

## Rethinking Happiness at School after COVID-19 and Some Implications for Future Research

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Received: March 23, 2021; received in revised form: June 20, 2021;  
accepted: June 23, 2021

### **Abstract:**

**Introduction:** This research aims to determine what makes children feel happy and unhappy at school, the determinants of their subjective well-being, and by using this information it attempts to develop recommendations for the ongoing process which is characterized by uncertainty and stress and for education due to the crisis created by COVID-19 and some implications for future research.

**Methods:** This is a qualitative study using a phenomenological approach. The study group of the research consists of 34 primary school students in the 3rd and 4th grades (between the ages of 8-11) during the first term of 2019-2020 school year. A semi-structured interview form including three open-ended questions was used as data collection instrument. The data were analysed with descriptive analysis technique.

**Results:** As a result of the study, the main determinants of children's happiness were found as the relationships which they established with their friends and teachers and their academic achievement. Also, it was revealed that students made references to creating more time for courses such as physical education, music, art, etc. and more free time at school and renewal of school fixtures in order to contribute to their happiness.

**Discussion:** Considering the students' opinions about what makes them happy/unhappy at school and the factors that can contribute to their happiness, it can be argued that what is important for children's happiness at school is their relationships with their friends and teachers. This finding of the research has itself an utmost importance in the current process which the children experience either limited or no relationship with their peers and teachers due to the COVID-19 crisis. Accordingly, this research discusses the children's happiness within the framework of the researches that prompt us to rethink about students' happiness in an atmosphere of stress and uncertainty.

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*Acta Educationis Generalis*  
*Volume 13, 2023, Issue 1*

**Limitations:** Although the qualitative method used in this study provided a profound picture of the views of students about what makes them happy/unhappy at the school, its limited sample constitutes an impediment to generalize it to all students in Turkey and the whole participants of the research.

**Conclusions:** Considering what makes students happy and unhappy in schools in that research, we can argue that even the existence of schools alone, as the main grounds of social relationships, can be considered as a means of happiness in the current process. Nevertheless, future research should aim to determine what makes children happy in a process which the students are deprived of all facilities which the schools provided.

**Key words:** happiness, happiness at school, COVID-19.

## **Introduction**

*“Boredom is a disease of epidemic proportions. ... Why are our schools not places of joy?”* (Goodlad, 1984, p. 242)

As a myth which the human being seeks, happiness has always been one of the main aspirations of humankind. Thus, the conceptualization, search and realization of happiness have been on the agenda of several philosophers, scientists and researchers for a long time. Especially with the positive psychology movement in 1990s, the concept of happiness gained more importance (Carr, 2011). Behind the popularity of happiness which is sometimes ‘used interchangeably with well-being, subjective well being and life satisfaction’ (Eid & Diener, 2004; Lu, Shih, Lin, & Ju, 1997), there is a great variety of impacts it created on the lives of people.

World Health Organization defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being” (WHO, 1948) and emphasizes happiness, well-being, as an important component of health. In fact it was revealed in several researches that happiness has positive effects on the physical health of people; even there is a well known assumption that happy people live longer (Diener & Chan; Siahpush, Spittal, & Singh, 2008; Veenhoven, 2008). According to Veenhoven (1988, 2008), people’s living longer may be associated with the fact that happiness has not a direct effect on health but it protects physical health and is related to the happiness factors. In this regard, the positive impact the happiness has on the mental, psychological, health can be considered as a happiness factor protecting human health. In fact it was identified in various researches that happiness reduces stress and anxiety and thus can improve psychological health directly and indirectly (Aubert, 2008; De Neve et al., 2013; Dohrenwend, 2000; Ekman, Davidson, Ricard, & Wallace, 2005; Ryan & Deci,

2000; Seligman, 2002; Talebzadeha & Samkan, 2011; Kendall, 1994; O'Connor, Dinan, & Cryan, 2011; Steptoe et al., 2011). In addition to the benefits of happiness for physical and mental health of individuals, it has also significant impacts on the social behaviour and socialization of people. In that regard, researches show that happy people are more sociable and exhibit better social behaviours and thus have stronger social relationships compared to unhappy people (De Neve et al., 2013; Diener & Seligman, 2002; Talebzadeha & Samkan, 2011). In parallel with all these benefits of happiness for people, it is expected that happy people or people who have higher subjective well-being, become more successful in various life domains. According to Diener (2013), happiness is not just a momentary outcome but it may also be the predictor and reason of future behaviour. Within this context it was revealed in various researches that happy people are more successful in such aspects of life as marriage, friendship, education, career, etc (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005; Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002; Mastekaasa, 1994) and cope with the changes and uncertainties of life more successfully (De Neve et al., 2013; Sarıçam, 2014).

Happiness's bringing success in many areas of life has led the concept to attain an important place in the field of education as well. In this regard, the happiness of children, as an important component of cognitive, social and emotional development of them, is engaging the attention of educators, policy makers and education researchers all around the world. This tremendous interest in the happiness of children includes various reasons in itself. In fact it is revealed in several researches that happiness influences children's cognitive, social and emotional development to a large extent (Anand, 2016; Fredrickson, 1998; Holder & Coleman, 2012) and children experiencing a happy childhood may have happiness in their later lives as well (Jose, Ryan, & Pryor, 2012). Also, it was revealed in a large number of studies that happiness brings better learning and plays a significant role in the students' motivation and educational achievement (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2008; Datu et al., 2017; The Centre for Adolescent Health, Murdoch Children's Research Institute, 2018; Ale-Yasin 2001; Talebzadeh & Samkan, 2011) In this sense, it is worth noting that the education systems should aim at happiness and a good education system should be organized in a way to contribute to the happiness of children (Noddings, 2003). In order to ensure the education systems to attain this goal, the role of the schools as one of the places which produce happiness (O'Rourke & Cooper, 2010) must be taken into consideration. Because, children spend most of their time in schools and the schools are among the first environments where the children acquire social skills required for their later lives, they have a key function in influencing children's experiences, emotional and social development, thus life courses (Baker et al., 2003). Going to a school and being

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in peer groups contribute to the development of children's social and individual skills such as friendship, trust, sensitivity, optimism, self-efficacy, flexibility, sociability and effective coping with challenge and stress; thus contribute to children's happiness to a large extent (Bird & Markle, 2012; Huebner, et al., 2006; Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2008; Lyubomirsky & King, 2005, p. 804). Especially the characteristic of 'coping with challenge and stress effectively' has utmost importance in the current process which the uncertainty and stress prevail all around the world. As it is proposed many years ago, people need the companion of other people in the cases of stress and uncertainty (Reis, et. al., 2010). Accordingly, it is expected that being with other students in a happy school environment reduces the stress and anxiety of children and provides them with more self-efficacy and social support perception (McCabe, Bray, Kehle, Theodore, & Gelbar, 2011). Within this context, the significance of schools which give way the students to experience these relationships and happiness comes into prominence. Nevertheless, education systems have been witnessing an unprecedented process globally and attempting to survive of a process without schools in some parts of the world today. As it is already known, with the declaration of pandemic caused by COVID-19 on 11th of March 2020, the schools and all the education services were closed in almost 200 countries affecting more than 1.5 billion students and the education and teaching services started to continue with online lectures (UNESCO, 2020; Spinelli, et al., 2020). Although the schools were reopened in some parts of the world, some countries like Turkey are attempting to reopen schools gradually; there are still millions of students who have not been to the schools since March 2020. The closures of schools not only resulted in students' loss of learning outcomes (Tarasawa, 2020) but some negative impacts on their psychological, social and emotional development. In fact, it is already known that during a severe pandemic like COVID-19, closures of schools may disrupt children's usual lifestyle and can potentially promote distress and confusion (Dubey et al., 2020). As it is pointed in various researches that students may expose to such stressors as fears of infection, uncertainty, monotony and boredom, lack of face to face interaction with their friends and teachers, home confinement and lack of outdoor activities, plays and this may result with prolonged psychological, social and emotional problems on children (Brazendale et al., 2017; Brooks et al., 2020; Cao et al., 2020; Wan, et al., 2020; OECD, 2020; Sprang & Silman, 2013; YoungMinds, 2020).

As it is already known, the children are among the most affected and suffered from the consequences of any natural disaster (Bulut, 2020) and COVID-19 epidemic may be considered as a natural disaster with the destruction it has caused on children and education of children. Within this context, it is possible to argue that the crisis created by the COVID-19 epidemic may go beyond being

a physical health problem and be a psychological health problem and a threat against the happiness, wellbeing of children soon. So, more studies addressing the psychological impact of the process are required. Nevertheless, considering the researches in the literature, it is revealed that the studies generally focus on the academic aspect of the process (Almanthari, Maulina, & Bruce, 2020; Dikmen & Bahçeci 2020; Pınar & Akgül, 2020; World Bank, 2020; Yılmaz, Güner, Mutlu & Doğanay, 2020) and tend to neglect the psychological and social aspects of it and especially the issue of happiness. Moreover, once the issue of happiness is considered separately, it is identified that in spite of all the positive influences happiness and happy schools have in students' cognitive, emotional and social development (Mahon et al., 2010) and the roots of happiness are created in childhood (Seligman, 1995), the issue of happiness in schools has been a neglected issue in both policy and practice and the concept of happiness at school has not been given due importance (Guilherme & de Freitas, 2017). Concerning the literature of happiness, it is identified that the concept of happiness was generally associated with the self-efficacy and success of students but the issue of what makes children happy and unhappy were mostly ignored (Asıcı & İkiz, 2018; Pan & Zhou, 2013; Schnittker, 2008).

Considering lack of literature regarding what makes children happy and unhappy at school, we intended to do a research about the determinants of children's happiness at school. The data of the research were collected before COVID-19 pandemic which affected the whole world and education systems. However, the focus of the study has evolved to a different point with the COVID-19 outbreak. In that regard, we started to consider how we could evaluate the data which we obtained from this study in terms of the happiness of children who were out of school during the COVID-19 outbreak. We firstly thought to analyze the concept of "happiness at school with COVID-19 outbreak" longitudinally by reaching the same sample. Nevertheless, from the pandemic declaration in Turkey in March 2020 to the time when this study was prepared and the revision processes were completed, primary and secondary schools were not permanently opened and there was a significant decrease in the number of students attending the school during the period when the schools were open temporarily. For this reason, it was not possible to enrich the research data, the research was only discussed on the data obtained before the COVID- 19 outbreak. Thus, this can be considered as a limitation of the study. However, considering the process in which the data were collected, we believe that this research has utmost importance as it is a happiness study that pertains to a period when our daily life routines have not yet changed with the COVID-19 pandemic and we have not faced with various physical, social and psychological problems caused by it yet. All in all, in the light of all these ideas with this study we aim to discuss how the knowledge of what makes children happy and unhappy at school prior to the COVID-19

outbreak can be used for children's happiness for ongoing process which is characterized by uncertainty and stress due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We believe that a deeper appreciation of what makes children happy and unhappy at school will contribute to the development of means to enhance the happiness of children both in the current process which there is almost no access or limited access to the school and in future.

## **1 Methods**

### *1.1 Research design*

This is a qualitative study using a phenomenological approach. Descriptive phenomenological design, one of the qualitative research designs, was used to examine the phenomenon of "happiness at school" in the study. In the descriptive phenomenological design, perceptions formed as a result of experiences about a phenomenon, concept or situation are presented (Ersoy, 2016).

### *1.2 Sampling and study group*

This study is a part of the project titled "Happiness Workshop" conducted by researchers in the fall semester of 2019-2020. The project, whose application permissions were obtained from Kars Provincial Directorate of National Education, was carried out in two primary schools (School A and School B), which were determined by convenience sampling method. Some characteristics of the schools where the study was conducted and the students studying in these schools are as follows:

School A is located on the university campus and provides education to approximately 140 students at the kindergarten, primary and secondary school levels. At primary school level, there is a classroom for each grade level. School B is a village school located 13 km from Kars city center and provides education to approximately 25 students at kindergarten and primary school level. At the primary school level, multigrade classrooms were available in Grades 1 and 2, and Grades 3 and 4. The study group of the research consists of all students (n:18) studying at the 4th grade of School A (n:18) and all students (n:16) studying at the 3rd and 4th grades of School B. In other words, 34 primary school students attending in the 3rd and the 4th grades (between the ages of 8-11) during the first term of 2019-2020 school year constituted the sample of the research. While 16 of the participants are female, 18 of them are males.

### *1.3 Data collection instrument*

As the primary source of data is the experiences of the participants who are studied, in depth interviews are often used as a means of data collection in phenomenological researches (Ploeg, 1999, p. 36; Creswell, 2007). Semi-

structured interviews are one of the most widely used interview types and semi-structured interview forms are frequently preferred by the researchers due to such advantages as being flexible, not having a certain standart, enabling the researcher to collect more detailed data and analysing the data more easily (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). Accordingly, a semi-structured interview form including three open-ended questions were created by the researchers. In the process of creating the interview form, the researchers made a detailed literature review and examined the related data collection instruments. The questions in the interview form were presented in a clear and understandable way, considering the cognitive and affective levels of the students. Also, the interview form was examined by two experts working in the field of guidance and psychological counseling and according to expert opinions; necessary corrections were made in the form.

#### *1.4 Data collection process*

Ethical rules were adhered to in all stages of the study. In order to conduct the interviews, permission was obtained from the provincial directorate for national education. The data of the research were gathered by a researcher and five guidance and psychological counseling department students guiding her in November of 2019-2020 academic year. The purpose of the research and the number of questions to be asked in the research were briefly explained to the students and they were asked whether they would like to participate in the study. As the students ages' and comprehension levels may differ and the students may be affected by each other, the questions were directed to students individually and the answers were written down.

#### *1.5 Data analysis*

The data obtained through the interviews were analyzed using descriptive analysis. In the descriptive analysis, the data are summarized and interpreted according to previously determined themes (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). The questions in the interviews were used as sub-themes, and the answers given to these questions formed the codes and categories. Codes and categories were taken directly as an expression or a word in the expressions of the participants without adopting a 'reductionist' attitude. Reliability analysis was conducted in order to evaluate the coder reliability. Reliability analysis was carried out by both the researcher who conducted the study and an independent researcher in the field of guidance and psychological counseling. For this process, the coder reliability formula ( $\text{Reliability} = \frac{\text{Consensus}}{\text{Consensus} + \text{Disagreement}} \times 100$ ) was used (Miles & Huberman, 2015) and the confidence percentage was calculated as 95%. An agreement has been reached for the encodings that cause a difference of opinion between the coders.

## 2 Findings

In line with the opinions of primary school students, the concept of “happiness at school” and three sub-themes explaining this theme were created. These are 1. Opinions of the students about what makes them happy at school, 2. Opinions of the students about what makes them unhappy at school, 3. Opinions of the students about what may be the means to make them happier at school. These themes are explained in the table 1 below:

Table 1

| <i>Happiness at school</i> |                                      |  |          |          |  |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|----------|----------|--|
| <i>Sub-theme</i>           | <i>Category</i>                      | <i>Code</i>                              | <i>n</i> | <i>%</i> |  |
|                            | Relationships among                  | Playing/Enjoying                         | 34       | 44.2     |  |
| What                       | friends                              | Making friends                           | 4        | 5.2      |  |
| makes                      | Sense of belonging                   | Being with friends                       | 16       | 20.8     |  |
| children                   |                                      | Being with teachers                      | 11       | 14.2     |  |
| happy at                   | Doing more                           | Reading books                            | 7        | 9.1      |  |
| school                     | educational/instructional activities | Studying                                 | 5        | 6.5      |  |
|                            |                                      | TOTAL                                    | 77       | 100      |  |
|                            | Brekadown of                         | Being upset by their                     | 30       | 54.5     |  |
| What                       | friendship relations                 | friends                                  |          |          |  |
| makes                      |                                      | Upsetting their                          | 21       | 38.2     |  |
| children                   |                                      | friends                                  |          |          |  |
| unhappy                    | Low academic                         | Having difficulty in                     | 4        | 7.3      |  |
| at school                  | achievement                          | understanding the subject                |          |          |  |
|                            |                                      | TOTAL                                    | 55       | 100      |  |
| <i>Happiness at School</i> |                                      |  |          |          |  |
| What                       | Creating more free time              | Increasing the time                      | 24       | 58.5     |  |
| makes                      | at school                            | allocated for breaks                     |          |          |  |
| children                   | Creating more time for               | Increasing the time of                   | 3        | 7.3      |  |
| happier at                 | the non-academic                     | physical education                       |          |          |  |
| school                     | courses                              | courses                                  | 1        | 1.8      |  |
|                            | Renewal of school fixtures           | Dancing in music courses                 |          |          |  |
|                            |                                      | Renewal of such                          | 11       | 26.8     |  |
|                            |                                      | stuffs as desk, whiteboard, dustbin, etc |          |          |  |
|                            |                                      | Increasing the                           | 2        | 3.6      |  |
|                            |                                      | numbers of computers                     |          |          |  |
|                            |                                      | TOTAL                                    | 41       | 100      |  |

*2.1 Opinions of the students about what makes them happy at school*

According to the opinions of primary school students, the factors regarding what makes them happy at school were identified as relationships among friends (n=38), sense of belonging (n=27), doing more educational/instructional activities (n=12). In the category of relationships among friends, two codes like playing/enjoying (n=34) and making friends (n=4) were identified. In the category of sense of belonging, two codes like being with friends (n=16) and being with teachers (n=11) were found out. Lastly, in the category of doing more educational/instructional activities, two codes like reading books (n=7) and studying (n=5) were identified.

According to table 1, primary school students specified the factors which makes them happy as relationships among friends, sense of belonging, doing more educational/instructional activities. Within this context, 44 % of students statements are intended for playing with friends/enjoying with them; 20.8 % of them are intended for being together with friends and 14.2 % of them are intended for being with their teachers.

Considering the findings about the factors leading to students' happiness at school, it can be argued that what makes children happy at school is their relationships with their friends and teachers.

*2.2 Opinions of the students about what makes them unhappy at school*

According to the opinions of primary school students, the factors regarding what makes the students unhappy at school were identified as breakdown of friendship relations (n=51) and low school success (n=4). In the category of breakdown of friendship relations, two codes like being upset by their friends (n=30) and upsetting their friends (n=21) were identified. In the category of low school success, the code of having difficulty in understanding the subject (n=4) was found out.

According to table 1, primary school students specified the factors which make them unhappy at school as breakdown of friendship relations and low school success. Within this context, 54.4 % of students' statements are intended for being upset by their friends; 38.2 % of them are intended for upsetting their friends and 7.3 % of them are intended for having difficulty in understanding the subject.

Considering the findings it was revealed that the opinions of students about the factors which makes them unhappy at school shared similarities with the factors which makes them happy at school and the students emphasized the importance of relationships with their friends for their happiness. In this regard, it can be argued that the relationships which the children have with their friends and teachers influence their life quality to a large extent (Demir, Doğan, & Proscal, 2013; Lee, 2016; Lee & Lee, 2014; Yoo, 2015; Van Hall et al., 2017). In

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addition to the relationships, the children's emphasis on low academic achievement indicates the impact of their learning on their happiness. In parallel to this finding, a number of studies also reveals that learning of students has a direct effect on students' happiness (Kim & Kim, 2014; Lee, 2016).

*2.3 Opinions of the students about the means to make them happier at school*

According to the opinions of primary school students, the means to make them happier at school were identified as creating more free time at school (n=24), creating more time for the courses such as P.E, music, art, etc (n=4), renewal of school fixtures (n=13). In the category of creating more free time, the code of increasing the time allocated for breaks (n=24) was identified. In the category of creating more time for the courses such as P.E, music, art, etc, the codes of increasing the time of physical education courses (n=3) and dancing in music courses (n=1) were determined. Lastly, in the category of renewal of school fixtures, the codes of renewal of such stuffs as desk, whiteboard, dustbin, etc; (n=11) and increasing the numbers of computers (n=2) were found out.

According to table 1, primary school students specified the factors contributing to happiness at school as creating more free time at school, renewal of school fixtures and creating more time for the courses such as P.E, music, art, etc. Within this context, 58.5 % of students' statements are intended for increasing the time allocated for breaks; 26.8 % of them are intended for renewal of such stuffs as desk, whiteboard, dustbin, etc. and 7.3 % of them are intended for increasing the time of physical education courses.

As for the factors contributing to children's happiness at school, it is revealed that most of the children referred to creating more free time for themselves. Within this context, it can be argued that the children are not happy with the current situation and are in need of having more time for courses such as P.E, music, art, etc and fun with their friends. In fact, it is already suggested that by allowing the students to express themselves, the courses, such as physical education, art and music, etc, contribute to the students' both individual and social development, thus their subjective wellbeing (Özkan, 2010).

Considering the findings of this research regarding the factors leading to their happiness/unhappiness and contributing to their happiness at school, it was identified that the children mostly emphasized the importance of the relationships and free time they have with their friends and teachers. Within this context, it can be argued that the core of children's happiness is the social relationships they established with their friends and teachers.

### **3 Discussion**

In this study we aimed to determine what makes children feel happy and unhappy at school, the determinants of their subjective well-being, and by using this information we attempted to develop insights for the ongoing process which is characterized by uncertainty and stress and for the future. Primary school which is included in the school age period is a period including the ages of 6- 12. In this period which is also called as middle years, the children start becoming independent from the family and attempt to socialize in real terms by establishing their own social environment and friendship relations for the first time. During this process, there are such tasks and characteristics that children must accomplish and gain as developing positive attitudes towards themselves, social groups and institutions; learning to get along with their peers and developing conscience, morality and system of values and the necessary concepts for daily life, etc. Havighurst which develops the concept of developmental tasks, defines this concept as tasks specific to a certain period of children, which lead to happiness when successfully achieved and completed, and in case of failure, which cause unhappiness (Bacanlı, 2002). Similarly, Seiffge- Krenke and Gelhaar (2008) who tested Havighurst's theory reached results supporting the relationship between developmental tasks and happiness. Considering the developmental tasks of children in middle childhood, who also constitute the study group of this research, it is clear that peer groups and school-based social environments, as the “major locations where peer relationships are formed” (The Centre for Adolescent Health, Murdoch Children’s Research Institute, 2018) have utmost importance in order to complete the development tasks of this period successfully and create a sense of happiness. In fact, it was revealed in this research and several other researches that the positive relationship of children with their friends and teachers is an important component of their happiness (Chaplin, 2008; Diener & Seligman, 2002; Saldarriaga, Bukowski, & Greco, 2015; Shonkoff et al., 2000; Thoilliez, 2011; Csikszentmihalyi & Hunter, 2003; Demir, Orthel, & Andelin, 2013; O’Rourke & Cooper, 2010; Demir, Özen, & Doğan, 2012; Demir, Dogan, & Proscal, 2013; Lee, 2016; Yoo, 2015; Van Hall et al., 2017). Similarly, children’s conceptualization of happiness at school as an increasing and enriching emotion, an expression of sharing (Kesik & Aslan, 2020) and the school as a pleasant and beautiful place of love, solidarity and socialization (Saban, 2008) support these findings regarding what makes students happy/unhappy.

It was revealed in several researches that being in a school environment contributes to students’ social skills, self-esteem, self-confidence and a sense of identity resulting with a higher level of cognitive skills and school success (Cunha & Heckman 2007; Di Pietro et al., 2020; Goodman et al., 2015; OECD, 2017; Sezer & Can, 2019). As stated by some of the students in this research, the

academic achievement or school success is an important component of students' happiness. Actually, it is worth noting that there is a mutual affinity between the learning and happiness of children. As learning quality influences children's happiness, children's happiness influences their learning as well. In fact, it was revealed in a large number of studies that the happiness brings better learning and plays a significant role in the students' motivation and educational achievement (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2008; Datu et al. 2017; The Centre for Adolescent Health, Murdoch Children's Research Institute, 2018; Ale-Yasin 2001; Talebzadeh & Samkan, 2011).

Considering the findings of this research and several other researches about what makes students happy/unhappy, it can be deduced that students "experience their happiness with others and from others" (Thoilliez, 2011, p. 346) and the schools are one of the most important places where children can experience it. Nevertheless, today the students all around the world are going through a rough period which they are exposed to unschooling or limited schooling as a result of the crisis situation created by the COVID-19 epidemic in education. The closure of schools as a result of temporary quarantine process and uncertainty of their situation in the near future have had very negative effect on students both physically and mentally. The students were deprived of a stimulating and enriching environment, learning opportunities, social interaction and in some cases adequate nutrition (United Nations, 2020). Losing their routine, having to restrict their social connections (YoungMinds, 2020), exposing to more screen time and less outdoor activity time placed a serious burden on students' mental health. In fact, it is argued that such stressors as fears of infection, anxiety about failure with online education, sense of uncertainty, monotony, lack of face to face contact with classmates, friends and teachers can cause stress and depression among students and result with an adverse effect on their mental health and thus wellbeing (Brooks et al., 2020; Cao, et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020). Furthermore, this process endangered the students with the situation of inability to complete their developmental tasks as well. As a matter of fact, the students in this reserach are in a period of rapid physical, emotional and intellectual growth (The Centre for Adolescent Health, Murdoch Children's Research Institute, 2018). According to Chaplin (2008), people and thus the relationships are one of the most important components contributing to children's happiness in middle years. Thus being valued by their peers and teachers have a vital importance in both their happiness and multifaceted development. Nevertheless, the current process causes the children to be deprived of the experience of being valued by their peers and teachers constituting an impediment to their happiness. In spite of virtual interactions and learning opportunities provided by various platforms via the Internet, it is revealed that healthy communication between students and teachers has not been established

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yet and the children can not experience academic achievement and satisfaction. Moreover, children are still in need of a physical environment where they can share their interests, thoughts and feelings and thus experience happiness (Colao, 2020). Thus, it would be relevant to argue that this period in education has recalled the importance of social relationships for mental and physical health of students (Diener & Seligman, 2002) and the role of schools in meeting the socialization needs of children. Indeed, schools are not only places which deliver educational materials to students, but also social environments which offer them the opportunities to interact with others and enable them to develop the social and emotional skills (Colao, 2020; OECD, 2017; Wang, et al., 2020). In fact, learning objectives can be accessed at the touch of a button but the essential purpose of education should be to increase the wellbeing of students which is closely associated with school performance (Colao, 2020). According to Seligman et al. (2009) the schooling of children should be more than accomplishment and educational content and aim to enable them to experience happiness, as a vehicle for increasing life satisfaction, and as an aid to better learning and more creative thinking. And that necessitates to give an ear to the voices of students about what makes them happy/unhappy in schools. Considering the voices of children in this research about what makes them happy/unhappy and the factors that children perceived as enabling them to feel happy and unhappy, recommendations that can be benefitted for both the current process and future can be derived as follows: First, considering that the students made highlighted references to the importance of relationships for their happiness, they should be given enough opportunities to spend time with their friends in schools and this can be carried out by such practices as increasing break time, time for courses such as P.E, music and art and providing the students with more sporting and artistic classes which enhance both their imagination, creativity and happiness. Secondly, as already stated by the students, the schools and classrooms should be made more appealing by benefiting from various and suitable equipments such as computer, smart board, internet, etc. Lastly, bearing the importance of relationships for the students' happiness in mind, teachers must prioritize the relationships and focus on the social and emotional aspect of their teaching more. They should adopt the fact that providing the students with social and emotional skills is also educational goals in themselves (Durlak et al., 2011) and attempt to focus on these skills in addition to school success.

All in all, if the schools do not contribute to the students' happiness and the students do not experience happiness in schools, can we still maintain that we are successful as a system, teachers, etc. or as already stated by Dewey (1938, p. 49), "What is the benefit of reading history and geography and/or reading and writing when a person may leave his/her soul and feeling through learning?"

## **Conclusion**

Considering what makes students happy and unhappy in schools in that research, we can argue that even the existence of schools alone, as the main grounds of social relationships can be considered as a means of happiness in the current process. Maybe, in an atmosphere which there is no school and face-to-face relationships are weakened, the factors that make students happy will change. The researches in the literature have put an emphasis on the importance of relationships for the happiness of students until now but possibly, this will evolve and students will be happy with different components or items. Nevertheless, what we must bear in mind that we must discover the ways to make students happy in an atmosphere which the students are exposed to a process which they are deprived of all factors which the schools provided. Then, we must ask such questions and attempt to answer them to weather the storm or sail safe in the storm in terms of students' happiness: While the school provides the students with components making them happy such as friendship, educational achievement, being valued by peers and teachers, etc, how can we transfer these components in the virtual atmosphere and improve the current unfavorable atmosphere? How can we redevelop the relationships among students if we are quarantined for an undetermined process again? As powerful buffers to struggle with the adverse effects of trauma created by COVID can teachers establish a safe and supportive environment for learning? (Terada, 2020). In this sense, do teachers have enough qualifications to ensure the students to feel a sense of accomplishment and motivate them in the online environment and to activate their motivation? Within this context it can be argued that all of that kind of questions should be answered in the current process immediately and so this necessitates more researches in the literature because "education is health" (Colao, 2020).

With this research, we aimed to determine what makes children feel happy and unhappy at school, the determinants of their subjective well-being, and by using this information we attempted to develop recommendations for the ongoing process which is characterized by uncertainty and stress and for education. Nevertheless, this research has some limitations. The greatest limitation of this research is that the research has been carried out before the COVID-19 crisis in education and it is difficult to make an inference to the current process. In this sense, we just attempted to present some implications for the ongoing process. Also, although the qualitative method used in this study provided a profound picture of the views of students about what make them happy/unhappy at the school, its limited sample constitutes an impediment to generalize it to all students in Turkey and the whole participants of the research. In this sense, the reader is invited to judge the applicability of the findings and conclusions to

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other samples. Also, it is suggested to expand the sample size including the students from other age groups. In order to develop a full picture, additional studies are needed on both to answer the questions above and reveal what generally makes the students happy/unhappy at school.

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