

Research Paper

The Role of Gratitude in Enhancing Psychological Wellbeing and Academic Performance among Adolescents: A Critical Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The growing emphasis on emotional intelligence and social well-being in educational settings has led to an increased interest in gratitude education. This study explores the integration of gratitude-based interventions in school curricula and their impact on students' emotional, social, and academic development. Drawing upon a broad body of global research, the findings underscore gratitude as a multidimensional construct that fosters empathy, enhances student engagement, supports positive teacher-student relationships, and contributes to overall well-being. Through a synthesis of qualitative and quantitative studies across diverse educational contexts, the paper highlights key mediators such as emotional support from teachers, fulfillment of psychological needs, mindfulness, and internal locus of control in enhancing the effectiveness of gratitude interventions. Additionally, emerging technologies and structured educational programs are shown to facilitate the implementation of gratitude practices, making them accessible and impactful. The review also addresses the consequences of ingratitude and the evolving understanding of related constructs like respect, reinforcing the value of gratitude as a foundational element of holistic education. This study advocates for the intentional and evidence-based inclusion of gratitude education to create emotionally supportive and academically thriving school environments.

Keywords: *Gratitude, Psychological Wellbeing, Academic Performance, Adolescents*

A curriculum incorporating gratitude in educational settings is gaining prominence in the evolving field of gratitude education. This approach builds on a growing body of research highlighting the cognitive, social, and emotional benefits of gratitude for both students and educators. As institutions strive to foster the development of robust personalities, integrating gratitude into the curriculum has become increasingly significant.

Gratitude is defined as a complex emotional response that involves recognizing and appreciating the good aspects of life, like the kindness of others. In education, gratitude is

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more than just acknowledging gifts or favours; it involves a deeper appreciation for connections, experiences, and chances. Research indicates that expressing gratitude can significantly enhance students' emotional wellness, leading to greater joy, stronger relationships, and enhanced academic performance. Acquiring the skill of demonstrating gratitude enables students to engage in a positive manner with peers and educators, creating a conducive atmosphere for education. Feeling a sense of belonging is crucial for emotional development and can help decrease feelings of loneliness or competition that may arise in educational settings (Shin et al., 2020).

Programs that encourage gratitude in education typically involve structured initiatives that offer educators the tools and techniques needed to effectively incorporate gratitude activities. For instance, the Greater Good Science Centre has created resources such as gratitude journals and educational lesson plans for young people to promote these activities in school environments.

The introduction of gratitude education offers an opportunity for positive transformation in the education sector. Teachers can greatly influence the emotional growth and enhance academic interest of their students by prioritizing gratitude in student development. This thorough approach enhances individual welfare and fosters a more compassionate and interconnected school environment, ultimately preparing students for achievement in both their academic and personal endeavours. As research advances in this area, it will be essential for educators to remain current on effective techniques for promoting gratitude in their students (Green et al., 2020).

Educating students on gratitude significantly enhances their social and emotional development by fostering empathy, reducing aggression, and promoting a favourable outlook on life. Engaging in gratitude can boost students' emotional strength and improve their social connections, resulting in a calmer classroom atmosphere. This emotional growth prepares students for future social interactions and challenges.

A study by Fazal-e-Hasan et al., (2021) developed and assessed a comprehensive framework for student gratitude education that highlighted its influence on students' positive perspectives, attitudes, and intentions toward their universities. The study conducted a survey involving 1,104 participants from public, private, and semi-public schools in Pakistan, employing current methods to collect data and using statistical analysis to examine the relationships within the proposed gratitude framework. The findings indicated that gratitude significantly explained how a university's emphasis on fostering relationships impacts students' positive views and attitudes. Specifically, the research shows that encouraging gratitude could enhance students' engagement and motivation to cultivate lasting relationships with their institutions.

A study by Aini et al., (2020) employed a comprehensive approach, utilizing both quantitative methods, such as academic assessments, and qualitative data gathered from interviews and focus groups, to gain insights into the impact of gratitude education on students' educational experiences. The findings revealed that gratitude education led to marked improvements in students' academic performance and attitudes toward learning. Additionally, qualitative evidence highlighted that these practices fostered enhanced emotional well-being and strengthened social connections among classmates. Students reported feeling more motivated and engaged in their studies, which contributed to a more

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positive learning environment. Overall, the study underscored the potential of gratitude education as effective tools for promoting not only academic success but also emotional health and social cohesion within educational settings.

A cross-sectional study by Nalipay et al., (2023) assessed the impact of an intervention that integrated academic and social skills with a gratitude exercise, revealing significant benefits for students' overall well-being and skill development. The methodology of the study included both quantitative measures such as academic and social skills assessments conducted before and after the intervention and qualitative feedback from participants to evaluate the efficacy of the interventions. The findings suggested that the integration of these approaches significantly enhanced students' academic performance and social skills while fostering a greater sense of gratitude that positively influenced their emotional well-being, demonstrating the potential benefits of such interventions in educational settings.

Czyżowska & Gurba, (2022) assessed how effective a gratitude intervention is at enhancing the sense of purpose and mental health of young adults in Europe. The study utilized a randomized controlled trial, where participants were assigned to either a gratitude intervention group, which engaged in structured gratitude exercises, or a control group. The results indicated that individuals in the gratitude program experienced significant improvements in both their sense of life meaning and overall mental well-being compared to those in the control group. This suggested that gratitude activities can effectively enhance these critical aspects of mental health among young adults, highlighting the potential for such interventions to foster a greater sense of purpose and emotional resilience in this demographic.

A study by Jin & Wang, (2019) examined how gratitude affects learning engagement in teenagers, focusing on the mediating roles of teachers' emotional support and students' basic psychological needs. Employing a quantitative research approach, researchers gathered data from 450 teenagers across various schools, assessing their gratitude levels, perceptions of emotional support from teachers, fundamental psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness), and engagement in learning using validated measures.

The results demonstrated that gratitude positively influenced learning engagement, with emotional support from teachers and the fulfilment of students' psychological needs serving as significant mediators in this relationship. This indicated that promoting gratitude can enhance teenagers' involvement in learning by strengthening emotional support from teachers and addressing their psychological needs. The findings underscored the importance of creating supportive educational environments that foster gratitude, ultimately contributing to improved learning outcomes and deeper student engagement.

A cross-sectional study by Martín et al., (2021) conducted a study to investigate upcoming technologies in gratitude education and their potential to improve learning results. Through expert interviews, researchers uncovered important trends and innovations that are influencing the field of gratitude education. The results showed that incorporating advanced technologies like artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and collaborative online platforms can greatly enhance student participation and learning effectiveness. In addition, the research emphasized the significance of integrating social-emotional learning components, such as teaching gratitude. Educational institutions can boost emotional well-being and motivation

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by promoting gratitude among students, resulting in better academic performance and a more positive learning environment.

A study conducted by Caleon et al., (2019) sought to examine the effects of gratitude on students' social connections, ability to bounce back in school, and general welfare within the school environment. The researchers utilized a quantitative method, specifically a sequential mediation analysis, with a cohort of 78 students from Hong Kong. Data on gratitude, interpersonal relationships, resilience, and well-being was collected through surveys. The findings indicated that expressing thanks has a noteworthy influence on enhancing interpersonal connections, which in turn contributes to fostering resilience in educational settings and positively affecting the overall school environment. Research has shown that promoting gratitude in academic environments can lead to positive outcomes by enhancing students' emotional and social capabilities.

Anand et al., (2021) investigated the connection between gratitude, mindfulness, and quality of life in teenagers, employing a quantitative approach through surveys that assessed these variables using established psychological scales. Findings revealed a significant correlation between higher levels of gratitude and improved quality of life, with mindfulness acting as a crucial mediator in this relationship. Practicing mindfulness not only enhances the positive effects of gratitude but also helps adolescents manage their emotions, strengthen social connections, and make healthier lifestyle choices. This research highlighted the importance of integrating mindfulness practices into interventions aimed at fostering gratitude, ultimately promoting greater emotional well-being and resilience among teenagers as they navigate the challenges of adolescence.

Caleon et al., (2024) investigated how gratitude affects adolescent students' relationships, resilience, and well-being within Asian educational settings. Employing a combination of quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, researchers collected data from adolescent students across various schools. The results indicated that expressing gratitude significantly enhances students' social connections, bolsters their resilience in facing challenges, and positively impacts their overall well-being. Specifically, students who participated in gratitude exercises reported stronger social bonds and improved emotional coping mechanisms. Qualitative feedback highlighted that engaging in gratitude practices fostered a more positive outlook and enriched interpersonal relationships, demonstrating the effectiveness of gratitude interventions as valuable tools for enhancing mental health and emotional resilience among adolescents.

A cross-sectional study by Chowdhury et al.,(2021) sought to investigate how gratitude impacts teenagers' involvement in learning, highlighting the role of teachers' emotional support and students' fundamental psychological needs as mediators. The scholars employed a quantitative method to collect data from 688 junior high school students in China through pre-existing surveys regarding gratitude, teacher emotional support, meeting basic needs, and involvement in academics.

The outcomes revealed that gratitude positively impacted learning engagement, with emotional support from teachers and meeting basic psychological needs acting as crucial mediating factors. More specifically, three ways were identified: gratitude influenced engagement in learning through teacher emotional support, meeting psychological needs, and a combination of both factors at the same time. The study highlighted the importance of

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enhancing emotional support from teachers and addressing students' psychological needs to maximize the benefits of gratitude on student involvement in the learning process.

A cross-sectional study by Cui et al., (2023) explored the impact of gratitude on student engagement in academic settings by examining the roles of internal locus of control and subjective well-being. The researchers used quantitative methodology and gathered data through surveys administered to students, assessing the interconnectedness of gratitude, internal locus of control, subjective well-being, and academic engagement. Statistical analyses were conducted to evaluate the indirect effects of these variables. The results indicated that students with higher levels of gratitude demonstrate increased academic involvement, highlighting the significance of gratitude in fostering a positive educational experience.

Furthermore, the relationship between gratitude and academic engagement is mediated by both feelings of control and subjective well-being, suggesting that enhancing these psychological factors can further boost student participation in academic tasks. This underscored the importance of promoting gratitude within educational environments to enhance student motivation and engagement, ultimately contributing to improved academic outcomes. By integrating practices that cultivate gratitude, educators can create a more supportive and engaging learning atmosphere for students.

A study conducted by Navarro & Tudge, (2020) evaluates the concept of gratitude by examining the effects of ingratitude, positing that a deeper understanding of ingratitude can illuminate the true nature and significance of gratitude itself. The scholars conducted a conceptual analysis by reviewing existing literature on both gratitude and ingratitude, synthesizing findings from various research studies to investigate how the absence of gratitude manifests and its consequent effects on mental well-being. The findings indicated that failing to express thanks can lead to adverse emotional and social outcomes, underscoring the critical role of gratitude in fostering healthy relationships and enhancing overall happiness. The study revealed that understanding ingratitude not only clarifies the definition of gratitude but also emphasizes its importance in improving mental health and promoting social cohesion. The authors advocate for the promotion of gratitude across various contexts and highlighted that addressing the harmful effects of ungratefulness can significantly enhance individual happiness and contribute positively to societal well-being. By illuminating the detrimental impacts of ingratitude, this research reinforces the necessity of cultivating gratitude as a vital component of emotional and social health.

Malti et al., (2020) conducted a study to explore the development of respect in children and teenagers, focusing on how their understanding and expressions of respect evolve from childhood to adolescence. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with nearly 500 children aged 5 to 15, gathering rich qualitative data. In addition, they collected supplementary information from parents, teachers, and peers to gain a comprehensive perspective on various aspects of respect. The study examined how children perceive respect, how they demonstrate it to others, and how they recognize respect received from others. The findings revealed that children's conceptions of respect are deeply intertwined with pro-social behaviours and emotional intelligence. As children grow, their understanding of respect shifts from a simplistic view centered on authority to a more nuanced appreciation for fairness and kindness. This research highlighted the importance of fostering an environment where respect is actively discussed and modelled. Encouraging

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respectful interactions not only enhances children's social skills but also contributes to their emotional well-being.

In India, promoting gratitude through culturally resonant strategies can address problems such as stress and competition while also honouring students' values. Practices such as maintaining a gratitude journal and sending thank-you notes can boost the feeling of togetherness in classroom environments. Adapting these techniques to emphasize collectivism and familial bonds fosters a sense of belonging and enhances the well-being of every student.

A study by Thomas et al., (2024) aimed to explore the relationships between gratitude expression, helping behaviour, and psychosocial well-being among adolescent students in Kerala. Employing a quantitative research methodology, the researchers distributed structured questionnaires to a sample of adolescents to assess their levels of gratitude, kindness, and various dimensions of mental and emotional well-being. The findings revealed a strong positive correlation between gratitude expression and helping behaviours, indicating that adolescents who regularly express gratitude were more inclined to engage in acts of kindness. Higher levels of gratitude were linked to enhanced emotional and social well-being, suggesting that promoting gratitude could significantly improve overall mental health and interpersonal skills within educational environments for adolescents.

Although several studies examined the role of gratitude education, psychological wellbeing and academic performance each study has adopted different research The research of Shin et al., (2020) emphasised on a single intervention, making it difficult to assess the long term effects of gratitude practices across different cultures. Whereas the study by Anand et. al, used a limited sample size and a non-representative sample, with results being only relevant to senior high school students. The use of a cross-sectional design by Cui et al., (2023) limits the capability to determine casual connections between gratitude, academic engagement, internal locus of control and subjective wellbeing.

The research by Green et al., studied factors that hinder the relationship between gratitude and life satisfaction, but fails to examine additional variables such as socioeconomic status or cultural background that may influence this correlation. The absence of oversight may limit the applicability of findings across different demographics. Czyżowska & Gurba (2022) focused only on European individuals without considering cultural variations that could impact the success of gratitude interventions. Thomas et al., (2024) focused on gratitude in adolescent students, but the study does have sufficient long-term data to track the development of these behaviours or their effects on mental health in the long term.

DISCUSSION

The reviewed literature underscores the transformative potential of integrating gratitude into educational curricula. Studies consistently highlight that gratitude not only boosts students' emotional well-being but also enhances academic engagement, resilience, and social cohesion. The mediating roles of teacher support, emotional intelligence, and psychological needs are repeatedly emphasized as key mechanisms through which gratitude exerts its positive effects. Moreover, findings reveal that structured gratitude interventions such as journaling, reflective practices, and mindfulness lead to measurable improvements in students' mental health and interpersonal relationships. The inclusion of emerging technologies like AI and virtual platforms also shows promise in enhancing gratitude

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practices. Importantly, research suggests that a lack of gratitude or experiences of ingratitude may negatively impact emotional and social development, reinforcing the importance of cultivating this virtue. Collectively, the findings advocate for a holistic approach to education, where gratitude is not merely an add-on but a foundational component fostering emotional growth, academic success, and overall well-being.

Suggestions for Future Research

There is significant scope for future research to explore the benefits of gratitude and its expression in enhancing emotional maturity among adolescents. It is worth examining whether introducing gratitude education in late childhood could have a more positive impact on emotional maturity. Qualitative research designs may help uncover the subtle experiences and expressions of gratitude among adolescents who may be less receptive to traditional testing and assessment methods.

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Conflict of Interest

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