

Gratitude and Subjective Well-Being among University Teachers

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Abstract

The present study was conducted to investigate the relationship between gratitude and subjective well-being (life satisfaction, positive affect and negative affect) among university teachers. Data was collected from 206 teachers (129 males and 77 females) from GC University, Lahore and University of the Punjab, Lahore. It was hypothesized that gratitude would be positively related to subjective wellbeing and that age, gender and gratitude would be good predictors of subjective well-being. First of all demographic information was obtained from the teachers and then three questionnaires were employed. The Gratitude Questionnaire-Six Item Form (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002) was used to assess the dispositional trait of gratitude. The cognitive aspect of subjective well-being was measured with Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larson, & Griffin, 1985) and The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) was used to assess the affective component of subjective well-being. Correlation and regression analyses were carried out and the results supported the hypotheses that there is a significant positive correlation among the level of gratitude, subjective well-being and positive affect. Age and gratitude were found to be the significant predictors of subjective well-being, whereas gender was found to be a weak predictor of subjective well-being. It was also noted that older and more qualified teachers reported higher level of gratitude. The study ends with a conclusion, directions for future research and highlighting the theoretical and practical implications of the research.

Key words: Gratitude, subjective wellbeing, university teachers

Gratitude, throughout history, has been regarded as beneficial for both individual and society. The word gratitude is derived from Latin root '*gratia*', meaning grace, graciousness, or gratefulness. According to Collins English Dictionary (2000) gratitude means a feeling of being grateful for gift or favor; gratitude as the quality or condition of being thankful; the appreciation of an inclination to return kindness. According to Encyclopedia of Philosophy and Psychology, gratitude is the sentiment on the part of the recipient of a favor towards its donor, involving a disposition to promote the good of the donor (Baldwin, 1986). Smith (1976) posed that gratitude is a passion or sentiment that motivates us to reward others for good things they have done for us (as cited in Cohen, 2006). Similarly, Weiner and Graham (1988) defined gratitude as a stimulus to return a favor to the other and thus reintroduce balance. Gratitude thus has various meanings and can be studied at several levels of analysis ranging from momentary affect to long term disposition (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002). Gratitude may serve important functions in human being's social and emotional lives (McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons & Larson, 2001). Gratitude is a pleasant state and is linked with positive emotions, including contentment (Walker & Pitts, 1998) happiness, pride, and hope. In short, although there are several definitions of gratitude, but the simplest definition is that gratitude is a feeling of thankfulness and appreciation.

Social researches have highlighted four aspects of gratitude: a moral affect, an affective trait, as an emotional trait and a cognitive trait. Moral philosophy and theology portray gratitude as a virtue. Virtues have been defined as character traits that a human being needs to flourish or to live well (Hurthouse, 1991; Snyder & Lopez, 2002; McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons & Larson, 2001). The affective aspect of gratitude refers to stable predispositions towards certain types of emotional responding that set the threshold for the occurrence of particular emotional states (Rosenberg, 1998; McCullough, Emmons & Tsang, 2002). The emotional aspect of gratitude demonstrates that gratitude is a commonly experienced affect which involves a feeling of emotional indebtedness towards another person; often accompanied by a desire to thank them or to reciprocate for a favor they have done for you (as cited in Cohen, 2006). The cognitive aspect of gratitude is an attribution-dependent state that results from a two-step cognitive process recognizing that (a) one has obtained positive outcomes and (b) there is an external source for these positive outcomes (Clare, Ortony, & Foss, 1987; Weiner, 1985).

Today, social researchers are using three basic approaches to study the concept of gratitude; religious, social and personality approach. In every religion, gratitude is a highly prized human disposition. For example, in Islam, one of Allah's appellations is *Al-Shakoor*, the Grateful One. Both Allah and his messenger, Mohammed (PBUH), taught all the mankind how to be grateful to Allah for His given blessings (Saeedi, 2002). Similarly, in Christianity, the expression of gratitude to God is a central theme of Christianity. Samuel and Lester (1985) demonstrated that gratitude was one of the most commonly reported emotional experiences that Catholic nuns and priests experienced toward God (along with hope, friendliness, happiness, reverence, affection, delight and enjoyment). From social point of view, it is argued that gratitude link people to wider societal network, functioning and concerns. People often experience gratitude for people whose roles (e.g. artists, politicians, or poets) have proven beneficial to them (as cited in Snyder & Lopez, 2002; McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons and Larson, 2001). And according to personality approach, the sense of wonder and appreciation for life is one of the core characteristics of self-actualizing individuals (Maslow, 1970). In the light of all these approaches, whether it is religious, social or developmental, individuals can function on the basis of gratitude because it provides an important emotional resource for promoting social and emotional stability and enhancing subjective well-being.

The term of subjective well-being (SWB) refers to peoples' own evaluations of their lives. These evaluations include both cognitive judgments of life satisfaction and affective evaluations of moods and emotions (Diener 1984; 2000). More specifically, (Diener, Lucas, Oishi, & Suh, 2002) subjective well-being is defined as a combination of positive affect (in the absence of negative affect) and general life satisfaction (i.e., subjective appreciation of life's rewards). Thus if a person reports that his life is satisfying, that he is experiencing frequent pleasant affect and infrequently experiencing unpleasant affect then he is said to have high subjective well-being. Today, happiness and well-being are used interchangeably to indicate a psychological construct (Diener & Emmons, 1984; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985; Diener, Scollon, & Lucas, 2003).

A new multidimensional model of subjective well-being was developed by Keyes and Lopez (1995) on the basis of the findings of Wilson (1967); Magnus, Diener, Fujita and Pavot (1991) and Schimmack (2006). This model define SWB as a state of complete mental health based upon the combination of *emotional well-being* (the presence of positive affect and satisfaction with life and the absence of negative affect), *social well-being* (incorporating

acceptance, actualization, contribution, coherence and integration), and *psychological well-being* (combining self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery, autonomy, positive relations with others). Today most of the researchers agrees that psychological, emotional and physical wellbeing leads to subjective well-being (Diener, 1984; Brief, Butcher, George, & Link, 1993; Fiest, Bodner, Jacobs, Miles, & Tan, 1995). Accordingly, positive psychologists are convinced that SWB is not comprised of single domain but it includes several domains of life and have suggested the specific ways of achieving well-being (Linley, Joseph & Seligman, 2004). For example, Maddux (1999) emphasized the importance of self-efficacy; Watson and Clark (1984) argued the importance of positive affect; Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2002) emphasized the importance of flow; Snyder and Lopez (2002) emphasized a range of other factors such as forgiveness, humility, humor, hope, love, empathy, altruism, positive response to loss, creativity, morality and spirituality, whereas few others; for example Emmons and Shelton (2002) emphasized the importance of gratitude in enhancing the level of subjective well-being.

Earlier findings have shown that manifestation of gratitude is associated with increases in physical health and emotional well-being. After 1960s, the focus was shifted to investigate the important components of SWB including forgiveness, hope, leisure activities, and gratitude, etc. Feelings of gratitude improve one's ability to cope with stress and bolsters positive interaction with others. Tesser, Gatewood and Driver (1968) found that benefits that were described as intentionally provided, costly to the benefactor and valuable to the recipient each brought linear increases in the amount of gratitude recipients would expect to experience. Weiner, Russell and Lerman (1979) explored that people also experienced gratitude when they believed a benefit was caused by other people's efforts and they were even able to correctly identify the cause of other people's gratitude as partly due to the fortunate effort of others (Zaleski, 1988). Modern literature also revealed that gratitude is one of the most beneficial character strength and that gratitude is positively associated with subjective well-being. Gratitude provides meaning to life by encapsulating life itself as a gift. Grateful individuals report having more energy and less physical complaints than their non-grateful counterparts (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999; McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, & Larson, 2001). Similarly, Emmons and McCullough (2003) found that gratitude/thankfulness influences emotional and physical well-being. Few more researches have also shown that gratitude plays an important role in our happiness, healthy adjustment to life and even in our

mental and physical well-being (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002; Watkins, Woodward, Stone, & Kolts, 2003).

In a series of related studies, McCullough, Emmons and Tsang (2002) obtained positive associations between gratitude as an affective trait (i.e., a personality-based proneness to experience grateful emotion) and measures of positive emotionality, vitality, happiness, satisfaction with life, hope and optimism. In the same way Adler and Fagley (2005) found that longer and more sophisticated measures of gratitude as an affective trait was positively associated with measures of positive affect, happiness and satisfaction with life. McCullough, Tsang and Emmons (2004) found the positive associations of subjective well-being and disposition to experience gratitude. Similarly, Emmons and McCullough, (2003) provide experimental evidence about affects of a grateful outlook on psychological and physical well-being. Polak and McCullough (2006), concluded that grateful people tended to be extraordinarily happy. They experienced high levels of positive emotion, low levels of negative emotion and were generally satisfied with their lives. In a laboratory study, Watkins, Woodward, Stone and Kolts (2003) found that grateful people tend to report being happier, more optimistic, more satisfied with their lives, and less anxious or depressed than do their less grateful counterpart. Krause (2006) suggested that feelings of gratitude can play an important role in crises and also during old age. Gratitude may also be a characteristic that offers protection against psychiatric and physical disorder (Kashdan, Uswatte, & Julian, 2006). Another study by McCraty et al., suggest that the emotional experience of appreciation may bode well not only for psychological well-being but perhaps also for physical well-being (as cited in Polak & McCullough, 2006). It was found that the experience of positive emotions broadens the scopes of individuals, attention and cognitions and consequently generates an “upward spiral” of improved coping and optimal functioning (Fredrickson, 2001). Galvin (2004) observed that people who were more strongly disposed to experience gratitude scored higher on measures of life satisfaction.

To conclude, theoretical framework and compendium of literature on subjective wellbeing indicates that research regarding the role of positive emotions i.e. gratitude plays an important role in sustaining well-being of people. The regular experience and expression of gratitude can help build personal and interpersonal resources for coping effectively with stress and adversity. Whether to talk about subjective well-being, health, personal relationships, social values or religion, expression of gratitude brings subjective well-being

and health in one's life. Gratitude is not a simple word or act but a personality disposition that prevails and helps in flourishing healthy life pattern.

The theoretical and practical implication of the present study is based upon the following three assumptions; Firstly, there is limited understanding regarding interaction and dynamics of several important components of happiness (subjective wellbeing) e.g. positive emotions like hope, forgiveness, love and gratitude, etc., And, secondly, although some Western researches have shown that positive emotions, e.g; gratitude has positive effects on subjective well-being, more evidence is still required from the West and the East in order to generalize these results at broader cultural contexts . Thus it seems important to conduct a study in the eastern context. So the objective of the present research is to find out relationship between level of gratitude and subjective well-being (life satisfaction) among teachers of two main universities of Lahore, Pakistan. For this the following hypotheses have been formulated:

There is a positive relationship between gratitude and subjective well-being (life satisfaction) among university teachers.

There is a positive relationship between gratitude and positive affect.

Gratitude, gender and age are robust predictors of life satisfaction.

Method

Sample

The teachers who consented to participate in this study belonged to both science and arts departments of the GC University, and University of the Punjab, Lahore. The sample comprised of 206 teachers (Males = 129 & Females = 77) among which 145 were married and 161 unmarried teachers, there were 119 lectures, 56 Assistant professors, 19 Associate professors and 13 Professors among which 90 teachers had MA/MSc, 71 had MPhil and 45 had PhD degrees. The age range of the sample was 23 to 75 years ($M = 38.24$, $SD = 12.28$).

Measures

The Gratitude Questionnaire-Six Item Form (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002)

This (GQ-6) consists of six items; four items are positive whereas two items are negative. Each item is to be rated on 7-point Likert-type rating. According to scale, the score

of 7 means 'strongly agree', 6 'agree', 5 'slightly agree', 4 'neutral', 3 'slightly disagree', 2 'disagree' and 1 'strongly disagree'. This tool has shown valid and reliable assessment of experience, expression of gratefulness and appreciation in daily life received from others. The Cronbach alpha estimates ranged from .76 to .84. Confirmatory factor analyses yield goodness-of-fit indexes within acceptable range (i.e., Comparative Fit Index range from .90 to .95, and Standardized Root Mean Residuals typically range from .05 to .10).

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985).

This scale (SWLS) was used for measurement of subjective well-being and consists of five items in all. All the items are positively stated. Each item is to be rated on 7-point Likert-type rating scale. According to scale, the score of 7 means 'strongly agree', 6 'agree', 5 'slightly agree', 4 'neutral', 3 'slightly disagree', 2 'disagree' and 1 'strongly disagree'. This scale measures the cognitive or global life satisfaction. The Satisfaction with Life Scale is shown to have satisfactory psychometric properties including high internal reliability ($\alpha = .82$) and coefficient alpha ($\alpha = .87$).

The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988)

This (PANAS) was used to measure the affective components of subjective well-being, one's emotional well-being. The twenty item measure has ten item assessing positive state and another ten for negative state. Each item is to be rated on 5-point Likert-type rating scale; 'extremely (5)', 'quite a bit (4)', 'moderately(3)', 'a little(2)', and 'not at all(1)'. Sum of the scores for Positive Affect and Negative Affect were obtained separately. Scores on each of the two scales can range from 10 to 50, with a high score indicating stronger effect for the scale content. Positive and Negative Affect Schedule is a reliable, valid and efficient means for measuring both the dimensions of mood. Internal reliability of Positive Affect has been reported as $\alpha = .88$, and of Negative Affect as $\alpha = .87$.

Procedure

After taking formal permission from the two concerned chairpersons, teachers were contacted in their departments. They were briefly explained the nature of the study and teachers who consented to participate in the study were given these questionnaires, along with a performa regarding general information about the research. They were requested to carefully read the instructions and provide information about their gender, age, education, marital status, monthly income, type of job, designation, institution in which they were

teaching and subjects being taught at the time of the study. In all, 280 teachers were approached for the data collection and 35% teachers filled in the questionnaires in the first meeting. Remaining 65% teachers asked the researcher to collect the filled questionnaires later at a time given by them.

Operational Definitions

Gratitude: an emotion, an attitude, a moral virtue, a habit, a personality trait or a coping response. It is a pleasant state and is linked with positive emotions, including contentment, happiness, pride and hope (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002).

Subjective Wellbeing: this refers to peoples' evaluations of their lives. These evaluations include both cognitive judgment of life satisfaction and affective evaluations of moods and emotions. More specifically, it is a combination of positive affect (in the absence of negative affect) and general life satisfaction (i.e., subjective appreciation of life's rewards) (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985).

Results

First of all reliability analyses (cronbach alpha) of the three measures used in the study was conducted to check their internal consistency in the sample. Reliability for entire scale of The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule is not computed as Positive Affect and Negative Affect are independent of each other (e.g., Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988; Diener & Emmons, 1984). The original Gratitude Questionnaire comprised of six items. After reliability analysis item no 6 was deleted due to very low total item correlation. Similarly, in The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule, item no 5 and 7 measuring positive effect were also deleted due to low total item correlation.

Analysis was performed with respect to each hypothesis. Inter-correlations among scores of all the scales; The Gratitude Questionnaire-Six Item Form, The Satisfaction with Life Scale and The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule are shown in Table 1, which indicates the nature and degree of relationship among the scales.

Table 1

Correlation Matrix for Psychological Scales (N = 206)

Scales	1	2	3	4
1. GQ-6		.42**	.17*	.02

2. SWLS	-	-	.28**	-.15*
3. PA	-	-	-	-.04
4. NA	-	-	-	-

Note. GQ-6 = Gratitude Questionnaire Form-6, SWLS = the Satisfaction with Life Scale, PA = Positive Affect and NA = Negative Affect.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Table 1 indicates strong positive relationships of gratitude with life satisfaction and positive affect. This shows that those who hold higher level of gratitude also have higher level of life satisfaction. It was also significantly related with positive effect. There is little relationship of gratitude with negative affect. Further SWLS was significantly related to positive affect. Significant negative correlation was found between SWLS and NA. The correlation coefficient between PA and NA is almost nil, since these are independent factors. This is however theoretically meaningful.

Multiple regression analysis was done to determine how much predictor variables i. e., gratitude, age and gender influence the criterion variable namely life satisfaction (see Table 2). Although, in this regression model, gender is a categorical variable and age and gratitude are continuous variables, however, behavioral scientists have used mixture of categorical and continuous variables in correlation and regression analysis in one time to represent their respective constructs (Cohen & Cohen, 1983).

Table 2
Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Life Satisfaction

Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>
Life Satisfaction				
Age	.07	.03	.15	2.14*
Gender	.37	.84	.03	.44
Gratitude	.47	.07	.40	6.23**

$R^2 = .19$, * $p < .05$. ** $p < .001$.

The resulting regression equation indicates that Life Satisfaction score was predicted significantly by these variables ($R^2 = .19$, $F(3,202) = 17.06$, $p < .001$). The standardized beta coefficient indicated a positive relationship between age and SWLS scores; such that more the age of participants the better satisfied they were with their life. SWLS score was also predicted significantly by the gratitude score. This indicated a positive relationship between gratitude scores and SWLS score; such that higher the gratitude level in the participants were, the more they had subjective well-being, however participant's gender did not have any significant additional predictive utility. The other two variables explained 19% of the variance accounting for Life Satisfaction.

Discussion

The aim of the study was to find out the relationship between gratitude and life satisfaction and it was hypothesized that it would be positive. The results indicated significantly positive relationship, and this supported the researcher's hypothesis. One reason of this relation, although the researchers did not measure in present research can be that the gratitude inductions led to increases in grateful emotions, which in turn led to more generalized increases in subjective well-being (e.g., McCullough, Emmons & Tsang, 2002, McCullough, Tsang & Emmons, 2004, Adler & Fagley, 2005). Positive relationship between gratitude and positive affect is also supported in the present study. It is suggested that people who tend to experience high levels of dispositional gratitude prone to have positive affect. These findings corroborate those of McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, (2002), who found that measures of gratitude as an affective trait were more closely linked to positive traits than negative ones. Thus, gratitude appears to be more effective elicitor of pleasant affect. The general concept about gratitude and SWB is that it is conceived of as a general tendency to hold a positive life view, which also affects the perception of different aspects of life such as health (Fiest, Bodner, Jacobs, Miles, & Tan, 1995). A trait of gratitude as a conscious practice, offers a host of health benefits. Gratitude is associated with increases in physical health and emotional well-being. In short, the practice of gratitude inculcates a more harmonious life (Csikzentmihalyi, 1999; Emmons & McCulloch, 2003).

Furthermore it was hypothesized that gratitude, gender and age would be strong predictors of life satisfaction. Resulting equation model of regression analysis indicates that SWLS scores were predicted significantly by these variables. Results indicate that gender failed to exert a statistically significant additive effect on SWB, which are in contrast with other results that emphasized that demographic variables, e.g., gender, income and other environmental factors correlate with happiness (Suhail & Chaudhry, 2004). Likewise, by predicting SWLS from age and gratitude, 19 % prediction of gratitude from these variables was obtained. These findings are in the proposed direction. Does the relationship between gratitude and SWB result from gratitude causing happiness, or is it that happiness causes gratitude? The answer to this puzzle is supported by the notion that happiness and gratitude may operate in a "cycle of virtue", whereby gratitude enhances happiness, but happiness enhances gratitude as well (Krause, 2006; Snyder & Lopez, 2007).

To sum up, the present eastern findings of this study correspond broadly with the Western findings, leading to make some general conclusion; manifestation of gratitude in everyday life is vital and may be causal for SWB; the similarity in the main findings arising from two apparently different cultures suggests the possibility that this utilitarian aspect of gratitude in everyday life of people also be universal. However, a great deal of further research in other cultures and countries would be required before such a conclusion can be made with confidence. It seems to be important to replicate the present study to see if the pattern of findings obtained from a sample of highly educated subjects is also present among the wider masses in Pakistan. It would also be interesting if these findings should be replicated in several years in an attempt to determine whether the continuing penetration of technological developments into Pakistani society at large has exerted some influence on the level of gratitude among Pakistanis. The future research may attempt to employ specific questions designed explicitly for a Pakistani context for identifying several other dynamics of SWB. Similarly the future research may also employ some form of pseudo-experimental methods that would allow more definite statements of cause and effect than a co-relational questionnaire design bearing common method variance.

Conclusion

This study provides an initial insight into the importance of positive psychology of gratitude and its role in enhancing the subjective wellbeing of Pakistani's. While summarizing the results of the present study it is important to note that there are interesting similarities between the present Pakistani data and the Western data reported above. The main findings are that gratitude has a positive relationship with subjective well-being and positive affect and that gratitude is a strong predictor of subjective wellbeing. In short, although much work remains to be done to learn more about the potential mediators and pathways when assessing the role of gratitude in SWB, the present results still seem important in this regard and it is hoped that these will contribute in the development of this relatively new field of psychology: "The Positive Psychology of Gratitude" that will ultimately help and pave a way to answer the most fundamental question of human existence; How to be more happy?

Following limitations might have influenced this research work.

1. Self-report measures were used in the study. Therefore, there might have been some social desirability biases in the data.

2. Participants of study belong to public sector universities only. For more generalization of results, private sector universities should also be included.
3. The duration of service was not regarded as a bar for including the sample in the study; it was thought that it could have limited the generalization of the results, however age factor partially account for this.

In view of above, following logical suggestions can be made.

1. Experimental researches are needed to confirm the cause and effect relationship between gratitude and subjective well-being.
2. Future researches should focus on other aspects of gratitude (i. e., moral, affective, emotional and cognitive) and subjective well-being as well.
3. In order to make research more broad based or to make it more generalized, other constructs of SWB; physical and mental health and happiness should also be included and investigated in future studies.

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