

Exploring the Relationship Between Students' Academic Success and Happiness Levels in the Higher Education Settings During the Lockdown Period of COVID-19

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Abstract

Happiness and subjective well-being are interesting topics for search and study. The perception of happiness differs from one person to another; however, happiness can be defined as a general feeling that people feel and share. The United Arab Emirates puts forth great efforts to achieve happiness amongst people who live in it. In aligning with the Happiness Meter that the United Arab Emirates (UAE) launched, this research study aims to measure the level of happiness among higher education students and its relationship with their academic success during the lockdown period of COVID—19. Exploring whether the happiness level predicts students' success and if a gender-based difference in the feeling of happiness and well-being resides. The *Oxford Happiness Questionnaire* (OHQ) was used to conducting this research project. *Simple linear regression* and *t-test* for independent samples were

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used to achieving the purpose of the study. Data analysis revealed that higher education students in the UAE have high levels of happiness and academic success; the students' happiness levels were found to be correlated to their academic success. *T*-test demonstrated that there was no gender-based difference in the happiness level among the students of higher education settings.

Keywords

Happiness, subjective well-being, academic success, higher education, happiness in the UAE

Introduction

Happiness, as a concept, has various meanings. Happiness refers to the state of feeling well or expressing pleasure; it is a changeable state that does not last for long. According to Diener (2020) happiness and life satisfaction which can be viewed as the feeling and thinking that humans' life goes well. Happiness is perceived as a subjective matter that differs from individual to another. Many theories help individuals to understand and achieve happiness such as *the Pleasant Life: Hedonism Theory* (Bentham, 1978), *the Good Life: Desire Theory* (Griffin, 1986), *the Meaningful Life: Objective List Theory* (Nussbaum, 1992; Sen, 1985), and *Authentic happiness* (Seligman, 2002a). Through your level of life satisfaction and well-being, happiness can be measured.

Academic success is an essential goal for higher education students. Feeling happy and being satisfied with the individuals' lives could help students achieve their academic goals. Many researchers studied the relationship between happiness and success from different perspectives such as success in workplace and academic success, they revealed that causal relationship between the positive affect and success might be found (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2008; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Uusiautti, 2013). These findings can imply that success brings happiness, and it is expected that a happy person will have a higher probability of achieving success.

Some researchers (Diener et al., 1999) assumed that success causes happiness, and proven a causal relationship through investigating the correlations between happiness and a several life desirable aspects, however the researchers identified the causality to be bidirectional; successful people are happy and happy people are motivated to success. The studies of Lyubomirsky et al. (2005) investigated the bidirectional causality relationship between happiness and success. The findings of their cross-sectional study revealed that individuals with high subjective well-being are successful in many areas of life such as success in workplace, social relationships, better health conditions, fulfilling and productive work.

On the contrary, experiencing negative emotions, such as anxiety, distress and shame lead to low academic performance (Arsenio & Loria, 2014; Liu et al., 2019; Saggino et al., 2017)

Towards the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020, the COVID – 19 Pandemic emerged and severely impacted the world. Many countries had to apply safety measures to curb and limit the spread and influence of the COVID – 19. These safety measures include the institution of a national curfew, keeping with social distance guidelines and transformation of education and work to remote environments, which disrupted the daily activities and affected the mental state and happiness levels of people. According to Cheong et al. (2020), safety measures can beget negative effects on people's happiness, well-being, and mental health, as it may increase the probability of developing negative emotions, anxiety, depression, and stress. The findings of Yang and Ma (2020) showed that at the beginning of the COVID – 19 Pandemic in China, there was a 74% decrease in people's emotions and well-being. A recent research study by Levkovich and Shinan-Altman (2020) was conducted to measure emotions during the pandemic, the findings demonstrated that 48% of the study's participants felt unhappy and developed negative emotions during COVID – 19. In addition, Ferguson et al. (2020) found that the safety measures and precautions such as social distancing and isolating at homes would impact people and potentially control transmission and coping with the COVID —19 Pandemic. Carlucci et al. (2020) investigated the adherence degree to quarantine and indicated that people who experienced anxiety and perceived the risk of COVID-19, showed high commitment to the quarantine guidelines. Balsamo and Carlucci (2020) conducted a research study to assess states of depression spread in socio-demographic perspectives during the lockdown of COVID-19, the results revealed that the likelihood of being infected by COVID – 19 did not increase by the depressive symptoms spread. Thus, there is a need to focus on the impact of COVID – 19 on people's well-being, mental health, and measure of happiness levels among people.

This paper aims to examine the level of happiness among students in the higher education during the COVID – 19 Pandemic and to investigate the relationship between happiness levels and students' academic success. This research hypothesizes that students' high levels of happiness and subjective well-being promote academic success. In addition, this study examines whether there is a gender-based difference in happiness levels as a factor that is assumed to predict students' happiness levels.

The findings of this research contribute to the larger body of knowledge concerning the measurements of happiness, academic success, gender differences in happiness levels, and will thus present benefits to the education settings. Recommendations will be presented to professors, and decision and policy-makers in higher education to support offering social activities and academic programs to enhance students' success, happiness, and subjective well-being.

Thus, the output will enrich the academic life through presenting a clear picture of the students' happiness level and well-being and indicates whether there is a need to provide happiness counseling sessions to students to help them cope with the Pandemic and achieve their academic goals. Considering students' happiness and well-being supports the positivity of the learning environment and assists in enhancing students' academic success on the university level. On a global scale, this study can be replicated in many other higher education institutions across the globe to promote students' well-being and academic success. The results from this study will advance the student experience in any academic institution for higher education, as it will provide data-driven recommendations for understanding the connections between happiness, subjective well-being and academic success and dealing with them accordingly to enrich the opportunities for students' well-being around the world through strengthening the exchange academic programs and spreading the approach of positive education.

Literature review

What is happiness?

Understanding the science of happiness was a focus of old philosophers. Early in the 4th century BC, the Greek philosopher Aristippus, believed that happiness refers to the combination of the hedonic moments and stages in our life (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Aristotle believed that happiness contains a minimum of two components: hedonia refers to pleasure and eudaimonia which means to live your life well (Kringelbach & Berridge, 2010). In the 18th century, philosophers composed of Baldwin, Locke, and later Bentham presented a basic definition of happiness to be viewed as the sum of pleasures (Tatarkiewicz, 1975, p. 34). This definition considers the individuals' statement of being happy regardless of virtual criteria, meaning this definition has never received full acceptance (Veenhoven, 1984).

Investigating the historical view of happiness proved that happiness was linked to fortune and be a lucky person to described as a happy one, while Americans have a modern view that happiness is an attainable thing that can be controlled and strived effectively (Kesebir & Diener, 2008; McMahon, 2006; Oishi, 2012). As a field of research and study, happiness has a specific nature that causes difficulty in defining and measuring (Kringelbach & Berridge, 2010). The concept of happiness has several meanings that differ among individuals and researchers. Many research studies (e.g., Oishi et al., 2013; Veenhoven, 2012) revealed that there are several concepts to reflect the perception of happiness. Kamvar et al. (2009) suggested that there is no fixed term to describe happiness as it is perceived differently among individuals, varies as individuals age, and there is age-based difference viewing the meaning of happiness. Younger people usually find happiness to be linked with elation and excitement

whilst older people express a different view of happiness as correlated with feeling secure. Although there is no clear concept for the term happiness, some researchers preferred using it (e.g., Lyubomirsky & Ross, 1997).

Happiness is feeling joy and pleasure; it is an objective for many people. Everyone has the right to feel happy and enjoy their life. As proposed by Nelson-Coffey (2020) happiness refers to positive emotions that individuals develop when involving in a pleasurable daily life. These positive emotions increase the level of happiness and flourish: they have many forms such as pleasure, comfort, gratitude, hope, and inspiration. Veenhoven (2012) stated that happiness is a major life goal that many individuals and policymakers hope to achieve. Understanding the concept of happiness and its different theories is an essential step to measure and set up policies to achieve it.

According to Veenhoven (2012), there is no single definition for happiness; it can be understood as the umbrella that includes all good things that bring welfare and well-being to humans. Empirical studies on happiness showed that there is a clear difference in the level of happiness among countries' nationals and across countries. Understanding and achieving happiness among many people is attainable in some ways. As an attractive field for both study and research, happiness emerged from positive psychology. Positive psychology was born to present a reaction to the great attention that both psychology and psychiatry give to negative conditions of varied mental disorders. According to Seligman (2002a), "Psychology is not just the study of disease, weakness, and damage; it also is the study of strength and virtue. Treatment is not just fixing what is wrong; it also is building what is right" (Seligman, 2002b: 4)

In the early beginning of the twenty-first century, Seligman (2002a) explained the great role that positive psychology plays to boost and increase people's awareness of the impact of psychology in helping individuals fulfill and enhance their lives. The last few decades have witnessed an interest and a renaissance in the research field and domains on happiness and well-being. Many research studies in happiness and well-being resulted in a variety of concepts that helps people understand the authentic meaning of happiness. Diener (1984) recommended using the subjective well-being (SWB) as a scientific term that represented happiness; it has been frequently used to evaluate personal life aspects such as pleasure, favorable emotions, and the loss of negative undesirable emotions relatively (Diener, 1984). The endeavors of Diener were supported by the research of Seligman (2002a).

According to Lee and Kawachi (2019), happiness was found to be associated with many life aspects such as personal values, family, and other social relationships, however it was found to be adversely related to extrinsic achievements, wealth and power, or enjoying a healthy body. The collaborative work of (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005) presented several research documents that showed the association between positive affect refers to happiness and many positive outcomes such as identified higher work performance, higher salaries, and better

health. This research study aimed to explore the correlation between happiness level and academic success of higher education students, exploring the differences in happiness level based on gender. For this study, happiness can be defined as a feeling of pleasure and positivity when individuals have balanced emotions, feel satisfied with their current situation, and developing a purposeful life.

Happiness in the United Arab Emirates (UAE)

The UAE is a rapidly growing country that supports and includes constant globalization, huge working opportunities, and immigrants. Hence, this may cause excessive occupational pressure, mental health deterioration among employees, and great stress. The UAE focuses on the quality of life as an essential factor that enhances life satisfaction and subjective well-being. The UAE provides an incubating environment for expatriates as it accommodates expatriates from various nationalities all over the world, where it was found that 84% of the UAE tenants are expatriates (UAE Interact, 2013). Despite the noticeable endeavors the UAE accomplishes to spread happiness and to ensure quality life for people who live across the Emirates, research on happiness and well-being in UAE is little, in addition to the lack of literature on the concept of happiness across the Arab countries (Brannan et al., 2013; Pflug, 2009; Suh & Oishi, 2004).

Many researchers focused on exploring the concept of happiness in the UAE and Arab countries (Hamdan, 2008; Lambert & Pasha-Zaidi, 2015; Omar, 2018; Simadi & Kamali, 2004). These research studies found that happiness arises from relationships. Emiratis and other Arabs who live in the UAE stated that happiness emerges from behavior such as: fulfilling social roles, being religious, gaining satisfaction from parents, and connecting with family after being independent. Emiratis also mentioned that religion provides a stable identity, a meaningful life, and forms daily behaviors (Diener et al., 2011; Hamdan, 2008). These previous studies revealed that the concept of happiness in the UAE is no longer the feeling of pleasure or joy; it is extended to be a metaphysical or spiritual element that reflects the individual's degree of sincerity and engagement in preferable positive behaviors to nourish their souls.

Achieving happiness in the UAE

In February 2016, the UAE Government quickly established a Ministry of Happiness and Welfare in the country and appointed the first minister of the state of happiness. The Ministry of Happiness mainly focuses on achieving happiness for society in alignment with all the UAE's plans, programs, and policies. The Minister of Happiness executes several distinctive responsibilities following the government's plans and objectives to attain happiness across all

emirates. To acquire happiness, the UAE Government (2016) emphasized the importance of promoting happiness among its citizens to increase occupational productivity and efficiency among all citizens and residents. The minister's excellency, Ms. Al Roumi, stated in her public speech, "Happiness is a serious job for governments. . . the main job for the government is to create happiness. In 2011, the UN encouraged the member countries to look at happiness for a holistic approach for development" (UAE Government, 2016).

Based on her excellency's speech, happiness is viewed as creating a positive environment that flourishes people, helping them reach their maximum full potential, feel happy, and be satisfied. H.H. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid, Vice President and Ruler of Dubai, called for supportive governmental initiatives. In the World Government Summit in Dubai, H.H. said, "We want a government that works on building the skills of its people, aside from providing services. . . a government focused on putting the happiness of citizens at the forefront of its priorities" (UAE Government, 2016).

The ministry of happiness conducts several supportive programs. These programs aim to reduce the mental pressure across both the governmental and private sectors. Therefore, the ministry set up a happiness agenda that works towards achieving happiness in the workplace and helps increase the employees' morale. The happiness agenda includes many happy programs and initiatives. Hence, one of those goals is employees' satisfaction, which represents an important item that tops the list of the happiness agenda. The happiness agenda includes the *National Program for Happiness and Positivity* which determines the governmental policies and services that can provide a positive lifestyle among people and develop a happiness index to measure people's level of happiness and satisfaction. The *National Program for Happiness and Positivity* is considered one of the most beneficial initiatives which emphasize including all people who live in the UAE, encouraging both governmental and the private sectors to effectively involve in achieving that objective.

When investigating the *National Program for Happiness and Positivity* in 2016, H.H. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid, initiated governmental programs and services to strengthen positive lifestyles. These programs seek the promotion of a positive lifestyle, mainly target enhancing wellbeing among people in the UAE. The *National Program for Happiness and Positivity* relies on three major variables: implementing happiness policies in governmental and private entities, spreading, and strengthening positivity among people in the UAE, and evaluating the level of happiness and life satisfaction among individuals based on Developed benchmark tools (Anwar et al., 2017).

These initiatives are conducted following legislative bodies and entities, which reflects how the government expresses legitimacy and the essentiality of happiness. The Ministry of Happiness provides continuous measures and evaluation for the happiness level, life quality, and satisfaction (Happiness Agenda, 2020). Additionally, the Happiness Plan encourages the knowledge development of

happiness and well-being as a lifestyle for individuals. The Happiness Plan considers the importance of research and study about happiness as they focus on publishing research studies, scientific and cultural books related to happiness studies. Statistics about the level of happiness revealed that the UAE was ranked in first place for two years in a row by young Arab students as the best country for quality life and study (Gulf News, 2016). Furthermore, the UAE achieved 17th place in the World Happiness Report, the report that estimates different issues containing the economy, wealth, social relations, and public welfare (Khawaja, 2012). As a result of the continuous endeavors the UAE puts forth, recently approached the 14th place (Helliwell et al., 2012).

Theories of happiness

Over the past decade, happiness, and subjective well-being as a field of study and research have been enriched by numerous research studies that focused on investigation and presenting further details about happiness and well-being (Diener et al., 2017; Hoffman et al., 2018; Kaufman et al., 2018; Oerlemans & Bakker, 2018). The field of positive psychology and happiness contains many theories that explain and measure happiness. Most philosophers identified two views of happiness: *hedonism*, and the *life satisfaction* theory. According to hedonism, happiness can be reflected when a person chooses pleasure over unpleasant experiences (Feldman, 2007). *Life satisfaction* theory views happiness as feeling good towards an individual's life entirely. The *emotional state view theory* presents a different view on the perception of happiness; it identifies happiness as a whole emotional status of what is known for emotional well-being. (Badhwar, 2018). This concept of happiness includes nonempirical forms of emotions, excluding pleasures that do not directly relate to an individual's emotional mood. Another view of happiness is the *hybrid theories* which aim to explore happiness from two sides: life satisfaction and pleasure or emotional state that involves the *subjective well-being*. Some researchers identified happiness with many aspects: subjective well-being, life satisfaction, or a link to emotional or hedonic mood (Seligman, 2002a).

In 2011, Seligman discussed the concept of happiness and introduced two different theories of happiness and well-being. Original Theory refers to *the theory of Authentic Happiness* and *Well-being theory*. Each theory has its significant view of understanding and explaining happiness. *Authentic Happiness Theory* represents a one-dimensional theory that concerns about happiness and being well. It measures life satisfaction, intending to increase life satisfaction. *The theory in Authentic Happiness* views happiness as a set of three different components that are all subjective measurable and well-defined better than happiness as a term. However, people intend to choose them for benefits and welfare. The three components are *positive emotion*, *engagement*, and *meaning*.

Positive emotion refers to the feeling of trance, repose, relief, warmth, the love of successes, and life entirely; Seligman called this element the “pleasant life”.

Moreover, an essential component of happiness is *Engagement*; it refers relevant to the ability to lose self-consciousness temporarily when doing a preferable activity. Engagement could also be examined through the slight difference between positive and negative feelings. *Engagement* presents flow where people merge with the object, meaning being fully concentrated on something and loss of self-consciousness during an activity that takes up all your attention and interest. Seligman viewed individuals who live such a type of life as the “engaged life.” The positive emotional element does not require many efforts, while individuals need to put effort into acquiring engagement (Seligman, 2011).

Meaning represents the third component of the Authentic Happiness theory. *Meaning* refers to individuals’ desire in finding meaning and purpose for their life. To enjoy a meaningful life, individuals express belonging and focusing on something more valuable than themselves. According to Seligman (2011), a meaningful life can be gained by belonging to something and fully advocating it based on your belief that it is bigger than yourself which may be supported by the positive affiliations such as religion, political party, or the family. To conclude the authentic theory, it is a theory that stands for three theoretical components: the joyful life, the good life, and the purposeful life. The pleasant and good life are based on subjective experiences rather than facts, while the meaningful life is entirely objective.

The other theory that was proposed by Seligman (2011) is the *Well-being theory*. The well-being theory does not refer to happiness antithetically, perceived as a construct that asserts the well-being as the essence of positive psychology. Well-being consists of five measurable elements (subjectively or objectively) that are combined in the term (PERMA). PERMA model refers to *Positive emotions* which means feeling happy and satisfied with life, *Engagement*, *Relationships*, *Meaning* and purpose, and *Accomplishment*. All five of these components contribute to explaining and defining well-being. The well-being theory’s principal purpose is to increase flourishing.

The first component, *Positive Emotions* can be examined through three different stages past, present, and future, where past emotions are expressed through forgiveness, while physical pleasures indicate present emotions and future emotions examined by developing continuous hope. *Engagement* is shown when an individual focuses their skills and experience to achieve a challenging task unconsciously. *Relationship*, the third component, is essential for the concept of well-being, where individuals strengthen their connections to find out the real meaning and joyful life. Fourthly, *Meaning* is attainable when people have a purposeful life that includes helping others. The last component, *Accomplishment*, is found when individuals seek to measure their qualifications, achievements, success, and the degree of appropriateness in many domains such as the workplace or hobbies. Thus, *accomplishment* is a target for some people whether it leads to positive feelings or not.

The link between happiness and success

Academic success is a broad term that includes several components. Kuh et al. (2006) defined students' academic success as follows "student success is defined as academic success, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of educational outcomes, and post-college performance (p. 5). York et al. (2015) theorized six components grounded definition to describe academic success including "academic success, satisfaction, acquisition of skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of learning objectives, and career success" (p. 9). Research discoveries have revealed that many factors could affect academic success. These factors contain knowledge and information structures and identifying the inspirational elements such as beliefs, mentalities, and personal qualities (Bassant, 1995).

Farahany (1994) found that people feel worried about their future and achieving their life objectives which include self-effectiveness, self-improvement, gaining varied perspectives, and developing personal skills and abilities and multiple components. Thus, Farahany's findings (1994) highlight the importance of happiness in human and social development. Higher education students are essential structural dynamics when investigating academic success through a global measurement. College life is full of variable stressors such as mental health status, psychological traits, and the strive for achieving goals. These variables are predicted to influence students, causing daily stress, sadness, and pressure. Happiness is one influential identifiable factor within the findings of scholastic accomplishments. As shown by a research study, individuals who have an acute bliss feeling are increasingly dynamic in scholarly practices and continuous academic education progress. As academic success is a basic goal for higher education students, feeling happy, and being satisfied with one's life could help students achieve their academic goals. Thus, many researchers studied the relationship between happiness and success (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2008; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Uusiautti, 2013). In one study conducted at the University of Phoenix, the researcher found that the level of happiness can predict academic success by using a linear regression model (Langevin, 2013). This research study aims to measure higher education students' level of happiness and their academic success and explore whether happiness is an influencer factor that could predict students' academic success.

Gender and happiness levels

The UAE as an Arabic eastern country has its nature where citizens are influenced by their Arabic heritage and cultures. The UAE is an open country that hosts and welcomes people from across the globe. The social context where individuals live can impact their level of happiness. Hori and Kamo (2017)

found that the context where individuals raised and grown forms their perception of the life experiences. Gender is an important factor that could impact people's happiness and well-being. Research on gender differences in happiness and well-being has attracted the focus of many researchers through the past decades. The research study by Chui and Wong (2015) examined the gender-based differences in happiness and life satisfaction among a group of adolescent students and found that highly academically successful boys are happier, but not highly satisfied about their life, however girls with lower academic success feel happy and satisfied. In general, examining the gender-based differences in happiness and subjective well-being revealed that the findings are mixed and differ from study to another based on the context and the variables considered in the research study. Some research studies showed that men are identified with significant higher levels of subjective well-being (e.g., Stevenson & Wolfers, 2009). However, the study of (e.g., Fujita et al., 1991) found that women have a higher level of subjective well-being. These findings were supported by the study of (Blanchflower & Oswald, 2004) who conducted a study using a large scale to measure life satisfaction on a representative sample of 94,574 from US and UK, their results indicated that women were identified with higher levels of life satisfaction than men. Research on gender-based differences in happiness levels and well-being in the UAE lack, so this research study aims to explore whether the gender-based differences reside among people in the UAE.

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to achieve the purpose of this study:

1. What is the level of happiness of the higher education students in the UAE during the lockdown period of COVID—19?
2. What is the relationship between students' level of happiness as measured by the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire and their academic success, as measured by CGPA during the lockdown period of COVID—19?
3. Is there a gender-based difference in students' level of happiness during the lockdown period of COVID—19?

Methods

Participants

This research study was conducted at a reputable private institute of higher education in Dubai, UAE. The UAE is famous for achieving the first rank among Arab countries in achieving happiness and life satisfaction. The participants of this study consisted of undergraduate students. The invitation to participate in the study was sent to 232 students, chosen randomly. A total of 191 accepted the invitation

Table 1. Distribution and percentages of participants by gender.

Gender	<i>n</i>	Sample %
Male	75	39.3%
Female	116	60.7%

N=191.

Table 2. Distribution and percentages of participants by college.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
<i>Valid</i>				
College of business	66	34.6	34.6	34.6
Computer information technology	11	5.8	5.8	40.3
College of design	39	20.4	20.4	60.7
Education	7	3.7	3.7	64.4
College of law	3	1.6	1.6	66.0
Media and mass communication	48	25.1	25.1	91.1
College of security studies	16	8.4	8.4	99.5
55.00	1	.5	.5	100.0
Total	191	100.0	100.0	

N= 191.

and responded to the *Oxford Happiness Questionnaire* (OHQ). This study was conducted at the end of spring 2020 and continued until the summer semester of 2020, throughout the pandemic and lockdown period. The 191 sample includes, 75 (39.3%) are males and 116 (60.7%) are females (see Table 1). Data analysis revealed that participants' age ranged from 18 to 37 with an average of 21.7, a median of 21 and a mode of 20, and a standard deviation of 3.405. Participants represent different colleges such as the College of Business Administration, College of Media and Mass Communication, College of Design, College of Security and Global Studies, College of Computer Information Technology, College of Education, and College of Law (see Table 2). Participants are a representative sample from different countries including the UAE, KSA, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Pakistan, and many other countries as shown in Table 3.

Instrumentation

The objective of this research study is measuring the level of happiness among higher education students and explore the relationship between the level of happiness and students' academic success. To achieve the study's goal, *the*

Table 3. Distribution and percentages of participants by nationality.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
UAE	64	33.5	33.5	33.5
Egypt	23	12.0	12.0	45.5
Lebanon	4	2.1	2.1	47.6
Syria	16	8.4	8.4	56.0
Palestine	13	6.8	6.8	62.8
Jordan	11	5.8	5.8	68.6
Yemen	7	3.7	3.7	72.3
KSA	7	3.7	3.7	75.9
Iraq	4	2.1	2.1	78.0
Algeria	3	1.6	1.6	79.6
USA	3	1.6	1.6	81.2
India	3	1.6	1.6	82.7
Pakistan	6	3.1	3.1	85.9
Sudan	4	2.1	2.1	88.0
Iran	16	8.4	8.4	96.3
Other	7	3.7	3.7	100.0
Total	191	100.0	100.0	

N = 191.

Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ) (Hills & Argyle, 2002) was used for that purpose. The *OHQ* is an appropriate tool to measure individuals' current level of happiness. The *OHQ* is a *self-report questionnaire* that consists of 29 statements; 17 are phrased positively and 12 items are negatively worded (R) which requires reverse coding before calculating the total happiness scores. All items about happiness, participants are required to indicate their agreement or disagreement with each statement by choosing a number for each corresponding scale. The *OHQ* is a *Likert scale* type includes a 6-point scale response type from *strongly disagree* = 1 to *strongly agree* = 6, where higher scores indicate higher levels of happiness of the respondents. The lowest score participant can get in a single question is 1 and the highest score is 6. The total score of happiness of participant can be calculated by adding the total scores for the 29 questions (considering the reverse items) and divide it by 29. To explain participant's score and understand their level of happiness, the OHQ interprets the scores as follows: the score 1–2 means not happy, 2–3 means somewhat unhappy, 3–4 indicates somewhat happy or moderately happy, 4–5 refers to rather happy or pretty happy, 5–6 means very happy, and 6 indicates too happy.

Examples of the OHQ questions are:

- I feel that life is very rewarding.
- I am not particularly optimistic about the future. (R)

- I find most things amusing.
- I am well satisfied about everything in my life.
- I don't have a particular sense of meaning and purpose in my life. (R)

Instrument reliability

According to Hills and Argyle (2002), the happiness measurement scale OHQ revealed high reliability within adequate internal consistency, reflected through *Cronbach's alpha* $r= 0.90$ and above. That was supported by the (Medvedev et al., 2016) research study which showed that the 29 items of OHQ are recognized with their high internal consistency that was reflected by *Cronbach's alpha* $r= 0.89$. For this study, *Cronbach's alpha* was conducted to evaluate the internal consistency between the items of the OHQ and find out the scale reliability. Data analysis revealed that the scale items found to be reliable, represented by a *Cronbach's alpha* of $r= .902$ (see Table 4) which supports the results of other research studies (e.g., Hills & Argyle, 2002; Medvedev et al., 2016).

Data collection

Data collection process started at the end of spring 2020 and continued until the end of the summer semester of 2020. The *Oxford Happiness Questionnaire OHQ*, was designed on Google forms with full description about the purpose of the study and the procedure for answering the questions, and the consent form was included. The link of the OHQ with guidelines was sent to many instructors and professors via their emails. The instructors and professors posted the OHQ link on the Learning Management System that they use to communicate with their students. Professors and instructor invited their students to participate in the study through the link and informed them that participation is voluntarily and optional. Many students from different colleges received the link of the questionnaire. All data transferred to SPSS version 22 to be analyzed and draw conclusion.

Data analysis and results

Prior to the analysis, issues of missing values, outliers, homogeneity of variance, normality, and independence have been addressed. Descriptive analysis showed that the students in the higher education setting in the UAE have a high level of

Table 4. The internal consistency of OHQ.

Scale	Cronbach's alpha	Cronbach's alpha based on standardized items	N of items
OHQ	.902	.904	29

happiness with a total score of the happiness measurement OHQ ($M=4.310$, $SD=.6514$) which represents being *Rather Happy* or *Pretty Happy* as interpreted by the OHQ measurement. For academic success, students showed high academic success with their Grade Point Average ($M=3.22$, $Median=3.40$, $Mode=4.00$ and $SD=.6192$) (see Table 5).

To explore the relationship between happiness level and the students' academic success, the students were given a survey OHQ to measure their happiness level ($M=4.310$, $SD=.6514$) and their academic success represented through their cumulative grade point average (CGPA) ($M=3.22$, $SD=.6192$), a Pearson's r data analysis revealed a medium positive correlation, $r=.414$, $p<.001$ is statistically significant which indicates that students' level of happiness is correlated with their academic success (see Table 6).

To predict whether students' level of happiness can predict their academic success, *Simple Linear Regression* was performed to achieve this objective. All issues of assumptions of linearity, homoscedasticity was hypothesized. Data analysis revealed that $R^2=17.1\%$ of total variance in students' academic success (GPA) is accounted for their feeling of happiness and well-being, $F(1, 189)=39.066$, $p<.001$ is statistically significant indicating that there is a linear relationship between students' level of happiness and academic success. The regression model is represents as following:

$$\text{Grade Point Average} = 1.520 + .393 \times \text{Happiness level}$$

Thus, for each 1 unit increase in happiness level, students' academic success/GPA increases .393 unit (see Figure 1)

Table 5. Mean score for CGPA and happiness level.

	Mean	Std. deviation	N
CGPA	3.2157	.61914	191
Mean score HAP	4.310	.6514	191

Table 6. Pearson correlation between CGPA and happiness level.

	CGPA	Mean score_ HAP
CGPA		
Pearson correlation	1	.414**
Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
N	191	191

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

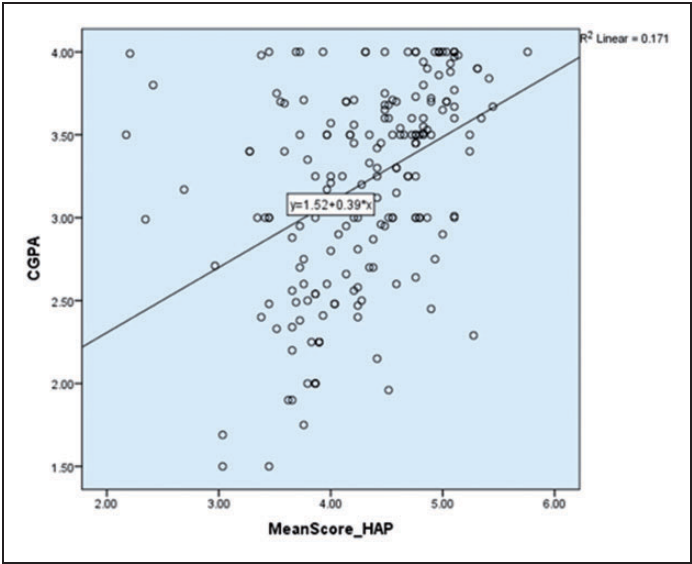


Figure 1. The relationship between happiness level and GPA.

Regarding the gender-based difference in happiness level, the mean score of happiness was computed. An independent-sample *t*-test revealed that the compared mean score of happiness for male students ($N=75$) is ($M=4.2340$, $SD=.6561$) with those of female students ($N=116$) is ($M=4.3597$, $SD=.6464$) was found to be not statistically significant, *Levene's Test* for equality of variances is not statistically significant $F(189)=.057$, $p=.812$, not statistically significant, which indicates that sample variances are equal, so we consider the equal variance assumed to interpret the findings, $t(189)=-1.304$, $p=.194$, not statistically significant, these findings indicate that there is no difference in the happiness level based on the gender of the participants (see Figure 2).

Discussion

Happiness levels and well-being represent an important factor that impacts a variety of aspects within an individuals' life. The UAE Government is one of the entities that puts forth great efforts to provide a high-quality life. The sudden appearance of the COVID – 19 Pandemic and the lockdown period has negatively impacted people's feelings and levels of happiness. Thus, students of higher education are at risk of experiencing a decline in feelings, happiness, and well-being, which could affect their academic success. This research report examines the level of happiness among higher education students in the

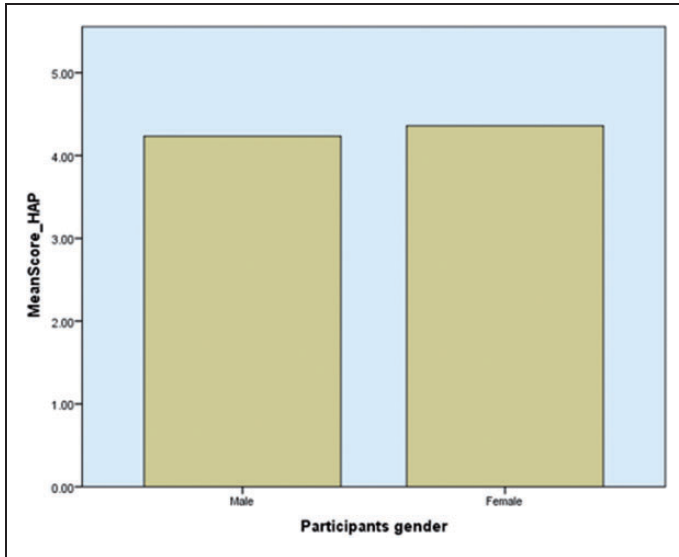


Figure 2. The of happiness level based on gender.

UAE during the lockdown period of COVID -19 and explores the relationship between students' academic success and their levels of happiness and examining the gender-based differences in happiness levels among students. The results demonstrate that during the lockdown of COVID – 19, higher education students in the UAE enjoyed high levels of happiness and subjective well-being as reflected by the results of the total score of *OHQ*. As explained by Hills and Argyle (2002), the mean score of happiness that the students showed represent the findings in *Rather Happy or Pretty Happy* indicating a high level of happiness and well-being, which suggests the great efforts of the UAE Government to enhance the life quality and spread happiness and well-being helped students to cope with the pandemic and lockdown period. The findings of this study agree with the results of a research conducted by the Community Development Authority and Dubai Statistics Center, which found that UAE citizens scored a happiness degree of 8.3 and Arab residents at UAE scored a 7.9 out of 10 (Libo, 2012). This level of happiness and well-being was found among other Emirati citizens as it was revealed from the results of a poll survey that around 91% of UAE nationals expressed their satisfaction or higher level of satisfaction with the life quality in UAE (Olson, 2012).

This research study showed that higher education students enrolled in a private institution in the UAE achieved high academic success with a moderate positive correlation with their levels of happiness, which refers to the students' ability to maintain a happy state, work dedicatedly, and pursue their academic

degrees regardless of the lockdown period. The results demonstrate high levels of happiness correlated positively with high academic success, which agrees with the finding of Fritz et al., (2017) which indicated that individuals with positive feeling have significant academic progress. The results of the *Simple Linear Regression*, state that students' happiness levels can predict students' academic success to some extent, which supports the research of Langevin (2013) who found that the levels of happiness can predict academic success using a linear regression model. The findings of this study offer valuable implications for higher education institutions in the UAE that include offering online academic programs and activities such as establishing happiness clubs for student engagements, increasing levels of happiness, and helping them cope with the challenges of the COVID – 19 Pandemic. In addition to providing awareness campaigns and training sessions to educate students on how to enhance their resilience, self-esteem, full potential, and levels of happiness during the pandemic and achieve their academic success. As the results of the *t-test for independent samples* showed, there is no gender-based difference in the levels of happiness among students of higher education in the UAE. Female and male students expressed similarly high levels of happiness and subjective well-being, which indicates that both males and females are treated equally, equally accepted and engaged in the learning environment, enjoy equity in education with their institutions, and highly motivated to achieve happiness and academic success. These findings support the inferences of some researchers (e.g., Okun & George, 1984; Shmotkin, 1990; White, 1992), who found that there are no significant differences in subjective well-being based on gender. The findings of the high levels of happiness and academic success of students emphasize that the environment of the UAE encourages people to feel happy and to continue towards achieving their goals and cope with any national or global situations such as COVID – 19 or any other pandemics.

The limitations of this study are in regard to the study design. Correlation design is not a causal relationship, the two variables; happiness and success are correlated, although happiness can predict academic success, happiness is not a causal factor of success.

Conclusion

This research paper examines the level of happiness among higher education students in the UAE during the COVID – 19 Pandemic, explores the relationship between students' happiness levels and academic success, and whether gender based-differences in happiness levels reside. During the COVID – 19 Pandemic, higher education students in the UAE showed high academic success and high levels of happiness with no gender differences. The correlation design revealed that students' levels of happiness are positively correlated with their academic success. Thus, happiness was found to predict students' success, the

more the levels of happiness increase, the students' academic success increased. The high level of happiness that participants achieved affirms the importance of achieving happiness, as the UAE's Ministry of Happiness and Welfare believes that happiness is a pursuit for individuals and thus explains and confirms the importance of the efforts made to achieve a high level of well-being and academic success.

Recommendations

This research paper was a trial to discover the relationship between happiness and students' academic success in a higher education setting in the UAE. As it was revealed, higher education students showed a high level of both happiness and academic success with no gender differences. The *simple linear regression* revealed that happiness can predict academic success. These findings can be implemented in the counseling centers to help students who need to increase their academic success. In addition, these findings could be integrated in the students' annual and semi-annual orientations such as offering workshop and training sessions about achieving happiness in the university life and other life aspects. Higher education institutions can include happiness studies as a course to be offered among the elective courses to increase the awareness and understanding of happiness concepts and the methods to achieve it. Besides, offering many academic activities such as happiness club to provide more engagement opportunities for the students to increase their academic success. As the correlation design does not indicate a causal relationship, future research should focus on investigating the happiness levels and success in workplaces and social relationships at AUE considering happiness as an influencer factor and covariate other factors that could interfere in the study. In addition, exploring the factors behind the high happiness levels and academic success considering any external extrinsic societal factors and intrinsic motivation to achieve happiness and academic success.

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