

Exploring the Complex Relationship between Elementary School Students' Academic Performance and Well-being: Insights from Three Studies

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Abstract: The relationship between academic performance and happiness is complex and has received significant attention in the literature. This essay analyzed three articles that highlighted the importance of considering various aspects of well-being, such as anxiety, self-esteem, and problematic smartphone use. A nuanced approach to promoting academic success among elementary school students is necessary, as negative emotions can have a detrimental impact on academic performance. Therefore, interventions aimed at promoting academic success should also focus on fostering positive emotions and well-being. These findings suggest that educators and policymakers should consider holistic approaches that address students' academic, social, and emotional needs. Further research is necessary to develop effective interventions that support students' emotional and academic development.

Keywords: Academic performance; Well-being; Happiness

1. Introduction

Happiness is difficult to define. Scholars such as ERGİNER et al. (2022)^[1] have argued that examining human happiness is a complicated process due to the distance between logic and emotion. But isn't it happiness that human beings seek throughout their lives? Göksoy (2017)^[2] considers that one of the most powerful feelings that make up the affective domain of people is happiness. Talebzadeh and Samkan (2011)^[3] also mention that happiness is a level of comprehension that is triggered by human values.

According to de Pablos Pons and González Pérez (2012)^[4], the definition of happiness is broad. It is related to that these elements of an educational setting interact, such as learning tasks, motivation, attitudes, and decision-making. However, there are so many factors and variables that can affect student happiness and achievement. Therefore, while talking about the relationship between students' achievement and happiness, other factors are bound to emerge, such as those affecting achievement or those affecting happiness. Specifically, Yu et al. (2022)^[5], in their research article, investigated the beneficial reciprocal links between social and academic functioning, including prosocial actions, peer preference, academic performance, and childhood happiness. It is also relatively common for negative emotions to affect students' performance as well as their sense of happiness. For example, as mentioned in the literature by Zapata-Lamana et al.(2021)^[6], students with a higher level of anxiety and lower level of happiness got the lower academic grade. The above two papers have concluded that students' academic achievement and happiness are positively related to each other. In the more recent literature by scholars such as Eoh, Lee, and Park (2022)^[7], they only think that students' school adaptation and achievement play a crucial role in students' happiness (rather than mutual influence).

2. Research Design

The importance of the research design cannot be overstated, stemming from the fact that it forms a solid foundation for the entire edifice of research work. It should therefore be prepared with the utmost care, as any error could undermine the project as a whole (Kothari, 2017)^[8]. The research design can be thought of as the research structure, the 'glue' that holds all the elements of the research project together (Salkind, 2010)^[9], and the blueprint for collecting, measuring, and analyzing the data(Kothari, 2017)^[8]. The three articles that I have selected differ in their research designs. Specifically, both Yu et al.(2022)^[5] and Eoh, Lee and Park (2022)^[7] used longitudinal research in their research work, while Zapata-Lamana et al.(2021)^[6]used cross-sectional research.

Longitudinal research involves collecting data from the same individuals repeatedly over a sufficiently long period to detect developmental changes (Rajulton, 2001)^[10]. Rajulton (2001)^[10] notes that longitudinal studies are essential as they can monitor development, infer causality over time, and identify change patterns. In Yu et al.'s (2022)^[5] study, they collected data using the same

research approach a year later, finding bidirectional correlations between well-being, pro-social behavior, peer preferences, and academic achievement. Eoh, Lee and Park (2022)^[7] also used longitudinal research, but did not establish causality between variables and did not include emotional stability and positive experiences.

In contrast, Zapata-Lamana, et al. (2021)^[6] used cross-sectional research, collecting data at a specific time. Cross-sectional research is a cost-effective method that can be carried out rapidly. However, it has limitations in determining causal correlations, which Zapata-Lamana et al. (2021)^[6] acknowledged by not analyzing intervening variables in school performance.

3. Research Strategy

Qualitative and quantitative research are two distinct paradigms for studying the social world (Seale et al., 2004)^[11]. Qualitative research is accepted in social sciences and applied fields (Marshall and Rossman, 2014)^[12]. Quantitative research focuses on objectivity and quantifiable measures (Queirós, Faria, and Almeida, 2017)^[13].

In all three of the articles chosen, they used quantitative research. Yu et al. (2022)^[5], Eoh, Lee, and Park, (2022)^[7], and Zapata-Lamana et al. (2021)^[6] had large participant samples, ensuring credibility and accuracy. However, Rahman (2020)^[14] states that quantitative research cannot identify deeper meanings. Combining quantitative and qualitative methods can complement each other (Kelle, 2006)^[15]. The studies had large participant samples, ensuring credibility and accuracy. However, quantitative research cannot identify deeper meanings. Combining quantitative and qualitative methods can complement each other and allow exploration of inherent experiences (Service2008)^[16].

4. The Methods of Data Collection

The way data is collected is crucial in research as it affects how the collected information is used and the interpretations derived from it. One common data collection method is through interviews, where a researcher asks predetermined questions one-on-one. The study by Eoh, Lee, and Park, (2022)^[7] used in-person interviews and questionnaires to gather data on school adjustment and academic achievement. Meanwhile, Zapata-Lamana et al. (2021)^[6] used questionnaires to measure anxiety, self-esteem, happiness, and cognitive-related behaviors. Peer nomination is a simple and effective approach for evaluating interpersonal skills, which is preferred by some scholars (e.g., Arnold et al., 1981; Linn, Arostegui, and Zeppa, 2009)^[17, 18]. Yu et al. (2022)^[5] combined self-report, peer nomination, and school records to measure various variables, including happiness and academic performance.

5. Conclusion and Implications

This study examines the contributions and limitations of three articles on happiness, academic performance, and mental health research. Yu et al. (2022)^[5] showed how social and academic factors may impact happiness in a potentially bi-directional pattern, providing insights into how happiness is cultivated during childhood. However, their study relied on self-reports and peer evaluations, and the relatively short period of data collection limits the depth of their findings. Zapata-Lamana, et al. (2021)^[6] highlighted the importance of mental health research in Latin America, providing up-to-date data on well-being and academic achievement. However, their study used cross-sectional analysis, limiting the ability to infer causal relationships. Eoh, Lee, and Park (2022)^[7] used multiple informants to increase data reliability and validity, finding a moderating mediating effect between school adaptation, academic achievement, happiness, and smartphone issues. However, their study, like the others, did not establish causal relationships. These studies provide valuable insights into the complex interplay between academic performance, mental health, and happiness, but further research is needed to establish causality.

Addressing students' well-being is important for academic success. Implementing comprehensive strategies integrating emotional, social, and academic development is recommended. Further research is needed to understand the relationship between well-being and academic performance.

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