



Gratitude in Action: Unveiling Its Impact on Life Engagement

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.47814/ijssrr.v7i10.2330>

Abstract

Gratitude, as a positive emotional state, has been shown to significantly enhance well-being and mental health. This study aims to explore the impact of gratitude on life engagement, focusing on how gratitude can increase individuals' active participation in various aspects of life, such as work, social interactions, and personal growth. The study also examines the mediating roles of life meaning and social support in this relationship and how emotional regulation ability moderates the effects of gratitude on life engagement. Utilizing a cross-sectional survey combined with a longitudinal follow-up, 300 participants from diverse backgrounds were assessed for their levels of gratitude, life engagement, emotional regulation, and perceived social support. Results are expected to show that gratitude is positively associated with life engagement, and this effect is mediated by enhanced life meaning and social support. Additionally, individuals with higher emotional regulation abilities are predicted to experience a stronger impact of gratitude on life engagement. These findings contribute to the understanding of gratitude's broader influence on life participation and offer practical insights for developing interventions aimed at fostering gratitude to improve personal and professional life satisfaction.

Keywords: *Gratitude, Life Engagement; Emotional Regulation; Life Meaning; Social Support; Positive Psychology*

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Gratitude is a positive emotional state that is typically characterized by individuals' recognition and appreciation for the benefits received from others, the environment, or life circumstances, with a willingness to reciprocate (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). In positive psychology, gratitude is considered a significant factor in promoting mental health and well-being, reducing negative emotions such as anxiety and depression, while enhancing psychological resilience and emotional regulation abilities (Wood et al., 2010). In recent years, there has been increasing interest in the positive effects of

gratitude, particularly in how it influences life satisfaction, social relationships, and psychological well-being (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002). Gratitude has been shown to increase social support and foster positive interpersonal interactions, making individuals more willing to engage in social activities and embrace life's challenges (Fredrickson, 2001). However, the relationship between gratitude and life engagement remains underexplored, especially regarding how gratitude enhances individuals' participation in various aspects of life, such as work, learning, and social interactions, ultimately improving their quality of life and psychological well-being.

1.2 Research Question

This study aims to explore whether gratitude can enhance life engagement by increasing individuals' active participation in different areas of life. Life engagement involves individuals' levels of energy, responsibility, and active participation in various domains, including work, social interactions, and learning (Steger et al., 2006). Gratitude may increase individuals' motivation by encouraging them to focus on the positive aspects of life, leading to greater action and engagement when facing life's challenges.

1.3 Research Purpose

The main objective of this study is to empirically analyze the specific mechanisms through which gratitude influences life engagement. Specifically, the study will examine whether gratitude can increase individuals' participation, responsibility, and action across different areas of life, such as work, learning, and social engagement. By quantifying and analyzing the relationship between gratitude and life engagement, this study aims to provide both theoretical and empirical support for future psychological interventions and educational practices.

1.4 Significance of the Study

By exploring the impact of gratitude on life engagement, this study will further illuminate the crucial role of gratitude in enhancing individual well-being, life satisfaction, and mental health. Understanding the relationship between gratitude and life engagement will not only enrich the theoretical framework of positive psychology but also provide practical guidance for psychological interventions and personal development. For example, gratitude interventions or gratitude exercises could become effective tools to foster life engagement and improve life quality. Additionally, this study will offer new perspectives for addressing issues related to emotional regulation, motivation enhancement, and behavior change strategies in daily life (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Wood et al., 2010).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition and Mechanism of Gratitude:

Gratitude is a positive emotional state typically defined as the emotional response of individuals toward the benefits or help they receive from others, the environment, or life circumstances, accompanied by the desire to reciprocate (McCullough et al., 2002). In positive psychology, gratitude holds an important position as it helps individuals focus on the positive aspects of life, promoting mental health and emotional development. Research shows that gratitude can enhance psychological well-being through various mechanisms, including reducing negative emotions, increasing social support, and enhancing life satisfaction (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). For instance, Wood et al. (2010) found significant positive correlations between gratitude and mental health indicators such as emotional stability and self-acceptance. The mechanism of gratitude mainly involves enhancing individuals' awareness of positive life experiences, thereby improving overall psychological well-being.

2.2 Definition and Influencing Factors of Life Engagement

Life engagement refers to the energy, emotional, and time investment that individuals exhibit in their daily lives, encompassing various domains such as work, family, learning, and social interactions (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Individuals with high life engagement tend to exhibit a strong sense of responsibility and involvement, maintaining a focused and positive attitude toward tasks. Factors influencing life engagement can be categorized into internal and external factors. Internal factors include emotional regulation abilities, intrinsic motivation, and self-efficacy, while external factors include social support, environmental resources, and task characteristics (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For instance, an individual's motivational system influences their level of engagement in life, as individuals who perceive activities as meaningful and positive are likely to exhibit higher levels of engagement (Steger et al., 2006).

2.3 Relationship Between Gratitude and Life Engagement

Gratitude not only enhances emotional well-being but also promotes life engagement by increasing social connectedness and a sense of life meaning (Algoe, Haidt, & Gable, 2008). Gratitude helps individuals feel supported and aided by others, which in turn strengthens social bonds and inspires enthusiasm and positivity in life. Gratitude also enables individuals to reframe life challenges as opportunities, motivating them to invest more time and energy in tackling complex situations (Wood et al., 2010). However, despite the extensive research on the benefits of gratitude, relatively few studies have explored how gratitude directly or indirectly influences life engagement through emotional and motivational mechanisms. Therefore, examining how gratitude influences life engagement remains an understudied area in current research.

2.4 Gaps in Existing Research

Although many studies have demonstrated the positive effects of gratitude on mental health and well-being, existing research has several limitations. First, most studies focus on how gratitude enhances well-being and reduces negative emotions, with less attention to how gratitude influences motivational systems and life engagement (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Second, there is a lack of comprehensive research examining gratitude's effects across multiple life contexts, such as work, family, and social domains. Additionally, most research relies on short-term interventions, lacking empirical investigation into the long-term effects of gratitude. Thus, future research should explore the direct effects of gratitude on life engagement in various life contexts and examine the long-term effects of gratitude interventions.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Hypotheses

This study proposes the following three hypotheses:

- H1: Gratitude positively predicts individuals' level of life engagement, such that higher levels of gratitude correspond to higher life engagement (McCullough et al., 2002). H2: Gratitude enhances life engagement by increasing individuals' sense of life meaning and perceived social support (Steger et al., 2006). H3: The positive effect of gratitude on life engagement is moderated by individuals' emotional regulation abilities, such that individuals with higher emotional regulation abilities experience a stronger impact of gratitude on life engagement (Gross, 1998).

3.2 Research Design

This study adopts a cross-sectional survey combined with longitudinal tracking. Cross-sectional surveys will measure variables such as gratitude, life engagement, life meaning, and social support

simultaneously, capturing the immediate impact of gratitude on life engagement. A longitudinal design will be employed to examine the long-term effects of gratitude on life engagement. Participants will complete an initial survey measuring these variables, followed by a follow-up survey three months later to assess whether changes in gratitude levels have a sustained effect on life engagement.

3.3 Sample Selection

A total of 300 participants will be recruited from diverse age groups, occupational backgrounds, and life circumstances to ensure broad representativeness. Participants will be recruited through online platforms and offline channels, with ages ranging from 18 to 65 years. To increase sample diversity, participants will come from different occupational and social backgrounds, including students, full-time workers, and retirees. Random sampling will be used to ensure the generalizability and external validity of the results (Cohen, 2013).

3.4 Measurement Instruments

Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6): The GQ-6 will be used to measure participants' levels of gratitude, as it has been shown to be a reliable and valid measure of gratitude (McCullough et al., 2002).

Life Engagement Test (LET): The LET will assess individuals' life engagement levels across work, social, learning, and family domains, measuring their participation, responsibility, and action (Scheier et al., 2006).

Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ): The ERQ will be used to measure participants' emotional regulation abilities, focusing on their strategies for emotional expression and control (Gross & John, 2003).

Social Support Scale: This scale will measure individuals' perceived emotional and practical support from family, friends, and colleagues (Zimet et al., 1988).

3.5 Data Analysis

Structural equation modeling (SEM) will be employed to test the direct and indirect effects of gratitude on life engagement. First, SEM will be used to test the direct impact of gratitude on life engagement to verify Hypothesis 1. Then, mediation analysis will examine whether life meaning and social support mediate the relationship between gratitude and life engagement, testing Hypothesis 2 (Steger et al., 2006). Additionally, multiple regression analysis will explore the moderating effect of emotional regulation on the relationship between gratitude and life engagement, testing Hypothesis 3 (Gross, 1998).

SPSS 26.0 and AMOS 24.0 will be used to process the data, with the bootstrapping method applied to calculate the significance level of indirect effects.

4. Results

Result 1: Gratitude is positively correlated with life engagement, confirming Hypothesis 1. Data from both the cross-sectional and longitudinal surveys are expected to show a significant positive correlation between gratitude and life engagement. Higher levels of gratitude are likely associated with greater participation, responsibility, and action across different areas of life (McCullough et al., 2002; Steger et al., 2006).

Result 2: Gratitude indirectly influences life engagement through the mediating effects of life meaning and social support, confirming Hypothesis 2. Mediation analysis is expected to show that

gratitude not only directly enhances life engagement but also indirectly promotes it by increasing individuals' sense of life meaning and social support. Gratitude is likely to help individuals find positive meaning in life and feel more supported by their social network, leading to higher levels of engagement in daily activities (Steger et al., 2006).

Result 3: Emotional regulation significantly moderates the relationship between gratitude and life engagement, confirming Hypothesis 3. Results from multiple regression analysis are expected to show that emotional regulation moderates the relationship between gratitude and life engagement. Individuals with higher emotional regulation abilities are expected to derive greater benefits from gratitude, exhibiting higher levels of life engagement (Gross & John, 2003).

These findings will provide strong theoretical and empirical support for understanding how gratitude enhances life engagement through life meaning, social support, and emotional regulation (McCullough et al., 2002; Steger et al., 2006; Gross & John, 2003).

5. Discussion

5.1 Interpretation of Predicted Results

The predicted results indicate that gratitude promotes life engagement by enhancing individuals' sense of life meaning and social support. When individuals experience gratitude, they are more likely to recognize positive meaning in their lives and feel supported by others, motivating them to engage more actively in daily activities and responsibilities. These findings are consistent with previous studies, which demonstrate that gratitude not only improves psychological well-being but also fosters social connectedness and life engagement (McCullough et al., 2002; Steger et al., 2006). Additionally, emotional regulation plays a critical role in moderating the impact of gratitude on life engagement. Individuals with higher emotional regulation abilities are better able to utilize gratitude to cope with stress and challenges, which further supports the importance of emotional regulation in personal coping strategies, particularly in stressful situations (Gross & John, 2003).

5.2 Theoretical Contributions

This study makes two main theoretical contributions. First, it expands the theoretical framework on the impact of gratitude on life engagement, addressing a gap in the literature concerning how gratitude enhances life engagement through life meaning and social support. Gratitude, as a positive emotion, not only fosters psychological well-being but also encourages active participation in life through social and psychological mechanisms (e.g., life meaning and social support). Second, the study reveals the moderating role of emotional regulation in the relationship between gratitude and life engagement. This finding highlights how individuals' emotional regulation abilities enhance the effects of gratitude, making it more effective in promoting positive life outcomes (Gross & John, 2003). These contributions provide a solid theoretical foundation for future research on the interaction between gratitude and emotional regulation.

5.3 Practical Applications

The findings of this study have broad practical applications. First, in educational settings, schools can implement gratitude interventions or gratitude expression activities to help students cultivate gratitude and increase their engagement in learning and social interactions. Second, in the workplace, managers can establish a culture of gratitude to enhance employee engagement and satisfaction, ultimately improving productivity and workplace satisfaction (Wood et al., 2010). Finally, in the field of mental health, gratitude interventions can serve as important tools for psychological therapy and stress management,

helping individuals enhance life meaning and emotional regulation, thereby improving well-being and mental health. These applications demonstrate that gratitude is not just an internal emotional experience but can also be fostered through external interventions to improve individuals' quality of life and social functioning (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Algoe et al., 2008).

6. Limitations and Future Directions

Limitations: This study is primarily in the theoretical construction phase and has not yet been implemented in an experimental setting. As a result, it cannot provide empirical data to validate the hypotheses. Moreover, the cross-sectional design used in this study can reveal correlations between gratitude and life engagement, but it cannot capture the long-term effects of gratitude on life engagement. The current design is also limited in accounting for potential influences from time factors and external variables (Steger et al., 2006). Future research should adopt longitudinal or experimental designs to investigate the specific effects of gratitude interventions, particularly their long-term impact on life engagement.

Future Directions: Future research should focus on implementing gratitude interventions, particularly across different age groups and occupational settings. Different social roles and life stages may influence how gratitude is experienced and expressed, and further research on these influences will help explore the adaptability of gratitude interventions across different populations. Additionally, future research should examine how gratitude affects life engagement in cross-cultural contexts to determine whether gratitude exhibits similar effects across cultures or if cultural differences play a role (Algoe et al., 2008).

Conclusion

This study systematically explored the impact of gratitude on life engagement, revealing that gratitude enhances life engagement by increasing individuals' sense of life meaning and perceived social support. The theoretical analysis proposed that gratitude has the potential to promote positive behaviors and improve quality of life, particularly for individuals with higher emotional regulation abilities (Gross & John, 2003). This study provides new insights into how gratitude influences life engagement and offers important theoretical support for developing gratitude-based psychological interventions. Future empirical research should further validate these mechanisms and explore the applicability of gratitude interventions across different populations to provide more practical guidance for enhancing individual well-being and productivity.

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