

Teaching of Gratitude among the Students of Secondary School as a Means of Well-Being

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“If only prayer you say in your life is “thank you” it would be enough.”—Meister Eckhart

Abstract: *Gratitude is a moral, actively pro-social and emotive expression where one acknowledges a gift, recognizes the value of the gift and appreciates the intention of the donor. The present paper is an attempt to focus on the implication of gratitude on social well-being and subjective life satisfaction. It also attempts to develop some skills to cultivate gratitude. Gratitude has very significant implication on the life satisfaction and subjective well-being of an individual. Through this it also contributes to social well-being. Despite such significance, positive emotions like gratitude and the strengths of life has been getting less importance in scientific psychological study. So, present paper is an effort to bridge such gaps in Indian context. Present study highlights that gratitude can enhance social well-being as a moral barometer, moral reinforce and moral motivator. Gratitude plays a critical role in happiness of an individual. Therefore, it is necessary to develop certain skills to teach gratitude in scientific way not only as a moral virtue. Researches, conducted in the field of Positive Psychology support that skills of well-being can be taught and learnt scientifically. Positive Psychology research also discovered that cultivating the skills of well-being works as an antidote of depression, vehicle of life satisfaction and as a means of creative thinking. On the basis of such discoveries present study tested the effectiveness of some skills in cultivating gratitude. It was discovered through close participant observation and experimental treatment that gratitude is skill based and can be taught and learnt effectively.*

Keywords: *gratitude, well being, moral barometer, moral reinforce, moral motivator*

1. INTRODUCTION

Gratitude is one of the most virtuous positive emotions of life. Gratitude is not only a positive emotion but also a habit, an attitude, a mood, a personality trait, a moral virtue, a motive, a way of living. According to The Oxford English Dictionary Gratitude is “the quality or condition of being thankful; the appreciation of an inclination to return kindness.” Emmons (2008) proposes that when somebody is said to be grateful he acknowledges that he has received a gift; he recognises the value of the gift and appreciates the intention of the donor. Acknowledgement of gift means acknowledgement of the goodness of life. A gift that a person has received is because of the love and generosity of others. He may not deserve this gift. Gratitude is a feeling of remembering and acknowledging this. Gratitude is an attitude, a motive, an intention to remember and acknowledge the contribution of others that made for the sake of our betterment. Secondly, gratitude is an attitude, a willingness to recognize the undeserved and unearned increments of value in one’s experience. It is the recognition of the sources of goodness of life which lie outside the self. Thirdly, gratitude is a way of appreciating the intention of a donor. Whose intention is others well-being. Who extends a help, a gift only because of his generosity, compassion and love, but not because of this that somebody has earned it or deserved it. Thus, gratitude has three-part construal—when someone is grateful he acknowledges willingly, recognises intellectually and appreciates emotionally.

1.1. Benefits of Gratitude

As a concept gratitude has a broad and timeless appeal. People have been considering gratitude as valuable and beneficial irrespective of creed colour, race, religion etc. Theologians, moral

philosophers and writers have been identifying gratitude as an indispensable manifestation of virtue and excellence of character (Emmons, 2008). It has been rightly remarked by a philosopher that “gratitude is the most pleasant of virtues and most virtuous of pleasures.” Though gratitude has been acclaimed extensively in such a manner but it has never, until recently, been studied scientifically. Reasons may be that as psychological trait gratitude seems simple, appears in surface, and seems a very obvious emotion. Possibly psychologists do not feel excitement and complicity to study such an emotion of surface. But recent psychologists discovered that gratitude is a deeper, very complex phenomenon and plays a critical role in human happiness. “Gratitude is literally one of the few things that can measurably change peoples’ lives.” (Emmons, 2008). It contributes to social as well as subjective well-being through its different fragrances. McCullough et. al. (2008) proposed that gratitude contributes to social well-being as a social benefactor, social reinforce and social motivator.

1.1.1. Gratitude as a Social/Moral Barometer

As a social barometer or benefactor gratitude indicates the well-being status of a society. By moral barometer it refers that one person becomes the beneficiary of another person’s moral action. If somebody has grace to me I become the beneficiary of his moral deed and if I acknowledge his grace, I appreciate his intention by being grateful; he is reinforced to repeat the grace. In this way people become beneficiary by each other’s moral action.

1.1.2. Gratitude as a Moral Reinforcer

McCullough et. al. (2008) proposed that gratitude reinforces prosocial behaviour because expression of gratitude increase the likelihood that benefactors will behave prosocially again in the future. They found that the persons who were thanked for their efforts are willing to work harder for others in the future if opportunities arise. And at the same time the persons those are not thanked are not willing to continue such behaviour in the future.

1.1.3. Gratitude as a moral Motivator

Gratitude motivates people to behave prosocially after receiving benefits. McCullough, Emmons and Tsang (2002) found that people who scored higher on self and peer report measures of the “gratitude disposition” also scored higher on measures of prosocial behaviour. Bartlett and DeSteno (2006) discovered that participants made to feel grateful towards a benefactor exerted more effort to help the benefactor on an unrelated task. They were also more likely to help a stranger.

1.1.4. Benefits of Gratitude Towards Subjective Well-Being

- Gratitude brings us happiness (Emmons, 2008; Lyubomirsky, 2012). It also boosts feeling of optimism, joy, pleasure enthusiasm and other positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2009; Seligman, 2013). The “broaden and build” theory of Fredrickson suggests that in contrast to negative emotions positive emotions lead us to more expansive and creative thoughts and behavior which create additional personal resources over time (Fredrickson & Brangian, 2005). Emotions like hope, optimism and gratitude contribute to optimal brain and mind function. (Hallowell, 2011).
- Gratitude reduces anxiety and repression. Emmons (2008) discovered that depression is inversely related with gratitude. Watkins (2004) Clinical experiments showed that clinically depressed individuals have significantly lower gratitude (nearly 50 percent less gratitude)
- Gratitude is good for our bodies. Emmons (2008) discovered that gratitude strengthens the immune system, lowers blood pressure, reduces symptoms of illnesses and makes us less bothered by aches and pains.
- Gratitude makes us more resilient. They improve resilience in crisis (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh & Larkin, 2003).
- Gratitude is good for schools. Gratitude makes students feel better about their school (Seligman, 2012; Fredrickson, 2009). It also makes teacher feel more satisfied and accomplished and less emotionally exhausted by reducing teacher burnout.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem under study is formally entitled as “Teaching of Gratitude among the Students of Secondary School as a Means of Well-Being”

3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Gratitude is one of the most potent determinants of social as well as subjective well being. Lack of study on the positive aspects of life like gratitude, hope, resilience, savour, self efficacy, happiness, etc. keeps the society unaware of their positive impacts. In this context the present study will through some light on gratitude as one of the positive aspects of life and its credit as pro-social behavior and subjective well-being. Therefore, it is necessary to build a capacity like gratitude to ensure the increments. The scientific psychologists in India are very less concern about the building of positives in lives through scientific methodologies. An attempt to build the positives of life is must to meet the current alarming psychological problems in social relationship and emotional life of the students. Along with the Positive Psychologists we also propose to strengthen the positives and strengths rather than repairing the negatives and damages. So this is an effort to build a positive of human life i.e. gratitude.

4. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study were-

- To compare the level of gratitude between experimental and control group of Secondary School students before gratitude exercises.
- To compare the level of gratitude between male students of experimental and control group of the Secondary School before gratitude exercises.
- To compare the level of gratitude between female students of experimental and control group of the Secondary School before gratitude exercises.
- To compare the level of gratitude between male and female students of experimental group of the Secondary School before gratitude exercises.
- To study the significance of change of the level of gratitude of the secondary school students of the experimental group after gratitude exercises.
- To compare the level of gratitude between experimental and control group of Secondary School students after gratitude exercises.
- To compare the level of gratitude between male students of experimental and control group of the Secondary School after gratitude exercises.
- To compare the level of gratitude between female students of experimental and control group of the Secondary School after gratitude exercises.
- To compare the level of gratitude between male and female students of experimental group of the Secondary School after gratitude exercises.
- To study the opinions of the secondary school students after gratitude exercises.
- To observe the behavior of the students during gratitude exercises.

5. HYPOTHESES

H1-There is no significant difference in the level of gratitude between experimental and control group of Secondary School students before gratitude exercise.

H2-There is no significant difference in the level of gratitude between male students of the experimental and control group of Secondary School before gratitude exercises.

H3- There is no significant difference in the level of gratitude between female students of the experimental and control group of Secondary School before gratitude exercises.

H4- There is no significant difference in the level of gratitude between male and female students of the experimental group of Secondary School before gratitude exercises.

H5- There is significant progress in the level of gratitude of the students of the experimental group of the Secondary Schools after gratitude exercises.

H6- There is no significant difference in the level of gratitude between experimental and control group of Secondary School students after gratitude exercises.

H7- There is no significant difference in the level of gratitude between the male students of the experimental and control group after gratitude exercises.

H8- There is no significant difference in the level of gratitude between the female students of the experimental and control group after gratitude exercises.

H9- There is no significant difference in the level of gratitude between the male and female students of the experimental group after gratitude exercises.

6. DEFINITION OF THE KEY TERM

Gratitude: Gratitude is a moral and actively pro-social behavior where one acknowledges a gift, recognizes the value of the gift and appreciates the intention of the donor. Scores will be calculated on the basis of these dimensions. More the score in the scale means more the level of gratitude.

7. METHODOLOGY

7.1. Sample

The investigators selected 37 students of class ten for the experimental group and 30 students of the same class for the control group from Kailashpur High School, Soonjan Adarsha Jatiya Vidyalaya, Sarbajanin High School, Dirak Higher Secondary School, Purbanchal Adarsha High School, Gyandeeep High School, Bordirak High School of Tinsukia District, Assam out of 400 students by using random sampling technique. The groups were randomized on the basis of their socio-economic status and academic achievement.

7.2. Design

In the present study, we used true experimental double group pre-test post-test design. We organized a residential camp for ten days and arranged for gratitude exercises for the students. A gratitude test was conducted on both the experimental and control group before providing gratitude exercises. We taught contents of class ten to both the groups. Along with this we arranged for gratitude exercises for the experimental group. Teachers, environmental condition and time were kept similar for both the groups. After ten days the levels of gratitude of the students were re-tested. Along with a co-observer, we observed the behavioral changes of the students during the gratitude exercises. We also collected the written opinions of the students regarding their experiences in gratitude exercise after the exercises.

7.3. The Tool Used

We used Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6) developed by McCullough, Emmons & Tsang (2002). The GQ-6 is a 6 item questionnaire on which respondents endorse each item on a 5 point Likert scale. We used the Assamese adaptation of the scale in this study. We also used an observation schedule (unstructured) constructed by us to observe the behavioural changes of the students.

7.4. Statistical Technique

We used 't' test to estimate the significance of difference between means.

7.5. Variables

7.5.1. Independent Variable

In the present study gratitude exercises are independent variable. Exercises are Gratitude Journey, Gratitude Letter and Gratitude Journal.

7.5.2. Dependent/Observed Variable

Dependent variable in the present study is gratitude.

7.5.3. Extraneous Variables

In the present study we considered socio-economic status, academic achievement, teacher and environment as extraneous variable and we have controlled these variables.

8. TREATMENTS

Seligman (2013) discovered that Subjective well-being and flourishing can be taught and learnt like language, mathematics etc. Seligman (2013) proposed that the term flourish could be decomposed in to five scientifically manageable realms. These are *positive emotion* (pleasant life), *engagement* (engaged life), *meaning* (meaningful life), *relationship* and *Accomplishment*. These terms are measurable, manageable, and can be handled precisely. Most importantly, Seligman (2013) found that positive emotions like gratitude, forgiveness, resilience, hope can be taught and learnt significantly. Buragohain (2014) found that hope can be taught and learnt through regular hope exercises. Among the positive emotions related with past, present and future gratitude is one which measurably determines the pleasant life and also plays a critical role in happiness (Emmons, 2008). Increasing amount of depression, frustration and other mental problems demand that the skill of happiness and subjective well being should be taught to the new generation. Seligman et al. (2005) discovered that teaching happiness will serve at least three purposes—as an antidote of depression, as a vehicle of increasing life satisfaction and as a means of development of creativity. Therefore, it is necessary to find out the scientific ways to teach happiness. This is also an effort to experiment the extent to which gratitude can be taught and learnt.

8.1. Gratitude Journey

Regarding this exercise we explained to the students—“We have too many things to be grateful. There are too many persons to be grateful. Even some small incidents like a smile, saying hello, giving a pen to put signature, sharing a seat to sit, sharing a story, etc. are too important to make us happy and to be grateful. But in most of the times we don’t get chance to say ‘thank you’ to the persons who have given benefits, gifts to us. Even the countless gifts of the mother, father, relatives, teachers, etc. can also be considered. Number of persons that we are yet to offer thank will not be so less. So, students just take one or two minutes and carry on a journey of thanking people; who helped you, benefited you. Acknowledge the gift, recognize the value of the gift and appreciate the intention of the donor. Be honest, be involved.”

8.2. Gratitude Letter

Regarding this we told the students to write gratitude letter to the persons, they are grateful to. We instructed them—“You engage yourself in writing a letter to those who have grace, help in your life.”

8.3. Gratitude Journal

In a Gratitude Journal one can write the gifts, graces and benefits those have been enjoyed. Emmons (2008) discovered that this technique makes people happier. He wrote “When we are grateful, we affirm that a source of goodness exists in our lives. By writing each day, we magnify and expand upon these sources of goodness.” We used this way to teach gratitude in my experimental residential camps. We told them to write gratitude inspiring events every day. We instructed them “There is no right way to write these. Not necessary to think of a good, handy diary book. Don’t be bothered about spelling or grammar mistakes. The point is, you develop a habit of paying attention to the gratitude inspiring events. Establish a habit of looking at the goods of life.”

9. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

9.1. Hypothesis No. 1

“There is no significant difference in the level of gratitude between experimental and control group of secondary school students before gratitude exercise”.

Table1. Significance of difference in the level of gratitude between experimental and control group before gratitude exercise.

Group	N	Mean	S.D.	C.R.	Inference
Experimental	37	25.38	3.35	1.02	Not significant
Control	30	26.30	3.91		

Table-1 shows that the CR value is 1.02 which is less than table value at 0.05 level of significance. Thus the null hypothesis is accepted and it is concluded that there is no significant difference in the level of gratitude between experimental and control group before gratitude exercises.

9.2. Hypothesis No. 2

“There is no significant difference in the level of gratitude between male students of the experimental and control group of Secondary School before gratitude exercises.”

Table2. Significance of difference in the level of gratitude between male students of the experimental and control group before gratitude exercises.

Group	N	Mean	S.D.	SED	t	Inference
Experimental Group(Male)	19	24.79	3.66	1.21	1.57	Not significant
Control Group(Male)	16	26.69	3.47			

Table-2 shows that the ‘t’ value is 1.57 which is less than table value at 0.05 level of significance. Thus the null hypothesis is accepted and it is concluded that there is no significant difference in the level of gratitude between male students of the experimental and control group of Secondary School before gratitude exercises.

9.3. Hypothesis No. 3

“There is no significant difference in the level of gratitude between female students of the experimental and control group of Secondary School before gratitude exercises.”

Table3. Significance of difference in the level of gratitude between female students of the experimental and control group before gratitude exercises.

Group	N	Mean	S.D.	SED	t	Inference
Experimental Group(female)	18	25.44	3.42	1.32	0.32	Not significant
Control Group(female)	14	25.86	4.02			

Table-3 shows that ‘t’ value is 0.32 which is less than table value at 0.05 level of significance. Thus the null hypothesis is accepted and it is concluded that there is no significant difference in the level of gratitude between female students of the experimental and control group of Secondary School before gratitude exercises.

9.4. Hypothesis No. 4

“There is no significant difference in the level of gratitude between male and female students of the experimental group of Secondary School before gratitude exercises.”

Table4. Significance of difference in the level of gratitude between male and female students of the experimental group before gratitude exercises.

Sex	N	Mean	S.D.	SED	t	Inference
Male	19	24.79	3.38	0.4	1.63	Not significant
Female	18	25.44	3.42			

Table-4 shows that ‘t’ value is 1.63 which is less than table value at 0.05 level of significance. Thus the null hypothesis is accepted and it is concluded that there is no significant difference in the level of gratitude between male and female students of the experimental group of Secondary School before gratitude exercises.

9.5. Hypothesis No. 5

“There is significant progress in the level of gratitude of the students of the experimental group of the Secondary Schools after gratitude exercises.”

Teaching of Gratitude among the Students of Secondary School as a Means of Well-Being

Table5. Significance of change in gratitude of the students of the experimental group of the after gratitude exercises.

Test	N	Mean	SD	r	SED	Df	t	Inference
Pre-test	37	25.38	3.35	0.53	0.52	36	8.37	Significant at 0.01 level
Post-test	37	29.73	2.85					

Here we converted the test hypotheses is in to null form i.e. ‘there is no significant change in the level of gratitude of the students of Secondary Schools after gratitude exercises’. Now, Table-5 shows that the Mean gratitude value in post test is larger than the mean gratitude value in pre-test. The computed value of ‘t’ i.e. 8.37 is greater than the table value and hence it is significant at 1% level of significance. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected and it is concluded that there is a significant progress in the level of gratitude after doing the gratitude exercises. Here we used one tailed test to measure significance of difference.

9.6. Hypothesis No. 6

“There is no significant difference in the level of gratitude between experimental and control group of Secondary School students after gratitude exercises.”

Table6. Significance of difference in the level of gratitude between experimental and control group after gratitude exercises

Group	N	Mean	S.D.	C.R.	Inference
Experimental	37	29.73	2.85	4.04	Significant
Control	30	26.30	3.91		

Table-6 shows that the CR value is 4.04 which are more than table value at 0.01 level of significance. Thus the null hypothesis is rejected and it is concluded that there is significant difference in the level of gratitude between experimental and control group after gratitude exercises.

9.7. Hypothesis No. 7

“There is no significant difference in the level of gratitude between male students of the experimental and control group of Secondary School after gratitude exercises.”

Table7. Significance of difference in the level of gratitude between male students of the experimental and control group after gratitude exercises.

Group	N	Mean	S.D.	SED	t	Inference
Experimental Group(Male)	19	29.79	3.05	1.15	2.70	Significant
Control Group(Male)	16	26.69	3.91			

Table-7 shows that ‘t’ value is 2.70 which is more than table value at 0.01 level of significance. Thus the null hypothesis is rejected and it is concluded that there is significant difference in the level of gratitude between male students of the experimental and control group of Secondary School after gratitude exercises.

9.8. Hypothesis No. 8

“There is no significant difference in the level of gratitude between female students of the experimental and control group of Secondary School after gratitude exercises.”

Table8. Significance of difference in the level of gratitude between female students of the experimental and control group after gratitude exercises.

Group	N	Mean	S.D.	SED	t	Inference
Experimental Group(female)	18	29.67	2.72	1.20	3.18	Significant
Control Group(female)	14	25.86	4.02			

Table-8 shows that ‘t’ value is 3.18 which is more than table value at 0.01 level of significance. Thus the null hypothesis is rejected and it is concluded that there is significant difference in the level of gratitude between female students of the experimental and control group of Secondary School after gratitude exercises.

9.9. Hypothesis No. 9

“There is no significant difference in the level of gratitude between the male and female students of the experimental group after gratitude exercises.”

Table 9. Significance of difference in the level of gratitude between male and female students of the experimental group after gratitude exercises.

Sex	N	Mean	S.D.	SED	t	Inference
Male	19	29.79	3.05	0.43	0.28	Not significant
Female	18	29.67	2.72			

Table-9 shows that ‘t’ value is 0.28 which is less than table value at 0.05 level of significance. Thus the null hypothesis is accepted and it is concluded that there is no significant difference in the level of gratitude between male and female students of the experimental group of Secondary School after gratitude exercises.

9.10. Opinion of the Students After Gratitude Exercises

We collected written opinions of the students regarding their experiences and feelings during gratitude exercises. All the students of the experimental group submitted their opinions and it was evident from their reports that gratitude exercises were highly engaging and interesting for them. All of them reported that they got a new experience and feeling. Regarding their experiences some of the students wrote to us “Sir, for the first time I realized that I am blessed so much. (Janmoni, 7th January, 2015). During the exercises I feel that there are so many people to be thankful. I feel that our lives are nourished by the gifts and helps of other people. It stimulates me to think for other also. I use to think, I should not forget these gifts.” (Rashmi, 7th January, 2015). “The exercises developed my love and respect towards my parents, teachers and for all of them from whom I have been receiving gifts, helps and graces.” (Sourav, 7th January, 2015). “I have to continue these exercises because after the exercises I feel fresh, blessed and motivated.” (Pranjit, 7th January, 2015). “The exercises release my tension and revitalize me to work more.” (Pinki, 7th June, 2015).

9.11. Result of Observation During the Gratitude Exercises

We observed the behavior of the students during the exercises. We recorded their body movements, emotional changes during the exercises. On day fifth we were engaging students in gratitude journey. The Journey was specially to thank parents and guardians. When the students were in climax of the exercise then one of them started to weep and told “I am so sorry in front of my parents. In spite of so many graces that I have been receiving from them I have been hiding some misdeeds without thinking about them. I am felling very sorry.” He also admitted his misdeeds in front of everybody and promised to admit in front of his parents also. After that one by one other student also started to admit their guiltiness and misdeeds which may have been hurting their parents. They cried loudly by saying their faults and misdeeds. All of them promised not to repeat such works. They further promised that they will confess in front of their parents and guardians. The situation was highly emotional and engaging. From this experience we have concluded that Gratitude towards parents makes students feel guilty for the misdeeds they have done. Gratitude makes students repented and enables them to confess for the guiltiness.

10. MAJOR FINDINGS

- There is no significant difference in the level of gratitude between experimental and control group before gratitude exercises.
- There is no significant difference in the level of gratitude between male students of the experimental and control group of Secondary School before gratitude exercises.
- There is no significant difference in the level of gratitude between female students of the experimental and control group of Secondary School before gratitude exercises.
- There is no significant difference in the level of gratitude between male and female students of the experimental group of Secondary School before gratitude exercises.

- There is a significant progress in the level of gratitude after doing the gratitude exercises.
- There is significant difference in the level of gratitude between experimental and control group after gratitude exercises.
- There is significant difference in the level of gratitude between male students of the experimental and control group of Secondary School after gratitude exercises.
- There is significant difference in the level of gratitude between female students of the experimental and control group of Secondary School after gratitude exercises.
- There is no significant difference in the level of gratitude between male and female students of the experimental group of Secondary School after gratitude exercises.
- Gratitude can be significantly learnt and taught.
- Practice improves gratitude.
- Gratitude towards parents makes students feel guilty for the misdeeds they have done. Gratitude makes students repented and enables them to confess for the guiltiness.

11. CONCLUSION

As emotion, motive and as a whole as a life style gratitude plays very significant role in happiness. So it is an urgency to develop certain scientific skills to cultivate this virtue. Along with this other positive emotions like resilience, self-efficacy, hope, satisfaction, forgiveness, savour, etc., can also be taught and learnt. It requires serious research by the part of the scientific psychologists. Indian psychologists are still far away from the western positive psychology movement. Therefore this is an urgency to initiate some research in this area and to contribute in the subjective well-being of the citizens.

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