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## **HAPPINESS AND THE EDUCATION SYSTEM: A CASE STUDY FROM SRI LANKA**

**Abstract.** Happiness plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' well-being, yet Sri Lanka's education system remains predominantly exam-oriented, often neglecting emotional well-being. This study explores the impact of education on happiness by analyzing student and lecturer perspectives. Findings indicate that academic pressure, inadequate mental health support, and limited career guidance negatively affect student satisfaction, while lecturers face workload stress and financial constraints. Both groups advocate for reforms, including student-centered learning, practical skill development, and better psychological support. Addressing these concerns through policy changes and institutional improvements can enhance national happiness and create a more balanced, fulfilling education system.

**Keywords:** Happiness, Education System, Student Well-being, Academic Stress, Mental Health, Sri Lanka

### **Introduction**

Happiness is an essential part of human life, shaping our well-being, success, and overall quality of life. According to Buddhist philosophy, "*Santutthi paramang dhanang*," which means "*Contentment is the greatest wealth*." This profound wisdom highlights that true prosperity lies not in material riches but in inner peace and happiness. The definition of happiness includes three key aspects which are emotional well-being together with life satisfaction and feeling of purpose. Psychologist Sonja Lyubomirsky states that happiness includes experiencing joy when showing life significance while encountering positive well-being (Lyubomirsky, 2007). Providing happiness in educational institutions goes beyond academic success since students can achieve inner fulfillment while they remain engaged with studies and develop their educational potential in various ways. The Happy Schools Initiative of UNESCO asserts that education needs to produce contentment through simultaneous outcomes and teaching because it requires school environments to emphasize emotional welfare along with social help and creative learning experiences (UNESCO, 2021).

In today's fast-paced world, the pursuit of happiness often takes a backseat, especially within the education system. Schools and universities emphasize academic achievements, career success, and competition, yet they rarely focus on emotional well-being and life satisfaction. The question arises: Should education only be about knowledge and skills, or should it also nurture happiness and holistic growth? This article explores

the vital connection between happiness and education, emphasizing the need for an educational system that not only imparts knowledge but also cultivates joy, emotional intelligence, and overall well-being.

The educational framework of Sri Lanka teaches all three elements of Buddhist philosophy: wisdom (*paññā*), morality (*sīla*) and mental discipline (*samādhi*). From before modern times monastic education enlisted two major aspects in its teaching: it taught ethical values along with mindfulness and self-discipline to students. The educational reform in Sri Lanka led to the implementation of standardized assessments as a replacement for student-led growth and academic freedom since the reform began.

The World Happiness Report and other national indices measure happiness by evaluating both economic indicators and social aspects of freedom and support and corruption levels. Sri Lanka's happiness has registered specific points of improvement followed by deterioration in its rating system. In 2023 Sri Lanka achieved position 112 according to a happiness survey with a score of 4.442 while in 2024 the country dropped to spot 128 with a score of 3.898. This decline suggests increasing socio-economic and psychological stress, particularly among students and educators. The education system plays a significant role in shaping this national well-being, and this study explores its impact on happiness by analyzing student and lecturer perspectives.

### **Student Perspectives on Happiness in Education**

#### **Academic Satisfaction and Stress Levels**

Survey responses indicate that a large proportion of students experience academic stress, with many describing their workload as “extremely stressful.” The primary source of stress is the rigid curriculum, which heavily emphasizes examinations and standardized testing. While some students report satisfaction with their education, many express dissatisfactions due to excessive competition and pressure.

When asked about the relevance of the curriculum to their future goals, many students provided neutral or negative responses. They find the learning process disengaging and often disconnected from practical applications. Research suggests that when students lack a sense of relevance in their studies, their intrinsic motivation and happiness levels decline (Jie et al., 2022). Additionally, many students reported that they do not have a balance between academic workload and relaxation activities, contributing to anxiety and burnout.

#### **Factors Affecting Student Happiness**

Student happiness factors in Sri Lankan education emerged repeatedly through different studies. The top student concerns were excessive academic workload alongside financial problems combined with inadequate career planning services and insufficient psychological support. Stricter grading policies along with stringent academic standards place substantial stress on students who eventually lose their learning interest. Students' express dissatisfaction with their educational experience because their future career readiness is insufficiently addressed by the existing skill-oriented learning opportunities.

Extracurricular activities play a minor role in Sri Lankan education systems and students participate at low rates. Studies prove that secondary school students who engage in sports and arts or join social clubs experience enhanced overall wellness according to Eime et al. (2013). Heavy academic pressures restrict Sri Lankan students from getting involved in such activities. Students expressed dissatisfaction about mental health services

at educational institutions because these resources remained inaccessible or ineffective to them.

### **Student Suggestions for a Happier Education System**

The students made a number of suggestions to enhance happiness during their educational journey. Students mostly recommended easing examination stress by switching to practical and project-based assessments. Several students request extended availability of mental health resources such as counseling services for all students. The majority of students affirmed their requirement for enhanced career guidance because this would help them choose their academic paths and career paths. Various individuals suggested adopting flexible teaching methods to strike a balance between classroom study and self-improvement. The proposed adjustments fit within the worldwide trend of education paradigms that promote comprehensive learning methods which effectively increase student well-being and achievement results.

### **Lecturer Perspectives on Happiness in Education**

#### **Educators' Views on Student Happiness**

A large number of lecturers confirm student comments that demonstrate Sri Lanka's academic-oriented education system sacrifices student welfare. Most lecturers state that the rigid examination-centered curriculum restricts student abilities to develop critical thinking together with creative thinking abilities.

Educators identify the non-adaptive nature of the current educational system as their main concern. The acquirement of theoretical knowledge by students does not prevent the absence of practical competencies and readiness to enter the workforce. Modern lecturers advocate for educational reforms that add vocational preparation and digital competencies together with interpersonal abilities into current academia. The persistent gaps within the educational system cause undergraduate students to perceive themselves unready to enter the workforce after completing their studies.

#### **Lecturer Job Satisfaction and Well-being**

The roles give pleasure to some lecturers yet many teachers face dissatisfaction because of overwhelming responsibilities and salary problems and restricted growth prospects. Data shows that many lecturing staff experience "somewhat stressful" workloads because of both insufficient research funding and their low teaching salaries. Lack of financial backing alongside insufficient institutional backing prevents lecturers from properly interacting with their students.

The provision of mental health services for teaching professionals emerges as a severe current issue. Research shows that educator stress along with dissatisfaction leads to decreased teaching performance that results in diminished student academic outcomes according to , Dennis et al. (2020). The satisfaction levels of lecturers improve when they receive better work-life balance support together with financial rewards and mental health services which lead to improved learning outcomes for students.

### **Lecturer Recommendations for a Happier Education System**

Lecturers propose several reforms to create a more balanced education system. A common suggestion is reducing the emphasis on rote learning and promoting critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Many advocates for increased financial support and incentives for educators to enhance job satisfaction. Others emphasize the need for improved mental health resources for both students and lecturers. Some lecturers

recommend integrating technology, vocational training, and soft skills development into the curriculum. There is also broad support for introducing flexible, student-centered teaching approaches that encourage active participation and independent learning.

### **Conclusion and Future Directions**

Research shows that Sri Lanka needs an urgent educational reform to develop better facilities for both faculty members and their student trainees. Students and their teachers experience discontent from the exam-oriented school system which operates within a country where education is free as well as structured.

Students together with lecturers support the adoption of an integrated educational model which includes psychological support with job placement services and supplementary educational opportunities. The research indicates educational establishments must apply educational programs which unite academic excellence with practical learning to prepare graduates for employment opportunities. Teachers need greater financial support together with training programs for their motivation to stay engaged and to build instructor effectiveness.

The declining World Happiness Index ranking of Sri Lanka requires urgent investigation on the relationship between education and national happiness metrics. Research must create new policies to support happiness-based educational strategies with experimental projects that assess these strategies for education. Sri Lanka should develop education environments emphasizing student needs while supporting educators to establish an acceptable educational standard for national happiness.

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