


## Drawing a Picture of Happiness: Examining the Emotional World of Students with Learning Disabilities

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**Abstract:** Students with learning disabilities experience difficulties in their emotional development. How these students express their emotional characteristics and feelings is a topic that needs to be focused on to understand them. This research aims to examine the perception of happiness among students with learning disabilities through picture analysis. The criterion sampling method was used to form the study group, which preferred the phenomenological design. Thirty students with learning disabilities who met the predetermined criteria participated in the research. Research data were collected from pictures drawn by students with learning disabilities, semi-structured interview forms, and the researcher's diary. The data obtained were analyzed using content analysis. According to the research findings, it was observed that drawings depicting the happiness perceptions of students with learning disabilities contained a high density of human figures and they drew themselves most often. However, using mother and father figures also showed that happiness was associated with family members. Students with learning disabilities drew symbols representing happiness, such as smiling faces, smiling suns, and hearts. However, it was found that among the drawings, they also depicted symbols reflecting emotions other than happiness, such as crying houses and sad suns. They expressed happiness through activities such as birthday parties and going to the park with their parents.

**Keyword:** Learning Disabilities

### Introduction

Learning disabilities (LDs) are disorders directly related to brain function and the central nervous system, manifesting themselves in learning processes or school-based problems (Orim, 2023). They are characterized by difficulties in one or more fundamental psychological processes associated with understanding and using the written and spoken forms of language, regardless of age, intelligence level, and educational background (Kring et al., 2015). Students with LDs experience difficulties not only in basic academic skills such as reading, writing, and mathematics (Fletcher et al., 2018), but also in social and emotional areas (Bek & Şen, 2015). A review of the relevant literature reveals that studies conducted with students with LDs generally focus on academic skills. For example, research has been conducted on developing fluent reading (Balcı, 2019; Baran & Karabulut, 2024; Yıldırım Doğru et al., 2022) and reading comprehension skills of students with LDs (Deniz & Aslan, 2020; Uçar Rasmussen & Cora İnce, 2017). However, it is important point out that insufficient attention is paid to issues such as these students' emotional characteristics and ways of expressing their feelings. Various concepts are examined through drawings that can be described as expressions of emotional states, and although not very common in the field of special education, some studies exist (e.g., Çetin & Tortop, 2019; Öğülmüş & İnce, 2025; Tabak, 2018). These studies focus on school, family, and teacher drawings, focusing on concepts related to the academic lives of students with LDs. Therefore, it is thought that examining the emotional states of them, based on their drawings, particularly in the context of the theme of happiness, such as their perception of happiness and people and activities that make them happy, will contribute to the literature by providing insight into the emotional world of these students.

Primary school is an important stage in which the foundations of both academic and emotional development are set for students (Sarıca Bulut, 2024). Students with LDs experience many negative emotions such as a lack of self-confidence, low self-esteem, and loneliness, along with academic failure. Considering that they may have difficulty expressing these feelings verbally or may be reluctant to do so, drawing pictures can be seen to shed light on their inner state. Pictures reflect many emotions such as, happiness, anxiety, and affection. Happiness is the first emotion experienced among others (Kılıç Tülü & Ergül, 2016). This research will provide a holistic perspective on understanding the emotional states of these students in relation to the theme of happiness.

### ***Emotional Characteristics of Students with LDs***

Emotions are of critical importance in academic achievement, particularly because they affect every aspect of cognition in all areas of life (Tyng et al., 2017). Whether learning is easy or difficult, or whether the student's performance is related to emotions, it also suggests that emotions play a role in the learning process. Emotions are more important when it comes to students with LDs (Polychroni et al., 2013). The reason for this is that these students often encounter emotional difficulties (Bryan et al., 2004; Polak & Grossman, 2024). Although the difficulties experienced by them in academic skills and their cognitive limitations are frequently mentioned in the relevant literature, emotional characteristics emerge as a secondary aspect. For example, these students are known to have difficulties expressing their emotions. They also struggle to understand the emotions of others (Petti et al., 2003).

Özen (2011) states that students with LDs intensely experience negative emotions, such as fear, anxiety, exclusion, and aggression. They often experience these feelings due to difficulties in verbal communication, which negatively affects peer relationships and teacher-student interaction (Carawan et al., 2015). Constantly experiencing failure leads to a diminished hope of achieving success in the future, causing anxiety, giving up, and passivity (Ercan, 2001). They experience anxiety, depression, loneliness, and low self-esteem (Zwicker et al., 2018). Research indicates that students with LDs experience greater anxiety than their peers (Nelson & Harwood, 2011). Anger, jealousy, disappointment, shame (Polychroni et al., 2013), hopelessness (Lackaye & Margalit, 2006), depression (Sideridis, 2007), low self-esteem (Hendren et al., 2018; Marinelli et al., 2016), fear (Miles, 1996), and stress are felt (Haft et al., 2023). Students with LDs may experience negative emotions more frequently due to negative school life and social relationships. There is a limitation in terms of what these students perceive as happiness among positive emotions.

### ***Expressing Emotions through Pictures***

Drawing is defined as a tool that enables the non-verbal expression of emotions and thoughts (Drake, 2021). Much more powerful than the ability to express oneself with words, pictures are a means of expression, narration and reflection that reveal a child's perception of their surroundings and human relationships (Arslan Cansever, 2017). They reflect their imaginary world onto paper using colours and lines (Fox & Schirmacher, 2014). In a sense, children expect to be understood by expressing their thoughts in a concrete way through their drawings (Drake, 2023).

Drawing ability develops with age (Jolley, 2010). Children begin drawing scribbles around the age of one and a half, but figures are clearly defined and reach a meaningful form by the age of seven (Yıldız & Esen Çoban, 2019). During this age, known as the schematic period, exaggerated facial expressions or colours are not present in the

drawings. Their emotional expressive power diminishes, since drawings focus on reflecting reality (Winner & Drake, 2022). When human figures are examined, children draw people with whom they have a close relationship or who play an important role in their lives, or family members (Arıcı, 2006). They use their own unique human schema. In one drawing, children may have drawn the human figure with the head from the side and the body from the front, while in another drawing, they may have drawn the entire figure from the front or with the head fully from the side (Güven, 2018). Human figure proportions are close to reality (Özsarı & Aytar, 2019). These figures include details such as head, body, arms, legs, eyes, nose, mouth, neck, and hair, but the eyes are depicted with a different style from the nose, and the nose is depicted with a different style from the mouth (Yavuzer, 2023). Children may exaggerate the body parts they consider important in their drawings, while completely omitting those they deem insignificant (Yıldız, 2023). They drew bodies as rectangles, triangles, squares, or irregular shapes; instead of drawing the body, they drew the clothing directly (Yavuzer, 2023). Details such as clothing buttons and embellishments are present (Yıldız, 2023). Regarding the spatial schema, children have now begun to use the ground line and skyline (Yavuzer, 2023). They draw the ground line at the bottom of the paper and the skyline at the top, positioning the other elements of the picture above the ground line (Oğuz Sarıalp, 2016). Every object in the picture is related to each other (Dilci, 2014). Colour choices are consistent with the appearance of objects in real life (Samsun & Güven, 2022). For example, a tree's trunk can be painted brown and its crown green (Summary, 2022). In most pictures, the sun is represented by yellow, whereas clouds and the sky are blue (Nalinci et al., 2023).

Pictures can be considered important tools for gaining information about children. Children reflect themselves in every picture they draw (Cherney et al., 2006). The difficulties students with LDs experience in verbal communication often make it hard to understand their emotional state. Drawing pictures and talking about them can be an effective way for them to express themselves and for their feelings to be understood. Furthermore, it is essential to listen to what the children want to express through their drawings and to talk to them (Rodari, 2007). It is thought that this research, which will offer a perspective on understanding their emotional world based on how they perceive happiness, will contribute to the literature in this field. This research aims to examine the perceptions of happiness in the pictures of students with LDs.

## **Method**

### ***Research Model***

The phenomenological design was preferred to examine students with LDs happiness perceptions through picture analysis in this research. Phenomenology is defined as a research model that focuses on understanding individuals' current perceptions, knowledge, and behaviors regarding a phenomenon and assumes that everyone has their own views on the phenomenon (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). In phenomenological research, individuals or groups who experience the phenomenon being studied and who can reflect on this phenomenon constitute the data sources (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). Definite and generalizable results may not be possible to establish in this type of research (Büyüköztürk et al., 2015).

### ***Study Group***

Criterion sampling, one of the purposive sampling methods, was used to determine the students with LDs who participated in this research. This method constitutes observation units consisting of individuals, events, objects, or situations possessing certain

characteristics (Büyükoztürk et al., 2015). The criteria sought in participants may be predetermined or determined by the researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Students with LDs who participated in the study met the following criteria: a) having a LD diagnosis, b) attending primary school, c) being able to answer questions about their drawings, e) volunteering to participate in the study. Thirty students meeting these criteria participated in the research. Demographic information about them was provided in Table 1.

**Table 1.**  
Demographic information of students with LDs

|               |                            | f  |
|---------------|----------------------------|----|
| Gender        | Girl                       | 20 |
|               | Boy                        | 10 |
| Age           | 7                          | 3  |
|               | 8                          | 18 |
|               | 9                          | 6  |
|               | 10                         | 3  |
| Grade level   | 1                          | 2  |
|               | 2                          | 18 |
|               | 3                          | 1  |
|               | 4                          | 9  |
| Family status | Mother and father together | 14 |
|               | Separated parents          | 16 |

Table 1 shows that two-thirds ( $f=20$ ) of the students with LDs were girls, while one-third ( $f=10$ ) were boys. More than half ( $f=18$ ) of them were in the second grade and 8 years old. In terms of family status, 16 of these students had separated parents, while 14 had parents who were still together.

### **Data Collection Tool**

A semi-structured interview form was used to collect the research data. The researchers prepared an interview protocol consisting of questions they planned to ask prior to the semi-structured interview, but they could continue the interview with follow-up questions depending on the flow of the conversation (Sert et al., 2023). There were two sections in the interview form developed for this research. The first section provided demographic information about the students LDs, while the second section contained questions aimed at determining their perception of happiness. Relevant literature was examined in the context of picture analysis and student's drawings for the preparation of the interview form. A semi-structured interview form was developed to obtain in-depth information about the students with LDs drawings, which was utilized.

The researcher's diary is another data collection tool. It enables the reflection of the application process and consists of notes taken by the researcher in their own words (Mills, 2007). As part of the research, the researcher observed students with LDs drawing pictures and took notes.

### **Data Collection Process**

This research was approved by the Social and Humanities Research Ethics Committee of Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University and conducted in accordance with ethical rules and guidelines (Committee approval number 13.26). Students with LDs who would participate in the study were identified by contacting Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers. A work schedule was created whereby sessions could be held after classes, with the days and times when students came to the institutions being determined. Before data collection, families were informed about the purpose and scope of the research and their consent was obtained. The researcher participated in training on child picture analysis and obtained a certificate.

In accordance with the schedule established for the collection of research data, a room suitable for individual practice was designated in Special Education and Rehabilitation Centres. Paper, pencils, erasers, and a set of twelve colored pencils were prepared for the students with LDs who were drawing. They were given the directions: *“Think about the moment when you felt happiest. I wanted you to describe this with a picture. You could use the materials on the table however you liked.”* Each student had 40 minutes to draw their pictures. While they were drawing, the researcher also noted her observations regarding the drawing process. After they had completed their drawings, the researcher asked them questions about the people in the pictures, the activities that made them happy, and the places they were in, to obtain detailed information about the pictures and interpret them correctly. Their answers were noted down by the researcher.

## Data Analysis

Content analysis was used in the analysis of the pictures drawn by students with LDs. Content analysis is defined as a systematic and repeatable method whereby certain words in a text are summarized into smaller content categories through coding within a specific set of rules (Büyüköztürk et al., 2015).

The participants' numbers were used in the pictures drawn by the students with LDs, without including any personal information. In this regard, the researcher first sorted these drawings according to participant numbers. Then, she examined them in detail and created codes. The codes created encompass various elements such as activities that made students happy, people they were happy with, colors, places, drawing characteristics, figures, and emotional states. After the coding was completed, similar codes were grouped together to create themes. Themes were created by considering the recurring details in the drawings of students with LDs. These themes were presented in tables. Findings were substantiated by selecting examples from the drawings of students with LDs, and themes were explained based on them. The researcher's observation notes taken during the application period and data obtained from interviews with students were also used in interpreting research findings.

The reliability of the research was ensured as follows: The researcher coded the pictures and created a coding list. The list created was submitted to two experts in picture analysis and special education for their opinion, requesting an assessment of the suitability of the codes and themes. Inter-coder reliability was calculated as .90. Each student was assigned a participant number, ensuring that each student's picture was interpreted solely based on the data. The findings obtained from the research were presented alongside examples of drawings for each theme.

## Findings

The themes, sub-themes and codes obtained from the pictures drawn by students with LDs to reveal their perceptions of happiness are presented in tables.

**Table 2.**  
Figures in the happiness-themed pictures of students with LDs

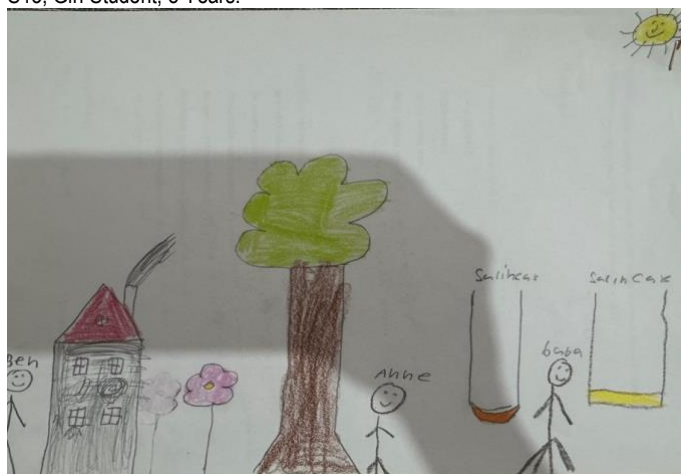
| Theme   | Sub-themes     | Codes           | f  |
|---------|----------------|-----------------|----|
| Figures | Human figures  | Mother          | 15 |
|         |                | Father          | 11 |
|         |                | Himself/herself | 18 |
|         |                | Friends         | 5  |
|         |                | Sibling         | 6  |
|         |                | Other           | 7  |
|         | Animal figures | Fish            | 3  |
|         |                | Butterfly       | 2  |

The figures depicted in the drawings created by students with LDs relating to a happy moment were analyzed under the sub-themes of human and animal figures. Human figures were more frequently depicted in their drawings. When examining the setting of human figures, it was worth noting that certain drawings represented the concept of family. Students with LDs drew themselves in 18 of these drawings. Mother and father figures also appeared frequently, while siblings were depicted in six of the drawings. However, there were fewer pictures including friends and other individuals from the social environment (such as an ice cream vendor, teacher, etc.). Based on the pictures of them, it was clear that family relationships and family members were important.

Fish and butterfly figures were included in the animal figure's theme. Students with LDs drew animal figures in five pictures.

**Figure 1.**

S13; Girl Student, 8 Years.



S13: An 8-year-old girl student drew her mother, father, and herself in her picture. Upon examining the human figures, it was observed that there were no detailed drawings, and they were depicted as stick figures. She might have drawn her family to express feelings of happiness. The smiling faces of the figures indicated a happy family. She expressed her views as follows: *"My mum would push me on the swing. I felt happy."* During the drawing process, the researcher observed that she was fully focused on drawing and enjoyed it.

**Table 3.**

Emotional state in the happiness-themed pictures of students with LDs

|                 | Sub-themes         | Codes               | f  |
|-----------------|--------------------|---------------------|----|
| Theme           | Facial expressions | Smiling face        | 21 |
|                 |                    | Unexpressed emotion | 9  |
|                 |                    | Fear                | 1  |
|                 |                    | Sad                 | 1  |
| Emotional state | Symbols            | Shining sun         | 6  |
|                 |                    | Heart               | 9  |
|                 |                    | Smiling mountain    | 1  |
|                 |                    | Smiling cloud       | 2  |
|                 |                    | Star                | 2  |
|                 |                    | Sad sun             | 2  |
|                 |                    | Roofless house      | 1  |
|                 |                    | Weeping house       | 1  |

The emotional states in the pictures of students with LDs were examined under two sub-themes: facial expressions and symbols. Facial expressions appeared to be the most frequently used means of expression for them to convey their emotions. Smiling faces were drawn in 21 of the pictures, and they emphasized feelings of happiness. Although

the research directed participants to draw pictures that made them happy, two pictures depicted negative emotions such as fear and sadness. They represented unspoken emotions using lines and undrawn mouth shapes in 9 pictures.

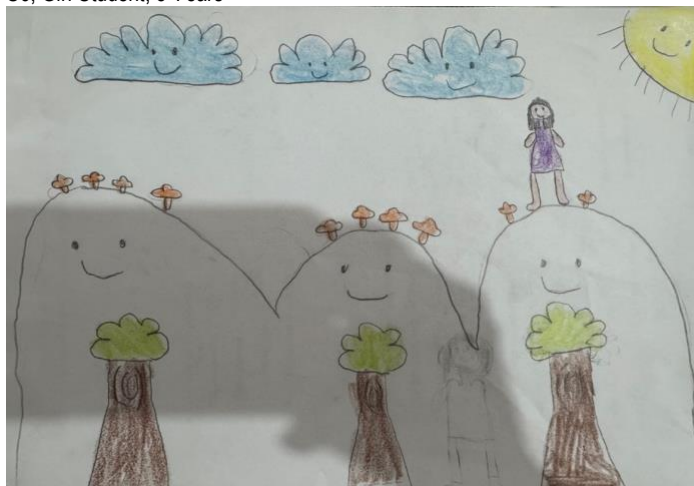
**Figure 2.**  
S15; Girl Student, 7 Years



S15: In this picture belonging to a 7-year-old girl student, the facial expressions of the human figures were drawn with smiling faces that could be associated with happiness. She drew her family, but the father figure was not included in the drawing. During the interview, the researcher was informed that her father was in another city for work and that she had drawn a picture of a time when she went to see him with her siblings. S15: *"We were going to my father's. We were waiting for the helicopter. I was happy."* The researcher noticed that she was humming a song and seemed happy while drawing.

Students with LDs illustrated more happiness symbols in the symbols theme. They were depicted expressing their emotional states through symbols such as a smiling sun, a heart, a smiling mountain, a smiling cloud, and a star. However, symbols evoking negative emotions, such as a sad sun, a roofless house, and a crying house, were used in four pictures.

**Figure 3.**  
S6; Girl Student; 8 Years



S6: This picture depicted a happy moment for an 8-year-old girl, with symbols of smiling sun, smiling clouds, and smiling mountains reflecting her happiness. Human figure also

had a happy facial expression. She explained her thought as follows: *“I was picking flowers in my mother’s village. The mountains and clouds were smiling at me.”* The researcher observed that she drew her picture in a planned and systematic manner and appeared to be happy.

**Table 4.**

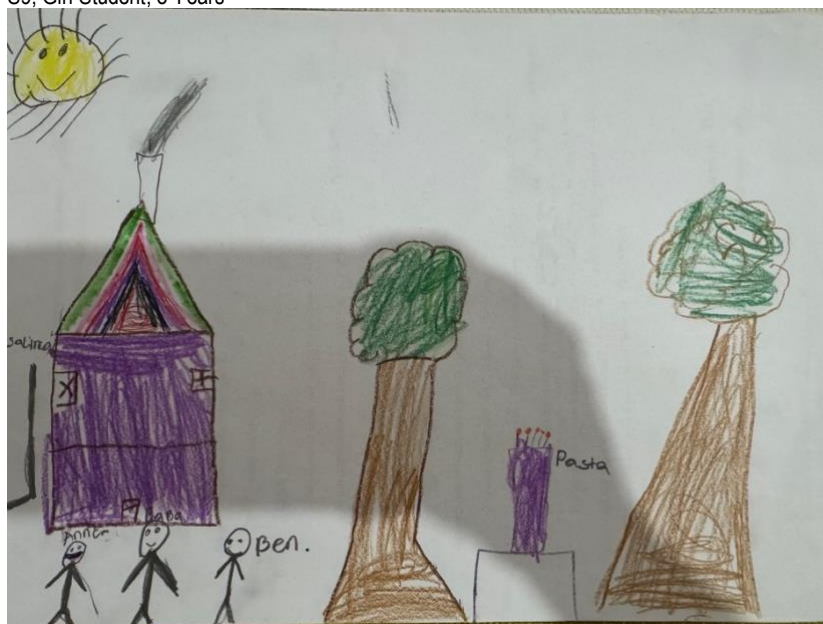
People who are happy together: Happiness-themed pictures of students with LDs

| Theme                         | Sub-themes         | Codes                 | f |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|---|
| People who are happy together | Family members     | Mother                | 5 |
|                               |                    | Mother-father         | 9 |
|                               |                    | Mother-father-sibling | 2 |
|                               |                    | Father                | 1 |
|                               |                    | Sibling               | 4 |
|                               | Individuality      | Himself/herself       | 2 |
|                               | Social environment | Friend                | 5 |
|                               |                    | Aunt                  | 1 |
|                               |                    | Other                 | 4 |

The theme of happy people in the pictures of students with LDs during moments of happiness was examined under the sub-themes of family members, individuality, and social environment. Their pictures indicate that they were happiest when they were with their family. Within the sub-theme of family members, drawings depicting a mother and father together stand out. Being together with them was represented as a source of happiness.

**Figure 4.**

S9; Girl Student; 8 Years



S9: In this picture of an 8-year-old girl, she was happy to be with her mother and father. The human figures drawn as stick figures were depicted as happy with smiling faces. She used the phrase in this picture of a birthday party, *“My mum and dad were buying a cake. They were putting it on the table. I was watching the cake.”* The figures were positioned close to each other. During the drawing, the researcher observed that she was quite excited and requested that music be played.

Individuals such as friends, aunts, ice cream vendors, and teachers who were important parts of their lives as students with LDs were highlighted in the social environment theme.

**Figure 5.**

S11; Girl Student; 8 Years



S11: An 8-year-old girl did not draw herself or her family in her picture, even though she appeared happy in it. This situation might indicate that the teacher played an important role in her life. She said: *"My teacher was getting married. I was very happy. My teacher was important to me."* Additionally, the researcher observed that she drew while listening to music and dancing.

Two of the drawings in the sub-theme of individuality, students with LDs drew only themselves. Although these pictures were made in the context of happiness, in four of the pictures, some of the figures represented negative emotions.

**Figure 6.**

S22; Girl Student; 8 Years



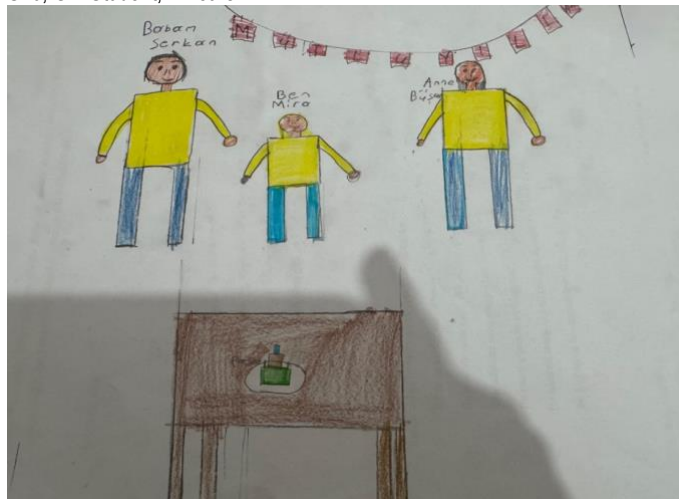
S22: In this picture drawn by an 8-year-old girl, human figures were represented as stick figures. Some figures' mouths were not drawn, while the others' mouths were drawn as a straight line, which could be interpreted as ambiguity. Getting or eating ice cream could generally be considered a happy activity for this age group. However, this picture depicted more negative emotions. S22 said, *"Her father bought the child ice cream, and her brother got angry. The ice cream was on the floor."* The researcher's observation was that she drew the picture with clenched fists, swinging legs, and sighing.

**Table 5.**  
Activities that bring happiness in pictures by students with LDs on the theme of happiness

| Theme                           | Sub-themes              | Codes                   | f |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|---|
| Activities that bring happiness | Family activities       | Mum buying balloons     | 1 |
|                                 |                         | Going to the park       | 3 |
|                                 |                         | Boarding the helicopter | 1 |
|                                 |                         | Visiting                | 1 |
|                                 |                         | Going to the hammam     | 1 |
|                                 |                         | Getting an ice cream    | 1 |
|                                 |                         | Watching films          | 1 |
|                                 |                         | Staying together        | 1 |
|                                 |                         | Birthday celebration    | 2 |
|                                 |                         | Going out together      | 1 |
|                                 | Activities with friends | Playing games           | 2 |
|                                 |                         | Playing a match         | 1 |
|                                 |                         | Dancing                 | 1 |
|                                 |                         | Going to school         | 1 |
|                                 | Outdoor activities      | Planting flowers        | 1 |
|                                 |                         | Fishing                 | 2 |
|                                 |                         | Picking flowers         | 2 |
|                                 |                         | Giving flowers to mum   | 1 |
|                                 | Unspecified activities  | No activity             | 5 |
|                                 |                         |                         |   |
|                                 | Other activities        | Going to the wedding    | 1 |

The pictures of students with LDs on the theme of activities that bring happiness were addressed under the sub-themes of activities with family, activities with friends, activities in nature, unspecified activities, and other activities. Family activities were found to be the most enjoyable for them. Among these activities, going to the park and celebrating birthdays were depicted most often.

**Figure 7.**  
S10; Girl Student; 7 Years



S10: A 7-year-old girl expressed her happiness through a drawing of her birthday party. This picture showed mother and father figures with smiling faces that conveyed a sense of happiness. They were drawn close to each other. She explained her picture as follows: *"We celebrated my birthday. I felt my memories and I was happy."* The researcher observed that she was happy while drawing.

Activities with friends and outdoor activities were equally important and a priority for students with LDs. Among activities with friends, playing games was the most popular activity, while among outdoor activities, fishing and flower picking were most often.

An important finding of the research was that the pictures of students with LDs lacked a subject or theme and did not depict any happy activities. The rate of drawings addressed in the sub-theme of unspecified activities was very close to activities carried out with friends and outdoors. It could be said that students with LDs experienced more neutral or negative emotions than moments of happiness. Furthermore, in pictures with no thematic pattern, it was vital to observe that parents of students with LDs were separated.

Figure 8.  
S25; Girl Student; 8 Years



S25: This picture, belonging to an 8-year-old girl student, lacked a specific subject and a moment of happiness. The positioning of the figures was interesting. For example, the cloud and the house were aligned, the houses were above, and the human figures were not fully drawn and were on the ground. Some figures, however, were not entirely clear. After interviewing her, the researcher concluded that she drew her mother, father, and herself. She described her father's job in her picture. S25: *“Construction was underway. Houses were being demolished. My father built houses and earns money.”* During drawing, she persistently wanted to close the classroom door and was swinging her legs.

Table 6.  
Colours in the happiness-themed pictures of students with LDs

| Theme   | Sub-themes      | Codes  | f  |
|---------|-----------------|--------|----|
| Colours | Warm colours    | Brown  | 12 |
|         |                 | Yellow | 25 |
|         |                 | Orange | 12 |
|         |                 | Red    | 14 |
|         |                 | Pink   | 15 |
|         | Cool colours    | Blue   | 25 |
|         |                 | Purple | 11 |
|         |                 | Green  | 22 |
|         | Neutral colours | Noir   | 18 |

In the pictures reflecting the happiness perceptions of students with LDs, it could be seen that the colour theme consisted of three sub-themes: warm colours, cool colours, and neutral colours. They used warm colours most frequently in their pictures. Among the warm colours, yellow was the most popular choice. Orange, red, brown, and pink were among the other colours used. This research's findings indicated that as warm colours reflected positive emotions, students with LDs focused on positive feelings and happiness when drawing a happy moment.

Students with LDs were observed to use blue the most in the cool colours theme. One of the noteworthy points of the research was that the frequency of preference for blue was the same as that for yellow. This situation could be explained by the fact that students with LDs included sun and cloud figures in their drawings.

**Figure 9.**  
S1; Girl Student; 7 Years



S1: A 7-year-old girl depicted herself, her mother, and friends in her drawing. She pictured them going to the park. The facial expressions of human figures reflected happiness. However, the blue clouds and the yellow sun, which could be associated with positive emotions such as happiness, were drawn. It was generally known that in pictures, the sun was depicted as yellow and the clouds as blue. S1: *“They were waiting to swing on the swing. My mum would swing me too.”* The researcher observed that she was happy and excited during the drawing process.

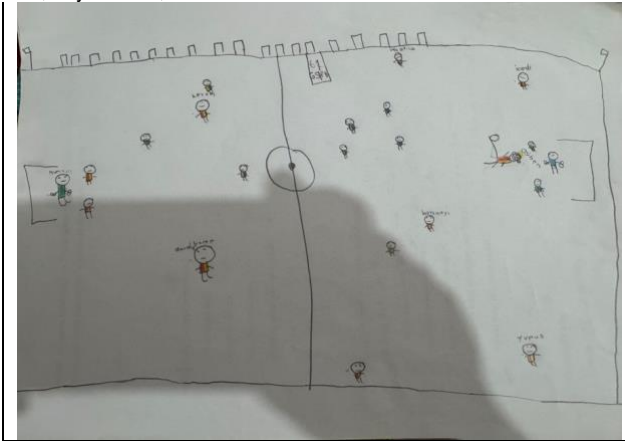
In the neutral colors theme, students with LDs used only black.

**Table 7.**  
The spaces in the happiness-themed pictures of students with LDs

| Theme | Sub-themes        | Codes          | f  |
|-------|-------------------|----------------|----|
| Space | Home indoor       | Home           | 11 |
|       |                   | Room           | 1  |
|       | Outdoor space     | Park           | 3  |
|       |                   | Garden         | 1  |
|       |                   | Football pitch | 1  |
|       |                   | School         | 2  |
|       |                   | Open space     | 4  |
|       |                   | Hamam          | 1  |
|       | Nature            | Seaside        | 2  |
|       |                   | Mountain       | 2  |
|       | Unspecified space | No place       | 5  |

When examining the theme of space, it could be seen that students with LDs drawings contained four sub-themes: home indoor, outdoor space, nature, and unspecified space. They expressed their happy moments by drawing their homes, including both indoor and outdoor spaces. Also, indoor and outdoor spaces were equally represented. Students with LDs might have drawn spatial figures in the context of family and social relationships.

**Figure 10.**  
S4; Boy Student; 9 Years



S4: A 9-year-old boy drew a football pitch, which was an outdoor location. He and the footballers were depicted in the picture. The human figures were drawn quite small. S4 said, *"We played the match. We would win the cup."* He drew a picture while keeping rhythm according to the researchers' observations.

In 5 of the pictures drawn by students with LDs, there was no detail related to the spatial environment. It could be said that the pictures did not focus on a specific moment. The nature theme featured drawings of the seaside and mountains.

**Table 8.**  
Figure drawing in the happiness-themed pictures of students with LDs

| Theme           | Sub-themes                                | Codes                                 | f  |
|-----------------|---|---------------------------------------|----|
| Figure drawings | Drawing characteristics of human figures  | Incomplete limbs                      | 24 |
|                 |   | Extremely long arms                   | 1  |
|                 |   | Line-shaped arm-leg                   | 3  |
|                 |   | Point eye                             | 1  |
|                 |   | Extremely small people                | 4  |
|                 |   | Stick figure                          | 7  |
|                 |   | Body/body parts from geometric shapes | 5  |
|                 |   | Extremely large hand                  | 1  |
|                 |   | Indistinct body                       | 1  |
|                 |   | Incomplete                            | 1  |
|                 |   | Disproportionate body                 | 2  |
|                 |   | Proportional drawing                  | 3  |
|                 | Drawing characteristics of animal figures | Wingless butterfly                    | 1  |
|                 |   | Human-sized fish                      | 1  |
|                 | Space drawing characteristics             | Roofless house                        | 1  |
|                 |   | Unrealistic spatial description       | 2  |
|                 |   | Multiple roofs                        | 1  |
|                 |   | Smaller than average door-window      | 1  |
|                 |   | Human-sized space                     | 2  |
|                 |   | Doorless home                         | 4  |
|                 | Drawing characteristics of nature figures | A house larger than normal            | 1  |
|                 |   | Mountain like a sea wave              | 1  |
|                 |   | Extremely large tree                  | 2  |
|                 |   | Extra-large flower                    | 1  |
|                 |   | Tall tree trunk                       | 3  |
|                 | Drawing characteristics of symbols        | Multiple suns                         | 1  |
|                 |   | Big heart                             | 1  |

The drawing of figures in the pictures of students with LDs consisted of five sub-themes: drawing characteristics of human figures, drawing characteristics of animal figures, space drawing characteristics, drawing characteristics of nature figures, and drawing characteristics of symbols. The details relating to the drawing characteristics of human

figures were more intense. This could be explained by the fact that students with LDs drew more human figures in their drawings. A notable detail within the sub-theme of human figure drawing characteristics was the prevalence of incomplete limbs. For example, there were missing hands, feet, arms, noses, and mouths in the 24 pictures. However, disproportionate bodies, bodies made up of geometric shapes, and stick figure-like drawings were also seen.

**Figure 11.**

S28; Boy Student; 9 Years



S28: A 9-year-old boy drew himself, his mother, and father in his picture. The body and feet were drawn with geometric shapes, and the leg-shaped lines were striking. However, the roofless house, the gloomy sun, and the sad human figures were the prominent details. S28: *“My mum and dad were out walking. My dad was very important to me; his hair was falling out.”* This picture showed that he had negative feelings. The researcher observed that he was willing to draw, but he looked at the ceiling and appeared to be deep in thought.

There was an incomplete drawing and a wingless butterfly figure in the drawing which exhibited characteristics of animal figures. A disproportionate animal figure and a fish drawn in unrealistic human proportions were also depicted.

**Figure 12.**

S5; Girl Student; 7 Years



S5: A 7-year-old girl depicted the moment of fishing. She drew herself and her friend on the water, with arms and legs illustrated as lines. The fish were the same size as the human figures, and the fish's body included both large and small fins. S5 said, *“We were catching anchovies. The anchovies were the most important thing in the picture. I was hungry, I was going to eat.”* During drawing, she maintained a steady rhythm and worked in a scattered manner.

Students with LDs drew houses without doors in their pictures. There were unrealistic depictions of spaces, with eyes and mouths drawn on the house and human figures drawn inside clouds. It was a striking finding that the student with LDs, whose parents were separated, did not draw the door element, which might reflect a negative emotion, and made unrealistic depictions.

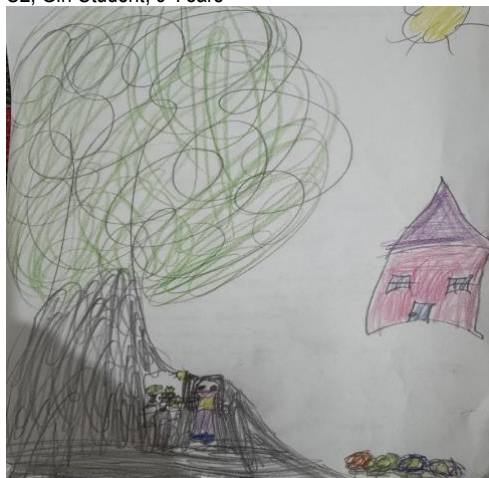
**Figure 13.**  
S16; Girl Student; 9 Years



S16: In this picture drawn by a 9-year-old girl, the figures had geometric body structures. Only heads were drawn, but their limbs were missing, and human characteristics were attributed to the house figure. The depiction of two suns appeared as a noteworthy detail. The subject or theme chosen by her could not be fully understood. S16: *"They were going to Women's Day. My aunt didn't want to take me, but my mother did."* The details in the picture showed that negative emotions were being expressed. She banged her hands on the table during drawing, appeared nervous and preoccupied, had a scattered attention span, and crumpled the paper.

In the drawing characteristics of natural figures, the long tree trunk was drawn. Larger-than-normal and unrealistic figures from nature were depicted. For example, drawing a mountain resembling a sea wave and having more than one sun could be interpreted as a reflection of the confusion in the emotional world.

**Figure 14.**  
S2; Girl Student; 9 Years



S2: A 9-year-old girl drew herself in her picture. She painted the large tree figure by shading it. The blackness of the tree trunk, and the way this blackness enveloped the human figure, was noticeable. S2 said, *"I planted flowers, and I was waiting for them to grow."* She also stated that she was the most important person in the picture. The researcher observed that she appeared to be happy.

When examining the symbol drawing characteristics of students with LDs, a large heart was drawn in one picture. This symbol could be associated with happiness.

## Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

This research aimed to examine primary school students with LDs perceptions of happiness through pictures. Students with LDs were directed to "Draw a picture of a moment when you were happy." Seven themes were derived from the resulting drawings, and these themes were discussed in relation to sub-themes. According to the research findings, most students with LDs drew pictures of happiness in accordance with the directions provided. A thorough inspection of the drawings revealed that the parents' living together, or separation had a substantial impact on the drawings of them. Furthermore, it was noticed that when their parents were away, students with LDs experienced more negative emotions, which they depicted in their drawings.

Psychological, emotional, and physical characteristics, as well as personality characteristic of the individual add subjectivity to the picture drawn (Başay & Aytar, 2019). Based on these pictures, it is possible to understand the emotional state of the individual who drew the picture (Özsarı & Aytar, 2019). In other words, individual differences in pictures relate to how a situation is perceived and what feelings it evokes (Tezelli, 2020). According to research findings, students with LDs tended to use human figures more often when drawing pictures on the theme of happiness. They also showed a tendency to draw pictures in which they appeared themselves most frequently among these figures. The human figure depicted in the child's drawing represents both themselves, and their sense of self (Nalinci et al., 2023). It was notable that they also frequently included figures of mothers and fathers in their pictures. During the schematic period, the students' drawings depict both their relationship with themselves and the logical relationships among others (Yavuzer, 2023). They reflect people with whom they have a close relationship or hold a significant place in their life, such as family members (Arıcı, 2006). In this context, it could be said that students with LDs established a connection between their families and happiness. They seemed to view their mother and father as sources of happiness.

Another finding from the research indicated that students with LDs used more emotional statements in their drawings that reflected positive feelings, such as smiling faces, smiling suns, and hearts, which could be interpreted as happiness. The feeling of happiness is characterized by the upward shaping of the mouth (Tülü & Ergül, 2016). Nalinci et al. (2023) state that the sun symbolizes positive emotions such as happiness and joy; it reflects a lively, energetic, and vibrant mood; the heart symbol represents emotional connection and love; smiling human figures symbolize happiness, while a crying figure is associated with sadness. However, some pictures also included drawings that could be related to negative emotions, such as fear, sadness, a crying house, and a sad sun. Özet (2022) states that using facial expressions when drawing the sun in children's pictures is related to dramatization; that a sad sun and clouds reflect unhappiness.

One of the significant findings of the research was that students with LDs appeared to be happiest in their drawings when depicted with family members. Especially, mother

and father figures were prominent in the drawings of them. This situation could be interpreted as a desire to be emotionally close, as they could draw pictures of times when they were happy with their mother and father. According to research findings, the activities that made students with LDs happy were those they did with their families. Activities such as going to the park and celebrating birthdays appeared as the most preferred happiness-themed pictures. These types of activities were the most popular among families and children in everyday life.

The findings from the research indicated that students with LDs used warmer colors more frequently in their pictures on the theme of happiness. While yellow, a warm color, was the most preferred colour; blue, a cool colour, was used with the same preference by them. During the schematic period, the pictures drawn by children mostly consisted of main colors (Yurttadur et al., 2022). Yellow signifies optimism, brightness, joy, excitement, ambition, freedom, open-mindedness, inspiration, wisdom, and an intellectual perspective (Bakırcıoğlu, 2012). Blue reflects feelings such as freedom, peace, tranquility, trust, loyalty, talent, beauty, harmony, love, a deep spiritual world, healing, and a sense of duty (Nalinci et al., 2023). When color choices are considered, it is seen that objects are painted in accordance with real life (Samsun & Güven, 2022). In primary school drawings, the sun is typically yellow, and the clouds are blue. When examining the pictures included in the research, it was possible that these colors were used more frequently due to the extensive use of sun and cloud figures.

According to another finding from the research, students with LDs depicted moments when they were happy by drawing indoor and outdoor spaces. The frequent depiction of spaces such as homes and parks in these drawings indicated the importance of family and family-related activities. The home is the center of emotional life, as well as a reflection of security, family intimacy, and life in the child's world (Yavuzer, 2023). One of the significant findings of the study was that the drawings made by students with LDs did not include a specific subject or theme, making it difficult to analyze the drawings in the context of the perception of happiness.

The findings of the research indicated that students with LDs frequently depicted missing hands, arms, and mouths in their drawings, particularly in human figures. The pictures also depicted bodies and body parts in geometric shapes. During the schematic period, the human figures drawn by the children may be irregular or consist of geometric shapes such as triangles and rectangles (Hasırcı, 2021). They may sometimes exaggerate the body parts they consider important in their drawings or choose not to draw them at all (Yıldız, 2023). For example, not depicting the hand, arm, or foot is interpreted as insecurity; not drawing the nose is interpreted as weakness; and not drawing the lips is interpreted as difficulties with developing connections with people. While picture analysis allows for the developmental assessment of students' drawings, it is also essential to consider their cognitive, perceptual, psychomotor, and affective development (Özet, 2022). It was concluded that the pictures contained these details that were not true to life and did not reflect reality. These characteristics observed in the drawings of animal and nature figures could be associated with the emotional states of students with LDs, but they could also be evaluated as a reflection of their perception, cognition, and motor skills. In spatial drawings, the depiction of human-specific features such as eyes and mouths, or the drawing of human figures within clouds, was a common practice. These details in students' LDs drawings appeared to indicate more negative emotions and people with whom they were unhappy. Cognitively, it is observed that students include imaginary elements in their drawings during the preoperational and concrete operational stages (Özet, 2022).

Based on the findings of the research, it is important to consider not only the academic achievements but also the emotional state of students with LDs in learning environments. Future research should examine how they perceive other positive emotions. This research was conducted with thirty students with LDs; however, to ensure generalizability, the research should be repeated with larger sample groups. Furthermore, it is recommended that studies be conducted with diverse groups.

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