

Student's Happiness in Learning: The Literature Perspective

Folorunso Obayemi Temitope OBASUYI¹, Oluwatoyin Babatunde OMONIYI²,
Oke James AJOGBEJE³

¹Department of Economics, School of Social and Management Sciences, College of Science, Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology, Ikere-Ekiti, Nigeria,

²Department of Economics, School of Social and Management Sciences, College of Science, Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology, Ikere-Ekiti, Nigeria,

³Department of Counselling Psychology, School of Social Science Education, College of Education, Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology, Ikere-Ekiti, Nigeria,

Abstract: Learning is an integral part of man that promotes the wellbeing of the learners in diverse ways. In the economics of education literature, little emphasis was placed on student happiness in learning that would assist in increasing human capital stock. Although there are works of literature on gross national happiness (GNH) used in place of gross domestic product (GDP) to explain economic growth, the student happiness indicator in educational processes requires attention for optimal productivity, performance, achievement and future wages satisfaction of the student. This paper, therefore, is a literature perspective that links the economic, physical, psychological and psychosocial concepts of happiness in association with cognitive, affective, mind and emotions. Thus, the paper is of the view that student growth in learning is determined by gross student happiness (GSH) during school activities and that the promotion of happiness in learning can be justified by economic, social, environmental and status inequality.

Keywords: Happiness, Subjective wellbeing, Gross National Happiness, Gross domestic product, capabilities, life-ability

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I. Introduction

Earlier scholars in the economics of education regarding human capital theory (Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1961) had postulated that skills are developed from education which increases productivity. Education, to a large extent, explains the differentials in wages of workers. Also, wages in turn correlate with workers' productivity. As it is, in the notion of education acquisition, the highest education of workers would earn graduates of higher learning higher wages (Kampelmann, Rycx, Saks, & Tojerow, 2018). While wages correlate with the level of education acquired (Kampelmann et al., 2015), achieving the best level of education that would lift an individual child out of poverty is presumed to be associated with the condition of the child's happiness during learning. Having this background, students in educational processes could acquire the skill(s) equally or unequally in the distribution because of psychological indicators affecting their minds and emotions during the learning processes. The mind and emotion, when they are filled with happiness, in no small measure, would likely influence student productivity in learning.

Happiness is a psychological factor that has its root in the heart and mind. Happiness could assist in critical thinking, increase morality for learning and cognitive ability of the child to perform academically. However, in theory, and practice, happiness is critically analysed as subjective (Sarıçam, 2014; Haybron, 2003; Veenhoven, 2005). It is subjective when a child acquires classroom knowledge and gets satisfaction even without smiling with friends/colleagues. Also, female student happiness may be subjective when a male counterpart is doing better, and use that to oppress her, although being in attendance of classes together, yet contented with her learning (Sarıçam, 2014). Simply put, students' happiness is manifested when students are doing better in many of the coordinate happiness indicators (e.g. mind and emotion) such as having contentment for possessing the ability to pay school fees, rent a good apartment, pass his/her courses very well, etc.

In the economic and development literature, little attention is paid to happiness as a significant factor that could raise the level of performance and future wage bill of a child when given a secular job appointment. Most of the literature specifically dealt with risks in schooling (Obasuyi et al., 2020). Several studies have analysed the socioeconomic indicators that could lead a child to complete the seven levels of education or otherwise (Thomas et al., 2001; Anilan, 2014; Sheffield et al., 2017; Goldman, 1995). It is on the basis of this

argument that this paper delves into the issues of understanding students' growth through a literature perspective.

Concept of Happiness

Prior to the publication titled "The Psychology of Happiness" written by Walter A. Pitkin in 1929, happiness was understood as "positive mood" or "positive emotions" of an individual (Kaufmann et al., 2019, p.1014). Contrary to that, Walter's publication argued that enjoyment and pleasure relating to human emotions differs from the state of happiness (Diener, et.al. 2017). Opportunity acquired or breakthrough coming up through 'chance' does not explain happiness. Thereafter, this position of Walter led to the divergence of the meaning of happiness, as we provide a few of these definitions here.

The first definition is the argument that happiness arises when "people's evaluations of their lives and encompasses both cognitive judgments of satisfaction and affective appraisals of moods and emotions" (Kaufman et al., 2018). The key ideas of the definition include *evaluation* of their lives; cognitive *judgments* of satisfaction; and *appraisal* of moods and emotions. From these, happiness goes beyond mood to comprise human emotions and satisfaction. This is classified as subjective happiness (Oerlemans, & Bakker, 2018). However, the control appraisal position has been questioned showing that individual appraisal of one's life is subject to biases. In other words, no amount of individual control appraisal could converge to produce expected happiness (Kaufman et al., 2018).

Second, "happiness can be thought of as an emotional state that reflects a high level of mental and/or emotional well-being" (Dubner, 2013, p.92). Dubner, (2013, p.92) further defines happiness "as a complex binary construct that encompasses subjective elements of both affect and cognition that contribute to wellbeing". The binary construct in the definition is *affect* and *cognitive* that correlates with well-being.

Third, the above definitions followed the psychologist's position. However, a large number of economists and development experts in the field of experimental economics defined happiness to be "an individual happiness over a given time period as the integral of the reported momentary happiness flow". In this instance, happiness is measured as a time period associated with flow factors of happiness. Still, like Kaufman et al. (2018) that support Zhou (2010) argument, the individual appraisal of happiness nullifies the "intertemporal of happiness data" (Zhou, 2010, p.9). In other words, individually reported measures of happiness could allow for distortion in the outcome.

Finally, in human, happiness usually has "positive affect and life satisfaction" when he/she experiences less negative effect (Diener, 2000; Sariçam, 2014, p.686).

II. Theoretical Perspective of Happiness

There are different theories associated with happiness that could be linked to student happiness in learning.

This paper draws from the literature of Amartya Sen on the "Capabilities" Approach to human welfare. In his work, he argued on the normative position which was drawn from normative parity in human development. Rhetorically, Amartya Sen asked the question: can people be able to be and do desirable things in life? (UNDP, 2015; Obasuyi, 2018, p.80). The point being driven home here is that human welfare should be measured beyond the position of the core economists on a utility perspective. Rather, welfare should be measured with human abilities to do basic things or to be in a condition of being, known as capabilities. Consequentially, the acquired capability comes with freedom across the households in possession of it (Nussbaum, 2000a, 2000b; Sen, 1999a, 1999b; Stanton, 2007). This approach simply proposes egalitarianism to different persons or groups of persons such that some have the ability or is capable of doing certain things than the other (Garnham, 1997).

Another consequential effect of being capable is the association with a good life (Veenhoven, 2014). In human development theory, happiness is associated with a good life. Hence, a good life has been reflected in the development literature and philosophy of happiness books (Veenhoven, 2014). Starting with a philosophical perspective, earlier philosophers advocated for a good life as reflected in the writing of Stoics and Aristotle. Over the centuries, two sides of the coin existed in the measurement of happiness. On the one hand, happiness is subjective as it is difficult to ascertain if one is truly happy. On the contrary, it is objective when one considers the factors that make him get life freedom (Sen, 1999b). The more one acquires life freedom, particularly the capacity of doing something that leads to good health, productivity and abandoning poverty, the more the happiness (Sen, 1999a; Obasuyi, 2018).

Let us understand better each of the concepts that are associated with good life which are also connected to individual happiness. First is the economic measurement of happiness. Second, the concept of livability was often associated with ecological and sociological studies. It is about living in an environment and being happy with the external condition where society plays a paramount role in happiness development. As

such, Veenhoven (2014) argued that livability can be measured using environmental indicators such as traffic jams, roads, sewers, landscaping, lawns, building ghettos, hostels, etc. This is because a large portion of people's life depends on the external conditions around them to develop happiness. Understanding the environment equally projects the extent that social external factors such as discrimination, oppression, inequality and poverty are well managed to recover, rebuild and retain good life for happiness development. In the recent position, livability is connected with housing either in terms of quality, location or accessibility (Kovacs-Györi, Cabrera-Barona, Resch, Mehaffy & Blaschke, 2019).

Third, life-ability was a concept used by Veenhoven (2014) which was derived from Sen (1999a)'s work on capability. There are different opinions on how life ability could be measured. It ranges from the classical approach to the philosophy of the moralist, the business approach, the preaching of the confusionist and the contemporary psychologists. These ideologies from different schools of thought brought out measurement indicators including wisdom, intellectual ability of the person, perseverance, rationality, personal autonomy and mental health (Veenhoven, 2014) for measuring life-ability

III. Educational Perspectives

Education and Happiness

Several studies have confirmed that education significantly contributes to growth (Nowak, & Dahal, 2016; Grant, 2017; York jr, 1963). Hence, several countries, particularly developed countries, prioritized education to increase human capital development that contributes to growth. While this is happening in the developed and high middle-income countries, although at varying degrees, education inequality permeates the developing countries (Obasuyi & Rajah, 2019). Students are dropping out of school in large numbers which led to developing measurement variables for identifying factors determining educational inequality (See Obasuyi, Rajah & Santa, 2020). Still, literature has not clearly confirmed the role of student happiness in learning to curb the education inequality vulnerabilities.

From the above conceptualizations of happiness, the ideas put across could be applicable to classroom learning. For example, a student is likely to be happy when his/her mood, emotion and satisfaction are optimized during learning. If optimized, holding other factors constant, the happiness of the student could lead him/her to attain the highest level of education. Happiness is positively related to learning outcome, productivity or final grade obtained from learning institutions. Hence, happiness in learning is the degree to which a student's happiness acquired is optimized through the stability of student's emotions, moods and satisfaction which helps him/her to attain a particular level of education towards earning a good living (Sen, 1999a). This paper, therefore, refers to it as 'Gross Student Happiness' (GSH) for quantitative experimentation.

Happiness as Subjective Indicator in Learning

Let us discuss happiness as subjective. There are two subjective dimensions to happiness that could impact on student learning – the hedonic and cognitive dimensions. The hedonic dimension explains the degree to which all affective indicators for a person's experiences are satisfying. The second dimension is about contentment, which is the degree to that individual aspirations are met (Sarıçam, 2014; Haybron, 2003; Veenhoven, 2005; Chekola, 2007). While distinguishing these dimensions, psychologists put it more straightforward – psychological happiness deals with the state of mind while prudential happiness deals with human wellbeing or good living (Haybron, 2003; Chekola, 2007; Sarıçam, 2014). So, it can simply be said that subjective happiness associates with "social happiness or life satisfaction" (Sarıçam, 2014, p. 686).

How does subjective happiness apply to learning activities? First, the classroom is the centre where students acquire experiences. The optimal state of learning experiences that deals with the student's mind or emotion would explain the degree of happiness of the student about what he/she is learning or have learnt. For example, the lower the degree of happiness in classroom learning would have two effects – poor academic performance and low status after graduation due to poor grades. The poor grade usually destabilizes the graduates in that, he/she cannot fully explore the labour market. When these occur in child life, the child accumulated experiences would earn him/her low wages/income due to low educational attainment, thereby providing the possibility for increasing future poverty.

Second, every student has goals to meet in the educational transition. At every stage of transition, there is a demand for meeting the goal of a good grade. Thus, the cognitive dimension of the student is to be contented with the grade got at that stage to make him/her express happiness. Simply, all indicators that would make him/her happy during the period of learning are met. Otherwise, the consequence of a student's low achievement in learning, as defined by the teacher's output, explains the degree of his/her unhappiness in learning at that time period.

Third, from a psychology and economics point of view, subjective happiness has indicators to explain it. Emotion, mood and satisfaction are psychological indicators while child health, education and standard of living are measures for the economic aspect (Sen, 1999a, 1999b).

Why We Need Happiness in Learning

An orient adage postulates that one is sexually inspired when the heart and mind are in the condition of happiness. In other words, what we do that is associated with happiness would produce better achievement and performance. Hence, the rationale for children's happiness in learning could be in four categories.

Economic Reason

The freedom proposed in Sen (1999a) is associated with the ability to migrate from relative poverty to prosperity. In other words, being wishes to do what others are doing when having the economic ability to do it. In this case, it is essential to argue that the student's economic condition dictates student happiness in his learning capabilities. For example, the level of income of the parents, guardians, etc. matters to students' ability to perform better in the classroom. For example, when examination is approaching, the non-payment of school fees would distort the mind and emotions of the student which would lead to internally unhappiness in learning.

Social Reason

Socially, society consists of different social strata where everyone wants to be socially identified. Likewise, every student wants to belong to certain social strata within the school premises that would translate to a larger society for acceptance. Hence, a state of happiness for a student is his capability to integrate into any of the social strata within the school premises improves his social status. Better social academic status leads to students' higher productivity in learning.

Environmental reason

A secondary school student was asked to state the kind of university he would like to attend. He started choosing the University of Lagos, the University of Ibadan and Obafemi Awolowo University, all in Nigeria. He added that those universities are beautiful and attractive. This is to argue that the physical environment is associated with the emotions of the student or student to be in an institution. In the wisdom of this paper, it is necessary to argue that a serene environment glimmers the heart and directly stimulate interest in learning. As such, students would be much concerned to attend an institution where the physical environment is attractive for learning. This stage of choosing an institution that is attractive has already stimulated affective constituents of the proposed applicant, known as hedonic level (Haybron, 2003; Kashdan, 2004; Brülde, 2007). The mind and emotions would be instilled in the learning process with the quality of academic performance and achievement that yields happiness. Simply, psychological happiness focuses on the state of mind while prudential happiness focuses on the well-being of the student (Haybron, 2003; Chekola, 2007).

Status Inequality Reason

In education distribution, educational attainment determines unequal education (Wu et al., 2008; Thomas et al., 2001; Agrawal, 2014). From the education attained, status is determined through social stratification (Montt, 2011). In this instance, the dropout children from school have been associated with several factors comprising economic, academic performance, health, peer pressure, etc. (Obasuyi, et al. 2020). These constitute factors that trigger student unhappiness during the learning process that could lead to inequality of status at the labour market.

IV. Conclusion

This paper is a literature perspective on happiness with a link to understanding student happiness in learning. While happiness is an integral part of man, it is subjective. The subjectivity of happiness is explained by the hedonic and cognitive dimensions. The hedonic dimension shows that human experiences are satisfying while the cognitive is about *contentment* which explains the extent of meeting individual aspirations. With this, mind and emotions are to work together in a student to yield optimal happiness in learning. In other words, the growth of students in learning is determine through experimentation of gross student happiness (GSH) proposed in this paper, that is, all educational, economic, social, environmental, etc. indicators which are in association with '*student's being*' give the best in the student's happiness in learning.

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