Can Gratitude be Taught: An Experiment on the Students of Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankardeva University (MSSU) in India

Pranjal Buragohain, Rajen Mandal
Department of Education, Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh , India

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 develop some skills to cultivate gratitude. Gratitude has very significant implication on the life satisfaction and subjective well-being of an individual. 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 and for moral repentance. 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. The present study shows through experimental treatment on the students of Mahapurusha Srimants Sankardeva University that gratitude is skill based and can be taught and learnt effectively.

Keywords: gratitude, Secondary school, gratitude exercise

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 (Emmons, 2008).

1.1 Benefits of Gratitude:

McCullough et al. (2008) proposed that gratitude contributes to social well-being as a social barometer, 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 *Gratitude for moral repentance:* Buragohain (2015) proposed that gratitude not only contributes as moral barometer, moral reinforcer and moral motivator as proposed by McCullough et al.(2008) but also for moral repentance. Gratitude makes people feel guilty for the misdeeds they have done. Gratitude makes people repented and enables them to confess their mistakes.

2. Statement of the Problem

The problem under study is formally entitled as "Can gratitude be taught: an experiment on the students of Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankardeva University (MSSU), Nagaon"

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 prosocial 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. I thought that 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. Positive psychologists propose that building strengths is far better than repairing the negatives and damages. Thus, research is necessary to develop skills and methodologies to build the positives of life that the traditional psychology has been neglecting till today.

Objectives

The objectives of the study were-

1. To compare the level of gratitude between male and female students of MSSU before the gratitude exercises.
2. To compare the level of gratitude between male and female students of MSSU after the gratitude exercises.
3. To study the significance of change of the level of gratitude of the students of MSSU after the gratitude exercises.
4. To study the significance of change of the level of gratitude of the male students of MSSU after the gratitude exercises.
5. To study the significance of change of the level of gratitude of the female students of MSSU after the gratitude exercises.

Hypotheses

H_1- There is no significant difference in the level of gratitude between male and female students of MSSU before the gratitude exercises.

H2- There is no significant difference in the level of gratitude between male and female students of MSSU after the gratitude exercises**.**

H3- There is a significant progress in the level of gratitude of the students of MSSU after the gratitude exercises.

H4- There is a significant progress in the level of gratitude of the male students of MSSU after the gratitude exercises.

H5- There is significant progress in the level of gratitude of the female students of MSSU after the gratitude exercises.

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.

3. Methodology

3.1 Sample

The sample of the investigation comprised of fifty (50) students studying in Master of Arts 2nd Semester in Education, Assamese and Sociology for the session 2014-16. The exercises were done as a part of an Add on (Life Skills) course of the University. The students who attended the classes were included in the sample of the study.

3.2 Design

The present study is an experimental study. The investigator decided to use quasi experimental Single group pre-test post-test design to meet the objectives. The researcher as a guest faculty took some classes on Life Skills on the sample. Gratitude was a major area of the classes. A gratitude test was conducted on the sample group before providing gratitude exercises. After that the researcher as guest teacher taught gratitude along with certain exercises for three days. The researcher conducted a post test after three days of his teaching.

3.3 Tool

The Investigator 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 7 point Likert scale.

3.4 Statistical Technique

't' test was used in the present study to estimate the significance of difference between means.

3.5 Variables

6.5.1 Independent Variable: In the present study the bundle of gratitude exercises was the independent variable. Exercises were Gratitude Journey and gratitude inspiring stories.

6.5.2 Dependent/observed Variable: Dependent variable in the present study was the level of gratitude of MSSU.

4.0 Treatments

A brief description of the treatments used in the present study to teach gratitude is given below.

4.1 *Gratitude Journey:* Regarding this exercise the investigator instructed 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."

4.2 *Gratitude inspiring stories:* The investigator collected ten gratitude inspiring stories to present before the students before the exercises. Out of ten stories three are anecdotes of the investigator and seven stories were from the study of the related literature. The investigator tried to present the stories in such a way that the sense of the story could be communicated properly.

5.0 Analysis and Interpretation

5.1 Comparison of gratitude of the male and female students of MSSU before the gratitude exercises.

H1: "To compare the level of gratitude between male and female students of MSSU before the gratitude exercises"

Table-1: Comparison of gratitude of the male and female students of MSSU before the gratitude exercises.

Sex	N	Mean	SD(pooled)	SED	df	t	Inference
Male	12	26.92	1.08	0.36	48	4.83	significant at 0.01 level
Female	38	28.66					

Table-1 shows that the t value is 4.83 which is more than table value (2.68 at 0.01 level) and therefore significant at 0.01 level. Thus the null hypothesis is rejected and it is concluded that there is significant difference in the level of gratitude between male and female students of MSSU before doing gratitude exercises.

5.2 Comparison of gratitude of the male and female students of MSSU after the gratitude exercises.

H2: "There is no significant difference in the level of gratitude between male and female students of MSSU after doing the gratitude exercises**.**"

Table-2: Comparison of gratitude of the male and female students of MSSU after the gratitude exercises

Sex	N	Mean	SD(pooled)	SED	df	t	Inference
Male	12	31.17	1.14	0.38	48	1.42	significant at 0.01 level
Female	38	31.71					

Table-2 shows that the t value is 1.42 which is less than table value (2.01 at 0.05 level) and therefore not significant at 0.05 level. 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 MSSU after doing gratitude exercises**.**

5.3 Significance of change in the level of gratitude of the students of MSSU after doing the gratitude exercises.

H3: "There is significant progress in the level of gratitude of the students of MSSU after the gratitude exercises."

Table-3: Significance of change in the level of gratitude of the students of MSSU after the gratitude exercises.

	N	Mean	SD	SED	df	t	Inference
Pre-test	50	28.24	3.72	0.36	98	9.28	Significant at 0.01 level
Post-test	50	31.58	2.48				

Here the investigator 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 MSSU after the gratitude exercises'. Now, Table-3 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. 9.28 is greater than the table value (2.36 at 0.02 level of significance) 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. The investigator used one tailed test to measure significance of difference.

5.4 Significance of change in the level of gratitude of the male students of MSSU after doing the gratitude exercises.

H4: "There is significant progress in the level of gratitude of the male students of MSSU after the gratitude exercises."

Table-4: Significance of change in the level of gratitude of the male students of MSSU after the gratitude exercises

	N	Mean	SD	SED	df	t	Inference
Pre-test	12	26.92	3.12	1.21	22	3.51	Significant at 0.01 level
Post-test	12	31.17	2.82				

The investigator converted the test hypotheses in to null form i.e. 'there is no significant change in the level of gratitude of the male students of MSSU after the gratitude exercises'. Now, Table-4 shows that the Mean gratitude value of boys in post test is larger than the mean gratitude value in pre-test. The computed value of 't' i.e. 3.51 is greater than the table value (2.51 at 0.02 level of significance) 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 among the male students of MSSU after doing the gratitude exercises.

5.5 Significance of change in the level of gratitude of the female students of MSSU after doing the gratitude exercises.

H5: "There is significant progress in the level of gratitude of the female students of MSSU after the gratitude exercises.

Table-5: Significance of change in the level of gratitude of the female students of MSSU after the gratitude exercises

	N	Mean	SD	SED	df	t	Inference
Pre-test	38	28.66	3.84	0.42	74	7.26	Significant at 0.01 level
Post-test	38	31.71	2.34				

Here the investigator converted the test hypotheses in to null form i.e. 'there is no significant change in the level of gratitude of the female students of MSSU after the gratitude exercises'. Table-5 shows that the Mean gratitude value of female students in post test is larger than the mean gratitude value in pre-test. The computed value of 't' i.e. 7.26 is greater than the table value (2.38 at 0.02 level of significance) 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 among the female students of MSSU after doing the gratitude exercises.

6.0 Major findings

1. There is significant difference between the mean gratitude scores of the male and female students of MSSU before the treatment.
2. No significant difference was found between mean gratitude value of the male and female students of MSSU after the treatment.

3. There is a significant progress in the level of gratitude among the students of MSSU after doing the gratitude exercises.
4. Significant progress was recorded in the level of gratitude among the students of MSSU irrespective of sex.
5. Gratitude can be significantly learnt and taught.

7.0 Conclusion

The present study experimented with some skills and exercises of teaching gratitude. Such treatments and exercises can be incorporated in the curriculum of educational institutions to teach positive emotions like gratitude. By studying the benefits of gratitude a humble suggestion is to teaching of gratitude along with other positive emotions like resilience, self-efficacy, hope, satisfaction, forgiveness, savour, etc. needs to be a serious concern of the educational institutions and policy makers. It is doubtless that everybody wants something better in life along with academic accomplishment. Therefore, the present research is a humble effort to develop certain skills to teach gratitude and also to establish that positive emotions are teachable and learnable like other academic traditional skills.

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