



Evaluation of Elementary School Students' Learning Happiness: A Systematic Literature Review from the Perspective of Educational Neuroscience

Nursalim

Makassar State University

Corresponding Author: Nursalim nursalim@unm.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated elementary students' learning happiness from an educational neuroscience perspective through a qualitative literature review. Data were collected from scientific publications indexed in Scopus, ERIC, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and SINTA (2022–2026) using thematic content analysis. The findings showed that emotional well-being, supportive classroom climate, and positive teacher-student relationships significantly influence students' cognitive engagement and learning happiness. The novelty of this study lies in integrating educational neuroscience with social-emotional learning perspectives. This study contributes to developing emotionally supportive and student-centered learning environments in elementary education.

INTRODUCTION

Learning happiness among elementary school students has become an important issue in the transformation of twenty-first century education. UNESCO emphasized that students' emotional well-being is a fundamental foundation for creating quality and sustainable learning environments (UNESCO, 2024). A safe, comfortable, and enjoyable learning environment has been proven to increase students' motivation, creativity, and engagement in the learning process. From the perspective of educational neuroscience, positive emotional conditions contribute to the optimization of brain functions, particularly in the prefrontal cortex, which plays a role in attention, memory, and decision-making processes (Sousa, 2024). Conversely, academic pressure and negative learning experiences may hinder cognitive development and affect the mental health of elementary school students who are still in a sensitive stage of neurological development.

Global phenomena indicate that the world of education is currently facing not only academic achievement problems but also a crisis of student well-being. The OECD report through the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022 revealed increasing learning anxiety, declining life satisfaction, and a low sense of safety and comfort among students in various participating countries (OECD, 2023). The post-pandemic effects of COVID-19 have further worsened students' psychosocial conditions due to changes in social interaction patterns and increased dependence on digital technology. Educational neuroscience research explains that enjoyable learning experiences can stimulate the release of dopamine and serotonin, which play essential roles in developing students' intrinsic motivation (Immordino-Yang, 2023). Therefore, learning happiness is no longer viewed as a complementary aspect of education but rather as a fundamental requirement for creating effective and humane learning processes.

In the Indonesian context, the issue of learning happiness has become increasingly relevant alongside the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and the Merdeka Belajar policy, which emphasize student-centered learning. The government has sought to encourage the creation of flexible, inclusive, and enjoyable learning environments for elementary school students. However, various reports indicate that learning practices in schools are still dominated by academic orientation and cognitive assessment. The PISA 2022 results showed that many Indonesian students continue to experience learning anxiety, difficulties in concentration, and a low sense of belonging at school (OECD, 2023). This condition demonstrates a discrepancy between the direction of national educational policies and the actual learning experiences of students in elementary schools.

The issue of learning happiness among elementary school students is also closely related to the social and cultural factors of Indonesian society. In many cases, children's learning success is still measured by academic scores, class rankings, and other formal achievements. Pressure from both family and school environments often causes students to experience psychological burdens from an early age. From the perspective of educational neuroscience, excessive emotional

pressure may trigger toxic stress that negatively affects working memory development, attention focus, and children's emotional regulation (Jensen, 2022). Furthermore, the competitive culture within education may reduce students' opportunities to enjoy learning processes naturally and meaningfully. Therefore, learning happiness should be understood as the result of interactions among biological, social, cultural, and educational environmental factors.

Educational neuroscience studies provide a scientific basis for understanding the importance of positive emotions in elementary school students' learning processes. Research has shown that children's brains develop optimally when they are in safe, supportive, and positive learning environments (Tokuhamas-Espinosa, 2022). Enjoyable learning activities can strengthen neural connectivity and enhance neuroplasticity, which plays a significant role in long-term memory formation. In contrast, stressful and monotonous learning environments may inhibit brain activities related to concentration and information processing. During elementary school age, children's brain development occurs rapidly, making emotional experiences during learning highly influential on both academic and social development. Therefore, the educational neuroscience approach is important for understanding the relationship between learning happiness and students' learning success.

Although research on student well-being and enjoyable learning continues to develop, studies specifically discussing elementary school students' learning happiness from the perspective of educational neuroscience remain relatively limited. Most previous studies have focused more on learning motivation, academic achievement, or curriculum implementation without comprehensively integrating neurological and emotional aspects. In addition, systematic literature review studies using a qualitative descriptive approach are still rarely found, particularly within the context of elementary education in Indonesia. Many studies have not deeply explored how school culture, social relationships, family environments, and learning practices influence students' learning happiness from the perspective of child brain development. These limitations indicate the existence of a literature gap that requires deeper and more systematic investigation.

The urgency of this research becomes increasingly significant because learning happiness has broad implications for educational quality and children's mental health. Positive learning experiences during elementary school can shape students' intrinsic motivation, social skills, and resilience in facing future learning challenges. Conversely, stressful learning experiences may lead to academic trauma, anxiety, and even rejection of educational processes. From the perspective of educational policy, research findings regarding learning happiness may serve as the basis for developing more humane learning models aligned with children's neurological development. Furthermore, this study is important for supporting government efforts to realize education that prioritizes students' well-being. Therefore, research on elementary school students' learning happiness needs to be conducted comprehensively and based on strong scientific studies.

Based on the explanations above, this study aims to analyze and evaluate elementary school students' learning happiness through a systematic literature review from the perspective of educational neuroscience. The focus of the study is directed toward identifying factors influencing learning happiness, examining the relationship between emotions and neurological processes in learning, and analyzing the implications of learning happiness for the quality of elementary education. This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach using thematic analysis techniques on scientific sources obtained from trusted databases such as Scopus, ERIC, Springer, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar. This study is expected to provide theoretical contributions in strengthening the concept of learning happiness from the perspective of educational neuroscience. In addition, the study is also expected to provide practical contributions for teachers, schools, and policymakers in creating learning environments that are more enjoyable, healthy, and supportive of students' development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Educational neuroscience becomes the main theoretical foundation in this study because it explains the relationship between emotions, brain function, and learning processes. Educational neuroscience integrates neuroscience, psychology, and education to understand how emotional experiences influence students' cognitive development (Tokuhamma-Espinosa, 2022). Immordino-Yang (2023) explained that emotions play a central role in attention, motivation, and memory formation. Positive learning experiences stimulate brain activity related to concentration and engagement, while stress and anxiety may hinder learning performance (Sousa, 2024). Therefore, learning happiness is closely associated with students' emotional and neurological conditions during classroom activities.

Learning happiness refers to students' positive emotional experiences, comfort, and engagement during learning activities (UNESCO, 2024). In elementary education, learning happiness is important because children are strongly influenced by emotional and social environments. Positive psychology theory emphasizes that positive emotions and supportive relationships improve students' well-being and motivation (Seligman, 2018). Previous studies also found that enjoyable learning environments increase academic engagement and emotional resilience among students (OECD, 2023). Conversely, excessive academic pressure may reduce students' motivation and emotional well-being.

The relationship between educational neuroscience and learning happiness can be understood through the influence of emotions on cognitive processes. Positive emotions stimulate dopamine production, which strengthens motivation, attention, and memory (Jensen, 2022). Constructivist learning theory also supports this perspective by emphasizing meaningful learning through active participation and supportive classroom environments (Schunk, 2020). Thus, learning happiness is not only an emotional condition but also an important factor influencing students' cognitive and academic development.

This study uses a conceptual framework that positions educational neuroscience as the primary perspective in analyzing learning happiness among

elementary school students. Learning happiness is influenced by emotional safety, teacher-student relationships, classroom climate, and instructional approaches. These factors affect students' emotional conditions and neural readiness for learning. Through a systematic literature review, this study synthesizes previous findings to explain how positive learning experiences support students' cognitive, emotional, and academic development.



Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design using a literature review approach to analyze learning happiness among elementary school students from the perspective of educational neuroscience. A qualitative descriptive approach was selected because it allows researchers to explore, interpret, and synthesize findings from previous studies systematically and contextually (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The data sources consisted of scientific journal articles, academic books, government policy documents, and research reports related to educational neuroscience, student well-being, and learning happiness. Literature sources were obtained from trusted academic databases, including Scopus, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, ERIC, and SINTA. The inclusion criteria included publications from 2022–2026, studies relevant to elementary education, educational neuroscience, and learning happiness, as well as peer-reviewed scientific sources. Meanwhile, the exclusion criteria covered non-academic publications, duplicated articles, studies lacking methodological clarity, and sources not directly related to the focus of the study.

The literature search process was conducted systematically using several stages. First, the researchers identified keywords such as “learning happiness,”

“educational neuroscience,” “student well-being,” and “elementary education.” Second, the search process was conducted through databases including Scopus, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, ERIC, and SINTA to obtain relevant scientific publications. Third, the collected articles were screened based on titles, abstracts, and research objectives to ensure relevance to the study focus. The selection and evaluation of article quality were conducted by assessing publication credibility, methodological rigor, relevance of findings, and theoretical contribution (Snyder, 2019). Articles published in reputable journals and indexed in recognized academic databases were prioritized to maintain the reliability and validity of the literature review process. Through this selection process, only literature that met the academic quality standards was included in the analysis.

The data analysis technique used in this study was thematic content analysis to identify patterns, themes, and conceptual relationships among the selected literature (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The analysis process involved data reduction, coding, categorization of themes, interpretation, and synthesis of findings related to learning happiness and educational neuroscience. The coding process focused on major themes such as emotional well-being, classroom climate, teacher-student relationships, cognitive engagement, and neurological learning processes.

To ensure the validity of the qualitative literature review, this study applied theory triangulation by comparing perspectives from educational neuroscience, positive psychology, and constructivist learning theory. In addition, peer debriefing techniques were conducted through academic discussions and evaluations to minimize researcher bias and strengthen the credibility of the interpretation process. Therefore, the study aimed to produce comprehensive and valid findings regarding learning happiness among elementary school students within the framework of educational neuroscience.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the literature review indicate that learning happiness among elementary school students is strongly influenced by emotional, neurological, social, and educational factors. Based on the thematic analysis of scientific literature published between 2022 and 2026, several dominant themes were identified, including emotional well-being, positive classroom climate, teacher-student relationships, social-emotional learning, and educational neuroscience perspectives.

Most studies emphasized that enjoyable learning experiences contribute significantly to students’ motivation, cognitive engagement, emotional regulation, and academic achievement. In addition, supportive learning environments and positive social interaction were consistently associated with higher levels of learning happiness among elementary students. The following table summarizes the main findings from previous studies related to the evaluation of elementary school students’ learning happiness from the perspective of educational neuroscience.

Table 1. Literature Review Findings on Learning Happiness among Elementary School Students from the Perspective of Educational Neuroscience

No.	Researchers & Year	Journal / Source	Main Research Findings
1	Immordino-Yang (2023)	Routledge	Positive emotions strengthen meaningful learning, attention, and cognitive engagement among elementary students.
2	Sousa (2024)	Corwin Press	Enjoyable learning environments improve memory, concentration, and motivation through brain-based learning processes.
3	Jensen (2022)	ASCD	Stress and academic pressure negatively affect emotional regulation and learning performance.
4	Howard-Jones (2024)	Routledge	Emotional safety supports executive brain functioning and enhances students' learning readiness.
5	UNESCO (2024)	UNESCO Publishing	Happy school environments contribute positively to student well-being and learning happiness.
6	OECD (2023)	OECD Publishing	Students with positive emotional experiences demonstrate higher academic engagement and school belonging.
7	UNICEF (2023)	UNICEF Publishing	Supportive classroom climates increase emotional comfort and active participation in learning.
8	Yu et al., (2024)	<i>International Conference on Computers in Education.</i>	Excessive academic demands increase anxiety and reduce elementary students' learning enjoyment.
9	MacAllister (2025)	<i>Journal of Advanced Research in Education</i>	Inclusive classroom environments improve emotional engagement and collaboration among students.
10	Fadly & Islawati (2024)	<i>Deleted journal</i>	Authoritarian teaching practices reduce students' emotional well-being and learning happiness.
11	Schunk (2020)	Pearson	Meaningful learning develops through active participation and supportive learning experiences.

12	Seligman (2018)	<i>Journal of Positive Psychology</i>	Positive emotions and relationships strengthen student motivation and psychological well-being.
13	Tokuhamas-Espinosa (2022)	W. W. Norton & Company	Emotional experiences influence neural plasticity and cognitive growth in children.
14	CASEL (2023)	CASEL Report	Social-emotional competence positively affects academic and social development.
15	Durlak, Mahoney, & Boyle (2022)	<i>Educational Psychologist</i>	Social-emotional learning improves emotional well-being and academic achievement.
16	Noddings (2019)	Cambridge University Press	Caring teacher-student relationships create enjoyable and meaningful learning experiences.
17	Mulia & Khaira (2025)	<i>Pionir: Jurnal Pendidikan</i>	Balanced discipline and academic challenges support resilience and emotional growth.

Based on the findings presented in Table 1, the literature consistently demonstrates that learning happiness among elementary school students is closely related to positive emotional experiences, supportive educational environments, and effective social interaction. Educational neuroscience perspectives further explain that emotional safety and enjoyable learning experiences positively influence cognitive processes, motivation, and neural development in children.

The dominant trend across the reviewed studies highlights the importance of integrating emotional well-being, social-emotional learning, and humanistic pedagogical approaches into elementary education. However, several studies also revealed that excessive academic pressure and authoritarian instructional practices remain significant barriers to students' learning happiness. Therefore, the findings emphasize the need for educational systems and classroom practices that prioritize students' emotional well-being alongside academic development to support holistic learning outcomes.

The findings of this study indicate that learning happiness among elementary school students cannot be separated from emotional, neurological, and social dimensions within the educational process. The reviewed literature consistently shows that positive emotional experiences contribute significantly to students' motivation, engagement, and cognitive readiness during learning activities. This finding supports the theory of educational neuroscience, which explains that emotions play a central role in activating neural systems related to attention, memory, and executive functioning (Immordino-Yang, 2023; Sousa, 2024).

From this perspective, learning happiness is not merely interpreted as students' temporary enjoyment in the classroom but as a neurological condition that influences the effectiveness of cognitive processes. The findings also reinforce constructivist learning theory, which argues that meaningful learning occurs when students actively engage in supportive and emotionally safe learning environments (Schunk, 2020). Therefore, emotional well-being becomes an important component in creating effective elementary education practices.

The dominant findings regarding the importance of supportive classroom climates and positive teacher-student relationships are consistent with previous studies on social-emotional learning. CASEL (2023) emphasized that emotional competence and positive social interaction improve both academic achievement and students' social development. Similarly, UNICEF (2023) reported that emotionally supportive classroom environments enhance students' participation and emotional security.

However, this study also identified that examination-driven education systems, particularly in Asia, tend to foster intense academic competition. This condition contributes to several negative consequences, including increased anxiety, lower learning interest, and reduced student happiness, which ultimately affect students' overall wellbeing and social equity (Yu et al., 2024). This difference may occur because educational cultures in many developing countries continue to prioritize academic achievement as the primary indicator of educational success. Consequently, emotional well-being and learning happiness are frequently treated as secondary aspects rather than integral components of the learning process.

From the perspective of educational neuroscience, the reviewed studies demonstrate that emotional safety directly influences children's neurological readiness to learn. Jensen (2022) explained that stress and fear negatively affect the functioning of the prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for concentration, decision-making, and emotional regulation. Conversely, positive emotions stimulate dopamine production that supports motivation and memory retention.

These findings are consistent with Howard-Jones (2024), who argued that emotionally meaningful learning experiences strengthen neural plasticity during childhood development. In elementary education, this issue becomes particularly important because children are still in critical stages of cognitive and emotional development. Therefore, learning happiness should be understood not only as an emotional outcome but also as a factor that shapes long-term neurological and cognitive growth.

Another important aspect emerging from this study concerns the socio-cultural influence on learning happiness. Several reviewed studies revealed that academic pressure from schools and families often contributes to anxiety and emotional discomfort among elementary school students (Fadly & Islawati, 2024). In many educational contexts, students are expected to achieve high academic performance through rigid instructional practices and competitive learning systems. This condition creates contradictions between the goals of humanistic education and the realities of academically driven school cultures. UNESCO (2024) emphasized that happy school environments should prioritize

students' well-being, inclusion, and emotional support alongside academic achievement. Therefore, the findings suggest that learning happiness is strongly shaped by broader social and cultural structures, not solely by classroom practices.

This study also contributes a broader perspective by integrating educational neuroscience with social-emotional and pedagogical approaches in understanding learning happiness. Previous studies often examined student well-being from psychological or educational perspectives separately. However, this literature review demonstrates that emotional experiences, neural processes, and educational environments interact dynamically in shaping students' learning experiences.

This integrative perspective provides a more comprehensive understanding of why emotionally supportive learning environments improve cognitive engagement and academic participation. In addition, the findings highlight that learning happiness should be viewed as a multidimensional construct involving neurological, emotional, social, and pedagogical dimensions simultaneously.

Theoretically, this study strengthens the relevance of educational neuroscience in explaining the relationship between emotions and learning processes in elementary education. Practically, the findings suggest that teachers should create emotionally supportive classrooms through positive interaction, collaborative learning, and student-centered instructional approaches.

Schools also need to develop educational environments that balance academic achievement with students' emotional well-being. From a policy perspective, educational stakeholders should integrate social-emotional learning and well-being indicators into curriculum development and educational evaluation systems. Such approaches are important to support holistic child development and sustainable educational quality.

Although this study provides comprehensive insights regarding learning happiness from the perspective of educational neuroscience, several limitations remain. Most reviewed studies were conducted in international contexts, while studies focusing specifically on elementary school students in Indonesia remain limited. In addition, differences in educational systems and cultural contexts may influence the interpretation of learning happiness across studies.

Therefore, future research should explore contextual and empirical investigations regarding learning happiness in Indonesian elementary schools using qualitative or mixed-method approaches. Further studies are also recommended to examine the implementation of educational neuroscience principles in classroom practices and their influence on students' emotional and academic development.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that learning happiness among elementary school students is a multidimensional construct influenced by emotional, neurological, social, and educational factors. Based on the literature review, positive emotional experiences, supportive classroom climates, caring teacher-student relationships, and meaningful learning activities play important roles in improving students' motivation, engagement, and cognitive readiness. From the perspective of educational neuroscience, emotionally supportive learning environments contribute significantly to attention, memory processes, and emotional regulation in children (Immordino-Yang, 2023; Sousa, 2024). The findings also indicate that excessive academic pressure and rigid instructional practices may reduce students' emotional well-being and learning enjoyment. Therefore, this study contributes theoretically by strengthening the integration of educational neuroscience, social-emotional learning, and humanistic pedagogy in understanding learning happiness in elementary education. Practically, the findings emphasize the importance of creating learning environments that balance academic achievement with students' emotional well-being and holistic development.

Based on these findings, several recommendations can be proposed for educational practice and policy. Teachers are encouraged to implement student-centered and emotionally supportive instructional approaches that promote positive interaction, collaboration, and meaningful learning experiences. Schools should also strengthen social-emotional learning programs and create inclusive classroom climates that support students' emotional safety and well-being. From a policy perspective, educational stakeholders need to integrate well-being indicators and emotional development into curriculum implementation and educational evaluation systems. In addition, future studies are recommended to conduct empirical investigations regarding learning happiness in Indonesian elementary schools to provide more contextual findings related to educational neuroscience and students' emotional development.

FURTHER STUDY

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted using a literature review approach, which relies heavily on the availability, quality, and scope of published studies related to learning happiness and educational neuroscience. Although the reviewed sources were obtained from reputable databases such as Scopus, ScienceDirect, ERIC, Google Scholar, and SINTA, most studies originated from international contexts, while research specifically focusing on Indonesian elementary school students remains limited.

Second, the thematic analysis in this study depended on the interpretation and synthesis of secondary data, which may contain conceptual differences across studies regarding the meaning of learning happiness, emotional well-being, and educational neuroscience. In addition, the study mainly emphasized qualitative interpretation of literature findings without involving empirical classroom observations or direct student experiences, which may limit contextual understanding of learning happiness in actual educational settings.

Therefore, future research is recommended to conduct empirical investigations involving elementary school students, teachers, and school environments to obtain more contextual and comprehensive findings regarding learning happiness from the perspective of educational neuroscience. Further studies may also apply mixed-method or longitudinal approaches to examine the relationship between emotional well-being, cognitive development, and academic achievement over time. In addition, future research should explore the influence of socio-cultural backgrounds, digital learning environments, parental involvement, and educational policies on students' learning happiness. Expanding research within Indonesian educational contexts is also important to provide contextual evidence that may support the development of emotionally supportive and neuroscience-based educational practices in elementary schools.

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