



HJRS Link: [Journal of Academic Research for Humanities \(HEC-Recognized for 2022-2023\)](#)

Edition Link: [Journal of Academic Research for Humanities, 3\(3\) July-September 2023](#)

License: [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International License](#)

Link of the Paper: <https://jar.bwo.org.pk/index.php/jarh/article/view/292>

IMPACT OF PRACTICING GRATITUDE ON FOCUS AND RESILIENCE IN CLASSROOM LEARNING AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Author 1:	NADEEM SARWAR (M.Phil Scholar), Department of Applied Psychology, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Email: maliknadeemsarwar25@gmail.com
Co-Author 2:	DR. FATIMA KHURRAM, Assistant Professor, Department of Applied Psychology, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Email: Fatima.khurram@iub.edu.pk
Corresponding Co-Author 3:	DR. SANA FAYYAZ, Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Bahaudin Zakariya University, Vehari Campus, Email: Sanafayyaz@bzu.edu.pk

Paper Information

Citation of the paper:

(APA) Sarwar. Nadeem, Khurram.. Fatima and Fayyaz. Sana, (2023). Impact of Practicing Gratitude on Focus and Resilience in Classroom Learning among University Students: A Qualitative Analysis, In Journal of Academic Research for Humanities, 3(3), 65–73.

Subject Areas:

- 1 Education
- 2 Humanities

Timeline of the Paper:

Received on: 01-06-2023
Reviews Completed on: 11-09-2023
Accepted on: 19-09-2023
Online on: 22-09-2023

License:



[Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International License](#)

Recognized:



Published by:



Abstract

The current study aimed to evaluate the impact of gratitude on focus and resilience in classroom learning among university students through an in-depth study. Therefore, the current study has been based on the qualitative research design, and data has been collected from 30 university students of Islamia University of Bahawalpur. The current study's problem is to investigate why university students cannot focus on learning and practicing gratitude. The thematic analysis technique has been used to analyse the data, and findings have been mentioned in different themes. The participants have been selected through random sampling. The e-mail as a reminder of gratitude was sent to all the participants, with 15 semi-structured questions related to gratitude, focus, and resilience. It has been found that those students who have received the e-mail are prone to experience more gratitude, which has increased the focus on classroom learning. In contrast to this, those university students who were not involved in this study and have not received any e-mail reminder to practice gratitude experienced less level of resilience and focused on learning. The findings of this study can be used to enhance the university students' focus on learning and resilience through practicing gratitude, which is the significance of the study and its implication. The current study is limited to university students, and findings can be generalized to only the study population. These findings can be used to enhance gratitude, resilience, and focus on learning among university students and develop best practices for effective learning by teachers.

Keywords: Gratitude, Focus, Resilience, Learning, Stress

Introduction

Martin Seligman was the president of the American Psychological Association (APA) in the twentieth century. He advocated for a shift in emphasis from the study of diseases and abnormalities to that of the positive human characteristics that lead to happy and fulfilling lives. By adopting this new approach, psychologists have been able to study the aspects that lead to flourishing in the discipline of Positive Psychology. Only in 15 years, this expanding field had created 20 new graduate schools, including prestigious institutions such as Penn and Claremont (Wilson, 2016).

Knowledge, courage, humanism, justice, moderation, and transcendence are just a few of the 24 character traits scholars have identified as essential for a meaningful and prosperous life. Gratitude, optimism, and tenacity are the three of the twenty-four personality qualities that have gotten the most scholarly attention. As a virtue, gratitude is the condition of being aware of and grateful for one's own and other people's kindnesses and desiring to repay such kindness via action. Those who possess this virtue recognize and appreciate all the pleasant parts of their lives and are happy compared to those who are against this concept (Güldal & Satan, 2020). This study aims to focus on the impact of practicing gratitude on the focus of students in learning and resilience. Moreover, the following are the study questions and objectives focused on the current study.

Problem Statement

The issue under consideration revolves around enhancing university students' focus and resilience within the classroom. In the contemporary educational milieu, students often encounter many stressors, diversions, and obstacles that may impede their capacity to focus on their academic pursuits and persist in the face of arduous scholastic endeavours. The issue is further compounded by the increasing incidence of anxiety and stress-related concerns among students enrolled in higher education institutions. Identifying

efficient approaches to tackle these obstacles is vital in enhancing the overall caliber of education and promoting students' academic achievements. In this way, the current study problem is to investigate the factors affecting resilience and focus on classroom learning at the university level. It also focuses on how gratitude can reduce all these issues and enhance focus resilience to enhance classroom learning.

Research Objectives

- To explore the importance of practicing gratitude in focus and class-based learning.
- To evaluate how practicing gratitude enhances resilience and reduces stress.
- To examine the relationship between practicing gratitude, focus, and classroom learning at the university level.

Research Questions

1. What is the importance of practicing gratitude in focus and class-based learning?
2. How does practicing gratitude enhance resilience and reduce stress among university students?
3. What is the relationship between practicing gratitude, focus, and classroom learning at the university level?

Significance of the Research

There are several reasons why this study is crucial. First, it investigates the psychological effects of gratitude on university students' focus and resilience, thereby addressing a current topic in the field. Identifying feasible actions to improve students' focus and academic success is relevant in light of the rising demand for academic performance and the prevalence of mental health difficulties. The study's distinctive and possibly significant approach to bettering students' classroom learning experiences is its emphasis on gratitude practices. Understanding the function of gratitude in education may have far-reaching ramifications for educational strategies and student support systems because of the favorable psychological effects

of gratitude. The results of this study also provide helpful information for teachers and universities that want to make their spaces more conducive to learning. Greater student involvement in classroom learning can be enhanced through focus and resilience to improve academic achievement and mental health by incorporating gratitude practices into the classroom.

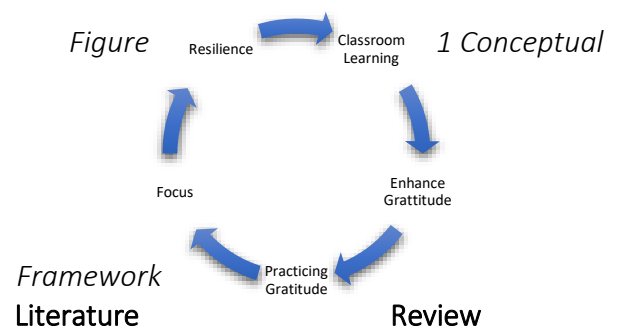
Research Methodology

This study explores gratitude's impact on university student's ability to focus on learning and remain resilient when understanding is challenging in the classroom. This study uses the qualitative research design and primary data collection method. The 30 participants have been chosen for accessibility from Islamia University of Bahawalpur (IUB) through random sampling. All participants were involved in some classroom roles and activities related to practicing gratitude, resilience, focus, and appreciation to improve learning. These students were selected through a random sampling approach. There were 15 male and 15 female students in this research participants.

The semi-structured interview was conducted in which 15 open-ended questions related to the three study variables were asked, and responses were recorded in text the form. These open-ended questions have been supposed to evaluate the study findings based on the relevant themes, codes, and categories on the base of collected data. The current study is based on a qualitative research design. Therefore, the themes of this measure have been adopted (Hudecek et al., 2020). Further, 15 questions have been developed to generate a theme from the relevant data and present the findings related to gratitude, resilience, and focus in enhancing classroom learning at the university level. The e-mail was sent every 2-3 days a month to the participants based on these 15 questions related to gratitude, resilience, and focus on evaluating the student's focus on learning. A

thematic analysis approach was used to develop themes and present the findings.

The current study is theoretically based on the cognitive and behavioural theories of learning and classical and operant conditioning. Further, it strongly connects with cognitive processes like thinking, perception, and learning. Therefore, the conceptual framework below illustrates how study variables impact each other and the effective practice of gratitude for effective classroom learning through enhancing focus and resilience.



Literature Review
 Watkins et al. (2018) said that gratitude has the potential to lead, energize, and transform lives. The experts then shared the most recent research results demonstrating gratitude's favourable impacts on health, happiness, and life success. Recent research presented at a conference and published in academic journals demonstrates that thanksgiving enhances the lives of individuals in several ways, including the mental, emotional, relational, spiritual, physical, and cognitive domains.

Some psychological advantages of practicing gratitude via reflection and reappraisal include more pleasant emotions, less stress, resilience, and better relationships. It seems that gratitude favors social interactions, deepening friendships and boosting the feeling of mutual support, aid, and collaboration (Kumar et al., 2022). Owing to the prominence of gratitude in most religions, grateful persons would express a greater sense of spiritual fulfillment and contact with God. Those who are grateful live longer and healthier lives, have more physical

stamina, better heart health, and sleep better. Those appreciative are often more cognitively engaged, alert, focused, imaginative in problem-solving, and sensitive to learning (Waters et al., 2022).

Gratitude as a Learned Trait

The investigation of Wilson (2016) indicates that 50% of a person's happiness is governed by heredity, 10% by the environment, and 40% by conscious behavior. Gratitude practices a series of purposeful acts shown by psychologists to promote pleasure, resilience, and appreciation of life. According to Waters et al. (2022), intentionally engaging in gratitude activities may enhance well-being. Some people may not be born with a naturally generous temperament, but gratefulness may be fostered through reflection and practice. Observations have shown, for instance, that individuals who consistently practice gratitude journaling establish mental habits that emphasize the good parts of their lives. It seems that gratefulness may be created via deliberate effort, like being thankful for everyone or having a pleasant time with an individual (Suarez et al., 2022).

Gratitude Practices

In recent years, several strategies have emerged to help people cultivate and improve their capacity for gratitude. These traditions invite people to halt, take stock, reflect on their good fortune, and express appreciation. It has been seen that gratitude positively impacts resilience and focus on learning, which was measured through different ways like self-evaluation. Practicing gratitude involves selecting and recording three to five distinct benefits daily or weekly. Concentrating on people rather than things, savoring each blessing, and maintaining an open mind all contribute to a more effective practice of gratitude writing. In this way, one can consider a person who has never been adequately grateful and then write him a letter of around 250-300 words to articulate his gratitude by sending him this letter twice or more (Wilson, 2016).

Kumar and Epley (2018) stated that the sender and the receiver of a letter of appreciation might enjoy a boost in pleasure. Discussion of gratitude can be grateful for the person paying attention to the appreciation letter because this enhances the gratitude, focus, and resilience of that person. People show gratitude by telling others about the positive things that occur daily, which also enhances resilience and focus on the learning process. Appreciation for these things fosters bonds between people, fostering social cohesiveness and communal development. Specifically, this gratitude activity asks students to reflect on their feelings about a specific topic. The State of Readiness exercise challenges students to explore their viewpoints and determine if they are more inclined towards gratitude or resentment (Kumar & Epley, 2018).

Gratitude's Relationship to Focus and Resilience in Learning

Increasing numbers of educator leaders consider that gratitude is one of the seven personality traits that predict academic success in students. The other six are grit, social intelligence, self-control, zest, curiosity, and optimism. Maddin (2011) stated that Knowledge is Power Charter Schools (KPP) developed a character report card to guarantee that its students use these soft skills based on the work of Seligman and his colleagues to enhance gratitude, focus, and resilience in classroom learning. Further, their research group formed the Character Lab at the University of Pennsylvania to generate, disseminate, and promote evidence-based educational initiatives that have been observed to be effective in enhancing the practice of the impact of gratitude on focus resilience in classroom learning (Caleon et al., 2019). According to Madigan (2019), longitudinal studies have shown an association between numerous characteristics of resilience, focus, and academic achievement. These findings support the hypothesis that academic accomplishment may be enhanced

by fostering the growth of three aspects of character: interpersonal competence, intellectual sharpness, resilience, focus, and self-awareness. Specifically, gratitude, social intelligence, and interpersonal self-control belong under "interpersonal character," while "intellectual character" includes "curiosity" and "zeal," and "intrapersonal character" includes "academic self-control" and "discipline." Yet, there is now just one book about appreciation in the classroom. Howells asserts in his work that students are more involved in their thoughts when they appreciate the views of others, which are based on focus and resilience (Madigan, 2019).

Focus in Learning

Students in Howells's (2012) study group concur that they want to study more efficiently but lack the essential abilities. Howells urges her college students to contrast the outcomes of a grateful attitude with those of a negative one, such as whining or resentment. Negatively disposed students are less likely to think creatively, pay attention, integrate new content, and value their learning. Conversely, students who enter class with gratitude are more attentive, engaged, and ready to learn. Howells encourages his students to be self-reliant by having them reflect on their mood at the beginning of class and consciously choose to do so with an attitude of thankfulness (Howell, 2012).

Resilience in Learning

Carol Dweck, a professor at Stanford University, coined the term "Resilience" in 2006 to convey the notion that one's IQ may be increased through effort. Students with a growth mind-set can recover quickly from setbacks and persevere because they see setbacks as stepping stones to greater achievement. The trait of grit, defined as persevering through disappointments or failures, is organically tied to the growth mindset (Alam, 2022). Grit is the trait that enables one to overcome adversity and emerge successful; those who embrace

hardship, work harder in reaction, and are more resilient in the face of failures are more likely to accomplish their academic and life objectives. Instructors must teach students how to exercise conscious control over their minds to handle academic stress better, maintain their focus, and comprehend their own and others' mental states (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2017).

Findings and Discussion

Students who were reminded to be grateful for learning and then tried to do so reported an increase in their sentiments of appreciation, attentiveness in class, and resilience as study became more challenging.

- The students who received the e-mail reported doing so a minimum of three times each week (N=10)
- The students who received the e-mail reported fewer than weekly actions of gratitude (N=5).
- Five students who did not receive the e-mail reported doing at least three acts of gratitude every week. (N=5)
- Students (N=10) who did not get the e-mail and reported practicing gratitude less often than once per week were omitted from further analysis.

Emerging Themes

Eighty percent of individuals who received e-mail reminders to practice gratitude responded to this open-ended question, whereas just a few were received from those who did not get reminders. These comments give context for the qualitative results of the 15 questions that were asked to develop themes and evaluate the gratitude impact on the focus and learning of students in the classroom. The comments were analyzed using a ground theory of analysis, which identified common threads that may influence students' concentration and perseverance in class. Each theme builds upon and develops the preceding ones.

A positive and calm attitude

When people consciously engaged in acts of thankfulness, an uplifted frame of mind

emerged as the most common result. Statements like "I discovered that practicing appreciation gave me a more optimistic view on learning" and "I realized life becomes a little brighter" demonstrate this uplifted disposition. Ten students said they were "happy," "happier," "jollier," or "calmer" after incorporating appreciation into their daily lives. There was a discernible ripple effect of these upbeat dispositions throughout the lives of the participants, as seen by comments such as, "After practicing thankfulness every day, I take delight in so much more, and I feel like I am genuinely experiencing life rather than simply getting through each day." One other student said, "Being grateful affects all parts of my life, not just university." More than simply academics, I'm feeling better about life in general.

Lessened stress

A second impact or theme, reduced stress, may have contributed to this improvement in mood. Fifteen people reported feeling less anxious after incorporating gratitude into their study routines. Three of them described it like this: "Practicing thankfulness quelled concerns associated with schooling"; "stressful components of learning were revealed to be minor in the light of appreciation." Several people also specifically mentioned gratitude as a tool that helped them deal with stress, saying things like, "Gratitude pulled me out of the pit of negativity and stress" or "One day I was stressed, anxious, and swamped but after I paused to list a few kinds of stuff to be appreciative for, my technique to the day changes drastically." Specifically, a few other students said they felt less stress when they consciously practiced thankfulness during tests. Nine people said they slept better after practicing appreciation in the evening. This improvement may be due to a lower level of stress. Three students reported benefits including "I went asleep more quickly" and "it alleviated my anxiety; thus, it was simpler to go to sleep."

Focus unlearning

It's hardly unexpected that people who consciously cultivate an attitude of thankfulness towards learning report being able to concentrate better on their studies. This effect likely stems from the beneficial effects of gratitude on mood, stress, and sleep quality. One participant said, "When I was fading out because I was bored or resentful, thankfulness would boost my attention." Fifteen respondents reported that gratitude helped them "concentrate better." As one student put it, "at least for the short term," practicing gratitude helped them concentrate better on their studies. For five participants, a more optimistic outlook resulted in increased self-awareness: "I observed much more of an awareness in my attitude towards my thinking and learning." Several students even said that practicing appreciation helped them better understand the "why" of their education. Ten students reported feeling less anxious and more prepared for tests after regularly practicing thankfulness; one such student said, "Practicing gratitude just before an exam lessened my worry, and I could concentrate and focus better on the exam."

Effort amidst challenges

While studying was difficult, students found it easier to put forth effort when they had a good attitude, experienced less tension, and could concentrate more intently. Two students said appreciation helped them "remain motivated when faced with a list of tasks to achieve" and "put long hours and tougher effort into schooling with a more pleasant attitude." Students' reports of enhanced resilience coincided with periods of decreased stress. Gratitude helped three participants "feel less anxious and more motivated to press through and accomplish any chores that appeared lengthy and tiresome," they said. As many as eight kids also reported a mental change in response to academic difficulties.

Five students reflected on how gratitude improved their ability to overcome academic

obstacles. Another student explained, "I am more receptive to hard circumstances than bitter." Another user said, "I found that challenging circumstances were less stressful when I reminded myself to be happy because trials help me improve." While these four themes are presented independently, they all contribute to and expand upon one another: a positive and tranquil outlook, less stress, focused learning, and effort in adversity. Students reported feeling less anxious when they adopted a more upbeat and relaxed disposition. They felt less overwhelmed and anxious, which allowed them to concentrate better on their studies.

Appreciation for reminders

There is one more idea worth discussing, but it is more autonomous. Fifteen of the university students who received the expressions of thanks said they found the messages helpful. The "gratitude fairy" messages were a hit with three pupils, who said, "I Liked receiving texts from the "gratitude fairy." I appreciated the modest tokens of appreciation that were sent to me. We appreciate it. Others went into further detail, writing things like, "Thank you for always urging us to be thankful" and "It's a beautiful exercise," while seven pupils wrote, "Thank you." Other students mentioned external prompts that helped them develop a heart of thankfulness, such as "My Gratitude Notebook that sits by my bed encourages me to think back, see benefits, and write them down." One student said, "I appreciated it when my instructors would take time for us to feel appreciative at the beginning of class." Students were prompted to consider gratitude's broader impact via reminders delivered through text, notebook entries, and classroom pauses. A student said, "The reminders helped me begin seeing blessings, and once I got going, I couldn't stop!" Gratitude seems to spread like a virus.

Implications

These study findings should be considered in the university boundary only. It is feasible

that instructors may benefit from introducing gratitude practices into their classes to assist pupils in keeping focus and persisting through difficult subjects. It is important to highlight that in this study, the benefits of greater attention and resiliency in learning were only shown in participants who received gratitude reminders in the form of written discussions and who self-reported practicing gratitude open-ended questioner at least 2-3 times per week. Students who did not get the reminders but reported practicing gratitude at least one to five times per week did not experience improved classroom attentiveness and resilience. The students who received e-mail reminders may have been inspired to show thanks in a more specific educational setting, whilst those who did not may have been practicing gratitude in a more generic sense.

Limitations

Although contributing to the growing body of research on gratitude, this study underlines the need for more research into the cognitive impacts of gratitude. Using self-reports to establish whether or whether the participants' levels of gratitude, attention, and resiliency increased during the study raises several methodological issues. They are intrinsically subjective, based on the writers' ideas and experiences. Gratitude may influence students' grades and the chance of dropping a course. However, future research must test this notion with more objective metrics. Due to the time and focus on qualitative research, this study also has a fault of biased aspects.

Future Recommendations

This study is based on the qualitative research design on a small sample but is effective in making classroom learning more effective and enhancing students' level of gratitude, which can be used by university teachers to enhance the student's focus on learning by reducing mental health issues. In the future, focusing on learning and paying attention to gratitude will be difficult due to high academic stress and competition that may affect the student's ability to get high

grades. In this way, current study findings and techniques will be helpful to manage and reduce these issues that can hinder effective classroom learning. Moreover, there is a need to work on this aspect because there is a gap to fill in the field of positive psychology to work better for the practice of gratitude to reduce issues of focusing on learning and resilience.

Conclusion

The cognitive impacts of gratitude are explored, and contributing to the growing scientific literature is mentioned in this study. Students who frequently practice gratitude for their education report a significant boost in their ability to focus on class when studying and on exams. Optimism towards learning and less stress may both contribute to this enhanced focus. Given the well-established relationship between university academics and anxiety and these findings, they are worthy of investigation. When a student intentionally chooses to adopt an attitude of thankfulness, emotional resources that might otherwise be devoted to stress and worry may be redirected to the goal of learning and comprehending new content. Students who try to establish an attitude of gratitude report feeling more resilient and able to endure challenging academic times. The capacity of students to recover from failures arises from their understanding of the constructive role that difficulty plays in their academic growth. So, a student with a grateful disposition may see challenges as an opportunity to improve rather than a cause to retreat.

References

- Alam, A. (2022). Positive psychology goes to school: conceptualizing students' happiness in 21st-century schools while 'minding the mind!' are we there yet? Evidence-backed, school-based positive psychology interventions. *ECS Transactions*, 107(1), 11199. DOI 10.1149/10701.11199ecst
- Caleon, I. S., Ilham, N. Q. B., Ong, C. L., & Tan, J. P. L. (2019). Cascading effects of gratitude: A sequential mediation analysis of gratitude, interpersonal relationships, school resilience, and school well-being. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, 28, 303-312. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40299-019-00440-w>
- Güldal, Ş., & Satan, A. (2020). The effect of mindfulness-based psychoeducation program on adolescents' character strengths, mindfulness, and academic achievement. *Current Psychology*, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-020-01153-w>
- Haimovitz, K., & Dweck, C. S. (2017). The origins of children's growth and fixed mindsets: new research and a new proposal. *Child development*, 88(6), 1849-1859. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12955>
- Howell, D. C. (2012). *Statistical methods for psychology*. Cengage Learning.
- Hudecek, M. F., Blabst, N., Morgan, B., & Lerner, E. (2020). Measuring gratitude in Germany: A validation study of the German version of the Gratitude Questionnaire-Six item form (GQ-6-G) and the Multi-Component Gratitude Measure (MCGM-G). *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 590108. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.590108>
- Kumar, A., & Epley, N. (2018). Undervaluing gratitude: Expressers misunderstand the consequences of showing appreciation. *Psychological science*, 29(9), 1423-1435. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797618772506>
- Kumar, S. A., Edwards, M. E., Grandgenett, H. M., Scherer, L. L., DiLillo, D., & Jaffe, A. E. (2022). Does gratitude promote resilience during a pandemic? An examination of mental health and positivity at the onset of COVID-19. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 23(7), 3463-3483. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-022-00554-x>

- Maddin, B. W. (2011). *KIPP student mobility: Whether and when students make non-promotional exits from KIPP middle schools*. Harvard University.
- Madigan, D. J. (2019). A meta-analysis of perfectionism and academic achievement. *Educational Psychology Review, 31*, 967-989. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-019-09484-2>
- Suarez, A. L., Elliott, A., Behrend, B. A., & Carver, C. L. (2022). The effects of COVID-19 on counselor-in-training resilience: A case study. *Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision, 15*(2), 19. <https://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/jcps/vol15/iss2/19/>
- Waters, L., Algoe, S. B., Dutton, J., Emmons, R., Fredrickson, B. L., Heaphy, E., ... & Steger, M. (2022). Positive psychology in a pandemic: Buffering, bolstering, and building mental health. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 17*(3), 303-323. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2021.1871945>
- Watkins, P. C., Emmons, R. A., Greaves, M. R., & Bell, J. (2018). Joy is a distinct positive emotion: Assessment of joy and relationship to gratitude and well-being. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 13*(5), 522-539. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2017.1414298>
- Wilson, J. T. (2016). Brightening the mind: The impact of practicing gratitude on focus and resilience in learning. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 16*(4), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.14434/josotl.v16i4.19998>