The Impact of Bullying on Happiness at Primary School: The Role of Socio-Demographic and Behavioral Variables

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This study aims to examine the happiness levels of primary school students and the various factors that affect these levels. The research addressed factors such as peer bullying, socio-demographic, and behavioural variables, all of which were analysed for their impact on happiness at school. A relational survey model was used, with data collected from 4,612 primary school students in the Aegean Region during the 2023 - 2024 academic year in Türkiye. Correlation and regression analyses were performed on the data. The results showed that students were generally "quite happy" with "one in three students" experiencing peer bullying. All variables combined affected school happiness by 18%. Peer bullying negatively impacted students' happiness levels, while girls were found to be happier. Additionally, excessive mobile/tablet use, daily television viewing, number of siblings and age had a negative effect on happiness at school. Conversely, behaviour grades, reading habits, and maternal education levels were found to have a positive impact on happiness. The findings suggest that educational policies and school programs should aim to enhance students' happiness, with recommendations including the prevention of peer bullying, strengthening teacher-student relationships, ensuring active family participation, and simplifying educational content. These results are expected to guide educators, policymakers, and families.

Introduction

Happiness is defined as "joy or pleasure derived from a momentary state" (TDK, 2024). Aristotle sees it as the activity of the soul aligned with virtue (Büyükdüvenci, 1993). According to the 2024 World Happiness Report, Türkiye ranks 98th among 143 countries (Helliwell et al., 2024). The 2023 Life Satisfaction Survey shows that the happiness rate among those aged 18 and above rose to 52.7%, with women (55.1%) reporting higher levels than men (50.3%) (TÜİK, 2024).

Primary school students' happiness significantly affects their academic success, social relationships, and mental health. Influencing factors include family structure, peer and teacher

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relationships, and bullying. Bullying, in particular, reduces happiness and school engagement (Aunampai et al., 2022; Tay, 2023). In Thailand, 49.7% of primary students experienced bullying, with 28% of victims reporting lower happiness. Rates were higher in rural areas and among younger children (Aunampai et al., 2022). Collaboration among teachers and administrative support positively affect happiness, while lack of family involvement and ineffective teaching hinder it (Sezer & Can, 2019; United Nations, 2016).

Curriculum design and school environments also play a role. Dense and abstract content can overwhelm students cognitively, while inadequate infrastructure may hinder their comfort and engagement, both of which can reduce happiness. Conversely, when schools are safe, clean, and well-equipped, they foster a sense of belonging and security, which promotes well-being (Sezer & Can, 2019; Özgenel & Bozkurt, 2020). OECD data show that Turkish students experience high levels of unhappiness, largely due to academic stress and a lack of belonging, highlighting how environmental and curricular factors contribute to emotional outcomes (OECD, 2017).

Schools not only impart academic knowledge but also shape children's emotional and social development. Happiness, linked to life satisfaction and well-being, contributes to success, health, and social adjustment (OECD, 2017; Aunampai et al., 2022). While curricula may not directly target happiness, they support emotional well-being through activities like group work and values education. UNESCO's Happy Schools Project (2016; 2022) advocates placing happiness at the core of education.

Factors Affecting Happiness at School

This study includes variables supported by theoretical and empirical research: exposure to bullying, gender, grade level, age, socio-demographics (parental education, income, number of siblings), daily activities (book reading, screen time), and school performance (academic and behavioral scores).

Exposure to Bullying

Students exposed to bullying report significantly lower happiness levels. Bullying harms social relations and emotional well-being, increasing risks of depression and loneliness (Yücel & Vogt Yuan, 2015; Aunampai et al., 2022). Even students who bully may experience guilt, affecting their own happiness (Dilmaç & Özkan, 2019). A safe school environment is essential (Johnson, 2019).

Gender, Grade Level, Age

Girls tend to report higher happiness levels due to stronger empathy and social skills (Çankaya & Meydan, 2018; Mertoğlu, 2020). Boys often associate happiness with physical and social activities (Roberts et al., 2005). Some studies indicate that age and grade may play a more influential role than gender, with friendship, praise, and achievement being key factors (Tay, 2023; Tenney, 2011).

Parental Education, Family Income, Siblings

Parental education, family income, and sibling dynamics are key socio-demographic factors influencing student happiness. Higher parental education often correlates with increased parental involvement, better educational support at home, and greater awareness of

children's emotional needs, all of which contribute positively to student well-being (Göcen, 2015; Mertoğlu, 2020). In contrast, students from low-income families may face material deprivation and limited access to digital tools, making them more vulnerable to risks such as cyberbullying, which negatively impacts happiness (Dilmaç & Özkan, 2019). The influence of siblings is more complex: having more siblings can mean fewer financial and spatial resources per child, which may strain well-being. However, siblings can also provide emotional companionship, promote social skills, and create a sense of solidarity, which can enhance happiness (Mertoğlu, 2020; Bibou-Nakou & Markos, 2013).

Reading and Technology Use

Reading fosters empathy and emotional growth, increasing happiness (Demir et al., 2019; Sili, 2012). In contrast, excessive phone/tablet use limits social interaction and raises the risk of cyberbullying and addiction, lowering happiness (Cote-Lussier & Fitzpatrick, 2016; Burhan & Moradzadeh, 2020; Demircioğlu & Akar, 2024).

Academic and Behavioral Scores

Academic and behavioral performance are closely linked to students' emotional well-being. Positive behaviors such as cooperation, responsibility, and respect are often recognized and reinforced by teachers and peers, which in turn strengthen students' sense of belonging and school engagement (Truong & Mahon, 2012; Bibou-Nakou & Markos, 2013). When students display discipline and compliance with school rules, they are more likely to be socially accepted and feel emotionally secure, as structured environments promote predictability and reduce conflict, both of which contribute to greater happiness.

Purpose and Importance

This study examines the happiness levels of 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grade primary school students and the factors influencing them, including bullying, gender, age, grade, parental education and income, number of siblings, academic and behavioral performance, reading habits, and screen time. It also explores the relationship between bullying and happiness.

The study is important as student happiness affects not only academic success but also social, emotional, and psychological well-being. While happy students are more successful and well-adjusted, the negative impact of factors like bullying remains underexplored. This research aims to address this gap by analyzing both individual and environmental factors.

Previous studies in Turkey have linked student happiness to bullying, exam stress, and family support. This study seeks to offer data for locally relevant solutions and provide recommendations for educational policies, school strategies, and increased awareness on bullying prevention and family engagement.

Problem Statement and Sub-Problems

(1) What are the levels of happiness, and the extent of bullying experienced at school by 2nd, 3rd, and 4th-grade primary school students?
(2) To what extent do the following variables predict students' happiness levels: (a) Level of bullying experienced at school, (b) Gender, (c) Age, (d) Grade level, (e) Mother's education level, (f) Father's education level, (g) Family income level, (h) Number of siblings, (i) Academic achievement score, (j) Behaviour score, (k) Number of books

read monthly, (l) Daily mobile phone/tablet use, and (m) Daily television watching time?

Method

Research Model

This study uses a quantitative research method, specifically the relational survey model, to examine primary school students' happiness levels, bullying experiences, and the role of various demographic and behavioral variables. The relational survey model aims to determine the direction and strength of relationships between two or more variables (Karasar, 2015). This method is important as it also prepares the ground for further analysis in the context of cause-and-effect relationships (Büyüköztürk et al., 2018). The relational survey model is commonly used in educational research and is effective for identifying factors influencing student happiness (Cohen et al., 2011). In this study, the dependent variable is students' happiness level, while bullying experiences, gender, grade level, parental education level, income, number of siblings, academic achievement, behavior score, number of books read, television watching time, and phone/tablet usage are independent variables.

Participants

The study was conducted with students from three provinces in the Aegean Region, primarily due to the challenges of collecting data from across the entire country in terms of time and resources. Therefore, the initial phase of the research focused on a specific region. During the school selection process, support was obtained from the Provincial Directorates of National Education in the relevant provinces. The research process is planned to progress region by region, and similar studies are intended to be carried out in other regions in the future. This approach aims to obtain more comprehensive and comparative data on the student profile at the national level. Descriptive information about the participants is presented in Table 1.

Tablo 1. Descriptive Information of the Participants

Variable	N	%	Variable	N	%
Gender			**Grade**		
Female	2376	51.5	2nd Grade	1212	26.3
Male	2236	48.5	3rd Grade	1592	34.5
Age			4th Grade	1808	39.2
7 years old	552	12.0	**Father's Education Level**		
8 years old	1288	27.9	Illiterate	308	6.7
9 years old	1856	40.2	Primary School	1088	23.6
10 years old	864	18.7	Middle School	1104	23.9
11 years old	52	1.1	High School	1316	28.5
Mother's Education Level			**Number of Siblings**		
Illiterate	536	11.6	0 Sibling	44	1.0
Primary School	1052	22.8	1 Sibling	536	11.6
Middle School	988	21.4	2 Siblings	1780	38.6
High School	1228	26.6	3 Siblings	1236	26.8
Associate/Bachelor's Degree	808	17.5	4 Siblings	460	10.0
Family Monthly Income			5 or more Siblings	556	12.1
Low	432	9.4	**Daily TV Watching Time**		
Medium	3712	80.5	0-1 Hour	1744	37.8
High	468	10.1	1-2 Hours	1728	37.5
Books Read Monthly			2-3 Hours	624	13.5

1 Book	316	6.9	4 Hours or More	516	11.2
2 Books	1196	25.9	**Phone/Tablet Playing**		
3 Books	1060	23.0	0-1 Hour	1936	42.0
4 Books	820	17.8	1-2 Hours	1764	38.2
5 or More	1220	26.5	2-3 Hours	572	12.4
Behavior Score			4 Hours or More	340	7.4
1 Point	84	1.8	**Academic Achievement**		
2 Points	268	5.8	1 Point	184	4.0
3 Points	836	18.1	2 Points	204	4.4
4 Points	1256	27.2	3 Points	896	19.4
5 Points	2168	47.0	4 Points	1100	23.9
Total	4612	100	Total	4612	100

Data Collection Tools

In this research, a personal information form, a school violence/bullying scale, and a school happiness scale for primary school students were used.

Personal Information Form

A personal information form developed by the researchers was used to collect demographic data, including students' gender, grade level, parental education, family income, number of siblings, book reading habits, screen time (TV and phone/tablet), academic achievement, and behavior scores. Academic and behavior scores (ranging from 1 to 5) were provided by classroom teachers.

School Violence/Bullying Scale

The "School Violence/Bullying" scale developed by Kepenekçi and Çınkır (2003) and adapted by Çankaya (2011) for primary students was used. The original 19-item, 5-point Likert scale was reduced to 12 items after confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and expert reviews. The scale includes 4 physical, 5 verbal, and 3 emotional bullying items. CFA results showed acceptable fit indices (GFI and CFI > .90, RMSEA < .08), and the reliability was Cronbach's Alpha = .82. Higher scores indicate more frequent bullying exposure.

School Happiness Scale for Primary School Students

The 9-item scale by Gündoğan and Akar (2019) was adapted from a 3-point to a 4-point Likert scale (1=never, 4=always) to increase variance and reliability. The scale includes 4 positive and 5 negative items (reverse-coded before analysis). Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) confirmed a two-factor structure, explaining 66.86% of the total variance (original: 49%). CFA showed strong model fit (CFI = 0.989, RMSEA = 0.026). The reliability coefficient improved to Cronbach's Alpha = .81 (original: .76). Total scores range from 9 to 36, with higher scores indicating greater school happiness.

Data Implementation, Analysis, and Interpretation

During the process of data implementation, analysis, and interpretation, the support of school management and classroom teachers was obtained, and the students voluntarily filled out the scales. The collected data was transferred to a computer, and prior to analysis, missing, erroneous values, outliers, and normality were checked, and necessary corrections were made. The analysis was conducted based on data from 4612 students. Negative items in the scales were reversed, and the total scores were processed.

In the first analysis, the totals and standard deviation values for the school happiness and bullying scales were calculated, and standard values were converted into percentages. Before the correlation analysis, categorical variables were transformed into dummy variables. Gender was coded as female (1) and male (2). The relationship between bullying and happiness was calculated using the Pearson Moment Correlation Coefficient, and the relationship with ordinal variables was calculated using the Spearman Rho Coefficient.

In the multiple regression analysis, the amount of variance explained by the dependent variable or the effect size was examined (Büyüköztürk, 2024). This analysis was conducted in four stages: in the first stage, bullying scores were included in the model, followed by the addition of gender and grade level. In the third stage, parental education level, number of siblings, and income level were added to the data, and in the final stage, the number of books read, academic achievement, behavior scores, and technological usage durations were incorporated into the model.

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations have been carefully observed in this study. Participants were informed about the purpose, procedures, potential risks, and confidentiality, and their participation was voluntary. The identities of the participants were kept anonymous, and the data was used solely for scientific purposes. The security of the data was ensured. Furthermore, there is no conflict of interest among the authors, and all sources have been properly cited. The research has received approval from the Uşak University Research and Publication Ethics Committee (Decision No: 2024-122, May 7, 2024).

Findings

The findings regarding the mean, standard deviation, and percentile values of the school happiness and bullying levels for 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grade students are presented in Table 2.

Basic Statistics for the Variables

Table 2. The mean, standard deviation, and percentile values of the scores obtained by students on the scales

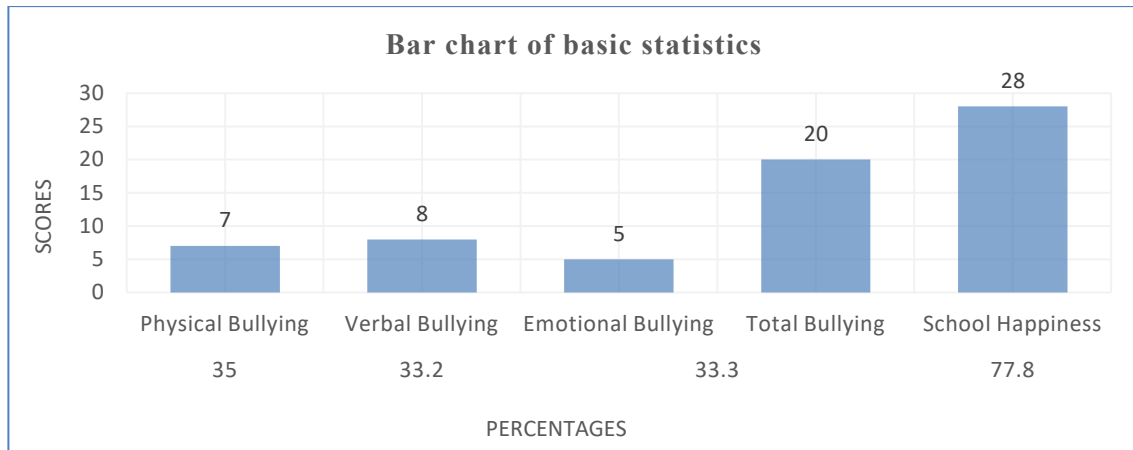| Scales	N	Min	Max	Mean (M)	Std. Dev. (SD)	%
School Happiness	4612	9	36	28	6	77.8
Total Bullying/Violence in Schools	4612	12	60	20	9	33.3
Physical Bullying	4612	4	20	7	3	35
Verbal Bullying	4612	5	25	8	4	33.2
Emotional Bullying	4612	3	15	5	3	33.3

Figure 1. Bar chart of basic statistics

The total score of students on the school happiness scale was calculated as 27.9, with a maximum possible score of 36. Based on this, the school happiness level of elementary school students was found to be 77.8%. The bullying/violence score in schools was 20, with a maximum possible score of 60. This indicates that 33.3% of the students were exposed to bullying in schools. It can be concluded that the school happiness levels of the elementary school students participating in the study are "good." On the other hand, it was observed that one out of every three elementary school students was exposed to bullying. The most common form of bullying was physical bullying, with a prevalence of 35%, followed by verbal bullying (33.2%) and emotional bullying (3.3%).

Correlation Between Variables

Before moving on to regression analysis, the correlations between the variables of the study were calculated, and the resulting correlation coefficients are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Correlations between variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Happiness	1,00																
Total Bullying	,28**	1,00															
Physical Bullying	,26**	,88**	1,00														
Verbal Bullying	,26**	,95**	,77**	1,00													
Emotional Bullying	,23**	,84**	,56**	,74**	1,00												
Gender	,09**	,11**	,14**	,12**	,02	1,00											
Grade	,02	,04**	,13**	,01	,04**	,00	1,00										
Age	,09**	,03*	,04*	,05**	,08**	,04*	,78**	1,00									
Number of Siblings	,14**	,13**	,12**	,12**	,12**	-,03	,09**	,08**	1,00								
Father's Education	,13**	,15**	,15**	,14**	,09**	,04**	,08**	,01	,30**	1,00							
Mother's Education	,13**	,16**	,15**	,14**	,12**	,01	,07**	,05**	,40**	,66**	1,00						
Book Reading	,21**	,22**	,21**	,19**	,19**	,05**	,06**	,03	,22**	,28**	,30**	1,00					

Income	,01	,10**	,12**	,08**	,07**	,02	,04*	,00	,19**	,23**	,24**	,23**	1,00		
TV Watching	,17**	,18**	,15**	,18**	,16**	,04**	,02	,04*	,08**	,13**	,13**	,14**	,09**	1,00	
Phone/Tablet Usage	,22**	,11**	,11**	,10**	,07**	,12**	,12**	,05**	,07**	,06**	,03	,12**	,08**	,26**	1,00
Behavior Score	,23**	,19**	,15**	,17**	,20**	,05**	,00	,05**	,03	,01	,06**	,01	,02	,08**	,12**	1,00
Academic Achievement	,18**	,09**	,04**	,08**	,13**	,03*	,02	,01	,09**	,04*	,02	,10**	,05**	,00	,09**	,67**	1,00
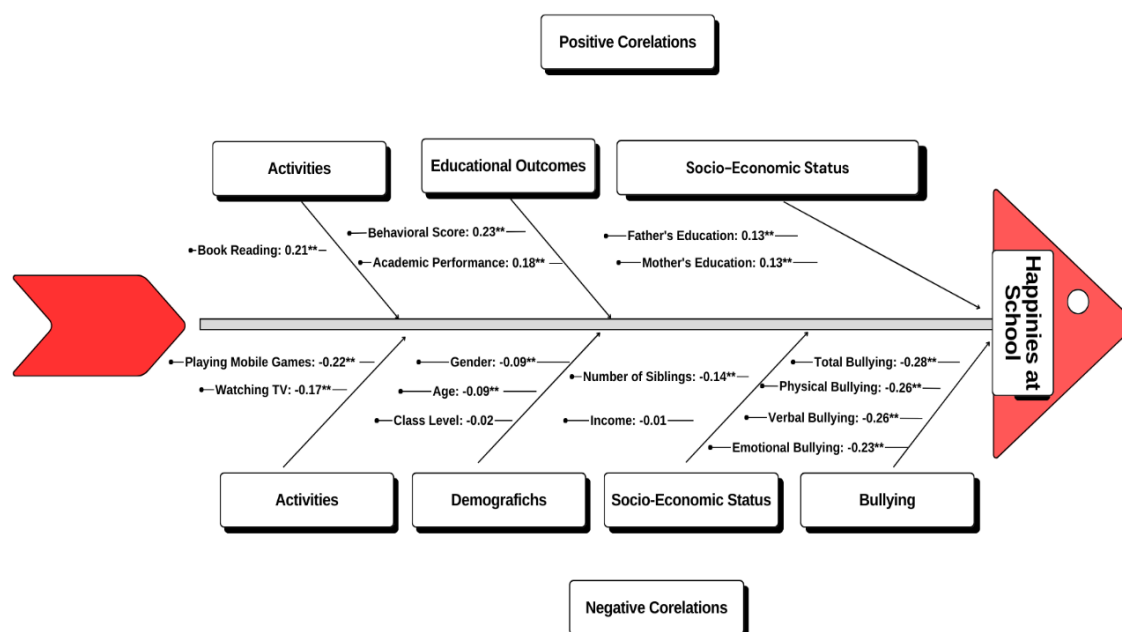
Figure 2. Fishbone diagram of variables related to school happiness.

According to the research findings, significant correlations were identified between students' happiness scores and various variables. The highest negative correlation with school happiness was found with factors such as bullying, phone/tablet use, TV watching, and the number of siblings. In contrast, positive relationships emerged with factors like behavior scores, academic achievement scores, book reading habits, and parents' education levels.

Bullying negatively affects students' happiness levels, with physical bullying, verbal bullying, and emotional bullying all showing negative correlations. Female students experience less bullying and are generally happier. Behavior scores and academic achievement scores have a positive effect on happiness; behavioral adjustment and respect for school rules contribute to students' increased happiness at school. Furthermore, as the number of books read increases, happiness levels also rise.

Excessive use of technological devices (phone/tablet use and TV watching) negatively impacts students' happiness. As the usage time of these devices increases, students' social interactions decrease, and their happiness levels decline. Family factors are also significant; students with highly educated parents and fewer siblings tend to be happier. However, no significant correlation was found between income levels and happiness.

In conclusion, students who read more books, have higher academic and behavior scores, come from more educated families, and are girls, experience less bullying and are happier. On

the other hand, students who watch TV and use phones/tablets are more likely to experience bullying and have lower happiness levels. As education levels increase, more books are read, technology use decreases, and income levels are higher. These findings suggest that the school environment and family structure play a significant role in influencing student happiness.

Regression Analysis for Predicting Students' School Happiness Scores

In this study, the data was subjected to hierarchical regression analysis. In this step, the independent variables were added sequentially to the regression model, and the ability of each set of variables to predict school happiness scores was calculated. The results obtained are presented in Table 4. Subsequently, to understand the degree of influence of each variable included in the regression analysis, the regression coefficients for the data were calculated, and the results are shown in Table 5.

Table 4. Hierarchical regression model for students' school happiness scores:

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	,283[a]	,080	,080	5,404	,080	400,10	1	4610	,000
2	,302[b]	,091	,091	5,372	,012	19,51	3	4607	,000
3	,329[c]	,108	,107	5,324	,017	21,82	4	4603	,000
4	,428[d]	,184	,181	5,097	,075	84,77	5	4598	,000

a. Predictors: (Constant), total bullying
b. Predictors: (Constant), total bullying, grade, gender, age
c. Predictors: (Constant), total bullying, grade, gender, age, income, number of siblings, father's education, mother's education
d. Predictors: (Constant), total bullying, grade, gender, age, income, number of siblings, father's education, mother's education, academic achievement, phone/tablet use, TV watching, book reading, behavior score

In the regression analysis, the first variable entered into the model was the bullying variable, which reflects the students' exposure to bullying at school. The bullying variable alone explains 7.4% ($R^2 = 0.074$) of the students' happiness levels at school. Based on the change in the F-value, the p-value is significant (p = 0.00). It is evident that bullying at school has a significant effect in predicting students' happiness levels.

In the second set of variables, in addition to the bullying variable, gender and grade level were included in the model. It was found that these variables, along with bullying, increased the students' happiness levels by 8.5% ($R^2 = 0.085$). When the effect of bullying is removed, gender and grade level alone explain 1.1% of the variation in school happiness levels. The p-value of the change in the F-value indicates that this result is significant (p = 0.49). Therefore, it can be stated that gender and grade level significantly predict students' happiness levels.

The third set of variables introduced into the model included socio-economic factors (mother's education level, father's education level, number of siblings, and family income). Together with the previous variables, socio-economic factors were found to explain 10.4% ($R^2 = 0.103$) of the students' happiness levels. When the effect of the previous variables is excluded, socio-economic variables alone explain 1.9% of the variation in school happiness levels. Based on the change in the F-value, the p-value shows that this result is significant (p = 0.53). Thus, socio-economic factors significantly predict students' democratic attitudes.

The fourth set of variables entered into the model included the students' academic achievement scores, behavior scores, screen time on cell phones/tablets, TV watching time, and number of books read. These variables, together with the previous ones, were found to explain 18.2% ($R^2 = 0.182$) of the students' happiness scores. The power of this variable set

alone to predict students' happiness scores was found to be 7.8% ($R^2 = 0.078$). The p-value of the change in the F-value shows that this result is significant (p = 0.00). It can be concluded that academic achievement scores, behavior scores, cell phone/tablet usage, TV watching time, and number of books read significantly predict students' happiness levels.
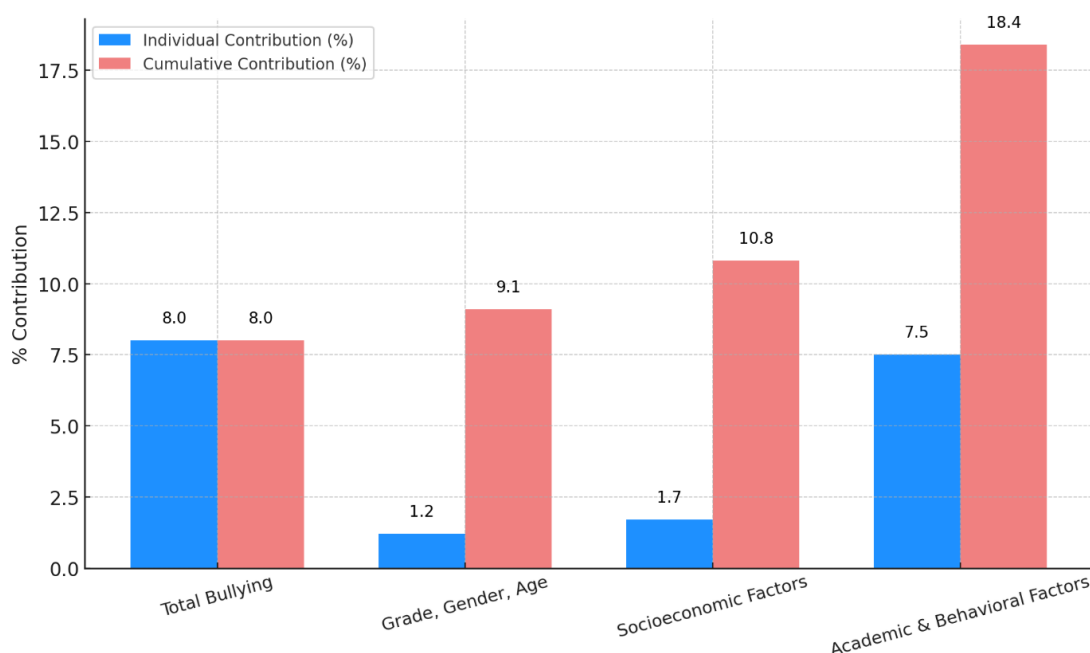

Figure 3. Regression analysis for the school happiness scale

In conclusion, all the variables together predict approximately 18.2% of the variance in students' happiness scores. The variable that predicts students' happiness levels the most, with a contribution of 7.4%, is exposure to bullying at school. The second most influential set of variables includes academic achievement scores, behavior scores, screen time, TV watching time, and the number of books read, contributing 7.8%. Following that, socio-economic factors (mother's education, father's education, number of siblings, and family income) account for 1.9%. The variable set with the least predictive power is gender and grade level, which explain 1.1% of the variance in students' happiness scores.

The regression coefficients for the variables subjected to regression analysis are provided in Table 5 in order to understand the degree of influence of each variable on the students' happiness scores.

Table 5. Regression coefficients for the total scores of the school happiness scale

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std.E.	Beta	T	p
(Constant)	32,471	1,074		30,234	,000
Bullying Total	-,114	,009	-,180	-12,609	,000
Gender	-,425	,153	-,038	-2,770	,006
Grade	,232	,157	,033	1,477	,140
Age	-,470	,132	-,079	-3,569	,000
Mother's Education	,200	,083	,045	2,409	,016
Father's Education	,078	,085	,016	,910	,363
Income	-,898	,181	-,070	-4,959	,000
Number of Siblings	-,238	,051	-,070	-4,639	,000
Book Reading	,517	,065	,119	8,000	,000
TV Watching	-,294	,074	-,057	-3,980	,000
Phone/Tablet Usage	-,863	,088	-,141	-9,823	,000
Behavioral Score	,856	,104	,154	8,230	,000
Academic Score	,117	,095	,023	1,225	,221

*For gender, female = 1, male = 2 was used as coding.

In the table, the independent variables are ordered based on the beta coefficient, from the highest to the lowest value. According to this, the variable that most predicts the students' school happiness scores is the experience of bullying at school (β=-0.178; p=0.00). The second highest predictor is the time spent playing on phones/tablets (β=0.156; p=0.00). Subsequently, the variables of students' behavior grades (β=0.141; p=0.015) and the number of books read (β=0.106; p=0.020) are found to significantly predict school happiness scores.

Students who are bullied at school have lower levels of happiness. Additionally, students who spend more time on phones and tablets tend to be less happy at school. In contrast, students with higher behavior grades and those who read more books are observed to be happier at school.
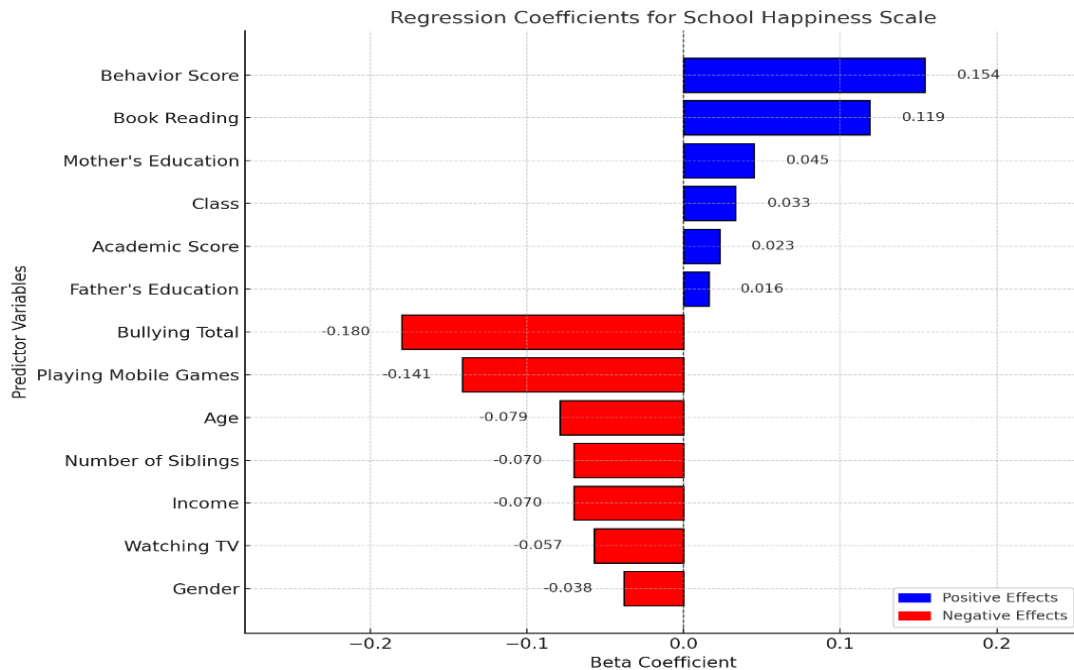

Figure 4: Regression coefficients for the total scores of the students' school happiness scale

No statistically significant effect of other variables on students' school happiness levels is found. However, the number of siblings, income level, grade level, and TV watching time are negatively affecting students' school happiness. Female students have higher school happiness scores compared to male students, and the educational level of mothers and academic success positively affect school happiness levels.

Discussion

Students' happiness level at school was rated as "mostly happy" at 78%, which is relatively positive. However, given that elementary schools are the primary environment where children can fulfill their basic needs—such as play, fun, friendship, and achievement—this rate may be considered below expectations. Compared to similar studies (Okutan et al., 2024: 90%; Tay, 2023: 91%; Mertoğlu, 2020: 85%), the results of this study were lower. However, the lack of sufficient research in this area makes it difficult to draw definitive conclusions. The use of a Likert scale may have provided a more objective assessment, but the relatively lower happiness levels could also indicate more realistic responses from students.

Regarding peer bullying, 33% of students reported experiencing bullying, with physical bullying being the most common, followed by verbal and emotional bullying. Demircioğlu & Akar (2024) found a higher rate of 41%. These findings align with global meta-analyses (34.5%-36%), though rates vary across countries—e.g., 30.4% in China and 77.5% in India. Despite methodological differences, bullying shows a clear upward trend worldwide.

Exposure Bullying and Happiness at School

Regression analysis revealed a statistically significant negative association between students' exposure to bullying and their reported levels of school happiness. In this study, students who reported being bullied—whether physically, verbally, or through digital platforms—tended to have lower happiness scores.

Previous literature also supports this pattern. For instance, Bibou-Nakou and Markos (2013) observed that students experiencing bullying reported lower happiness, particularly in contexts where teacher and parental support were limited. Similarly, Aunampai et al. (2022) reported that students exposed to bullying in Thailand were 28% less likely to describe themselves as happy at school. These findings are consistent with international research by Pengpid and Peltzer (2013) and Huang (2021), which documented inverse relationships between bullying experiences and psychological well-being.

In addition, our analysis indicated that students who engaged in bullying behavior themselves also tended to report lower levels of happiness. This aligns with the findings of Dilmaç and Özkan (2019), who observed that students involved in cyberbullying exhibited lower subjective happiness, potentially due to emotional factors such as guilt or shame. However, our regression results do not confirm causality and should be interpreted as associations within the current dataset.

Environmental and contextual variables also appeared relevant. Students in rural schools, where physical activity and peer interaction opportunities are generally higher, reported higher happiness levels on average. This is consistent with findings by Cote-Lussier and Fitzpatrick (2016), as well as Öztürk (2019), who emphasized the role of peer relationships in student well-being. Conversely, school environments characterized by intense academic

pressure and competition—often observed in urban settings—were associated with lower happiness levels (Truong & Mahon, 2012).

Among all variables included in the model, bullying emerged as the most strongly associated factor with lower school happiness. According to our regression model, experiencing peer bullying was associated with a decrease of approximately 7.4% in school happiness scores. While this analysis does not establish causality, it highlights a robust and consistent pattern across multiple studies and contexts. These findings underscore the importance of implementing school policies focused on anti-bullying measures and increasing teacher sensitivity to bullying behaviors.

Gender and Happiness at School

Regression results indicate a statistically significant association between gender and reported school happiness, with female students generally scoring higher on happiness measures than their male counterparts. This pattern is consistent with previous findings in the literature, which suggest that female students often demonstrate stronger social-emotional skills, higher levels of empathy, and more positive interactions with teachers (Göcen, 2015; Çankaya & Meydan, 2018). These factors may contribute to the observed differences, though the regression model does not imply causality.

Some studies have reported that girls tend to benefit from more developed social support systems and emotional awareness, which may correspond to higher well-being scores (Mertoğlu, 2020; Okutan et al., 2024). However, this association is not universally observed across all age groups. For example, Tay (2023) found no significant gender differences in happiness among 2nd and 3rd grade students. Other research has proposed that male students may find happiness through different avenues, such as physical activity or competitive play, rather than through social bonding (Roberts et al., 2005).

Additional analyses suggest that male students in this study reported higher rates of exposure to bullying, particularly physical forms, which were negatively associated with school happiness (Aunampai et al., 2022; Kokkinos, 2013). These findings align with previous literature noting that bullying victimization is more common among boys in early grade levels and tends to decline as students grow older (Huang, 2021).

Grade Level, Age, and School Happiness

Regression analyses revealed variation in happiness scores across grade levels. Students in the second grade reported the highest average happiness levels. A slight decrease was observed in third grade, followed by a partial increase in fourth grade, suggesting an adjustment phase as academic and social demands shift during middle elementary years (Tay, 2023; Okutan et al., 2024).

When considered alongside age, younger students (ages 7–8) consistently scored higher on happiness measures compared to their older peers (ages 9–10). This aligns with prior findings (Mertoğlu, 2020) and may reflect broader developmental patterns. However, while the grade level variable showed some association with happiness, age appeared to be a more robust predictor in the regression model.

The trend of declining happiness scores with age may correspond to the increasing complexity of academic tasks, evolving peer relationships, and the onset of self-awareness

that intensifies social comparison. While the current results do not establish a causal relationship, they highlight the importance of considering developmental stages when assessing students' emotional well-being.

Sociodemographic Variables and School Happiness

The regression analysis revealed multiple statistically significant associations between sociodemographic factors and students' reported school happiness.

Parental Education

A positive association was observed between parental education levels —particularly maternal education— and students' school happiness. Students whose mothers had higher levels of education reported significantly higher happiness scores. Paternal education was also positively associated with happiness, though to a slightly lesser extent. These findings align with prior research highlighting the role of parental education in shaping children's subjective well-being (Göcen, 2015; Mertoğlu, 2020). Additionally, the strength of these associations may vary regionally. For instance, in regions such as Southeastern Anatolia, lower maternal education levels may elevate the influence of paternal involvement in children's happiness, suggesting contextual differences in family dynamics.

Income Status

Income level was also found to be significantly associated with school happiness. Students from lower-income households reported lower happiness scores on average, and this group also showed a higher likelihood of exposure to cyberbullying, a factor negatively associated with happiness (Dilmaç & Özkan, 2019). While higher income was generally associated with greater happiness, some findings in the literature suggest that very high-income levels may be linked to complex social dynamics, which could potentially affect happiness in different ways. These results highlight that financial security may support student well-being, but its influence may not be linear.

Number of Siblings

The number of siblings showed a nuanced relationship with school happiness. Regression results indicated a weak negative association, suggesting that as the number of siblings increases, students' happiness may slightly decline—possibly due to limited resources or personal space (Huebner & Alderman, 1993; Gilman & Huebner, 2006). However, other studies have reported positive associations between having siblings and well-being, especially when sibling relationships provide emotional support and opportunities for social learning (Göcen, 2015). The analysis further suggests that family communication quality and emotional closeness may play a more decisive role in happiness outcomes than sibling count alone (Mertoğlu, 2020). In larger households, social support may increase, but resource constraints could reduce happiness, especially under financial strain (Bibou-Nakou & Markos, 2013; Cote-Lussier & Fitzpatrick, 2016).

In summary, the findings suggest complex and context-dependent associations between sociodemographic characteristics and school happiness. While regression results do not imply causality, they highlight the importance of supportive family environments and financial stability in relation to students' well-being.

Reading Habits, Technology Use, and School Happiness

Regression analyses revealed statistically significant associations between students' media habits and their reported levels of school happiness. Reading habits were positively associated with happiness, whereas television viewing and mobile phone/tablet use showed negative associations.

Reading Habits

A positive relationship was found between students' frequency of reading and their school happiness scores ($\beta = 0.119$). Prior research supports the notion that regular reading is associated with improved social-emotional skills, including empathy and perspective-taking (Sezer & Can, 2020; Demir et al., 2019). Mertoğlu (2020) suggested that reading may not directly influence happiness but can be indirectly related to it through the development of emotional and cognitive skills. National reports such as ABİDE 2018 (MEB, 2019) and findings by Sili (2012) have also associated reading with reductions in aggressive behavior, which may correspond to enhanced well-being. However, these associations are not necessarily causal and should be interpreted as correlations observed in the sample.

Mobile Phone and Tablet Usage

Regression findings indicated a negative association between time spent using mobile phones or tablets and students' happiness levels. Consistent with these results, previous studies have identified that excessive screen time is related to reduced physical activity, limited face-to-face social interaction, and increased mental health concerns (Aunampai et al., 2022; Burhan & Moradzadeh, 2020). Dilmaç and Özkan (2019) further reported that excessive device use may increase exposure to cyberbullying and online dependence, both of which are inversely related to subjective well-being. Overuse of digital media has also been linked to reduced family communication and diminished emotional competencies such as empathy (MEB, 2008). While these factors are associated with lower happiness, the present study does not infer direct causal relationships.

Television Viewing

Similarly, a negative association was observed between television viewing habits and school happiness. Previous studies have shown that viewing violent or fast-paced TV programs is associated with increased aggression and reduced prosocial behaviors in children (Conners-Burrow et al., 2011; Akçay & Özcebe, 2012; Çelebi, 2014). These media patterns may influence children's perceptions of social norms and conflict resolution strategies. Promoting media literacy has been suggested as a potential buffer to these negative associations, as it may encourage more mindful media consumption and support emotional well-being (Snavely & Cooper, 1997).

In conclusion, the regression results indicate that reading habits are positively associated with school happiness, while high levels of digital and television media use are negatively associated. These findings reinforce the importance of understanding students' media behaviors in relation to their emotional and social experiences at school, though no causal inferences can be made from the observed data.

Positive association with happiness, suggesting that students who exhibit more socially acceptable and cooperative behaviors tend to report higher happiness levels.

This pattern is consistent with previous research indicating that school happiness is more closely related to students' social integration, peer relationships, and sense of being appreciated than to their academic performance (Bibou-Nakou & Markos, 2013; Truong & Mahon, 2012). Behavior scores—which reflect students' adherence to rules, social adaptability, and interpersonal conduct—were among the strongest predictors of happiness in the current model. Students with higher behavior scores may experience more recognition and acceptance from teachers and peers, which can be linked to increased happiness levels. Conversely, lower behavior scores may correspond with social adjustment difficulties and reduce school satisfaction.

Conclusion

This study investigated primary school students' happiness in relation to various demographic, behavioral, and environmental factors using regression analysis. Overall, most students reported feeling "happy most of the time"; however, this level was lower than might be expected given the structured and supportive nature of primary school environments.

Peer bullying emerged as the variable most negatively associated with happiness, with approximately one in three students reporting some form of bullying experience. Among these, physical bullying was most frequently reported, and exposure to bullying was associated with a 7.4% reduction in reported school happiness.

In terms of gender, female students reported higher happiness scores, aligning with literature that links female students to stronger empathy and social skills. When analyzed by grade, the highest happiness scores were observed among second-grade students, with a slight decline seen in higher grades.

Among sociodemographic factors, maternal education level showed a positive association with happiness, while having a higher number of siblings and very high household income were weakly negatively associated. Reading habits showed a positive association with happiness, while excessive use of mobile phones, tablets, and television viewing were negatively associated. These media behaviors were linked to reduced social interaction and emotional regulation, according to prior literature.

No significant relationship was found between academic achievement and school happiness; however, behavior scores were among the strongest positive predictors of happiness. These findings highlight the importance of social adjustment and behavioral engagement in students' school well-being. Interventions that promote emotional regulation, peer relationships, and supportive school environments may further contribute to improving student happiness.

Recommendations

(1) Schools may consider implementing comprehensive guidance programs aimed at raising awareness of bullying and equipping teachers with the skills to identify and respond to such behaviours. Increasing teacher sensitivity to bullying could potentially reduce its occurrence and support student well-being.
(2) Efforts to enhance parental involvement could be beneficial, particularly in raising awareness about students' exposure to bullying. Informative workshops and communication channels between school and home may support early intervention.

(3) Social-emotional learning programs may be considered, particularly those aimed at developing empathy, emotional regulation, and social relationship skills among male students. These programs could contribute to increased emotional awareness and social adjustment.

(4) Support mechanisms could be developed to help students manage academic and social pressures that may increase with age and grade progression. Integrating game-based learning and promoting inclusive social activities might support both academic engagement and school happiness.

(5) Expanding social support programs and psychological counselling services may provide valuable assistance to students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Additionally, parent education initiatives could enhance family communication and indirectly support students' emotional well-being.

(6) Encouraging reading habits through structured activities, such as designated reading hours, book clubs, or reading competitions, might support students' cognitive and emotional development, which has been associated with higher school happiness.

(7) Media literacy education could be incorporated into school curricula to promote conscious and balanced use of digital devices. Providing guidance on healthy screen time habits may help mitigate the potential negative effects of excessive technology use on student well-being.

(8) Schools may consider implementing behaviour-focused guidance activities and recognition systems that reinforce positive behaviour. Such practices could foster a sense of belonging and social acceptance, which are associated with higher levels of school happiness.

In conclusion, a collaborative approach involving teachers, families, and school leadership may help foster a supportive, inclusive, and emotionally safe school environment. Future studies might build on these findings by examining larger and more diverse samples, thereby contributing to the refinement of educational strategies and policy development.

Declarations

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