

My Happiness, My Learning: A Co-Creating Curriculum to Empower Youth Companions Through the Voices of Youth

Tidarat Sakveerakul

Puey Ungphakorn School of Development Studies, Thammasat University, Thailand

Abstract

This study aims to explore the meaning of happiness from the perspectives of youth, examine the role of family, school, and community in promoting or hindering youth-designed happiness, and synthesize approaches to support youth in designing meaningful well-being. The research employed Participatory Action Research (PAR) in three regions of Thailand. Research assistants lived in rural communities for seven months, gathering in-depth data from 31 youth aged 16–18 and collecting quantitative data from 31 youth using two instruments: The Secondary Child Happiness (SCH-Thai 12) and the Child and Youth Skills in the VUCA World (CY-VUCA Thai 11). The findings reveal that while youth demonstrate high levels of critical thinking, communication, and civic awareness, their happiness remains low. This suggests a disconnect between their inner potential and the external support systems, especially regarding opportunities for autonomy, expression, and meaningful participation. The study proposes five key strategies: opening space for authentic youth choice, shifting adult roles from controllers to supporters, strengthening self-management, fostering safe environments for learning through experience, and connecting youth happiness to real-life engagement. These findings offer insight for developing educational practices, learning activities, and youth policies grounded in youth voices and agency.

Keywords: youth happiness; autonomy and relatedness; community-based youth development; PERMA Model; Self-Determination Theory (SDT)