

Effectiveness of Happiness Curriculum

A Positive Psychology Intervention in Schools by the Government of Delhi

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Abstract

One of the fundamental goals of education focuses on the overall well-being of children. The purpose of this study was to undertake a preliminary analysis of the implementation and effectiveness of the happiness curriculum introduced by the Delhi Government in the schools from nursery to class eighth. The perspectives of the teachers, parents and students towards the happiness curriculum were studied.

The sample consisted of 300 students (6th to 8th class) taken from ten schools. 60 teachers and 60 parents were also included. Qualitative data was collected via semi-structured questionnaire given to students, teachers, and parents. The questionnaire covered different aspects of the curriculum and the concept of happiness. Majority of students, teachers and parents were found to be satisfied with the Happiness Curriculum and opined that it should be continued and implemented in senior classes also.

INTRODUCTION

One of the fundamental goals of education focuses on the overall well-being of the children. Gandhiji (in Harijan, 1937) had emphasised on the development of mind, body, and soul

in a harmonious way. “By education I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man— body, mind and spirit.” Besides learning of the three R’s, Reading, Writing and Arithmetic in school, he insisted

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and emphasised on the development of three H's— Hand (psycho-motor domain), Heart (affective domain) and Head (cognitive domain) in the schools. Thus, the aim of education should be to develop the integrated personality of the child.

Aristotle, the ancient Greek philosopher put it rightly that, “Happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life, the whole aim and the end of human existence.” Unfortunately, the sole aim of education seems to be shifted towards marks or tests which have taken away the joy of learning and drifted away the focus from whole-child teaching and learning to rote learning. It is thus, creating stress and burden on children and making them anxious and depressed (WHO, 2012) instead of happy, creative, and productive citizens. In schools, less or rather no time is spent on child's social-emotional and behavioural learning (Bailey, Meland, Brion-Meisels, and Jones, 2019). Even when there are some activities regarding this, it may be done without giving much thought to it and in the absence of a systematic rationale and guidelines.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) of USA emphasises the development of social and emotional aspects along with the academic component. It emphasises on managing emotions, having positive goals and relationships. It advocates for a systemic social and emotional learning (SEL) of the children which

tries to promote happiness, mental health and reducing risk behaviour in children and youth (Payton, Wardlaw, Graczyk, Bloodworth, Tompsett and Weissberg, 2000).

UNESCO pioneered “The Happy Schools Project” in Bangkok (June, 2014) with the intention of promoting happiness in schools through enhanced learner's well-being and holistic development. In India also, a few initiatives have been taken to achieve the goal of happiness. The Government of Madhya Pradesh has started a department of happiness in the year 2016. A Centre for Happiness has been started in IIT Kharagpur with an aim of creating awareness, understanding, and encouraging research on happiness. The Government of Delhi has specifically come up with a Happiness Curriculum (July, 2018) in their schools for students from nursery to class eighth.

Thus, everybody (educationists, government as well as the parents) aim at making children happy. One of the reasons for approaching happiness in a systematic and structured way is the increasing number of mental health related issues in the present-day society (APA, 2019 and WHO, 2003). The 21st century of technological advancement and focus on high career goals and aspirations, have led to dissatisfaction, confusion, stress, and other mental health related problems. (Pew Research Center, 2018). Happiness is one of the important variables that is found

to be related to various aspects of our life including academic achievement (Heidari, 2009). Dr. Emma Seppala, author of 'The Happiness Track' discusses why well-being needs to be a priority in the 21st century classrooms, *Letting Happiness Flourish in the Classroom*. She says, "Happy kids show up at school more and able to learn because they tend to sleep better and may have healthier immune systems. Happy kids learn faster and think more creatively. Happy kids tend to be more resilient in the face of failures. Happy kids have stronger relationships and make new friends more easily." (Amico, 2016, August 8, *Happiness in the Classroom*). Happiness is directly related to adaptive functions such as psychological adjustment, physical health, and problem-solving skill (Jackson, Wiz and Lundquist, 2003). Being happy is of great importance to most people, and happiness has been found to be a highly valued goal in most societies (Diener and Seligman, 2002).

Hence, based on the empirical significance of happiness, school-based interventions need to be taken up to promote happiness in children. In this regard, the present research tried to assess the effectiveness of the Happiness Curriculum designed and implemented by the Government of Delhi in schools from nursery to Class VIII.

The Happiness Curriculum

The Happiness Curriculum, an initiative by the Government of Delhi, is taught in all the Delhi Government schools from nursery to Class VIII in a bid to promote happiness among children with the following objectives—

- to develop self-awareness and mindfulness amongst learners;
- to inculcate skill of critical thinking and inquiry in the learners;
- to enable learners to communicate effectively and express themselves freely and creatively;
- to help learners to understand their expectations in relationships, develop empathy, and ensure healthy relationships with family, peers and teachers;
- to enable learners to apply life skills to deal with stressful and conflicting situations around them;
- to develop social awareness and human values in learners to engage in meaningful contribution in society and
- to develop holistic approach to education in a universal context.

(Education Department, Government of NCT of Delhi, 2019. *Happiness Curriculum Framework*.)

The Happiness Curriculum was implemented in the schools by the Govt. of Delhi in July 2018. The curriculum is designed separately for nursery to Class II, Class III to V and Class VI to VIII. The curriculum involves a happiness period of

45 minutes and five minutes of meditation in the beginning of each class. The curriculum has four parts which includes mindfulness, stories, activities and expression. In mindfulness, students are asked to focus the attention through different activities such as listening attentively, being aware about different sounds, see and observe things more attentively in their present environment, etc.

Stories are used to make the children think, analyse, and reflect on some aspects related to values, life, and society. In the Happiness Curriculum, such stories are included which can bring the change in the behaviour of children. The purpose of stories is to stimulate creative thinking of children.

Activities component of the Happiness Curriculum requires the students to do some activity related to self, society and nature which are fun to engage in.

In expressions component, teachers ask questions on the last day of the week, facilitating free speech from children. These questions enable the teachers find out whether students are putting the lessons learned to practice in their day-to-day life or not.

The main aim of the present study was to find out the effectiveness of the Happiness Curriculum and the perception of the stakeholders of children, teachers as well as parents towards it. The study focused only on Classes VI to VIII.

Methodology

Objectives

- To undertake a preliminary analysis of the implementation and effectiveness of the Happiness Curriculum introduced by the Delhi Government in the schools.
- To study the perspectives of the teachers, parents and students towards the Happiness Curriculum.

Sample

The Happiness Curriculum is implemented in all the schools of Delhi government. The schools are divided into various zones covering the entire Delhi. The present study focused only on the south zone schools of Delhi.

In this study, a sample of 300 students (150 girls and 150 boys) from Classes VI to VIII, were taken. Students were taken from ten Sarvodaya Senior Secondary Coeducational schools of Directorate of Education (DoE), Delhi. There were 10 students, 2 teachers and 2 parents from each class (6th to 8th) from each school. Thus, a total of 60 teachers and 60 parents were also included in the present study.

Tools

Data was collected through questionnaire (bilingual— Hindi and English) given to students, teachers, and parents. The questionnaire covered different aspects of the curriculum and the concept of happiness. While administering the questionnaire, the researcher directly asked the questions and collected the

responses to clarify any doubts while answering the questionnaire.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data was collected using the questionnaires and the items included in the questionnaires were grouped into the following main components:

The responses of students, teachers and parents on the questionnaires were analysed based on the above components. The findings are presented below in Tables 2–5 which gives a comparative analysis of the responses provided by students, teachers, and parents.

Table 1
Components in the Questionnaires

S. No.	Components
1.	Orientation about Happiness Curriculum
2.	Expectation from Happiness Curriculum
3.	Content of the Happiness Curriculum
4.	Impact of the Happiness Curriculum on Students
5.	Meaning of Happiness (student/teacher/parents)
6.	What can a student/teacher/parents do to create happiness?
7.	Overall Feedback

The responses of students, teachers and parents on the questionnaires were analysed based on the above components.

Orientation and Expectation from the Curriculum

Analysing the data in Table 2, we can see that regarding the orientation

Table 2
A Comparative Analysis of the Responses Provided by Students, Teachers and Parents

Happiness Curriculum	Responses			
	Students		Teachers	Parents
	Boys	Girls		
Orientation	93.4% reported 'Yes' and 6.6% 'No'.	83.3% reported 'Yes' and 17.7% 'No'.	68.4% got one day orientation about the Happiness Curriculum; 31.6% did not get any orientation.	82% said, 'Yes' and 18% said 'No' orientation was given.

Expectations	Learn to behave nicely and study will be better, concentrate, relax (40%), enjoy, and will listen stories and do activities (30%), learn to behave nicely and help others (20%) and play games (10 %)	Enjoy/do activities (30%), learn good things, (20%), learn stories and enjoy (20%), laugh whole day (10%) and learn to behave nicely and study will be better, will be able to concentrate and relax (10%).	-	Happy children (38%), better study (36%), and good behaviour/ human being, relieved from tension, able to concentrate and do-good things, etc. (32%).
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on Happiness Curriculum, there is a need for proper training to all the teachers involved in the curriculum transaction. This is reflected in the Figure 1 below:

As it is clearly shown by the results that substantial number of teachers (31.6%) were not oriented about the Happiness Curriculum. Teachers

are main stakeholder group within a change, who formally and informally shape the change processes and associated initiatives (Dudar et. al., 2017). Hence it is very important that teachers get proper orientation so that they can deliver on it. However, it is interesting to note that in response to the question on

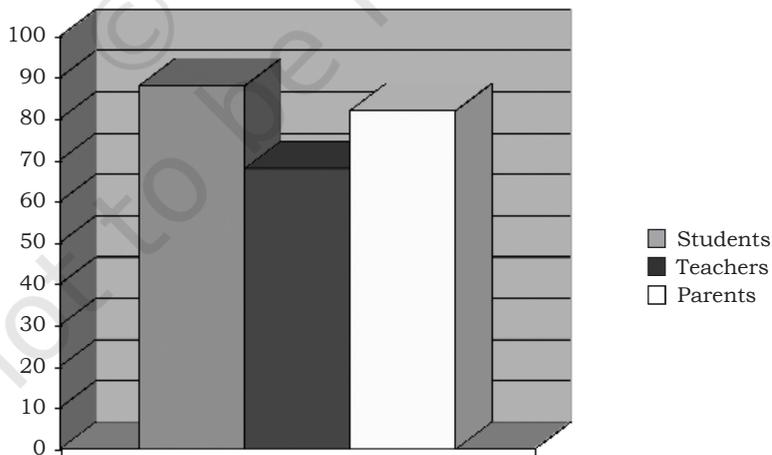


Figure 1: Orientation about Happiness Curriculum

'Do you feel competent to carry out this curriculum?' 93.3 per cent of the teachers responded that they feel competent whereas 6.6 per cent do not feel competent and feel that proper training should be given.

Consonance was found in the responses of students and teachers which show that both enjoy teaching and learning in this period of happiness. 100 per cent students (both boys and girls) look forward for this period. 96.6 per cent of the teachers observed that students enjoy and wait for this period as there is no burden of homework and exams. They feel free, get to express themselves and participate. Expectations about the curriculum

reflected that the students anticipated doing different activities in the happiness period. They also expected that the happiness curriculum will help them in achieving good academic performance (40% boys and 10% girls) and learning good behaviour (60% boys and 30% girls). Listening stories and enjoying were common expectations as reported by the girls (30%) and boys (40%).

The result findings reveal that students and teachers both enjoy teaching and learning in this period of happiness. And both talk about behaving nicely, studying well and being a good human being as expectations from the happiness curriculum.

Table 3
A Comparative Analysis of the Responses Provided by Students, Teachers and Parents

Happiness Curriculum	Responses			
	Students		Teachers	Parents
	Boys	Girls		
Content (Mindfulness, Story, Activities, and Expression)	66.6% like stories as they are interesting, easy to understand and teach good new things; 26.6% like activities/games, and 22.2% like mindfulness as it relaxes and gives peace of mind.	like stories (57.7%), activities/games (26.6%), mindfulness (17.7%) and expression (4.4%) as they get to share their feelings. 37.7% found difficulty in expression as it is difficult to share because of fear of classmate laughing, etc., 31.1%	53.3% said Activities (are good and easy to carry out, students get involved and enjoy) and expression (because students share their experience and full class participate enthusiastically), 40% said stories, because these are very interesting,	

	<p>40% found mindfulness difficult because it is difficult to close eyes, concentrate, too much noise, get, headache, etc., 22.2% expression, 13.3% found activities difficult as they don't have space in the class, difficult to carry out, 13.3% found no difficulty, 4.4% stories as found it boring.</p>	<p>mindfulness, difficult to close eyes, concentrate, too much noise, get, headache, etc., 15.5% found activities difficult as they don't have space in the class, difficult to carry out, 11.1 found no difficulty, 2.2% stories as found it boring.</p>	<p>students can easily connect with these and develop good learning, 13.3% said all four blocks are good, 13.3% said mindfulness as it helps students to calm down. 56.6% said all are good, no block is difficult, 20% said mindfulness as students find it difficult and vague 13.3% said stories because some stories are beyond the level of children's understanding, some are too lengthy and too preachy and are tough for students, 13.3% said expression because they feel conscious that other students will laugh/make fun.</p>	
<p>Impact on Students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attention in the class: • Behaviour with classmates, teachers or other school staff, parents • Studies/ Academic performance: 	<p>95.6% (Both male and female) said it has become better and improving, 4.4% says no improvement</p>		<p>96.6% said yes that there is a change although very early to say and only 3.3% says there is no change at all.</p>	<p>91.6% said studies and 95.6% said yes to change in behaviour and concentration.</p>

The Content and the Impact of the Curriculum

The instructions regarding the Happiness Curriculum were found to be easy to understand and carry out as reported by 99 per cent students and 96.6 per cent teachers (refer Table 2).

Findings indicated mindfulness to be the most difficult part (40% boys, 31.1% girls and 20% teachers). It is interesting to note that though the teachers felt that mindfulness was the best part of the curriculum, yet it was reported to be difficult to implement. Stories were reported to be easy and interesting and they can easily connect (66.6% boys, 57.7% girls, and 33.3% teachers).

Girls (37.7%) as compared to boys (22.2%) found more difficulty in expression because of fear of classmates laughing, etc. The teachers also reported students having difficulty in expression because they feel conscious that other students will laugh and make fun. Most of the students found stories easy and interesting with similar observations by teachers also.

The curriculum also required the students to share and discuss the stories or activities conducted in the happiness period with their parents. Data indicated 83 per cent students share with the parents, whereas 16 per cent don't share as either parents don't have time or forget to ask, and sometimes children don't get time or forget to share and 1 per cent share sometimes. 87 per cent of the

parents also said their child shares and discusses the stories or activities conducted in the happiness period, 8.7 per cent said 'no', 4.3 per cent sometimes.

The importance of the happiness curriculum was also reflected when the teachers reported (63.3%) that Happiness Curriculum should be for all classes, extending to students of Classes IX to XII as well. They observed that it brings positive thinking, happiness, and enthusiasm, able to express themselves, relieves tension or stress, pressure of board exams. Whereas 10 per cent of the teachers emphasised on mindfulness component only instead of the whole curriculum as it helps in concentration and relieves stress and tension. However, 26.6 per cent of teachers did not want the introduction of Happiness Curriculum to the higher classes as students in higher classes need more time and concentration to study and clear board exams. On the other hand, only 8.7 per cent of parents said 'No' for it in the higher classes, and 87 per cent of the parents agreed for it as the curriculum will help students to learn good things, reduce stress and tension of board exams.

Since mindfulness helps develop concentration, (Walsh and Shapiro, 2006) implementing mindfulness at higher classes will help the students in their study. This needs to be highlighted and conveyed to the stakeholders that it will also help the students in their study along with other benefits.

Table 4
A Comparative Analysis of the Responses Provided by
Students, Teachers and Parents

Components	Responses			
	Students		Teachers	Parents
	Boys	Girls		
Meaning of happiness	33.3% helping someone/ others, 17.3% seeing parents happy 13.3% playing games, 11.1% from within 6.6% peace of mind, 4.4% laughing, 4.4% by getting what you want, 4.4% being with friends, 2.2% respecting elders, 2.2% watching T.V., 2.2% mindfulness.	33.3% seeing parents or other significant (siblings, friends, teachers)happy, 22.2% helping someone/ others, 17.3% from within, peace of mind, 11.1 % playing and talking to friends, 2.8% watching T.V., dancing, etc.	73.3% said that happiness is peace of mind, feeling of contentment/ inner satisfaction, having meaningful work and life, fulfilled life, positive, working with full enjoyment and full participation with mind and body, loving and caring atmosphere at home, state of being and being in present moment, 10% feel happiness is seeing students are happy, when they share openly, when they enjoy and 16.6% miscellaneous like happiness from work, family, feeling relaxed and free, doing what you want.	22% says that my child's happiness, smile on my child's face 17% says that happiness is inner feeling which we get from inside. 17% says helping others/ weak and making them happy 13% says that happiness is peace of mind Miscellaneous: priceless thing, happiness you get from self, studying, playing games, it's a big thing, it's good, it makes us healthy.

<p>What makes you happy (for Students)/ What can you do to make the students/child happy (for Teachers/ Parents)?</p>	<p>42.2% helping someone/ others 17.7% Playing games, 17.3% by getting good marks, 13.3 by making friend and make them laugh, 6.6 respecting teachers and parents, 2.2 by watching T.V., eating, listening to stories</p>	<p>48.8% seeing parents or other significant (siblings, friends, teachers, 33.3% helping someone/others 8.8 by getting good marks, 6.6% watching T.V., eating, 4.4% listening to stories, dancing, drawing</p>	<p>56.6% by making the teaching more interesting, creative with activities, with play way method, engage them in activities 43.3% by listening/talking to them about their interests and get involved with, appreciating them, by supporting them rather than criticising them, praise their efforts, encourage them, have good rapport with them</p>	<p>43% says by fulfilling their wishes and loving them 17% giving them more time and listen to them 17% by helping him in his studies 13% being happy in their happiness 10% by giving things which he likes, can do anything</p>
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Meaning of Happiness and Ways to be Happy

Talking about perception of happiness in students, it was noted (see Table 4) that in male students it was helping others (33.3%), followed by seeing parents happy whereas in females, it was seeing parents or other significant happy (33.3%) followed by helping others. These results are supported by the previous findings that women tended to report higher happiness (Yue, Jiang, Arjan, Jia and Su-Xia 2017). This could be due to the gender role ideology that women tend to be sensitive to the needs of others and express their emotions more openly (Kaufman, 2000; Wood, Rhades and Whelan 1989). However, similar responses have been observed in other aspects such as happiness

was related to playing games by 13.3 per cent boys and 11.1 per cent girls.

Students (16.6 per cent boys and 12.8 per cent girls) also reported happiness in talking to friends, peace of mind, watching T.V., etc. These findings are supported by other studies which signify the importance of family, peer group relationships, leisure activities in positive mental health of adolescents (Singh, 2014).

Majority of the teachers (73.3%) related happiness to inner satisfaction, peace and meaningful work and life; whereas parents (47%) related happiness to inner satisfaction, peace and meaningful work and life. Further, teachers reported that students can be made happy by making teaching interesting and

activity based (56.6%) and listening to them (43.3%). Parents (43%) also said that children can be made happy by loving them and fulfilling their wishes. It can be noted that around 50 per cent of the teachers emphasised on making teaching interesting and activity based which is also supported by Lujan, and DiCarlo (2006) in their study, and listening to the students which is not very much prevalent in the present system of education. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF, 2005) talks about activity-based teaching-learning at the school, however, the implementation is lacking. (Brinkmann, 2015; UNICEF, 2015 and Takker, 2011).

The present study thus highlights a crucial element, i.e., activity-based, and joyful learning is important for happiness of school children. This is evidenced in the research study which ascertained that activity-based method is far better than the lecture as it is highly rewarding and changes the classroom environment into a place for exchanging the ideas rather than a passive listening (Kumari, 2017).

Overall Feedback

As we can see from Table 5, students found the Happiness Curriculum to be a very good experience. They stated that it can be of longer duration. Teachers commented that it has helped the students to be happy. They suggested for proper orientation in the curriculum and training about the ‘mindfulness’ component of the happiness curriculum. It was suggested that various non-governmental agencies (NGOs) can be made use for this purpose. Parents suggested Happiness Curriculum to be for all the classes.

The study has pointed out at a unanimous response from students as well as teachers enjoying the happiness period. The reason has been indicated as there is no burden of homework and examination. This has an important implication for our education system where everything centres on marks. This is also reflected when almost half of the students reported that the happiness curriculum will help them in achieving good academic performance. The findings of the study have significant implications for shifting from a

Table 5
A Comparative Analysis of the Responses Provided by Students, Teachers and Parents

Components	Responses			
	Students		Teachers	Parents
	Boys	Girls		
Overall feedback	97.8% (good or very good experience), only 2% (not happy)	97.8% (good or very good experience), 2% (it could be better).	96.6% said amazing, very good, interesting, inspiring whereas only 3.3% ok/not very satisfactory.	91.3% yes and 8.7% No

marks or score orientated education system towards a whole-child oriented system focusing on the overall growth integrating the hand, heart and head.

Overall, the Happiness Curriculum was found to have been effective in meeting its aims. It has been reported to be a very good experience by 97.8 per cent students and 96.6 per cent teachers. Parents (91.3%) also reported their child is happier than before.

The responses from students, teachers and parents show the congruency which validates the result that experience of happiness period is good or very good by not only students but teachers as well.

CONCLUSION

Happiness Curriculum has overall shown positive effects on students and teachers. Almost all students, teachers and parents reported it to be a great experience. Although most of the teachers felt competent to teach Happiness Curriculum, yet

it is suggested to organise proper orientation and short-term training program for better implementation of the curriculum. Especially there is need to provide training to teachers regarding the mindfulness component of the curriculum. Further, the findings also highlighted that the Happiness Curriculum needs to be initiated for higher class also, especially the mindfulness component.

The study will benefit policy makers, school teachers, students and parents as how happiness can be taught for the betterment of the students. Perception of happiness among various stakeholders needs to be considered and the suggestions given by the students, teachers and parents can be valuable inputs towards designing and implementing the curriculum in a more effective manner. It will enable to achieve the ultimate goal of education in creating happy students and enhancing their overall mental health.

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