

Giving Thanks Works: A Correlational Study of Gratitude and Mental Wellbeing Among College Students

Aisha Rais Ahmed, Saima Masoom Ali

Abstract:

Over the past few decades have obliged psychologists to alter their model of mental health. Indeed, positive psychology is a field that has explored an extensive body of research on how individuals can cultivate contentment. Gratitude contributed significantly and reflected a momentous construct of positive psychology that was recognized for its profound impact on fostering well-being. The study aims to inspect the correlation between gratitude and Life satisfaction. exploring further into whether gratitude displays a positive connection with positive affects while demonstrating an inverse correlation with negative effects. The study included a sample of three hundred and twenty students who were selected from two colleges in Karachi, with participants' ages ranging from fifteen to nineteen years. A simple random sampling method was employed as a sampling technique to recruit the participants. Data collection was utilized a brief demographic sheet, the Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) (Watson et al., 1988), and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener et al., 1985) along with Gratitude Questionnaire-Six Item Form (GQ-6) (McCullough et al., 2002). The Pearson correlation analysis was engaged to explain the resulting pattern, while the outcomes determined high significance at $p < .001$. Certainly, gratitude not only demonstrates a positive association with subjective well-being but also validates an inverse link with negative effects. This evokes that exercising gratitude allows individuals to enjoy each cheering event in their lives.

Keywords: Positive Psychological, Gratitude, Subjective well

being (SWB), Satisfaction with life, Positive effects, Negative effects, College Students.

Introduction:

In the domain of consciousness, positive psychology is familiar. Its history is brief, but its past is vast, spanning back to the time when man was able to understand happiness and sadness, pleasure and suffering, good and evil, etc. Researchers have studied the spread of detrimental effects associated with low self-esteem and other environmental factors connected to stress and other health problems. (Josephs et al., 2003).

According to Edwards (2002), the phrase wellbeing refers to healthy mental health. A lot of phrases that are frequently used in many ways in literature have seen a shift in the last few decades due to the expansion of research on well-being. When it comes to research on well-being, psychologists generally follow two distinguished traditions. The first practice is known as the eudemonic tradition, whereas the second practice is hedonistic (Waterman 1993; Ryan & Deci, 2001). The Aristotelian school of philosophy gave rise to the eudaimonia viewpoint, which also has origins in humanistic psychology, a field of study that focuses on ideas related to positive human functioning (Ryff, 1989). Therefore, the appearance of positive emotions and experiencing satisfaction, while the absence of destructive emotions, or avoiding discontent, are defined as the Hedonistic worldview, which places an emphasis on contentment.

However, the concept of well-being is dynamic and encompasses aspects that are not only related to health but also psychological and subjective aspects. Subjective well-being (SWB) and the notion of contentment are traditionally tightly related. The field of SWB has seen rapid advancements in research since its inception. Globally, research in this field is expanding, and experts are taking into account the variables influencing and associated with it.

Conversely, gratitude falls under the enormous accomplishment of positive psychological advancement that is gaining admiration and approval in scientific investigations (Lesowitz & Sammons, 2009). No doubt, gratitude is the most significant strategy and character strength (Duckworth et al., 2005; Seligman et al., 2006). As it certainly serves as a remedy for reflection. In addition, it has the potential to trigger positive psychology interventions (PPIs) that improve people's well-being. Thus, these healing meditations encourage people to be positive and are regarded as the stimulating essence of life. regarding achieving mental health or managing any unpleasant experiences and emotions they may encounter (Seligman et al., 2006). Gratitude has been described as a feeling, a method, a moral, a habit, a quality of the personality, or a coping mechanism. The word "gratitude" comes from the Latin "gratia," which can mean "grace," "graciousness," or "gratefulness". The fundamental nature of humanity lies in kindness, the majesty of both giving and getting, and the attraction observed in receiving something for nothing" are the common themes shared by all of these Latin roots (Pruyser, 1976, p. 69). Rather, when someone receives something deserving and well-intentioned for them, they typically feel grateful (Wood et al., 2008). However, a great deal of research has indicated that gratitude is an attitude toward being appreciative of other people's helpful deeds (McCullough et al., 2001). Positive psychologists, on the other hand, contended that it results in long-term positivity, which is important since it promotes contentment and is linked to well-being. Subsequently, the primary focus of the present study is to inspect the relationship of Gratitude with Life Contentment, Positive effects, and Negative effects.

Literature Review:

Certainly, the value of gratitude has been proven for many years. Besides, it is unquestionable that gratitude plays a vital role in fostering happiness and well-being. It also possesses character potential and is associated with other positive emotions like

happiness, prosperity, and contentment (Froh et al., 2008). Over the past ten years, a substantial body of research has emerged, demonstrating that gratitude is positively correlated with every aspect of well-being. According to George Herbert's book "Seven Laws of Spiritual Success," that having a grateful heart and a positive outlook are the most valuable qualities one can possess. Moreover, researchers, authors, and consultants have all conjectured that a sense of thankfulness and belonging is associated with well-being. Comparably, it is widely acknowledged among various investigations and researchers. Lazarus & Lazarus, (1994); Mayer et al., (1991); Ortony et al.; and Weiner, (1985) suggested that the construct 'gratitude' has a beneficial emotional valence that is connected to subjective and psychological well-being. On the other hand, it is also considered a pleasant state that relates to other constructive emotions including contentment, hope, and positive feelings. Accordingly, these all are requisite elements of well-being (Walker & Pitts, 1998). Conversely, other studies established a beneficial relationship between gratitude and various well-being tools, such as resilience, religiosity, contentment, and other positive emotions. However, there was an inverse relationship discovered between different measures of negative emotions and gratitude (Watkins et al., 2003).

Although, the importance of gratitude and life satisfaction in leading fulfilling lives has been researched by an extensive body of research, revealing various benefits such as improved mental, emotional and physical health, positive behavior, high-quality relationships, and greater life meaning with high quality of life (Diener and Tay, 2017). The research has particularly emphasized the positive relationship among gratitude, life satisfaction and positive emotions, with studies like those by Alkozei et al. (2018) contributing to this understanding. Despite this knowledge, the longitudinal relationship between gratitude and life satisfaction has remained largely unexplored until recent studies by Jans-Beken et al. (2018) and Unanue et al. (2019), who utilized a four-wave

design among Dutch adults to reveal a prospective positive relationship from gratitude to subjective well-being (SWB).

An intriguing aspect of this connection lies in the relationship between gratitude and affect, as evidenced by research conducted by Jans-Beken et al. (2019). This study emphasizes a strong correlation between gratitude and positive affect, coupled with a negative correlation with negative affect at the trait level. Supporting the broaden-and-build theory, it is proposed that individuals with a predisposition towards higher levels of gratitude frequently experience intense feelings of gratitude, contributing to the accumulation of personal resources (Xiang & Yuan, 2020). Furthermore, investigations by Bohlmeijer et al. (2021) and Davis et al. (2016) highlight not only the positive impact of gratitude on well-being and life satisfaction but also its role in reduction of distress and depressive symptoms, providing an in-depth and comprehensive insight into its influence on mental health.

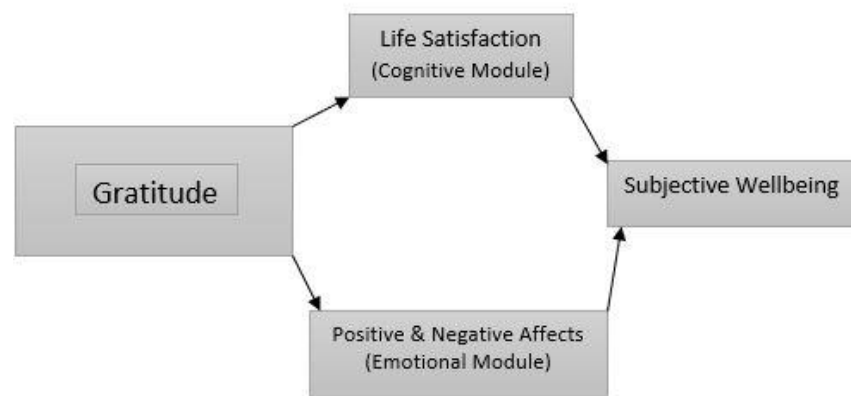
Altogether, there is a consensus among investigators that the assessment of life satisfaction and happiness can be successfully done through the perfect tools of subjective well-being by using reliable and valid scales (Diener & Lucas, 2000). The 1st tool is the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) which was developed by Diener et al. in 1985 and directed on the cognitive expression of well-being. The second tool that was taken to cater to emotional expression is the Positive Affect and Negative Affect Schedule (Watson et al., 1988). These two extensively and frequently utilized scales are considered authentic measures for obtaining an individual's SWB. Although, satisfaction with life scale gauges the cognitive factor of SWB, whereas positive affect and negative affect schedule evaluate the emotional factor.

However, the aforementioned studies offered scientific evidence that there is a relationship between gratitude and well-being. Thus, it is apparent that gratitude is indispensable for human existence.

contrary to other emotions, Gratitude is developed and is not innate (Emmons & Shelton, 2005). Children are instilled with an attitude of gratitude through the persistent efforts of close associates, including parents, teachers, peers, and guardians.

Conclusively, the role of gratitude is the foundation and fostering overall mental health. It proceeds as a robust mechanism for positive change by easing stress, improving mood, tightening social bonds, and supplying a more hopeful outlook on life.

Theoretical Framework:



Notably, life satisfaction, considered the cognitive component of SWB, encompasses individuals' overall evaluation of their satisfaction across various life domains and aspects, while positive and negative affects evaluate the emotional valence (Diener et al., 2017).

Operational definitions:

- **Gratitude** - Gratitude is an emotion like appreciation and a sense of thankfulness in reaction to a fortunate chance or tangible gift.
- **Satisfaction with Life** –It is *the level to which one positively*

evaluates his/her quality of life.

- **Positive and Negative affects** –The term indicates positive and negative emotions and expressions.

Hypotheses:

The following study aims to investigate the following developed hypotheses.

H₁: A student's expected level of gratitude might have a positive relationship with life satisfaction.

H₂: The greater level of gratitude in students might have more positive effects, despite gratitude and negative affects inversely connected.

Methodology:

The researcher employed a quantitative research method with a focus on the correlation. This section will expand on the study's methodology, encompassing research design, participants, instruments, procedure, and data analysis.

Participants:

A total of 320 participants, aged between 15 and 20 years (mean age = 17, standard deviation = 1), and enrolled in college comprised the sample. The participants were recruited from two colleges, Sir Syed Government College (185 students) and Army Public College, Saddar (135 students), in roughly equal proportions. The sample selection was done through a random sampling technique, the researcher had a list of students then participants were recruited randomly from the list, ensuring that each student had an equal opportunity to be included in the course of the study.

Measures:

Gratitude Questionnaire-Six-Item Form (GQ-6): The developer of the Gratitude Questionnaire-Six-Item Form (GQ-6) is McCullough et al., (2002), this is particularly designed to measure an individual's proneness to experience gratitude in their daily lives. The responses of items are measures based on a 7-point Likert-style response scale, where participants rate their level of agreement on each item ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). Item numbers 3 and 6 were reversely scored to get the total sum. While McCullough et al. (2001) reported the GQ-6 to have high internal consistency. Cronbach's alphas were .77.

Satisfaction with life scale (SWLS): The following tool was established by Diener et al., (1985). It is devised to evaluate the reasoning facet of an individual's satisfaction with life. This brief survey contained only 5 items, that are rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale. The probable scoring range extended from 5 to 35, with an average point at a score of 20. Diener et al. (1985) reported favorable reliability and validity for the given measurement of scale, with a coefficient alpha of 0.87 and a test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.83 over 2 months. Furthermore, factor analysis found the unidimensional features of the scale (Diener et al., 1985).

Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS): This tool was Instituted by Watson et al., in 1988. Mainly, the measure consists of two scales, the first one is positive affect which is indicated by PA and the second one is negative affect (NA). The positive affect scale assesses ten procedural emotions such as thrilled, alert, and interested while the negative affect scale evaluates ten negative emotions like upset, fearful, and hostile. Respondents are requested to indicate whether they generally feel this way using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from very slightly (contain score 1) to extremely (contain score 5). The score range extended from 10 to 50, respectively. The PANAS scale demonstrates reliability, exhibiting both convergent and discriminant validity with high

internal consistency. Cronbach's alphas for the scale ranged from .84 to .88.

Procedure:

The researcher emphasized the study's significance and subsequently administered questionnaires, including a demographic section consisting of age, educational background, and date of test administration. Participants were also queried about any concerns related to the study tasks. Following participants' consent and a detailed explanation of the study's purpose, data collection commenced. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was employed to analyze result patterns and calculate the mean.

Results:

Table 1.1 *Demographic testing (n=320)*

<i>Description</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>
Colleges		
Sir Syed Govt College	185	57.8%
Army Public College	135	42.2%
Level of Education		
XI year	170	53.12%
XII year	150	46.87%

Age

15-16	86	26.87%
17-18	154	48.12%
19-20	82	25.62%
Total	320	100%

Table 1.1 displays the percentages of college students, their age, and their level of education. The investigator has recruited a sample of 320 participants.

Hypothesis 1: ‘Gratitude’ Positively correlates with Satisfaction in Life

Table 1.2

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Gratitude</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Satisfaction with Life	.644**	0.000

**p< .01

Table 1.2 demonstrates a moderate level of positive connection between Life Satisfaction & Gratitude (r= 0.644, p< 0.001). This signifies that the greater the increase in gratitude, the participants were more likely to be satisfied with their lives. The product confirms the 1st premise.

Hypothesis 2: The construct 'Gratitude' Positively relates to Positive Affects while contrarywise link with Negative Affects

Table 1.3 Relationship Coefficient for Gratitude and Positive Affects

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Gratitude</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Positive Affects	.624**	0.000

**p< .01

Table no. 1.3 confirms a substantial association between Positive Affects & Gratitude ($r= 0.624$, $p< .01$). further to indicate that a greater level of participants' gratitude was more likely to have improved Positive Affects.

Table 1.4 Relationship Coefficient between Gratitude and Negative Affects

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Gratitude</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Negative Affects	-.508**	0.000

**p< .01

More results exposed the remarkable inverse association between Negative Affects & Gratitude ($r=-0.508$, $p< .01$). That implies that gratitude enhances which may lead to a decrease in Negative Affects. Therefore, the 2nd hypothesis is supported by the findings.

Discussion:

The principal aim of the stream study was to explore the link between gratitude and subjective well-being (SWB). The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), a widely accepted and recognized tool for the assessment of SWB (Diener et al., 1985), was employed to evaluate the cognitive dimension (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). To measure the emotional aspect, the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS), known for its good validity and frequent use (Watson et al., 1988), was incorporated. In this study, these instruments were used to measure both facets of SWB. Gratitude was gauged using the Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6) scale. Gratitude undeniably has a strong relationship with emotional and mental well-being. Individuals embracing gratitude often showcase increased levels of life satisfaction and a plethora of positive emotions, including happiness, enthusiasm, optimism, contentment, and pleasure. Moreover, gratitude plays the role of a shield against destructive and harmful emotions. Those who foster and cultivate gratitude in their lives display increased resilience, successfully navigate daily challenges, and, in the long run, experience a heightened sense of overall well-being.

In this research, two hypotheses were established, examined, and confirmed. The initial hypothesis proposed to explore how gratitude connects to life satisfaction. Gratitude manifests itself in the appreciation for various aspects like financial gains, job stability, perceived autonomy, health, and life expectancy (Kraus et al., 2012; Rojas, 2010). The researchers of this study were interested in exploring this notion and explore its potential link to life satisfaction levels. The investigation revealed a statistically significant positive association between gratitude and contentment, highlighting their interdependence and relationship (see Table 1.2). Several published studies support this finding, establishing the association between gratitude, life satisfaction, and various indicators contributing towards an enhanced life (Tay et al., 2017).

It is worth noting that both gratitude and life satisfaction act as predictors of happiness. Prior research, exemplified by the work of Wood et al., (2008), consistently highlights a positive connection between gratitude and subjective well-being. Their study, consisting of 389 adults, established a distinct bond between gratitude and life satisfaction. This correlation is further supported by studies like that of McCullough et al., (2003), which found that individuals with high gratitude levels tend to enjoy increased life satisfaction. The long-standing acknowledgment of gratitude's significance puts a great emphasis on its important role in enhancing people's happiness. Gratitude transcends beyond solely fostering positive emotions; it holds the ability to diminish negative emotions or affects, as noted by Polak and McCullough. Scholars, researchers, writers, and practitioners commonly acknowledge the idea of a positive correlation between gratitude and positive emotions like joy, pleasure, and hope, while simultaneously noting an inverse association with negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, and hostility (McCullough et al., 2002). This aligns with the second hypothesis of the present study, (shown in Tables 1.3 and 1.4), indicating a statistically significant, moderate to strong relationship between gratitude and emotions. Gratitude, identified as a positive emotion, enhances individuals' sensitivity to positive aspects of their surroundings and reduces the impact of negative life events, resulting in the development of positive and beneficial behaviors (McCullough et al., 2002). It notably alleviates the negative affects such as loss of hope, frustration, or dejection. Numerous studies, including Lin (2014), McCullough et al. (2002), and Garland et al. (2010), verify that individuals with higher dispositional gratitude report elevated positive emotions and reduced negative emotions. Further support for this understanding comes from various studies such as Froh and Kashdan et al. (2009); Froh and Yurkewicz et al. (2009); and Sheldon and Lyubomirsky (2006). In conclusion, gratitude plays a crucial and central role in the world of positive psychology. Researchers assert its significance in elevating both subjective and

psychological well-being. By dedicating time to focusing on positivity and distancing oneself from negativity, individuals can uncover the beauty of appreciating the world around them. Furthermore, gratitude not only plays a significant role in enhancing mental health outcomes but also enables one to savor each positive happening in their life. Additionally, its strong potential extends to allowing individuals to cope with significant life challenges and contribute positively to both individual lives and the broader community.

Conclusion:

This investigation validates that inculcating gratitude is closely allied to feeling contentment and bliss in life. In short, the research proposes that as we foster gratitude attempts, our overall satisfaction expands. The future of psychology is hovering around the promotion and development of character strengths and catalyzing to bring this concept to fruition. Moreover, to look ahead when the client visits for a session, the therapist focuses on emphasizing strengths rather than settling on troubles and disturbances. What will the transformative world look like and how it be reshaped in the future? By drilling gratitude in groups or societies would benefit substantially, advancing intense family bonds and cultivating a population more prompted to gladness. The training of gratitude into our communal belief holds the promise of forming a better world, demonstrated by rising mental health and interpersonal relationships.

Recommendation

- Nevertheless, to confirm the effectiveness and sensation of gratitude mediation, further investigations are strongly needed and imperative on this subject. that is strongly required for mental health consultants to utilize this practice in mediation designed to boost positive outlook toward life.
- In contrast, significant outcomes have been detected in the

student population, but it remains necessary to examine whether these same findings would be evident in elderly populations.

- Despite the sample could be probably diverse in ethnicity and culture, searching this magnitude could increase the generalizability of the conclusions.
- Future studies might well uncover the conduct that communicating gratitude is far more than just a temporary, satisfying happening or it has the potential capacity for transforming entities and their lives.

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