



How to Help Students Learn with Happiness

Anchalee Chayanuvat*, Wei Han and Sun Xuexia

Suryadhep Teachers College, Rangsit University, Pathum Thani, Thailand

*Corresponding author: E-mail: anchalee.c@rsu.ac.th

Abstract

The article seeks to contribute to the emerging ideas of how to help students learn with happiness despite general beliefs that studying is a serious matter. Based on the literature review of a number of studies and educators' viewpoints based on their experiences (Racheed, Naqvi, Ahmad and Ahmad, 2017; So and Kang, 2014; Scoffham and Barnes, 2011; Ikegami and Agbenyega, 2014; O'Rourke and Cooper, 2010; Boorn, Dunn and Page, 2010; Dornyei, 2001; Immordino-Yang and Damasio, 2007; Chayanuvat and Limsakul, 2019; Chalakbang, 2016; Scrivener, 2005; Savekpan (office.nu.ac.th); Panich, 2016; Halliwell, 1992; Loh and Kanai, 2016; Ophir, Nass and Wagner, 2009; Kirshner and Bruychere, 2017; Kelly, McCain and Jukes, 2009; Li and Ranieri, 2010; King and Datu, 2017; Musserotte, 2011; Wattanachai, 2014; Robertson and Acklam, 2000; Cox, 2007; Jandai, 2016; Long, 1985; Nunan, 2003; Ellis, 2006; Goswami, 2004; Gillies, 2016), a synthesis of factors influencing student happiness is proposed. In the beginning, the paper discusses why students are under pressure and stress nowadays. The changing world, parents, and competitions are all major causes of stress. Besides, the world at school sometimes does not help students to relax. In class, most students may not feel happy. As a result, we need to know the young learners' preferences and learning styles. It is suggested that the teachers should have freedom in designing lessons that match the needs and abilities of their students. They should also be encouraged to make use of new learning theories that are assumed to help students learn with happiness such as task-based language learning, cooperative teaching, and brain-based learning.

Keywords: *Learning with happiness, Young learners' preferences, Theories of learning*

1. Introduction

Nowadays, following tremendous changes in our highly competitive unfriendly society, many students are under pressure of having to exert themselves. Why does this situation happen? People around them may be the causes for a number of different reasons. Firstly, parents usually expect their children to be above average. They expect that their children easily enter a competitive world of education because they have already prepared everything to support them. Upon their views, good grades will pave the way for a good job (Mala, 2018). If a child gets a good result in examinations, his/her parents often praise him/her publicly and reward the child with whatever requested, reinforcing the significance of grades. For students who cannot deliver good exam results, parents will feel shameful, angry, and embarrassed, thus putting more pressure on them. In this way, many students feel depressed. According to Racheed, Naqvi, Ahmad, and Ahmad, (2017, p. 257), the majority of students perceived examinations and course load as stressors. In Thailand, within March 2019 alone, 4 cases of students both secondary and tertiary levels committed suicides due to stress because they could not deliver what their parents expected (Online Thairath, 1,4,7,26 March 2019).

To be fair on people close to the students, there may be external causes from society such as the economy and personal health. These factors make teaching and learning even more difficult. With lots of problems in their heads, students will not be able to concentrate well while studying in class. However, looking around us, we find the unfriendly modern society where competition becomes more and more intense. A relationship between people becomes more distant and many students live far from homes in order to get a good education as expected by their families. The trend is that students are pushed to study in schools with a high reputation, forcing them to be lonelier (Jandai, 2016). Admission into these schools depends on the GPAs they have already earned from a previous school. Thus, it is accepted that a major part of the pressure on these students is a high expectation of their families. Offering shocking information,



So and Kang (2014) point out that the paradox in curriculum reform in Korea results in high academic performance achieved at primary and secondary education levels, which has caught the world's attention in contrast to students' low level of interest in learning and their decreased levels of happiness. The worst feature of unhappiness as witnessed in Thailand and Korea is similar: "the rise in teenage suicides due to overwhelming stress tied to academic achievement" (p. 797).

Scoffham and Barnes (2011) believe that happiness or unhappiness affects childhood well-being. Based on the analysis of reviewed selected papers that mention the importance of happiness in education (So and Kang, 2014; Scoffham and Barnes, 2011; Ikegami and Agbenyega, 2014; O'Rourke and Cooper, 2010; Boorn, Dunn and Page, 2010 Promkarn (2019), it is worth taking a closer look at how classroom teaching can bring happiness to students. In simpler words, "happiness matters" (Scoffham and Barnes, 2011, p. 535).

What does happiness mean? Where does it come from? By looking at how one feels in a happy moment, happiness is a state of well-being characterized by emotions ranging from contentment to intense joy (Concise Oxford English Dictionary, 2018). Happiness comes from the mind and nurtures a person's mental and physical being while unhappiness does the opposite. Immordino-Yang and Damasio (2007, p. 9 cited in Scoffham and Barnes, 2011, p. 539) emphasize the importance of emotions and make the following remark:

When we educators fail to appreciate the importance of students' emotions, we fail to appreciate the very reason that students learn at all.

In conclusion, when all the factors combined: the highly competitive society, parents' extra high expectations towards their children that turn to pressure on the students, the belief that good grades mean everything for a student's future dictating the ways teachers teach, too serious and strict teachers, no fun in class, studying is indeed painful for the kids. As teachers, we must be aware that our students have confronted so much trouble from socio-economic factors outside the classroom. My proposition, therefore, is: are there any possible ways to make students learn with happiness at school?

2. Objective

The objective of this paper is to synthesize from the selected literature on how we can help our students to learn with happiness and be free from stress and pressure around them.

3. Factors related to Happy Learning

In this part of the paper, the basic factors related to creating happiness in learning will be explored, followed by the classroom factors and the learning theories that are believed to contribute to happiness.

The Basic Factors

Students should learn with happiness to grow into well-balanced adults. Emotions are part of the motivation, categorized in the affective domain (Dornyei, 2001). Negative emotions tend to make us inefficient in learning while positive emotions tend to help us to remember more complex things. There are three major factors that are interrelated in creating an effective classroom presented in the following graphical representation.

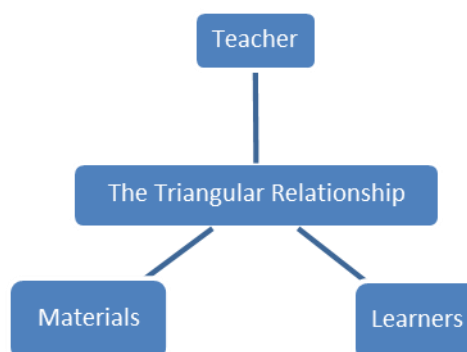


Figure 1 Adapted from Chayanuvat (1996)

This shows that a learning environment will be most effective if all three factors are aligned. The first factor is certainly the most important as the teacher can enhance student learning through their continuous effort in lifelong learning (pmca.or.th, 26 September 2018).

Qualities of the Teachers

Chayanuvat and Limsakul (2019) conduct a study on necessary qualities that qualified teachers must have at a primary school in Lopburi. The findings reveal that the most important aspect of all is values and characteristics of the teacher followed by the teacher's responsibilities, while knowledge of teaching is ranked third in importance and the least important aspect in the perception of qualified teachers is a relationship with the community. Most researchers/experts believed that the teacher needs to understand students and show other common abilities such as flexibility, adaptability, kind, trustworthy, and inspiring. Chalakbang (2016, pp. 123-127) points out that good teachers should have the following:

- Upgraded perception and skill in teaching
- Moral, ethics, and responsibilities
- Flexibility and understanding changes
- Respect for students' rights for their integrity and potential enhancement
- Motivation for displaying leadership
- Happiness and pride of being a teacher
- Acceptance and faith from others

Similarly, Promkarn (2019, pp.96-109) mentions 10 characteristics of 21st Century teachers in schools with international students which embody teacher spirituality. First and foremost, the teacher needs to have the abilities to manage classes with teaching skills and specialized learning management. The ability to use technology is a requirement for teachers in this century. Adaptability and communication skills as well as cross-cultural understanding help in the interaction with students, while the teacher is expected to be a good role model as always.

Scrivener (2005, p.15), focusing on creating a positive class atmosphere, points out that the teacher must do or have the following qualities to create the class atmosphere that students will be happy in:

- Show respect to students
- Be fair
- Listen to students
- Have a good sense of humor
- Give clear positive feedback
- Be patient
- Be non-judgmental
- Not complicate things unnecessarily



- Be honest
- Trust people
- Be approachable
- Be enthusiastic and inspires enthusiasm
- Be well-organized
- Empathize with students' problems
- Inspire confidence

If the question is “What type of teachers do students want?”, it is clear that the teachers who only teach in class or who believe that they have the knowledge to impart do not fit in. In the digital era, knowledge comes from various sources and the teachers are no longer knowledge providers. They must be coaches, facilitators, and mentors at the same time. Savekpan (office.nu.ac.th) can sum up all the ideas about qualified teachers in one sentence. “Good teachers must show a desire for student development, endurance, versatile, love, organizing, and positive thinking.” Panich (Bangkok Dhurakij Newspaper, 15 January 2016) emphasizes that “professionalism is not enough. They must do more. First, love for students, Second, find ways to support them.” This is obvious that desirable human qualities in the teachers are much more important than the knowledge they have. The children want to be treated with warmth, support, and encouragement.

Learners

Teachers should know the characteristics of the students that they teach. These students have their own learning preferences. This should be understood by the teachers so that the quality of their teaching and the learning process can be improved to match the learners' needs and preferences. For example, young ones may enjoy different types of lessons from adult learners. In relation to this, Halliwell (1992: 3-5) clarifies the characteristics of young learners as follows:

1. Children are already very good in interpreting meaning without necessarily understanding the individual work.
2. Children already have great skill in using unlimited language creativity.
3. Children frequently learn indirectly rather than directly.
4. Children take pleasure in finding and creating fun in what they do.
5. Children's words are full of imagination and fantasy, and it is more than simply a matter of enjoyment.
6. Children get bored easily. Children have no choice to attend school. The lack of choice means that class activities need to be fun interesting and exciting as possible by setting up interesting activities.

Knowing that students have their differences and preferences, teachers should treat them as individuals with individual needs, interests, and personal digital learning styles. According to the University of Pennsylvania (2009), learners can be classified by their learning styles as visual, audio and kinesthetics. It is said that the learning strategies of students in this digitally changing world are different from the learners of previous generations. Teachers should select the right types of activities for students. Activities that match the students' learning styles will make them relaxed and feel happy to be in class.

A number of educators talk about the characteristics of digital natives. This is probably a major factor to consider about the learners. Researches try to identify them in more details. First, they have never lived in the world without computers. Secondly, they may not have the digital competence despite their ability to use a vast range of computer gadgets. When the word “multitasking” is used, it means the ability to quickly switch between carrying out different tasks or using different media and constant tasks of switching between different devices can lead to diminished concentration and the loss of abilities to ignore irrelevant stimuli (Loh and Kanai, 2016; Ophir, Nass and Wagner, 2009; Sampasa-Kayinga & Lewis, 2015 cited in Kirshner and Bruychere, 2017). This indicates an implication for the teachers. They have a harder job of identifying their learner characteristics. If the lessons are not attractive to them, they may feel bored and uninterested.



Materials

A lot of schools prefer to select textbooks to use, and teachers systematically plan how to teach each unit in the same way. It is what So and Kang (2014) call “prescribed curriculum”. If that is the case, there is no room for imagination and creativity on the part of the teacher, resulting in boring and unimaginative lessons. Most importantly, teachers should use custom-made content to motivate their students. “One size fits all” may be a thing of the past (Kelly, McCain and Jukes, 2009, p. 39). Dealing with digital natives, we need to develop well-designed teaching and learning materials for them (Li and Ranieri, 2010).

According to Kelly, McKain and Jukes (2009, p. 272), as new technologies will enable the students to interact with others from around the globe as if they were in the same room, it is wise to think of the benefits of online learning. Sources of information will not remain the traditional textbooks known in the 20th century. Traditional ways of learning will be replaced by those of online-technology-based learning which are far more interesting and dynamic.

Therefore, the question is not which textbook will be the most effective but how to make students of the digital age learn as best as they can.

4. Classroom Factors for Happy Learning

Questions have been raised about how to make a classroom a safe and comfortable place for our students, and there are also attempts to answer this question. Logically, to be happy inside a classroom means there are no conflict, no pressure, and no hurt feelings there. All partners must work in unity with one another. According to King and Datu, (2017, p. 116), “well-being of a student depends on the well-being of their classmates providing evidence for the social contagion of well-being in the classroom context.” The following shows the factors inside the classroom for happy learning.

4.1 Cooperation among Students

As we all know, different students have different personalities. Each is an individual. Some like to work alone while others like to work in teams. However, in a class of mixed abilities, working in teams provide positive results. Cooperative learning, as opposed to competition in class, is a teaching method emphasizing the success of the group rather than the success of the individual. Students are arranged in small groups in such a way that each group mixes most able students with less able ones. Achievement of a task within a group of individuals is the best (Musserotte, 2011). Through cooperation, they can improve their personal skills and teamwork abilities. The teacher can just be a facilitator. An active class atmosphere comes from cooperation, not competition. At the same time, an active class atmosphere will help students learn with happiness. Wattanachai (2014) begs the teachers not to separate knowledge from ethics and morality. Students should be taught to support one another. He proposes three education reform goals: 1) Teachers must love their students and vice versa; 2) Students must be kind and generous to their classmates; they are not to compete against one another but to compete with themselves with the goal to be better. Thus, the better students must teach friends who are weaker in the study and 3) Teachers must create activities in which students have to work together so they can appreciate the value of unity.

4.2 Relationships of All Classroom Dwellers

Successful teachers are those who have the ability to maximize the learning potential of all students in their classes. Developing positive relationships between a teacher and students is a fundamental aspect of quality teaching and student learning. There is something really special when you walk into a classroom and see a sea full of smiling happy faces (Cox, 2007). From this, we know that as a teacher, building a good relationship with students is important. But how? First, we need to take care of our students’ physical and mental health. Also, it is vital to make friends with your students outside of class, i.e. enjoy lunch together. Building a good relationship with students is the role of the teacher (Mason, 2017). O’Burke and Cooper (2010) found in a study of 312 primary-aged students that happiness in the classroom for young children comes from a sense of friendship, belonging, and optimism.



4.3 The Use of Technology

Technology is a necessity in today's world, and it pervades the classroom where each and every single student has an electronic gadget for use. The newest technologies allow us to try things in physical and virtual classrooms that were not possible before. Teachers can integrate technology into the classroom in multiple ways to enhance the educational goals. However, when "*most schools are still operating in the ideas of the Industrial Age*", students will not feel happy because they may not be able to study without the use of technology. In fact, schools should cater to the needs of modern kids or "digital learners" and how they learn (Kelly, McCain and Jukes, 2009, pp. 13, 37). Teachers should develop instructional approaches that incorporate digital, online, multimedia experiences into learning activities and resources.

4.4 Teaching Pedagogies

Different teachers have different teaching styles and may use different teaching procedures, so 'every lesson is unique' (Robertson and Acklam, 2000: 6). However, there are certain guidelines that we can follow and certain elements that we can incorporate into our plans to help us create purposeful, interesting and motivating lessons for our learners. The buzz words for teaching to enhance learning that all teachers know are "student-centered". We are told to refrain from direct teaching as our students nowadays. Jandai (2016) says the Thai educational system prevents children from actual learning, using their imagination and creativity. As a result, Thai children are transformed into robots that aimlessly join the economic system. If we follow his suggestion, perhaps the following theories should be adopted.

Task-Based Learning

What is a task?

- ✓ A task is a piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others, freely or for some rewards. (Long, 1985, p.89)
- ✓ A task is an activity which enhances the learner's own experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning. (Nunan, 2006, p.14)
- ✓ A task enables learners to manipulate and practice specific features of language with real meanings. (Ellis, 2003: p.16)

Cooperative Learning

Without the cooperation of its members, society cannot survive, and the society of man has survived because the cooperativeness of its members made survival possible. Cooperative learning is a teaching method where students of mixed levels of ability are arranged into groups and rewarded according to the group's success, rather than the success of an individual member. Cooperative learning is expected to give students experience in working together when group members struggle to accomplish the demands of the task one another in learning (Gillies, 2016, p. 40). This method consists of structuring the classroom so that all the students work in teams with a purpose to fulfill the objective of helping other students. The students are the ones to choose the topics they consider most relevant and each student works on one of them. When group members work together as a team, they tend to support rather than competing with one another. A pressure of having to show who is the best will not be the only goal for them to learn.

Brain Based Learning

Brain-based learning is motivated by the general belief that learning can be accelerated and improved if educators base how and what they teach on the science of learning, rather than on past educational practices, established conventions, or assumptions about the learning process. For example, it was commonly believed that intelligence is a fixed characteristic that remains largely unchanged throughout a person's life. However, recent discoveries in cognitive science have revealed that the human brain physically changes when it learns and that after practicing certain



skills it becomes increasingly easier to continue learning and improving those skills. This finding—that learning effectively improves brain functioning, resiliency, and working intelligence—has potentially far-reaching implications for how schools can design their academic programs and how teachers could structure educational experiences in the classroom. Evidence suggests that stress is a significant factor in creativity, memory, behavior, and learning. Teachers who purposely manage stress factors (purposefully decrease or increase stress) in class are likely to experience a positive classroom environment. There are many ways to decrease stress in the classroom, such as integrating stretching exercises, incorporating recess, teaching coping skills, and utilizing physical education. Goswami (2004 cited in Scoffham and Barnes, 2011) explains that the circuits connected with fear and anxiety deserve the attention of teachers for different reasons. When a learner is stressful or fearful, connections with the front cortex become impaired, affecting our social judgments and our response to risk and reward. Along the same line, Fredrickson (cited in Scoffham and Barnes, 2011, p. 251) believes that positive emotions enable us to build enduring personal resources ranging across physical, intellectual, social, and psychological capacities.

The following picture shows the factors that teachers must pay attention to in order to make their students learn with happiness.



Figure 2 factors that teachers must pay attention to in order to make their students learn with happiness.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

To conclude, if you want to help students to learn with happiness, make the class atmosphere light-hearted. Second, choose the most effective methods to combine with the interesting design to motivate them. Finally, highlight cooperation and relationships in class activities. The above suggestions are what Boorn, Dunn, and Page (2010) believe. So when they design a training course for teachers so that they can make their classrooms a nurturing classroom, they address secure relationships and attachment, resilience,



and the importance of positive learning environments in enhancing well-being and children's readiness to learn.

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