

HAPPINESS PERCEPTIONS OF PRESCHOOLERS AND PARENTAL STRATEGIES USED TO INCREASE CHILDREN’S HAPPINESS

Çiçek Eminanç and Ilknur Tarman

Abstract: This qualitative research study aimed to evaluate how preschoolers aged 4 to 5 perceived “happiness” and the strategies parents use to make their children happier. The criteria sampling approach, a purposeful sampling technique, was utilized to create the study group, which included 20 preschoolers and their parents who had applied for assessment by the Child Development Polyclinic of a maternity and pediatrics hospital in Istanbul, Türkiye. Apart from demographic information, the data employed in the study comprised semi-structured interviews and children’s descriptions of their drawings; these were analyzed using content analysis. The study’s findings showed that the children used adjectives that express positive emotions, such as “laughing”, “joyful”, and “loving”, to describe their feelings, and were reported being happy when they engaged in play-based activities such as playing video games, watching television, engaging in sports, and visiting the beach or the park. The children’s picture drawings of happiness mostly featured aspects of play and nature. One of the research’s most significant results is that parents employed a variety of methods to make their children happy, like playing games, taking them on walks, taking them to the park, and cooking their desired foods. The article concludes with suggestions based on the findings obtained from the research.

Keywords: child, happiness, happiness enhancing strategies, parent, preschooler

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Happiness, one of the most basic emotions of human beings and a feeling that everyone desires, plays a vital role in shaping our lives (Tarman & Eminanç, 2023). Sizer (2010) agreed that happiness is essential for humans. The pursuit of happiness is intrinsic to human nature (Cüceloğlu, 2008). People constantly seek environments, strategies, and activities to increase happiness. In regard to children, Columbo (1986) described happiness as a multidimensional structure that includes mental, physical, social, and psychological dimensions of a child's development. Happiness can also be expressed as a person's development of positive emotions, pleasure, and enjoyment of life; in other words, happiness can be defined as the common point of positive emotions and positive emotionality (Kemer, 2019), while experiencing negative emotions causes a lack of happiness and reduces life satisfaction (Bastian et al., 2004).

Studies have shown that happiness has positive effects, including protection against psychological problems (Yavcık & Eryılmaz, 2020). According to the sociologist Veenhoven (1991), who put forward various views and studies about happiness, happiness facilitates and extends social relations between individuals. It has been observed that happy children adapt better to preschool education and exhibit fewer behavioral problems (On & Lee, 2017). Happy people are helpful, self-controlled people who cope better with stress and adverse situations, while happy children think flexibly and cope better with their life problems (McCabe et al., 2011). According to Ikegami and Agbenyega (2014), happiness is an integral part of the overall development of children; has positive effects on a person's personality, self-confidence, and life satisfaction; and increases people's group social relations. Thus, happiness has a positive effect on society. It creates positive attitudes among children towards their teachers and peers and encourages them to become active citizens by increasing their academic success (Talebzadeh & Samkand, 2011). The preschool period is critical in shaping children's personalities and mental and physical development (Durmuşoğlu & Taşdemir, 2022). During these years, children's brains are very flexible and sensitive to stimuli (Akdağ, 2015). Behaviors and learnings acquired during early childhood affect the basic personality structure in adulthood (Durualp & Aral, 2010).

Preschool children can interpret their own emotions and the emotions of the people around them; they can recognize the feelings of other people from their facial expressions (Levine, 1995). Studies have shown that children aged 4 to 5 can distinguish and convey feelings of anger, sadness, and happiness (Camras, 1980; Casey, 1993; Gür et al. 2020). Moreover, Çelik et al. (2002) showed that the emotion children can most easily define is happiness.

Happiness in preschool has many benefits for children. It facilitates the formation of positive emotions in children and develops their imagination and creativity. It strengthens empathy and tolerance towards other peers in the class and positively improves their cognitive, social-emotional, and motor, that is, holistic development, starting from an early age (Demiriz & Ulutaş, 2016; Izzaty, 2018). Happiness is one factor that affects children's mental development, creativity, and social and emotional development (Izzaty, 2018; Kaur & Sharma, 2021). According to

Talebzadeh and Samkand (2011), taking students' mental health into account and creating a happy environment in schools will make students more interested in school, where a happy environment fosters effective learning and the development of students' abilities. Furthermore, happiness increases group relationships among children and supports children's self-confidence and cognitive and physical health (Talebzadeh & Samkand, 2011). When their happiness is increased, children look at life more positively and interact more positively with their environment (Demiriz & Ulutaş, 2016).

Preschool happiness affects a person's adulthood, and healthy, happy children are likely to succeed in their private lives and school environments (Huppert & So, 2013). Later, especially in adolescence and adulthood, it enables them to overcome pathological conditions and increases their harmony with the environment (Mert & Kahraman, 2018). Unhappiness is correlated with problems such as decreased academic achievement, reduced interaction with peers in social relations, depression, and increased use of harmful substances (Bakkaloğlu et al., 2019, p. 172).

It has been observed that current studies on happiness were generally conducted with adolescents and adults, and that there are very few academic studies on the happiness of preschool children (Demiriz & Ulutaş, 2016; Park & Peterson, 2006; Uusitalo-Malmivaara, 2012). Some studies (Gündoğan, 2022; Fernandes et al., 2012) have recommended more studies on children's happiness. Happiness plays a vital role in raising children who as adults will be mentally and physically healthier, more harmonious, and more social. We anticipate that this study will help parents, teachers, and educators to know what makes children happy and better support them.

In light of the stated rationales, this study aims to learn how preschool children perceive "happiness" and what methods parents employ to make their children happier. Our research question was, "How do preschool children perceive happiness, and what strategies do parents use to increase their children's happiness?" Based on this problem statement, the following questions were investigated:

1. How do children perceive happiness in the preschool period?
 - a. How do young children in the preschool years describe happiness?
 - b. What situations make children happy throughout the preschool years?
 - c. How do preschool children express happiness in their drawings?
2. What strategies do parents use to increase their children's happiness?

Method

Research Design

We employed a phenomenological study design to investigate children's perceptions of happiness and the strategies parents use to increase their children's happiness. This design was chosen because it reflects the perspectives of the participants themselves. This type of qualitative design relies on collecting detailed descriptions from participants in order to gain in-depth

information regarding their experiences of the phenomenon in question; it also allows flexibility in conducting the research (Creswell, 2013). In a phenomenological study, the researcher uses verbal definitions, expressions, observations, and written texts about the phenomenon in question (Büyüköztürk et al., 2020), and the interview technique is generally used (Onat Kocabıyık, 2015).

Study Group

The study group consisted of 20 children aged 4 to 5 and their parents. They were chosen by the criterion sampling method (Patton, 2001) from among those who had visited the Child Development unit of a maternity and pediatrics hospital affiliated with the Istanbul Provincial Health Directorate in Türkiye. The following criteria were taken into account:

- The child was a client of the Child Development Polyclinic of the hospital and was 4 or 5 years old.
- The child did not have any language or speech barriers.
- The child did not have any physical or motor disabilities.

The demographic characteristics of the children and parents participating in the study are provided in Table 1.

As seen in Table 1, a slight majority (55%) of the 20 children participating in the study were boys. Most of the children were 4 years old (70%), and most (80%) were receiving preschool education. Most of the parents were mothers (85%); only three fathers participated. Half of the parents were high school graduates or equivalent, 20% had graduated from secondary school, and 15% from primary school, while 10% were undergraduates and 5% were associate degree graduates.

Data Collection Tools

This study used a demographic information form, an interview form, and children's pictures as data collection tools. These are described individually in this section.

Demographic Information Form: To ascertain the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants, questions were asked concerning the age, gender, and preschool education status of the children, and the parents' age and educational status. Questions that would reveal the participants' identities were omitted.

Interview Form: To create the interview form, we began with a literature review, examining domestic and foreign publications and theses. After preparing the questions, opinions were taken from four faculty members who were experts in child development and preschool education. The questions were then modified based on the experts' feedback. Before collecting data for the research, a pilot study was conducted with three mothers and three children not in the participant group to check the clarity of the questions. Questions and expressions that were difficult for the pilot group to understand were removed.

Table 1. *Characteristics of the Participating Group*

| Characteristic | <i>n</i> | % |
|----------------------------|----------|----|
| Child's gender | | |
| Boy | 11 | 55 |
| Girl | 9 | 45 |
| Child's age | | |
| 4 | 14 | 70 |
| 5 | 6 | 30 |
| Preschool education status | | |
| Yes | 16 | 80 |
| No | 4 | 20 |
| Preschool institution type | | |
| Public | 8 | 50 |
| Private | 8 | 50 |
| Parent | | |
| Mother | 17 | 85 |
| Father | 3 | 15 |
| Parent's age | | |
| 27–30 | 6 | 30 |
| 31–34 | 8 | 40 |
| 35–38 | 3 | 15 |
| 39+ | 3 | 15 |
| Parent's education status | | |
| Primary school | 3 | 15 |
| Secondary school | 4 | 20 |
| High school and equivalent | 10 | 50 |
| Associate degree | 1 | 5 |
| Bachelor degree | 2 | 10 |

Children's Drawings: After a one-on-one interview with each child, the child was asked, “Can you draw me a picture of a happy child?” After the child had finished drawing, they were asked to describe the pictures they had made. Their explanations, verbal expressions, and definitions of the pictures were recorded.

Data Collection Process

Ethical permission for this research was obtained from the Istanbul Aydın University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee (dated 09.06.2022 and numbered 2022/10). After the Istanbul Provincial Health Directorate granted research permission to collect data, parents were informed about the study. All communications between the researchers and the participants were in Turkish. The article, prepared in Turkish, was translated into English by a professional translator proficient in both Turkish and English.

Interviews were conducted with the parents who had agreed to participate and their children. Interviews were held first with the child and then with the parent. Interviews with children were conducted in a quiet environment that would not be distracting and where they could express themselves comfortably. The interviews were recorded with a voice recorder and lasted an average of 10 to 15 minutes. After asking questions designed to reveal their perceptions of happiness, the children were asked to draw a “picture of a happy child” and describe their drawings. The children’s comments on what made them happy were recorded. Parents were then asked a few questions, such as: “How do you know when your child is happy?”, “Which situations make your child happy?”, “What do you do to make your child happy?”, and “Can you tell us about your most recent happy memory with your child?”

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using content analysis, a qualitative method. According to Yıldırım and Şimşek (2011), content analysis brings similar data together within the framework of specific concepts and themes, which are organized and interpreted in a way that the reader can understand. In our study, after the end of each interview, the audio files were transcribed. The transcribed data were then compared with the audio files to ensure that nothing was missing or mistaken, and corrections were made where necessary. The texts were then read repeatedly to derive categories from the answers of the participants. Nine categories emerged: positive emotion, play-entertainment, education, consumption, nutrition, instrumental value, intrinsic value, family, and nature. Data coding was performed the information obtained from the participants and the children’s drawings. Four themes related to the categories emerged: emotion, activity, value, and environment. The data were organized according to the themes, categories, and codes. Tables were made to show how often each code was represented in the data, and the findings were interpreted.

In the data analysis, the participants’ real names were not specified, to conform with the privacy policy. Participating boys were coded as “CB”, girls as “CG”, and parents as “P”. Each participant was given a number (e.g., CB1, CB2, CB3...; CG1, CG2, CG3...; P1, P2, P3...).

Validity and Reliability of the Research

Measures of validity and reliability are one way of assessing the quality and value of scientific research (Noble & Smith, 2015). In qualitative research, the concept of transferability takes the place of the concept of external validity that is used in quantitative research. Transferability is the ability to adapt the findings obtained from the data to similar contexts and situations (Arastaman et al., 2018). Having detailed descriptions will increase transferability (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011); therefore, this study included direct quotations to reflect the participants’ views and thoughts, and explained each research stage in detail. To ensure authenticity, our data included transcriptions of recordings of interviews with participants.

In qualitative studies, “credibility” takes the place of “internal validity”, which is used in quantitative studies. Credibility concerns how accurate the findings are and how well they reflect

reality (Merriam, 2009). Credibility can be achieved by collecting data transparently, faithfully, and consistently during research. To increase the credibility and consistency of the research, we sought the opinions of four experts from the field of preschool education and child development. The interview questions were prepared and arranged according to expert feedback. Afterward, a pilot study was conducted, and the questions were finalized. The second author of the study, who is an expert in the field of child development and preschool education, confirmed the appropriateness of the codes, categories, and themes. The data were also coded by researchers, and the percentage of consensus was calculated to determine the consistency of the codes. Consensus among coders was obtained using the Miles and Huberman (1994) formula: $\text{consensus} / (\text{agreement} + \text{disagreement}) \times 100$. The agreement between the two coders was 93%. According to Miles and Huberman, reliability can be accepted if the agreement between the codes evaluated by the researchers is 80% or more.

Findings

In this section, the findings obtained from examining how preschool children perceive happiness are presented in three parts: how children define the concept of happiness, what makes them happy, and how they express happiness in their drawings. The strategies parents use to increase their children’s happiness are then presented.

How Children Define the Concept of Happiness

Children were asked, “What is happiness?” The findings regarding the themes, categories, and codes of how children make sense of the concept of happiness are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. *Children’s Responses to “What is happiness?”: Themes, Categories, and Codes*

| Theme | Category | Code | Girl (<i>n</i>) | Boy (<i>n</i>) |
|----------|--------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Emotion | Positive emotions | Beautiful | 1 | 2 |
| | | Laughing | 2 | 3 |
| | | Rejoicing | 1 | |
| | | Loving | 1 | 1 |
| | | Affection | | 1 |
| | | Being happy | 2 | |
| Activity | Play-entertainment | Entertaining, going out | 2 | 1 |
| | Education | Going to school, drawing pictures | | 2 |
| | Consumption | Getting whatever they want | | 1 |

Note. There were 11 boys and 9 girls.

When the answers they gave to the question “What is happiness?” were evaluated, it was seen that most of the children ($n = 14$) described happiness as a “feeling” (emotion), and included words that express positive emotions, such as “beautiful”, “laughing”, and “being happy”. While boys (n

= 3) most often associated the concept of happiness with “laughing”, girls gave equal place to “laughing” and “being happy”. Some of the children who identified happiness with a feeling said:

Happiness means laughing. I know I’m happy when my mom makes me laugh. (CB8)

It means laughing. (CB10)

It means that “I love you”. (CG6)

It’s a beautiful thing. Turning on the TV to watch cartoons. (CB7)

Some children ($n = 6$) associated happiness with activities. Two of the girls included activities involving play and fun (“having fun”, “going out”), while two of the boys associated education with happiness (“going to school”, “drawing pictures”). On the other hand, one boy expressed happiness as consumption (“getting what he wanted”). Under the activity theme, three children identified happiness with “play-entertainment” ($n = 3$) activities. Some of the expressions of children who associated happiness with activities were:

Going out is having fun, laughing. I’m going to my friend’s house and I’m happy.

They have Barbies, I have Barbies, we sometimes play. (CG7)

It is to go to school. At school, the teacher hugs me, we [use] play dough. (CB4)

It means having what you want. It’s about going where you want to go. (CB11)

What Makes Children Happy

The children’s answers to the question “What makes you happy?” yielded the themes, categories, and codes given in Table 3.

Table 3. *Children’s Responses to “What makes you happy?”: Themes, Categories, and Codes*

| Theme | Category | Code | Girl (n) | Boy (n) |
|----------|--------------------|--|--------------|-------------|
| Activity | Play-entertainment | Playing games, watching TV, doing sports, going to the seashore, going to the park, going to a shopping mall | 3 | 11 |
| | Education | Drawing pictures | 1 | |
| | Consumption | Buying gifts, wearing earrings | 2 | |
| | Nutrition | Eating, eating chocolate, eating cake | 2 | 1 |
| Value | Instrumental value | Sharing, helping | 1 | |
| | Intrinsic value | Loving animals, being loved by father | 1 | 1 |

Note. There were 11 boys and 9 girls.

The elements that make children happy were examined under the themes of activity and value. Within the activity theme, most children ($n = 14$) nominated activities in the play-entertainment category; for example, “playing games”, “watching television”, and “going to shopping centers”. It was observed that boys ($n = 11$) were likelier to mention play-entertainment more than girls ($n = 3$) were.

While some of the girls ($n = 2$) stated that actions in the consumption category — “buying gifts” and “wearing earrings” — made them happy, one girl stated that drawing pictures made her happy (education category). Under the nutrition category, two girls and a boy stated that “eating food”, “eating chocolate”, and “eating cake” made them happy. Some of the statements evaluated within the theme of activity were:

I am happy when my friends play games with me. My friends are playing games with me at school. (CG1)

When someone takes me to the sea, playing with toys, playing with a ball, and playing matches are my favorites. (CB3)

My parents make me happy, they play games with me. Yesterday I made pizza and eggs with play dough at home. (CG1)

In the context of the value theme, one of the girls stated that sharing and helping someone makes her happy, while another girl mentioned her love of animals. One of the boys stated that his father’s coming home made him happy. Some of the children’s statements were:

I am happy when I am with my father and mother. I am happy when my father comes, and when I see my brother. (CG2)

I am happy when I help my friends and when I share a toy with someone. (CB9)

How Children Express Happiness in Their Drawings

After the questions about happiness, the children were asked to draw a “happy child” and describe their drawing. The descriptions gave rise to the themes, categories, and codes in Table 4.

Most of the drawings made by children were in the context of the activity theme. Seven each of the girls and the boys included play-entertainment elements, such as toys, balls, dolls, and friends. However, two girls and two boys included book and letter items, which were categorized as education. In the “consumption” category, two girls and four boys included elements such as hats, ornaments, and cars. One boy drew a cake, which was put into the nutrition category.

Table 4. *Happiness in Children’s Drawings: Themes, Categories, and Codes*

| Theme | Category | Code | Girl (n) | Boy (n) |
|-------------|--------------------|--|--------------|-------------|
| Activity | Play-entertainment | Toy, ball, doll, robot, cartoon, friend, child, human | 7 | 7 |
| | Education | Book, letters | 2 | 2 |
| | Consumption | Hats, ornament, earring, phone, car, hair | 2 | 4 |
| | Nutrition | Cake | | 1 |
| Environment | Family | Bed, mother/father, oneself, kitchen, home | 3 | 3 |
| | Nature | Sea, sand, rain, rock, rainbow, grass, tree, flower, road, sun | 5 | 11 |
| Value | Intrinsic value | Heart | 3 | |

Note. There were 11 boys and 9 girls.

Most children included family and nature elements (environment) in their drawings. Three girls and three boys included elements of family, such as bed, mother/father, and home. Boys ($n=11$) included more elements about nature than girls ($n=5$), such as sea, rock, rainbow, flowers, and roads. Some of the children's drawings are presented below.



Mom, me, heart. I am happy because my mother loves me. When we love someone, we get very happy when our heart beats. (CG6)



Sand, sea, rain, sun, rainbow, child, house, phone. This boy is happy to go into the sea. (CB3)

Three of the girls included the element of “love” in the context of the value theme and expressed it as the heart:



I drew my friend and me. These are our hearts. I'm happy to play games here with my friends. When I'm happy, I never fight with my friends. (CG1)



Hearts, sleeping baby, rainbow. Here, the baby's father is taking it to a beautiful place. Then he gets tired and sleeps soundly. I loved the village because I was happy with my father when I went to the village, but I cried a little for my mother. My mother was not in the village. (CG8)

Strategies Used by Parents to Increase Children’s Happiness

This section includes the findings obtained by examining the strategies used by parents to increase their children’s happiness. Table 5 shows the findings regarding the themes, categories, and codes created for these strategies.

Table 5. *Strategies Used by Parents: Themes, Categories, and Codes*

| Theme | Category | Code | <i>n</i> |
|----------|--------------------|--|----------|
| Activity | Play-entertainment | Playing games, taking for a walk; taking to park, picnic, and cinema | 18 |
| | Nutrition | Cooking what they like and want | 5 |
| | Consumption | Buying toys they want | 4 |
| Value | Instrumental value | Encouragement, hug, kiss | 2 |

Note. There were 20 parents.

In the context of the activity theme, happiness-enhancing strategies in the categories of play-entertainment, nutrition, and consumption were used by parents. Most of the parents ($n = 18$) stated that they take their children to the park, on walks, to picnics, and play games with them to make them happy. Parents expressed their views as follows:

He is happy when he spends time with us, especially when his father is at home and playing games with him. I take him wherever he wants, I play games with him. (P1)

I try to do as much as I can. I’m trying to take her for a walk. I used to buy a lot of toys before, but now I don’t. She was very happy then. (P2)

He is happy to drive around, go to the village, and get into bumper cars at the mall. Sometimes I take him for walks, I do some activities. I took him on a picnic in the summer. We went to the shopping mall and got into bumper cars. (P14)

Under the nutrition category, five parents stated that they cook the food their children want and like, which helps to make them happy. Under the consumption category, four stated that they make their children happy by buying the toys they want. Parents stated:

She is a very easygoing child. She can be happy with a chocolate. I make her happy by buying what she wants to have. (P2)

Toys make him happy. I’m doing what he wants. If he wants something at the market, I buy it at once. (P4)

I cook the things she likes. For example, she likes yoghurt, soup, and wraps, I cook them. (P9)

In the context of the value theme, while one parent stated that she kisses and hugs her child to make him happy, another parent said she encouraged her child to do something:

Even hugging usually makes him happy. A very caring boy who knows what he wants. I hug him, caress him, take him in my arms. (P10)

I encourage him to do something and naturally he is happy when he achieves something. (P3)

Discussion and Conclusion

This study qualitatively explored how preschoolers between the ages of 4 and 5 perceive the concept of happiness and what strategies parents used to increase their children's happiness. The children in our study mostly described happiness in terms of positive emotions, using such words as "loving", "being happy", "affection", "rejoicing", and "laughing". According to Myers and Diener (1995), happiness consists of three components: frequent positive emotions such as joy, excitement, and hope; low frequency of negative emotions such as anger, sadness, and hatred; and life satisfaction (Çirkin & Göksel, 2016). Preschool children defined the concept of happiness as love, laughter, and affection in a study by Öveç (2012). Izzaty (2018), Gür et al. (2020), and Hong et al. (2014) also reached similar findings in their studies, which overlap with the results of the present research.

Our second research question asked the children what made them happy. Here, our results showed a marked difference by gender: only three of the nine girls but all 11 boys mentioned at least one play-entertainment activity, such as playing video games, watching television, participating in sports, visiting parks and beaches, and shopping. This is in line with Öveç (2012), who suggested that boys appear to derive happiness from physical activities such as walking and playing with friends. Another study examining the relationship between the game preferences and the self-regulation skills of 4- to 5-year-old children determined that boys prefer games with more physical activity than girls do (Tuzcuoğlu et al., 2020, p. 6). Güngör-Aytar et al. (2019) also found that boys tend to equate happiness with physical activity. In a study by Aymen-Peker and Erol (2019), in which they examined children's perceptions of play, it was seen that when children describe play, they choose emotional expressions such as joy, happiness, enjoyment, and enthusiasm. In addition, it has been determined that communicating with others (family, animals, and friends) increases children's happiness (Arslan & Özyürek, 2023). Studies by Hong et al. (2015), Izzaty (2018), Maftai et al. (2020), Öveç (2012), Ramazan and Öveç (2017), and Uyan-Semerci and Erdoğan (2017), in which children generally stated that playing games, going to the park, walking, and family time family made them happy, are also parallel with the results of this research.

The children's descriptions of their drawings of a "happy child" appeared to support the children's opinions regarding the meaning of happiness. Most of the drawings illustrated activity

and environment themes. Under the activity theme, many of the pictures included play-entertainment elements, such as toys, balls, dolls, robots, cartoon characters, friends, children, and people. Under the environment theme, children included elements of nature, with boys' drawings including more elements regarding nature (11) than girls' drawings (5). Drawing pictures is an important tool, embodying children's spiritual, inner worlds and their feelings, thoughts, and experiences by transferring them to paper (Buyurgan & Buyurgan, 2012). Yavuzer (2001) emphasized that children's pictures reflect their spiritual worlds and give clues about the child that experts can attempt to interpret. Results of studies on how children express their happiness through drawing by Öveç (2012), Maagerø and Sunde (2016), Ramazan and Öveç (2017), Samir Bakr (2019), and Yukay Yüksel et al. (2015) overlap with the results of this study.

Most parents in our study tried to increase their children's happiness through play-entertainment activities, such as taking them to the park, to picnics, walking, and playing games with them. Özyürek and Gürleyik (2016) also found that parents play games with their children in order to make them happy. Playing games increases children's well-being (Fattore et al., 2007). Fredrickson (1998) described happiness as an emotion that enables the development of physical, social, and cognitive skills; it also tends to produce more engagement with play and entertainment activities (Talebzadeh & Samkan, 2011). Tezel-Şahin et al.'s (2017) study on how fathers spend time with their preschool children determined that the most frequent activity was play; they also took them to the park, on picnics, and to the cinema, as well as painting and chatting with them.

A study conducted by Baltacı (2020) determined that Turkish mothers use more happiness-enhancing strategies than Swedish mothers do. Baltacı attributed this to the fact that Swedish mothers have a busy work life, which limits the time they can spend with their children. Anderson-McNamee and Bailey (2010) pointed out that “families who play together are more cooperative, supportive and have better communication” (p. 1). They urge parents to balance their work-home schedules to find the necessary time to play with their children, noting that parental involvement in play promotes the well-being of the family environment, strengthens the bond between parents and children, and contributes to children's development.

This research has some limitations. Only a small sample of preschoolers aged 4 to 5 and their parents who were living in Istanbul participated in the study. Larger studies could be conducted in different cities of Türkiye. A comparative study that includes children and parents from different ethnicities living in Türkiye could provide a wider viewpoint and show different findings. Intercultural comparisons could be made by investigating the perceptions of happiness of children living in different countries using qualitative and quantitative methods. Thus, universal and culture-specific happiness determinants could be revealed, since culture is one of the most significant factors in perceptions of happiness and how to attain it.

This study used a qualitative research design to explore how preschoolers between the ages of 4 and 5 perceive the concept of happiness and parental strategies that increase children's happiness. In future research, quantitative methods could be used to examine this issue. Studies could be

conducted to examine the happiness perceptions of children according to different demographic variables. The results obtained from quantitative studies help in understanding how the concept of happiness is shaped in children. In addition, quantitative data allow the determination of factors that increase or decrease happiness by measuring the relationship between happiness perception and other variables.

Since happiness as a small child may be helpful for overcoming pathological conditions in later life, especially in adolescence and adulthood, and fosters increased harmony with one's environment, it would be beneficial to implement programs designed to increase the happiness and well-being of preschool children. In this context, game-based social skills activities, emotional awareness and mindfulness programs, and nature, music, and art workshops can be organized. Also, training in happiness-enhancing strategies could be given to families and preschool teachers.

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