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The Mediating Role of Happiness in the Relationship between Psychological Safety and Silence Behavior of Educational Staff

Abstract

The primary purpose of the research was to investigate the effect of psychological safety on the silent behaviour of academic staff with the mediating role of happiness. This research was descriptive-correlational regarding the data collection method. The statistical population was all employees (administrators and teachers) of public schools in Tehran, of whom 373 persons were selected. The questionnaires included a “psychological safety” questionnaire by Edmondson (1999), a researcher-made questionnaire on “silence behaviour” according to the Vakola and Bouradas questionnaire (2005), and “happiness” by Oxford (1990). Descriptive and inferential statistics (Pearson correlation coefficient and structural equations modelling tests) were used to analyse the data. The results showed a positive and significant relationship between psychological safety and the employees’ happiness. Findings of the structural equations modelling indicated that the direct effect of psychological safety on silence was -0.61, and psychological safety with the mediation of happiness reduced to silence by -0.77. It could be concluded from the results of this research that happiness has an important effect on reducing organisational silence, and this research would provide a theoretical reference for managers to take comprehensive measures to improve happiness in the organisation.

Keywords: *psychological safety, silence behaviour, happiness*

Introduction

There is a universal agreement that the education system's quality depends on its teachers' quality. For teachers to fully exercise their professional competence, they must enjoy a favourable work environment (Casely-Hayford et al., 2023). Working as a teacher is mentally challenging as teachers must manage numerous cultural, social, and community demands from multiple directions, resulting in many daily emotional interactions (Muenchhausen et al., 2021). Despite multiple challenges such as reduced satisfaction (Haerens et al., 2022), commitment (Raman et al., 2015; Okçu & Uçar, 2016), quality of life (Yisunthet, & Chen, 2017) and reduced occupational performance of employees and health and organisational effectiveness (Yozgat et al., 2013), in educational organisations, removal of organisational silence space and encouragement of employees to express their ideas and creation of open organisational space, due to the effects, it has on organisational results and works (Madrid et al., 2015) is still the most critical challenges and concerns of educational managers at present. In other words, employees' silence is the silent sound of the failure of educational organisations. Employee silence refers to the refusal to express genuine concerns related to individual or group behaviour, perception, and emotional evaluation to those capable of making changes, which may be unethical behaviour (Yu et al., 2022). Silence behaviour of subordinates is a conscious, active, and purposeful action. In other words, silence behaviour is a behavioural choice that can deteriorate or improve organisational performance. Silence can convey sharing information or disfavour and opposition, thus becoming a pressure mechanism for individuals and organisations (Abdul Rahman et al., 2020). In addition, withholding information is perceived as an obstacle to organisational development and change (Dedahanov & Rhee, 2015). It would influence innovation (Lee et al., 2020), task performance, citizenship behaviour (Hao et al., 2022), and teaching quality (Yue et al., 2022).

It particularly faces educational organisations that should be dynamic due to their nature with a type of stagnation because when employees deliberately avoid expressing their opinions, practically the organisation will be deprived of receiving pure thoughts of its employees as strategic capital. Therefore, the probability of becoming a learning and creative organisation approaches zero, reducing educational quality. To have creative, motivated, and happy teachers in the education process, in addition to providing a basis for expressing their ideas and opinions, their updated needs at the organisational level in the work process should be taken into account. A safe working environment where employees can express their feelings, suggestions, and ideas will reduce organisational silence.

Psychological safety is the state of confidence that subjects of education will not be punished, humiliated, or ostracised for their values, ideas, experiences, behaviour patterns, fears and mistakes, successes, and achievements (Clark, 2020; Hunt et al., 2021). To create a good and safe psychological climate in an organisation, employees need to be able to express their views and disagreements freely and comfortably (Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009). Psychological safety in education means that people feel comfortable being themselves. They are entirely devoted to the educational process and feel fine, even “putting on the line” everything they have and what they have achieved, all of themselves (Khudyakova et al., 2021; Valeeva & Tyumaseva, 2022). Psychological safety exists when employees feel they can speak up, suggest ideas, and ask questions in their workplace (Edmondson, 2019).

However, this does not mean that psychological safety is considered a warm and intimate environment where people are close friends without any problems or stress; it means a climate that emphasises preventing problems and achieving goals. According to what was mentioned above, it can be stated that turning organisational environments into environments with high psychological safety can lead to improvement in performance (Young Lee, 2022), increasing employees’ creativity and, consequently, positive feelings about their lives and jobs (Post, 2012). It is known as happiness in organisational literature. Happiness refers to a feeling of enjoyment, such as a warm internal sensation, a sense of achievement, a feeling of coordination, internal calmness, a happy experience, joyful feelings, a sense of release, and confidence in oneself to make healthier decisions to increase one’s intellect and imagination (Aunampai et al., 2022).

Happiness and Organisational Silence

Research shows a positive relationship between happiness and productivity in the organisation (Oswald et al., 2015). Happiness causes better job performance, physical and mental health, self-control, and self-regulation. Happiness is the foundation of many issues and the driving force of society. Happiness and cheerfulness permeate social phenomena such as interpersonal relationships and affect cognitive processes such as learning memory, problem-solving, and intellectual flexibility. Interaction and sympathy, helping and solving the problems of colleagues, camaraderie and altruism and coordination among employees, increasing the speed of doing things, creating an environment full of respect, creating a sense of purposeful (Awada & Ismail, 2019), creating constructive competition in the

organisation, improving the quality of doing works could be positive consequences of happiness at work (Haghgoian et al., 2016).

In a study, Abdallah et al. (2022) investigated the mediating role of happiness in the relationship between authentic leadership and silence behaviour. This study used happiness at work as a psychological mechanism underlying the relationship between these two variables. This study was conducted on 310 government officers in government institutions in Indonesia. The findings showed that authentic leadership harms the silence behaviour of subordinates. In addition, happiness at work mediates the relationship between authentic leadership and subordinates' silence behaviour. In another study, Nikpay et al. (2017) called the role of psychological capital in reducing the organisational silence of school teachers in Khorramabad city in a sample of 285 teachers. They concluded that among the components of psychological capital, self-efficacy, hope, and optimism, apart from resilience, have a negative and significant relationship with systematic silence.

Mental Safety and Happiness

Teachers and teaching staff face numerous requests from colleagues, students, and parents daily, which creates challenges for them (Pardelan et al., 2018). These challenges and stresses can cause physiological and behavioural consequences that disrupt the psychological safety of teachers (Agyapong, 2022). In the event of a decrease in psychological safety, organisations, especially educational organisations that have a special role in educating people in society, will face a decrease in creativity, risk-taking, and an increase in job burnout, which will decrease happiness and result in a decrease in job motivation, performance, and productivity of teachers (Khaljian et al., 2017). According to the research conducted by various researchers, it has been shown that mental hardiness has a positive relationship with happiness, and those who have received high hardiness scores have higher happiness and performance (McCarthy & Hyland, 2018). In a study, Aboramdan et al. (2022) concluded that the relationship between the emotional culture of happiness and happiness at work is mediated by relational attachment and psychological safety. In another research, Khaljian et al. (2017) called the relationship between secure-base leadership and the happiness of school employees with the mediating role of mental safety. They concluded that there is a relationship between secure-base leadership, mental safety, and employee happiness.

The presence of this feeling in the working environment would lead to a more participatory organisation (Norris, 2019), psychological safety (Aboramadan

& Kundi, 2022), entrepreneurship (Ravina-Ripoll et al., 2022), job dedication (Akgunduz et al., 2022), innovation (Usai et al., 2020), and increasing job performance (Erazo Muñoz et al., 2022). Given that lack of feeling of unsafety and fear of consequences for making comments in employees and having satisfaction and positive feeling of activity for those who work in educational environments provide a strong source of motivation for improving performance, but little literature and research can be found on psychological safety, silence and happiness in Iranian schools which makes conducting this research necessary and inevitable. Based on this, the following hypothesis was developed for investigation and testing:

- Happiness plays a mediating role in the relationship between psychological safety and the silence behaviour of educational staff

Research Methodology

Research Design

In this research, a correlational research design has been used. The correlation design helps the researcher check the possibility of a relationship between the studied variables without manipulating the same variables. This design allows the researcher to check the direction and strength of the relationship between the variables (Gall et al., 1996). In this design, the researcher collected his data by using a questionnaire.

Participants

The statistical population was all educational staff of public schools in Tehran. The total number of whom was 115277. 373 persons were selected as samples by multi-stage cluster sampling method and using the Morgan table. Regarding the distribution of respondents according to the age variable, the research findings indicated that 21.7% (81 people) were 20–30 years old, 30.8% (115 people) were 31–40 years old, 31.4% (117 people) were 41–50 years old, and 16.1% (60 people) were over 50 years old. 57.9% (216 people) of the respondents were women and 42.1% (157 people) were men. 8.6% (32 people) of the respondents had a diploma, 22.3% (83 people) had an associate degree, 57.9% (216 people) had a bachelor's degree, and 11.3% (42 people) had a master's degree and above. In addition, 1.6% (15 people) did not answer the level of their education; 15.5% (58 people) had less than 5 years of service, 29.2% (109 people) had 5–10 years of service, 38.6% (144

people) had 11–20 years of service, and 16.6% (62 people) had more than 21 years of service.

Procedure

In this research, after determining the sample, the researchers went to the schools and distributed the questionnaire among the teachers after coordinating with the officials and managers of the schools. The criteria for entering the research were: 1) being a teacher and having at least 6 months of work experience; 2) interest in participating in the research and the criteria for leaving the research was to answer the questionnaires. To comply with ethical considerations, the purpose of the research was explained to all participants, and they were assured that the information related to each person would remain confidential and this information would be used only for research work after the end of it, all information related to them will be destroyed. After collecting the questionnaires, the data were analysed at two descriptive and inferential levels using SPSS version 24 and Lisrel version 11 software.

Measurement

The instrument used to collect data was three questionnaires, including a “psychological safety” questionnaire with seven items by Edmondson (1999), a “happiness” questionnaire with eight items based on the happiness questionnaire by Oxford (1990), and finally, a researcher-made questionnaire on the “behaviour of silence” with five items according to the questionnaire of Vakola and Bouradas (2005). Experts confirmed the validity, and Cronbach’s alpha calculated the reliability after performing a test on 40 people, which was 0.81, 0.88, and 0.84, respectively. Descriptive statistics (frequency distribution, mean, standard deviation) and inferential statistics (Pearson correlation coefficient and structural equations modelling tests) were used to analyse the data. Questionnaires were graded on a Likert scale of 1 (never) to 5 (always). The minimum score in the psychological safety questionnaire was 7, and the maximum score was 35. The minimum score in the happiness questionnaire was equal to 8, and the maximum was equal to 4. The minimum score in the behaviour of silence questionnaire was 5, and the maximum score was 25.

Research Results

Table 1 presents descriptive findings of the research variables. Then, the Pearson correlation coefficient test was used to investigate the relationship between the variables (Table 2).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics mean, standard deviation, kurtosis, and skewness of the variables

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	Kurtosis	Skewness	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Psychological safety	3.600	0.828	-0.107	0.793	0.794	0.85	0.46
Happiness	3.706	0.816	-0.427	-0.739	0.866	0.895	0.52
Silence	2.279	0.931	-0.860	0.292	0.832	0.882	0.60

As shown in Table 1, the value of skewness and kurtosis is in the absolute value of one. Therefore, it can be said that the data has a normal distribution. The average variance extracted, Cronbach's alpha, and composite reliability for all variables are acceptable.

Table 2. Matrix of correlation between the variables

	Psychological safety	Happiness	Silence
Psychological safety	1		
Happiness	0.707**	1	
Silence	-0.802**	-0.754**	1

The correlation coefficients shown in Table 2 indicate that the correlation coefficient between psychological safety and silence is $r = -0.802$, $r = 0.707$ between psychological safety and happiness, and $r = -0.754$ between happiness and silence.

This section investigates the direct, indirect, and total effects of psychological safety on silence with the mediating role of happiness. Direct effects are the beta values between independent and dependent variables, and indirect effects result from multiplying two or more paths. Also, the total effect of each independent variable indicates its total direct and indirect effects on the dependent variable.

Table 3 and Figures 1 and 2 show that the model's fit indices are favourable and that the model has an acceptable fit. According to the model, the hypotheses are investigated in the following section.

Table 3. Fit indices of the model

	GFI	NNFI	CFI	PNFI	RMSEA	X2/df
Acceptable fit	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.5	<0.08	1–3
The fit of the model	0.95	0.97	0.96	0.83	0.062	2.43

Table 4. Differential validity using the Fornell & Larker index

Silence	Safety	Happiness	
		0.726	Happiness
	0.678	0.756	Safety
0.777	-0.854	-0.786	Silence

For diagnostic validity, which indicates the existence of partial correlations between the indicators of one structure and the indicators of another, the criterion of Fornell and Larker (1981) was used. As can be seen in Table 4, the questionnaire has weak differential validity. The following gives the index values of the variance inflation factor for the questionnaire items.

Table 5. Variance Inflation Factor

VIF	
1.238	A1
1.46	A2
1.501	A3
2.273	A4
1.745	A5
1.678	A6
2.422	A7
1.357	S1
2.599	S2
2.345	S3
2.082	S4

VIF	
1.608	S5
3.362	H1
2.538	H2
1.54	H3
2.368	H4
2.352	H5
2.712	H6
2.349	H7
1.487	H8

As can be seen in Table 5, the VIF values for the research items (except for H8) are acceptable.

Hypothesis: Happiness plays a mediating role in the relationship between psychological safety and the silence behaviour of educational staff

As seen in the model, the path coefficient obtained in the experimental model for psychological safety to employees' silence was -0.61, and the t-value was -6.84. Given that the t-value was significant at $P < 0.05$, there is a direct effect of psychological safety on silence. Also, the path coefficient obtained in the experimental

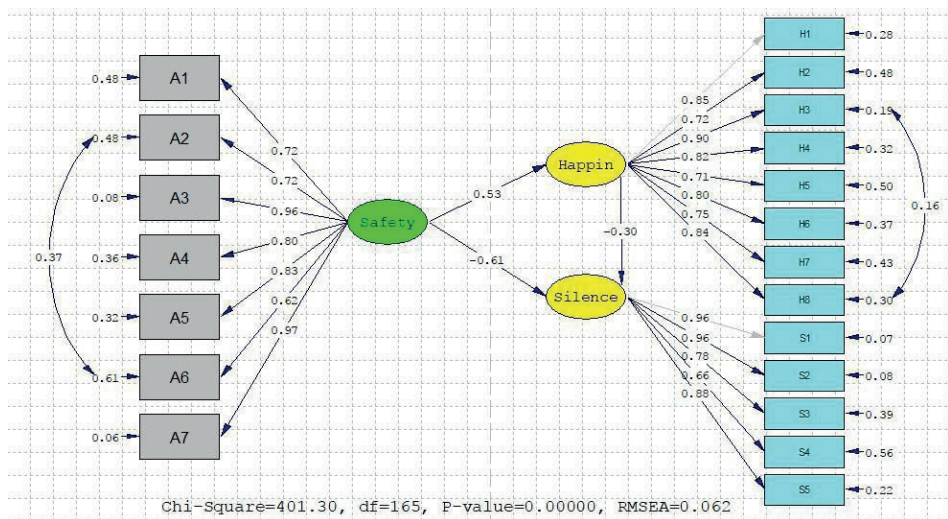


Figure 1. The model in the state of standard estimation

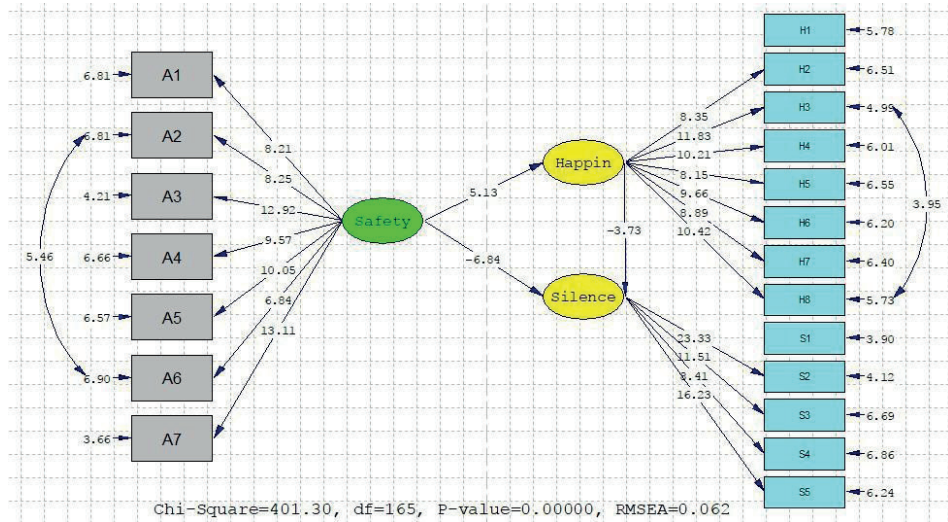


Figure 2. The model in the state of significance

model in the path of happiness to silence was -0.30, and the t-value was -5.13. Given that the t-value was significant at the $P < 0.05$, happiness has a direct effect on silence.

According to the results in Table 6, the indirect effect of psychological safety on silence with the mediation of silence is investigated. The beta coefficients obtained in the model were 0.53 and -0.30 for the effect of psychological safety on happiness and the effect of happiness on behaviour, respectively. By multiplying these two paths, it is specified that psychological safety with a beta coefficient of -0.16 ($0.53 \times -0.30 = 0.16$) affects employees' silence with the mediation of happiness. The t-values obtained were 5.13 and -3.73. Given that the t-values are higher than 1.96, the results are significant, and the research hypothesis is confirmed.

Table 6. Direct and indirect path coefficient of psychological safety

Paths studied in the model	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effect	Sig. value
Psychological safety → Silence	-0.61	-0.16	-0.77	-6.84
Psychological safety → Happiness	0.53	**	0.39	5.13
Happiness → Silence	-0.30	**	-0.42	-3.73

Conclusion

Educational environments are particularly important due to their role in individual and social development, so organisational researchers and psychologists are interested in them. An essential task in managing educational institutes is to provide psychological safety in educational environments. The psychological safety level in educational environments, besides having an influential role in organisational performance and satisfaction of all educational beneficiaries, is one of the most critical factors that guarantee the effectiveness of educational processes that reduce individuals' psychological stress in intellectual activities and increase participation, sense of belonging, self-confidence, and mental health at work (Baeva & Bordovskaia, 2015). Therefore, studying psychological safety in educational environments as a psychological fact has a significant role in positive individual and social development. The results of investigating the present research on the role of psychological safety on the silence of public school employees (administrative employees and teachers) in Tehran with the mediation of happiness showed that psychological safety has an effect of -0.61 and 0.53 on silence and happiness, respectively. Also, the effect of happiness on silence was -0.30, and the effect of psychological safety on silence with the mediating role of happiness was -0.77 (indirect effects equal to -0.16). In explaining the results, it would be stated that organisational studies indicate that in organisations with high psychological safety, there is higher procedural justice, supervisor support, and reward because they care about the welfare of the employees. Therefore, individuals in these organisations interact with each other more and more comfortably, and a lack of fear of threat or rejection creates happiness in employees and makes them enjoy the work environment. In this situation, employees desire to stay in the work environment, act effectively and creatively, and dare to express their ideas and work issues. Expressing opinions means respecting people and their issues would cause job commitment (Dollard & Bakker, 2010), group learning (Edmondson, 2019), and consequently the productivity of time (through a reduction in time of joint review) (Bstieler & Hemmert, 2009), free exchange of information about work and facilitating coordination, learning, and progress of team goals (Schulte et al., 2012), preventing mistakes of work team (Post, 2012). Therefore, in this situation, having employees with more happiness at work is not inaccessible.

The present study's results align with the study of Khaljian et al. (2017). They concluded that there is a relationship between secure-base leadership and psychological safety and employee happiness; Aboramdan et al. (2022) also concluded that the relationship between the emotional culture of joy and happiness at work

is mediated by relational attachment and psychological safety. The findings of Abdilllah et al. (2022) in which they concluded that happiness at work mediates the relationship between authentic leadership and the silence behaviour of subordinates align with the present study's findings.

People oriented toward optimism and happiness evaluate their skills better, remember positive events more than negative ones, and act better in decision-making. Therefore, people who see their work environment as safe for participation and expressing their ideas and thoughts would have a positive feeling about themselves and their work, which reduces their tendency not to share ideas, opinions, information, and, generally, isolation and silence. Therefore, managers of organisations, especially educational ones, by providing psychologically safe environments for the participation of employees and expressing their ideas and issues can be effective in their positive feelings and satisfaction with work and witness less withdrawnness and silence in their employees. However, this requires paying attention to the complicated organisational context and considering multiple factors affecting the creation of psychological safety at the organisational level, including interactive communications and organisational norms, existence or lack of conflict, and incompatibility in situations such as rewards, values, and evaluation systems. Therefore, managers can use employees' ideas and new solutions for solving organisational problems to improve their psychological safety, but they should not insist on using cliché solutions. In other words, just receiving ideas is not important, but providing a basis for actualising employees' ideas is essential. Thereby, they would succeed in providing occupational and psychological safety for employees, especially the creative and innovative ones. They should also support employees' failures when using new solutions and avoid controlling and monitoring their activities directly. They should encourage employees to share their beliefs on work with others even if they are opposite of others'.

Implications of the Findings

This study was conducted to investigate the mediating role of happiness in the relationship between psychological safety and the silence behaviour of teachers. The findings showed that happiness significantly mediates the relationship between psychological safety and silence behaviour. Therefore, it could be said that the happier the educational environment in which the teachers are working, the less silent the teachers are, and the teachers can easily raise their issues and problems as well as educational problems with the principal. These results would

be useful in the education system because in selecting school principals, attention is paid to the principal's ability to create a happy educational atmosphere. Also, considering that psychological safety had a significant effect on teachers' silent behaviour; it can be said that creating psychological safety leads to the creation of a happy environment, which in addition to creating a pleasant atmosphere for teachers, causes the person not to be under more job pressures and the silent behaviour is reduced to its minimum.

Limitations

This study has limitations, such as the fact that it was conducted cross-sectionally, and it is necessary to conduct longitudinal research in this field to increase the generalizability of the results. Also, considering that the research used a questionnaire, it is suggested that in future studies, other methods of data collection, including interviews and observation, should be used. Also, in this research, moderating and intervening variables are not considered, and future researchers must enter more variables into the model in their studies and then examine the model's fit.

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