

Examining the Factors that Enhance Students' Happiness in Higher Education Institutions: A Case Study in a Private Higher Education Institution in the UAE

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Life satisfaction and happiness of an individual depends on his/her ability to deal with various situations of life. Individuals capacity to fully understand and then control their emotions results in a decrease in the stress of life. No doubt, the happiness of a consumer is associated with his/her satisfaction from services that are being provided. Moreover, a sense of achievement and learning enjoyment is another paramount source of gratification. According to the World Happiness Report published in 2013, students of higher education institutes in the UAE are less euphoric than students of well-developed countries. Engagement of students in morally uplifting experiences is indispensable for the development of the public. Factually, there is no rumination on student's happiness that can be materialised from the synchronic policies in the UAE, demonstrating the dire need to understand the importance of cultivating the environment of happiness in HEIs of the UAE. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the happiness scale among students of higher education institutes and then correspond this scale with four criteria of PERMA, in order to explain the factors which are important for student's contentment in HEIs of the UAE.

Key words: Happiness, Higher Education Institutions, PERMA, UAE.



Introduction

Individuals and societies prefer to attain happiness than increase GDP during rising depression. Unfortunately, research on happiness is not recognised as a discipline. That is why different disciplines try to define happiness in different ways and researchers have developed diverse techniques in measuring happiness. Easterlin *et al.* (2003) defined happiness as life gratification, comfort, prosperousness and usefulness. Diener *et al.* (2003) added impassioned, ardent, soulful etc. as synonyms of happiness.

Moreover, happiness can be measured by having enough money, better health, a safe future, housing, educational opportunities and employment. In the same way, happiness can be achieved by improving the quality of life according to Lee *et al.* (2008). So, legislators should take into account happiness when designing policies for society. Currently, the UAE education framework does not appreciate the importance of happiness among students and the entire HEIs of the Arab world are facing this dilemma. The UAE has maintained high education standards and has established a modern education system by using technology, excellent curriculum and an instrumental learning atmosphere for students, which in doubt has enhanced the happiness of learners.

The UAE government (KHDA Annual Report, 2016) has allocated 21.2% of the country's budget to education, in order to modernise the education system of the country. This has become possible by recruiting professional educators and by acquiring smart educational programs. The education ministry has designed a five-year ambitious plan to increase student's learning habits and strengthen the teaching skills of educators. During the 2017-2018 academic year, the new school syllabus was implemented in order to encourage the culture of mutual respect, broad mindedness, and faithfulness towards the nation. The purpose of all this practice was to enhance sustainability, morality, humanities, civic senses and happiness among students.

The UN Happiness Report (2015) assigned 28th rank to the UAE in the world. In 2018, Miss Uhoud Al Roumi was hired as the first minister of happiness. She emphasised that all sections of society and educational institutes must designate happiness as their first priority. To impart excellence in emotional, psychological and physical well-being, it is important to reform the curriculum. At the same time, it is also important to improve physical infrastructures of schools in order to provide a proper environment for learning.

Happiness and Higher Education

It can be asserted that all nations are in need of health opportunities, educational uplift and moral growth. However, Peterson (2006) argued that role of educational institutes should be

more than only to focus on the growth of a personality character and physical fitness. In other words, significance should be given to the sentiments, which are associated with learning and learners. It is believed that happiness in life can be achieved by engagement in learning activities. So, policy-makers should give due importance to happiness in their policies. But unfortunately, this idea of happiness is not well appreciated in policies. It is believed that if students are not satisfied with his/her current educational institute, then it is quite difficult for him to transfer his funding to any other educational organisation. Therefore, it is suggested that all educational organisations should make student's satisfaction their top priority.

Survey of Students' Happiness in Higher Education of the UAE

Researchers have observed a gap in how happiness is perceived in the Middle East, in spite of having diligence on the connection between happiness and culture. UAE, being a young country, experienced development in various economic and social sectors including tourism, real estate and sea trade over the last ten years. By effective utilisation of the oil income, the UAE government has improved the standard of life of citizens by providing employment opportunities and generous pension schemes. The government has provided enough funds for education, housing and health sectors and established recreation centres. Since the existence of the UAE, society has been shaped as a blend of traditional and modern steps. This country gets its strength from religion and culture and sometime relies on western system, whenever it requires. Economy of the UAE is strong and has a huge number of working expatriates (84%). According to a survey of The Gulf News, UAE in Arab world is first preference of young Arabs to live. The World Happiness Report, which measured social fabric, financial strength, prosperity and economic conditions has ranked UAE at 17th place and recently it moved at 14th. Community Development Authority and Dubai Statistics Centre jointly measured the happiness score of the UAE, which is 8.3, whereas in other Arab countries this score is 7.9 (Libo, 2012). A poll of 5000 UAE nationals was conducted and 91% of these citizens were satisfied with their quality of life (Olson, 2012).

Fairness, freedom, urban and industry development are the main factors which make citizens of any country remain happy (Veenhoven, 2012). Al-Othman, (2012) mentioned that married couples with sound health, religious inclination, better communication and better education are happier than couples having low education level, bad communication skills and less religious inclination. Simadi *et al.*(2004) observed that expatriates gave more importance to economic values, while Emirati students attach more importance to religion. Literature investigation and scope of emphasis of happiness/contentment provide deep analysis into the abstract idea of the UAE residents about their social and economic uplift and impact of the culture of expatriates. So this study will focus on the gap in the literature by taking into account the concept of contentment among UAE citizens and expatriates.

Happiness and Satisfaction

An individual's capacity to analyse traumatic situations and their ability to assess the impact of their care is associated with overall life gratification and contentment. This is in addition to other factors, such as depression challenges, and mental and physical wellbeing. The strength of an individual to deal with worse and negative circumstances can impact

Happiness is greatly related with a higher state of contentment from provided services as compared to achievements related to academic learning. Dean & Gibbs (2015) presented a factual study on the gratification and happiness of UK educational students. According to them "intellectual participation of learners and their commitment determine their happiness and their satisfaction depend on mode of delivery instead of process". They have discussed that divergence between contentment and happiness is quite evident and can be considered as two concepts, especially when satisfaction and happiness comes from involvement in edifying happenings and rational belief of happiness. Quite importantly, the measurability of satisfaction makes it more advantageous trailing for those who are in need to express its effect either to potential students or to those who back their learning process. But Dean and Gibbs (2015) demonstrated that the "idea of standard in higher education should be expanded not only to contentment but belief of student happiness should be implemented as one of the characteristic by which learning availability should be assessed if not measured." In view of the gap between contentment and happiness, the current study presents a comprehension of key factors that a learner experiences and their impact on both contentment and happiness by observing four out of five criteria in PERMA in order to elaborate on the factors that effect a student's satisfaction in HEIs of the UAE. Students of a Management College in the Emirates of Dubai were selected as the sample and investigated to develop student's happiness in higher studies.

Literature Survey

Benjamin et al. (2014), Demir & Ozdemir (2010) and Spiers & Walker (2008) have stated that services provided for higher education studies should be applied beyond the contentment of students. They recommended that educational institutes should implement the idea of a student's happiness, so that they can perform well in their studies. Moreover, Seligman (2012), Frey & Stutzer (2010), McDowell (2010), and George (2009) supported the concept of physical well-being as a source of happiness. Tugade & Fredrickson (2007), Sheldon & Lyubomirsky (2006) and Shiota et al. (2006) observed a new schedule of constructive feelings and mindsets. Simsek (2009), Drake and co-workers (2008) and Zimbardo et al. (1999) developed personalised wellbeing concepts as criteria to examine someone's life during past and coming times. Currently, the trajectory of life is made and carries one within an interim framework. Moreover, Hedonism theory has developed a model of happiness (Hollis-Walker *et al.* 2011, Ryan *et al.* 2001). Deci et al. (2008) has maintained that human

flourishing is self-indulgent. However, Simsek (2009) made the opinion that emotion can be described as aspiration, oblivion, and contrition and more clearly happiness can be an alternative of physical soundness.

None the less, research has made various reasons for the assumption of positive learning methodology. In the meantime, positive learning is a solution to depression among youngsters, facilitates finding a way for enhanced life contentment, inspires scholarship and innovation, emphasises community development, and uplifts social solidarity (Sligman, 2009, Waters et al., 2011). Positive learning reports and stabilises inner awareness and personal control of mental wellbeing from a young age, which gives long lasting benefits during adulthood with emotional stability and capacity of introspection. In order to develop a connection between a student's happiness and higher education, the following studies have been summarised in Table 1.0.

Table 1.0: Pragmatic Survey on Learners' Happiness and Higher Studies

Year/Writer	Dependent Variable	Field of reference/ Unit of Analysis	Inferences
(2017) Elwick et al. UK Academic Organizations	Higher Study	Review	Thriving(√), gratification (√) and well-being(√)
(2017) Michalos	Higher Study	International contentment/ Survey	Ethnicity(√), Remuneration(√), Self- respect(√), Social Assistance(√), Current frame of mind(√), Social gathering(√), Natural Surroundings(√), Life Episode(√).
(2012) Cuñado and de Gracia Spain	Higher Institution	Ordered logistics regression	Earning And Employment Status(-) Self-Esteem(√) Employment Status (√)
(2015) Kern et al.	Higher Institution	516 Australian students (age 13– 18)/four of the five	Life Contentment(√), Aspiration(√), Thankfulness(√), School

		PERMA elements, and two factors of ill-being / Study.	Commitment(√), Growth Attitude(√), Religious inclination(√), Liveliness (√), Bodily Activity(√), Somatic Signs(-), and Nerve racking Life incidents(-).
(2015) Leskisenoja and Uusiautti	6 th grade children Finland	Theory of happiness (PERMA)/ Northern-Finland school/ student discussion/ Survey forms.	Attainment (√), Positive emotions (√), Commitment (√), Associations (√).
(2000) Frey & Stutzer/ Switzerland	Higher Institution	Information collected from interviews of 6000 Swiss citizens /Anova/Sensitivity Inspection.	(1) Happiness index Resident (√) Self-employment(√) (2) Financial Variable Individual unemployment(-) Earning Level (√) (3) Political Organizations Direct representation (√)
(2012) Chen /Japan, South Korea and Taiwan	Higher Institution	Questionnaire	personal earning(√) social set up(√), learning(√)
(2009) Xiao et al.	Higher Institution	Students of a state university in the U.S./ Questionnaire	Cost Administration(√) Steadiness(√) Life contentment(√)

Source: Author's Computation

From Table 1.0, it can be concluded that very small efforts were made to examine students' happiness during higher education among Arab countries and the UAE. That is why current study is important to fill this gap by developing the connection between happiness and higher academic institutions in the UAE



PERMA model and Higher Studies in the UAE

Factual verification on the link between learning and happiness can be tracked down to Cuñado and de Gracia (2012), Hu (2013), Sabatini (2014) and Ford et al. (2014). They realised that happiness comes with moral learning to persuade client accomplishment. In 2011, Seligman proposed the PERMA model, which is a collection of five psychological stability indicators. In the PERMA model, P stands for emotions, E for engagement, R for relationships, M for meaning and A for accomplishment. By following this model, present research has developed its contours for measuring the well-being of students. Information for this study was collected from the students of a management college in Dubai. PERMA is a multifaceted model, linked with constructive learning. This model provides a skeleton, which measures criteria that are cherished by youth (e.g. interrelations and positive feelings) in connection with the present organisational set up and plan of action (Waters et al. 2012, Norrish et al. 2013, Kok et al. 2013, Cunha et al. 2014, Kern et al. 2015). Furthermore, pleasant sensations of happiness are in the manifestation of optimistic tenderness and contentment. There are many features of emotional links between learning institutes and actions like the incorporation of affection, and being focused and active in life. Moreover, affection of community integration means protection and assistance are linked to moral feelings, making progress towards destination, performing designated assignments on a regular basis and feelings of attainment.

During current times, there are not so many investigations that analyse the interlinkage between standards and learner's contentment, specifically by combining PERMA model with anxiety. The purpose of the present study is to acquire PERMA features to examine the students in one of the management colleges in the Emirates of Dubai. As described earlier, the UAE has emphasised the provision of student's contentment in its policy and has made best efforts in assisting this idea in all facets of life. To attain this national purpose, a private organisation should shake hands with government by providing the best facilities not only for just satisfaction but also for continuous happiness.

Materials and Methodology

There were 55 students in a management study from a local college in Dubai, UAE who were selected to carry out the current study. The data was collected by using PERMA criteria i.e positive emotion, accomplishment, engagement relationships, depression and anxiety to develop the Happiness Questionnaire. This questionnaire was then randomly distributed among college students. For data analysis, descriptive statistics and ANOVA test were used.



Procedures

Instruments

This research uses survey form as a way to quantify the link between happiness and its features among management college students. Features of social and population structure in Part A of the survey form were basically developed for this research and used to find the interviewee's peer group, gender, academic qualifications, marital status, accommodation and family's social position. Whereas, Part B shows features of survey form that constitutes four constructs using a five-point Likert scale. All queries were based on technical reports and specialist views that have been used in other researches in the past. In addition, contributors were hired from a management college of the UAE. 43 male and female students belonging to the age group 20-45 years were selected for current research. These selected students were evenly allocated between four majors and these students indicates the whole community of the institute (Gandomi & Haider, 2015; Meyers et al. 2016; Musibau et al. 2017).

Ethical deliberations

Current research was sanctioned by BoT of the management college at UAE. Contributors collected details about the study methodology and goals, and they consented the data forms. Confidentiality was promised by allocating codes to the collected information.

Significance

There has been limited research available on student's happiness level in HEIs, so the current study fills this gap and has enlisted valuable persuasions to legislators on the importance of this subject. These findings would enhance student's accomplishments and would ultimately uplift the proneness of human capital blooming to achieve sustainable growth in the UAE.

Findings

Findings of current research indicates that the presence of a significant level of depression and anxiety among students reduces their accomplishment during study, which compromises the calibre of human capital, thus has a negative impact on the sustainable growth of any country. Stress of student life can be countered by providing excellent services through their educational institutes. During this study, we also observed that engagement of students, their alliance among their fellow staff, and their achievements boost their merriment. On the basis of these findings, we have suggested that private institutes providing higher education in the UAE should pledge their assistance to students beyond smugness and focus on student's glee. Moreover, student support offices in educational institutes should arrange orientations for

students to concede the risks of depression and arrange psychological appraisal and mediation to revamp the mental health of learners.

Illustrative Examination of the Demographic Features

In the illustrative examination, current research examines the allocation of the facts along with some of the demographic features of the participants. Relying on current research, the participants were requested to inform them about their gender, residency, year of study, and their area of interest. Table 4.1 indicates the distribution of 43 participants according to the demographic features of the students of the college.

Table 4.1: Description of the Participants

Participants Features	Frequency (n=43)	(%)
Gender		
Male	29	67
Female	14	33
Total	43	100
Nationality		
UAE	33	77
Other Arab	7	16
Asian	3	7
Total	43	100
Years in College		
Freshman	22	51
Junior	6	14
Senior	7	16
Sophomore	8	19
Total	43	100
Major Area of Specialisation		
Health Informatics Management (HIM)	3	7
Hospital Administration (HA)	3	7
Hospitality Management (HM)	5	11
Human Resource Management (HRM)	32	75
Total	43	100
	N=43 and Percent=100	
	Stata 15.1 2018	

This table indicates the gender of students in management institutes of the UAE. Table shows that most of the participants are male amounted to 29/43 (67%), whereas the remaining 14/43 (33%) are female. Most participants belong to the UAE, representing 33/43 (77%), 7/43 (16%) belong to other Arab states, while 3/43 (7%) are Asians. As far as the year of study in college is related, most students are freshman, whereas sophomore, senior and junior are ranked 2nd, 3rd, and 4th respectively. Freshman are counted as 22/43 (51%), sophomore is 8/43 (19%). In the end, based on their area of interest, 32/43 (75%) are students HR department. HM, HIM and HAM are 11/43, 7/43 and 7/43 respectively of management institute of Dubai.

Illustration of Happiness Index Factors

By applying the PERMA model and its happiness index with slight changes, present research modifies PERMA features for UEA students for happiness parameters (joyous, fulfillment, consolation, tribute, maturation, set of attitudes, energetic, amusement, and stress). Other elements that persuaded happiness are altered parameters of PERMA. Happiness = F (Learner's commitment, Association, Achievement, Sadness and Stress, so happiness is measured by these five parameters. Student's commitment for Learning, Association and Achievement impact deeply on student's happiness in the form of positive feelings. But Sadness and Stress are conceived to measure the negative feelings of selected students at college.

Table 4.2: The Illustrative Examination and Internal Consistency Reliability for Happiness factors

<u>Happiness</u>	Stand. Dev.	Skewness	Mean	Alpha
Joyous	0.625	-0.591	4.41	0.814
Fulfilment	0.753	-0.572	4.33	0.827
Consolation	0.677	-0.78	4.34	0.879
Tribute	0.78	-0.96	4.32	0.829
Maturation	0.68	-0.44	4.31	0.884
Energetic	0.62	-0.83	4.49	0.762
Amusement	0.66	-0.76	4.29	0.962
Stress	0.91	0.78	-3.92	0.814

N=43 and Percent=100

Stata 15.1 Output 2018

Internal consistency reliability is a measure of how well the items on a test measure in the same construct or idea. Internal consistency reliability in organisational research uses the most commonly used estimators, which are Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability

coefficient (Peterson & Kim, 2013). The composite reliability coefficient, however, uses different loading but can be explained in the same way as Cronbach's alpha (value above 0.70 of internal consistency reliability is considered as satisfactory, but values below of 0.60 shows the absence of reliability). During the current study all items are compatible and accordant.

The reply from students to measure happiness parameters ranged from 1 to 5. All the replies of students are constructive, acceptable and agreed that optimism, glad with their academic organisation, relaxation from tutorials, physical activities, tribute, maturity have a pleasant impact on student's feelings and 4.30/5 gave their consents about these facts. Similarly, 3.99/5 also accepted the fact that stress lessens student's happiness. These investigations are in accordance with the findings of Pekrun et al. (2011) and Kern et al.'s (2016) theory of wellbeing.

Happiness, Commitment, Association, Sense of Achievement, Stress and Sadness

In total, the survey for happiness and mean score for Happiness was 4.21 (Stand. Dev. 0.74). Remarkably (Alpha=0.84) was found, that is > 0.70, which is evident that happiness parameters are compatible and authentic. Commitment was measured with a mean score of 4.13 (Stand. Dev. 0.829) indicated with Alpha 0.84, which is same as happiness. Association with fellows and instructors have a mean score of 4.37 (Stand. Dev. 0.70). This score is higher than happiness and commitment, whereas Alpha is 0.90, which is consistent and authentic. Sense of achievement has a mean score of 4.298 with a standard deviation of 0.76 and Alpha 0.80 for students of both gender. Finally, result of stress and sadness indicates mean scores of 3.692 (Stand. Dev. 1.139) and 3.29 (Stand. Dev. 1.29) respectively. Whereas Alpha is 0.76 and 0.81 respectively. All parameters are authentic as mentioned in table 4.2

Table 4.2: Illustrative Statistics/confirmatory factor examination

<i>Parameters</i>	<i>Happiness</i>	<i>Commitment</i>	<i>Association</i>	<i>Achievement</i>	<i>Stress</i>	<i>Sadness</i>
Mean	4.21	4.130	4.37	4.298	3.692	3.29
Stand. Error	0.11	0.129	0.106	0.113	0.169	0.19
Median	4.33	4.11	4.43	4.45	4.114	3.69
Mode	4.70	4.77	4.66	4.512	4.19	3.49
SD	0.74	0.829	0.70	0.760	1.139	1.29
Variance	0.51	0.703	0.50	0.610	1.340	1.789
Kurto	-0.11	0.098	0.50	-0.439	-0.100	-0.817

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Skewn ess	-0.70	-0.81	-0.90	-0.769	-0.749	-0.429
Range	2.40	2.99	2.41	2.369	3.87	3.99
Min.	2.50	2.3	2.54	2.60	1.09	1.01
Max.	5	5	5	5	5	5
Sum	179.1	181.1	187.3	184.14	160.1 4	140.69
Alpha	.84	.84	.90	.80	.76	.81
n=sample size. ** p<0.01. Mean (Stand. Dev.). T-test. Author's Computation 2018						

Coefficient of Evaluation

Table 4.3 indicates a positive and numerically important link between the commitment and happiness scale, where the coefficient 0.035879. This outcome shows a 4% elaboration of commitment on student's happiness of the management college of Dubai. This shows that by increasing a student's commitment/engagement, it would impact the student's happiness by 4%. A student's achievement is numerically important and positively impacts happiness by 0.05-1%. Enhancement in student's achievement increases their happiness by 5%. Similarly, association impacts the student's happiness by 4%. But sadness negatively impacts happiness but numerically it is not important. Stress shows a -0.001139 reduction in student's happiness if stress is enhanced by 1 unit. These results assist the inferences of (Pekrun *et al.* 2011, Kern *et al.* 2016) theory of wellbeing. This theory of wellbeing discusses that people who want accomplishment, potential, favourable outcomes and expertise in different subjects, including the place of work, learning organisation and home. Moreover, people require assistance, appreciation, sense of achievement, commitment and social fitness to continue wellbeing (Diener & Seligman 2004; Adler *et al.* 2016). If the purpose of a society is to measure the welfare of citizens, then all governments and private departments should focus on the welfare of their employees and customers, in this way accomplishment of both employees and customer enhance and society marches to gain permanent and continuous development.

Table 4.3: Connection among the commitment, association, achievement, stress, sadness and happiness

Dependent Variable: Students' Happiness				
Parameters	Coefficient	Std. Error	z-Stat.	Prob.
Commitment	0.035879	0.01254	2.671627	0.0101
Achievement	0.05153	0.011670	4.882674	0.0000
Sadness	-0.00679	0.008754	-0.77173	0.0434
Stress	-0.001139	0.007129	-0.16167	0.8617
Association	0.040148	0.011711	3.412142	0.0015
R-squared	0.404746			
Prob. Stat	0.0000			
Durbin Watson	2.2310			
Stata 15.1 Output				

On the basis of results mentioned in table 4.3, commitment, association, achievement, stress and sadness were disclosed in the model as predictable features. The linear regression model indicated that commitment, association, achievement, stress and sadness are determined of happiness. All these parameters explained 40% impact on happiness in the UAE. This shows that commitment, association, achievement, stress and sadness are excellent parameters to measure the happiness of students of the UAE. That is why we have developed the PERMA model of welfare in the UAE, so that any legislation related to welfare in higher academic organisations of the UAE should be focused on excelling commitment, association, and a sense of achievement, but we must be careful in dealing with stress and sadness.

Abstract of Findings

By presenting all possible outcomes for each parameter of the model in last section, in table 4.4 the hypothesis is summarised.

Table 4.4: Synopsis of Postulate Testing

Postulate	Relationship	Outcome
H₁	Pragmatic outstanding link between commitment and happiness	Agreed
H₂	Pragmatic outstanding link between association and happiness.	Agreed
H₃	Pragmatic outstanding link between achievement and happiness.	Agreed
H₄	Pessimistic link between stress and happiness.	Not agreed
H₅	Pessimistic link between sadness and happiness.	Agreed



Out of the five direct links that were examined, every second hypotheses were acknowledged. The link between independent variables (commitment, association, achievement, stress and sadness) and dependable variables (happiness) are quite important from a statistical point of view. But sadness is not important in finding student's happiness.

Conclusion

The current investigation was carried out among 43 management students of a college. Data was collected by using the PERMA model (positive feeling, commitment, association, achievement, stress and sadness) to develop a survey form which was indiscriminately distributed. This research sums up the presence of significant levels of stress and sadness amongst students lower in their achievement in college and restricting the availability of trained human resources, which is required for the progress of any society. No doubt, a student's life has depression and they require something extra ordinary from colleges for their fulfilment. Moreover, the conclusion has been made that commitment, association among their fellows and instructors and achievement enhance student's gladness. So, we recommend that higher education institutes in the UAE should provide their resources beyond fulfillment and should be focused on happiness. Moreover, student guidance centres should acknowledge the risks associated with stress, depression and anxiety among students and should provide counselling and guidance to cope with depression and stress related issues. In addition, outdoor activities like sports and exercise etc. have a pleasant link with happiness. That is why sports and extracurricular activities facilitate to channelise the physical output of youngsters and help them to perform well and remain happy under stressful situations. In the end, well trained support and academic staff and the reputation of university provide secure feelings to students about their degrees.

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