

Fostering Holistic Development: Teachers' Perspectives on the Happiness Curriculum

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Abstract

The Happiness Curriculum is an initiative by the Delhi government aimed at the holistic development of learners from Nursery to Class 8. This holistic development of students is crucial for the nation's overall growth and progress. The success of such a curriculum depends not only on its content but also on its proper implementation. Teachers play a vital role in bringing this curriculum to life in both school and classroom settings. This paper examines teachers' perspectives on the holistic development of learners attending happiness curriculum classes. The researchers collected data from Delhi government schools. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 20 in-service teachers as respondents. Interviews and observation schedules were employed as data collection tools, followed by thematic analysis techniques. The findings revealed that while the happiness curriculum is a good initiative for learners, including many beneficial activities, teachers find it an additional burden. They suggest appointing separate teachers to handle happiness curriculum classes, as they do not get enough time to teach their core subjects. They noted that happiness curriculum does not contribute significantly to the holistic development of learners. Therefore, educational administrators and policymakers should consider integrating the happiness curriculum more broadly within the educational framework. This would ensure that the focus on happiness and well-being extends beyond the classroom, supporting the overall development of learners.

Keywords: Happiness curriculum, holistic development, school teachers

Introduction

Education is a fundamental human right (United Nations, 1948) and a vital indicator of community well-being and the attainment of sustainable development goals (Nazar, et al., 2018). It encompasses a broad scope, designed to meet the needs and aspirations of both individuals and larger communities. Education plays a crucial role in shaping a child's overall personality and helps them adapt to their environment (Madan, 2024). Beyond academic achievements, it instils moral values and ethics in individuals.

The education system has continuously

evolved, beginning with the traditional gurukul approach and progressing to integrate modern concepts, pedagogy and technology into the learning process (Sharma and Larson, 2002). Modern education aims to cultivate sound knowledge, confidence, critical thinking, mindfulness and values in students. Furthermore, engaging and enjoyable learning experiences help keep students motivated and enthusiastic, thereby promoting long-term sustainable learning (Government of NCT of Delhi, 2019). Despite the benefits of engaging learning environments, many children today enter classrooms burdened by fear, anxiety,

disturbances and stress resulting from unhealthy family relationships and peer conflicts. A National Health Survey report indicates that children aged 13 to 17 years often experience mental health disorders (Gururaj, et al., 2016). Prolonged exposure to such adverse environments can lead to negative attitudes towards education, impeding holistic learning and development (Kumar, et al., 2013). Positive relationships with families, teachers and peers can mitigate these adverse effects by fostering a sense of belonging, which supports overall growth and counters mental health challenges (Chory-Assad and Paulsel, 2004)

Fostering balanced growth and development requires exposing children to various aspects of education, including intellectual, physical, spiritual and aesthetic. This comprehensive approach encourages holistic development among learners (Tagore, 1997). However, contemporary challenges, such as income disparity, poverty and increasing suicide rates among students highlight the urgent need for educational success (Twenge, et al., 2019). Schools that prioritise student well-being are more likely to achieve positive academic outcomes and facilitate comprehensive development (Helliwell, et al., 2015).

Education, therefore, plays a dual role imparting knowledge while also nurturing attributes like self-confidence, mindfulness and responsibility, which are essential for building harmonious communities (Patil, 2012). Reflecting this understanding, the Delhi government launched the Happiness Curriculum in 2018. This programme focuses on the development of co-scholastic skills, such as mindfulness, self-awareness, critical thinking, reflection and socio-emotional competencies to foster balanced and harmonious communities (SCERT-Delhi and DoE, 2019).

Teachers play a pivotal role in implementing the happiness curriculum by incorporating elements like mindfulness, games, storytelling, reflective discussion and role-play activities in the classroom. These

components help create a comprehensive educational environment and enhance everyday learning experiences.

This study seeks to explore teachers' perspectives on the happiness curriculum and assess its effectiveness in promoting holistic development among students. Specifically, it focuses on understanding how the curriculum's components influence students' overall growth and well-being.

Conceptual Framework: A Comprehensive Approach to Happiness Curriculum

The happiness curriculum is rooted in a multidisciplinary framework that integrates the principles of holistic education, positive psychology and social-emotional learning (SEL). This integration aims to nurture students' overall development by addressing their cognitive, emotional and social needs. The curriculum aspires to create an educational environment that not only enhances academic achievement but also builds emotional strength, interpersonal skills and a sense of fulfilment. Through this approach, the happiness curriculum seeks to cultivate student's well-being and prepare them for meaningful and successful lives.

Holistic Education for Balanced Growth

Holistic education emphasises the importance of fostering growth across various domains-intellectual, emotional, social and psychological by viewing students as integrated individuals rather than as a collection of separate skills (Clark, 1991; Miller, 2007). This philosophy highlights the interplay between different dimensions of learning and development, encouraging students to reflect on their values, clarity of thought and emotional experiences.

The central principle of holistic education is rooted in the Gestalt philosophy, which posits that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. This perspective underscores

the idea that a student's experience and development are shaped through the integration of emotional, cognitive and social dimensions growth. Rather than addressing these aspects in isolation, holistic education promotes a unified understanding of learners as dynamic and interconnected individuals.

The happiness curriculum brings these principles to life through activities that prioritise reflective and experiential learning. Mindfulness practices, for instance, help learners become more aware of their emotions and thoughts. Storytelling activities foster empathy by allowing them to connect with diverse perspectives, while expressive exercises like art and role-play encourage creativity and self-expression. These approaches collectively promote intellectual, emotional and social growth, contributing to the development of well-rounded individuals who thrive in all aspects of life.

Positive Psychology: Cultivating Resilience and Well-being

The principles of positive psychology, particularly those proposed by Seligman (2009), provide a foundation for fostering happiness and resilience. Seligman's framework identifies three primary types of happiness: pleasure, engagement and meaning. This model suggests that sustainable well-being extends beyond fleeting moments of joy, encompassing deeper forms of fulfilment and purpose.

The happiness curriculum incorporates these dimensions to help learners build a positive mindset and emotional strength. Pleasure is fostered through activities like games and storytelling, which bring joy and encourage social interaction. Engagement is nurtured through hands-on and immersive experiences, such as collaborative discussions, creative projects and physical activities, which promote focus and a state of flow. Meaning is cultivated by guiding learners to reflect on their values, empathise with others and explore their sense of purpose.

By addressing these multiple dimensions, the curriculum helps learners develop resilience, cope with challenges and sustain a positive outlook on life. Through the integration of positive psychology practices, the happiness curriculum aims to support learners achieve a balanced state of well-being, characterised by joy, deep engagement and a meaningful sense of purpose. The holistic approach empowers them to navigate life's challenges with confidence and build a foundation for

Building Socio-Emotional Competencies

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) provides a framework for equipping learners with essential emotional and social skills needed to navigate their personal and interpersonal lives effectively. It promotes the development of core competencies, such as self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, relationship-building and responsible decision making, which are fundamental for emotional well-being and success in both academic and social contexts (Elias, et al., 1997; Weissberg, 2019). The happiness curriculum integrates SEL by including activities that cultivate the following essential skills.

Self-awareness: Activities, such as mindfulness practices and reflective journaling, help learners recognise and understand their emotions, thoughts and behaviour, thereby enhancing emotional intelligence.

Self-management: Techniques like guided breathing, meditation and visualisation empower learners to regulate emotions, manage stress and maintain focus in challenging situations.

Social awareness: Storytelling, group discussions and role-play exercises help learners develop empathy and appreciate diverse perspectives.

Relationship skills: Collaborative projects and partner-based activities promote effective communication, conflict resolution and team work key components of building healthy and meaningful relationships.

Responsible decision-making: Scenario-based learning and reflective exercises guide learners in analysing situations weighing consequences and making informed decisions.

These SEL-based activities contribute to fostering a positive school culture where learners feel valued, respected and supported (CASEL, 2013). Studies indicate that implementing SEL leads to improved academic performance, reduced stress levels and greater emotional resilience, aligning closely with the objectives of the happiness curriculum

Integrating Key Frameworks into the Happiness Curriculum

The happiness curriculum draws on the principles of holistic education, positive psychology and SEL to create a robust, multidimensional framework for fostering student development. Holistic education provides a broad philosophical base, emphasising the interconnectedness of growth across intellectual, emotional and social domains. Positive psychology highlights the importance of well-being, resilience and cultivating happiness through meaningful and engaged experiences. SEL offers practical strategies for developing essential life skills like emotional regulation, empathy and ethical decision-making.

By combining these perspectives, the happiness curriculum integrates intellectual development with emotional and social learning. It does not view well-being as secondary to academic achievement but rather as a core component of learners' overall growth. This integrated approach nurtures the development of individuals who are not only academically capable but also emotionally resilient, socially skilled and purpose-driven.

Through activities and practices inspired by these frameworks, the curriculum aims to promote holistic development, enabling learners to excel academically while also cultivating the skills and outlook necessary

for lifelong well-being and fulfilment. This alignment of philosophies ensures that the happiness curriculum equips learners with the resilience, empathy and adaptability required to flourish in their personal and professional lives

Happiness Curriculum: An Overview

The Delhi government introduced the happiness curriculum in 2018, aimed at learners from Nursery to class 8. It dedicates 45 minutes every day to activities, such as mindfulness, storytelling and interactive discussions. The primary objective is to create a joyful and engaging learning environment that supports learner's social, emotional and psychological well-being alongside their academic progress. By fostering holistic development, the curriculum moves beyond academic achievement to enhancing the learners overall quality of life and promoting balanced growth (SCERT-Delhi and DoE, 2019).

Core Domains of Happiness Curriculum

Mindfulness

The mindfulness component of the happiness curriculum is inspired by Vipassana, a meditative practice rooted in Buddhist traditions. It goes beyond traditional learning methods, enabling learners to cultivate emotional intelligence and self-awareness. Through daily mindfulness meditation, learners can gain a better understanding of their emotions and learn to manage them effectively. This practice also fosters empathy, as learners start recognising and appreciating the emotions of others. Moreover, engaging in mindfulness equips learners with the clarity and emotional stability needed to navigate challenges, thereby fostering resilience and personal growth (SCERT-Delhi and DoE, 2019).

Storytelling

The storytelling element of the happiness curriculum integrates real-world experiences into the classroom activities, offering learners opportunities for self-reflection and empathy. Within this component, learners are encouraged to share personal experiences and learn from their peers' stories, promoting mutual respect and understanding. Teachers facilitate discussions, guiding them to explore how they might approach similar scenarios in their own lives. This practice fosters a sense of belongingness and emotional resilience, which are essential for successful social and emotional learning (Weissberg, 2019).

Activity-Based Discussions and Self-Expression

This component of the happiness curriculum provides structured opportunities for learners to articulate their thoughts, emotions and ideas through creative and collaborative activities. For Examples, include: teachers may ask learners to write short reflections or share insights on topics, such as family life, relationships or personal aspirations. These tasks allow learners to articulate their emotions in a supportive and inclusive environment. Such activities promote learners self-confidence and emotional well-being, while also providing them with a safe space where they feel valued and can express themselves freely. This approach also helps to foster a positive and empathetic classroom atmosphere, allowing every learner to feel heard and appreciated.

Significance of the Domains

The happiness curriculum integrates these three dimensions— mindfulness, storytelling and activity-based discussions to promote the holistic development of learners. These dimensions aim to enhance learners' self-awareness, emotional regulation and interpersonal skills equipping them with the tools needed to navigate their academic and personal lives successfully.

Justification of the Study

Existing literature highlights various perspectives on the happiness curriculum. Malik (2023) found that both male and female teachers hold similar views on its implementation, while Handa et al. (2023) observed a paradoxical decline in learners' happiness levels following participation in happiness classes. Other studies have explored the curriculum's practical applications, noting that activities like mindfulness, critical thinking and reflection benefit both teachers and learners (Care et al., 2020).

Despite this extensive research, there remains a gap in the literature regarding the curriculum's contribution to learners' holistic development from teachers' perspectives, as well as the specific practices that teachers employ in the classroom. Understanding these elements is crucial, as teachers are the primary facilitators of the happiness curriculum and play a key role in achieving its objectives. This study aims to address these gaps by exploring teachers' perspectives on how the curriculum supports holistic development and examining the strategies they employ in implementing its components in classroom settings.

Research Questions

- How do the goals of the happiness curriculum support the holistic development of learners across emotional, social and cognitive learning domains?
- What strategies and practices do teachers employ to implement the happiness curriculum in their classrooms, and how these practices align with the intended outcomes for holistic development?

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research approach with a descriptive design, aiming to provide an in-depth understanding of the

implementation of the happiness curriculum and its impact on learners' holistic development.

Population and Sampling

The study focuses on government school teachers in Delhi, who are directly involved in implementing the happiness curriculum. The researchers obtained prior permissions before visiting the field to approach teachers for participation. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 20 in-service teachers from government schools across Delhi. The selection criteria ensured that all participants had prior experience with the happiness curriculum, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of diverse perspectives and practices across varied school settings.

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected using semi-structured interview schedule and classroom observations, providing both narrative insights and real-time documentation of classroom practices.

Interviews: Each semi-structured interview lasted approximately 15–20 minutes. The interview schedule included core questions designed to capture teachers' perspectives on the following aspects.

- Their understanding of the goals of the happiness curriculum
- Learner engagement during happiness curriculum classes
- Instructional strategies employed for curriculum implementation
- The influence of the curriculum on learners' academic performance
- Teachers' perceptions of the curriculum's impact on learners' holistic development

Classroom Observations: Each teacher was observed during one session using a structured observation schedule. The key focus areas included the following.

- Classroom interactions and teacher-learner engagement

- Implementation of mindfulness, storytelling and activity-based discussions
- Instructional strategies and their alignment with the curriculum's goals

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data, ensuring a systematic and nuanced interpretation of teachers' responses and classroom practices. The steps included the following.

Transcription: Interviews and observation notes were transcribed verbatim.

Coding: Transcriptions were systematically coded to identify recurring patterns and themes.

Theme Identification: Themes were identified to capture the authentic meanings embedded in the data. These themes reflect how the happiness curriculum is implemented in classrooms and its role in promoting holistic development.

This analytical approach facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the curriculum's implementation and its potential to promote emotional, social and cognitive growth in learners, going beyond mere learner engagement or satisfaction.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The analysis was structured around key themes that emerged from teacher interviews and classroom observations, guided by feedback to integrate holistic education, SEL and positive psychology frameworks.

Theme 1: Teachers' Understanding about Happiness Curriculum

Teachers largely perceive the happiness curriculum as an additional subject comprising activities that engage students for a dedicated 45-minute period. One respondent stated,

"The happiness curriculum functions like a subject, and the happiness booklet serves

as a guidebook. We follow the instructions outlined in it for teaching.”

Some teachers perceived the curriculum as a valuable initiative by the Delhi government aimed at shaping learners’ personalities beyond academic learning. They described it as a framework that encourages learners to share and express their thoughts and emotions with guided support from teachers. However, teachers’ understanding reflects only a partial alignment with the principles of holistic education, as they perceive the curriculum as separate from core academics rather than an integrated approach to intellectual, emotional and social development. This perspective may limit the curriculum’s potential to foster an interconnected learning experience. Despite this, teachers indirectly promote SEL through mindfulness and storytelling activities, which help students to experience joy, connection and presence, aligning with Seligman’s concept of “pleasant happiness”.

Theme 2: Learners’ Engagement in Happiness Curriculum Classes

Teachers reported that learners actively participate in mindfulness, meditation, storytelling and group discussions during happiness classes. One teacher shared,

“I teach history to Class 7 students. During happiness classes, I’ve noticed that they engage actively in every activity, whether group discussions or individual tasks.”

However, some teachers noted waning enthusiasm among learners over time, occasionally accompanied by disruptive behaviour. Classroom observations revealed a gap between teachers’ perceptions and classroom realities, with instances of learners engaging in behaviour like throwing pens or leaving the classroom during midway.

This theme highlights the potential of happiness curriculum activities to foster self-discovery, interpersonal skills and creativity core goals of holistic education. Group

discussions and collaborative exercises reflect aspects of ‘engaged happiness’, promoting resilience and emotional well-being in learners.

Theme 3: Academic Achievement of Learners Attending Happiness Curriculum Classes

Teachers expressed mixed views regarding the curriculum’s impact on academic achievement. While some believed it enhanced students’ focus and learning capacity, others felt it had little direct impact on academic outcomes. One teacher remarked, “The happiness curriculum doesn’t seem to influence academic achievement. While students sit quietly during the happiness class, their disruptive behaviour resumes as soon as it ends.”

Holistic education emphasises integrated development across all learning domains, including academics. While the happiness curriculum may not explicitly enhance academic performance, it fosters social-emotional skills like self-management and relationship-building, which indirectly support academic readiness and motivation.

Theme 4: Inculcation of Moral Values and Interpersonal Skills

Teachers observed positive behavioural changes among learners, including increased empathy, reduced aggression and improved understanding of ethical values. One teacher noted, “Students now show greater empathy towards peers and family members, and have a better understanding of right and wrong.”

While some respondents felt the changes were less pronounced than expected, the curriculum’s activities like storytelling and group discussions aligned closely with SEL competencies, such as social awareness and relationship skills. These activities encourage learners to practice empathy, cooperation and ethical thinking, fostering a compassionate and supportive school environment.

Theme 5: In-Service Teacher Training

Most of the participants reported lack of formal training to implement the happiness curriculum effectively. One teacher stated, “We haven’t received any training to conduct happiness classes.”

Teachers relied on the curriculum handbook and occasional visits from the coordinators for guidance. In the absence of structured training, they may find it challenging to align classroom practices with the principles of holistic education.

Providing focussed training could help equip teachers to better support learners’ emotional and social growth, integrate SEL strategies and balance the three forms of happiness (pleasant, engaged and meaningful) in learners.

Theme 6: Holistic Development of Learners

While teachers recognised the potential of the happiness curriculum to promote holistic development, many questioned whether a 45-minute daily session was sufficient to achieve this goal. One teacher remarked, “The primary goal of education is holistic development. However, conducting happiness activities for only 45 minutes cannot ensure comprehensive growth.”

The teachers also noted that prior to the introduction of the curriculum, schools engaged learners in various academic and co-curricular activities that supported holistic development. This feedback highlights the need for a more integrated approach, where the happiness curriculum is embedded throughout the school day rather than limited to a single period.

The happiness curriculum offers opportunities for social, emotional and moral development, aligning with holistic education principles. However, its full potential can only be realised only when its practices are woven into the broader educational framework, fostering integrated development across all domains of learning.

Findings and Discussion

The analysis reveals that the respondents hold varied perceptions of the happiness curriculum. While some consider it a distinct subject, others regard it as a curricular element that supports broader educational goals. Despite these differing views, the happiness curriculum promotes active student participation in classrooms, fostering thoughtfulness and reflection as students share insights and experiences from their personal and academic lives.

Positive Outcomes of the Happiness Curriculum

Participation in happiness curriculum classes has led to noticeable improvements in learners’ behaviour and attitudes. Some of the areas these classes have influenced are as follows.

Social-Emotional Growth: Learners display greater cooperation with peers, develop more empathetic attitudes, and display greater respect towards teachers and family members. They also demonstrate reduced aggressive behaviour, aligning with SEL competencies, such as social awareness and relationship-building.

Active Engagement: Learners participate actively in classroom activities, such as mindfulness, storytelling and group discussions, aligning with positive psychology principles of ‘engaged happiness’, promoting resilience, joy and a sense of connection.

Enhanced School Involvement: Some respondents observed improvement in learners’ performance across academic and extracurricular activities, reflecting the curriculum’s potential to indirectly contribute to holistic development.

These findings are supported by Chakraborty (2019), who noted that the happiness curriculum enables learners to maintain healthy relationships with their parents, teachers, peers, siblings and relatives.

Challenges and Mixed Opinions

Despite the observed benefits, the respondents highlighted several challenges and limitations, which are as follows.

Limited Impact on Academic Performance:

Some respondents believe that the happiness curriculum has minimal influence on academic outcomes, viewing its focus on non-academic activities as insufficient to foster substantial academic growth.

Behavioural Reversion: While learners exhibit positive behaviour during happiness classes, these changes are often temporary. Many learners often revert to their previous conduct after the class concludes.

Lack of Teacher Training: Teachers expressed the need for structured training and support to conduct happiness curriculum classes effectively. Some suggested appointing dedicated teachers to manage these sessions.

These concerns align with findings from Billig (2000) and Benson (2006), who argued that learners participating in community service activities, rather than structured happiness classes, exhibited greater empathy, happiness and academic success. This suggests that schools could benefit from integrating community-based activities into their approach.

Role in Holistic Development

While the respondents acknowledged the curriculum's potential to contribute to learners' holistic development, they noted that its current implementation falls short of achieving this goal. Some emphasised that prior to the happiness curriculum, schools implemented various policies and co-curricular activities that supported comprehensive development. The belief that 45-minute happiness classes are insufficient to ensure holistic growth highlights the need for a more integrated approach.

Holistic education principles advocate for interconnected growth across emotional, social and cognitive domains. To maximise

the impact of the happiness curriculum, its principles should be woven throughout the school day and integrated into both core academic and co-curricular activities.

Recommendations for Improvement

To enhance the effectiveness of the happiness curriculum, the following steps are suggested.

1. **Incorporate Community-Based Activities:** In line with the findings of Billig (2000) and Benson (2006), organise activities that connect learners with their communities, promoting empathy, social responsibility and academic motivation.
2. **Embed Principles Across the Curriculum:** Integrate the principles of the happiness curriculum into daily classroom practices and core subjects to foster holistic growth rather than confining them to a single period.
3. **Provide Teacher Training:** Develop structured training programmes to equip teachers with the skills needed to implement the curriculum effectively, fostering SEL and positive psychology in their classrooms.
4. **Dedicated Staffing:** Appoint trained facilitators to lead happiness curriculum classes, ensuring consistent delivery and better alignment with its intended goals.

These recommendations aim to address the existing challenges while reinforcing the curriculum's role in promoting holistic development and well-being for learners.

Conclusion

The introduction of Delhi's happiness curriculum is a positive step towards fostering the holistic growth of learners from nursery to Class 8. By incorporating mindfulness, meditation and activities that encourage critical thinking, the curriculum aims to enhance learners' social, emotional and psychological well-being. While teachers generally support this initiative, some feel that its additional requirements detract from

their focus on core subjects. To address these concerns, integrating happiness curriculum activities into co-curricular programmes and existing subjects could streamline efforts, allowing students to benefit from a more integrated approach to development. Providing teachers with targeted training

and implementing a feedback mechanism could further enhance the curriculum's effectiveness, enabling educators to deliver these activities in alignment with overall academic goals. This approach would help balance curricular demands while nurturing well-rounded, resilient learners.

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