In Search of Happiness and Wellbeing of School Students

Sourovi Thakur and Usashi Kundu (De)

Abstract

Happiness is related to personal health, growth and development. Positive psychology gives major emphasis on student's level of happiness and wellbeing for better learning. To achieve the prime goal of education i.e. overall development of students, they must be provided with a happy and barrier-free environment in school. Happy students flourish both internally and externally. World Happiness Report (2017) indicated that India belongs to the global group of least happy countries. This unpleasant report compels the educationists to improve the wellbeing of students apart from their academic achievements. Following this agenda researchers wish to cultivate the idea of happiness lesson at school level. The aims of the study are to comprehend the concept of happiness and its necessity during student life. The study also seeks to explore various strategies to accentuate the happiness and wellbeing of school students. This is a qualitative-analytical study based on review of scholarly literatures in this field. The study reveals multifarious benefits of teaching happiness to school students. This article also mentions various strategies to be taken by schools to train their students in long-lasting happiness and wellbeing.

Keywords : *Happiness, life-satisfaction, mindfulness, sustainability, wellbeing.*

Introduction

The main motto of positive psychology is to make an individual understand and develop psychological wellbeing and health which induces greater learning in students. This is achieved by augmenting stronger attention, broader creative thinking and more cognitive abilities.[1] Positive psychology tries to do so by increasing the level of happiness. Everybody wishes to be happy in life. Crisp (2000) quoted Aristotle who sums up the concept of happiness beautifully. He said that the ultimate meaning, purpose and aim of human existence amount to nothing but happiness.[2] In 2011, United Nations General Assembly Resolution announced 'the pursuit of happiness as a fundamental human goal'. The time spent in school is very crucial for each and every student's life because this shapes their future course of life. Each of them is born different, grows up in different environments, faces social, economic and emotional turmoil of

varied levels and thus tries to adapt herself differently now and then. How appropriately students can cope themselves depends on their well being. Many of them are malnourished physically or/and mentally. It is the responsibility of schools to provide an environment conducive to each and every student so that each one can flourish both academically and psychologically. The lesson in happiness is expected to lead students to explore, experience and express their happiness in a more meaningful and sustainable way. A learner would cherish happiness within herself as well as among others and in society.

In this context, the current study intends to explore the concept of happiness. The objectives of this study are to find out the strong bases behind the necessity of possessing happiness and wellbeing during student life and to explore various feasible strategies for schools to induce happiness among their students. A thorough in-depth review of scholarly literature has been carried out for this purpose. Various relevant secondary sources of data like journals, books, articles, etc. have been read through analytically. The idea of the study is not to make schools initiate counselling or therapeutic centres but to make them realise how a little more attention to students' happiness and wellbeing can lead to better and stronger student learning.

Rationale of the study

The young generation all over the world is facing a high rate of depression and most of them go untreated.[3] A study revealed that India is witnessing student suicide rates at an alarming level.[4] Another study in Chandigarh indicated that 45.8% of school students had psychological issues and 6% had suicidal ideas.[5] Quite recently Deb, Strodl and Sun worked with students of Kolkata and found out that about 66% of them faced tremendous academic pressure and surprisingly 32.6% of them are symptomatic of various psychological ailments.[6] UNESCO (2016) summarised the external and internal factors that diminish the happiness of students that in turn undermine their quality of education as well as the quality of life.[7] The most influential are inequalities, intolerance, overload of information due to technological advancements, poor educational environment, insensitive teachers, and obsolete curriculum. While competing in the rat race to achieve the highest academic score, students lack the elements of happiness. This compels educationists, policymakers,

curriculum developers, teachers and parents to deliberate how to nurture and train pupils so that their happiness and wellbeing could also be addressed. In such a scenario we wish to inquire how to cultivate the concepts of happiness and wellbeing at school level. If happiness training in a school is found to be beneficial for student's physical and psychological wellbeing then it is important that these concepts and the benefits of happiness are explored and strategies are evolved in order to implement them in schools.

The concept of happiness

Happiness or wellbeing (a more formal term) can be taken as an optimal psychological functioning and experience.[8] Morris very aptly mentioned that we often find books which name ten steps to happiness or the secret of a happy life but in reality happiness is not achievable just by performing some tasks.[9] In his words, happiness is not a destination but the journey itself. O'Brien described it as 'happiness that contributes to individual, community or global well-being without exploiting other people, the environment or future generations.'[10] According to the definition by WHO (1992) happiness doesn't mean only the absence of any kind of illness or infirmity, it is having a physically, socially and mentally sound well-being.[11] Happiness should be regarded as a subjective concept because it is perceived differently by different persons.[12] But for everyone, it is defined in terms of three components, viz. frequent positive affect, high life satisfaction and infrequent negative affect.[13] Scoffham and Barnes provided a holistic working definition for happiness that regarded it as a flourishing state of mind that is a reflection of self-fulfilment. They consider happiness as a relative state that can be provoked by a wide range of stimuli under various environments and manifested in different forms.[14] Ryff has stated six dimensions of wellbeing which are self-acceptance, harmonious relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life and personal growth.[15] Whereas Martin stated that optimal happiness includes five elements, namely positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement.

The concept of happiness and wellbeing follow two approaches in positive psychology. The first is the hedonic approach. This approach considers happiness in terms of life's satisfaction, presence of positive emotions and absence of negative emotions.[16] The second one is the

eudaimonic approach which takes happiness as an outcome of self-realisation.[17] Recently psychologists are keener on combining both approaches to define happiness.[18]

The Happiness Tried model developed by Nagraj addresses four dimensions of a human life viz. material, behavioural, intellectual and experiential which are associated with senses, feelings, learning and awareness respectively. The model talks about monetary happiness, deeper happiness, and sustainable happiness.[19]

Momentary happiness: When happiness is experienced through our five sense organs they last for a short period of time. Thus, it is named momentary happiness. We may mention for example, happiness from eating(taste) a piece of cake or from watching a good movie.

Deeper happiness: When happiness comes from an internal feeling of affection, love, gratitude, care or respect, it lasts for a longer duration and posits more impact on our mental state. Thus, it has the name, deeper happiness. For instance, when a teacher acknowledges his student, that sense of care gives more impactful happiness to the student and motivates him.

Sustainable happiness: This happens after problem-solving, learning new things or understanding a new concept. This involves clear thinking, self-understanding, concentration, mindfulness and many other internal states of mind. This kind of happiness stays for quite a long period. Hence, it is called sustainable happiness.

The present generation is more inclined toward momentary happiness as they seek pleasure from materialistic life. They should be trained to experience deeper and sustainable happiness so that they become more empathetic, compassionate and goal-oriented in their life. Mindfulness is very effective in this regard.

Necessities of happiness and wellbeing during student life

Since 1998 positive psychology flourished with the pioneering works of Seligman, Csikszentmihalyi and Fredrickson who advocated that a positive state of mind can induce physical, intellectual, social, and psychological benefits. Over and again research has proved that a happy person is successful in different domains of life. Certain features of a happy person are especially essential for a growing student. This includes creativity, multi-tasking abilities, trustworthiness, helpfulness, the

endurance of doing repetitive and boring work and sociability.[20] Happiness is an integral part of both mental and physical wellbeing. Happiness brings more self-control and coping abilities,[21] strengthens the immune system[22] and leads a longer life.[23] Fredrickson in his theory of 'broaden and build' proposed that happiness widens a person's thought-action repertoire and helps him to develop psychological resources.[24] These resources guide a person to deal with his life's adversities by adopting an appropriate course of action. She also mentioned that happiness develops a sense of wellbeing which in turn again strengthens our happiness in the first place. The theory also opines that attention, action and cognition can be improved with positive emotions.[25] Csikszentmihalyi associated happiness with strong personal engagement which he termed a 'sense of flow'.[26] This sense of flow in a classroom situation is able to make the students more committed and involved in their course of actions. Happiness is essential for increasing students' school satisfaction because this affects their engagement, absence rate, drop out tendencies in school, deals with different behavioural issues and improves overall psychological wellbeing.[27] The study of Suldo et al. (2011) suggested that happiness is positively correlated with the academic achievement of students.[28] Happiness is believed to reduce procrastination, increase self-control[29] and gives hope for the future.[30]

Strategies to enhance happiness and wellbeing among school students

During student life one of the basic needs is happiness and along with proper wellbeing these promote effective learning of the students. According to Park, the training for happiness and wellbeing should begin in childhood and not later than adolescence.[31] During this period students spend a considerable part of the day in school with peers and teachers. The work of Quoidbach et al. suggested that there are various ways of inducing happiness using positive emotions and therefore either by cultivating or avoiding such activities one can bring long-lasting happiness.[32] School can play a vital role in finding and enriching happiness among all its students. Some of the most effective and feasible strategies are illustrated below:

Reducing fault finding: Even in a positive situation paying too much attention to the fault finding or exploring what could have been done better otherwise, has been found to be inversely correlated with happiness and thus diminishes self-esteem and satisfaction.[33] It is the responsibility of the

teachers to highlight the achievements over the failures of their students.

The perfect fit: Not every activity can bring happiness to everyone because the interests, motivational levels, values, attitudes are different for different people.[34] Again, there are certain activities that can induce happiness universally by satisfying the universal psychological needs.[35] Thus, choosing the correct task for each student is a daunting task for educators.

Engaging in action: For engaging in an action both taking the initiative to start an action and sustaining it till the end are essential. After dealing with a problem when someone starts an action, it gives her a great happiness. This gives students a sense of achievement. For example, students get great pleasure being able to start a cricket match after the completion of a tough examination. On the other hand, sometimes a sustaining performance gives pleasure. For example, after practicing a certain difficult set of mathematical problems, when they learn to solve the problem, it gives them immense happiness.

Incorporating mindfulness: Mindfulness through breathing exercises is very helpful for students in helping to release stress and anxiety. Mindfulness using various sensory experiences benefits them by making them relaxed and thus helps them to focus on their tasks.[36] For instance, deep breathing is very effective to de-stress students during examinations. Hearing white-noise music intermittently during long hours of study can relax their mind and improve concentration.

Practice of gratitude: Research showsthat practising gratitude on a regular basis promotes wellbeing by cherishing the positive experiences of life, thus getting maximum satisfaction and happiness.[37] Teachers should train their students to appreciate whatever they got in life.

Act of kindness: Students could be asked to perform certain kind acts in a stipulated time so that other persons may be benefited or happy.[38] The cost (not monetary) must be shouldered by the student himself. For example, she can teach a fellow friend, donate blood, write an appreciation letter to someone and so on. This eventually enhances pro-social behaviour, cooperation, altruism and optimism that in turn add to happiness.

Identifying signature (unique) strength: The act of identifying and using one's signature or unique strength pumps up mood, resilience, self-confidence and finally enhances wellbeing.[39] Thus, students should

explore their unique capabilities and use them in daily activities. It is the responsibility of teachers to help students to explore their strengths.

All these strategies are expected to make a paradigm shift in how a student perceives happiness. Instead of searching for happiness externally, students would be able to find deeper and sustainable inner happiness and wellbeing through self-realisation.

Conclusion:

For many years there was apathy toward teaching students about happiness and wellbeing. The larger conservative section of the society regarded education as rigid and cold. For them teaching is to transfer skills and only the knowledge that is useful for a future career. It is never regarded as a medium for teaching students to be happy.[40] Today, when the school timetable is already overloaded with a huge syllabus and series of examinations, curriculum developers, policymakers and school administrators are more likely to avoid a concept like happiness and wellbeing of students as these are hard to identify and measure. Therefore, teachers should shoulder the task of providing a positive interpersonal and physical environment to their students. The Delhi Government planned to implement a happiness curriculum in its schools in 2018. This was a path-breaking attempt to improve children's well-being. The present study can be summarised in the words of Noddings that happiness must be one of the major aims of education and that it should provide significant happiness to all its students both at personal and collective levels.[41] Schools can be a prime centre for developing these skills and capacities among students for better adaptation.[42] As the Buddhist philosophy states that happiness is not a destination rather it is a journey itself, let this journey of every student be joyful.

Endnotes:

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