

Periodic Research

To Study the Effect of Age and Gratitude Intervention on Adolescents



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Abstract

Gratitude is a positive virtue which could be used to minimize the negative effects of today's materialized society. Through intervention programmes it could be easily implied in different institutions. This paper investigates the effect of age and levels of gratitude intervention on gratitude of adolescents. Previous work reveals different pattern for gratitude according to age, though stated that children became enable to experience gratitude at an early age but experience and expression favours elder adolescents and suggested that gratitude could be cultivated. This paper compares the two age groups of adolescents and found younger one at advantage from gratitude intervention. Long level of gratitude intervention is also found more effective in improving the gratitude score among adolescents. Finding shows significant effect of age on gratitude ($F; 1,234 = 13.277, P < .01$) favouring lower age-group and long level of Gratitude interaction is found more effective ($F; 2, 234 = 209.41, P < .01$)

Keywords: Gratitude, Positive Psychology, Gratitude Intervention.

Introduction

Gratitude can be conceptualized as a virtue, as an emotional state, as a habit or as an attitude. McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, and Larson (2001) conceptualized gratitude as a moral emotion. They proposed that gratitude serves three moral functions. As a moral barometer, gratitude signals the beneficiary that a benefactor bestowed a gift upon him or her, as a moral motive, gratitude encourages pro-social behaviour in the beneficiary either directly toward the benefactor or others. And, as a moral reinforcer, gratitude increases the probability that the benefactor will act pro-socially towards the beneficiary in the future.

Review of Literature

As an emotional state, previous research suggests that the main ingredients of gratitude are an intentional gesture that is of value to the recipient and costly to the benefactor (Lane & Anderson, 1976; Tesser, et al., 1968). Gable & Haidt (2005) suggested an additional ingredient that is perceived responsiveness to the self. Perceived responsiveness is an appraisal that is associated with feeling understood, valued, and cared for by another individual. Thus, we can say that gratitude is expression of gratefulness to someone or for someone or something.

Bosacki, Sitnik, Dutcher & Talwar (2018) reveal in their study significant positive correlations between Adolescents' perceptions of gratitude, self competencies and emotional and spiritual well-being.

Liau et al. (2018) concluded that gratitude for teachers improves the students' psychological adaptation for negative, stressful situations of life both in and outside school. It helps them to focus on their goal in long term.

Noor et al. (2018) found the similar results as earlier findings that gratitude intervention increased the magnitude and life satisfaction and decrease the distress. Such findings have greater aspects for practical implications.

It is found that older adults with more gratitude in comparison to middle age and younger adults. Older adults became more able to appreciate gratitude in their life in later years as they realize the reality of materialistic world where nothing is permanent except the inner peace of soul. (Chopik, et al., 2017)

Developmental Determinants of Gratitude

Although not much is known about the development of gratitude, many social and cognitive factors are likely to play an important role in its development.

The first factor is language development in children, through which he/she can experience and express gratefulness for someone or something. This language development could be developed through providing conversations, learning material etc. in children's social circle.

The second factor is age, because only after developing a theory of mind (Wellman, 1990); children begin to perceive behaviour as intentional. And only then they become able to attribute acts as intentional and experience empathy. Froh and Yurkewicz (2007) found that girls reported experiencing gratitude more than boys. Whereas, boys may derive more benefit from gratitude than girls (Kashdan et al., 2008). That is because of the 'masculine image' of the boys, which prevents them from experience and express gratitude. Consequently scholars suggested that intervention programmes should be formed keeping these differences in focus, so that they could be equally fruitful to everyone.

Benefits of Gratitude

Recent psychological research shows that gratitude plays an important role in our happiness, our healthy adjustment to life, and even in our physical well being. Participants who participated in scientific experiments of gratitude reported more optimism, fewer physical symptoms, better sleep, more progress on their own personal goals, higher level of positive states, such as alertness, enthusiasm, and determination, fewer negative states (as stress, envy, sadness, bitterness and fear), and were more likely to report having helped someone else, and even excel in academic context. Grateful people – those who perceive gratitude as a permanent trait rather than a temporary state of mind – have an edge on the not-so-grateful, when it comes to health, according to Emmons' research on gratitude.

Cultivation of Gratitude

We tend to remember the bad things much more easily than the good. Without challenges, there can be no progress. Without obstacles, there can be no achievement. Be thankful for the opportunities that they provide. "Thousands of years of literature talk about the benefits of cultivating gratefulness as virtue", says Robert Emmons. In recent years, scholars suggest different ways to cultivate gratitude, as they consider it a learned process. So, gratitude can be cultivated and people could grab all the benefits which result because of this virtue. And the amazing fact is that its cultivation does not require any strict schedule or programme. Emmons and McCullough (2003) showed that gratitude can be taught and learned, practiced and applied.

Objective of the Study

To study the effect of age, levels of gratitude intervention and their interaction on gratitude of adolescents.

Hypotheses

It is hypothesized that age, levels of gratitude intervention and their interaction will have significant effect on gratitude of adolescents.

Variables of the Study

Independent Variable

The first variable, age of the subjects is symbolized as A has two levels, i.e. 11-14 years, and 15-18 years, are symbolized as A_1 and A_2 respectively. The second independent variable is level of gratitude intervention has been symbolized as LGI having three levels, i.e. long level of gratitude intervention, moderate level of gratitude intervention and short level of gratitude intervention and they are symbolized as LGI_L , LGI_M and LGI_S respectively.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable of the present study is Gratitude.

Sample

The present study has a sample of 240 subjects. Among these subjects, there were 120 subjects of 11-14 yrs age-group and 120 subjects of 15-18 yrs age-group. Among 240 subjects, 80 subjects were provided with long level of gratitude intervention, 80 subjects with moderate level of gratitude intervention and rest 80 subjects with short level of gratitude intervention. Thus, there were 6 cells and equal number of subjects was selected for the each cell.

Sample Selection

By using the simple random sampling technique, 240 subjects studying in different schools of Gajraula and Meerut (U.P.) were selected on the basis of related age-group. In order to find out subjects for the present study the Principal of the following schools of Gajraula and Meerut city were personally contacted and requested to provide their genuine help in the data-collection, by permitting to use their students as subjects. After getting the permission of Principals of the institutions, related teachers of the class were requested to provide their help in the collection of data. Adolescents falling in the age-group of 11-14 yrs were randomly selected from class 6 to 9 and 15-18 yrs were from class 10-12.

Experimental Design

For the present study, two-way factorial design of 2×3 with 6 cells was used to study the effects of the two variables, i.e. level of gratitude intervention and age on gratitude of the adolescents. The first factor was age of the subjects. It was varied at two levels, i.e. 11-14 years (A_1) and 15-18 years (A_2). The second factor was level of gratitude intervention (LGI), which was varied at three levels, i.e. long level of gratitude intervention (LGI_L), moderate level of gratitude intervention (LGI_M) and short level of gratitude intervention (LGI_S).

Measuring Tool

GQ-6 (The Gratitude Questionnaire- Six Item form) constructed by McCullough, Emmons and Tsang (2001) was used for the purpose of measuring gratitude. There are 6 statements in this scale, using the 7-point scale ranging strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Procedure

The data collection of the present study was conducted at different schools. In order to avoid any inconvenience to the subjects, principal of the respective schools were requested to spare one-room

for our work. With the co-operation of related teachers of the class, time-schedule for providing intervention to the adolescents was determined. GQ-6 scale was adopted in Hindi language by the researcher. GQ-6 scale, for the gratitude measurement and gratitude-stories required for gratitude intervention were arranged. For establishing good rapport with subjects, a very cooperative and healthy environment was created in the setting of the data collection. The GQ-6 scale was then distributed to the subjects individually in three groups according to pre-determined different levels of gratitude intervention. Then, a brief explanation about the meaning and nature of the gratitude was provided to the subjects. Gratitude stories (intervention in the form of short-written, one page stories) were distributed to the subjects, frequency of story distribution to the subjects varied

according to three levels of the gratitude intervention. Subjects were asked to go deeply through the gratitude-stories, so that they could understand the gratitude content in the stories. After reading, stories were collected from the subjects. The intervention was conducted by the same procedure for the intervention time-period of two months separately for three groups according to three levels of gratitude intervention. The dependent variable, i.e. gratitude was measured by GQ-6 scale at the end of the intervention time-period of two months to measure the individual differences in experiencing gratitude.

Results

The objective of the present study has been to investigate the effect of age and level of gratitude intervention on gratitude of adolescents. The analysis of variance was employed to deal with variances.

Table – 1
Summary of Analysis of Variance for Gratitude Scores

Source of Variance	SS	Df	MS	F
Age (A)	9.201	1	9.201	13.277**
Level of Gratitude Intervention (LGI)	290.256	2	145.128	209.41**
A x LGI	16.464	2	8.232	11.878**
Within Treatment (Error)	162.375	234	.693	—

** Significant at .01 Level of Confidence

Effect of Age

Table -1 reveals the significant main effect of age on the gratitude score of the subjects. (F; 1,234=13.277, p<.01). Significant 'F' ratio leads us to conclude that age is an influential variable in determining the amount of gratitude of subjects. Table

-2 shows that gratitude score was higher for the A₁ (11-14 years) level of age group than A₂ (15-18 years) level of age group. So, it can be interpreted that gratitude intervention is more effective with A₁ (11-14 years) level of age group and hypothesis has been accepted.

Table – 2
Mean Gratitude Scores for Two Age Groups

Age	Mean Score
11-14 years (A ₁)	7.51
15-18 years (A ₂)	7.12

Effect of Level of Gratitude Intervention

Table-1 reveals the significant main effect of levels of gratitude intervention on gratitude of adolescents (F; 2, 234=209.41, p<.01). On the basis of this significant 'F' ratio, it can be easily stated that difference in magnitude of gratitude of adolescents subjected to three levels of gratitude intervention i.e., long, moderate and short levels. Thus, the hypothesis

has been accepted. But in order to know that if the magnitude of gratitude among adolescents varies according to descending order of level of gratitude intervention or in some other manner, mean gratitude scores of the adolescents on the three levels of gratitude intervention was calculated and presented in the table - 3.

Table – 3
Mean Gratitude Scores for the Subjects on Three Levels of Gratitude Intervention

Levels of Gratitude Intervention	Mean Score
Long Level of Gratitude Intervention (LGI _L)	8.75
Moderate Level of Gratitude Intervention (LGI _M)	7.13
Short Level of Gratitude Intervention (LGI _S)	6.07

Table -3 shows that magnitude of gratitude was greater in those subjects who were provided with the long level of gratitude intervention in comparison to the subjects who were provided with moderate and short levels of gratitude intervention.

Interaction Effect of Age and Level of Gratitude Intervention (A x LGI)

The two factor's interaction effect, i.e. between two levels of age of the subjects and three levels of gratitude intervention was found significant

(F; 2, 234 = 11.878; p<.01). Thus, the hypothesis regarding the interaction effect of these two variables has been accepted. Results indicate that collectively these two variables have influence in affecting the gratitude scores of the subjects, as they have, when worked as independent variable in determining the gratitude score.

Mean Scores given in table -4 also indicate differences between two age groups on three levels of gratitude intervention.

Table – 4
Mean Gratitude Scores of Two Age Group at
Three Level of Gratitude Intervention (Ax LGI)

Level of Gratitude Intervention	Age	
	11-14 Years (A ₁)	15-18 Years (A ₂)
Long Level of Gratitude Intervention (LGI _L)	8.67	8.82
Moderate Level of Gratitude Intervention (LGI _M)	7.25	7.02
Short Level of Gratitude Intervention (LGI _S)	6.62	5.52

Discussion

Effect of Age on Gratitude

Present study aims to investigate the effect of age on gratitude, while subjects were provided with different levels of gratitude intervention. Results demonstrated that subjects of two different age group differ significantly on gratitude. Younger adolescents showed a greater advantage for gratitude intervention than older adolescents.

Melanie Klein (1957) proposed a psychoanalytic theory describing the development of gratitude in children. She asserted that gratitude first emerges in the earliest stages of infancy. The more gratification the infant feels towards maternal nourishment, the greater the experience of being the recipient of a valued gift. Regular gratification will foster the experience of joy and gratitude in the child. Dan McAdams and Jack Bauer (2004) also maintained that the early attachment experience, as conceptualized by (Bowlby, 1969), may be where gratitude originates.

Emmons and Shelton (2002) argues, that, "gratitude does not emerge spontaneously in newborns" (p. 468). Because sustained effort and focus are needed to develop virtues such as gratitude. Therefore, infancy could be the primary developmental stage for gratitude, firm conclusions will only be reached with rigorous empirical confirmation. Empirical work conducted by Baumgartner-Tramer (1938), Graham (1988), and Gleason and Weintraub (1976) indicated that gratitude may begin developing in early childhood; probably consolidating in middle childhood. Older children report experiencing and expressing more gratitude compared to younger children.

Research investigated the effect of gratitude intervention on two different age groups. And results favour the age group A₁ (11-14 years) which showed a greater advantage for adolescents at lower level of age. Results could be explained on the basis of ABC model of attitude and factors causing change in attitude. According to which it is not easy to persuade someone who already had an existing pattern of attitude from a long duration. And with increasing age, people become more rigid for changing their attitude, while it is comparatively easy to persuade an individual who is in the midway of developing attitude. . Gordon, Musher-Eizenman, Holub, and Dalrymple (2004) found that older children included more themes than younger children and they tended to show less appreciation for material objects in relation to their younger counterparts. At an early age of 4 children begin to develop the theory of mind, which is a "sophisticated understanding of person as 'mental agents' whose actions are caused by intentional mind

states, such as desires, intentions, and beliefs" (Gergely, 2003, p. 26).

This pattern of result could also be explained as the consequence of efforts applied by adolescents of A₂ age group to maintain their consistency between attitudes or between attitudes and behaviour and to reduce dissonance. As earlier described, two models for attitude change reveal that people do not easily engage in careful, cognitive analysis for attitude change, because they were supposed to be having rigid attitudes in comparison to the 'A₁' age group. As far as factors concerned regarding the attitude change, we can also say that 'A₁' age group was at advantage for gratitude intervention, because this group was more open to grasp new information from their environment, and changed attitudes accordingly in comparison to the 'A₂' age group.

Effect of Level of Gratitude Intervention on Gratitude

Results demonstrated clearly that different level of gratitude intervention has its influential effect on determining the score for gratitude among adolescents. As the intensity of gratitude intervention increased, the gratitude-score increased too. Though a big difference was not evident on viewing the data, this could be because the GQ-6 Questionnaire was only a 6-item questionnaire with 7-point scale, that will not give the liberty to the subjects for extended scores. The obtained results reveal that gratitude scores of the subjects belonging to different levels of gratitude intervention differ significantly. The present study offers further support for Emmons and McCullough (2003), Watkins, Woodward, Stone, and Kolts (2003), and Sheldon and Lyubomirsky (2006).

'ABC Model' of attitude has been used for explaining the reasons behind increased scores for gratitude after providing intervention. To some extent some reason could be found also in the 'Moral Motive Theory' and 'Broaden-and-build theory'. It is easier to conceptualize according to the ABC Model of attitude; that why intensity as the different levels of gratitude intervention has different effect on subjects. Greif & Gleason (1980) found that parental prompting leads children to express gratitude, while with no prompting, expressing gratitude is least frequent. According to Wellman (1990), after developing a 'theory of mind' children begin to perceive behaviours as intentional, that is, the basic cognition needed to experience gratitude (McCullough et al., 2001). Then they were able to attribute things in their surrounding as the result of other's effort, and stop taking them for granted. McCullough & Emmons (2003) concluded, that gratitude induction led to increase in grateful emotion, which in turn led to increase in well-being. Subjects with such induction reported to develop

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Periodic Research

empathy, generous attribution and appraisal. All these are the basic cognitive needs required to develop grateful cognition towards ones' life. McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, and Larson (2001) conceptualized gratitude as moral emotion and provided their theory as the three basic functions of gratitude, whereas the first function, as moral barometer required the above stated cognitive abilities to evaluate an act of help as intentional, valued costly and not the obligatory one. According to the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 1998, 2001), positive emotions are adaptive evolutionary mechanisms which broaden thought-action repertoires, improving creativity and cognitive ability. Also as suggested by Fredrickson (2004), gratitude is a positive emotion, broadens the cognitive abilities, which in turn leads to the increased grateful perception of life. It has also been found that people experiencing positive affect evaluate themselves and others more positively, make more lenient attributions, and behave in a more confident, optimistic and generous way in interpersonal situations. Jackson et. al. (2001) applied Learner and Keltner's (2000, 2001) thinking to gratitude, demonstrating that gratitude causes people to make stable, controllable causal attribution. Gratitude causes people to focus on other individuals as causal agents. Gratitude is associated with appraising one's own positive outcomes as being due to the intentional, benevolent, costly, valuable behaviour of other people. Thus, positive emotions can have a direct effect on cognitive performance & cognitive appraisal of individuals.

In the present study 'given stories' as different levels of gratitude intervention were the source of positive emotion, which triggered the 'gratitude' as moral emotion (Jefferson, 1771). The amount of given stories to different group was the manipulation conducted the by the investigator. Results suggested that gratitude score increases with the increasing level of intervention or with the amount of given stories to the subjects. In the light of previous work it can be stated that gratitude-score was fluctuated with the amount of given stories as they provided the essential cognitive-conditions required for experiencing and expressing gratitude. 'Given-stories' worked as an initiation for developing a grateful attitude. Given stories were the source of information and propaganda, which was highest in the form of repetition for adolescents at long level of gratitude intervention, which in turn initiates and fulfills the motivational needs and cognitive needs.

Thus, age and different levels of gratitude intervention have their influential effect on gratitude of adolescents. Results also supported the previous work that gratitude could be learned and practiced. For making a beautiful world we can easily implied it in our academic institutions for overall development of our students.

Conclusion

Present and previous works shows that in spite of focus on negative aspects of life and make effort to remove them we should focus on the positive things in our life we get from God, our beloved-ones or from anyone, in any form this effort could be of

greater importance. As we read that even the richest people of the world ultimately search for the inner peace of soul and mind that money could not provide. And effort to appreciate the positive things we get in life is quite a simpler thing which could be made easier with Gratitude interaction at every level as in home, office and school etc. Experiencing gratitude create a positive social circle which ultimately return back to you in the form of positive results.

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Periodic Research

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