

THE ROLE OF GRATITUDE IN PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING ACROSS GENDER AND EDUCATIONAL STRANDS

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54476/ioer-imrj/741579>

ABSTRACT

This research quantitatively investigates the effects of gratitude on psychological well-being among participants of varying genders and educational backgrounds. Employing a correlational and descriptive methodology, the study analyzes data from 164 individuals using the Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6) and the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales-21 (DASS-21). Initial descriptive analysis assessed gratitude distribution, followed by correlational and multiple regression analyses to explore the link between gratitude and well-being. Results reveal a significant negative correlation between gratitude levels and DASS-21 scores, suggesting gratitude is a key indicator of psychological health across diverse demographics. Cultural and experiential factors, rather than gender or education, influence gratitude expression. The study acknowledges limitations due to its reliance on self-report measures and recommends future longitudinal research with varied data collection methods. Findings highlight gratitude's role in enhancing psychological health, as a moral measure, motivator, and social bond enhancer. This underlines gratitude's importance in fostering community cohesion and individual well-being, and its relevance in discussions on happiness. Given the global rise in mental health issues, these insights offer valuable perspectives on cultural aspects of gratitude and its potential in educational and therapeutic settings.

Keywords: Gratitude, psychological well-being, gender, educational strands

INTRODUCTION

In exploring the intricate relationship between emotional well-being and societal factors, this study posits gratitude as a pivotal element in mental health. Gratitude, a complex and universally prevalent practice, is often seen as a virtuous, adaptable response (Emmons &

McCullough, 2003). It plays a crucial role in human development and social interaction, fostering prosocial behaviors and nurturing relationships (Algoe, 2012). The role of gratitude in enhancing mental well-being is gaining recognition globally. Studies from regions like North America have shed light on gratitude's beneficial impact in mitigating

P – ISSN 2651 - 7701 | E – ISSN 2651 – 771X | www.ioer-imrj.com

WAPANO, M.R.R., BARQUILLO, L.D.A., *The Role of Gratitude in Psychological Well-Being Across Gender and Educational Strands*, pp. 42 - 51



mental health challenges (Wood et al., 2008). However, there's a noticeable dearth of research on this subject in Asian contexts, particularly in the Philippines. In the Philippines, known for its strong family bonds, community values, and the "Bayanihan" spirit, expressions of gratitude take on unique cultural dimensions. Amidst the worldwide escalation of mental health issues (World Health Organization, 2019), which also resonate within the Philippines, there's a pressing need for research exploring how gratitude and mental health intersect across different national cultures. This gap in existing literature underscores the necessity for this study, aiming to bridge the knowledge gap and enrich our understanding of gratitude's cultural nuances and its impact on mental well-being.

Although gratitude has been studied in other populations, such as Froh et al. (2008), has not been extensively studied in the specific context of the Philippines. The study of gratitude in the Philippines is situated in a unique socio-cultural context, shaped by a combination of indigenous values and colonial history. The main objective of this study is to fill the current gap by linking gratitude to psychological well-being.

The rationale behind the choice of this study topic comes from a combination of personal and professional reasons. The authors, who witnessed gratitude's profound impact, intend to apply this understanding to empirical investigation. Furthermore, the pressing need to address mental health issues in the Philippines, accentuated by the lack of research in this area of study, emphasizes the importance of this study. Furthermore, the Philippine Mental Health Law (Republic Act No. 11036), which was enacted in 2018, underscores the need to understand and address mental health concerns. Additionally, it is worth noting that correspondence issued by the Department of Education strongly emphasizes integrating values, such as gratitude, into the educational curriculum.

This emphasis demonstrates the recognized importance of gratitude in fostering comprehensive development. This research attempts to investigate the relationship between gratitude and psychological well-being in the setting of the Philippines. By doing so, it aims to address a gap in the existing literature and align with the legislative requirements and standards established at the national level. The present study defines psychological well-being as the emotional and psychological condition of a person, specifically including aspects related to stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms. This definition is based on using the DASS-21 (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) as a measurement tool. This self-report questionnaire, characterized by its tripartite framework, provides a comprehensive assessment tool encompassing fundamental aspects of an individual's psychological well-being. The validity and reliability of the DASS-21 have been extensively validated, rendering it a reputable tool for assessing the intricacies of mental health difficulties (Henry & Crawford, 2005). Its sensitivity in differentiating between depression, anxiety, and stress symptoms further underscores its relevance in modern research, especially given the increasing global attention to mental health concerns (Cao, Liao, Jiang, Chen, & Lin, 2023).

The concept of gratitude, which encompasses a range of emotional reactions to acts of kindness, earned significant interest within the field of positive psychology. The investigation into the specifics of gratitude has prompted significant scholarly attention, particularly about its relationships with demographic factors and its potential impact on mental well-being. The concept of gratitude is a multidimensional psychological state that encompasses the acknowledgment and admiration of the favorable elements of existence, together with the benevolence and assistance bestowed upon an



individual by others (Youssef-Morgan, Van Zyl, , & Ahrens, 2022).

The University of Northampton's paper critically analyzes recent philosophical and psychological literature on gratitude, acknowledging its growing academic significance. Gratitude has evolved from being an undervalued feeling to becoming a prominent subject in the field of positive psychology, which is concerned with individual and societal well-being. The renewed interest in virtue ethics and the cognitive revolution in psychology have brought attention to the complex nature of gratitude, which challenges its definition as a virtue within traditional philosophical frameworks such as Aristotle's (Gulliford, Morgan, & Kristjánsson, 2013).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study are structured around three key areas. First, it aims to explore the distribution of gratitude scores across various gender groups and educational backgrounds. This investigation is grounded in the hypothesis that significant variations in gratitude scores are influenced by societal roles, cultural influences, and educational disciplines, emphasizing understanding of potential gender differences as suggested by Froh et al. (2008). Second, the study examines the correlation between overall gratitude scores and psychological well-being, as indicated by the DASS scale. Informed by the foundational works of Wood et al. (2008), the study hypothesizes a significant correlation between gratitude and indicators of psychological health, particularly focusing on the link between gratitude and aspects of poor mental health like depression. Lastly, the research seeks to determine if gratitude scores and demographic information can predict psychological well-being. This aspect builds upon the works of Emmons and McCullough (2003) and Twenge and Campbell (2001), examining the role

of gratitude and demographic factors as determinants of mental health. Collectively, the study aims to deepen the understanding of the variations in gratitude among different demographic groups, its relationship with psychological well-being, and its potential to predict mental health outcomes.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design. This study employed a quantitative research design, utilizing both correlational and descriptive methods. Initially, a descriptive approach was adopted to assess the distribution of gratitude scores among different gender and educational groups. This was followed by correlational analysis, which explored the relationship between gratitude scores and indicators of psychological well-being. Additionally, multiple regression analysis was conducted to investigate the predictive power of gratitude scores concerning psychological well-being.

Respondents. The study comprised 164 participants who met specific inclusion criteria: (1) being enrolled as a 12th-grade student in a private school, (2) being aged 18 or older, and (3) being a resident of Iligan. The age range of participants was 18 to 20 years, with an average age of 18.28 years and a standard deviation of 0.46 years. In terms of gender distribution, females were the majority, making up 65.2% of the sample (N=107). Males accounted for 34.1% (N=56), and one participant, or 0.6% of the sample (N=1), identified as non-binary.

Data Gathering Procedure. An application for formal research approval was duly submitted to the appropriate study authorities to ensure compliance with ethical research standards. After obtaining the necessary institutional approval, the electronic survey instrument was developed. The research protocol included an informed consent policy that clearly explained the purpose of the study and ensured that participants fully understood their participation in the study. It placed



great emphasis on the rights of individuals, in particular the right to withdraw from research at any time without facing any negative consequences

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, participants were actively advised to clarify any perceived ambiguity in the questionnaire. Provisions have been made to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the data to emphasize the research objective of ethical considerations further. Participants were informed that their individual responses would remain confidential and that the data would only be reported in aggregate form, with no personally identifying information

An adequate amount of time was allocated to participants to ensure thorough completion of the questionnaires. Gratitude levels were gauged using the Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6; McCullough et al., 2002), a 6-item self-report tool crafted to assess an individual's proclivity towards experiencing gratitude. Items within this instrument are evaluated on a 7-point Likert scale, anchored by 1 (strongly disagree) and 7 (strongly agree). Representative items encompass statements such as 'I have so much in life to be thankful for' and 'If I had to enumerate my sources of gratitude, the list would be extensive.' For the present study, the internal consistency of the GQ-6, as indicated by Cronbach's alpha, was established at 0.70.

The psychological well-being of participants was assessed using the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales-21 (DASS-21; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). The DASS-21 is a shortened version of the original 42-item self-report instrument, designed to measure the three related negative emotional states of depression, anxiety, and stress. Comprising 21 items, respondents rate each statement on a 4-point scale. In the current study context, the DASS-21 exhibited robust reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.94960.9496. value indicates a very high level of internal consistency for the scale.

Statistical treatment of data. The study utilized the following statistical analyses to investigate the research aims: To conduct the initial investigation on the distribution of gratefulness scores among different genders and educational strands, basic descriptive statistics, such as

means and standard deviations, were employed. The Pearson correlation coefficient was employed to assess the relationship between gratitude scores and psychological well-being, as measured by the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS). The study utilized multiple regression analysis to examine the relationship between gratitude scores and psychological well-being.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

1. Gender and educational differences in gratitude

The study's first objective was to determine the distribution of gratitude scores across gender groups and education strands.

The gratitude scores were gauged using six items, with participants expressing their level of agreement on a 7-point scale.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of Gratitude Scores by Gender

Gender	Mean Gratitude Score	Standard Deviation	Count
Male	5.23	0.94	107
Female	5.13	0.82	56
Non-binary	3.33	NaN	1

Table 1 shows that for male participants, the average gratitude score was 5.23 with a standard deviation of 0.94, and this was derived from a sample size of 107 participants. On the other hand, female participants had a slightly lower mean gratitude score of 5.13 with a standard deviation of 0.82, based on a sample size of 56 participants. It is noteworthy to mention that there was a single non-binary participant in the study, who reported a gratitude score of 3.33. Given the singular data point for the non-binary category, a standard deviation could not be computed.

A t-test was conducted to compare the gratitude scores of male and female respondents.



There was no significant difference between male (M = 5.23, SD = 0.94) and female (M = 5.13, SD = 0.82) scores; $t(161) = 0.7562, p = .4509$

Results indicate that male participants had slightly higher gratitude scores than their female counterparts but this difference did not reach statistical significance. This finding is consistent with research by Kashdan, Mishra, Breen, and Froh (2009), that although gender may influence the way gratitude is expressed, it does not significantly affect the amount or frequency of gratitude.

However, it is important to consider the cultural, social and economic context. Kim, Lee, and Lee (2015) conducted a study in South Korea, indicating that expressions of gratitude can influence social roles and cultural expectations. In societies with different gender roles, individuals of different genders may show differences in how they recognize and express gratitude influenced by dominant societal expectations and values. A study emphasizing the importance of incorporating identities suggests that individuals who deviate from traditional gender norms may face social challenges that can affect their psychological state of well-being (McLemore, 2006).

The results show no significant difference in gratitude scores between men and women. The results of this research align with the findings of Kashdan et al. (2009). However, it is important to note that Baron-Cohen (2003) conducted research that presents a different perspective. According to Baron-Cohen, there is a suggestion that females, on average, may exhibit a more prominent sympathetic reaction, perhaps resulting in heightened sensations of gratitude. However, it is possible that the differences observed in the levels of gratitude reported by individuals might be attributed to factors such as the specific measurement tools used, cultural factors, and the

characteristics of the population under investigation.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics of Gratitude Scores by Strand/Track

Strand/Track Label	Mean Gratitude Score	Standard Deviation	Count
General Academic Strand	5.16	0.88	42
Accountancy, Business, and Management	5.35	0.92	8
Humanities and Social Sciences	4.97	0.96	38
Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics	5.33	0.88	68
Technical-Vocational-Livelihood Track	4.90	0.86	8

In Table 2, it is evident that respondents belonging to the "General Academic Strand" had an average gratitude score of 5.16, with a standard deviation of 0.88, from a sample size of 42 participants within this particular strand.

In the "Accountancy, Business, and Management" strand, the average gratitude score was found to be somewhat higher at 5.35, with a standard deviation of 0.92, as determined from a sample size of 8 participants. Participants in the "Humanities and Social Sciences" group had an average score of 4.97, with a standard deviation of 0.96. The sample size for this group was 38. The strand "Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics" had the highest number of participants, with a sample size of 68. This group demonstrated an average gratitude score of 5.33, with a standard deviation of 0.88. Lastly, the individuals enrolled in the "Technical-Vocational-Livelihood Track" had an average gratitude score of 4.90, with a standard deviation of 0.86. This data was derived from a sample size of 8 participants.

A one-way ANOVA compared gratitude scores among educational strands/tracks. There was no significant effect of strand/track on gratitude scores, $F(4,161)=1.2531, p=.2908$

Although it was hypothesized that gratitude scores would change based on gender and educational backgrounds due to social roles, cultural influences, and the intrinsic character of educational disciplines, the results of this study did not provide statistically significant differences. This finding presents a contrasting perspective to the findings of Froh et al. (2008), who emphasized the presence of gender differences in expressing gratitude during adolescence. However, several

studies by Watkins, Woodward, Stone, and Colts (2003) suggest that gratitude may be a universally experienced emotion, less affected by social and educational differences. In also, Algoe and Stanton (2012)) posited that social learning or Culture-specific factors can influence only the expression of gratitude, not its underlying emotions. Froh et al. (2008) suggest that changes observed throughout adolescence may not persist or diverge in subsequent stages of education. These findings are consistent with research by Kashdan, Mishra, Breen, and Froh (2009) , suggesting that gratitude's effects vary across time and context.

2. Correlation of Gratitude and Psychological Well-Being

Pearson correlation analyses were conducted on the total gratitude score and the DASS scale measuring psychological distress in examining the relationship between gratitude and psychological well-being. The results of the study indicated a negative correlation between moderate to moderate intensity between the two variables, where the correlation coefficient was $r(162) = -0.325$, $p < 0.0001$. The present findings indicate a correlation there is a negative effect on individuals' self-reported levels of gratitude and their scores and the DASS scale. High levels of gratitude are associated with improved psychological well-being and lower levels of psychological distress. The present study revealed a significant negative association between gratitude and psychological distress, as measured by the DASS scale. The foregoing is consistent with an expanding body of scholarly research emphasizing gratitude's positive effects on psychological well-being. Consistent with the results, previous research by Emmons-McCullough (2003) showed that individuals who engaged in the practice of keeping a gratitude journal showed higher levels of positive affect, more optimistic about future events, and higher interpersonal consciousness, compared to individuals who did not engage in this process (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Although a study by Alkozei, McCormick, Burns, and Coon (2020) found that the use of gratitude interventions significantly reduced symptoms of anxiety and

depression, a more detailed study by Wood, Froh, and Geraghty (2020) did highlight the role of gratitude as a reliable predictor of low levels of depression.

This finding supports the notion that gratitude may serve as a protective factor against emotional distress. The protective role of gratitude can be contextualized within the broader framework of positive psychology. The theoretical framework proposed by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) emphasizes that positive emotions, personal efficacy, and meaningful socialization can contribute to improved well-being and resilience in mental health conditions. The experience of gratitude, characterized by a pleasant emotional climate, has the potential to foster positive moods, enhance interpersonal relationships, and reinforce adaptive strategies. Thus the effects of psychological distress are reduced (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). There is a need to understand the complexity of gratitude and its connection to overall well-being: Ma, Tunney, and Ferguson (2017) highlighted that although gratitude has the potential to encourage prosocial behaviors, its impact on individual well-being may be more complex than direct positive communication. Future studies should explore in depth to explore key mechanisms and a supervisor who can make transformational changes.

3. Gratitude as a Predictor Psychological Well-being

This study used linear regression analysis to examine the predictive relationship between gratitude and psychological well-being. The independent variable in this study was the gratitude scores, whereas the dependent variable was psychological well-being, as assessed by the DASS scores. The analysis revealed that gratitude scores significantly predicted DASS scores, $\beta = -0.9286$, $t(162) = -4.379$, $p < 0.0001$, $\beta = -0.9286$, $t(162) = -4.379$, $p < 0.0001$. The model accounted for approximately 10.6% of the variability in DASS scores, $R^2 = 0.106$. This negative coefficient suggests that as gratitude scores

increase, DASS scores, indicative of psychological distress, tend to decrease. In essence, higher levels of gratitude are associated with better psychological well-being.

The research highlights the significant correlation between gratitude and psychological well-being, an area significant in several geographical contexts, such as Asia and Southeast Asia. Significantly, these results align with several previous studies, contributing to the wider discourse on the effects of gratitude on mental well-being.

In line with the findings of Emmons and McCullough (2003), it was observed that individuals who engaged in maintaining gratitude journals demonstrated higher degrees of positive affect and enhanced optimism regarding future outcomes. These results indicate that gratitude may protect against psychological distress (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Alkozei, McCormick, Burns, and Coon (2020) provided more evidence in favor of the protective nature of gratitude-based therapies, demonstrating that such interventions resulted in significant decreases in symptoms associated with anxiety and depression. Wood, Froh, and Geraghty (2010) conducted a study that emphasized the importance of gratitude as a reliable indicator of depression reduction.

Consistent with the study, Bernardo (2010) conducted a study in the Philippines that revealed a positive correlation between levels of gratitude and psychological well-being among Filipino students. The study also found that high levels of gratitude were associated with fewer symptoms of depression relationships, and suggests the importance of gratitude to enhance psychological well-being (Bernardo, 2010). Chen, Chen, and Kee (2018) conducted a study in Southeast Asia that showed that gratitude therapy among Malaysian adolescents has the ability to increase life satisfaction and reduce stress. Lau and Cheng (2017) highlighted the importance of gratitude in reducing depressive symptoms and acting as a protective factor against academic stress among Chinese university students. Their research shows that those with high levels of gratitude have fewer

symptoms of depression, suggesting the potential benefits of gratitude in the face of academic stress (Lau & Cheng, 2017). However, it is important to understand the complexity of the relationship between gratitude and well-being. While this study and other relevant research demonstrate the potential protective effect of gratitude, many scholars argue that the relationship between gratitude and psychological well-being is complex.

In a meta-analysis by Ma, Tunney, and Ferguson (2017), inquiries were raised regarding the influence of the strength of gratitude on individual well-being. The authors proposed that although gratitude has the potential to increase acts of altruism, its impact on an individual's subjective well-being may be more complex and multifaceted. When considering the larger theoretical framework, it is possible to consider the connection between gratitude and well-being from the perspective of Positive Psychology. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) advocated that positive emotions, personal qualities, and meaningful involvement are integral to enhancing well-being and providing resilience against mental health difficulties. Gratitude, a significant positive effect, can increase one's hopeful perspective, reinforce interpersonal relationships, and improve coping strategies, thus mitigating psychological discomfort (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

CONCLUSIONS

This study delved into the correlation between gratitude and psychological well-being. The preliminary analysis revealed a significant negative relationship between gratitude levels and psychological well-being, as measured by DASS scores. This discovery suggests that individuals with higher levels of gratitude tend to experience improved psychological well-being. This finding aligns with existing research, such as Emmons and McCullough's (2003) study, which underscores the positive impact of gratitude in alleviating psychological distress. Furthermore, the regression results have supported this perspective

by demonstrating that gratitude scores are robust predictors of DASS scores, accounting for approximately 10.6% of the variance in psychological well-being measures. Importantly, the protective influence of gratitude transcends cultural boundaries, as evidenced by research conducted in both Western and Asian contexts. In summary, gratitude is pivotal in psychological well-being, as evidenced by its association with enhanced mental health outcomes.

RECOMMENDATION

The significant correlation between gratitude and psychological well-being, as evidenced in this study, underscores the value of incorporating gratitude interventions within educational settings. Given the substantial influence that schools wield in shaping adolescents' emotional and psychological development, introducing focused gratitude interventions can be highly beneficial for enhancing student well-being. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed for implementing school-based gratitude interventions:

Firstly, schools can consider integrating a gratitude curriculum into their educational programs. This could involve incorporating dedicated lessons or sessions where students are taught the importance of gratitude, its benefits, and practical ways to incorporate it into their daily lives. Activities like gratitude journaling, where students document things they're thankful for, can help instill a consistent habit of reflection.

Additionally, organizing regular peer-sharing sessions in the classroom can create a platform for students to share personal gratitude stories. This amplifies individuals' positive feelings and fosters a collective sense of appreciation within the class.

The use of educational technology can also play a role in promoting gratitude practices.

Schools can employ classroom apps that send daily prompts encouraging students to reflect on something they're grateful for, making it a seamless part of their educational experience.

Furthermore, it can be beneficial to offer professional development sessions for educators on integrating gratitude into their teaching methods and classroom management strategies. Teachers can play a significant role in modeling gratitude and creating a classroom culture where appreciation is valued and expressed.

Schools can initiate each morning with short mindfulness sessions that incorporate gratitude to set a positive tone for the day. A simple 5-minute guided meditation focused on gratitude can be an effective way to start the day.

Encouraging students to undertake gratitude-themed projects, such as creating art, writing gratitude letters to important figures in their lives, or organizing gratitude-themed events, can provide them with practical opportunities to express and cultivate gratitude.

Lastly, implementing gratitude-based feedback mechanisms within the school environment, such as gratitude boards or 'gratitude jars,' can encourage students to express appreciation for their peers regularly.

By integrating these gratitude-focused interventions into the school environment, educational institutions can nurture an atmosphere of gratitude and positivity. Given the substantial relationship between gratitude and psychological well-being, these initiatives can significantly contribute to students' overall emotional health and personal development.

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