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# The relationship of competitiveness motive on people's happiness through education

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## ABSTRACT

This paper applied data from 32 countries to find out the relationship between competitiveness motive and happiness, and results showed that competitiveness motive negatively predicted happiness through public education expenditure. Public education expenditure was found to have a mediation effect between competitiveness motive and happiness. Different variables were used, such as happiness score of 2000–2008, public health expenditure as percentage of GDP in 2001 and 2004, public education expenditure as percentage of GDP in 2001 and 2004, and competitiveness motive score. Overall, countries with high competitiveness motive had low public expenditure on education and thus countries had low happiness scores.

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## 1. Introduction

The competitiveness motive has been a topic of research for decades. People who score high on this variable are known as other-referenced people; that is, they are motivated by social comparison. They aim mainly to demonstrate superior capacity and want to show their competence by doing better than others (Van de Vliert & Janssen, 2002). The competitiveness motive is defined as “the drive to win against others and obtain some form of dominance over them through winning” (Lynn, p. 60). On the Spence–Helmreich scale, the items on competitiveness measure motivation to do better than others. People with a strong competitiveness motive have an external locus of perceived control and causality and thus lower levels of intrinsic interest in and satisfaction with tasks (Duda, 1992; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). These people exhibit competitiveness, which involves pitting oneself against competitors, and enjoy interpersonal competition (Spence & Helmreich, 1983). Franken and Brown (1992) explained that for people who are competitive, competitive situations could be a source of motivation, and these situations provide such people with information about what is an acceptable or high level of performance. Interestingly, competitiveness is one of the major motivations of entrepreneurs (Maurer et al., 1994).

The competitiveness motive is associated with achievement, as competitiveness is a motivator for work effort. For example, in their study of college students, Harackiewicz, Barron, Carter, Lehto, and Elliot (1997) found that the competitiveness motive had a positive effect on graded performance because people with a competitiveness motive worked hard to ensure that they received a good grade, although they may have had a more superficial understanding of the material. In terms of career, students who score high on the competitiveness motive are able to get higher pay and have better prospects for promotion. It is also believed that the competitiveness motive is associated with positive motivational qualities and can lead to creativity (Franken & Brown, 1992).

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Kirkcaldy and Furnham (1993) found that monetary success was positively related to competitiveness because people with higher other-referenced performance motives will boost investments to show that they are better than others. The competitiveness motive is found to be a significant factor for economic growth across countries (Lynn, 1991). Furnham, Kirkcaldy, and Lynn's study (1996) showed that the competitiveness motive was positively correlated with GDP across 42 countries. Based on the above research, competitiveness motive is positively related to economic growth since money is spent on areas related to economic development, such as research and development (Varsakelis, 2001). When this type of expenditure is encouraged to boost the competitiveness of the economy, expenditure on public services may be lower, and thus people's happiness may decrease.

Some studies have found that competitiveness motive is negatively associated with satisfaction. For example, Van de Vliert and Janssen (2002) found that the competitiveness motive is negatively correlated with life satisfaction and well-being. Diener and Biswas-Diener (2002) also found that highly competitive people had less time for leisure and socializing and thus a decreased sense of well-being. Very often, people's happiness is related to their satisfaction and well-being levels (Blanchflower & Oswald, 2002). Overall, based on the above studies, the following hypotheses are developed.

**H1.** Countries with high competitiveness motive scores will spend lower percentages of their GDP on public services, such as public health and education expenditures as percentage of their GDP.

**H2.** Countries with high competitiveness motive scores will have lower scores on happiness

**H3.** Countries that spend lower percentages of their GDP on public services, such as public health and education expenditures as percentage of their GDP, will have lower scores on happiness.

Furthermore, this study wants to make a contribution in testing if public health or education expenditure as percentage of their GDP has any mediation effect between competitiveness motive and happiness. Therefore, the following hypothesis is developed.

**H4.** Public health or education expenditure as percentage of their GDP has a mediation effect between competitiveness motive and happiness across countries

## 2. Method

Three data sets were applied and there were six variables in this study, namely competitiveness motive, public health and education expenditures as percentage of GDP in 2001 and 2004, and happiness 2000–2008. First of all, the dataset for the competitiveness motive was taken from Lynn's study (1991). The data for competitiveness motive was collected in the late 1980s from over 14,000 young people across 43 countries. Participants were asked to answer validated questionnaires related to their competitiveness motive (Furnham et al., 1996). As mentioned earlier, competitiveness motive was measured by five items from the Spence and Helmreich Competitiveness Scale, and each item was scored on a strongly agree to strongly disagree scale (Lynn, 1991).

Public health and education expenditures as percentage of GDP in 2001 and 2004 were included for analysis using data taken from the World Bank (2009a,b). We chose these years because many countries did not have data of 2005 and onwards while this paper was written. According to the World Development Indicators (World Bank, 2004), public expenditure on education as percentage of GDP indicates the public spending based on percentage of GDP on public education plus subsidies to private education at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. For public health expenditure as percentage of GDP, it consists of recurrent and capital spending from government budgets, external borrowings and grants, and social health insurance funds based on percentage of GDP (World Bank, 2004). Data collected by World Bank was widely used in research, and more than 150 countries around the world, with populations of more than 1 million, were included for data collection.

The happiness dataset of this study was taken from the World Database of Happiness (Veenhoven, 2009) which includes the average happiness scores of 145 nations for the period of 2000–2008. Unfortunately, the World Database of Happiness did not include happiness scores of specific years. Therefore, since the years of 2001 and 2004 of public expenditure as percentage of GDP on health and education were included in this study, countries' average happiness scores for the period 2000–2008 was applied. According to the World Database of Happiness, happiness is defined by the degree of the overall subjective enjoyment of one's life. The method of questioning was mainly applied to measure happiness and the questions were classified by two ways, and they were focus (the kind of happiness addressed) and timeframe (the period considered). All assessments of happiness were scored by numerical scales of 1–10. Similar to the dataset of competitiveness motive, participants of the happiness database were also young people. The World Database of Happiness (2009) also suggested that the average happiness in nations was a valid indicator of the livability of these nations by using different statistical tests for checking the validity, such as the global tests for concurrent and congruent validity. Items included in measuring happiness across nations are available at the World Database of Happiness (Veenhoven, 2009).

The data of 32 countries, which were collected from the three datasets, are presented in Table 1. In fact, the idea of combining different datasets for this study was taken by the study of Van de Vliert and Janssen (2002) in which they applied Lynn's data on mastery and competitiveness motives to predict work satisfaction, life satisfaction and subjective well-being taken from the Human Development Index across 42 nations. This study is trying to make a contribution in finding out how competitiveness motive is able to predict other factors, such as public expenditures on health and education as percentage of GDP, and how those factors can predict the happiness of people across countries.

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