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Factors and Indicators of Creating Happiness in High School Academic Environment

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Abstract: This study aimed to identify the factors and indicators of happiness in high school educational environments using a qualitative research method. The study population included experts in education and psychology, especially happiness. In addition, the research sample consisted of 21 experts who were selected by purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Semi-structured interviews were applied to collect the required data. In this research, first, factors, components, and indicators were identified based on theoretical and research literature and interviews with experts, and then the experts were graded based on a 10-point Likert-type scale in terms of importance. Finally, the data were analyzed using MAXQDA software. The findings revealed that according to the interviewees, creating happiness in the educational environments of secondary schools depends on five factors, 14 components, and 59 indicators. These factors and indicators included physical space (visual space, facilities, and space design) and educational (cultural-artistic) activities (exciting situations and holding extracurricular workshops). Further, the other factors were academic activities (job skills and personal characteristics of school staff, quality of academic contents, and scientific-research activities), student characteristics (moral-social, emotional-psychological, physical, and family characteristics), and school earnings (formal and informal financial contributions). The respondents believed that these factors affect happiness in secondary schools. In general, the findings of the present study can be used in designing interventions to improve the level of happiness in high schools.

Keywords: Happiness, Academic environment, High schools, Qualitative research.

Introduction

The importance and role of education in the improvement and development of individual and social life has led the community and parents of students to expect the school to be a growing, dynamic environment and a breeding ground for the potential talents of their children (Guzmán, Green, Oblath, & Holt, 2020). One of the goals of education is to provide favorable conditions for the development of learners' talents. The school, as the most important place for the presence of future generations, must be a healthy and dynamic environment. One of the important topics that have been discussed a lot today is the issue of happiness in schools (Mohammadzadeh & Salehi, 2015). Happiness is one of the basic emotions and plays an important role in a person's psychological and social life (Steptoe, 2019). Living happily is as important as good nutrition, love and security because it promotes mental and physical health (Zhang & Chen, 2019). Happiness in schools is not a mono cause issue, but a multi causes issue (Mertoğlu, 2020).

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On the other hand, according to research, the level of happiness in Iranian schools is very low and has no special place in educational planning (Akbarpouran & Rezaii, 2018). One of the problems of any society is neglecting happiness and as a result increasing various mental illnesses such as anxiety and depression (Rijavec, 2015).

According to Veenhoven (2015), happiness refers to the degree to which a person judges the desirability of their overall quality of life. In other words, happiness means how much a person loves his life. Oishi, Graham, Kesebir, and Galinha (2013) believed that across cultures and time, happiness was most frequently defined as good chance and positive external circumstances, nonetheless, in American English, this definition was transformed to definitions focused on fortunate internal feeling conditions. Folkman and Lazarus (1991) see happiness as a feeling that results from functional progress toward a goal. Therefore, in the cognitive perspective, happiness is derived from the goal (Veenhoven, 2009).

Hanh and Weare (2017) indicated that happy teachers directly contribute to students' happiness, so that teachers help to educate their students with happiness. Even teachers believe that students 'happiness can be considered as an important part of teaching. This is a good reason that focuses on the happiness of the teacher as well as the happiness of the student. It was also mentioned that the happiness of the teacher is related to the happiness of the student (Moskowitz & Dewaele, 2021).

UNESCO in a study entitled "Framework for Happy Schools in Asia" presents three dimensions for a happy school: learning to live together, learning to become, and the context of positive psychology. This study indicated that *Happy Schools Framework* consists of 22 criteria for a happy school, as well as instances of approaches for attainment each of the criteria in schools (Salmon, 2016).

Rijavec (2015) in a study entitled "Should happiness be taught in schools?" states that within positive psychology; the idea of well-being (happiness) exemplifies the key criteria for positive functioning and is generally considered the goal in life to be improved. Rijavec (2015) stated that most important reasons for teaching happiness in school are high incidence of depression among young people worldwide, the small increase in life satisfaction in the last half a century, low students' contentment with school in many countries, and the collaboration between learning and positive emotion.

Demir and Özdemir (2010) indicted that hat one reason why the quality of friendships is associated to happiness is because friendship experiences make a background where basic needs are satisfied. Mahon, Yarcheski, and Yarcheski (2005) showed there were no gender differences in happiness between boys and girls. Statistically significant positive relationships were found between happiness and the health-related variables for the entire sample, with different forms of relations when boys and girls were examined distinctly. Cheng and Furnham (2002) indicated the personality traits (EPQ), self-confidence (PEI), friendship and school grades were all significantly reversely associated with happiness and loneliness. Regression analysis exposed that extraversion and neuroticism were direct predictors of happiness and self-confidence, whereas psychoticism and extraversion were direct predictors of loneliness. The effect of sex on happiness and loneliness was moderated by friendship and neuroticism, and by neuroticism and psychoticism, respectively. Likewise, extraversion was a

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significant predictor of general confidence and social interactions which directly influenced loneliness whilst psychoticism was a direct predictor of loneliness. Self-rated school performance was the only direct predictor of happiness whereas general confidence and social interactions were related to adolescents' self-reported loneliness.

Wolk (2008), in a study entitled "Joy in School", suggested some recommendations to make school happier. These suggestions include help students find pleasure in learning by giving them the freedom to explore what they love, give students some choice in how they will go about their learning and how they will demonstrate their knowledge, permit students to create original work, and show off that work, give students and teachers time to tinker, make school spaces inviting, offer more classes in gym and in the arts and use more authentic assessments and student self-assessments.

In Iran, Baluch Kareh (2018), in his research showed that happy people have control over their lives, are responsible, are purposeful and have a positive outlook on life. They are forward-looking and hopeful, and they resist difficulties and hardships. Also, in Fazlullahi, Isfahani Jahangir, and Haghgoyan (2011) study, six factors were identified as effective factors on students' happiness, which were prioritized in the following order: 1. Interaction between student and teacher; 2. University welfare facilities; 3. Organizational climate of the university; 4. Student participation in class activities; 5. Teaching methods and evaluation of professors; 6. Membership in special groups (sports, culture, religion, etc.). Panahi and Dehghani (2012) also showed relationship between all variables but, gender and formal participation with happiness. Findings on multiple regression technique show that, satisfactory of needs, trust to others and informal social participation affect happiness, respectively. Also, the relevant variables account for about 15 percent of the variance on student's happiness.

Chalabi and Mousavi (2009) indicated that average score of happiness for all three cities is low. Besides that among sixty nine countries, the rank order of happiness for Iran is 61. Multiple variable analyses indicate that among different factors such as trust, friendship, family relationship, lack of social isolation at micro level and social capital at macro level has direct impact on happiness. Joukar and Rahimi (2008) indicated a significant difference regarding the level of happiness among communication patterns. Scheffe's test showed that the happiness score was higher in consensual and pluralistic patterns and lower in protective and laissez-faire patterns. Also, in consensual and pluralistic patterns the level of happiness was higher in males than in females.

It should also be noted that happiness in all societies is influenced by the philosophy of education and the value system that governs that society. Considering that the Iranian society is a religious society, in the present study, an attempt has been made to identify the factors and indicators of creating happiness in the educational environments of secondary schools according to the Iranian culture.

Material and Methods

The present study is applied in terms of purpose and qualitative in terms of data collection. Data were analyzed by content analysis method. The study population included experts in education and psychology, especially happiness. In addition, the research sample consisted of 21 experts who were

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selected by purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Accordingly, the research sample included researchers in the field of happiness (faculty members) and education specialists (including principals and experts in the Education Office of Alborz Province and principals and teachers of high schools in Alborz Province) Semi-structured interviews were applied to collect the required data. The saturation of data was achieved when researchers stopped finding any new information among participants (after 21 interviews). The sample composition is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The sample composition

Interviewees	N	Education level	
Faculty member	5	PhD – Associate professor	1
		PhD – Assistant professor	4
Deputies and high schools experts of the Education Office	10	Master degree	8
		Bachelor	2
High school principals	3	PhD student	1
		Master degree	2
Teachers	2	PhD student	1
		Master degree	2

Data collection: In order to collect data, in addition to reviewing the research literature related to the field of happiness in educational settings, a semi-structured interview was used. In this type of interview, the questions are pre-designed and the goal is to gain in-depth information from the interviewee. The reason for using semi-structured interviews is that in this method, it is possible to exchange opinions as well as guide the discussion and the subject of the interview in order to achieve the objectives of the research. Other questions can also be asked to better discover and understand the information.

The interview sessions were organized in such a way that the initial coordination was done with the interviewees by phone or in person, and by explaining the subject and purpose of the interview, the appropriate time for the interview was determined and the interview was conducted. Each interview session lasted 45 to 60 minutes. The saturation of data was achieved when further interviews did not provide new information (After 21 interviews).

To ensure the validity of the research, while studying the theoretical foundations and background of research in the field of happiness, the methods of member checks and participant review, triangulation and establishing an audit trail (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011) were used. In the member checks and participant review, some interviewees were asked to review the analysis process or the categories obtained and to express their views on them. Triangulation was also used to ensure more validity. For this purpose, in the present study, from various sources, including a) collecting information, theoretical foundations related to the research variable and research conducted in this field, b) opinions of experts in the field of happiness psychology, and c) deputies and high school experts of Alborz Education Office and high school principals and teachers were used to obtain more comprehensive and in-depth data on the factors affecting happiness in high school educational settings. Also, for an establishing an

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audit trail, we used peer review method, while obtaining the specialized opinions of the supervisor and advisor, data analysis and its results were provided to several experts.

Data analysis method: To analyze the data, the coding method was performed using MAXQDA software. Content analysis method as a research technique includes concepts, categories and main and secondary factors. The three stages of coding in this approach are: a) open coding, b) axial coding and c) selective coding. The results of open coding analysis in the qualitative part of the research were 142 open codes that after refinement and reduction of open codes, 59 open codes with a total frequency of 351 were reported. After that, categorization was done, which resulted in 14 central codes in the form of research components. After reclassification, five effective factors of happiness in high school educational environments were identified.

Results

This study seeks to answer the question: What are the factors and indicators of creating happiness in high school educational settings? In order to answer the research question with research literature and interviews with experts, factors, components and indicators of happiness in high school educational environments were identified in the form of 5 factors, 14 components and 59 indicators that we provided as follow.

1. The factor of physical space

The results of coding and content analysis of the categories revealed that 3 categories in the physical space factor affect happiness in high schools. From the participants' point of view and the results of previous researches, these categories are: 1. Visual space including (quality of paint, quality of cleaning and beautification of walls), 2. Facilities including (ventilation system, light condition of spaces and laboratory space and workshop) and 3. Space design included (proper space layout of spaces, design of flexible spaces, the relationship between interior and exterior and furniture) that the paint quality of spaces with 26.66% has the highest frequency and the relationship between interior and exterior with 1.33% has the lowest frequency among the physical space factor indicators (Table 2).

Table 2. Frequency of categories and indicators of physical space factor

Factor	Category	Indicator	Frequency	Percentage
Physical space	Visual space	Quality of paint	20	26.66
		Quality of cleaning	11	14.66
		Beautification of walls	15	20
	Facilities	Ventilation system	6	8
		Brightness condition of spaces	10	13.33
		Laboratory and workshop space	2	2.66
	Space design	Proper space layout of spaces	4	5.32
		Design of flexible spaces	2	2.66
		Relationship between interior and exterior space	1	1.33
		Furniture	4	5.32
Total			75	100

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According to the participants' views and reviewing previous research, the physical space factor was identified as one of the most important factors. In this regard, one of the interviewees says: "At first glance and visual sight, the appearance of the school can affect the student's psyche and attract him to the learning environment" (interviewee No. 4). Another interviewee states that "the facilities and internal arrangement of the school evoke various messages in the student's mind, including order and cleanliness and the amount of amenities" (Interviewee No. 17).

2. Factor of educational activities

The results of content analysis through coding revealed that two categories in the educational activities affect happiness in high schools. According to the participants and the results of previous research, these two categories are: 1. Exciting situations (celebrations, religious ceremonies, camps, holding competitions, educational games and playing music and movies), 2. Holding extracurricular workshops (art workshops and academic workshops) which holding student camps had the highest frequency (28.57%) and holding extracurricular workshops had the lowest frequency (6.34%) (Table 3).

Table 3. Frequency of categories and indicators of educational activities

Factor	Category	Indicator	Frequency	Percentage
Educational activities (Artistic-cultural)	Exciting situations	Celebrations	10	15.87
		Religious ceremonies	6	9.52
		Camps	18	28.57
		Holding competitions	6	9.52
		Educational games	7	11.11
		Playing music and movies	5	7.93
	Holding extracurricular workshops	Art workshops	7	11.11
		Academic workshops	4	6.34
Total			63	100

One of the interviewees says: "Educational activities are not taken very seriously and only academic extracurricular activities are emphasized, while about the issues that cannot be achieved through direct education, educational activities can be used" (interviewee No. 10). Another interviewee states that "competitions and games in schools are very important because they affect the flourishing of the student's unknown abilities" (interviewee No. 20).

3. Factor of academic activities

The results of coding and content analysis exhibited that three categories in the factor of academic activities affect happiness in high schools. According to the participants and the results of previous research, these categories are: 1. Job skills and personal characteristics of school staff (student participation, social communication skills, be happy, leadership style, expectations of students, evaluation style, having the necessary expertise, teaching method of teachers, type of educational planning, method of assignment, age of staff), 2. Quality of academic content (type of content organization, attractiveness, being required), 3. Scientific-research activities (Attending the

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conferences, holding scientific workshops, experimental and laboratory activities, access to teaching resources and teaching aids in the library). According to the findings, student participation with 18.75% had the highest frequency and method of assignment and attending the conferences with .89% had the lowest frequency (Table 4).

Table 4. Frequency of categories and indicators of educational activities

Factor	Category	Indicator	Frequency	Percentage
Academic activities	Job skills and personal characteristics of school staff	Student participation	21	18.75
		Social-communication skills	19	16.96
		Being happy	8	7.14
		Leadership style	6	5.35
		Expectations of students	2	1.78
		Evaluation styles	3	2.67
		Having the necessary expertise	4	3.57
		Teaching method of teachers	10	8.92
		Educational planning type	6	5.35
		Method of assignment	1	.89
		Age of staff	6	5.35
	Quality of academic content	Type of content organization	9	8.03
		Attractiveness	5	4.46
		Being required	4	3.57
	Scientific-research activities	Attending the conferences	1	.89
		Holding scientific workshops	2	1.78
		Experimental and laboratory activities	2	1.78
		Access to teaching resources and teaching aids in the library	3	2.67
Total			112	100

One of the interviewees says: "Any academic activity done at school can directly affect students' happiness. “There are various elements in academic activities that quality of each of which can affect the level of students' happiness. The principal, the staff, and especially the teachers can play an important role in developing happiness at school. The happiness or unhappiness of school staff, their personality type, their educational skills and specialties, different ways and styles of classroom and school management, and the way school staff interact with students affect student happiness ”(Interviewee No. 8) .

Another interviewee states: "The academic resources provided to the student, including books, films and educational tools, the needs of the learners , attending the conference and taking them to large universities, can affect student happiness ”(Interviewee No. 11).

4. Factor of student characteristics. The results of coding and content analysis showed that four categories in the factor of student characteristics affect happiness in high schools. According to the participants and the results of previous research, these categories are: 1. Moral-social characteristics (religious tendencies, citizenship responsibilities, group membership, school rules, school culture) 2. Emotional-psychological characteristics (being positive, extroversion, perfectionism, emotional intelligence, interest in academic major, responsibility, self-confidence) 3. Appearance features (appearance, facial expressions, adornment) and 4. Family characteristics (happiness rate of family,

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family interactions and attitudes, attitudes of family to happiness, family economic status). According to the findings, family economic status with 19.58% had the highest frequency and beauty with 1.03% had the lowest frequency (Table 5).

Table 5. Frequency of categories and indicators of inclusive characteristics

Factor	Category	Indicator	Frequency	Percentage
Student characteristics	Moral-social characteristics	Religious tendencies	6	6.18
		Citizenship responsibilities	2	2.06
		Group membership,	3	3.09
		School rules	2	2.06
		School culture	5	5.15
	Emotional-psychological characteristics	Being positive	9	9.27
		Extroversion	5	5.15
		Perfectionism	3	3.09
		Emotional intelligence	6	6.18
		Interest in academic major	7	7.21
		Responsibility	2	2.06
		Self-confidence	3	3.09
	Appearance features,	Appearance	9	9.27
		Facial expressions	4	4.12
		Adornment	1	1.03
	Family characteristics	Happiness rate of family	3	3.09
		Family interactions	6	6.18
		Attitudes of family to happiness	2	2.06
		Family economic status	19	19.58
Total			97	100

One of the interviewees says: "Students with different mental and personality traits can be happy or unhappy,". For example, a student with an extroverted personality type is opposite to a student with a neurotic personality type. Even a student's positivity affects his or her happiness, as well as other psychological characteristics of him/her" (Interviewee No. 20). Another interviewee says, "Family attitudes affect student happiness. Some people think that laughter is kitty, and that happiness is not appropriate for children's personality. On the other hand, the necessary financial resources to create happy situations in the family may be insufficient, and the economic problems of the family prevent the occurrence of happiness in the family" (Interviewee No. 5).

5. Factor of school earnings

The results of coding and content analysis revealed that two categories in the factor of school earnings affect happiness in high schools. According to the participants and the results of previous research, these two categories are: 1. school per capita (amount per capita, time per capita) 2. Financial contributions (formal and informal). According to the findings, per capita rate with 50% had the highest frequency and time per capita allocation and informal financial participation with 14.28% had the lowest frequency (Table 6).

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Table 6. Frequency of components and indicators of school earnings

Factor	Category	Indicator	Frequency	Percentage
school earnings	school per capita,)	amount per capita	7	50
		time per capita	2	14.28
	Financial contributions	Informal	2	14.28
		Formal	3	21.42
Total			14	100

One of the interviewees says: "school principals can attract and equip school facilities with the help of the people or with the help of other social institutions and companies." School funding opens the door for the principal to make positive changes for rejuvenation, but it should be noted that many principals are either not motivated to pursue and attract donations, or are located in areas where public donations or institutions are not available to attract donations" (Interviewee No. 8).

In the figure 1, all selective coding that have been extracted from the perspective of experts in the form of factors and indicators of happiness in the educational environments of high schools, are presented.

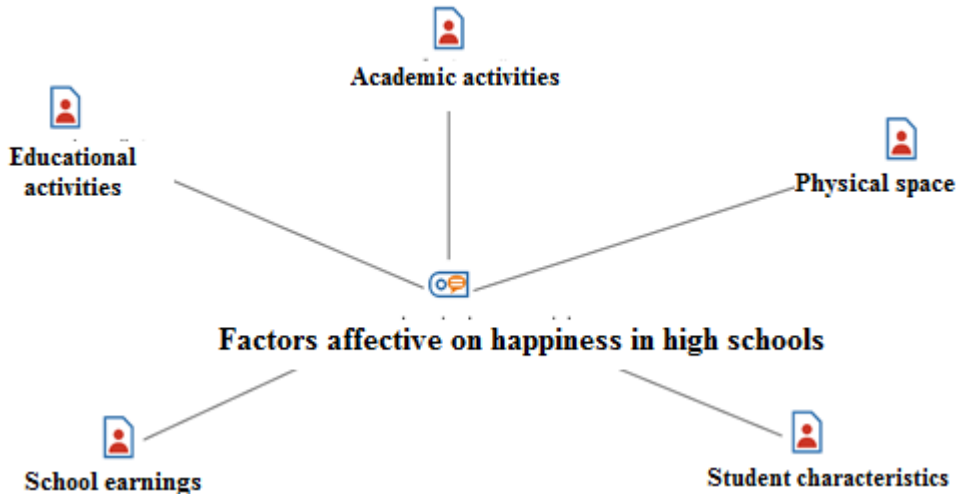

Figure 1. Factors extracted from experts interviews

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Discussion

The purpose of this study was to identify the factors and indicators of happiness in high school educational settings. According to the opinions obtained from the experts, the factor of physical space with three components of visual space, facilities and space design, the factor of educational activities (cultural-artistic) with two components of exciting situations and holding extracurricular workshops, the factor of academic activities with three components of job skills and personal characteristics of school staff, the quality of academic content and scientific-research activities, the factor of student characteristics with four ethical-social components Emotional-psychological characteristics, appearance features and family characteristics and the factor of school earnings with two components of formal financial and informal financial aids affect happiness in high school educational environments. These results are in line with the findings of studies of Chalabi and Mousavi (2009), Joukar and Rahimi (2008), Fazlullahi et al. (2011), Mohammadzadeh and Salehi (2015), Panahi and Dehghani (2012), Sezer and Ertug (2019), Veenhoven (2009), Wolk (2008), Oishi et al. (2013), Demir and Özdemir (2010) and Salmon (2016).

For instance, in Sezer and Ertug (2019) study, twelve main qualifications were identified related to the school happiness. These main qualifications were physical apparatus, school setting, learning situation, communication and cooperation, education planning, social activities, school administration, teacher qualifications, school distinct, student centeredness, learning activities, and student qualifications. The results indicated that the priority level of the main qualifications varies from one participant group to another. The teachers give priority school climate, school management, and physical equipment. On the other hand school administrators give more priority to the school setting, physical equipment, and education policy for school happiness. The parents give more priority to the physical equipment, school climate, collaboration and communication for school happiness. In addition, the students give more priority to the learning situation, school setting, and physical equipment.

In general, according to the results, it can be recommended that high schools should be in collaboration and communication for effective school setting, physical apparatus should be coordinated for aptitude training; learning environment should be prepared considering multi-dimensional improvement of the students to increase school happiness.

This study, like to other qualitative studies has some limitations which include possible small sample sizes, potential bias in answers, self-selection bias, and potentially poor questions from researchers. In

generalizations, these limitations must be taken into account. It is suggested that future researches, using mixed method strategies to further generalize the findings.

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