Research Article

Effect of Self-Esteem and Gratitude on Personal Growth in Indian Students

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Abstract

It is known that self esteem and gratitude play a pivotal role in the development of an individual. The purpose of this study was to find out about the exact role that self esteem and gratitude play in the development of Indian students of 16 to 24 years. Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale, Gratitude Questionnaire and Personal Growth Initiative Scale were administered on the participants who were selected for the study by the method of random sampling. Data was collected with the help of google forms as personally meeting the subjects was not possible during the pandemic. Findings suggests that most participants who participated in the study possessed high levels of gratitude and moderate levels of self esteem, thus showing good personal development. It was believed that increment in self esteem leads to the increment in overall personal development of a person, but in this research, it came out that rise in self esteem up to a certain level can positively impact personal development, more than that can create a negative impact on the development. It was also found out that gratitude and personal development were positively correlated to each other, i.e., rise in levels of gratitude leads to increment in personal growth of students

Introduction

Effect of Self-Esteem and Gratitude on Personal Growth in Indian Students
In psychology, the concept of the self refers to a person's experience as a unitary and independent being that is separate from others which is continuously experienced through time and place. As people age and develop, their experience of self also differs. In fact, people are not born with a sense of self, but the concept that one is a separate and independent being is what that a child must develop.

People from different cultures may also differ in the components which make their sense of self. People of Western countries tend to view themselves as independent individuals. If they are asked to describe themselves, they tend to reside on their individual skills and personality traits (e.g., as an intelligent, moral, and hardworking individual). Individuals from the Asian countries (e.g., Japan, India, etc.), however, tend to have a more interdependent view of self, defining who they are in terms of their social relations

Some mental illnesses, such as Alzheimer's or Bipolar Affective Disorder, alter people's experience of the self. For example, people suffering from autism appear to possess concrete physical experiences of self. They do not experience the self at a more abstract level. If they answer a questionnaire about their personality traits, they afterwards do not remember the traits that they said they possessed. This is opposite to people not suffering from autism, who show a strong memory bias toward recalling the traits they said were self-descriptive. This difference can be explained if one assumes that non-sufferers have a memory about themselves, that is, a cognitive representation of their inner personality that aids their later memory. Those with autism, it appears, do not have a self-schema that is as richly developed.

The self that people possess has significant implications on their thoughts, emotional reactions, and behavior. The impressions that people tend to have about themselves, at least in Western countries, tend to be rather positive ones with many strengths and proficiencies. People tend to see other similar people with

strength and different ones with weaknesses.. In this way, people can boost their self-impressions as lovable and capable people.

A sense of self also influences the emotions people feel. People do not feel merely bad or good, but experience a variety of emotions. Some emotions arise because people view that they performed the actions that produced them. Many emotions involve self-consciousness, and the experience of all these emotions requires a sense of self.

Development is a process that creates growth, progress, positive change or the addition of physical, economic, environmental and social components. Personal development is a process that continues throughout our lifetime. In Abraham Maslow's process of self-actualisation (Maslow, 1970), he suggests that all idividuals have an in-built need for personal development which occurs through a process called self-actualisation. He says that all individuals have the need to see themselves as competent and autonomous and that every person has limitless room for growth.. In other words, self actualization refers to self-fulfilment and the need to reach full potential as an unique human being.

Personal growth is the process by which a person recognizes himself or herself and continually develops himself or herself to reach his or her full potential. As we grow on a personal level, we start feeling more passionate about life in general. We are more motivated because as we learn and grow, motivation and excitement are further added to our lives.

Although it might seem ironic, but personal growth expands our frame of reference to include the people around us instead of becoming more self-centered. Our sense of awareness and opportunity enhances as the world around us expands. This possibility mindset fills us with an attitude of eager expectancy as we start each new day.

Gratitude refers to the appreciation of everything one has. It is the recognition of value irrespective of materialistic worth of things one has. Generated from within, this social emotion strengthens relationships, and its roots run deep in evolutionary history — from the survival value of helping others and being helped in return. Psychiatry researchers define gratitude as: "the appreciation of what is valuable and meaningful to oneself and represents a general state of thankfulness and/or appreciation". (Sansone & Sansone, 2010)

According to Dr. Robert Emmons (2003), the feeling of gratitude involves two stages. First is the acknowledgment of goodness and positive things in one's life. We claim that all in all, life is good, and there are many things which make life worth living. Sometimes, the acknowledgment that we have received something satisfies us, both by its mere presence and also by the effort that the giver put into choosing it. Second, gratitude refers to recognizing that some of the sources of this goodness and positive things lie outside the self. A person can be thankful to another person, to animals, and to the world, but not to oneself. At this stage of our lives, we recognize the goodness in our lives and who to thank for it.

Self esteem means self respect or self worth, and self respect or worth plays an important role in everyone's life. Our self esteem decides that who we are and how our personality is. Confidence in one's self decides one's self esteem level. Too little self esteem can leave people feeling defeated or depressed. Sometimes it leads people to make wrong decisions. Basically individuals' personal evaluation of their own worth means self esteem.

Examples of low self esteem are - "I'm useless", "nobody likes me", "I'm a looser", "I am not capable of doing this work", "I'm not beautiful", etc. Examples of high self esteem are - "I'm a great leader ", "I'm capable of doing anything", "nobody hates me", "I feel happy about that", "life is full of happiness", "I'm a winner", etc. In other words, self esteem it is all about how much we appreciate ourselves and how positive we feel in our day to day life when we try to do new activities or how much confidence we have in ourselves when we take decisions.

Literature Review
Impact of Gratitude and Self-Esteem on Personal Development
Being grateful for things and thanking the universe by writing a letter or something shifts one's attention so

that his focus is on positive emotions. Expressing gratitude helps an individual even if he or she doesn't explicitly share it with someone. When we give credit for our happiness to those who helped us in each part of our life, this makes us more positive. Further, we are happier and more satisfied with life because we have completed the exercise of gratitude. Feeling of giving makes us a complete human and being grateful for things by showing gratitude towards others fills our life with positivity.

According to Maslow, people need both esteem from other people as well as self-respect or esteem. It's really important to maintain a balance between both. Our nature of being grateful makes us positive, calm, happy and our self esteem makes us grow from inside. Both will help us to grow as a person and achieve self actualization. There are many factors affecting self esteem like :- personality, life experiences, age, health, thoughts, social circumstances, the reactions of others, comparing the self to others, etc. Our own view of self esteem means believing in ourselves, i.e., how much we believe in ourselves. It is the way of looking at our own self. Our thoughts and beliefs define our self esteem, our low and negative behaviors define low self esteem and our positive and active behaviors define high self esteem.

In practice everybody is able to develop positive self-esteem, and nobody has a totally undeveloped self-esteem. The more flexible a person is, the better he can resist everything that would otherwise make him fall into a state of failure or desperation. Self-esteem allows creativity at the workplace, and is an especially critical condition for teaching professions. The importance of self-esteem is obvious when one realizes that the opposite of it is not the esteem of others, but self-rejection, a characteristic of that state of great unhappiness that we call depression.

Review of Literature

Scientists conceptualize gratitude as both a state and a trait. State gratitude is an attribution-dependent or affective-cognitive state based on the ability to be empathic, resulting from both appraising a received benefit as a positive outcome as well as recognizing that this positive outcome stems from an external source. The grateful emotion promotes (upstream) reciprocity, and prosocial behaviour (Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006; Clore, Ortony, & Foss, 1987; Lazarus & Lazarus, 1996; Nowak & Roch, 2007; Tsang, 2006; Weiner, 1985; Wood, Maltby, Stewart, & Joseph, 2008). Trait gratitude can be viewed as a wider life orientation towards noticing and being grateful for the positive in the world. Attention can be directed to the feeling of sufficiency, to the appreciation of the little things in life, and to other people in our lives (Thomas & Watkins, 2003). Individuals with a grateful perspective on life are more likely to show (pro)social behaviours (Wood et al., 2010), theorized to at least partly underly previously established associations between gratitude and health-related outcomes. The results, suggesting state and trait gratitude being beneficial for physical and mental health, have led to the development of gratitude interventions to decrease psychological symptoms and increase physical and mental well-being.

If individual's feelings are respected during childhood, thoughts valued and abilities recognized then self-esteem strengthens. Belief system of an individual plays an important role in the life of the individual. If thoughts are belittled, feelings are crushed, and work of an individual or ability is criticized then it is very hard to maintain self-esteem and it remains low and weak. In this situation, individual's belief on himself breaks and moves towards darkness. On the other hand, individual's high belief of himself/herself might also change the situation and make the person work harder in a positive direction. This can further increase the person's self-esteem.

In a study (Noronha, Laveena and Monteiro, Meena and Pinto, Nelson, 2018), the researchers tried to study the connectivity between academic performance and self-esteem. The main purpose of the study was to find out the level of self-esteem of the students with low academic performance. The objectives of this study were to investigate the relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement, to understand the Socio-Economic background, to assess the level of self-esteem, and to find about the reason for low academic performance of the students in spite of having high self-esteem. The research design used for the study was descriptive in nature. (Noronha, Laveena and Monteiro, Meena and Pinto, Nelson, 2018)

There are no research studies that have examined the effect of gratitude and self-esteem on personal growth. However, from some theoretical and empirical literature, it is possible to find indirect support for our research objective. In a research conducted on self-awareness and personal growth (Ugur, Constantinescu & Stevens, 2015), it was found that combined with the
subjective reactions of group members and facilitators, it can be said that for the consistent expression of

personally selected values and characteristics it is necessary that these aspects (i) become internalized as meaningful guides for living, (ii) motivate behavior that is consistent with the chosen values and characteristics and (iii) contribute to a sense of well-being and personal growth. It further concluded that the process of self-development can be facilitated by the internalization of cognitive learning and is supported by affective processes that, together, yield favorable developmental outcomes for students.

Besides, the theoretical and empirical literature represents the long-term benefits of striving for and achieving personal growth in concrete ways. For example, Bauer and McAdams (2004) and Bauer, Park, Montoya, and Wayment (2015) found that university students with personal, growth-oriented goals displayed higher levels of social and emotional well-being, as well as social and cognitive maturity. Tuominen-Soini, Salmela-Aro, and Niemivirta (2008) found that university students who were oriented toward personal growth scored high on measures of maturity and well-being.

METHOD
Population:
The present study was conducted among students of high school, Under Graduation and Post Graduation of various schools and colleges located in various states of India.

Sample Locale:
A sample of 156 Indian students was taken, mostly from the states Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh,

Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir, etc.

Sampling Method:
The method of simple random sampling was used for selecting sample from the population.

Inclusive Criteria:
 The sample of Indian students was selected randomly for the research irrespective of their gender. Most of them lied within the age range of 16 to 24 years. Informed consent was taken prior to the study.

Exclusive Criteria:
Non- English speaking students were avoided for the study.

Instruments:
The Gratitude Questionnaire is one of the most frequently used tools in gratitude. This tool is a self-report questionnaire that measures the tendency to recognize, respond, and experience gratitude that how a particular person express their feelings to show gratitude. The responses of responses of each item are based on a 7-point Likert scale that ranges from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree. There are two negatively scored items that are reverse coded. The scores range from 6 - 42. The higher the score, higher is the level of gratitude of the subject.

The Personal Growth Initiative Scale is a self-report instrument that yields a single scale score for personal growth initiative. Personal growth initiative is a person's active and intentional involvement in changing and developing as a person which helps a person in the overall development. The PGIS consists of nine items that are rated on a Likert scale from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 6 = Strongly Agree. Scores of each item are summed to obtain a total PGI score.

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale is a 10-item scale that measures global self-worth by measuring both positive and negative feelings about the self. The responses of each item are based on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Agree to 4 = Strongly Disagree. There are 5 negatively scored items that are reverse coded. The scores range from 10 - 40. Higher scores indicate high self-esteem while lower scores indicate low self-esteem of the respective subject.

Statistical Analysis
The obtained empirical data were processed using the version 20 of the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software. Descriptive statistics (Mean and Standard Deviation) and Pearson Product Moment Correlation were used for the present study.

Result

Table 1 : Mean, S.D. and Level of Scores of Gratitude, Self-Esteem and Personal Growth

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level
Gratitude	30.80	6.37	High
Self-Esteem	24.39	6.45	Moderate
Personal Growth	41.15	8.35	High

Table 1 represents the mean score of Gratitude (Mean = 30.80) with standard deviation of 6.37. This shows that most of the students who participated in the present study have high level of Gratitude.
The mean score of Self-Esteem (Mean = 24.39) with standard deviation of 6.45 is also shown in Table 1. This shows a moderate level of Self-Esteem present in most of the students

who participated in the present study.
Besides Gratitude and Self-Esteem, Table 1 shows the mean score of Personal Growth (Mean = 41.15) with standard deviation of 8.35. This tells that the participants of the present study have high level of Personal Growth.

Table 2 : Relationship of Personal Growth with Gratitude and Self Esteem

Variables	Gratitude	Self-Esteem	Personal Growth
Gratitude	1		
Self-Esteem	-0.156	1	
Personal Growth	0.320**	-0.309**	1

**(p<0.01)

Table 2 shows the relationship of Personal Growth with Gratitude. The analysis of the data shows that Gratitude (r = 0.320**) is significantly correlated with Personal Growth. It indicates that there is a positive relationship between the two variables, i.e., with increase in the level of one variable the level of the other will also increase and with decrease in level of one variable the other will decrease simultaneously.

The relationship between Personal Growth and Self-Esteem is also shown in Table 2. The results reveal that Self-Esteem (r = -0.309**) is significantly correlated with Personal Growth. It also shows that there is a negative relationship between the two variables, i.e., with increase in the level of one variable the level of the other decreases.

Discussion
In the study conducted, gratitude was found to be significantly and positively correlated with personal growth (Table 2). High level of gratitude resulted in high level of personal growth as well. It means most of the participants of the study possess a positive approach towards life. And gratitude can be considered as one of many reason of this approach. Participants scored highly on the Gratitude Questionnaire 6 (GQ-6). The questionnaire included items like 'I have so much in life to be thankful for'. This means that they feel they have more things to feel positive and grateful about than being sorry. This positivity is a result of being grateful for everything in life. Practicing gratitude automatically reduces one's complaining nature. Gratitude can have a significantly positive effect on one's personal growth. Most of the participants highly agreed that they were able to appreciate people, events and situations as they got older in the item number 5 of the questionnaire. Participants also agreed to the statements like they are grateful to a wide variety of

people. These people can be their parents, teachers, fellow students, etc. Participants disagreed to the fact that it takes long amounts of time to feel grateful to someone or something. Thus the overall results achieved by the participants tell us that students get to see a positive impact of practicing gratitude on their personal growth.

The other variable studied in this research was self esteem. It was found that self esteem was negatively correlated with personal growth (Table 2). Also, when self esteem was moderate, personal growth was high (Table 1). This indicates that possessing higher self esteem than the required level can pose threat to the personal growth of a person. Participants who agreed highly on items like 'On the whole, I am satisfied with my life' tend to get satisfied easily with everything they get in their life and further resist to do more hard work and fear to achieve challenging goals. This situation can be highly dangerous for students who may think that they have achieved all that is required to have a successful career and may show a complacent behavior which may lead to an unsuccessful career and personal life. Most of the participants agreed highly to the statement 'I feel that I have a lot of good qualities'. Those who feel high of themselves in this regards, tend not to notice their faults knowingly or unknowingly, thus creating a state of misconception of their superiority and can hurt others. This can also lead to a lack of experience required in certain area of career or personal life of a student. But the thing to be noticed here is that if subjects agreed to the statements like 'I am a failure' and 'I do not have much to be proud of', show the lack of self esteem which can again prove to be a hindrance in one's personal growth as one will lack self confidence as well. This would lead to a poorer performance than one's potential. Thus having a moderate amount of self esteem is good for the personal growth of an individual.

Conclusion

These findings have important implications for the design of curricular programs which can help in student psychological development. Also, this research can lead fellow researchers to explore more about what can be the optimal levels of self esteem. High level of self esteem leads to low level of personal growth according to recent studies like ours. This problem can be further assessed and can lead to variety of new findings that can prove helpful in studying self esteem, gratitude and personal development more accurately.

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