrooms, emotionally supportive teacher-student relationships are particularly crucial, as learners with disabilities depend on relational security to engage academically and socially (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Loreman, 2017; Sharma & Sokal, 2016).

The third domain, enhanced instructional quality, indicates that happiness strengthens pedagogical practices. When teachers feel fulfilled, they become more creative, patient, and adaptive in their instruction, which directly improves their ability to address diverse learning needs. According to the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, positive affect expands individuals' cognitive flexibility, creativity, and problem-solving capacity, enabling teachers to use more varied and responsive instructional strategies (Fredrickson, 2001; Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002). Empirical studies in education confirm that teachers with higher levels of well-being demonstrate greater instructional engagement, more innovative teaching practices, and stronger responsiveness to students (Hargreaves, 2000; Day & Gu, 2010; Briner & Dewberry, 2007). In inclusive classrooms, positive emotional states allow teachers to adjust pacing, differentiate instruction, and provide individualized support more effectively, which is especially important for learners with disabilities (Sharma & Sokal, 2016; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

The fourth domain, psychological resilience and work sustainability, highlights how happiness protects teachers from emotional exhaustion and burnout. Positive emotions derived from meaningful

interactions with learners enable teachers to regulate stress, recover from emotional strain, and maintain psychological balance over time (Fredrickson, 2001; Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002). In educational settings, teacher well-being is a significant protective factor against burnout, emotional fatigue, and depersonalization, particularly in high-demand environments such as inclusive classrooms (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017; Day & Gu, 2010). When teachers experience joy, purpose, and emotional connection with students, they develop greater resilience and are more capable of sustaining long-term commitment to teaching despite ongoing challenges (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Hargreaves, 2000). Thus, happiness functions as a psychological buffer that supports emotional stability, professional endurance, and sustained engagement in inclusive education.

Finally, meaningful and purpose-driven teaching–learning processes reveal that happiness deepened teachers’ sense of professional significance. Seeing learners with disabilities grow reinforced teachers’ belief in inclusive education and gave their work moral and emotional value (Day & Gu, 2010; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). According to Frankl’s (1963) theory of meaning, individuals who perceive their work as purposeful are better able to endure hardship and remain committed despite adversity. In inclusive education, teachers who view their role as contributing to equity, dignity, and social justice report higher levels of motivation, fulfillment, and professional identity (Ainscow, 2020; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). This meaning-based happiness allows teachers to interpret instructional and emotional challenges as worthwhile investments rather than burdens, thereby strengthening their long-term engagement in inclusive teaching.

Discussion of findings

Theoretical implications

The findings of this study provide empirical support for several prominent theories on teacher well-being and inclusive education. Consistent with Fredrickson’s (2001) broaden-and-build theory, positive emotions derived from relational fulfillment with learners expanded teachers’ cognitive, emotional, and social resources, enabling greater flexibility, creativity, and resilience in instructional practice (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). Moreover, the study reinforces Bandura’s (1997) self-efficacy theory, demonstrating that professional competence and mastery of inclusive teaching strategies significantly enhance teachers’ motivation, job satisfaction, and emotional well-being (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007; Sharma et al., 2012). These results also align with the prosocial classroom model, which posits that emotionally supportive and trust-based teacher–student relationships buffer the demands of teaching and enhance instructional effectiveness (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Aldrup et al., 2018). Finally, the findings extend Frankl’s (1963) theory of meaning, indicating that perceiving inclusive teaching as morally significant work fosters existential fulfillment, strengthens commitment, and sustains long-term engagement in inclusive education (Steger et al., 2012; Day & Gu, 2010). Collectively, these results integrate positive emotions, professional competence, social support, and meaning-making into a comprehensive framework for understanding teacher happiness in inclusive contexts.

Practical implications for schools and teachers

The study underscores that teacher happiness functions as a critical psychological resource that can be leveraged to improve inclusive teaching. Schools should prioritize the development of strong teacher–

student relationships by facilitating mentoring, smaller class sizes, and flexible instructional approaches that allow teachers to form meaningful emotional connections with learners with disabilities (Spilt, Koomen, & Thijs, 2011; Ainscow, 2020). Sustained professional development in inclusive pedagogy, differentiated instruction, and behavior management is essential for enhancing teachers' competence, self-efficacy, and instructional creativity (Forlin, 2010; Sharma & Sokal, 2016). Furthermore, fostering collaborative school cultures through team teaching, peer mentoring, and regular consultation with SPED specialists reduces teacher isolation, enhances collegial support, and strengthens professional identity, thereby supporting well-being and instructional effectiveness (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020). Finally, implementing teacher well-being initiatives, including psychosocial support, recognition programs, and workload management, is crucial for maintaining teachers' emotional stability and long-term engagement in inclusive education (Day & Gu, 2010; Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018).

Implications for policy

At the policy level, these findings highlight that inclusive education reforms require explicit attention to teacher well-being. Education authorities in the Philippines and similar contexts should institutionalize policies that: (1) integrate teacher well-being and emotional support into inclusive education frameworks (UNESCO, 2020; Ainscow & Miles, 2008), (2) mandate continuous professional development for non-SPED teachers in inclusive classrooms (Sharma et al., 2018), (3) hold school leadership accountable for fostering collaborative and supportive environments (Collie et al., 2012), and (4) provide structured psychosocial support and mental health resources (Roffey, 2012; Chan, 2019). By embedding teacher happiness within policy, inclusion can transition from a source of stress to a sustainable, high-quality educational experience for both teachers and learners with disabilities, ultimately enhancing instructional effectiveness and student outcomes (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020; Savolainen et al., 2022).

Conclusion

The study found that the happiness of non-SPED teachers teaching learners with disabilities is grounded in emotional connection with learners, professional growth and competence, social and institutional support, and a strong sense of meaning and purpose, all of which enhance motivation, classroom climate, instructional effectiveness, and resilience in inclusive classrooms; theoretically, these findings extend positive psychology and self-efficacy theory by showing how positive emotions and perceived competence reinforce each other and support ecological systems theory by demonstrating how school leadership and collegial support shape teacher well-being; in terms of contribution to the body of knowledge, this study advances a strengths-based perspective of inclusive education by positioning teacher happiness as a central mechanism for sustaining effective and committed non-SPED teaching, particularly in the Philippine public school context; therefore, it is recommended that schools prioritize teacher well-being through structured psychosocial support, collaborative professional cultures, and continuous inclusive education training to sustain teacher happiness and improve inclusive teaching outcomes.

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