

Happiness Level Among School Staff During COVID-19

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Abstract

Schools play a vital role in building the students' knowledge and personalities. Students' lives are affected by their teachers and other staff in their school. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, many countries and organizations across the world have executed plans to change their work theme from face-to-face into remote working. The UAE has decided to change the learning theme from the traditional school-based learning into distance learning. With the changes that distance learning have, the happiness level of the school staff can be affected. Therefore, this paper aims to measure the happiness level of school staff at one of the primary schools in the UAE. A questionnaire was designed and distributed among all staff categories at the school. The questionnaire consisted of questions related to positive emotions, negative emotions, and overall happiness. The collected data was analyzed using statistical analysis techniques. The results revealed a high level of happiness among the school staff. The positive emotion was the leading factor that affects feeling happiness. This high happiness level reflects the effectiveness of the governmental plans executed during the pandemic.

Keywords

Happiness, COVID-19, Distance Learning, Statistical Analysis and Likert Scale

1. Introduction

Schools play a vital role in building the students' knowledge and personalities. Students' lives are affected by their teachers and other staff in their school. The positive influence of the school staff is critical to meeting the challenges of educating and guiding young minds to their full potential (Hills and Robinson, 2010). Therefore, the happiness and the well-being of the school staff are crucial to influencing the students positively. (Myers and Diener, 1995) defined happiness as the experience of both frequent positive effect and infrequency negative effect as well as the overall satisfaction with life. Happiness at the workplace is considered a key factor of productivity and motivation in any organization (Duari and Sia, 2013). There are many definitions of happiness in the workplace. According to (Wesarat, Sharif and Abdul Majid, 2014), happiness at workplace is how satisfied people are with their work and lives. (Sharma and Jain, 2018) found out that workplace happiness combines different factors, including positive feelings towards the organizational culture, work engagement, income, and team bonding. Also, happy employees tend to be motivated at work which leads to positive results, which plays a major role in the success of any organization.

With the spread of the 2019 coronavirus (COVID-19) throughout the world in March 2020, many countries and organizations across the world have executed plans to change their work theme from face-to-face into distance working. COVID-19 pandemic is considered a massive challenge to educational systems. Many countries decided to cease traditional classroom learning and switch to distance learning immediately (Daniel, 2020), and the UAE is no exception. The distance learning process has been more spread in the UAE due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Almuraqab, 2020). Since schools turned into distance learning for more than a year now, it is essential to measure the happiness level of school staff during the pandemic. Some studies aimed to see the lockdown impact due to the pandemic and happiness, such as the works of (Singh and Mishra, 2020; Greyling, Rossouw and Adhikari, 2021). Many changes occurred during distance learning such as recording lessons and conducting exams online which was a bit difficult in invigilation. In addition to that, the interaction between students and staff, as well as staff with staff was impacted. All of this can affect the happiness level.

To the best of the author's knowledge and based on the literature review (see section 2), the research work related to happiness at the workplace during COVID 19 is minimal. No work targets measuring happiness at schools in the

workplace UAE during the pandemic. Therefore, this work aims to measure the happiness level of school staff at one of the primary schools in the UAE. Based on the results of this work, the decision-makers at the school will be able to identify the happiness level of the staff and increase it.

This paper is organized as follows: Section 2 summarizes the literature findings, Section 3 illustrates the methodological framework, Section 4 presents the results and discusses the findings, and a conclusion is provided in Section 5.

2. Literature Review

In this section, we review the related works to happiness in schools in three streams. The first stream summarizes works done on measuring happiness. The second stream focuses on works that measured happiness in educational institutes and the third stream summarizes the works that considered happiness during the COVID-19 pandemic.

There are several research works conducted on happiness and positive emotion. For Instance, (Rowe, Fitness and Wood, 2015) investigated the experiences and functionality of positive emotions in learning and teaching by conducting interviews with students and lecturers at an Australian University. (Szczygieł and Mikolajczak, 2017) studied the role of positive emotions for linking trait emotional intelligence and subjective well-being by analyzing the results of 254 survey participants. In addition, (Rao, Vijayalakshmi and Goswami, 2018) applied mean analysis and analysis on variance statistical testing to examine the effect of three happiness factors (intrinsic, extrinsic, and work-life issues) on faculty with three years of experience. Moreover, (Tasnim, 2016) reviewed the causes, consequences, and effects of happiness at the workplace from the psychological aspect and other external factors. Similarly, (Fisher, 2010) reviewed the definition, causes, and consequences of workplace happiness based on positive psychological literature.

Other research works aimed to measure the happiness of academic staff in educational institutes. For example, (Thevanes and Jathurika, 2021), studied the relationship between the happiness of academics and job satisfaction in a selected university in Sri Lanka by surveying 57 academic staff and analyzing the data using univariate and bivariate analysis. As a result of their study, it was found that employee happiness and job satisfaction are high in the selected university. (Mousa, 2021) found out that gender diversity, diversity management, and organizational including can effectively predict workplace happiness by surveying 320 academics from three public universities in Egypt. In Turkey, (Arslan and Polat, 2021) studied the relationship between teacher's perspective and their happiness at schools by surveying 768 teachers in public schools. Some studies were conducted in the UAE, such as the work of (Moussa and Ali, 2021) which aimed to study the relationship between higher education students' happiness and academic success during the COVID-19 pandemic using the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire. Furthermore, the work of (Al-Ali et al., 2018) investigated the impact of job happiness factors (optimistic moods, social relationship, and passive mood) on the job performance at oil and gas industry in UAE.

Some studies developed targeting happiness and emotion during the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, (Greyling, Rossouw and Adhikari, 2021) analyzed the relationship between the lockdown caused by the pandemic and happiness in three countries: New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa. These countries vary in the lockdown duration and regulations. It was found that regardless of the country regulation or duration of lockdown, the lockdown was associated with a decrease in happiness levels. Furthermore, (Singh and Mishra, 2020) reviewed the literature on the impact of COVID-19 on employees' safety and happiness. (Lee, 2021) examined the effect of different factors on employees during the transition to remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic. These factors are psychological safety, organizational support, and emotion.

Based on the literature review results, and to the best of the author's knowledge, no research aimed at measuring staff happiness at schools in the UAE during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, this research aims to measure school staff's happiness and positive emotions during distance learning at one of the primary schools in the UAE.

3. Methodological Framework and Results

The methodology used in this research consists of two stages. The first stage is the design of the questionnaire. The second stage is the analysis of the collected data, which are described in the sections below.

3.1 The Design of the questionnaire

Happiness during remote teaching is measured through a survey. The survey consists of questionnaire design. The questionnaire is designed and distributed electronically among the different school staff categories (academic and administrative staff). The questionnaire is designed in both Arabic and English languages based on the workplace PERMA-profiler that is developed by (Butler and Kern, 2016). The PERMA profiler consists of 5 categories which are positive emotions, engagement, meaning, and accomplishment. Health is also added to them. Each category has three questions in the questionnaire. It also consists of questions about negative emotions and happiness. The purpose of the questionnaire is to check the happiness level of the staff at one of the schools. The proposed happiness scale consists of three main categories. The first category is the positive emotion towards working remotely. The second category indicates the negative emotions towards working remotely. The third category measures the general happiness feeling of the respondent. The overall happiness value (OHV) is the total score obtained under the three happiness categories. We applied a five-point Likert scale on the questionnaire, which asks the participants to show their level of agreement on given statements using a scale from 1 to 5 (Joshi *et al.*, 2015). In the first section of the survey, we collected general information about the participants, such as their gender, age, experience, and job role. In the next section, question covering the three categories of the happiness scale were presented. The number of participants was 39, with the majority of the participants being teachers (Table 1).

Table 1. participants' characteristics

Category	Sub-category	Percentage of participants
Gender	Male	% 38.9
	Female	% 61.1
Age	20-35 years	% 27.8
	36-50 years	% 66.7
	Above 50 years	% 5.6
Job position	Teacher	% 66.7
	Social Worker	% 22.2
	Head of Faculty	% 5.6
	Classroom assistance	% 5.6

3.2 Analysis of Results

In this work, we conduct statistical tests to answer the hypothesized questions. In order to identify the suitable statistical type, we conduct Shapiro-Wilk normality test. P-values were found to be between 0.00032 and 0.0104. Thus, we conclude that the data is found to be from a non-normal distribution and a non-parametric test needs to be used. We then utilize sign test to answer the research questions. We test if the data differs significantly from the mid-scale value at a significant level (α) of 5%.

$$S_1 = \begin{cases} H_0: \tilde{\mu} = M \\ H_1: \tilde{\mu} > M \end{cases} \quad (1)$$

Where H_0 is the null hypothesis, H_1 is the alternative hypothesis, $\tilde{\mu}$ is the median of the data, M is the mid-score value. The null hypothesis (H_0) means that the dataset median is less than or equal the mid-score value, while the alternative hypothesis (H_1) means that the dataset median is greater than the mid-score value.

Note that for the negative emotion we test $H_1: \tilde{\mu} < M$ as the smallest the value the better. Also, the total happiness score is calculated as

$$\begin{aligned} & \text{Total Happiness Score} \\ & = \text{Positive Emotion} + ((5 \times NQ^{Neg}) + 1 - \text{Negative Emotion}) \\ & + \text{Happiness feeling} \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

Where NQ^{Neg} is the number of questions in the questionnaire related to the negative emotion. Note that since the higher score the better value for positive emotion and happiness feeling while it is the opposite for the negative emotion, we modify the scores of the negative emotion in the equation to be in the same direction as the positive

emotion and happiness feeling (i.e., the higher score the better). This modification is done by subtracting from the maximum possible score (maximum Likert value multiplied by NQ^{Neg}) the negative emotion score.

Table 2. Hypothesis testing results

	P-value	Selected hypothesis	Remark
Positive emotion	0.011851	H_1	The positive emotion score was found to be high (greater than 7.5 out of 15).
Negative emotion	0.000533	H_1	The negative emotion score was found to be low (less than 7.5 out of 15).
Happiness feeling	0.011851	H_1	The happiness feeling was found to be high (greater than 2.5 out of 5).
Total happiness score	0.004738	H_1	The happiness score was found to be high (greater than 17.5).

Table 3. Bivariate correlation

	Positive emotion	Negative emotion	Happiness feeling
Positive emotion		-0.15	0.96
Negative emotion	-0.15		-0.08
Happiness feeling	0.96	-0.08	

Table 2 shows the hypothesis testing results using the hypothesis in Eq. (1). The results indicate a high overall happiness score as the null hypothesis is always rejected. To examine if the happiness levels are high or very high, we repeat the hypothesis testing using $M = 4 \times NQ$. The analysis reveals no strong evidence to reject the null hypothesis which indicates that the positive emotion, the happiness feeling, and the total happiness score are high. The negative emotion is found to be low.

Table 3 shows the bivariate correlation between the different categories. Bivariate correlation helps understanding the relationship between the different factors. A strong positive correlation was found between positive emotion and feeling happiness. Weak negative correlation was found between negative emotion and happiness feeling.

4. Discussions

The school community was satisfied with working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic as the analysis revealed with a high level of happiness. The positive emotion was the leading factor that affects feeling happiness and consequently the total happiness score. This high happiness level reflects the effectiveness of the governmental plans executed during the pandemic. It also reflects readiness of the infrastructure and employees to move from face-to-face working environment to the remote working theme. To further increase the happiness level, authorities need to keep focusing on boosting employee's positive emotions throughout strategies that considers employees, increase their joyfulness and positiveness. With the high positive emotion, the negative emotion remains low leading to less impact on the happiness feeling, i.e., positive emotions outweigh negative ones.

5. Conclusion and Future work

In summary, happiness of school staff can greatly impact the students' lives. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the UAE started to cease the traditional learning at schools and move towards distance learning. This paper measured the happiness level of the staff at one of the schools in the UAE during the implementation of distance learning. The study revealed that the school staff was satisfied with working remotely as a high happiness level was obtained from the analysis. This implies that the developed governmental plans are effective, and the school management has effectively implemented them. For future work, this study can be extended to examine the well-being at the school. The scope of the study can be widened to cover more than one school in the country. In addition to illustrating the impact of COVID-19 on happiness and well-being through a comparative study.

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Biography

Anwar Hamdan attended University of Sharjah in UAE, where he obtained his B.Sc. in Civil Engineering in 2016. After graduation, he spent some time working as a civil engineer in the roads and traffic department at one of the engineering companies in the UAE. After that, he moved to the academia as a graduate research assistant at the Sustainable Engineering Asset Management research group at the university of Sharjah. During that time, he obtained his M.Sc. in Engineering Management from the same university in 2020.