

Parents' and Teachers' Views Towards Happiness Curriculum: Reflections on Learning Outcomes and Gaps

Dr. Mamta Singhal^a

^a Associate Professor, Institute of Home Economics, University of Delhi

Abstract

This paper explores the views of parents and teachers towards the happiness curriculum being implemented in Delhi government schools since 2018. The data was collected from 40 school teachers and 100 parents using an online survey and semi-structured interviews with some of them. The survey was conducted through google forms which consisted of two sections. Sections A used Likert scale items, while section B consisted of open-ended qualitative questions to find parents' and teachers' views about the happiness curriculum. After the survey, 10 teachers and 20 parents were approached for telephonic interviews to get deeper insights about the data. The study throws light on outcomes and gaps in the implementation of the happiness curriculum and suggests directions for the future.

Keywords: Happiness, Happiness Curriculum, Learning Outcomes

Introduction: An Overview of The Happiness Curriculum

Happiness Curriculum is an initiative of the state government of Delhi, India, that was launched by State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT), Delhi and Directorate of Education in 2018. The idea behind launching this curriculum from classes Nursery to VIII is that the schools should not only help the students to develop their cognitive capacities in the areas of math, science and language but should also cater to their happiness and wellbeing. The need for such an initiative stems from the fact that India has ranked poorly in terms of its happiness index in the world. The aggression, dissatisfaction and frustration are growing in our young population leading to mental health issues. Education is a social entity and it should help in building a happy and peaceful society. Thus, schools must also focus on building individuals who are mindful, responsible, confident and happy. Happiness has now become a part of the global policy agenda. As mentioned in the Happiness Curriculum framework (Pg.10.), "In 2011, the United Nations General Assembly recognized happiness as a fundamental human goal in Resolution 65/309 entitled 'Happiness: towards a holistic approach to development. According to the 2015 World Happiness Report (Helliwell, et al., 2015), schools that prioritize learner wellbeing have the potential to be more effective, with better learning outcomes and greater achievements in learners' lives". The research and policy frameworks have also emphasized this need and indicated that learning is better when students are happy.

In order that any curriculum can address these goals, it must define what is happiness, the goals of happiness curriculum, the content of happiness curriculum and the ways to implement happiness curriculum in schools.

With this purpose, the SCERT and Directorate of Education have published happiness curriculum framework and handbooks for teachers. The happiness curriculum is divided into three units, with each unit containing several modules. The teacher's handbook for each class provides a detailed description of activities under each module. The handbook also guides the teachers about the implementation of these activities.

In the context of the present study, classes 6 to 8 were selected. A thorough study of the handbooks and curriculum framework revealed that happiness classes are being held in the schools (for classes 6 to 8) on all weekdays, with each day focusing on a particular aspect of the curriculum. A basic plan for each day is provided in the happiness curriculum framework, which includes mindfulness activities, story-telling and reflection, activities and reflective games, self-observation and self- reflection on various days. The handbooks of happiness curriculum for each class provides detail description about how to conduct these activities. It is expected that the happiness curriculum will help the learners to become (a) mindful and attentive; (b) develop critical thinking and reflection;(c) develop socio-emotional skills (d) develop a confident and rational personality. These are the four major learning outcomes of the happiness curriculum.

The happiness curriculum has completed 3 years since its launch in 2018 in Government Schools of Delhi, and the researcher felt the need to conduct a survey to know the views of teachers and parents about the success of the happiness curriculum.

Objectives of the Study

- (1) To explore the views of teachers and parents about the achievement of various learning outcomes of the happiness curriculum
- (2) To find out the gaps (if any) pointed by teachers and parents in achieving the learning outcomes of the happiness curriculum
- (3) To suggest the possible ways of improving the happiness curriculum in the future.

Review of Related Literature

The studies on the happiness curriculum in the context of Delhi schools are not many. The most comprehensive study was conducted jointly by Brooking Institutions and Dream a Dream foundation in 2020. The study has reported positive changes in students' behavior on the basis of discussions with students and teachers and observation of happiness classes. The research, however, also explicated that there are certain answered questions about the approach and effectiveness of the happiness curriculum. It needs to be ascertained whether there are differences between the ones who have taken happiness classes and those who have not.

In another research, Gupta, K. (2020) conducted interviews of over 35 school teachers and found that teachers view happiness curriculum as a way of inculcating moral values and good habits among the children. The study has reported some positive effects on happiness classes on children, such as increased concentration, betterment of student-teaching relationships and reduction in violent behavior. Despite the positive impact, the study has also highlighted the hurdles and challenges in the implementation of happiness classes. Some of these challenges include –(i)large class size, which makes it difficult to conduct the hands-on activities, (ii) lack of training of teachers and(iii) lack of

Parents' and Teachers' Views Towards Happiness Curriculum: Reflections on Learning Outcomes and Gaps

autonomy in the selection of activities. Mittal, R. (2019), in her article, talks about how there is a need to reflect upon the issue of learning happiness in class or being happy while learning. She discussed that while the happiness curriculum is a positive step in making the schools a joyful space for learning but whether the happiness curriculum can address the needs of a diversity of learners, create happiness beyond happiness classes, or its sustainability is yet to be evaluated.

With reference to other countries, Bhutan had introduced the "Educating for Gross National Happiness Policy (EdGNH)" in 2010, and several researches have been done on its implementation and gains. The research conducted by Deki C. Gyamtso, Kezang Sherab & T. W. Maxwell (2017) in two teacher education colleges of the Royal University of Bhutan revealed that the teacher educators need to understand how to incorporate the policy recommendations into their modules and upgrade their knowledge and skills about the practices and values associated with gross national happiness and develop a sound understanding of learning of EdGNH.

Sherab, Maxwell & Cooksey (2013) conducted a case study in Zhabdrun Public School of Bhutan to understand the implementation of Gross National Happiness (GNH) education in the school. The study revealed the school infused the values of GHS through extracurricular activities, but nothing was done to implement GNH in the regular curriculum. The researchers also highlighted the issues of workload, syllabus coverage and examination pressure that might affect the implementation of GNH education in school. Overall, the GNH education showed positive results on students' life.

Although happiness curriculum or happiness education are not very popular terms, countries across the globe have emphasized the need for mental health education in schools. The mental health education is aligned to various aspects of the happiness curriculum, but the use of terms happiness curriculum or happiness education is likely to produce more positive reactions from the stakeholders like parents.

Sample

The sample was purposive in nature and consisted of 40 teachers and 100 parents from Delhi, India. The teachers who participated in the survey were involved in the implementation of the happiness curriculum from classes 6 to 8 in government schools of Delhi. Some of them were also the happiness coordinators of the schools. The teachers helped in sending the survey to the parents of students of their respective classes, and, hence all the parents who participated in the study had their child studying in these schools. All teachers and parents willingly participated in the survey, and they had experienced the implementation of the happiness curriculum for at least one year.

Tools for Data Collection and Analysis

The study used an online survey using google forms to collect the data. The survey was developed after doing a literature review of the happiness curriculum framework and teachers' handbooks published by SCERT, New Delhi. A preliminary discussion with the happiness coordinators was also held to understand what kind of questions might be helpful in providing insights into the research. Two separate survey forms were developed for teachers and parents.

The researcher decided to use both objective-type (Likert scale based) items as well as open-ended subjective questions in the survey. The initial survey form consisted of 20 items in section A which

was based on a 5 point Likert scale, and 7 questions in section B, which was subjective in nature. A pilot study and expert review helped in removing items that were repetitive or ambiguous. Also, the participants who participated in the pilot study suggested to keep the survey short so that participants are not deterred by the time consumed in filling it up.

The final survey for teachers thus had 12 items in section A and 4 questions in section B. The survey for parents had 12 items in section A and 5 questions in section B. The items were constructed in such a manner that part A was common in both the survey forms, whereas part B had different questions. The section A of both the survey focused on finding the views of teachers and parents towards the learning outcomes of the happiness Curriculum. For each learning outcome, 3 items were included in the survey. The participants had to record their responses on a 5 -point Likert scale from Strongly Agree (SA), Agree(A), Neutral (N), Disagree(D), Strongly Disagree (SD). The section B consisted of subjective questions, and these were analyzed qualitatively. The researcher read all the responses by teachers as well as parents and developed 4 categories for analysis.

- (i) Strengths of the happiness curriculum
- (ii) Gaps in happiness curriculum
- (iii) Suggestion for improvement in future

All the items were also translated in Hindi and kept alongside in the same form for the ease of understanding and responding by the participants. The overall analysis of sections A and B of the survey was used in arriving at findings and implications for the future.

Analysis

The tables I and II below depicts the analysis of teachers' and parents' surveys, respectively, on Likert scale items of section A. The items of the Likert scale belonged to the four learning outcomes and asked the teachers and parents to express their views from strongly agree (SA) to strongly disagree (SD) on a 5- point scale. For each learning outcome, the percentage of participants who recorded strongly agree or agree responses was calculated, and they were considered as having favorable views about the Happiness Curriculum. Similarly, the percentage of participants who recorded a neutral, disagree or strongly disagree view was calculated for each learning outcome, and they were considered as having unfavorable views. The neutral responses were put into the category of unfavorable views as it shows that the participants have noticed 'no change' with the Happiness Curriculum, which effectively means that the curriculum does not seem to have much value for them.

The favorable views on each learning outcome indicate that the participants (teachers or parents) find the happiness curriculum useful and have noticed favorable changes in children with its implementation. The unfavorable views mean that participants do not find the happiness curriculum useful as they have not noticed any favorable change in children. The unfavorable does not mean a negative change as none of the activities of the happiness curriculum could lead to any negative impact by its basic nature. However, if it does not bring a positive change in children, it will lose its purpose and hence need reflection and improvement.

Table I (Teachers' Views on different learning outcomes of The Happiness Curriculum)

Parents' and Teachers' Views Towards Happiness Curriculum: Reflections on Learning Outcomes and Gaps

Learning outcome	Percentage of teachers with favourable views	Percentage of teachers with unfavourable views
Being mindful and attentive	87	13
Developing critical thinking and reflection	82	18
Develop socio emotional skills	85	15
Being confident and rational	83	17

Table II (Parent's Views on different learning outcomes of The Happiness Curriculum)

Learning outcome	Percentage of parents with favourable views	Percentage of parents' unfavourable views
Being mindful and attentive	85	15
Developing critical thinking and reflection	74	26
Develop socio emotional skills	71	29
Being confident and rational	80	20

The tables I and II show that a vast majority of teachers and parents have shown favorable views about Happiness Curriculum outcomes. They believe that the happiness curriculum is a good initiative and has brought positive changes in children. The most favorable views by both teachers and parents are shown about being mindful and attentive. The teachers and parents feel that children have become calmer and hence are able to concentrate more. The percentage of parents' and teachers' views on learning outcomes related to the development of critical thinking and reflection is markedly different. While 82% believe that children have developed critical thinking and reflection, only 74% of parents seemed to notice that in their children's behavior. Similarly, only 71% percent of parents, as against 85% teachers, feel that children have developed better socio-emotional skills. This calls for a reflection and more inclusive approach where parents and teachers can together decide and discuss what is working and what is not working. More than 80 percent of teachers and parents feel that children have become confident and rational. They express themselves more openly and logically, participate in discussions and help in household chores. Overall, the teachers and parents have shown favorable views about the learning outcomes of the happiness curriculum. However, one must not forget that those who have shown unfavorable views are also important stakeholders, and there is a need to further explore the reasons behind their views.

The subjective analysis based on section B and interviews with some participants (both teachers and parents) is presented in the next section.

Analysis of section B

The qualitative analysis of the responses to the subjective questions led to the following 3 categories.

- (i) Strengths of the Happiness Curriculum
- (ii) Gaps in Happiness curriculum
- (iii) Suggestion for improvement in Happiness Curriculum

The responses of parents and teachers on the above categories are summarized as given below. The analysis also reveals the difference in parents' and teachers' views, which could be a point of reflection.

(i) **Strengths of the Happiness Curriculum:** Most of the parents and teachers have agreed that the happiness curriculum has some very useful activities that help to bring positive changes in children. The most liked activities by teachers and parents are related to mindfulness. According to the teachers, activities such as mindful listening, mindful eating, mindful breathing, and mindful drawing are helpful in making children focused in the classroom. The parents have also reported that mindfulness-related activities reduce the stress and anxiety in children and make them calm. According to teachers as well as parents, stories are also liked by children, and the children have gradually started sharing their experiences after listening to the stories. The parents feel that stories help in building moral values in children. The parents also feel that children have become more caring and respectful towards them and have started contributing to the household chores. These views are supported by the majority of teachers and parents. However, some have also mentioned that the happiness curriculum has brought no change or very little change in children. Their views are analyzed under the next point- gaps in the happiness curriculum.

(ii) **Gaps in The Happiness Curriculum:** Not all teachers and parents have observed positive effects of the happiness curriculum in children. According to the happiness coordinators and teachers, it is a good initiative, but all teachers should get proper training about its implementation. The teachers also mentioned that the time allotted for the happiness class is not sufficient. For instance, after telling a story, students should be given time to reflect upon it and share if they had similar experiences, but usually, only very few students get a chance to talk about them as they have to rush for other classes. The class strength in most government schools is large, making it difficult to conduct hand-on activities with children. Some stories are related to conflict resolution in difficult times, and the teachers feel that only stories are not sufficient to teach them these traits. It requires conducting other activities like role plays, situation analysis and dramas, and giving children an opportunity to do conflict management, but usually, the teachers do not have time for these activities. On the aspect of responsibility towards the environment, both teachers and parents have not noticed any sustainable change. One of the teachers who was contacted for a telephonic interview said that while the happiness curriculum teaches sensitivity towards plants, animals and the environment but what is more important is that we as elders become their role models. The parents, teachers and society, in general, should serve as role -model for children. As reflected in the analysis of section A of parents, a significant percentage of parents have shown unfavorable views; that is happiness curriculum has not brought any positive change in children. On subjective questions also these parents have expressed that Happiness Curriculum has not brought changes on certain aspects, especially with respect to becoming more responsible or less aggressive. They like the stories and activities like mindfulness but do not find their children taking these sincerely. They feel that today's children are always hooked on to TV and

Parents' and Teachers' Views Towards Happiness Curriculum: Reflections on Learning Outcomes and Gaps

smartphones, and for them, these classes are just a formality. The parents mentioned that we do not know what changes can be brought, but certainly, it needs to be more practical. One of the parents has mentioned that children should enjoy all their subjects and therefore happiness should be infused in their regular classes. In his words, "The happiness curriculum has not brought any change in their academic performance, and so what good is it for." The parents have expressed that happiness classes should lead to enhanced interest in academic subjects and then only it would be successful in real terms. Some of the teachers have agreed to this point of view and said that only when we can begin to notice changes in students' performance in school subjects, parents would be satisfied.

(iii) **Suggestions for Improvement in Curriculum:** Largely both parents and teachers are satisfied with the happiness curriculum and its outcomes. They believe that the change may be slow, but it would have a long-term impact on students' lives. Not all parents are convinced of their long-term impact as they said that Happiness Curriculum is only till class 8 and till that age children anyway are in a happy state and do not have any bad habits. The real challenges start in adolescence, when they are under peer pressure, have to make their careers and be ready for adulthood. The happiness curriculum is not equipping them to handle the complexities of life. The suggestion that emerges from such responses is that Happiness Curriculum may need to continue some interventions in higher classes as well. However, its content and methodology should stem from the needs of students. Instead of having a pre-defined and same curriculum for all schools, there may be some general guidelines. The counselors and teachers should interact with parents and students time to time to understand their needs and anxieties and try to address them to arrive at sustainable solutions.

In the telephonic conversation with the researcher, one parent expressed that real happiness comes from being 'successful' in some field. If the children are not successful, how can they be happy? It does not matter what the happiness curriculum preaches; our lives are decided by the fact whether our children can earn their bread and butter. It is therefore important that "Schools help them make their career to make them happy in life."

The suggestions given by the teachers include allowing more time and variety in the activities across classes. Instead of every day, the classes may be held twice a week but should be more intense so that all children can get time to express themselves. Having the gaps between the happiness classes will increase the students' interest as the students start finding the same routine boring. It will also increase the time for self-reflection.

Conclusion

This paper has provided insights about the implementation of the happiness curriculum in Delhi Schools based on the survey of 40 teachers and 100 parents. The findings indicate that teachers and parents have favorable views about the happiness classes and find them useful in bringing positive changes in children. The curriculum, however, promises some higher goals, and we cannot say that those are being taken care of. Also, whether the changes observed in children's behavior are sustainable and would equip them to deal with complex and difficult situations cannot be ascertained as we need to perhaps conduct a longitudinal survey over several years with those who have taken the happiness classes and those who have not taken these classes. The study also suggests that, for parents, the happiness curriculum should lead to increased concentration and better results in school subjects and currently, they do not see that change. The happiness curriculum is a good initiative but should adapt

to the needs of the students as per their context, and hence teachers need to play the role of counselors along with being happiness teachers in the schools. This would need more deliberations about the content and methodology of the happiness curriculum. It may be a good idea to extend the happiness classes in the secondary school also so that some continuity is maintained in students' adolescence period where they are likely to experience more challenges and stressful situations.

References

1. Brooking & Dream a Dream (2020). Development of student and teacher measures of Happiness Curriculum factors. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Development-of-student-and-teacher-measures-of-HC-factors-FINAL-081920.pdf>
2. Deki C. Gyamtso, Kezang Sherab & T. W. Maxwell (2017). Teacher learning in changing professional contexts: Bhutanese teacher educators and the Educating for GNH initiative, *Cogent Education*, 4:1, DOI: [10.1080/2331186X.2017.138463](https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2017.138463)
3. Gupta, K. (2020). The challenges before Delhi's 'Happiness' teachers, during COVID and otherwise, *Citizen Matters*. Retrieved from, <https://citizenmatters.in/delhi-aap-school-education-happiness-curriculum-covid-21824>.
4. Helliwell, John F., Layard, R., & Sachs, J. (eds.) (2015). *World Happiness Report 2015*. New York: Sustainable Development Solutions Network.
5. Mittal, R. (2019). From Learning Happiness to Happiness while Learning: Reflections on the happiness curriculum, *The New Learn*. Retrieved from <https://www.thenewlearn.com/2019/03/from-learning-happiness-to-happiness-while-learning-reflections-on-the-happiness-curriculum/>
6. SCERT Delhi & DoE Delhi (2018). *Handbook for Teachers (Happiness Curriculum) Grade 6-8*. New Delhi. SCERT & DoE
7. SCERT Delhi & DoE Delhi (2018). *Happiness Curriculum*. New Delhi. SCERT & DoE Retrieved from http://www.edudel.nic.in/welcome_folder/Happiness.htm
8. Sherab, K., Maxwell, T. & Cooksey, R. (2014). Implementation of Gross National Happiness Education in Bhutan: The case of an efficacious "Zhabdrung" Primary School, *Bhutan Journal of Research and Development*, 3(1), 1-15.