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Beyond the Classroom: A Comparative Study of Subjective Well-Being Among Early Childhood Teachers in Indonesia and Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the differences in Subjective Well-Being (SWB) among early childhood education (ECE) teachers in Indonesia and Malaysia. A total of 200 teacher of ECE participated. Statistical tests indicated that the data from both groups significantly deviated from a normal distribution. As a result, the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test was applied to compare the SWB scores, revealing a significant difference between the two countries ($p = 0.015$). Teachers in Malaysia reported higher SWB, suggesting that cultural and educational policies may influence well-being. Regression analysis assessed the impact of work tenure and gender on SWB, but neither factor was found to be significant. Notably, years of service negatively affected SWB, indicating that longer tenure is associated with lower well-being in both countries. These results highlight the importance of considering contextual factors such as social support and work-life balance in addressing teacher well-being. This study addresses a significant research gap by providing cross-national evidence on subjective well-being (SWB) among early childhood education (ECE) teachers in Southeast Asia, this research offers novel insights into how national education systems and socio-cultural environments influence teacher well-being. By comparing Indonesia and Malaysia, the study highlights previously unexplored regional differences and underscores the need for context-sensitive policy interventions across diverse educational settings.

Keywords: Subjective Well-Being (SWB), Early Childhood Education (ECE) Teacher, Happiness, Comparative Study

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INTRODUCTION

Understanding subjective well-being (SWB) in early childhood education (ECE) is essential for enhancing teacher effectiveness, job satisfaction, and overall quality of life (Collie, 2023). Tang 'et al' (2022) highlighted that although Malaysia and Indonesia share similarities in economic development and cultural heritage, their education systems, legal frameworks, and social contexts differ significantly. The development and well-being of young children are profoundly influenced by early childhood educators (Wei & Ye, 2022; Afita & Nuranasmita, 2023). However, research on individual subjective well-being remains limited, particularly in cross-national contexts such as Indonesia and Malaysia. Subjective well-being refers to how individuals perceive and evaluate their own lives, encompassing levels of happiness, satisfaction, and overall quality of life (Helliwell et al., 2021). In recent years, early childhood education in Indonesia has gained increasing attention, with sustained initiatives to accelerate access and improve quality (Yasin et al., 2023). Conversely, Malaysia has implemented a range of measures aimed at enhancing early childhood education and care (Sutan & Ahmad, 2023).

The urgency of this research lies in the need for a cross-cultural understanding of early childhood educators' subjective well-being, particularly amid ongoing educational reforms in Southeast Asia. As developing countries with large early childhood populations, Indonesia and Malaysia play a critical role in shaping future generations through early childhood education (Munusamy et al., 2024). However, the well-being of early childhood educators—who are central to the teaching and caregiving process—remains underexplored and often underprioritized (Kiat et al., 2025). An imbalance between job demands and professional support may lead to prolonged stress, burnout, and a decline in the quality of care and education provided (Jiang et al., 2025). Therefore, this study is timely and necessary to generate empirical data that can inform more targeted and contextually relevant policies and programs aimed at improving the well-being of early childhood educators in both Indonesia and Malaysia.

Despite these efforts, ECEs in both countries may encounter similar challenges such as low salaries, high workloads, limited resources, and a lack of professional recognition (Muhardi et al., 2023). These challenges have the potential to negatively impact their subjective well-being (D. Tang et al., 2022). Research on the subjective well-being of ECEs in Indonesia and Malaysia is scarce, with few studies directly comparing these two nations. Therefore, conducting a comparative study can provide valuable insights into the factors that influence subjective well-being within diverse cultural and educational contexts. This study aims to address this research gap by examining the subjective well-being of ECEs in Indonesia and Malaysia. Specifically, it will explore various factors that may influence their well-being, including the work environment, job satisfaction, teacher-student relationships, support systems, and cultural influences. By conducting a cross-national comparison, this study seeks to identify both similarities and differences in the subjective well-being of ECEs in Indonesia and Malaysia. This will provide valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and practitioners to improve the well-being and effectiveness of this vital workforce.

This research delves into the subjective well-being of early childhood educators in Indonesia and Malaysia. By examining the factors that influence their well-being, we can gain valuable insights to support them better. The unique aspect of this research is the cross-national comparison. We'll be able to identify similarities and differences in the experiences of Indonesian and Malaysian early childhood educators. Cultural values, educational policies, and even classroom environments can all play a part in shaping their well-being. Understanding these nuances will be key to creating improved support systems (Jeon et al., 2024). Hopefully this research result will inform the educational policies and practices. By pinpointing areas where things can be improved, we can advocate for changes that create a more positive and supportive working environment for early childhood teachers.

This, in turn, will contribute to their overall well-being and ultimately benefit the young children they educate. Early childhood educators who feel valued, supported, and fulfilled will be better equipped to nurture and inspire the next generation. This research is a stepping stone towards making that a reality. This study enhances the existing worldwide literature on teacher well-being by providing actual data from Southeast Asia, an area frequently overlooked in international research. The findings enhance our comprehension of how local and national variables converge to influence the well-being of early childhood educators by emphasizing their lived experiences in two nearby yet different socio-cultural and educational environments. This comparative method not only elucidates the structural and systemic elements influencing educators but also uncovers context-specific coping mechanisms and sources of resilience that may guide culturally relevant solutions. The study possesses both academic relevance and practical consequences for legislators, school administrators, and teacher training institutes dedicated to improving the well-being and career sustainability of early childhood educators.

METHOD

To understand the well-being of early childhood educators in Indonesia and Malaysia, this study used a quantitative approach. Self-report survey was employed to gauge their

subjective well-being and other factors that might influence it. This survey is intended a large-scale snapshot, capturing trends across both countries.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, t-tests for group comparisons, and regression analysis to identify demographic predictors of subjective well-being (Gonzalez, 1999).

Participants

200 early childhood teachers were taken as sample, consist of 128 from Indonesia and 72 from Malaysia. The sampling technique used was convenience sampling, as it allows the researcher to easily collect data.

Instruments and Measures

One of the measurement tools for assessing subjective well-being (SWB) is the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), developed by Diener et al. (1985). This scale consists of five items designed to measure an individual's cognitive evaluation of life satisfaction. Additionally, to assess subjective well-being more comprehensively, Diener et al. (2010) developed an eight-item scale aimed at measuring social-psychological prosperity as a complement to cognitive evaluations of SWB.

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), developed by Diener et al. (1985), is a widely used instrument for assessing the cognitive aspect of subjective well-being. This scale consists of five items rated on a Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Psychometrically, the SWLS demonstrates excellent reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.87 to 0.89, and a test-retest reliability of 0.82 over a two-month interval (Wu et al., 2022). The construct validity of the SWLS has been confirmed through positive correlations with other indicators of well-being, such as positive affect and self-esteem, and it also shows good discriminant validity due to its low correlation with negative affect or neuroticism. Additionally, the scale exhibits strong convergent validity, as it correlates highly with other measures of subjective well-being. The SWLS has been widely used across various countries and cultures, including in the Indonesian context, and has been translated into multiple languages with consistently reliable and valid results (Tabatabaei et al., 2023).

To measure the affective component, several scales can be utilized, such as the Positive Affect Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) by Watson, Clark, and Tellegen (1988), which assesses positive and negative affect through 20 items. Another tool is the Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE), designed to measure positive and negative feelings irrespective of their source, arousal level, or cultural context, comprising 12 items (Diener et al., 2010). Psychometrically, PANAS demonstrates strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.84 to 0.90 for positive affect and from 0.85 to 0.88 for negative affect (Tabatabaei et al., 2023). Its construct validity has been supported through strong correlations between positive affect and traits such as extraversion, and between negative affect and neuroticism. Moreover, PANAS shows good discriminant validity, as it effectively differentiates between the two independent dimensions of affect. The scale has been validated across diverse cultural contexts, including an Indonesian version, which has also yielded reliable and valid results. This study employs the SWLS by Diener et al. (1985) and the PANAS by Watson, Clark, and Tellegen (1988) to assess both cognitive and affective aspects of life satisfaction. These scales were chosen to capture a comprehensive understanding of an individual's life satisfaction from both cognitive and emotional perspectives.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Test of Data Normality

To determine whether there is a difference in subjective well-being between early childhood teachers in Indonesia and Malaysia. One of the steps that must be taken is t-test. The assumption of the t-test is data normality; therefore, the initial step is to conduct a normality test on the data (Bailey et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2025). The normality test is an important step in statistical analysis, particularly when using the Independent Samples t-Test (Kenneh et al., 2023) . This test aims to evaluate whether the data distribution in each group follows a normal

distribution, which is one of the key assumptions of the independent t-test. Other assumptions that must also be met include the homogeneity of variances, which can be tested using Levene's Test, and the independence of observations between groups (Barroga et al., 2023).

If the data do not follow a normal distribution, the results of the t-test may become invalid, especially if the sample size is small (<30 per group) (Creswell & Inoue, 2024). In such cases, the use of an alternative test, such as the Mann-Whitney U Test, is recommended. In this study, the normality test was conducted using either the Kolmogorov-Smirnov or Shapiro-Wilk test. Kolmogorov-Smirnov is suitable for large samples, while Shapiro-Wilk is more sensitive to small samples and is more frequently recommended. The significance (p-value) of this test determines whether the data follow a normal distribution (Murry et al., 2023). If the p-value < 0.05, the data are considered non-normal, while if the p-value ≥ 0.05, the data are considered to follow a normal distribution. When the data are non-normal, several steps can be taken, such as applying data transformation (e.g., logarithmic or square root), using non-parametric tests such as the Mann-Whitney U Test, or increasing the sample size. With a sufficiently large sample size (usually >30 per group), the Central Limit Theorem states that the sample mean will approach a normal distribution, even if individual data points are not normally distributed. The following are the results of the normality test in this study:

Table 1
Data Test of Normality

Negara	Test	Statistic	df	p
Indonesia	Kolmogorov–Smirnov	.136	103	< .001
	Shapiro–Wilk	.944	103	< .001
Malaysia	Kolmogorov–Smirnov	.151	72	< .001
	Shapiro–Wilk	.931	72	< .001

Note. SWB = Subjective Well-Being.

The normality test was conducted to evaluate whether the Subjective Well-Being (SWB) scores in the respondent groups from Indonesia and Malaysia follow a normal distribution. Two methods were used for this test: the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test with Lilliefors significance correction and the Shapiro-Wilk test.

The results for the Indonesia group showed that the Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic was 0.136 with 103 degrees of freedom (df) and a significance (Sig.) < 0.001. The Shapiro-Wilk test yielded a statistic of 0.944 with the same df of 103 and Sig. < 0.001. Both results indicated that the SWB score distribution in the Indonesia group significantly deviates from normal distribution (p < 0.05) (G. Tang, 2025).

For the Malaysia group, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test showed a statistic of 0.151 with 72 df and Sig. < 0.001, while the Shapiro-Wilk test resulted in a statistic of 0.931 with 72 df and Sig. < 0.001. Similar to the Indonesia group, these results also indicated that the SWB score distribution in the Malaysia group significantly deviates from normal distribution (p < 0.05). Based on the results of both normality tests, the SWB score distributions for both the Indonesia and Malaysia groups did not meet the normality assumption. Therefore, it is recommended to use non-parametric statistical analysis for further testing, such as the Mann-Whitney U test to compare scores between the two groups, or the Spearman Correlation test if there is an analysis of relationships between variables. The use of these methods is more appropriate as they do not rely on the assumption of data normality (Field, 2018).

Mann-Whitney U Test

The Mann-Whitney U Test is a non-parametric statistical test used to compare two independent groups (Wyder, 2025). It serves as an alternative to the Independent Samples t-Test and is applied when data do not meet the assumptions of normality or homogeneity of variance. This test is particularly suitable for ordinal data or data with a non-normal

distribution, as it operates by comparing the ranks of data from the two groups, rather than their raw values.

The primary objective of the Mann-Whitney test is to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between the medians of the two groups (Onwuegbuzie, 2025). The procedure involves combining the data from both groups, ranking them collectively, calculating the sum of ranks for each group, and computing the U statistic. The U value is then compared to the critical values in the Mann-Whitney distribution table or assessed for significance using the p-value.

In this test, the null hypothesis (H_0) posits that there is no significant difference between the medians of the two groups, while the alternative hypothesis (H_1) asserts the contrary. The decision criterion is based on the p-value: if p-value < 0.05, H_0 is rejected, indicating a significant difference between the two groups. Conversely, if p-value ≥ 0.05, H_0 is not rejected, suggesting no significant difference. The Mann-Whitney U Test offers several advantages: it does not require the assumption of normality, is applicable to ordinal data, and is not affected by outliers. However, its limitations include the lack of detailed information regarding effect size and lower efficiency compared to parametric tests when the data are normally distributed. This test is frequently employed in research comparing two independent groups, especially when the data are non-normally distributed or contain outliers. In this study, the Mann-Whitney U Test was applied to compare subjective well-being levels between two groups of teachers from Malaysia and Indonesia. The results of the Mann-Whitney test are presented in the table below:

Table 2
Mann-Whitney U Test

Test Statistics[a]

	ScoreSWB
Mann-Whitney U	2914.000
Wilcoxon W	8270.000
Z	-2.421
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.015

a. Grouping Variable: Nationality INA MAS

The following is an explanation of the Mann-Whitney test table above: If the Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value in the Mann-Whitney test is 0.015, we need to interpret the results based on the significance level set beforehand (usually 0.05). The steps for interpreting the results are as follows:

1. The significance value (Asymp. Sig.) provided is 0.015.
2. The commonly used significance level (α) is 0.05.

Interpretation:

• If Asymp. Sig. < 0.05: The result is significant, meaning there is a significant difference between the two groups being compared.

• If Asymp. Sig. ≥ 0.05: The result is not significant, meaning there is no substantial difference between the two groups.

Conclusion for a value of 0.015: Since 0.015 is smaller than 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis (H_0) and accept the alternative hypothesis (H_1). This indicates that there is a significant difference between the two groups compared in the Mann-Whitney test.

The Mann-Whitney test analysis of the data in this study shows that the Mann-Whitney U value is 2914.000, the Wilcoxon W value is 8270.000, and the Z value is -2.421. The significance value obtained is 0.015 (Asymp. Sig. 2-tailed), which is smaller than the commonly used significance level in research, α = 0.05. Based on the hypothesis testing criteria, if the significance value (p-value) < α, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected. In this context, the null hypothesis states that there is no difference in the median Subjective Well-Being (SWB) scores between groups based on the country variable, while the alternative hypothesis (H_1) suggests that a difference in the median exists. Therefore, the rejection of the null hypothesis indicates a

statistically significant difference between the SWB scores of the respondent groups from Indonesia and Malaysia.

The Mann-Whitney test is used in situations where the data do not meet the assumptions of normality or homogeneity of variance. This test works by comparing the ranks of the data rather than their raw values, meaning it does not require normally distributed data. In this analysis, the rejection of H_0 means that the SWB score distributions between the two country groups are not identical. However, the Mann-Whitney test does not provide detailed information about the direction of the difference (whether Indonesia's SWB scores are higher or lower than Malaysia's) or the magnitude of the difference. To obtain additional information, descriptive analysis is necessary, such as calculating the median value for each group.

Moreover, the interpretation of these statistical results should be linked to the research context. A significant difference in SWB scores may reflect cultural differences, educational policies, or socio-economic factors between Indonesia and Malaysia that influence the subjective well-being of early childhood educators in both countries. These findings can serve as a foundation for policymakers to understand the factors affecting teachers' well-being and to design appropriate intervention programs to improve their quality of life.

Overall, the Mann-Whitney test has provided evidence that there is a significant difference between the median SWB scores of the two country groups. With a p-value of 0.015, this result offers a high level of confidence in the difference found in this study.

Table 3
Rank of SWB Score

Ranks

	Nationality	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
SWB Score	Indonesia	128	80.29	8270.00
	Malaysia	72	99.03	7130.00
	Total	175		

The results of the Mann-Whitney test provide information regarding the comparison between two groups, namely early childhood education (ECE) teachers in Indonesia and Malaysia, based on their Subjective Well-Being (SWB) scores. The sample size for the Indonesia group consists of 103 teachers, while the Malaysia group includes 72 teachers, indicating that the Indonesia group has more participants than the Malaysia group. Regarding the mean ranks, the Indonesia group has a mean rank of 80.29, whereas the Malaysia group has a higher mean rank of 99.03. This suggests that, overall, teachers in Malaysia tend to have higher SWB scores than those in Indonesia.

Furthermore, the sum of ranks for Indonesia is 8270, while for Malaysia it is 7130. Despite the higher sum of ranks in Indonesia, this indicates that the distribution of ranks in the Indonesia group is more varied compared to the Malaysia group. This means that, although the mean rank is lower, the SWB scores of individuals in Indonesia are more dispersed or diverse compared to those in Malaysia.

In conclusion, the results of this Mann-Whitney test indicate that ECE teachers in Malaysia tend to have higher SWB scores compared to those in Indonesia, as reflected by the higher mean rank in Malaysia.

Regression Analysis

Simple regression analysis is a statistical method employed to examine the relationship between a single dependent variable and one independent variable (Cresswell et al., 2023). Its primary objective is to predict the dependent variable's value based on the independent variable and to assess the extent to which the independent variable accounts for the variance observed in the dependent variable.

The influence of work tenure on Subjective Well-Being (SWB)

The following is a table of coefficients from the regression analysis of work tenure on Subjective Well-Being among early childhood education (ECE) teachers in Indonesia and Malaysia.

Table 4

Regression Analysis Results of Work Tenure on Subjective Well-Being (SWB)

The results of the simple regression analysis indicate that work tenure does not have a significant effect on the subjective well-being (SWB) of early childhood education (ECE) teachers. Based on the coefficients table, the regression equation derived is as follows:

SWB = 45.495 - 0.040WORKTENURE

The constant value of 45.495 suggests that if work tenure equals zero, the predicted SWB of ECE teachers would be 45.495. This constant is statistically significant, with a t-value of 70.476 and a p-value of 0.000, indicating significance at the 0.05 level. However, the regression coefficient for work tenure is -0.040, indicating that each additional unit of work tenure reduces the predicted SWB score by 0.040 points. Although this relationship is negative, the p-value of 0.495 and t-value of -0.683 suggest that the relationship is not statistically significant. Furthermore, the standardized Beta coefficient of -0.052 indicates that work tenure has a very minimal effect on SWB when the data scale is taken into account. In conclusion, work tenure does not have a significant impact on the SWB of ECE teachers both for Indonesian and Malaysian teachers. This finding implies that work tenure is not a key predictor of variations in SWB in this study.

The Influence of Gender on Subjective Well-Being (SWB)

The following is a table of coefficients from the regression analysis of the effect of gender on Subjective Well-Being (SWB).

Table 5

Regression Analysis of Gender on Subjective Well-Being (SWB).

Coefficients[a]

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	45.495	.646		70.476	.000
	Worktenure	-.040	.059	-.052	-.683	.495

a. Dependent Variable: SWB

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	41.596	2.311		18.001	.000
	Gender	1.832	1.192	.116	1.538	.126

a. Dependent Variable: SWB

Based on the results of the simple regression analysis in the table above, this study aims to examine the effect of the gender variable (G) on the subjective well-being (SWB) of early childhood education (ECE) teachers. From the coefficients table, the regression equation derived is: SWB = 41.596 + 1.832Gender

The interpretation of this regression equation is as follows: the constant value (B = 41.596) indicates the average predicted SWB when the gender variable is zero. Meanwhile, the regression coefficient for gender (B = 1.832) suggests that for each one-unit increase in the gender variable (for

example, when the gender code changes from 0 to 1), the predicted SWB value will increase by 1.832. However, the statistical significance of the gender regression coefficient should be noted. The t-value for the gender variable is 1.538, with a p-value (Sig.) of 0.126, which is greater than the standard significance level of 0.05. Therefore, it can be concluded that the effect of gender on SWB is not statistically significant. In other words, within the context of this study, there is insufficient evidence to suggest that gender significantly influences the subjective well-being of ECE teachers. Additionally, the standardized Beta coefficient value of 0.116 indicates that gender contributes very little to explaining the variation in SWB. In other words, the relationship between gender and SWB is weak in this model.

These results suggest that gender is not a major factor influencing the subjective well-being of ECE teachers in Indonesia and Malaysia. It is therefore recommended to include other more relevant independent variables, such as working conditions, social support, or cultural factors, to strengthen the research model. Further analysis could also be conducted to explore other factors that may have a significant impact on SWB. In conclusion, although there is an indication of a positive relationship between gender and SWB, this relationship is not statistically significant and has a minimal effect on the variability of SWB in this study.

In this study, which examined the Subjective Well-being (SWB) of early childhood education (ECE) teachers in Indonesia and Malaysia, gender was considered as an independent variable. The statistical results from the regression analysis indicate that gender did not significantly influence the respondents' SWB. Specifically, the t-value associated with the gender regression coefficient was 1.538, with a corresponding p-value (Sig.) of 0.126. This p-value is considerably higher than the conventional threshold for statistical significance, typically set at 0.05. Consequently, the null hypothesis—that gender has no effect on SWB—cannot be rejected.

From these results, it's reasonable to conclude that within the parameters of this study, there isn't sufficient empirical evidence to assert that gender plays a significant role in shaping the SWB of ECE teachers. The lack of statistical significance implies that any observed differences in SWB between male and female teachers are likely due to random variation rather than a genuine underlying effect of gender. This conclusion is further supported by the standardized Beta coefficient for gender, which was reported as 0.116. This value indicates a relatively weak relationship between gender and SWB. In standardized terms, a Beta coefficient close to zero suggests that the predictor variable—in this case, gender—accounts for only a small proportion of the variance in the outcome variable.

The weak and statistically non-significant influence of gender found in this analysis aligns with several previous studies in the field of teacher well-being, which suggest that gender may not be a determining factor when compared to other socio-contextual and occupational factors. While gender-based differences in psychological and emotional responses have been widely documented in the broader psychological literature, their specific relevance within professional environments—particularly among early childhood educators—might be overshadowed by more direct and impactful variables. For example, factors such as workload, job security, access to professional development, workplace relationships, and institutional support often exert a stronger influence on overall teacher well-being. Moreover, cultural variables may also play a pivotal role in shaping SWB. In a cross-national study such as this, where teachers from two distinct national and cultural contexts—Indonesia and Malaysia—are compared, the influence of cultural expectations, gender norms, and societal values on teacher well-being should not be underestimated. Cultural frameworks influence not only how individuals experience well-being but also how they report and interpret it, thereby adding another layer of complexity to the interpretation of gender-related findings.

Another avenue for future investigation could involve qualitative methods to explore in greater depth the lived experiences of male and female ECE teachers. While the quantitative data in this study indicate no significant gender effect, qualitative interviews or focus group discussions may reveal subtle gendered dynamics in work-life balance, caregiving responsibilities, or perceptions of professional identity that are not easily captured through survey-based instruments

In summary, the current findings highlight that gender, while a potentially relevant demographic variable, had no statistically significant or practically substantial impact on the subjective well-being of early childhood education teachers within the sampled context. The positive coefficient suggests a possible trend where gender might have a directional relationship with SWB, but the lack of statistical significance and the small Beta value indicate a negligible explanatory role. These results underscore the necessity of incorporating more context-grounded, occupationally relevant, and psychosocially rich variables into research models to better understand the multifaceted nature of teacher well-being. Consequently, future research should aim to refine analytical models by integrating variables that more accurately reflect the realities of the teaching profession, thereby yielding more meaningful and actionable insights for policy and practice.

DISCUSSION

This study's primary finding reveals a statistically significant difference in Subjective Well-being (SWB) levels between early childhood education (ECE) teachers in Indonesia and Malaysia. Utilizing a Mann-Whitney U test, it was determined that Malaysian teachers reported significantly higher SWB scores than their Indonesian counterparts ($p=0.015$). This suggests that contextual and systemic differences, such as national education policies, cultural norms, or institutional support, may influence teacher well-being. Interestingly, neither gender nor years of service were found to significantly impact SWB levels in either country, indicating that structural or external environmental factors might be more influential than individual demographics in shaping teachers' subjective well-being.

This study diverges from prior findings in several significant ways. While Collie (2023) highlighted job demands and resources as primary determinants of teacher well-being, our research underscores the national context (Indonesia vs. Malaysia) as a more significant differentiating factor. Munusamy et al. (2024) focused on mental health predictors among Malaysian educators but did not offer cross-border comparisons. Similarly, Tang et al. (2022) discussed parental perceptions in Malaysian early childhood education without directly addressing teacher well-being.

Furthermore, our findings contrast with Jeon et al. (2024), who identified burnout and depression as predictors, as this study found neither years of service nor gender to be significant factors. Helliwell et al. (2021) emphasized global happiness metrics, but this research narrows its focus to a specific professional group within Southeast Asia. Nartova-Bochaver et al. (2019) explored multidimensional well-being from a justice perspective, whereas this study employs a national comparative lens. Renshaw & Chenier (2019) suggested targeted screening for Subjective Well-being (SWB), while our research calls for systemic policy reform. Finally, Nilsson et al. (2022) discussed personality estimations in SWB; however, this study emphasizes environmental influences rather than personality traits. Overall, this research adds value by emphasizing cross-country differences and highlighting that SWB is shaped by macro-level policies and cultural norms, rather than solely by individual or intra-institutional factors.

These findings carry substantial implications for both policy and practice. The recognition that Malaysian early childhood education (ECE) teachers experience higher Subjective Well-being (SWB) than their Indonesian counterparts suggests that Indonesia needs to examine its ECE policy structures, institutional support, and teacher development systems. Our results call for targeted policy interventions to address contextual issues like workload, resource availability, and social support networks. Education stakeholders can leverage these insights to design well-being-centric programs, promote a healthier work-life balance, and institutionalize psychological support services for teachers. More broadly, an improvement in teacher well-being is likely to enhance the quality of early childhood education, ultimately benefiting student outcomes and educational equity across Southeast Asia.

While this study offers valuable contributions, it's important to acknowledge several limitations. First, the use of a convenience sampling method may restrict the generalizability of our findings across the entire population of early childhood education teachers in both countries. Second, data collection relied solely on self-reported measures, which are susceptible

to social desirability bias and personal interpretation. Third, despite employing non-parametric statistics to address non-normal distributions, the study lacks qualitative insights into the lived experiences of teachers. Additionally, the analysis was limited to a narrow set of demographic variables (gender and years of service), excluding potentially influential factors such as income levels, school infrastructure, or emotional labor. Finally, the cross-sectional design prevents us from assessing causality or changes in Subjective Well-being over time.

Future research should expand in several directions to build upon these findings. First, employing mixed methods or longitudinal designs could offer deeper insights into the dynamics and evolution of SWB among early childhood education (ECE) teachers. Second, future studies should integrate a wider range of variables, such as teacher autonomy, perceived organizational justice, parental involvement, and salary satisfaction. Additionally, researchers should include more Southeast Asian countries (e.g., Thailand, Vietnam, Philippines) to explore regional patterns in teacher well-being. A qualitative component—interviews or focus groups—would also help capture contextual nuances that quantitative data might overlook. Finally, future frameworks could adopt an intersectionality analysis, investigating how combinations of gender, class, and professional roles intersect to shape subjective well-being within educational settings.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference in the level of Subjective Well-Being (SWB) between early childhood education (ECE) teachers in Indonesia and Malaysia. This is evidenced by the Mann-Whitney test, which shows an Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.015, which is smaller than the significance level of 0.05, indicating a significant difference between the two country groups.

This difference suggests that the country factor, specifically Indonesia and Malaysia, influences the SWB levels of ECE teachers, although other factors, such as gender and work tenure, do not have a significant impact on SWB. This conclusion is supported by the regression analysis results, which indicate that gender and work tenure do not significantly affect the subjective well-being of teachers.

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended to further develop theories related to Subjective Well-Being (SWB), particularly in the context of the early childhood education (ECE) teaching profession. One theoretical suggestion is to conduct more in-depth research that explores various factors influencing the SWB of ECE teachers, taking into account the social, cultural, and educational policy contexts in each country.

Existing theories of subjective well-being, such as Maslow's theory of basic needs or self-determination theory, could be expanded by incorporating job-specific variables, such as social support, job satisfaction, and work-life balance, which are more relevant to the ECE profession. Furthermore, future research should explore the interaction between individual factors (such as gender and work tenure) and external factors (such as educational policies and organizational culture), which may have a more complex impact on the subjective well-being of teachers.

From a practical perspective, the findings of this study provide valuable insights for policymakers, educational administrators, and relevant institutions aiming to improve the well-being of early childhood education (ECE) teachers. Given the differences in SWB between teachers in Indonesia and Malaysia, it is crucial for stakeholders to consider educational policies that more effectively support teacher well-being, such as reducing workload, enhancing social support, and providing adequate facilities to promote work-life balance.

Since gender and work tenure do not significantly influence SWB, greater attention should be directed towards external factors affecting teacher well-being, such as professional development programs, enhancing the social status of the teaching profession, and offering relevant incentives to increase job satisfaction and motivation.

Governments and educational institutions can design programs focused on strengthening factors that have proven to impact the SWB of ECE teachers. This might include enhancing emotional and social support in the workplace, creating a more inclusive work

environment, and providing clearer career development opportunities. Policy programs that take into account the contextual factors relevant to each country can help bring about positive changes in the quality of life and subjective well-being of ECE teachers, which, in turn, will have an impact on the quality of early childhood education in both countries. This study shows a significant difference in the level of Subjective Well-Being (SWB) between ECE teachers in Indonesia and Malaysia, with teachers in Malaysia having higher SWB scores. This difference is not influenced by gender or length of service, as shown by the results of the regression analysis. This finding confirms that the context of education policy and the socio-cultural environment of a country play an important role in shaping the well-being of ECE teachers.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Teguh Fachmi is responsible for constructing the conceptual framework, drafting the manuscript, and conducting a preliminary analysis of the research phenomenon. Seah Siok Peh is tasked with the dissemination and collection of data. Rohman holds responsibility for performing data analysis, interpreting the findings, and finalizing the research outcomes.

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