Report of Happiness in the Iranian Educational System: A Qualitative Research

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Abstract—The purpose of this study is to understand the current situation of happiness in the Iranian educational system from the perspective of students, teachers and educational administrators. This research is done in qualitative paradigm. Data collection is done by in-depth interview method. Research participants were selected purposively according to sampling rules, with maximum variation and reaching the saturation point. According to most participants in this study, schools in Iran are not usually happy. This lack of happiness is associated with and related to the educational system, curriculum, teaching method, physical environment of schools and their facilities.

Keywords—Happiness, Iran, educational system, qualitative study.

I. INTRODUCTION

HAPPINESS is considered very important in life. However, it is difficult to define. Different theoretical approaches offer different interpretations of the happiness concept. Philosophers consider two meanings for happiness. In one sense, "happiness" as a value term is almost synonymous with welfare. Another meaning, like "depression", has a psychological use. The main descriptions of happiness in this sense are hedonism, the life satisfaction theory, and the emotional state theory. [1].

Many philosophers have spoken about happiness. Plato states from Socrates' point of view that all human beings naturally desire happiness and happiness is obtainable and teachable through human effort [2]. Aristotle in his book, 'Ethics of Nicomachus', expresses his theory of happiness. He poses the question: "What is the ultimate goal of human existence?" He is looking for an answer that is always desirable on its own, rather than being considered important in order to achieve something else. Aristotle claims that almost everyone agrees that happiness is the ultimate goal of their lives, since the value of every desire, including wealth, fame and pleasure, is simply due to the happiness of individuals [3]. Anthiests, one of Socrates' students, often counts as the founder of the cynicism school. Anthiests said that virtue alone is enough to guarantee happiness [1].

Happiness is also important in Stoic philosophy. However, they believe that self-control is enough to be happy [4]. Philosophy of pleasure or Epicureanism is a philosophical school based on the teachings of the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus. He equals pleasure with goodness and believes that it is the duty of everyone to enjoy and escape from suffering. Epicure's notion of pleasure is not an instant pleasure; it means enjoying the whole life. At the top of the gate of Aphekur's garden was written: "Your soul will be happy here; we believe that happiness is the greatest good." In his opinion our goal in this world must be happiness. [5].

Happiness is also discussed by modern philosophers. Jeremy Bentham (1732-1848) was a British philosopher, lawyer and social reformer. He is considered the founder of modern utilitarianism. He believed that human beings should profit in every action. The most ethical thing is to have the most benefit. Usefulness is the pleasures that are obtained by eliminating the suffering of the action. Therefore, happiness is the experience of pleasure and lack of suffering [6].

William James (1810-1842) was a leading philosopher and psychologist in the 19th century. Many contemporary philosophers refer to James' ideas as a source of inspiration for their new ideas about perception, meaning, and belief. The extract of William James' thoughts on happiness can be seen in four components: (a) Happiness is optional. (b) Happiness requires active risk-taking. (c) Life is worthwhile and meaningful if it contains meaningful activities. (d) Happiness often comes after a crisis of meaning [7].

Not all philosophers see happiness in a positive way. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) strongly criticized the British utilitarian who emphasized the achievement of most joy. He stated that "human beings do not seek joy, only the English people do that!" Instead, Nietzsche wanted to define higher and harder goals than mere joy. Nietzsche invites people to appreciate what is difficult and can be achieved through effort and pain. And thus, he asks people to have a positive look at suffering and unhappiness, as they have an essential role in creating all the valuable things of life, including the highest achievements of human culture, especially philosophy [8].

Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) is one of Europe's greatest philosophers in the field of ethics, art, contemporary literature and new psychology. His philosophy states that those acts of man who are guided by personal interests and desire for joy are selfish and therefore immoral; since only love can be moral. Schopenhauer considered happiness as a fulfilled wish, which in turn gives rise to a new desire. And unhappiness is the lack of satisfaction or having unfulfilled wishes [9].

Albert Camus (1913-1960) was one of the great philosophers and authors of the 20th century, who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1957, due to his literary works that clearly address the problems of human conscience in

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modern times. Camus did not accept violence in the world because it rejected humanity. He was aware of the afflictions of modern societies, and had a negative worldview [10].

> "Today happiness is like a crime---never admit it. Don't say 'I'm happy' otherwise you will hear condemnation all around." Albert Camus (1959)

Happiness in psychology has three possible components to happiness: (a) positive emotion, (b) life satisfaction, and (c) the absence of negative emotions or psychological distress [11]

From the second half of the 20th century, with the advent of positive psychology (science of happiness), more serious studies have done on the effects of happiness. Dr. Martin Seligman, in his book 'Authentic Happiness' summarizes research indicating that people who are happy:

- Do better in social relationships,
- Use their intelligence more efficiently,
- Are more optimistic,
- Have better physical health, and
- Are more creative [12].

Nell Noddings (2003) in her book, Education and Happiness, argues the importance of happiness in the education system [13]. We agree with Noddings, that it is the duty of education to boost happiness in the community. But the first step to achieve this goal is to determine the current situation of happiness in the school systems.

In the last World Happiness Report 2017, Iran is ranked 108 [14]. This low ranking of Iran in the global report of happiness reflects the negligence of the need for happiness in Iran's educational system. This study is a report of happiness in Iran educational system which is done in a qualitative method. We directly turn to students, teachers and educational administrators to discover their own view on happiness in Iranian schools.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

In order to answer research questions, the stages of analyzing qualitative data are carefully done. At first, the interview texts of all the interviewees are implemented with a glimpse of the data. After that, the concepts are made. And at the same time, the key points related to the subject matter of the research are extracted from the text of the interviews in an open coding manner, and the codes for each point are set. In the next step, by putting together the key points and with constant comparative method, the basic concepts and, simultaneously, the subsidiary categories are formed. Then, the focal categories are determined using the axial coding method. In the final stage, according to the commonality that exists among extractives, a theoretical model is obtained by using the selective coding method.

III. IRANIAN SCHOOLS

"Are Iranian schools happy? Why?" To answer this question, we interviewed 24 students, teachers and educational administrators in Shiraz schools.

The answer was: Iranian schools are not happy because,

1. Students lose their joy as they approach the final years of school.
2. Student joy in school is just friends.
3. School administrators and teachers are unaware of many joy factors.
4. There is a lot of competition between students due to school expectations.
5. School focuses only on education.
6. Student talent is not measured.
7. Joy does not matter in schools.
8. The student feels he/she is forced to go to school.
9. Lessons are not practical.
10. Creativity is not important for schools.
11. The classrooms are boring.
12. Students have no time for their favorite activities.
13. Textbooks are not attractive.
14. Sports in schools are not important.
15. There are not enough sports facilities in schools.
16. Students rarely go to camps or scientific trips.
17. Camps are not desirable.
18. Teaching method (lecture) is boring.
19. Students are under pressure because of the university entrance exam.
20. There is no group work in school.
21. School class program is not desirable.
22. Educational content has a high volume.
23. Textbooks are not up to date.
24. Teachers do not use modern educational methods.
25. Physical environment of schools is not attractive.
26. Students are not satisfied with the educational assessment system.
27. School uniforms are not happy in color.
28. Schools do not pay attention to the psychological aspects of students.
29. Teachers are not happy.
30. Teachers do not have job satisfaction.

IV. HAPPINESS CONCEPT

We wanted to discover the personal viewpoint of students, teachers and administrators on happiness and happy schools. So it was important to know what they mean by saying the word 'happiness'. Therefore, another question in the interviews was "What is happiness in your opinion?"

The answer was: 'Happiness' is

- An internal feeling.
- A component of a child's inherent characteristics.
- A mental and psychological trait.
- Life satisfaction.
- Inner interest.
- To enjoy.
- Having high energy.
- Being charming.
- Having motivation.
- That a person enjoys the moment he/she is there.
- Doing pleasing and lovely things.
- Having a good mood.

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- Hope for the future.
- Diversity, creativity and innovation.
- To live a fruitful life.

V. CONCLUSION

The answers of the interviewees can be classified into the following four main categories:

A. Educational System

One of the findings of this study is the job dissatisfaction of teachers in the Iranian educational system. All the teachers interviewed in this study expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of respect for the teacher's position in Iranian society. Therefore, teachers in Iran's educational system are unhappy and they do not have enough motivation. The teachers and administrators interviewed in this study claimed that in Iran's educational system, joy is not a priority and there is no plan for happiness of students. They have stated that not only the educational system does not try to rejoice students, but also does not provide the conditions for happy programs. On the other hand, according to them, students do not have enough time for happy programs due to the pressure of studying and exams. These indicate the inefficiency of the Iranian educational system. Students participating in the interview consider the university entrance exam unfair. According to them, this exam is not a real test of talent. In their opinion, school is boring and there is no creativity in schools. Another issue is that school does not care about the self-awareness and identification process of students. Some students are not interested in their educational orientation, and many are not well aware of their future career.

B. Curriculum

In some definitions, "curriculum" includes all experiences, studies, discussions, group and individual activities, and other actions that students do under the guidance of school. Students, teachers and administrators interviewed in this study considered the curriculum in the Iranian educational system as static and non-supportive. According to them, the curriculum in Iran is not suitable for the age of children and does not match with the real needs of students. Study is limited to exam preparation and getting a good grade. Students are dissatisfied with the lack of useful skills at school. They believe that many of their talents are wasted in school. Educational content, according to the interviewees, contains a high volume of information and knowledge in the curriculum. This has led to student and teacher fatigue. While educational content can be text, audio or video, in most cases, the content in Iran is presented in plain text. Interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that the content and images of textbooks are not attractive. Students who participated in this study reported the textbooks as unpleasant, unattractive and difficult to understand. They also complained about the fact that the educational content is merely theoretical and non-practical. Another disadvantage of textbooks is that their content is outdated and not updated.

C. Teaching Method

Teaching is defined as the organization of student learning, and the teaching method is a series of activities that are carried out according to the existing conditions and facilities in order to provide the most favorable context for effective education and training. Oral methods and active methods are considered as a variety of teaching methods. In oral methods, only the teacher acts, but in active methods, students have an active role in learning. According to interviewees, the teaching method in Iranian schools is traditional and inactive. Teaching is often done in the form of a lecture. Students who participated in interviews complained that the method of lecturing is boring. According to them, teachers' lectures do not allow them to be happy in class.

D. Physical Environment of Schools

Psychologically, learning is influenced by the physical environment of schools. In addition, the happiness is also affected by the environment. This is despite the fact that interviewees reported the physical environment of schools as unfavorable. School buildings are not well designed, they say. The school yard is small and inadequate. School buildings are not so beautiful. There is not enough light in some classes. The heating and cooling facilities of some schools do not have good quality. Seats are not comfortable. School colors are not happy and the color of school uniforms also is rarely happy.

Although this is a qualitative research and we do not intend to generalize the findings to all Iranian schools, but due to similarities among Iranian schools, this study can be considered as an accurate report of Iran's educational system. Determining the status of happiness in Iranian schools was the first goal of this study and the findings of this research can be used to improve happiness in schools of Iran and even of other countries.

VI. SOLUTIONS

Through this research we understand the ideal situation of happiness in the Iranian educational system from the perspective of students, teachers and educational administrators. There are some solutions to boost happiness in schools. *We will have happier schools in Iran or in any other country with a similar educational system if we apply these suggestions:*

1. Choosing happy colors for school uniforms.
2. Scheduling some free hours in the school program.
3. Holding various ceremonies at school.
4. Scheduling music, art and sports in the school program.
5. Increasing the hours of exercise at school.
6. Providing sports facilities in schools.
7. Holding joyful school competitions.
8. Teaching life skills to students.
9. Providing educational and recreational facilities at schools.
10. Paying attention to student's psychological problems.
11. Beautifying the school environment.
12. Giving more space to the school yard.
13. Making educational content practical.

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14. Creating attractive textbooks.
15. Using the outdoor environment for teaching.
16. Paying attention to school hygiene.
17. Selecting comfortable uniforms for students.
18. Taking students to recreational-educational camps.
19. Paying attention to changing the mood of students in the classroom.
20. Using active teaching methods.
21. Promoting social activities in schools.
22. Employing professional teachers.
23. Updating textbooks.
24. Reducing Educational Pressures.
25. Giving students more freedom in school.
26. Respecting teachers and students.

Fig. 1 School uniforms in Iran

Fig. 2 A classroom in Iran

Fig. 3 Iran University entrance exam (Konkur)

Fig. 4 Teaching method in Iran

Fig. 5 Iranian National Teachers' Protest on October 5, International Teacher's Day

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