Happiness and Personality Traits as Predictors of Optimism in School and College Teachers

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The present research was aimed at investigating the predictive role of personality traits and happiness in forecasting optimism of teachers working in public and private schools and colleges. The participants of this study included 154 teachers (male = 80; female = 74) with age range of 26-50 years. Data were collected by using Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (Argyle & Hills, 2002), Life Orientation Test-Revised (Scheier, Carver & Bridges, 1994), and International Personality Item Pool (Goldberg, 2006). Cronbach alpha of these scales on current sample was found good. Results revealed that happiness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, agreeableness, and openness were significant positive correlates of optimism. Moreover, optimism was predicted by happiness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability. Furthermore, teachers working in public schools and colleges had higher level of optimism as compared to teachers of private institutions. Furthermore, there were nonsignificant gender differences on optimism. Findings of present study has important implications for school and college teachers, administrators, and principals of educational institutions.

Keywords. Optimism, happiness, conscientiousness, agreeableness, openness to change, extroversion

In the area of positive psychology, optimism holds central value that helps human beings to flourish and lead contented lives (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). A familiar phrase describing glass with water has helped us to differentiate between optimism and pessimism.

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The person with high optimism perceives the filled part of glass whereas the person with low optimism observes the empty portion of glass. Another important aspect of optimism is to base it on reality testing. A true optimist makes only realistic expectations about future keeping in view the current situations of the world (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004).

The word optimism is originated from a word of Latin language "optimum" which means "best". Generally it is the phenomenon of predicting best outcomes in an event. In positive Psychology there are two main perspectives to conceptualize it. The first one is dispositional optimism and second one is explanatory optimism. Dispositional optimism considers it as a personality attribute of expecting positive consequences in a situation (Sheier & Carver, 1987). For this purpose they continuously strive to accomplish their goals. They focus and concentrate on their tasks with full devotion. Carver and Sheier, (2009) suggested that dispositional optimism has its grounds into self-regulatory model and human activities are greatly influenced by expectations about their consequences. Explanatory optimism motivates a person to examine the causes and impact of past events to make predictions about future. This viewpoint proposed that positive events are related with internal and stable causes whereas negative events are attributed to external and unstable factors.

Positive emotions had positive influence on optimism and happiness is one of them (Carver & Sheier, 2009; Park et al., 2004). Happiness is an emotional state characterized by feelings of satisfaction and state of well-being. It is also believed that happiness is made up of three related factors which are presence of positive feelings, absence of negative feelings and satisfaction with life (Argyle, Martin, & Crosland, 1989). People in happy mood tend to be optimistic and find ways to expect best in future. Myers (2000) found in a study that optimism has close relationship with happiness, social support, and faith. He also found that young people and females stated higher levels of happiness as compared to males. Another study conducted in India found that young male and female graduates who were happy had higher levels of optimism and psychological well-being (Hasnain, 2014). The study revealed significant gender difference son happiness and males were found higher on happiness than females. Another research carried out in Palestine found that Palestinian children scoring high on happiness had higher levels of optimism and subjective well-being (Veronese, Castiglioni, Tombolani, & Said, 2012). It was also revealed that happier people engage themselves in highly abstract and deep thinking which add to their optimism (Updegraff & Suh, 2007). Research indicated that

optimists show satisfaction with life and psychological adjustment (Fleming, 2006).

In addition to positive emotions, personality traits were also positively related to optimism (Lucas, Diener, & Suh, 1996). A research indicated that emotional stability, agreeableness, extraversion and conscientiousness were positively associated with optimism (Sharpe, Martin, & Roth, 2011). The key features of this study included the collection of larger data from 4332 participants of five different sub samples. Authors also employed three different scales of optimism and five different personality inventors to assess study variables. Riolli, Savicki, and Cepani (2002) indicated that higher optimism was related to higher level of extraversion, openness to experience, conscientiousness and lower neuroticism. Boselie, Vancleef, Smeets, and Peters (2014) showed that the induction of temporary state of optimism can invalidate the sustained degenerating effect on executive task functioning. Ashraf, Jaffri, Sharif, and Khan (2012) revealed that optimistic attitude plays a vital role at work place in increasing organizational pledge because optimistic employees have ability to perform even complex task with best prospective results in any condition. Similar findings were reported in a longitudinal investigation of 77 families. The study showed that agreeableness and extraversion significantly predicted optimism (Bulloch, 2011).

Optimism and happiness are positive correlates of each other. This study has considered optimism as an outcome variable because it instills hope in individuals to deal with unpredictable or stressful situations successfully thereby leading to positive feeling in the form of happiness. Moreover, optimism is an essential requirement for personal as well as professional success as it develops courage to meet the challenges of work and family life. Furthermore, optimism enhances one's ability to think of creative solutions to problems encountered at workplace.

Optimism of teachers is important because they are role models for their students and their attitudes have significant impact in their lives. Optimistic attitude of teachers and positive personality traits can add positivity in the lives of their students. It may help them in looking at a brighter side of a picture even during stressful situations and coping with them effectively. Hence, it was the need of the hour to identify the positive aspects of school and college teachers.

In Pakistan, existing literature has focused on applying the concepts of positive psychology in rescue workers (Haleem, Masood, Aziz, & Jami, 2017), elderly people (Hayat, Khan, & Sadia, 2016),

young adults seeking counseling services (Anjum, & Amjad, 2016) and divorced women (Kaneez, 2015). The present study has focused on positive aspects of school and college teachers by investigating their optimism, happiness and personality traits. Keeping in view the existing literature, following objectives and hypotheses were formulated.

Objectives

1. To investigate the relationship among optimism, happiness, and personality traits among school and college teachers.
2. To examine predictive role of happiness and personality traits in predicting optimism among school and college teachers.
3. To find out gender and job sector based differences on optimism of school and college teachers.

Hypotheses

1. Optimism, happiness, extraversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness are positively related to each other.
2. Happiness, extraversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness will predict optimism.
3. There is likely to be gender and job sector based differences on optimism of school and college teachers.

Method

Participants

The sample of this study consisted of 154 school and college teachers of public and private educational institutions. Their age range was 26-48 years ($M = 32.06$, $SD = 10.09$). Purposive sampling method was used to select study participants. Their inclusion criteria was their job tenure of at least 2 years and exclusion criteria was based upon their job status of being regular or contract. Teachers working on contract and daily wages were excluded.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Sample (N =154)

Demographic Variables	Categories	f (%)	M	SD
Age (in years)			32.06	10.09
Gender	Men	80(51.9)		
	Women	74(48.1)		
Educational Institute	School	80(51.9)		
	College	74(48.1)		
Job Sector	Public	80(51.9)		
	Private	74(48.1)		

Instruments

Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R). Developed by Scheier, Carver and Bridges (1994) was used to measure the general optimism of teachers. It is a 10 item measure with five response options. The reliability of this scale is .70. The sample item of optimism subscale is "In uncertain times, I usually expect the best". It has three reverse code items and item numbers are 3, 7, and 9. These items act as control key to identify the participants who try to give socially desirable responses.

IPIP Big-Five Factor Markers. It was employed to assess personality traits and developed by Goldberg (2006). It is a 50-Item inventory with five-point Likert scale to measure Emotional Stability, Conscientiousness, Extroversion, Agreeableness, and Openness to Change. Each domain of personality is assessed by 10 items with five point rating ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5).

Oxford Happiness Questionnaire. Developed by Argyle & Hills (2002), was used to assess happiness of school and college teachers. The questionnaire consisted of 29 items with 4 choices for each one. The sample item of this scale is "I have very warm feelings towards almost everyone". The reliability of the scale reported by authors was .91 and the psychometric properties of this questionnaire were also established in Germany (Francis, Ziebertz, & Lewis, 2003) and United Kingdom (Furnham & Berwin, 1990).

Demographic information sheet. Gender, age, educational institute, job sector, family system, monthly income, birth order, educational level and siblings were included in demographic form.

Procedure

Prior to the data collection participants were approached in their educational institutions. Their informed consent was taken and research objectives were communicated to them. It was also clarified that their responses will be kept confidential, anonymous and will be used for research purpose only. Anonymity of responses was also assured by giving a secret code to their questionnaires. Moreover, they have right to withdraw from the study at any time. After taking informed consent, questionnaires were distributed to them. Demographic sheet was administered which contained information about age, gender, work experience and job sector. The researcher gave them instructions to complete the questionnaire honestly. The meanings of difficult words were explained to the participants. Data was stored securely on a password protected computer, and backed up in accordance with Pakistani data protection laws.

Results

Reliability analysis was employed to measure the reliability of instrument used in the study. Later, Pearson Product Moment Correlations and for prediction step-wise Linear Regression Analysis was done.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Analysis of Study Variables (N =154)

Variables	k	α	M	SD	Range Potential	Actual	Skewness
Happiness	29	.77	117.75	15.49	1-7	1-7	-0.91
Extroversion	10	.70	36.10	5.21	1-7	1-7	-0.26
Agreeableness	10	.85	44.17	6.81	1-5	1-5	-1.07
Conscientiousness	10	.54	35.08	6.33	1-5	1-5	-0.23
Emotional Stability	10	.50	28.41	5.16	1-5	1-5	.09
Intellect	10	.48	23.61	4.50	1-5	1-5	.45
Optimism	10	.60	24.58	5.82	1-7	1-7	1.08

Reliability estimates of scales computed by using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient was as follows: Oxford Happiness Questionnaire .77 (high) and Life Orientation Test .60 (Moderate). The reliability of scales of IPIP was as follows: Extraversion .70 (high), Conscientiousness .54 (Moderate), and Agreeableness .85(very high), Emotional Stability .50(Moderate) and Intellect .48 (moderate).

Table 3

Correlation Matrix of Study Variables (N=154)

	Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Happiness	-	.43**	.39**	.46**	.15	.17	.49**
2	Extroversion		-	.38**	.27*	.29*	.20*	.26*
3	Agreeableness			-	.44**	.12	.15	.23*
4	Conscientiousness				-	.14	.13	.39**
5	Emotional Stability					-	.17	.31**
6	Intellect						-	.21*
7	Optimism							-

**p<. 01. *p<. 05.

Table 3 indicates that optimism was positively and moderately related to happiness ($r = .49$, $p < .01$), conscientiousness ($r = .39$, $p < .01$) and emotional stability ($r = .31$, $p <.01$). It also shows that optimism has significant, positive but weaker relationship with intellect ($r = .21$, $p < .05$), agreeableness ($r = .23$, $p < .05$) and extroversion ($r = .26$, $p < .05$). Moreover, happiness was positively related to extroversion ($r = .43$, $p <. 01$), conscientiousness ($r = .46$, $p = .01$) and agreeableness ($r = .39$, $p = .01$).

Table 4

Happiness and Personality Traits as Predictors of Optimism (N=154)

Predictors	ΔR^2	β
Step 1	.25*	
Happiness		.50**
Step 2	.05*	
Happiness		.40**
Conscientiousness		.21**
Step 3		
Happiness	.03*	.38
Conscientiousness		.20
Emotional Stability		.15
Total R^2	.33*	

*p<.05, **p<.001.

The results indicated that happiness strongly predicted optimism, $\beta =.49$, $p < .001$, $F (1,151) = 48.22$ and it explained 25% variance in optimism ($R^2= .25$). Results further indicated that conscientiousness also significantly predicted optimism, $\beta = .39$, $p < .001$, $F (1,151) = 27.63$ and it explained 5% variance in optimism ($R^2 = .05$). Emotional stability was also found to be a significant predictor of optimism, $\beta =.23$, $p < .004$, $F(1,151) = 8.6$ and it explained 3% of variance in optimism ($R^2= .03$). Together, happiness, conscientiousness and

emotional stability explained 33% variance in optimism. Agreeableness and extraversion were not statistically significant predictors of optimism because they did not explain significant variance for optimism.

Table 5

Impact of Gender and Job Sector on Optimism of Teachers (N = 154)

Source of variance	DV	SS	df	MS	F	Partial η^2	Observed Power
Gender	Optimism	9.46	1	9.46	.29	.02	.084
Job Sector	Optimism	176.26	1	176.26	5.45*	.04	.641
Gender * Job Sector	Optimism	174.79	1	174.79	5.41*	.04	.637
Error	Optimism	4813.13	149				
Total	Optimism	5169.30	152				

*$p< .05$.

Results of two factor analysis of variance indicated that male and female teachers did not differ significantly on optimism, $F (1, 150) =$ 1.64, p=ns. Moreover teachers working in public and private institutions differ significantly on optimism, $F (1, 150) = 5.45, p < .05$. Results also showed that teachers working in public institutions scored higher on optimism ($M = 31.04, SD = 6.44$) than those in private institutions ($M = 26.14, SD = 4.20$), $t(98) = 4.51, p < .001$. Similarly, the interaction effect of gender and job sector was significant on optimism, $F (1,152) = 5.41, p < .05$. Results further showed that female teachers working in public institutions were more optimistic ($M = 120.77, SD$=15.30) than those in private institutions ($M = 114.91, SD = 15.21$).

Discussion

The main objective of current study was to examine the impact of happiness and five personality traits on optimism. Another objective was to investigate the impact of gender and job sector on optimism. This study found that the measures used in the current sample had good psychometric properties.

It was hypothesized that there would have significant positive correlation among optimism, happiness and personality traits and this hypothesis was supported. Results of correlation matrix indicated that personality traits had highly significant, positive and moderate correlation with optimism and happiness as well as four personality

traits which were emotional stability, extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness. Sharpe et al. (2011) found similar results indicating positive influence of personality traits on optimism. The individuals higher on conscientiousness and emotional stability were found higher on optimism. One possible reason for this finding may be that optimism brings positivity in one's personality and helps in boosting one's mood. It enhances one's positive outlook towards the world around them.

Furthermore, it was hypothesized that personality traits and happiness are likely to predict optimism and this hypothesis was also supported in present study. The results indicated that happiness was a highly significant predictor of optimism. This finding might have occurred because positive mood and pleasant feelings promote the expectation that future will be bright with positive events. These events may include satisfaction with intimate relationship, colleagues, academic or professional achievements, health conditions and socio-economic status. This finding can also be explained through feel good and do good phenomenon which proposed that people in good mood tend to think well and do well (Barrett & Salovey, 2002). Results further indicated that extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability significantly predicted optimism. This result was in line with a previous study carried out by Bulloch (2011) indicating that agreeableness and extraversion are significantly good predictors of optimism. Agreeableness tends to generate positive emotions by bringing harmony and peace in interpersonal relationships which enhances optimism by making one more optimistic about one's social circle. Conscientiousness was a significant predictor of optimism because people high in conscientiousness make workable plans and organize their schedules to achieve their goals. Moreover, when they follow their goals step by step, they become more optimistic about goal accomplishment. Extroversion can predict optimism when extroverts would provide positive feedback to someone in their social circle.

Third hypothesis of this study stated that gender and job sector (public, private) would have significant impact on optimism and this hypothesis was supported. The results of this study revealed that teachers working in public institutions reported higher level of optimism. It also indicated that male and female teachers did not differ significantly on optimism. The interaction effect of gender and job sector was significant on optimism. Results indicated that female teachers felt more happiness than male teachers but male teachers were more emotionally strong than female teachers. The reason behind this could be that females are more emotionally expressive and

they better cope in adverse situations but men feel more burdened due to bulk of responsibilities and they feel less happiness. Myers (2000) reported the same findings showing that the teachers serving in public sector educational institutes scored higher on optimism than those working in private sector. One possible reason could be that public sector teachers feel more job security than private sector teachers whereas teachers working in private institutions experience the threat of job insecurity which makes them feel distressed.

Conclusion

It is concluded from the results of this study that teachers who were happy, emotionally stable and conscientious, and emotional stability had optimistic approach in life. Moreover, female teachers teaching in public schools and colleges were more optimistic in comparison with those working in private institutions.

Limitations and Future Recommendations

The results of present study were mitigated by few limitations. The sample was limited to the teachers of Lahore and Sheikhupura only, so findings cannot be generalized to the whole Pakistani population of teachers. Future researches need to be conducted on larger scale and should include other cities of Pakistan.

A research should be conducted on public and private level university teachers to find out the level of optimism through their personality traits.

Qualitative study should be conducted to explore the psychosocial correlates of optimism in teachers.

Implications

This study has important implications for teachers of different educational institutes, principals and educational psychologists. Teachers who are happy, conscientious and emotionally stable are optimistic towards their students, colleagues and principals. Optimistic teachers can instill the hope for success in a failing student. They may motivate them to continue their struggle even after failure and can improve the classroom environment in their institutions. Teachers can also play an important role in improving interpersonal relations among colleagues and principals.

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