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Predictors of Happiness and Life Satisfaction among University Teacher-Trainees on Internship

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*Happiness,
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The study investigated the factors that drive happiness and life satisfaction among university teacher trainees on school practice internship. It was a purely qualitative study that employed explorative methods and a phenomenological design because it dealt with the subjective experiences about happiness and life satisfaction during internship as a phenomenon. It was conducted on a population of 25 participants drawn from a total population of about 700 teacher trainees on internship placement. The respondents were selected using both purposive and convenient sampling technique. These methods were preferred because purposively, the respondents were teacher trainees on internship and conveniently, they were under the supervision of the corresponding author. Data was collected using in depth interviews and analysed using themes and narratives drawn from the transcribed data. Results' presentation, analysis and discussions was done concurrently. The findings revealed that happiness and life satisfaction among teacher trainees on internship school practice placement is determined by economic and financial drivers, supervision processes, collegial social support and connections, student or learner attributes, logistical provisions and follow up factors. As a result of the findings, universities invested in teacher training and schools hosting internship teacher trainees are required to boost the university-based and school-based factors in order to promote happiness and life satisfaction among the trainees respectively through provision of teaching practice logistics, supervisor support and evaluation, student/learner discipline, as conditions aimed at enhancing happiness, for the end goals of academic achievement.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, positive psychology has become an area of interest (Seligman & Csikszentmihaly, 2000; Snyder & Lopez, 2002) as research enthusiasts have delved into understanding the appetitive dimensions of psychological accomplishments, through investigating aspects such as happiness and life satisfaction (Shubina, 2015). With the emergence and growth of positive psychology, students within the age range known as young or emerging adults are faced with situations that affect their emotional domains, that is, the factors that influence happiness and life satisfaction. This could be a result of diverse factors that are both personal and non-personal ranging from personality traits to experiences associated with interpersonal relationships. Happiness is documented as one of the six key emotions, in addition to anger, fear, sadness, disgust and surprise (Kalhori et al., 2017). All human beings, irrespective of age, gender and educational level have satisfaction about life and happiness as a vital life goal, but more importantly, they view happiness as a health benefit (Miret et al., 2014). To be a person of happiness and vitality means the person has the basic needs taken care of, from a health perspective. Introversion requires minimal stimulation to attain happiness while extroverted individuals on the other hand require high stimulation (Furnham & Irene, 2007). There are two systems that explain the link with happiness, that is, behavioural activation which is associated with extroversion and behavioural inhibition which is associated with introversion (Weiss et al., 2008). Happiness definitions, correlates and predictors are new phenomena (Eysenck, 1990). Furnham and Brewin (1990) correlate it with neurotic and extroverted personality while Aegyle and Lu (1990) correlate it with the aspect of enjoyment and active participation in activities that have a social dimension.

Studies on happiness and life satisfaction are vital at different stages of human growth and development as the phenomena influence growth and well-being (Gonzalez, Casas & Coenders, 2010). Positive

psychology posits that the science of life satisfaction and happiness focuses on what entails the things that make people happy and satisfied about life and existence. According to Kesebir and Diener (2008), happiness is a cognitive state characterized by positive affective experiences that range from delight to sense of contentment. Wilson (1967) adds that happy people are productive, optimistic, knowledgeable and with vigor and young at heart. Life satisfaction episodes entail those moments when an individual evaluates their quality of life as positive and likeable (Okeju, 2023). Seligman (2002) asserts that if one scores below average on positive affectivity, they may still appreciate and embrace life as good and satisfying. However, as some researchers argue, older persons have been found to report higher levels of happiness than their younger counterparts (Kasser & Sheldon, 2009) because the former have already achieved their accomplishment and relationship goals, hence, life satisfaction while the latter are still struggling for the same (Roberts & Chapman, 2000). The experience of happiness and life satisfaction have been associated with the mental, social and physical well-being (Bertels, 2015). Happiness is both the cognitive and affective evaluations of one's life (Diener, 1985) in diverse areas of life such as relationships, health and at work that can produce positive and negative emotions (Dogan, Totan & Sapmaz, 2013). The moment one experiences more of the former than the latter, then they have achieved life satisfaction (Myers & Diener, 1995). Happiness is joy and contentment (Baumgardner & Crothers, 2009) and is related to values (Casas et al., 2005), emotional intelligence (Khosla & Dokania, 2010), expectations (Staats & Stassen, 1985), to mention but a few.

Theoretically, the study used Michalos's Multiple Discrepancy Theory (1986). The theory explains how individuals achieve life satisfaction at a personal level. According to this theory, satisfaction about life and happiness are a product of how one perceives the status quo of events in relation to how events should be or expectations. A comparison is done between the status quo, the expectation, and the

wants in the past and present, what other individuals have and what they feel they deserve. The combination of all these attributes determine happiness. A teacher trainee would as well compare all these aspects in line with the demands of the school practice internship exercise to arrive at life satisfaction. Significant discrepancies between these attributes reduce happiness but the reverse is true in situations of non-significant discrepancies. A teacher trainee focused on achieving happiness and life satisfaction would still be happy if the gap between what they perceive as drivers of happiness and what they actually have at their disposal is not significantly wide. Therefore, educational systems at both university and school levels where these teacher trainees are students and teachers respectively need to strengthen their systems so as to enable the achievement of these attributes. The objective of the study was to explore the factors that influence happiness and life satisfaction among university teacher trainees on internship placement. The research question was; what are the factors that influence happiness and life satisfaction among teacher trainees on internship placement?

LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the contentious issues among researchers has been whether or not factors such as locus of control and happiness overlap, cause and/or affect each other or have significant variations (Shubina, 2015). The external and internal attributions of events around human beings determines how they experience well-being (Okeju, 2023) as individuals with internal locus of control seem to be in control of their well-being better than their external locus of control counterparts (Rotter, 1990).

Based on Eysenck's personality theory, as much as happiness is emotional and affective in nature, it has a biological basis too (Furnham & Irene, 2007). Indeed, the relationship between personality and happiness is apparent because of individual differences that are also genetic in nature. Extroversion, for instance leads to feelings of joy and happiness (Yung, 2004) while happiness and hope give birth to joy (Gray, 2013). Traits of personality and modes of emotion are related (Strobel 2011; Aghamoh, Mmadi & Asgari, 2016). Happiness is not only associated to extroversion only

but also to temper, depression and neuroticism (Hayes & Stephen, 2023; Salary & Shaieri, 2013) where the relationship is not just significant but also positive (Garousi Farshi, 2001) while its relationship with openness to experience as a personality trait is inverse. One key element of the relationship between personality and happiness is the mediating role of mental health (Lu & Shih, 1997). All in all, personality and happiness among university students exists (Ziapour et al., 2018).

Another predictor of happiness and life satisfaction among young adults such as those in universities is how they measure and perceive their self-worth. Among parents, teachers and students, self-esteem has become a daily word (Baumaster et al., 2003) hence the wide spread focus on boosting it, because of its perceived and proven association with diverse appetitive outcomes such as life satisfaction. Learners with high self-esteem are more likely to be happy partly because they are likeable and attractive (Baumaster et al., 2003). The relationship between self-esteem and happiness is strong (Nabirye, 2023) and associated with pleasant feelings while low self-esteem has contributed to depression. Self-esteem, as a pathway for measuring self-value (Salavera, Usan & Teruel, 2020; Penaherrera, Cachon & Ortiz, 2014) has diverse dimensions, such as behavioural, social, emotional, biological and cognitive, hence each of these aspects could affect happiness and life satisfaction (Penaherrera et al., 2014). Self-esteem is a happiness predictor (Cheng & Furnham, 2004; Diener & Diener, 1995; Simsek, 2013) because of its role in social relationships (Moran et al., 2014; Yip & Martinz, 2006). Also, self-esteem and happiness are correlated when mediated and moderated by social ecology, hence a socio-ecological context (Fujiwara & Takemwa, 2014; Yuki et al., 2024). Self-esteem is a predictor of happiness (Campbell, 1990) and well-being (Diener, 1999). It is also linked to self-verification (Cast & Burke, 2002). The relationship between self-esteem and happiness is very intimate and the two attributes are conceptually inseparable (Shubina, 2015; Ryff, 1989; Myers, 2002 & Diener, 1999) yet they are also distinct (Parducci, 1995).

Genetics and happiness is one undeniable relationship. Some researchers have linked happiness and life satisfaction to genetics as

mediated by economics (DeNeve et al., 2012). Life satisfaction and genetics are sometimes linked (Bertels, 2015). Happiness involves what makes the heart sing (Blum et al., 2009). Genetic factors and well-being are related, especially behavioural genetics, well-being and happiness (Margot, Van de Weijer, de Viriers & Bartelb, 2022; Lianne & Meine, 2022). The underlying factors for happiness have two dimensions, that is, endogenic/biological/genetic factors and exogenic/behavioural factors. The genetic/biological factors are the most significant predictors of happiness and life satisfaction (Roysambi et al., 2003). There are significant variations in happiness and the indicators include, but are not limited to life satisfaction, subjective well-being and emotionality, all of which are linked to genes (Nes, 2024). Genes are key predictors of happiness (Dogan et al., 2013) of about 40-50 percent (Lykken & Tellegen, 1996).

There is also an association between happiness and life satisfaction, and self-efficacy, an association that has not yet been well investigated by researchers (Ersanli, 2015; Van Zyl & Dhurup, 2018). Self-efficacy, with its various dimensions of emotional understanding, emotional regulation, utilisation of emotions and perception of emotions are important in predicting happiness (Kirk, Schutte & Hine, 2008). Both affective and interpersonal self-efficacy are proximal in determining happiness and positive thinking (Mahmoodi et al., 2019). It is also believed in Psychology that happiness can be a product of emotional intelligence (Okeju, 2023) and other emotional dimensions (Ghahramani et al., 2019) with significant and positive relationships. Combined with personality traits, emotional intelligence leads to increased happiness among students (Khosroshahi et al., 2013). Kelly (2000) also argues that locus of control is a strong predictor of happiness and life satisfaction. A person has internal locus of control first and external locus of control next (Küçükkaragöz et al., 2013). From the reviewed literature on studies conducted on happiness and life satisfaction, it is noted that most studies tackle the attribute in relation to common and widely investigated variables such as emotional intelligence, self-esteem, self-efficacy and genes. Therefore, there is a glaring need to study happiness among unique groups such as teacher trainees, not as

mere university students but during and in relation to the internship exercise as a lived experience for this unique population and unique circumstance.

METHODOLOGY

The study took a purely qualitative approach and exploratory phenomenological design to explore the factors that make university teacher trainees on internship placement happy and satisfied with life. As a result, the study also aimed at suggesting strategic mitigation measures to improve happiness and life satisfaction in this population. Phenomenologically, the study's main phenomenon was happiness and life satisfaction (Giorgi, 2017; Moran, 2002; Cohen et al., 2007). The explorative phenomenological design helped the researchers to generate rich data from the student teachers' happiness as their lived experience which would hence assist in generating mitigation strategies to promote happiness and counter and minimise factors that make them unhappy and dissatisfied with life.

The target population was year three university students on teaching practice internship from one Ugandan university pursuing a Bachelor of Arts/Science with Education degree course. The year of study for the teacher trainees was preferred because it implies a second and last internship placement which is a good basis for comparison with the initial or debut placement and a stage of anticipation for the world of work as the next stage in the career journey for the target population. Teaching practice internship is a transition period during which university teacher trainees put the taught theoretical pedagogies into practice as they prepare for the world of work as teachers/instructors (Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009; Cohen, Manion, Morrison & Wyse, 2010; Chen et al., 2012). They were twenty-five in number and were both male and female, selected using purposive (Campbell et al., 2020; Rai & Thapa, 2015) and convenient (Emerson, 2015; Emerson, 2021; Farrokhi & Mahmoudi-Hamidabad, 2012) sampling techniques from the schools the corresponding author had been posted as a school practice supervisor, well aware of the potential bias this posed. The inclusion and exclusion criterion was that they had to be finalists/in year three hence excluding year two teacher trainees.

Data were collected using in-depth interviews with the assistance of digital recorders. Validity of data was ensured through interviewing a relatively diverse number of respondents such as males and females (DaFitzPatrick, 2019; Golafshani, 2003) and through using purposive sampling and prolonged engagement (Franklin & Ballan, 2001)) while reliability was ensured through inter-rater judgement for interview guides questions where experts in educational psychology were consulted on appropriateness of the questions in terms of language and structure (Golafshani, 2003; Hoepfi, 1997). It was transcribed and thereafter, themes were generated to guide the presentation and analysis of data on factors that make university teacher trainees on internship placement happy and satisfied about life. Data were analysed using thematic analysis. Data presentation, analysis and discussion of findings were done concurrently (Creswell, 2014).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the key informant interviews, teacher trainees on school practice submitted their experiences of happiness and satisfaction about life in this unique setting, which can be themed as follows;

Economic sources of Happiness

It emerged that economic and specifically, financial factors are players in teacher trainee happiness while on internship. They asserted that they needed money to satisfy various needs that would in the long run facilitate their survival during the exercise, as one female respondent asserted,

“Once I have money during teaching practice, I am at peace. It is an economically challenging period of the year as we need money to pay rent as school practice locations are far away from our university hostels, and sometimes in districts that are far away from home. We also need money for utility bills such as water and electricity. All in all, money drives everything. School practice is averagely a three-month exercise and this necessitates finances as schools do not offer what is required. So, for me, if I have money during this period, I am happy and life moves on smoothly.”

Hence, from this assertion, it can be asserted that money makes life easier and manageable for

university student teachers on internship exercise as it is a source of survival, as another female teacher trainee also expressed,

“As ladies and young girls for that matter, you can never deny the importance of money during this exercise. As girls, it is very undeniable that we need money to be happy and safe. Safety here means once our needs that require money are met with ease, then we do not have to worry and be tensed about satisfying needs such as hair and skin care products, things that males take for granted, but which are very vital in the life, contentment and happiness of most young ladies. Once I have money to satisfy these personal needs, then I am at peace knowing that men will not take advantage of me sexually as a goal towards getting money for such. A girl with money in her pockets makes me happy, safe and empowered.”

The two assertions, though both came from female teacher trainees are evidence that one major source of happiness among teacher trainees on internship is money/finances. Such findings are evidence that gender influences how people view finances as sources and bases of happiness and life satisfaction, based on the perception about amounts and urgency of needs and hence, this may need to variations and inequalities within the experiences. These findings concur with those unearthed by Al-Nagger et al., (2010) on Malaysian university students, who placed economic factors as second in rank in determining life satisfaction. To these researchers, financial satisfaction equals happiness. This is further fronted by Chakraborty et al., (2019) who studied happiness among Indian college students. According to them, happiness as an end goal in life is driven by economic comfort, among other factors. Xiao et al., (2009) also look at happiness and life satisfaction as products of financial behavior and conduct. Positive financial behavior and life satisfaction are also mediated by academic performance and academic actualization. Last but not least, Iisager (1948) who conducted research on Danish college students, also identified economic factors as major in determining feelings of happiness. Hence, economic factors are detrimental in determining the happiness and life satisfaction among university students.

Colleague support factors for Happiness

Another factor that emerged from the teacher trainees as a source of happiness is support from both fellow trainees and already established teachers. One male teacher trainee asserted,

“One satisfying experience during school practice is when you find your colleagues that are doing school practice in the same school. And actually, we are happy to generally be a big group of interns. This is mainly due to the anticipation of social support within us. School practice comes with many challenges but having a sense of unity against these common challenges is very redeeming and satisfying. We laugh about our triumphs and cry together about our bad experiences, but most importantly, we strategise together on how to achieve our short and long term goals. I really feel sorry for teacher trainees who don’t get to experience this.”

This support was not only reported to come from fellow trainees/interns but also from teachers that are already established in the schools, as a female intern asserted,

“In my initial school practice internship, I was very saddened by the way my mentor teacher, that is, the teacher whose subjects and lessons I was taking over was very unfriendly and non-supportive. She was not willing to guide me on several issues like teaching materials, guidance on how to handle indiscipline cases, and things like that. This forced me to change school for my final internship. I have been pleasantly surprised at how teachers in my two departments go out of their way to make me comfortable. They are very social and supportive.”

Therefore, support from not only the fellow teacher trainees but also subject teachers was presented as a vital source of happiness among teacher trainees on internship. This is aligned with studies such as those done by Mahmoodi et al., (2019), Foo and Prihadi (2021), Nauffal & Sbeity (2013) and Suralaga and Rohmadi (2021) who link happiness to actual social support from teachers, friends, perceived social support and optimistic tendencies.

Supervision-related factors for Happiness

As much as it is the expectation by every teacher trainee on internship to be subjected to supervision and assessment, this experience comes with different and contradicting emotions. As some trainees look forward to it, others dread it. But one of them asserted,

“Supervision, I am referring to meaningful supervision gives me joy. A supervisor that calls me in advance, tells me when they will be coming makes me happy. He comes in time, talks to me before the lesson, supervises me and thereafter, helps me to understand how I taught, where I was superb and where I need to improve to score better marks. That one is a good supervisor and supervision. That is a supervisor you look forward to. However, what depresses some of us is random supervisors who come without prior notice, supervise for less than twenty minutes, run away without giving the supervisee feedback. It is indeed depressing.”

The satisfaction about supervision is also expressed in terms of its significance, as another male teacher trainee expressed,

“Another reason why supervision is a reason to celebrate is because it signifies academic progress. If I am supervised, that is one step away from possible course completion and eventual graduation. If I am not supervised, or if supervision is delayed, it is worrying. Actually, we know that the more times we are supervised, the more we improve academically and the higher the chances of passing and graduating. And, by the way, we are gladdened at the practice of changing supervisors as this minimizes monopoly and increases objectivity in scores but also ensures a diversity of feedback which increases academic growth”

Such a finding concurs with studies conducted by Bekkouche (2024) who argues that supervision and student overall well-being are linked due to the intrinsic motivation it produces. This is also observed in findings in a study conducted by Livni, Crowe and Gonzalvez (2012) who assert that supervision, in terms of effectiveness, evaluation and co-operation lower student exhaustion and

heighten satisfaction, well-being and happiness. Therefore, supervision as a source of happiness in two dimensions, that is, how it is conducted and the academic benefits that come with it.

Student related factors for Happiness

It was also revealed through the in-depth interviews with teacher trainees on internship that happiness and life satisfaction are derived from factors that are student related, that is, the students under their teaching. As one female teacher trainee expressed,

“The students that we teach can make or break you. I have been in situations in my previous internship where the students I was teaching were non cooperative and undisciplined. They would make noise especially when my supervisor was present. They would hiss at me and that was very uncomfortable. They were not active in my class. But in this particular internship which is my second one, I was very intentional in selecting the school because to me, the foundation of the school guarantees student discipline and academic focus. It makes me happy when students are respectful, active and progressive. It motivates me to be a better teacher.”

These findings agree with those done by Alhebaishi (2019) who asserts that what makes student teacher interns happy is love, care, discipline and cooperation from the learners. That generally, the internship practicum is a positive experience because it generates affective and emotional satisfaction when learners provide the kind of support they expect.

Logistical Factors for Happiness

Teacher trainees on internship also expressed logistical factors, such as scholastic and academic materials, as drivers of happiness during internship. These, to them, are materials expected to be provided by the mother faculty at the university to assist and aid in the teaching, as one of them that is male asserted,

“There are certain materials we expect from the School of Education as part of the provisions to assist in our teaching. These include manila charts, markers, lesson preparation booklets, to

mention but a few. When these are provided in time, it feels good because it helps us to prepare in time and achieve organization. Without them, school practice can't begin. So their provision, that is, timely provision should be given utmost priority.”

This is also affirmed by Pekrun (2017) who posit that scholastic and academic materials ease the work of a teacher intern and the provision of these specialized and professional materials enables joy in teaching. Therefore, logistical supplies that are specific and cannot be purchased from common vendors are a factor for happiness and life satisfaction in terms of not only provision but specifically, timely provision. Iradel et al., (2021) also agree with findings that instructional materials' provision for teaching interns gives birth to emotions such as happiness while their absence leads to anxiety.

Follow up factors for Happiness

According to the teacher trainees doing internship, what makes them happy and satisfied is not just the process but the assurance that the same process is assessed and evaluated, as one argued,

“Of recent, we see staff from our faculty coming to assess how the internship exercise has been conducted. This is an anonymous exercise which to us is aimed at improvement. We get to air out our views on what we are pleased and displeased about. It is a good practice that should continue because we feel that supervisors too are given this feedback, for improvement reasons.”

These practices enhance promotion of good practices, minimization of unprofessional practices, all aimed at the improvement of internship experiences (Celen & Akcan, 2017) with special emphasis on processes and their improvement (Denton & Peters, 1988). Therefore, follow-up practices are liked by teacher trainees because of their perceived benefits.

CONCLUSIONS

Therefore, based on the findings, it can be concluded that university teacher trainees' perception and actual experiences of happiness and life satisfaction are triggered by factors related to economic/financial provisions, collegial support, mentor support,

supervision experiences, student attributes, logistical factors and follow up processes. Happiness and life satisfaction incorporates psychological, emotional and professional fulfilment beyond economic and financial drivers. The presence and abundance of these attributes plays a role in contributing to teacher trainee happiness while their absence or in limited proportions causes anger and anxiety.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings are a good basis for strategic interventions at different stakeholder levels in teacher training. A happy and satisfied teacher translates into a happy, satisfied and progressive student. This in the long run positively affects academic achievement. This is why it is important to evaluate the factors that make a teacher motivated and satisfied about their profession and general life. These strategies are deemed necessary at school, university and policy making levels such as the Ministries responsible for education and teacher training. Based on the findings and conclusions, it is recommended that teacher training institutions especially universities give priority to making conditions for teacher trainees on internship exercise conducive through provision of adequate and timely scholastic and logistical provisions like lesson preparation booklets and journals. Universities should further enhance financially-driven life satisfaction by contributing financially to the welfare of students through internship funds/allowances to assist in lessening the burden on expenses on housing, feeding and other utility bills. The assessment and evaluation of the teaching practice exercise would also be helpful in schools too, where the teacher trainers have a role they can play to assist teacher trainees achieve happiness and life satisfaction, through educating their students about the importance of internship and through reinforcing discipline and active learning during lessons. Schools have an important role in ensuring discipline among learners as this is a factor for teacher trainee happiness and satisfaction, through positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement and punishment. They could also ensure that teacher trainees are assigned mentors that are already teachers for continued guidance of the trainees. Having fully equipped libraries and laboratories is also another practical way for ensuring teacher

trainees smoothly experience teaching. This study, in a broader context, is significant in unearthing the rarely thought about yet significant underlying drivers of teacher motivation and achievement that in turn have implications on important educational attributes on the learners under their tutorage. Educational institutions cannot afford to underplay the role of affective conditions for they drive how they feel about themselves as persons, as teachers and most importantly how they teach.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Some of the study participants were hesitant to give responses because of the fear that this would be reported to the faculty and be penalized for criticizing authority. This was overcome by assuring them that the study was for research purposes only. There was also hesitation in criticizing the schools of attachment because they hoped these would be the prospective employers. This was resolved by assuring them that their identity would be kept anonymous and would not be revealed to the schools.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Dr. Loyce Kiiza Kobusingye is a Senior Lecturer of Educational Psychology and teacher trainer. She birthed the research idea in terms of the variables and population for the study. She carried out the literature review, collected and analysed the research data. She did the original and final write up of the manuscript.

Mr Okeju John, as a graduate of Master of Education in Educational Psychology. He was the source of information on the relationship between self-esteem, locus of control and life satisfaction. He also participated in the literature review and the manuscript's proof reading.

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