

May I have some more time to play, please? : An Exploration of Javanese Indonesian Children's Happiness

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Abstract

Happiness was defined as a positive emotional state that is subjectively perceived individuals. This study is aimed to identify what factors which contribute to child's happiness in Java, Indonesia. This research is very important considering the concept of happiness from a child's perspective is rarely studied. This study used an open ended question to 51 young Javanese Indonesian children 3-5 year-old and they answered individually. Children were asked a single question "what makes you happy most?". The study was done in Java, Indonesia. The data were screened by using content analysis for the presence of statement revealing factors or source perceived as contributing to child happiness. The result showed that the most response mentioned by Javanese children is: have more time to play and given toys. This response was followed by other responses such as food and drink, hobbies, learning activity in school, indoor and outdoor activity in leisure time, material things, and people. In addition to the result, this study also found that age and gender differences in what children perceive to make them happy. This result is clearly different from western study result. The study confirms a theory on the child development about the importance of daily interactions in children usual context.

Keywords: children, happiness, age, gender.

1. Introduction

Happiness, recently, becomes one of the research topics which concerns the experts and researchers (Snyder & Lopez, 2007; Koopmans, et.al, 2010; Brockmann & Delhey, 2010). The measurement of happiness itself as one of the effectiveness benchmarks of an intervention program to community (Cummins, Lau, Mellor, & Stokes, 2009; Brockmann & Delhey, 2010). Based on survey in Germany, Heady (2008) states that the goal of life is happiness, has been envisioned by each community. It can be concluded that happiness plays an important role in the lives of individuals. More specifically, happiness is defined as a positive emotional state that is subjectively perceived individuals (Snyder & Lopez, 2007).

This study is aimed to: (1) identify the concept of happiness from the child's view, and (2) identify what factors which are contributed to child's happiness in Java Indonesia. This research is very important considering the concept of happiness from a child's perspective is rarely studied. There is limited research on happiness or life satisfaction from the point of view of child. Previous studies preferred on how happy children and adult are, not what makes them happy. In fact, as a parent or even teacher when asked on their expectation always wants a happy child. However, sometimes the meaning of happiness itself becomes different when adults are asked.

Based on previous research, the concept of happiness is influenced by personal factors (i.e age, gender) and socioculture (i.e family values). In line to the study by Currie et al (2012) that young people's subjective well-being or happiness appeared to get lower as their age increased. Previous research from five different countries (Casas, Figuer, Gonza' lez, & Coenders, 2004), found significant correlations between adolescents' and their parents' values. Furthermore, Huebner and collaborators have found relationships between the life satisfaction of adolescents and different parenting's styles (Saha et al, 2010). It could be said that values are an interesting example of parents-children transmission which are different from one to another society.

Previously, Csikszentmihalyi & Hunter, (2003) stated that happiness is influenced by internal factors (i.e genetic and personality) as well as external macro (i.e social conditions, life events, and the immediate social environment) that are directly in contact with the individual. Another previous study, Coenders, Casas, Figuer, & Gonza' lez, (2005) confirmed that cultural differences are having significance correlations with subjective wellbeing. Myers & Diener (1995) agreed that there were differences in happiness among the population of different countries, even though the income variable was fully being controlled. In addition, it was revealed that African American people were happier than European American.

Huebner and his colleagues have validated a hierarchical model in which life satisfaction was defined by a complex structure of family, school, environment, friends and self-image. They have also linked a significant number of demographic, environmental, cognitive, behavioural, and personal factors with levels of self-satisfaction among adolescents. Continued by another study, Huebner and collaborators identified that life satisfaction is influenced by school atmosphere (Zullig et al. 2009).

At this point, I could assume that what would make Javanese Indonesian's children happy and how could children be happy would be different from western study. Study by Chaplain (2009) and Thoilliez (2011) found that when children are asked directly about what makes them happy, relationships with family (people) are the predominant response associated with happiness or unhappiness. This study is significantly important following

the study of happiness which was developed mainly from the Western's researcher. This study have research questions: (1) What makes Javanese Indonesian children happy? and (2) What factors can contribute happiness to Javanese Indonesian children?.

2. Literature review

Psychologists have defined and correlated things that contribute to happiness (synonym for psychological well-being, mental well-being, or subjective well-being) (Argyle, 1987; Eysenck, 1990). Happiness has been defined as an *effect* and *cognition*. The *effect* refers to the effect of a person's current mood state of joy which has a relatively in short duration and less stable. The *cognition* refers to the concept of overall satisfaction, good mood and tends to be more stable and durable. Argyle et al. (1989) defines happiness as the average satisfaction of the condition (in general) during a certain period, the frequency and the level of positive affect and the absence of negative affect.

Similarly, happiness is defined as terms of global life satisfaction or perceived quality of life, presence of positive affect, and the absence of negative affect (Diener, 1984). These three concepts actually have different meanings that still need further research to be understood separately (Diener, et al. 1999). However, these three components are substantially correlated and can be interpreted happiness (Diener 1994; Sheldon and Lyubomirsky, 2006).

2.1 Prior research on happiness

During past decades, happiness becomes an interesting topic to explore (Huebner, 2004). Despite so many researches on happiness, the main question asked to respondent are "how happy are you?" rather than "what makes you happy?". The studies with an adults sample showed a correlation between happiness and life events such as employment and income (Bortner and Hultsch, 1970; Bouazzaoui and Mullet, 2005), marital status and family (Glenn and Weaver 1998), or friendships and social ties (Chan and Lee, 2006; Demir and Weitekamp, 2007). Although study on happiness provided a lot of finding, the true conceptual of what makes people happy still unclear.

There are several reasons for this current research to use children as informant. Firstly, parents sometimes do not know exactly what children think and feel, for example parents think that their children should be happy and will feel happy if they are given new toys. In fact, some children do not need new toys, what they need is just to be given time to play. This misinterpretation has urged researchers to do further study used children as informant to describe what makes children truly happy. Study across 48 countries found that parents strongly desire high levels of their children's happiness (Diener and Lucas, 1999), yet research on children's happiness has been slowly to develop.

Secondly, children 3-year-old can describe and give a concrete experience in which they have happy feeling (Harter, 1982b). Starting by Park and Peterson (2006) surveyed parents about their children's character strengths and happiness. The result found love, zest, hope and gratitude to be associated with happiness in children ages 3–9.

The reason underlying the need for research to identify the sources of happiness of children in Java Island, Indonesia due to conceptualization of the welfare of ordinary people living in Java Islands Indonesia may differ from conceptualization from Western countries. Most research on happiness or well-being is often interpreted as has been done by using Western Conceptualization and measurement of well-being. However, the conceptualization of well-being is assumed to be influenced by culture background (Kim et.al, 2007). As Kitayama and Markus (2000) point out:

"Well-being is a "collaborative project", in the sense that the very nature of what it means to be well or to experience wellbeing takes culture-specific forms (Shweder, 1998)."

Besides, the reason comes up from an information from the CICP (Center of Indigenous and Cultural Psychology), a research department of Psychology Faculty-Gadjah Mada University-Indonesia, that the study of happiness tend to involve more teenagers or adult. The findings have been widely presented in local seminar in Surakarta, Central Java-Indonesia, yet the results have not been published in scientific journals.

3. Methodology

The participants of this study were children at 3-5 years old in Java, Indonesia. Children, who had informed consent from their parents, are involved. This study explored the source of happiness among children at 3-5 years old. It was based on the finding of Harter study (1982a), demonstrated "happiness" is one of the first four emotions children are able to recognize:

"The youngest children, 3-year-olds, could consistently generate three emotional labels—happy, sad and mad—and in certain cases a fourth, scared. They clearly understand all four of these feelings and can give rich and appropriate examples of events or experiences in which they have had these emotions" (Harter 1982b).

The research was carried out in several sub-urban in Java Island. The participants lived in sub-urban in the central part of Java. The study involved 51 children consist of 28 boys and 23 girls. Children’s families are from the same lower middle SES group. Socioeconomic status (SES) was defined in terms of parental occupational status, and educational level of both parents. In the low-middle SES family, both parents maximally graduated from high school education level and mostly father had skilled labor or white-collar jobs as civil servant. The data were analyzed trough qualitative approach. This study used an open ended question to young children 3-5 year-olds and they did it individually. Children were asked a single question “what most makes you happy?”. The data of children responses to a single question was screened by using content analysis for the presence of statement revealing factors or source perceived as contributing to child happiness. This content analysis produced a list of statements and categories.

4. Findings and Discussion

Based on study result in Java Island, 51 Javanese Indonesian’s children age 3-5 years old involved, the first answer of what makes them happy can be divided into seven categories: play and toys, food and drink (e.g eating an ice cream, eating fruits), hobbies (e. singing), learning activity in school (e.g using pen to write, learning to draw at class), indoor and outdoor activity in leisure time (e.g sleeping at home, watching television at home, and going to the zoo), material things (e.g get a gift), and people (e.g mother cook for them, play with friends). Play and toys are mentioned as the most things which can make children happy, followed by food and drink, doing hobbies, learning activity in school, indoor and outdoor activity in leisure time, material things and people. Here, I enclosed the data:

Table. 1 General result of study in Java Island

Number	Categories	Number of children	Percentage (%)
1	Play and toys	17	33.3
2	Food and drink	8	15.7
3	Hobbies	7	13.7
4	Learning activity in school	6	11.8
5	Indoor and outdoor activity in leisure time	6	11.8
6	Material things	4	7.8
7	People (parent and friends)	3	5.8
Total number of children		51	100

Viewing the preliminary data, the children are happy when they can play and have some toys (33% of 51 children). Furthermore, the following is the variation categories viewed from internal factor:

Table. 2 Variation categories viewed from age and sex

Number	Categories	Sex		Age		
		Male	Female	3	4	5
1	Play and toys	10	7	2	13	2
2	Food and drink	4	4	1	5	2
3	Hobbies	3	4	1	4	2
4	Learning activity in school	2	4	-	5	1
5	Indoor and outdoor activity in leisure time	3	3	1	3	2
6	Material things	4	-	2	2	-
7	People (parent and friends)	2	1	1	2	-
Total number of children		28	23	8	34	9
		51		51		

This result is clearly different from western study result as presented by McAuley & Layte (2012). Their study showed that Irish children’ social relationships with family and peers are important contributors to children’s happiness. Furthermore, evidence of previous research has shown that the most important contributor to

children's happiness is social relationships of children with family and friends, and the child's temperament (Holder and Coleman, 2009; Holder and Klassen, 2010). In fact, when the children were asked directly about what made them happy, relationship with family is the dominant response that appears related to happiness or unhappiness (Chaplain, 2009; Thoilliez, 2011). The study confirms a theory on the child development about the importance of daily interactions in children usual context (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Geertz (1961) as well as other recent ethnographers (Keeler, 1987; Shiraisi, 1997) emphasize the importance of "ngemong": within Javanese family context. It refers to the ideal way that Javanese's parent should look after their children. At a physical level, Javanese babies are carried around by their mother and other adults in a "selendang", a long shawl worn over the shoulder to form a sling. Due to this condition, children generally experience relatively extended periods of close physical proximity to their mother. It is possible that it actually makes the child does not have enough free time to play. In contrast to the children in the western country, they have a chance to play more freely. Availability of the opportunity to play free means that the child has the opportunity to satisfy the needs of his play. Early childhood need some period to play, where children spend time to play and explore their environment. The capacity and motivation for rich and imaginative make-believe play seem to come, in part, from the preschooler's basic predicament, which Lev Vygotsky (Vygotsky, 1976) explained so well.

In addition, in Java, when children are able to walk, adults keep a close eye on them to prevent them from falling or experiencing physical injury. This makes the scope of a child's play more limited. Children are only allowed to play in the eyes of the parent range. Too many concerns of parents make children not allowed to play freely.

Based on the table 2, it can be concluded that there are different categories between age and sex/gender. Having enough time to play using toys is the most things that can make boys and children at age 4 years old happy. Boys seem to have more energy than girls. It makes boys highly require the need of an active playing freely. According to Gurian and Stevens (2004), state that the difference brain structure between girls and boys explain why girls outperform boys in reading and writing, and why boys tend to gravitate toward physical activities (free play). It concluded that boys seem need more free play than girls. Furthermore, at the age of 4 years, the need for free play with peers increases. Children above the age of three are beginning to socialize with other children through play. By about the age of three, early friendships begin to form and children's peers begin to have a more lasting influence (Parke & Ladd, 1992). In fact, Javanese parents do not let children to play freely with friends. In the end, the needs to play in boys did not compensated by the presentation opportunity to play freely by their parents. This may caused boys yearn for time to have free with friends.

The result above is approved by another research. Diener (2009) reviews that age and gender/sex have significance correlation with happiness. But, the result only mentioned the different level of happiness across group of age and gender. Younger individuals are experiencing intensity of positive and negative feelings higher than older. This suggests that younger age have a feeling that more easily awakened. Similarly, female are reported more likely to experience negative and positive feelings than male.

As resume, it is important to have a broader view to differentiate the source of happiness. The result of this research can be used as information to create and to further implement appropriate education program both at home and school

5. Limitation and suggestion

This current study was done only by using a qualitative approach. So, it is recommended to conduct both qualitative and quantitative to have result consistency. This study also suggests to consider the different of demographic background. Furthermore, longitudinal research in this field is needed since research on children perspective has been rarely to study.

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