



Beyond Competence: Rethinking Education for Holistic Well-Being and Happiness

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Abstract:

Traditional education systems often prioritize academic achievement and competency development while overlooking students' emotional well-being. However, increasing cases of stress, anxiety, and burnout among students highlight the need for a more balanced educational approach. This study explores the concept of happiness-based education, examining its impact on student motivation, engagement, and overall well-being. Using a qualitative approach with case studies and phenomenological analysis, the research investigates educational institutions that have successfully implemented happiness-centered learning models. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis related to policies on student well-being. The findings indicate that integrating mindfulness, social-emotional learning, and value-based curricula significantly enhances both academic performance and students' psychological development. Despite its benefits, challenges such as curriculum adjustments, teacher training, and policy support remain obstacles to widespread implementation. This study concludes that collaborative efforts between educators, parents, and policymakers are essential for sustaining happiness-based education and ensuring a holistic learning experience. Future research should focus on cross-cultural comparisons and long-term outcomes of this educational model.

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Introduction (مقدمة)

Education in the 21st century increasingly emphasizes academic achievement and cognitive competence as the primary indicators of student success. Educational systems focused on exam results and academic performance often overlook students' psychological and emotional well-being (OECD, 2021). Recent studies indicate that high academic demands negatively impact students' mental health, increasing stress and anxiety (Salmela-Aro et al., 2022). Therefore, there is an urgent need to redesign educational systems to be more inclusive of students' well-being and happiness.

Several studies have shown that psychological well-being is closely linked to students' academic performance. Students experiencing excessive stress tend to have lower motivation and academic achievement compared to those who balance competence with emotional well-being (Duckworth & Seligman, 2017). Thus, education systems should not focus solely on academic achievement but also integrate happiness as an essential part of the learning process.

The concept of happiness-based education has been growing in various countries such as Finland, Bhutan, and Japan, where emotional well-being and happiness are incorporated into the national curriculum (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2021). Finland's education model, for instance, emphasizes a balance between academics and emotional well-being by limiting school hours and ensuring ample time for rest and play (Sahlberg, 2015).

Additionally, a report by UNICEF (2020) shows that countries with high student happiness levels also have higher overall life satisfaction. This suggests that education focusing on well-being alongside competence positively impacts students' development. Happiness-based education can help students develop social skills, improve mental health, and create a more supportive learning environment (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

In positive psychology theory, Seligman (2011) introduced the PERMA model (Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment) to explain human well-being. This model demonstrates that happiness is not solely derived from academic achievement but also from social engagement, life purpose, and positive interpersonal relationships. Therefore, happiness-based education should consider multiple psychosocial factors in the learning process.

A longitudinal study in the United States found that students who have positive and enjoyable learning experiences are more likely to develop better emotional intelligence and critical thinking skills (Froh et al., 2019). This finding strengthens the argument that an education system focused solely on academic competence may hinder the development of students' social and emotional skills.

One challenge in integrating happiness into education systems is the lack of awareness and policies supporting this approach. In many countries, education remains centered on rigid assessments and high academic pressure, often neglecting student well-being (Noddings, 2013). Thus, a shift in educational policies and paradigms is necessary to support this initiative.

Furthermore, integrating technology into modern education can enhance students' well-being. Technology-based learning offers more interactive and enjoyable experiences while reducing excessive academic burdens (Selwyn, 2020). The use of technology in education can create a more flexible environment, allowing students to learn at their own pace and according to their interests.

In the context of globalization and an increasingly dynamic job market, happiness-based education also plays a crucial role in preparing students for future challenges. Students who balance academics with well-being tend to be more resilient in handling pressure, have better interpersonal skills, and adapt more effectively to change (Diener et al., 2018).

This study aims to analyze how educational systems can be designed to enhance not only academic competence but also holistic student well-being. It will also explore educational models that have successfully integrated happiness into their curriculum and the challenges that may arise in implementing such an approach.

This study focuses on analyzing happiness-based education through a multidisciplinary approach involving educational psychology, education policy, and innovative pedagogy. It will explore various educational models implemented worldwide and evaluate their impact on students' well-being. Additionally, this study aims to identify concrete strategies for integrating happiness-based approaches into formal education systems at both school and university levels.



Method (منهج)

This study employs a qualitative research approach using case study and phenomenological analysis methods to explore the implementation of happiness-based education. A qualitative approach is appropriate for understanding complex and subjective experiences, particularly in education, where individual perceptions and institutional cultures shape learning environments (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study method enables an in-depth investigation of specific educational institutions that have integrated well-being into their curricula, while phenomenological analysis helps to uncover students' and educators' lived experiences regarding happiness-centered learning. An exploratory study was conducted in selected educational institutions that have adopted a happiness-based learning model. The goal was to examine how these institutions structure their curricula, teaching methodologies, and assessment strategies to enhance students' well-being. This approach allows for an in-depth understanding of the key components contributing to an effective happiness-centered education system (Yin, 2014).

The study involved multiple stakeholders, including students, teachers, and school/university administrators from institutions implementing happiness-oriented curricula. These participants provided firsthand insights into the effectiveness, challenges, and perceptions of well-being-based education. The selection of participants followed a purposive sampling technique to ensure diverse perspectives from individuals actively engaged in happiness-centered learning environments (Patton, 2015). Additionally, experts in education and psychology were included to provide academic perspectives on happiness-based learning. These experts helped contextualize the findings within broader theoretical frameworks of positive psychology and educational development. Their perspectives contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of how happiness can be systematically incorporated into pedagogical practices.

To gain a holistic understanding, the study employed multiple data collection methods, including in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. These methods provided rich qualitative data, allowing the study to examine both the subjective experiences of participants and institutional practices. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with students, teachers, administrators, and educational experts. The interviews focused on participants' experiences with happiness-based education, their perceptions of its benefits and limitations, and the institutional strategies used to promote well-being. Interview questions were designed to be open-ended to encourage participants to share their thoughts freely (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Observations were carried out in schools and universities that have integrated happiness-centered curricula. Classroom interactions, teaching strategies, student engagement, and overall learning environments were carefully analyzed. This method allowed for direct insights into how happiness-oriented pedagogies were implemented in real-time settings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The study also reviewed

educational policy documents, curriculum guidelines, and institutional reports related to student well-being. This analysis provided additional context for understanding how happiness-based education is formally structured and supported at the policy level. By examining these documents, the study aimed to assess the institutional commitment to student well-being and identify best practices in happiness-oriented education.

The data analysis process followed a thematic approach to identify recurring patterns and themes in participants' experiences and institutional practices. Thematic analysis was employed to categorize data into meaningful clusters, allowing for a deeper understanding of how happiness is embedded in education (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To enhance the validity and reliability of the findings, triangulation was applied by comparing data from multiple sources, including interviews, observations, and document analysis. This approach ensured that the study's conclusions were based on robust evidence rather than isolated perspectives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Data coding was performed using NVivo software, which facilitated the organization and interpretation of qualitative data. The coding process involved several stages: open coding to identify broad themes, axial coding to establish connections between different themes and patterns, and selective coding to refine the key findings into a coherent narrative about happiness-based education. A comparative analysis was also conducted to examine differences and similarities in happiness-centered education models across various institutions. This helped in understanding how diverse educational settings influence the effectiveness of well-being-focused learning.

To ensure ethical research practices, informed consent was obtained from all participants before conducting interviews and observations. Participants were assured of their anonymity and confidentiality, and their involvement in the study was entirely voluntary. The study also adhered to the ethical guidelines outlined by the American Educational Research Association (AERA, 2011) to uphold research integrity and protect participants' rights.

This study's methodology provides a comprehensive approach to examining happiness-based education. By employing a qualitative case study and phenomenological analysis, the research captures the lived experiences of students and educators while identifying best practices in happiness-centered learning. The combination of interviews, observations, and document analysis ensures a well-rounded understanding of how educational institutions integrate well-being into their curricula. The thematic and triangulated analysis methods strengthen the study's validity, making it a valuable contribution to the ongoing discourse on holistic education.

Result (نتائج)

3.1 The Role of Well-Being in Education (Peran Kesejahteraan dalam Pendidikan)

The integration of well-being in education has been shown to have a profound impact on students' motivation and academic performance. Research indicates that students who experience higher levels of happiness and emotional well-being tend to demonstrate greater engagement and intrinsic motivation in their learning processes (Ryan & Deci, 2000). When students feel supported emotionally and psychologically, they are more likely to take intellectual risks, persist through challenges, and exhibit higher levels of creativity and critical thinking (Durlak et al., 2011). Thus, fostering a positive educational environment contributes to both academic achievement and personal development.

A comparison between competency-based and well-being-oriented education highlights significant differences in student outcomes. Traditional education models often emphasize measurable competencies such as standardized test scores and academic rankings, sometimes at the expense of students' emotional and psychological health (Seligman et al.,

2009). In contrast, education systems that prioritize well-being recognize that cognitive, emotional, and social aspects of learning are interconnected. Countries such as Finland have successfully implemented education policies that balance academic excellence with student well-being, resulting in higher satisfaction levels among learners (Salmela-Aro & Upadyaya, 2014).

Moreover, happiness-centered education contributes to long-term benefits beyond academic performance. Studies suggest that students who experience well-being-oriented learning environments are more likely to develop resilience, adaptability, and a sense of purpose in their future careers (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). By equipping students with emotional intelligence and self-awareness, education can help them navigate personal and professional challenges effectively. These benefits extend beyond individual students, positively influencing society by producing individuals who are mentally healthy and socially responsible.

Teachers also play a crucial role in fostering student well-being. A supportive teacher-student relationship has been identified as one of the strongest predictors of student motivation and emotional stability in the classroom (Hattie, 2009). When educators adopt an empathetic and student-centered approach, they create an environment where learners feel safe to express themselves and explore new ideas. Schools that integrate teacher training in well-being-focused pedagogy often report lower rates of student anxiety and higher levels of engagement (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

The role of curriculum design in promoting well-being is another critical factor. Traditional curricula tend to prioritize knowledge acquisition and skill mastery, often overlooking the importance of fostering positive emotions and personal growth. In contrast, a curriculum that incorporates well-being principles, such as mindfulness exercises and character education, can enhance students' overall happiness and sense of fulfillment (Noble & McGrath, 2016). By embedding social-emotional learning into daily instruction, schools can create a balanced approach to education that nurtures both intellectual and emotional development.

Ultimately, an education system that prioritizes well-being does not negate the importance of academic excellence; rather, it enhances students' ability to perform well by ensuring they are mentally and emotionally equipped to learn effectively. A holistic approach to education that integrates well-being as a core principle can contribute to more sustainable and meaningful learning outcomes for students, preparing them for both academic and life success (OECD, 2018).

3.2 Implementation of Happiness-Based Education (Implementasi Pendidikan Berbasis Kebahagiaan)

Several educational institutions worldwide have successfully implemented happiness-based learning models that prioritize student well-being alongside academic achievement. These models often incorporate evidence-based practices such as mindfulness training, value-based curricula, and social-emotional learning (SEL) programs. For example, mindfulness techniques have been widely adopted in schools to help students manage stress, enhance focus, and develop self-regulation skills (Schonert-Reichl & Roeser, 2016). By incorporating mindfulness exercises into daily classroom routines, educators create an environment that promotes emotional stability and cognitive clarity.

Another key component of happiness-based education is the integration of values-driven learning. Many schools have shifted from a rigid knowledge-transfer approach to one that emphasizes character development, ethical reasoning, and purpose-driven education (Lickona, 1992). This model encourages students to reflect on their personal goals, contribute to their communities, and cultivate a sense of meaning in their academic pursuits. Schools that have adopted this approach often observe improvements in student behavior, reduced

disciplinary issues, and increased motivation to learn (Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009).

Social-emotional learning (SEL) has emerged as a crucial framework for fostering well-being in education. SEL programs teach students essential skills such as self-awareness, emotional regulation, and interpersonal communication (Durlak et al., 2011). Schools that implement SEL frameworks report higher levels of student engagement, lower dropout rates, and improved overall school climate (Zins et al., 2004). These programs equip students with the emotional intelligence necessary to navigate challenges, build healthy relationships, and thrive in diverse environments.

A case study of Finland's education system highlights how a nationwide emphasis on student well-being can lead to outstanding educational outcomes. Finland's approach includes flexible learning environments, minimal standardized testing, and a strong focus on play and creativity in early education (Sahlberg, 2011). Finnish schools prioritize student autonomy and intrinsic motivation, leading to high levels of student satisfaction and academic achievement. This model demonstrates that integrating well-being into education does not compromise academic success but rather enhances it.

Similarly, Bhutan has implemented a unique education system based on the concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH). This approach integrates mindfulness, cultural preservation, and environmental responsibility into the curriculum (Ura, Alkire, Zangmo, & Wangdi, 2012). Schools in Bhutan emphasize holistic development, ensuring that students are nurtured emotionally, socially, and intellectually. The success of this model has sparked interest in other countries seeking to incorporate well-being principles into their education systems.

Despite the promising outcomes of happiness-based education, challenges remain in its implementation. Resistance from traditional education policymakers, lack of teacher training in well-being-oriented pedagogy, and standardized assessment pressures can hinder the adoption of these models. However, as global awareness of the importance of mental health and holistic development grows, more educational institutions are beginning to recognize the necessity of integrating happiness-based frameworks into their curricula. The shift towards well-being-oriented education represents a fundamental rethinking of learning, one that seeks to balance academic excellence with emotional and psychological well-being, ultimately preparing students for more fulfilling lives (Noddings, 2013).

3.3 Challenges and Opportunities (Tantangan dan Peluang)

One of the main challenges in integrating happiness into formal education is the deep-rooted emphasis on standardized assessments and academic achievement. Many education systems worldwide prioritize test scores and measurable competencies over students' emotional well-being, often leading to high levels of stress, anxiety, and burnout among students (PISA, 2018). The pressure to perform well in exams can overshadow the importance of fostering creativity, emotional intelligence, and personal growth. This rigid focus on assessment makes it difficult for schools to incorporate well-being-based learning without facing resistance from policymakers and educational institutions.

Another significant barrier is the lack of teacher training in well-being-focused pedagogy. Traditional teacher education programs primarily focus on subject-specific knowledge and instructional techniques, often neglecting the psychological and emotional aspects of learning (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). As a result, many educators feel unprepared to integrate social-emotional learning (SEL) or mindfulness practices into their classrooms. Without proper training and resources, teachers may struggle to implement happiness-based education effectively, limiting its impact on students.

Cultural and societal perceptions of education also pose challenges. In many countries, success in education is often equated with academic excellence and prestigious career opportunities rather than holistic well-being (Sahlberg, 2011). Parents and communities may resist changes that prioritize emotional and social development, fearing that such approaches may compromise their children's competitiveness in the job market. Shifting these deeply ingrained beliefs requires a broader societal transformation that acknowledges the value of well-being as a fundamental aspect of education.

Despite these challenges, there are promising opportunities for collaboration among educators, parents, and policymakers to support happiness-based education. Schools that have successfully implemented well-being initiatives often work closely with parents to create a supportive learning environment both at school and at home (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). When parents actively participate in their children's emotional and psychological development, students experience greater consistency in well-being practices, reinforcing positive habits and mindsets.

Policymakers also play a crucial role in facilitating systemic changes that promote happiness in education. By integrating well-being principles into national curricula and teacher training programs, governments can help create a more balanced approach to learning (OECD, 2018). Some countries, such as Finland and Bhutan, have already adopted education policies that emphasize holistic development, demonstrating that large-scale implementation is possible. Increased research and advocacy for well-being in education can further encourage policymakers to prioritize student happiness alongside academic performance.

The rise of technology and digital education also presents new opportunities for fostering well-being in learning environments. Online platforms and mobile applications now offer resources for mindfulness, emotional regulation, and personalized learning experiences tailored to students' needs (Schonert-Reichl & Roeser, 2016). By leveraging digital tools, educators can provide accessible and scalable solutions for integrating happiness-based learning into traditional and remote classrooms. As awareness of mental health and well-being continues to grow, the future of education has the potential to become more balanced, nurturing both the intellectual and emotional aspects of student development.



Discussion (مناقشة)

Implications of Happiness-Based Education on Students' Academic and Psychosocial Development

Happiness-based education has a profound impact on both the academic and psychosocial development of students. Research indicates that students who experience higher levels of well-being demonstrate better cognitive engagement, motivation, and academic performance (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). When students feel emotionally secure and valued, they are more likely to develop a positive attitude toward learning, resulting in improved problem-solving abilities, creativity, and critical thinking skills. This reinforces the notion that well-being is not merely an extraneous factor but a crucial component of academic success.

Beyond academics, fostering well-being in education also enhances students' emotional intelligence and social skills. Programs that integrate mindfulness, social-emotional learning (SEL), and resilience training help students manage stress, build self-awareness, and navigate interpersonal relationships effectively (Schonert-Reichl & Roeser, 2016). These competencies are essential in preparing students for life beyond the classroom, equipping them with the necessary skills to handle future personal and professional challenges.

Furthermore, a happiness-based approach promotes intrinsic motivation, encouraging students to engage in learning for personal fulfillment rather than external rewards such as grades or parental approval. Studies show that intrinsically motivated learners are more likely to retain information, demonstrate persistence in problem-solving, and engage in lifelong learning (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This shift from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation fosters a culture of curiosity and self-driven exploration, which is crucial for holistic student development.

However, implementing happiness-based education requires a paradigm shift in how schools approach student assessment and learning outcomes. Traditional models of education often prioritize measurable achievements, which can sometimes conflict with the emphasis on well-being. Therefore, developing new assessment frameworks that evaluate not only academic proficiency but also psychological resilience, emotional well-being, and social adaptability is essential for fully realizing the benefits of happiness-based education.

Relevance of This Concept in 21st-Century Education

In the 21st century, education must address the growing complexity of modern life, including rapid technological advancements, globalization, and increasing mental health challenges. The rise of digital learning, social media, and remote education has transformed how students engage with knowledge, necessitating a broader educational focus that includes emotional and psychological well-being (OECD, 2018). A happiness-centered approach helps students develop adaptability and coping mechanisms to navigate the uncertainties of an ever-changing world.

The prevalence of anxiety, depression, and burnout among students further underscores the urgency of integrating well-being into education. Studies reveal that excessive academic pressure and the demand for high performance often lead to mental health struggles among students (PISA, 2018). By embedding emotional well-being strategies into the curriculum, schools can foster resilience and prevent mental health crises before they escalate.

Additionally, happiness-based education aligns with the competencies required for success in the 21st-century workforce. Employers increasingly value soft skills such as emotional intelligence, teamwork, and adaptability alongside technical knowledge (World Economic Forum, 2020). When education prioritizes holistic development, students graduate not only with intellectual capabilities but also with the social and emotional tools necessary for professional and personal success.

As artificial intelligence and automation reshape job markets, future careers will demand greater human-centric skills—such as creativity, empathy, and emotional resilience—rather than rote memorization or mechanical problem-solving. A happiness-based education framework ensures that students are not just academically competent but also emotionally prepared to thrive in a dynamic global landscape.

Comparative Analysis with Education Models in Other Countries

Several countries have already recognized the importance of happiness in education and have implemented policies to prioritize student well-being. Finland, for example, emphasizes a student-centered approach that minimizes standardized testing while fostering collaboration, creativity, and mental well-being (Sahlberg, 2011). This model has led to consistently high academic performance and student satisfaction, demonstrating that educational success does not have to come at the expense of well-being.

Similarly, Bhutan has incorporated the concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH) into its education system, integrating mindfulness practices, cultural values, and holistic well-

being into the curriculum (Thinley, 2012). This approach aims to develop students who are not only academically capable but also socially responsible and emotionally fulfilled.

In contrast, countries with highly competitive education systems, such as South Korea and China, continue to face challenges related to student stress and burnout. Despite producing high academic achievers, these systems often struggle with mental health issues among students due to intense pressure and long study hours (Lee & Larson, 2000). This comparison highlights the need for a balanced approach that values both academic excellence and psychological well-being.

By examining global education policies, it becomes evident that a well-rounded education system must integrate happiness as a fundamental goal rather than an afterthought. Policymakers can draw insights from successful models and adapt them to local cultural and institutional contexts to ensure sustainable well-being in education.

Strategies for Integrating Student Well-Being into National Curricula

To effectively incorporate happiness into education, schools must adopt concrete strategies that prioritize students' emotional and psychological health. One approach is integrating mindfulness and SEL programs into daily classroom activities. Research shows that mindfulness-based interventions can enhance focus, reduce stress, and improve emotional regulation among students (Davidson et al., 2012). Schools can introduce mindfulness exercises as part of the curriculum to cultivate a positive learning environment.

Another essential strategy is restructuring the assessment system to emphasize holistic growth rather than purely academic achievements. Alternative evaluation methods, such as portfolio-based assessments, self-reflection journals, and project-based learning, allow students to demonstrate their understanding in diverse and meaningful ways (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005). This approach reduces test anxiety and fosters a deeper connection with the learning material.

Furthermore, teacher training programs should incorporate well-being-focused pedagogy. Educators play a pivotal role in shaping students' mental and emotional health, and equipping them with the necessary skills to support student well-being is crucial (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Training sessions on emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, and positive psychology can empower teachers to create a nurturing classroom environment.

Finally, collaboration between schools, parents, and policymakers is essential for sustaining happiness-based education. Regular parent workshops and community engagement initiatives can align home and school environments, reinforcing the importance of emotional well-being beyond the classroom (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). Policymakers must also allocate resources to support well-being programs and develop policies that recognize happiness as a key educational objective.

By implementing these strategies, education systems can foster a generation of students who are not only intellectually capable but also emotionally resilient and socially competent, ensuring a more balanced and fulfilling learning experience.



Conclusion (خاتمة)

Happiness-based education offers a new paradigm that balances academic achievement with students' emotional well-being. With the increasing academic pressure and mental health challenges faced by students in the modern era, this approach is becoming increasingly relevant in global education systems. This study shows that integrating happiness into

education can enhance students' learning motivation, engagement, and psychosocial well-being. Additionally, approaches such as mindfulness, social-emotional learning, and value-based curricula have proven effective in shaping a more holistic and meaningful learning experience.

However, the implementation of happiness-based education still faces various challenges, including curriculum adjustments, teacher training, and support from national education policies. Therefore, collaboration between educators, parents, and policymakers is essential for the successful adoption of this system on a broader scale. By adapting learning strategies that prioritize student well-being and leveraging technological advancements, education systems can become more adaptive to the needs of future generations. Further research is needed to explore the effectiveness of this approach across different cultural and educational contexts worldwide.



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