



Creating a happy learning experience for children:

Infographic supporting teachers in overcoming perceived challenges and mental barriers to promote student happiness

These findings are based on the PhD research project (2019–2023) titled “School-level actors’ understanding of happiness and their role in promoting student happiness”, a mixed-method study conducted with 50 school leaders, teachers, and education professionals across South Korea

Understanding happiness as the goal of education

94% of the participating school actors involved in the project either agreed or strongly agreed that teaching students the meaning of happiness and the attitudes for a happy life should be the goal of education.

92% of the participating school actors involved in the project either agreed or strongly agreed that teaching students to find enjoyment in their learning and gain satisfaction from their achievements should be the goal of education.

88% of the participating school actors involved in the project either agreed or strongly agreed that teaching students how to understand their emotions should be the goal of education.

Key takeaway

Despite these varying understandings of ‘happiness’ as the goal of education, the importance of ‘happiness’ per se was agreed upon by the majority of participants.

Factors of “disruption”

Participants explained how their perceived role in promoting student happiness is continuously challenged by largely three different obstacles: personal, institutional, and sociocultural factors.

Out of a total of 50 participants, only 4 responded that they haven’t encountered any barriers in their pursuit of their perceived role in promoting student happiness.

Teacher well-being

“It is important to consider not only the well-being of students but also the happiness of teachers themselves. During the years when I taught Year 13 consistently, I experienced constant exhaustion and felt tired all the time.”

Pandora, Upper secondary school teacher

Anxieties

“What I think as happiness may not be happiness from the perspective of students.”

Anonymous teacher participant

“How students perceive happiness can vary based on their personal situations, so as a teacher, it is unclear to me what it truly means to “teach happiness.” There’s a worry that emphasising students’ happiness might just be another way of forcefully imposing a specific idea of happiness onto them, like cramming education down their throats.”

Anonymous teacher participant



Assessment and evaluation

“In reality, however, the priority in school education becomes a realistic one, such as university entrance examination outcomes, which are the yardstick of schools’ performance.”

Anonymous teacher participant

Pressure and heavy workload

“One moment we’re buried in paperwork, and the next moment we’re dashing down the hallway to teach a class. And on top of that, we have to provide one-on-one counselling and keep an eye on the students. It’s like we’re expected to be real-life ‘Superman’ or something.”

Michael, Lower secondary school teacher

“As the students proceed from primary, and lower-secondary into upper-secondary schools, the school culture gradually gets admission- and result-centred, and their belief in their own capability changes. For example, if students perform poorly on their exams, they then draw the line on what they can and cannot do. It is during this process that their self-esteem, self-efficacy, and happiness go down.”

Sunny, Primary school vice principal & Former school commissioner

Key takeaway

Although participants saw promoting student happiness as one of their roles, they did not see the present school system as an enabling environment for them to actualise their visions and roles.

Their perceived capabilities and what they envision doing as school actors were bounded and compromised by the exigencies of their day-to-day work demands and sociocultural norms and atmosphere.