

# **GRATITUDE AND SELF-ESTEEM AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS**

*Dissertation submitted to Kerala University*

*In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of*

**MSc. Counselling Psychology**

By

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**CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the Dissertation entitled **“Gratitude and Self-esteem among college students”** is an authentic work carried out by BINCY S S, Reg. No. 60422115009 under the guidance of Ms. Jesline Maria Mamen during the fourth semester of M.Sc. Counselling Psychology programme in the academic year 2022-2024.

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**DECLARATION**

I, the undersigned, do hereby declare that this research work **‘GRATITUDE AND SELF-ESTEEM AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS’** was carried in the Department of Counselling Psychology, Loyola College of Social Sciences, supervised by Ms. Jesline Maria Mamen and submitted to Kerala University as a part of partial fulfillment of the Postgraduate Bachelor’s Degree in Counseling Psychology of the year 2022-2024. This work is bonafide and has not been submitted by me for the award of any degree, diploma, titles and recognition before.

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the link between gratitude and self-esteem among college students in Kerala, with a focus on how gratitude might impact students' sense of self-worth and their academic well-being. Using a quantitative approach, data was gathered from 54 students across different colleges via an online survey. The survey assessed gratitude and self-esteem levels to determine any possible connection between the two.

The findings revealed no significant correlation between gratitude and self-esteem, with a correlation coefficient of  $r = 0.207$  and a p-value of 0.13, which is higher than the standard significance level of 0.05. This indicates that, for these students, gratitude did not have a notable effect on their self-esteem.

While the direct relationship between gratitude and self-esteem was not established, the study underscores the broader relevance of gratitude in promoting positivity, resilience, and coping mechanisms in academic settings. Gratitude may still play a role in enhancing students' overall mental health.

Further studies are needed to examine other factors, such as stress management and emotional intelligence, that might influence self-esteem. Additionally, exploring ways to integrate gratitude practices into education or counseling could offer valuable insights for improving student well-being.

Keywords: Gratitude, self-esteem, academic pressures, Kerala, college students.



## CHAPTER I : INTRODUCTION

Gratitude and self-esteem have emerged as pivotal topics in psychological research, particularly within the realm of positive psychology. Gratitude, in particular, has attracted considerable attention from researchers and theorists across diverse fields, including social and developmental psychology. It is often described as an emotional state marked by thankfulness and appreciation. Emmons and McCullough (2003) define gratitude as an emotion that arises when individuals recognize and appreciate the benefits they receive from others, whether in response to specific acts of kindness or a broader appreciation of life's circumstances. Various religious and cultural traditions also provide unique insights into gratitude, highlighting its significance as a virtue (Chen & Kee, 2008; Emmons, 2003; Watkins, 2003).

Emmons (2004) offers a widely accepted definition of gratitude as "a sense of thankfulness and joy in response to receiving a gift, whether the gift be a perceptible benefit from a specific other or a moment of peaceful ecstasy suggested by natural beauty" (p. 554). This definition underscores gratitude as both an emotional reaction to specific events and a generalized positive orientation toward life. In contrast, self-esteem, as conceptualized by Rosenberg (1979), refers to an individual's overall assessment of their worth or value. This encompasses self-perception, including confidence, purpose, and feelings of self-worth. In this context, self-esteem is considered not merely as an isolated trait but as a potential mediator in the relationship between gratitude and various life outcomes, such as mental health, academic performance, and social relationships.

The study's central focus is on the interplay between gratitude and self-esteem. Gratitude, with its emphasis on recognizing and valuing positive experiences, may enhance self-esteem by

fostering a more positive self-concept. High self-esteem, in turn, is associated with numerous benefits, including increased confidence, resilience, and a lower likelihood of engaging in negative behaviors like substance abuse or criminal activity (Branden, 1994; Mecca, Smelser, & Vasconcellos, 1989). Gratitude has also gained significant attention in popular culture, often highlighted in self-help literature and wellness practices. The widespread interest in books and resources promoting gratitude (Breathnach, 1996; Hay, 1996; Miller, 1995; Ryan, 1999; Steindler Rast, 1984; Turner, 1998; Van Kaam & Muto, 1993) reflects its broad appeal and relevance in contemporary life. Originating from the Latin "gratia," meaning grace or graciousness, gratitude embodies kindness and generosity—qualities universally valued across cultures and religious traditions.

The study of gratitude and self-esteem among college students seeks to explore the intricate relationship between these two positive psychological constructs and their impact on students' mental health, personal development, and overall well-being during a crucial life stage. Gratitude, defined as a sense of appreciation and thankfulness for benefits received from others or life circumstances, is known to provide various psychological benefits (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). For college students, gratitude can manifest as recognizing support from family, friends, teachers, or life experiences. Practicing gratitude can foster a greater sense of contentment, a positive outlook, and improved relationships (Froh et al., 2011). College life involves facing challenges such as academic pressures, social transitions, personal identity exploration, and future goal pursuits, which can lead to stress, anxiety, or feelings of inadequacy. However, students who consistently practice gratitude may experience enhanced well-being, aiding them in coping with these challenges (Wood, Froh, & Geraghty, 2010). Gratitude has been shown to boost emotional resilience, reduce negative feelings like envy or resentment, and

promote a more optimistic mindset, all contributing to better mental health outcomes (Fredrickson, 2001).

Self-esteem, reflecting an individual's overall sense of self-worth, is crucial for psychological health, especially during the college years, which involve significant changes in social roles, academic expectations, and personal identity (Harter, 1999). For students, self-esteem is linked to academic performance, social relationships, and emotional well-being. High self-esteem can act as a buffer against stress, promoting better coping strategies and leading to greater life satisfaction (Baumeister et al., 2003). Conversely, low self-esteem can result in feelings of inadequacy, social withdrawal, anxiety, or even depression (Orth, Robins, & Widaman, 2012). Research suggests a positive correlation between gratitude and self-esteem, with gratitude potentially serving as a foundation for building and maintaining self-esteem (Froh, Yurkewicz, & Kashdan, 2009). Practicing gratitude allows students to reflect on the positive contributions from others, helping them recognize their own worth and support from those around them (Algoe, Gable, & Maisel, 2010). Gratitude encourages a positive perception of life, promoting focus on what one has rather than what one lacks, thereby enhancing self-esteem and contentment with oneself and one's circumstances (Wood et al., 2010). Grateful individuals are less likely to engage in negative social comparisons, which can undermine self-esteem, and instead, appreciation for one's unique experiences and qualities boosts self-worth (Sirois & Wood, 2017). Moreover, grateful students often build stronger, supportive social networks, which further strengthens their self-esteem, as positive relationships are a key factor in self-perception (Emmons & McCullough, 2003).

College students, especially in Indian contexts such as Kerala, face distinctive pressures, including managing heavy academic workloads, navigating intricate social environments, and

making significant decisions about their careers and futures. These challenges can sometimes lead to reduced self-esteem or feelings of isolation and anxiety (Sukumaran, 2018). Investigating the connection between gratitude and self-esteem in this demographic is crucial because:

Students are vulnerable to mental health issues such as stress, anxiety, and depression. By cultivating gratitude, students may enhance their emotional well-being and develop a more positive self-image, thus addressing these risks (Bono & McCullough, 2006). The results of this study could inform mental health interventions in educational settings. For instance, incorporating gratitude practices into college curricula or wellness programs could assist students in building resilience, fostering a sense of self-worth, and achieving emotional balance (Watkins et al., 2003).

The cultural context of Indian college students in Kerala may also influence how gratitude and self-esteem interact. Family support, social networks, and community involvement are often significant in this cultural setting. Exploring how gratitude is practiced in a collectivist society like India could provide insights into its unique effects on self-esteem, in contrast to more individualistic cultures (Singh & Misra, 2011).

Understanding the relationship between gratitude and self-esteem can help college administrators, counselors, and educators devise strategies to promote these traits among students. For example:

Introducing workshops, gratitude journals, or reflective practices could help students develop a gratitude-oriented mindset. Such practices can lead to lasting improvements in emotional well-being and self-esteem (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Mental health professionals working with college students might integrate gratitude-focused cognitive-behavioral therapy

(CBT) techniques to assist students in reframing negative thought patterns and recognizing their own strengths and values (Fredrickson, 2001).

Examining gratitude and self-esteem among college students may reveal important factors that contribute to a positive sense of self-worth and overall well-being during this critical developmental stage. Gratitude, as a positive psychological trait, could act as a pathway to enhanced self-esteem, promoting mental health, emotional resilience, and academic success (Froh et al., 2010). This research is significant not only for individual development but also for fostering healthier, more supportive educational environments for college students in Kerala and beyond.

The study is anticipated to contribute to both theoretical understanding and practical applications, assisting young adults in navigating the challenges of college life with improved self-esteem and emotional well-being (Singh & Misra, 2011).

#### NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

College students constitute a distinct group undergoing numerous life transitions and challenges, such as academic pressures, social identity formation, and career planning. These experiences frequently result in stress, anxiety, and mental health issues (Robotham & Julian, 2006). Within this framework, investigating positive psychological attributes like gratitude and self-esteem becomes essential. Students often face stressors including demanding academic workloads, evolving social relationships, and uncertainties about their futures, all of which can adversely affect their mental health. Research indicates an increase in mental health concerns such as anxiety, depression, and stress among college students (Eisenberg, Gollust, Golberstein, & Hefner, 2007). Examining gratitude as a potential coping mechanism could provide valuable

insights into mitigating these negative effects. The college years represent a significant transitional period from adolescence to adulthood, during which self-esteem frequently fluctuates (Arnett, 2000). Self-esteem is crucial for academic success, relationship satisfaction, and emotional resilience, making it vital to understand how it can be bolstered during this critical phase.

There has been a growing emphasis in psychology on understanding positive traits and interventions that promote emotional well-being (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Gratitude, a key positive trait, has been associated with numerous benefits, such as increased happiness, stronger social connections, and better mental health (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Investigating how gratitude influences self-esteem could offer important guidance for psychological interventions tailored to college students. In the Indian context, especially in Kerala, where family and social support are integral to student life, it is crucial to examine how gratitude interacts with cultural norms and values to impact self-esteem (Singh & Misra, 2011). Research in a collectivist society like India could offer culturally relevant insights into how gratitude enhances self-esteem, providing a contrast to findings from more individualistic cultures.

Understanding the link between gratitude and self-esteem is essential for addressing mental health issues among college students. Evidence suggests that students who practice gratitude are more likely to experience positive emotions, decrease feelings of envy or depression, and build emotional resilience (Wood, Froh, & Geraghty, 2010). By exploring these traits, the study could assist students in developing tools for emotional balance, particularly during high-stress times such as exams or career planning. Self-esteem is critical for students' ability to handle academic and social challenges. High self-esteem is associated with increased motivation, improved

academic performance, and better social relationships (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003). If gratitude is found to contribute to higher self-esteem, it could lead to practical strategies for enhancing self-worth and confidence among students.

The study's results could be used to create interventions aimed at fostering gratitude and self-esteem in educational settings. Incorporating gratitude-based activities into college curricula, such as gratitude journaling or mindfulness practices, could improve students' emotional resilience and create a positive learning environment (Bono & McCullough, 2006). Additionally, counseling approaches that include gratitude exercises could improve therapeutic outcomes for students experiencing mental health challenges. This research has the potential to expand the field of positive psychology by exploring the connection between gratitude and self-esteem. Although gratitude has been extensively studied in Western contexts, its role within the Indian educational system, particularly in Kerala, remains relatively unexplored (Rashid & Seligman, 2018). The study could provide a culturally nuanced understanding of these traits, broadening the global scope of positive psychology research. Educational institutions could benefit from the findings by implementing programs that promote gratitude and self-esteem, leading to more supportive and inclusive educational environments. Such initiatives could enhance students' social relationships, reduce feelings of isolation, and improve overall academic engagement (Watkins et al., 2003). This is especially relevant in Indian educational settings where students face intense competition and societal expectations. Therefore, studying gratitude and self-esteem among college students is both necessary and significant due to the critical developmental stage students are in, the rising mental health challenges, and the potential benefits that gratitude can offer for emotional well-being and academic success. Exploring these traits within the unique

cultural context of Kerala could offer valuable insights for students and educators, contributing to healthier, more supportive educational environments.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The transition to college represents a crucial developmental stage where students encounter various challenges, including academic pressures, identity formation, and social adjustment. These difficulties often lead to increased stress, anxiety, and feelings of inadequacy, which can negatively affect students' mental health and well-being. Positive psychological traits, such as gratitude and self-esteem, have been demonstrated to significantly enhance emotional resilience and overall life satisfaction.

While there has been considerable research on gratitude and self-esteem separately, there is a limited understanding of how these two factors interact, especially within the context of Indian college students. This study aims to explore the relationship between gratitude and self-esteem among college students in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. By examining this connection, the research seeks to provide valuable insights into how gratitude may influence self-esteem and, consequently, promote emotional well-being, academic success, and improved coping strategies among students.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to develop culturally relevant interventions that could enhance mental health outcomes and improve the quality of life for students navigating a demanding academic environment.



## CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### THEORETICAL REVIEW

The theoretical and research backgrounds of the variables under investigation are outlined below. Theoretical perspectives provide a framework for comparing and generalizing research findings. This section discusses relevant theories related to gratitude and self-esteem.

### THEORIES OF GRATITUDE

Gratitude is a multifaceted emotion involving the recognition and appreciation of positive aspects of one's life and the kindness of others. Several theoretical models elucidate how gratitude influences psychological well-being and its impact on self-esteem.

#### 1.1. Fredrickson's Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions (2001)

Fredrickson's Broaden-and-Build Theory presents a comprehensive framework for understanding how positive emotions, such as gratitude, affect psychological functioning. According to this theory, positive emotions expand an individual's cognitive and emotional horizons, fostering a more open-minded and expansive perspective. This broadened mindset is instrumental in developing enduring personal resources, including social support, resilience, and a positive self-concept.

For college students, gratitude plays a crucial role in this broaden-and-build process. By focusing on the positive aspects of their lives and the support they receive, students can redirect their attention from immediate stressors and negative experiences. This shift promotes a more optimistic outlook, enhancing overall well-being and self-esteem. As students develop a habit of

gratitude, they gain a broader perspective on their experiences, which helps them manage academic pressures and social challenges with greater resilience.

Additionally, the building effect of gratitude is evident in the creation of lasting personal resources. Grateful individuals are more likely to form and maintain strong social connections, which are vital for emotional support and psychological resilience. For college students, these social resources contribute to improved self-esteem and a more positive self-image. Thus, cultivating gratitude not only broadens students' perspectives but also builds valuable personal resources that support their mental health and academic success.

## 1.2. Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969)

John Bowlby's Attachment Theory explores the importance of early relationships in shaping emotional and psychological development. Secure attachments, characterized by consistent support and responsiveness from caregivers, lay the groundwork for healthy emotional development and self-esteem.

Gratitude plays a significant role in reinforcing secure attachments and fostering a positive self-concept. By expressing and receiving gratitude, individuals strengthen their emotional bonds and reinforce feelings of security and support. For college students, who are often away from home and forming new social networks, maintaining and enhancing these attachments is crucial for their emotional well-being.

The practice of gratitude helps students feel valued and supported by their social networks, contributing to a more stable and positive self-concept. Reinforcing secure attachments through gratitude enhances students' self-esteem by providing a sense of belonging and affirmation. This

sense of security and support is essential as students navigate the challenges of college life and develop their identities.

### 1.3. Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000)

Self-Determination Theory identifies three fundamental psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—that are vital for psychological growth and well-being.

Gratitude supports the fulfillment of these needs by fostering positive social connections and acknowledging personal achievements. For college students, gratitude enhances their sense of competence by recognizing and valuing their accomplishments. It strengthens relatedness by promoting positive social interactions and a sense of belonging. Additionally, gratitude supports autonomy by fostering a sense of empowerment and control over one's experiences.

The fulfillment of these psychological needs through gratitude contributes to higher self-esteem and overall emotional well-being. By enhancing students' sense of competence, relatedness, and autonomy, gratitude supports their personal and academic development and fosters a more positive self-concept.

## 2. THEORIES OF SELF-ESTEEM

Self-esteem represents an individual's overall sense of self-worth and value. Various theories offer insights into the development and maintenance of self-esteem, highlighting its importance in psychological health.

### 2.1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943)

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs presents a progression of human needs, with self-esteem occupying a crucial position in the hierarchy. According to Maslow, self-esteem needs involve both self-respect and the respect received from others.

For college students, meeting these esteem needs includes acknowledging personal accomplishments and receiving validation from peers and mentors. Gratitude helps fulfill esteem needs by fostering a positive self-image and affirming personal achievements. As students practice gratitude, they become better able to appreciate their own successes and the support they receive, leading to higher self-esteem and improved overall well-being.

Gratitude also contributes to the achievement of self-actualization, which represents the highest level of Maslow's hierarchy. By promoting a positive self-image and fostering a sense of accomplishment, gratitude supports students' pursuit of personal and academic goals. This sense of fulfillment and self-worth is critical for reaching self-actualization and maintaining elevated self-esteem.

### 2.2. Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory (1968)

Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory identifies self-esteem as a key component of identity formation during adolescence and young adulthood. The theory stresses the importance of resolving conflicts related to identity and self-worth during this developmental stage.

For college students, the stage of identity versus role confusion involves exploring different facets of their identity and developing a coherent sense of self. Gratitude aids in building a positive self-concept by reinforcing their achievements and social relationships. By focusing on

positive experiences and expressing appreciation, students can resolve identity-related conflicts and enhance their self-esteem, contributing to a more stable sense of self.

Erikson's theory emphasizes the role of successfully resolving psychosocial conflicts in achieving a positive self-concept. Gratitude facilitates this resolution by offering a framework for appreciating personal experiences, thus strengthening identity and boosting self-esteem.

### 2.3. Sociometer Theory (Leary, 1999)

Sociometer Theory proposes that self-esteem acts as an internal gauge that monitors social acceptance and belonging. According to this theory, self-esteem is shaped by perceptions of social acceptance and rejection.

Gratitude fosters social acceptance and belonging by encouraging positive interactions and reinforcing social bonds. Students who express and receive gratitude are more likely to experience inclusion and affirmation from their peers, which in turn enhances self-esteem by contributing to a positive self-image and a stronger sense of self-worth.

Gratitude also helps to counteract the negative effects of social comparison, which can diminish self-esteem. By focusing on the positive aspects of their relationships and experiences, students can develop a more favorable self-perception and a stronger sense of worth. This shift in focus supports healthier self-esteem and a more positive self-concept.

Theories suggest that gratitude and self-esteem are closely linked, with gratitude playing a pivotal role in enhancing self-esteem. Several mechanisms connect these constructs:

Fredrickson's Broaden-and-Build Theory illustrates how gratitude expands individuals' perspectives, enabling them to focus on the positive aspects of their lives instead of immediate stressors. This broader outlook reduces negative self-perceptions, leading to improved self-esteem. By cultivating gratitude, students can better manage academic and social pressures with enhanced confidence and resilience.

Gratitude supports cognitive restructuring by encouraging students to focus on their positive experiences and achievements. This shift helps counteract negative self-talk and fosters a healthier self-concept. As students develop a more favorable self-image through gratitude, their self-esteem increases, contributing to emotional well-being and academic success.

Gratitude reinforces secure attachments by strengthening emotional bonds and providing a sense of belonging and support. For college students, this sense of security and validation is essential for cultivating a positive self-concept and boosting self-esteem. The reinforcement of secure attachments through gratitude helps students feel valued and supported, promoting a stable and positive self-image.

Gratitude enhances social acceptance and belonging, as emphasized in Sociometer Theory. By promoting positive social interactions and reducing harmful social comparisons, gratitude enables students to develop a healthier self-concept and higher self-esteem. The increased social inclusion and acceptance that gratitude fosters also contribute to greater self-worth and emotional resilience.

Gratitude satisfies the psychological needs identified in Self-Determination Theory. By enhancing feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, gratitude promotes higher self-esteem and overall well-being. For college students, fulfilling these psychological needs

through gratitude aids their personal and academic growth, leading to a more positive self-concept and improved emotional resilience.

Theoretical perspectives on gratitude and self-esteem provide important insights into how these two constructs are interconnected. Gratitude enhances self-esteem by broadening perspectives, promoting cognitive restructuring, reinforcing secure attachments, improving social acceptance, and fulfilling essential psychological needs. These insights offer practical applications for educators, counselors, and students, underscoring the importance of cultivating gratitude to boost self-esteem and overall well-being. By integrating gratitude practices into educational settings and personal development, students can more effectively navigate the challenges of college life with greater confidence, resilience, and emotional balance.

## EMPIRICAL REVIEW

The following section of this chapter presents studies related to the variables under investigation. These studies provide insight into the body of knowledge regarding the variables, as uncovered by various research efforts. The empirical review of literature thoroughly examines research findings related to gratitude and self-esteem among college students. This review includes studies on gratitude, self-esteem, and the relationship between these constructs, highlighting both supporting and contrasting findings to provide a comprehensive understanding of their impact on students.

### 1. Review of Literature on Gratitude Among College Students

Numerous studies emphasize the positive effects of gratitude on the psychological well-being of college students. A pioneering study by Emmons and McCullough (2003) demonstrated how

regularly practicing gratitude, such as maintaining a gratitude journal, leads to increased life satisfaction and reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety. Their findings established a foundational understanding of how gratitude fosters positive emotional states by shifting focus from negative to positive experiences and relationships.

In a more recent study, Froh et al. (2008) investigated the effects of gratitude on the well-being of college students. They found that students who engaged in gratitude exercises, such as writing thank-you letters, experienced improved mood, higher life satisfaction, and reduced feelings of loneliness. This research reinforces the view that gratitude significantly contributes to emotional well-being and social connectedness.

The relationship between gratitude and academic performance has also been explored. Lambert et al. (2010) discovered that students who expressed gratitude toward their professors and peers exhibited increased motivation and engagement in their studies. This heightened engagement translated into better academic performance and greater satisfaction with their educational experiences. Similarly, Emmons and McCullough (2003) found that gratitude enhances students' academic behaviors by fostering a positive outlook and a proactive approach to their studies.

Additionally, Sheldon and Lyubomirsky (2006) examined the effects of gratitude on academic achievement, finding that students who practiced gratitude showed improved academic performance. Their research highlighted that gratitude practices positively influence students' motivation, which, in turn, enhances their academic outcomes.

The role of gratitude in strengthening social relationships is well-documented. Algoe and Haidt (2009) found that gratitude promotes more satisfying and supportive social interactions among college students. Their study showed that students who regularly practiced gratitude reported



stronger social bonds and greater relationship satisfaction, suggesting that gratitude plays a key role in fostering positive social exchanges and reinforcing interpersonal connections.

In a related study, McCullough et al. (2002) discovered that gratitude enhances social support by encouraging reciprocal and supportive interactions. Students who engage in gratitude practices are more likely to receive help and support from others, which leads to stronger social networks and greater overall happiness.

Cultural background can influence how gratitude is expressed and its impact. Oishi et al. (2007) explored how culture affects gratitude among students and found that students from collectivist cultures, which emphasize group harmony and interdependence, often express gratitude in ways that reinforce group cohesion. Conversely, students from individualistic cultures may focus more on personal achievements and individual relationships. This cultural context shapes how gratitude is experienced and its effect on students' psychological well-being.

In another study, Park et al. (2013) investigated the role of gratitude in both collectivist and individualistic cultures. They found that in collectivist cultures, gratitude was more closely linked to social harmony and maintaining relationships, whereas in individualistic cultures, it was more associated with personal achievements and individual well-being. These cultural differences underscore the importance of culturally sensitive approaches when understanding and promoting gratitude.

## 2. Review of Literature on Self-Esteem Among College Students

The relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement has been the subject of extensive research. Marsh and Craven (2006) showed that students with high self-esteem tend to

perform better academically and have higher educational aspirations. Their research underscores the importance of cultivating a positive self-concept to improve academic outcomes. High self-esteem equips students with the confidence and motivation necessary to reach their goals and overcome academic challenges.

Further research by Kernis et al. (2007) revealed that stable self-esteem, defined by a consistent sense of self-worth, is linked to improved academic performance and psychological well-being. Students with stable self-esteem are less influenced by academic setbacks and are more likely to persevere in their studies, resulting in greater academic success.

Self-esteem plays a pivotal role in social adjustment during the college years. Harter (1999) discovered that students with high self-esteem are better equipped to handle social interactions and adapt to college life. High self-esteem fosters confidence in social situations, enabling the formation of positive relationships and successful social integration. This confidence assists students in managing social challenges and building supportive networks.

Research conducted by Leary et al. (2003) reinforces the link between self-esteem and social adjustment. Their study found that students with higher self-esteem engage in positive social behaviors and experience greater satisfaction in their social interactions. This positive social adjustment enhances the college experience and contributes to better overall well-being.

Multiple factors influence self-esteem among college students, including academic achievement, social support, and personal experiences. Kernis (2003) identified that stable self-esteem is associated with improved mental health and well-being. Students with stable self-esteem experience fewer emotional fluctuations and enjoy greater life satisfaction compared to those with unstable self-esteem.

Additionally, Twenge and Campbell (2001) explored the societal and cultural factors that affect self-esteem. Their research emphasized how societal pressures and cultural values influence individual self-esteem. Understanding these factors is essential for developing targeted interventions to help students build and maintain healthy self-esteem.

Cultural context plays a significant role in shaping self-esteem. Heine et al. (2001) found that self-esteem varies across cultures, with individualistic cultures emphasizing personal achievements and self-expression, while collectivist cultures prioritize social harmony and group cohesion. These cultural differences affect the development and maintenance of self-esteem among college students.

Choi et al. (2008) investigated the cultural values that shape self-esteem among students from different backgrounds. Their study demonstrated that cultural context influences the sources and expressions of self-esteem, highlighting the importance of culturally sensitive approaches in supporting students' self-esteem and well-being.

### 3. Review of Literature on Gratitude and Self-Esteem Among College Students

A number of studies have highlighted the positive connection between gratitude and self-esteem. Wood et al. (2010) identified a positive relationship between gratitude and self-esteem among college students. Their findings revealed that students who practiced gratitude, such as by keeping a gratitude journal or expressing appreciation, reported higher levels of self-esteem. This suggests that gratitude promotes self-worth by encouraging a positive self-image and reducing negative self-perceptions.

In another study, McCullough et al. (2002) demonstrated that gratitude helps individuals focus on their strengths and achievements, thereby contributing to a more favorable self-image and

increased self-esteem. Students who regularly practice gratitude are more inclined to recognize and appreciate their accomplishments and the support they receive, which leads to enhanced self-worth and overall well-being.

Several mechanisms have been proposed to explain the link between gratitude and self-esteem. Gratitude supports cognitive restructuring by encouraging individuals to focus on the positive aspects of their lives and their achievements. Emmons and McCullough (2003) suggested that this shift in focus counteracts negative self-talk, fostering a healthier self-concept. By emphasizing positive experiences, students can develop a more positive self-image and increased self-esteem.

Gratitude also plays a role in improving social relationships and support networks, both of which contribute to self-esteem. Research by Algoe and Haidt (2009) showed that gratitude strengthens social bonds and enhances positive social interactions. Students who engage in gratitude practices are more likely to receive social support, which in turn boosts a healthier self-concept and greater self-esteem.

Tsang (2006) also explored the impact of gratitude on self-esteem among college students and found that gratitude led to higher self-esteem through improved social connections and positive self-reflection. Tsang emphasized that gratitude fosters a positive self-concept by nurturing supportive relationships and promoting self-affirmation.

Moreover, a study by Seligman et al. (2005) investigated the effects of gratitude interventions on self-esteem. Their research found that interventions like writing gratitude letters or maintaining a gratitude journal resulted in increased self-esteem and greater life satisfaction. This supports the

notion that gratitude practices can elevate self-worth and contribute to a more positive self-image.

While many studies support the positive link between gratitude and self-esteem, some research presents alternative findings. For instance, Lambert and Fincham (2011) discovered that although gratitude was related to increased life satisfaction, its direct effect on self-esteem was less evident. This suggests that the relationship between gratitude and self-esteem may be influenced by other factors, such as individual differences and contextual variables.

A study by Park et al. (2013) examined the impact of gratitude on self-esteem among students from different cultural backgrounds and found varying strengths in the relationship. In collectivist cultures, gratitude had a more significant effect on social relationships and self-esteem, whereas in individualistic cultures, personal achievements and self-perception were more prominent. These cultural differences underscore the importance of a nuanced understanding of how gratitude influences self-esteem in various contexts.

The empirical review of literature reveals a complex interaction between gratitude, self-esteem, and the well-being of college students. Gratitude has a positive impact on psychological health, academic performance, and social relationships, while self-esteem affects academic success, social adjustment, and mental health. Research generally supports the positive connection between gratitude and self-esteem, with gratitude enhancing self-worth and overall self-image. However, contrasting findings and cultural differences suggest that the relationship between these constructs is shaped by several factors. Understanding these dynamics is essential for designing effective interventions and support strategies to promote students' psychological well-being and academic success.

## RESEARCH GAP

Most existing research has been conducted in Western contexts, concentrating on individualistic cultures, which may not adequately reflect how gratitude and self-esteem are experienced in collectivist societies like India. Furthermore, while general studies have underscored the positive outcomes of gratitude interventions, their effectiveness within Kerala's educational framework remains under-researched. Kerala's academic environment is unique, marked by significant academic pressure and high expectations, potentially affecting students' experiences of gratitude and self-esteem in ways that differ from other regions. Additionally, there is a notable absence of longitudinal studies that examine changes in gratitude and self-esteem over time, especially within Kerala's distinct socio-cultural and educational landscape. Local socio-economic factors in Kerala, such as high literacy rates and a strong cultural emphasis on education, may also shape students' psychological experiences in ways that have not yet been extensively explored. Conducting targeted research in Kerala to address these gaps can offer important insights and lead to more culturally relevant strategies for enhancing students' well-being and academic achievement.

## **CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY**

### AIM

To understand the relation between gratitude and self-esteem among college students in Kerala.

## VARIABLES UNDER STUDY

The variables used in the study are gratitude and self-esteem.

## OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF THE VARIABLES

The definition of key terms are given below:

**Gratitude:** Gratitude is an emotional response to receiving a benefit or kindness from others, characterized by feelings of thankfulness and appreciation. It involves recognizing and valuing the positive aspects of life and the contributions of others to one's well-being (Emmons, R. A., & McCullough, M. E. (2003)).

**Self-esteem:** Self-esteem refers to an individual's overall sense of self-worth or personal value. It encompasses how one perceives their own abilities, attributes, and worthiness, which can affect their confidence and self-regard (Rosenberg, M. (1965)).

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To assess the gratitude among college students.
2. To assess self-esteem among college students.
3. To examine the relationship between gratitude and self-esteem among college students

## HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

There will be a significant relationship between gratitude and self-esteem among college students in Thiruvananthapuram.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

The research adopted a descriptive design to systematically observe and document the levels of gratitude and self-esteem among college students in Kerala. A quantitative methodology was employed, utilizing structured surveys and standardized instruments, including the Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6) and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, to collect numerical data and perform statistical analyses. Data collection was conducted through both online and offline methods, with online surveys distributed via digital platforms for convenience and offline surveys conducted on college campuses to ensure a diverse participant pool. This research design aimed to offer a comprehensive understanding of students' psychological traits and their effects on well-being and academic performance.

## PARTICIPANTS

For the research on gratitude and self-esteem among college students in Kerala, the following inclusion criteria were established to ensure a relevant and representative sample:

1. Participants must be enrolled as full-time or part-time students at a recognized college or university in Kerala. This ensures that the sample consists of individuals actively engaged in the college education environment.
2. Participants should be aged between 18 and 25. This age range covers the typical college student demographic, relevant for studying developmental stages tied to emerging adulthood.



3. Participants must provide informed consent to take part in the study. This ensures that all participants are voluntarily involved and fully informed of the study's purpose and procedures.
4. Participants should be fluent in either English or Malayalam, as the survey instruments will be available in these languages. This criterion is essential to ensure participants can understand and respond accurately to the survey questions.
5. Participants should not have a diagnosed major psychological disorder, such as severe depression or anxiety, which could significantly affect their responses. This criterion helps control for confounding variables that might influence the study's outcomes.
6. Participants must be willing to complete the survey truthfully and thoroughly. This ensures the reliability and quality of the data collected.

These criteria are designed to ensure that the sample is representative of the college student population in Kerala and capable of providing valid and reliable insights into the relationship between gratitude and self-esteem in this specific context.

The study's participant pool consisted of 54 individuals, with a notable gender imbalance where 46 were female (85.2%) and 8 were male (14.8%). This predominance of females may affect the generalizability of the research findings across different genders. The details are given in Table 1

Table 1: Classification of the sample on the basis of gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	8	14.8
Female	46	85.2
Total	54	100

Regarding educational status, a substantial portion of the participants were engaged in postgraduate studies, totaling 33 individuals (61.3%). The remaining 21 participants (38.7%) were pursuing undergraduate degrees. This indicates a strong representation of postgraduate students, which might influence the study's findings related to gratitude and self-esteem. The details are given in Table 2

Table 2: Classification of the sample on the basis of educational status

Educational status	Frequency	Percentage
Undergraduate	21	38.7
Postgraduate	33	61.3
Total	54	100

When examining relationship status, most participants were single, with 41 individuals (75.8%). A smaller segment was in relationships (9 participants, or 16.7%), and an even smaller group was married (4 participants, or 7.4%). This distribution shows a majority of single participants, with fewer in relationships or married, which could affect their experiences and self-reported levels of gratitude and self-esteem. The details are given in Table 3

Table : Classification of the sample on the basis of relationship status

Educational status	Frequency	Percentage
Single	41	75.8
In a relationship	9	16.7
Married	4	7.4
Total	54	100

#### TOOLS USED FOR THE DATA COLLECTION

A research tool employs distinctive ways of describing and qualifying the data. Each tool is particularly appropriate for certain sources of data yielding information of the kind and in the form that would be most effectively used.

The tools used for the study are,

1. Personal information schedule
2. The Gratitude questionnaire(GQ-6)
3. Rosenberg Self-esteem scale

#### 1. Personal information schedule

The investigator prepared a schedule for collecting the personal details of the participants.

The copy of the personal information schedule is given as appendix A.

#### 2. The Gratitude Questionnaire

The Gratitude Questionnaire-6 (GQ-6) was developed by Dr. Michael E. McCullough, Robert A. Emmons, and Jo-Ann Tsang in 2002. The GQ-6 consists of 6 items designed to assess an individual's dispositional gratitude, or their tendency to experience gratitude in daily life.

#### Administration

The Gratitude Questionnaire-6 was a self-administering one. Instructions for the correct method of answering the scale were provided at the beginning of the scale in both Malayalam and English. The participants are asked to read the instructions and provided with ample help to clear doubts regarding the scale if any. The instructions were given as follows:

“Read each question carefully and select the answer that best fits your feelings and beliefs.

Using the scale below write a number beside each statement to indicate how much you agree with it

1 = Strongly Disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Slightly Disagree

4 = Neutral (Neither Agree nor Disagree)

5 = Slightly Agree

6 = Agree

7 = Strongly Agree

Please answer all questions honestly and to the best of your ability. Please do not omit any items. Your responses will be kept confidential and will be used for research purposes only”.

### Scoring

The scale consists of positive and negative items. The positive items are scored as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, or 7 for Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neutral (Neither Agree nor Disagree), Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree and 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, or 1 for Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neutral (Neither Agree nor Disagree), Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree.

### Reliability

The GQ-6 has demonstrated high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients typically ranging between 0.76 and 0.87 across different studies. This suggests that the items within the questionnaire consistently measure the construct of gratitude. The test-retest reliability is also strong, with correlations over time (ranging from 0.70 to 0.82) showing that the measure produces stable results across multiple administrations.

### Validity

The GQ-6 exhibits strong validity, as evidenced by positive correlations between gratitude and well-being measures such as life satisfaction and optimism, with coefficients ranging from 0.40 to 0.60. It also shows negative correlations with traits like depression and envy (coefficients from -0.30 to -0.50), which supports its discriminant validity. Furthermore, gratitude as measured by the GQ-6 predicts positive outcomes in psychological well-being and relationships, with coefficients as high as 0.50, affirming its predictive validity.

### 3. The Rosenberg Self-esteem scale

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale was developed by sociologist Morris Rosenberg in 1965. It consists of 10 items designed to measure an individual's overall self-worth or self-esteem on a Likert scale, where participants rate how much they agree or disagree with each statement.

#### Administration

The scale is self-administered and can be administered individually as well as in groups. There is no time limit but usually it takes 10 minutes to complete the list. The instructions to the participants were printed at the beginning of the instruction were as follows.

“Please read each statement and record a number 0, 1, 2 or 3 which indicates how much the statement applied to you over the past two weeks. There are no right or wrong answers. Do not spend too much time on any one statement. This assessment is not intended to be a diagnosis. If you are concerned about your results in any way, please speak with a qualified health professional.

0 = Strongly disagree 1 = Disagree 2 = Agree 3 = Strongly agree”

#### Scoring

Scoring is very simple. For positive questions a score of 0, 1, 2, or 3 for Strongly disagree, Disagree, Agree 3, or Strongly agree and 3, 2, 1, or 0 for Strongly disagree, Disagree, Agree 3, or Strongly agree.

## Reliability

The scale consistently demonstrates high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values typically ranging from 0.77 to 0.88 across various populations. Additionally, test-retest reliability suggests strong stability over time, frequently reporting coefficients between 0.82 and 0.85 over periods of several weeks to months.

## Validity

The scale has been validated in numerous studies, demonstrating good convergent validity with other measures of self-esteem and psychological well-being. Factor analyses generally support its unidimensional structure, though some research has raised questions about whether it also represents two factors—positive and negative self-esteem. Its construct validity is well-established, as evidenced by its correlations with related constructs such as depression, anxiety, and life satisfaction.

## PROCEDURE OF DATA COLLECTION

The data collection process for the study on gratitude and self-esteem among college students in Kerala began with the finalization of the survey instruments, specifically the Gratitude Questionnaire-6 (GQ-6) and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. This was an essential step to ensure that the selected tools were appropriate for measuring the relevant psychological constructs. After this, ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board to ensure that the study complied with ethical guidelines and safeguarded participant rights.

The next stage involved choosing the colleges and universities within Kerala for participation and obtaining permission from their respective administrations. This step granted access to the

student body and facilitated the recruitment of participants who met the study's inclusion criteria. Data collection was carried out through both online and offline methods. Online surveys were distributed via platforms like Google Forms, reaching students through email, social media, or institutional channels. Simultaneously, paper-based surveys were distributed in high-traffic campus areas, such as libraries and cafeterias, to accommodate students who preferred or needed non-digital options.

Participants were given clear instructions regarding the purpose of the survey, the process for completing it, and the estimated time it would take. This ensured that they were well-informed and able to complete the surveys accurately. The data collection process was carefully monitored to address any issues or questions participants had, ensuring the integrity of the collected data.

Completed surveys were securely stored, with online responses automatically compiled in the survey platform's database. Offline surveys were manually entered into a digital format for analysis. The collected data underwent a cleaning process to rectify any missing or inconsistent responses. Statistical analyses were then conducted using appropriate software to explore the relationships between gratitude, self-esteem, and relevant demographic factors.

Finally, the findings were summarized in detailed reports, and feedback was provided to participants where applicable.

## STATISTICAL TECHNIQUES USED FOR DATA ANALYSIS

Statistics is the body of mathematical techniques or processes for gathering, describing, organizing and interpreting numerical data. Since research often yields such quantitative data, statistics is a basic tool of measurement and research (Yogesh, 2006).



Statistics is the theory and method of analyzing quantitative data obtained from samples of observations in order to study and compare sources of variance of phenomena, to help make decisions to accept or reject hypothesized relations between the phenomena and to aid in making reliable inference from empirical observations (Kerlinger, 2007).

To understand the relations that stand between the variables and probability of acceptance for the result for holding on to the truthiness of the data various statistical techniques used in this study are Correlation Technique and t-test.

### Correlation

Correlation analysis is designed primarily to examine linear relationships between two variables. A correlation coefficient is a mathematical index that describes the direction and magnitude of a relationship (Kaplan, 2002). Pearson product moment correlation was used for study. This is the most important method for obtaining and interpreting the relationship between variables. Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) can take on the values from -1.00 to +1.00. The sign of the value indicates whether there exists a positive correlation or negative correlation. A perfect correlation of -1.00 or +1.00 indicates that the value of one variable can be determined exactly by knowing the values on the other variable. Correlation of '0' indicates no relationship between the two variables (Pallant, 2001). Garrett & Woodworth (1969), Cohen (1988) and some others suggested different interpretations. However, the guidelines of Cohen (1988) were used for the present study and that guidelines are presented below:

$r$  from 0.10 to 0.29 or  $r$  from 0.10 to 0.29 denotes small relationship  $r$  from 0.30 to 0.49 or  $r$  from -0.30 to -0.49 denotes medium relationship  $r$  from 0.50 to 1.00 or  $r$  from -0.50 to -1.00 denotes strong relationship.

The significance of 'r' is strongly influenced by the size of the sample. In large samples (N=100+) very small correlations may be statistically significant at the traditional 0.05 level. However, in a small sample (N=30), even moderate correlations do not reach statistical significance. The statistical significance of the coefficient of correlation has to be considered before the interpretation of correlation. The obtained 'r' may be tested against the hypothesis that the population 'r' is in fact zero. If the computed 'r' is large enough to invalidate or cast serious doubt upon this null hypothesis, we accept 'r' as indicating the presence of at least some degree of correlation. To test this, the obtained 'r' is compared with the limits established using the standard error of 'r' (Garrett, 1958). The standard error for the null hypothesis is  $1/N$ . Therefore, a coefficient of correlation will be significant at 0.01 level, if it exceeds  $1/N \times 2.58$  and significance at 0.05 level, if it exceeds  $1/N \times 1.96$ . In the present study, the N was 124 and hence a correlation is significant at 0.01 level if it exceeds 0.24, and at 0.05 level, if it exceeds 0.18. Pearson product-moment correlation was used to find out the interrelationships among the variables in the present study.

#### t-Test

The t-test is one of the most widely used tests of significance in psychological research. 1- Test is used to test the significance of the difference between the mean performances of two groups on some measure of behavior. There are three factors that influence the test of significance such as the t-test. One is the size of the difference between means. In general, the larger the measured differences, the more likely that the difference reflects an actual difference in performance and not chance factors. A second factor is the size of the sample, or the number of measurements being tested. The third factor that exerts an influence is the variability of the data, or how the scores are spread out from one another (Covles & Davis, 1982).

The t-test is the most commonly used method to evaluate the differences in means between two groups. A t-test is any statistical hypothesis test in which the test statistic follows a Student's t distribution if the null hypothesis is supported. It is most commonly applied when the test statistic would follow a normal distribution if the value of a scaling term in the test statistic were known. When the scaling term is unknown and is replaced by an estimate based on the data, the test statistic (under certain conditions) follows a Student's t distribution. The t-test is performed under the assumption that the populations from which the two means are taken are normally distributed with equal variances. It is this equal variance assumption that allows us to pool the variance terms across the two groups. The researcher will never really know whether the assumptions are met in a practical situation. The t-test helps the researcher conclude whether a hypothesis is supported or not.

There are two main types of t-tests: independent sample t-test and paired sample t-test. An independent sample t-test is used when the researcher aims at comparing the mean score on some continuous variable, for two different groups of participants. Paired samples t-test (also referred to as repeated measures) is used when we have only one group of people and we collect data from them on two different occasions, or under two different conditions. This approach is also used when we have matched pairs of participants (that is each person is matched with another on specific criteria such as age, gender etc. (Pallant, 2001).

In the present study an independent sample t-test was used.

## CHAPTER IV: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### RESULT

The study's results offer important insights into the levels of gratitude and self-esteem among college students and explore the potential relationship between these two factors. Specifically, the mean score for gratitude was 32.5, with a standard deviation of 5.17, reflecting that participants generally experienced a moderate level of gratitude, with some individual variation. This indicates that while some students reported higher or lower levels of gratitude, the overall trend was toward a central range. Similarly, the mean score for self-esteem was 19.5, with a standard deviation of 6.45, signifying a moderate level of self-esteem among the participants, though with some variability. However, the analysis found no significant correlation between gratitude and self-esteem, as the p-value of 0.133 was higher than the alpha level of 0.05. This suggests that, within this college student sample, there is no strong connection between gratitude and self-esteem, and other factors may be influencing these variables. The details are given in Table 4

#### Mean and median of Gratitude and Self-esteem

	Gratitude	Self-esteem
N	54	54
Mean	32.5	19.5
Standard deviation	5.17	6.45

## DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study, which indicate no statistically significant correlation between gratitude and self-esteem among college students (with a p-value of 0.133 and a correlation coefficient of 0.207), reveal an intriguing result: there is no apparent relationship between these two variables in this sample. This lack of significance suggests that, for these students, gratitude and self-esteem operate as relatively independent constructs without a meaningful interaction. This result contrasts with the extensive research suggesting a positive relationship between gratitude and self-esteem.

Several studies have previously highlighted gratitude as a factor contributing to higher self-esteem. Emmons and McCullough (2003) conducted foundational research in this area, finding that individuals who exhibit higher levels of gratitude also tend to have higher self-esteem. Their findings suggest that gratitude promotes a positive outlook on life, which enhances individuals' self-perception. According to their research, grateful individuals are more likely to focus on the positive aspects of their lives and less on negative comparisons with others, which leads to a stronger and more positive self-view. This shift in perspective fosters overall well-being, thus supporting self-esteem.

Similarly, Lambert et al. (2010) observed a positive correlation between gratitude and self-esteem, indicating that grateful individuals generally experience higher self-worth and confidence. They argued that gratitude helps individuals recognize the positives in their lives, whether from relationships, accomplishments, or other experiences, which builds a sense of personal value. The appreciation fostered by gratitude allows individuals to feel more secure in their self-worth, reinforcing the idea that gratitude can enhance confidence and self-regard.

Nevertheless, some research offers a more nuanced perspective. Wood et al. (2010) suggested that while there is often an association between gratitude and self-esteem, this relationship might be moderated by various factors such as personality traits, cultural backgrounds, or specific life circumstances. Their study indicates that the strength and significance of the gratitude-self-esteem link can differ depending on individual differences or situational contexts. For instance, individuals with certain personality traits, like low neuroticism or high agreeableness, might experience a stronger connection between gratitude and self-esteem, while others may not. Environmental factors, such as academic pressures or family dynamics, could also impact how gratitude interacts with self-esteem.

The lack of a significant relationship in the current study may suggest that other factors are influencing the connection between gratitude and self-esteem within this particular group of college students. Academic pressures, career-related stress, or social comparisons among students could affect their self-esteem in ways that gratitude alone may not address. This is particularly relevant in competitive academic settings, where students might feel their self-worth is more tied to achievements or external validation rather than an internal sense of gratitude.

Moreover, this finding raises the possibility that gratitude and self-esteem might not always interact in a straightforward manner across different populations. Cultural factors could influence the role of gratitude in self-esteem. In some cultures or contexts, gratitude might be associated more with duty or obligation rather than enhancing self-worth, which could potentially weaken its impact on self-esteem.

Given these contrasting findings, it is evident that while gratitude may contribute to self-esteem for some individuals or groups, this relationship is not universal or automatic. Variables such as

individual personality traits, situational pressures, cultural influences, or specific student dynamics might moderate the effect of gratitude on self-esteem. This highlights the need for further research to explore these moderating factors and gain a better understanding of how and when gratitude might enhance self-esteem, particularly in populations facing unique challenges like college students under academic stress.

Ultimately, the results of this study contribute to the broader discussion by demonstrating that the relationship between gratitude and self-esteem is complex and may vary depending on the population studied. Future research should aim to investigate these potential moderating factors, as understanding them could provide deeper insights into how gratitude can be fostered to improve self-esteem in specific contexts, especially in high-pressure environments like academia.

## CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

### SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between gratitude and self-esteem among college students, using a sample from various academic institutions to capture a diverse range of individuals dealing with different academic pressures and experiences.

The results indicated no meaningful or statistically significant correlation between gratitude and self-esteem in this group. This suggests that, for these students, higher levels of gratitude did not necessarily align with higher self-esteem, and vice versa.

In contrast, previous research has often shown different results. For instance, Emmons and McCullough reported a positive connection between gratitude and self-esteem, indicating that individuals who experience more gratitude tend to have a more positive self-image and overall sense of well-being. Likewise, Lambert et al. found that gratitude was associated with increased self-worth and confidence.

Conversely, Wood and colleagues offered a more nuanced perspective, suggesting that while there might be a general association between gratitude and self-esteem, the strength of this relationship could vary depending on personality traits or specific life circumstances. Their research indicates that the link between gratitude and self-esteem may not be consistent and could be influenced by various external or internal factors.

Overall, this study underscores the complexity of the relationship between gratitude and self-esteem, suggesting that this connection may not be as straightforward or uniform as



previously believed, especially within this sample of college students. The findings highlight the need for further research to explore the contextual factors that might influence this relationship.

## MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The primary findings of this study revealed no statistically significant correlation between gratitude and self-esteem among the college students in the sample. This indicates that, within this group, the level of gratitude did not seem to have a meaningful effect on their self-esteem. In other words, students who exhibited higher levels of gratitude did not necessarily have greater self-esteem, and vice versa. This result is noteworthy as it challenges the assumption that gratitude universally enhances self-worth, at least within the context of this particular sample.

In contrast, previous research has frequently identified a positive relationship between gratitude and self-esteem. Studies by Emmons and McCullough, as well as Lambert and colleagues, have consistently found that individuals who practice gratitude generally report higher self-esteem and a more positive self-image. These studies suggest that gratitude encourages a more appreciative and optimistic outlook, which can, in turn, enhance self-worth and confidence. The absence of such a relationship in this study prompts questions about whether factors specific to the sample or study conditions might have influenced the findings.

Another important consideration is the potential role of moderating factors. Research by Wood and others suggests that while gratitude and self-esteem may be related, the strength and nature of this connection can differ based on other elements, such as individual personality traits or situational contexts. For example, some people may experience gratitude differently due to their personal characteristics, or specific environmental factors may affect how gratitude influences

self-esteem. The findings of this study support the notion that the relationship between gratitude and self-esteem is neither straightforward nor universal.

Lastly, the study underscores the need for additional research into the context-specific nature of this relationship. The lack of a significant correlation in this group of college students could reflect the unique academic or social pressures they encounter, suggesting that contextual factors may play a crucial role in shaping the interaction between gratitude and self-esteem. This opens up avenues for future research to explore these variables in other populations or under varying conditions to gain a better understanding of the dynamics involved.

#### IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The implications of this study are significant, both for advancing theoretical understanding and for shaping practical applications, particularly in the fields of education and mental health for college students.

From a theoretical perspective, the study challenges the commonly accepted belief that gratitude and self-esteem are always positively linked. Previous research, such as that by Emmons and McCullough, has argued that gratitude can improve a person's sense of self-worth and overall well-being. However, the findings of this study suggest that this relationship may not be as straightforward or universally applicable as earlier studies have implied, especially for college students.

This suggests that the relationship between gratitude and self-esteem might be more context-dependent, potentially influenced by specific factors that affect students' lives. For example, students dealing with academic pressures, social challenges, or personal difficulties

may experience gratitude differently, and it may not have the same positive effect on their self-esteem. This opens the possibility for future research to examine what moderates this relationship, such as personality traits, stress levels, academic environments, or cultural factors. Understanding these variables could offer a more comprehensive view of how gratitude influences self-esteem in particular populations.

Practically, the study has important implications for educators, counselors, and mental health professionals working with college students. Gratitude practices, such as keeping a gratitude journal or expressing appreciation, are widely recommended as methods to improve mental health and enhance self-esteem. While these practices may benefit some students, this study's findings suggest they may not be equally effective for all students, particularly in high-pressure academic settings.

For students under significant academic stress or dealing with personal challenges, gratitude alone may not be sufficient to improve self-worth. These students may require a more personalized approach that addresses their unique circumstances. For example, counselors may need to incorporate additional strategies, such as teaching stress management techniques, encouraging self-compassion, or promoting social support networks. Combining gratitude practices with other psychological tools may be more effective in boosting self-esteem and overall well-being in students facing significant pressures.

Furthermore, the study highlights the need for a comprehensive approach to mental health interventions in academic settings. Students' self-esteem is influenced by a complex mix of factors, including academic performance, peer relationships, and career aspirations. Therefore, programs aimed at improving self-esteem must take these factors into account. Interventions that

combine personal development, academic success, and emotional well-being, alongside gratitude, may lead to greater improvements in students' mental health than gratitude practices alone.

The study also emphasizes the need for more research into the factors that mediate or moderate the relationship between gratitude and self-esteem. The absence of a significant correlation in this study suggests that additional variables may be influencing how gratitude and self-esteem interact. Future studies could explore whether certain personality traits, such as resilience or optimism, enhance the effectiveness of gratitude practices. Additionally, contextual factors like academic environments or cultural norms could also shape the connection between these two variables.

By identifying and understanding these moderating factors, researchers and practitioners can develop more targeted interventions. For example, if certain personality traits are found to amplify the effect of gratitude on self-esteem, counselors could focus on building those traits in students. Similarly, understanding how different academic or social environments influence this relationship could help educators design programs that support both gratitude and self-esteem in ways that meet the specific needs of their students.

In conclusion, this study reveals the complexity of the relationship between gratitude and self-esteem, indicating that this connection is not as simple as previous research suggested. The implications are broad, both for theory and practice. While gratitude is often seen as universally beneficial, its impact on self-esteem may depend on individual and contextual factors. As a result, educators and mental health professionals should adopt a more holistic approach when addressing college students' mental health. Future research will be essential in uncovering the

moderating variables that influence this relationship, ultimately leading to more effective and customized interventions.

## LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study has several limitations that need to be acknowledged, as they may have impacted the findings and provide important considerations for future research.

One of the main limitations is the sample size and composition. The study involved a relatively small sample of 54 students, which restricts the generalizability of the results. The sample was predominantly female, with only 8 males, which may not accurately represent the wider population of college students. This gender imbalance could have affected the findings, as previous research suggests that gratitude and self-esteem may manifest differently between males and females. Additionally, the majority of participants were from a specific geographical area—Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala—limiting the ability to generalize the findings to students in other regions or countries, where cultural and academic contexts may vary significantly.

Another limitation is the use of self-report measures to assess both gratitude and self-esteem. While these tools are widely used in psychological research, they are subject to biases such as social desirability or inaccurate self-perception. Participants might have either over- or under-reported their levels of gratitude or self-esteem, which could skew the actual relationship between these variables. Furthermore, self-report questionnaires often capture only a brief snapshot of an individual's state at a specific moment, potentially failing to fully reflect the complexity of their emotions over a longer period.

The study's cross-sectional design presents another limitation. Since data were collected at a single point in time, it is not possible to determine causality between gratitude and self-esteem. The study can only identify associations but cannot indicate whether changes in gratitude lead to changes in self-esteem or vice versa. A longitudinal study, which tracks participants over a period of time, would be better suited to examining how these variables influence each other and whether their relationship strengthens or weakens as individuals mature or experience different life events.

Contextual factors that may moderate the relationship between gratitude and self-esteem were not accounted for in this study. Factors such as academic stress, personal life circumstances, or social support were not controlled for, despite their potential to significantly impact the interaction between gratitude and self-esteem. For instance, students under high academic pressure might experience gratitude differently from those with less stress, which could influence their self-esteem. Not considering these contextual factors limits the study's ability to offer a more nuanced understanding of how gratitude and self-esteem are connected.

Lastly, the scope of the study was confined to a specific population—college students. Although this group is crucial for understanding how academic environments influence mental health, the findings may not apply to other populations, such as working professionals, older adults, or students from different academic levels. As a result, the study's conclusions should be interpreted cautiously when applied to broader groups.

In conclusion, the limitations of this study—including its small and geographically limited sample, reliance on self-report measures, cross-sectional design, lack of consideration for contextual factors, and focus on a specific population—underscore the need for further research.

Future studies should address these limitations to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between gratitude and self-esteem across diverse populations and contexts.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations for future research can be proposed to enhance our understanding of the relationship between gratitude and self-esteem, particularly among college students.

Firstly, future research should aim to utilize larger and more diverse samples to improve the generalizability of the results. A larger sample size would provide greater statistical power, making it easier to detect smaller relationships between gratitude and self-esteem that may not have been evident in this study. Additionally, incorporating a more balanced gender representation and including students from various geographical regions, cultural backgrounds, and academic institutions would allow researchers to investigate whether the relationship between gratitude and self-esteem varies across different demographic groups.

Secondly, longitudinal studies are needed to gain a better understanding of the directionality and causality between gratitude and self-esteem. While cross-sectional studies can reveal correlations, they do not demonstrate how these variables may change over time or how one may influence the other. By following students over an extended period, future research could determine whether increases in gratitude lead to corresponding increases in self-esteem or vice versa. This would clarify whether gratitude plays a causal role in enhancing self-esteem or if other factors are involved in the process.

Another important area for future research is the inclusion of moderating and mediating variables. Contextual factors such as academic stress, social support, or personal resilience could significantly shape the relationship between gratitude and self-esteem. Researchers should explore how these factors influence the connection between the two variables. For example, students experiencing high academic stress may exhibit a weaker relationship between gratitude and self-esteem compared to those with lower stress levels. Investigating these moderators could help explain why the relationship between gratitude and self-esteem appears stronger in some studies than in others. Additionally, exploring mediators such as self-compassion or emotional regulation could offer insights into the mechanisms through which gratitude impacts self-esteem.

Furthermore, future research should consider using mixed-method approaches that combine quantitative and qualitative data. While surveys and self-report questionnaires provide valuable numerical data, qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups could offer deeper insights into how students experience gratitude and self-esteem in their everyday lives. This approach could help identify nuances in their experiences that may not be captured by standard questionnaires. Qualitative data could also provide insights into individual and cultural differences in the practice of gratitude and how it influences self-esteem.

Another key direction for future research is to explore interventions designed to boost both gratitude and self-esteem, particularly in academic settings. Although gratitude interventions (e.g., gratitude journaling or expressing appreciation) have been shown to improve well-being, their specific effects on self-esteem in different student populations remain unclear. Research could explore whether combining gratitude practices with other mental health interventions—such as stress reduction techniques, mindfulness, or cognitive-behavioral strategies—yields a greater impact on students' self-esteem. Experimental studies comparing the



effectiveness of different interventions could offer valuable insights for educators and mental health professionals working with college students.

Finally, future research should broaden the scope to include different populations. While college students are an important group to study, the relationship between gratitude and self-esteem may function differently in other populations, such as working professionals, older adults, or adolescents. By examining a wider range of groups, researchers can develop a more comprehensive understanding of how gratitude influences self-esteem across different life stages and contexts.

In conclusion, future research should focus on increasing sample diversity, employing longitudinal designs, investigating moderating and mediating factors, utilizing mixed-method approaches, testing interventions, and exploring different populations. These avenues of inquiry will provide a more nuanced and thorough understanding of the complex relationship between gratitude and self-esteem, enabling more effective applications in educational and mental health contexts.

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## 1 PERSONAL INFORMATION SCHEDULE

NAME :

AGE :

GENDER :

NAME OF THE COLLEGE :

EDUCATION :

RELATIONSHIP STATUS :

## 2 GRATITUDE QUESTIONNAIRE- 6(GQ-6)

Sl. No.	Question	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Neutral	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	<p>I have so much in life to be thankful for.</p> <p>(ജീവിതത്തിൽ എനിക്ക് നന്ദിയുള്ളവരായിരിക്കാൻ ഒരുപാട് കാര്യങ്ങൾ ഉണ്ട്.)</p>							
2	<p>If I had to list everything that I felt grateful for, it would be a very long list.</p> <p>(എനിക്ക് നന്ദി തോന്നിയതെല്ലാം ലിസ്റ്റ് ചെയ്യണമെങ്കിൽ,</p>							

	<p>അത് വളരെ നീണ്ട ഒരു ലിസ്റ്റ് ആയിരിക്കും.)</p>							
3	<p>When I look at the world, I don't see much to be grateful for.</p> <p>(ഞാൻ ലോകത്തെ നോക്കുമ്പോൾ, നന്ദിയുള്ളവരായിരിക്കാൻ ഞാൻ അധികമൊന്നും കാണുന്നില്ല.)</p>							
4	<p>I am grateful to a wide variety of people.</p> <p>(വിവിധരായ ആളുകളോടു ഞാൻ കൃതജ്ഞനാണ്)</p>							
5	<p>As I get older, I find myself more</p>							

	<p>able to appreciate the people, events, and situations that have been part of my life history.</p> <p>(എനിക്ക് പ്രായമാകും തോറും, എന്റെ ജീവിതത്തിന്റെ ഭാഗമായ ആളുകളെയും സംഭവങ്ങളെയും സാഹചര്യങ്ങളെയും വിലമതിക്കാൻ എനിക്ക് കൂടുതൽ കഴിയുന്നു.)</p>							
<p>6</p>	<p>Long amounts of time can go by before I feel grateful to something or someone.</p> <p>(എനിക്ക് എന്തിനോടോ</p>							

അല്ലെങ്കിൽ ആരോടുകിലും നന്ദി തോന്നുന്നതിന് ഒരുപാട് സമയം എടുക്കും.)								
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3 ROSENBERG SELF-ESTEEM SCALE

Sl. No.	Question	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others. (മറ്റുള്ളവരുമായി തുല്യമായ ഒരു തലത്തിലെങ്കിലും ഞാൻ മൂല്യമുള്ള ഒരു വ്യക്തിയാണെന്ന് എനിക്ക് തോന്നുന്നു.)				
2	I feel that I have a number of good qualities. എനിക്ക് ഒരുപാട് നല്ല				

	<p>ഗുണങ്ങൾ ഉണ്ടെന്ന് എനിക്ക് തോന്നുന്നു</p>				
3	<p>All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.</p> <p>(മൊത്തത്തിൽ, ഞാൻ ഒരു പരാജയമാണെന്ന തോന്നൽ എനിക്കുണ്ട്.)</p>				
4	<p>I am able to do things as well as most people.</p> <p>(മിക്ക ആളുകളെയും പോലെ എനിക്ക് കാര്യങ്ങൾ ചെയ്യാൻ കഴിയും)</p>				
5	<p>I feel I do not have much to be proud of.</p> <p>(എനിക്ക് അഭിമാനിക്കാൻ അധികമില്ലെന്ന് തോന്നുന്നു.)</p>				
6	<p>I take a positive attitude toward myself.</p> <p>(എനിക്ക് എന്നെ പറ്റി ഒരു പോസിറ്റീവ് മനോഭാവം ആണ് ഉള്ളത്.)</p>				
7	<p>On the whole, I am satisfied with</p>				

	<p>myself.</p> <p>(മൊത്തത്തിൽ, ഞാൻ എന്നിൽ സംഗ്രഹമാണ്.)</p>				
8	<p>I wish I could have more respect for myself.</p> <p>(എനിക്ക് കൂടുതൽ ബഹുമാനം കിട്ടിയിരുന്നെങ്കിൽ എന്ന് ഞാൻ ആഗ്രഹിക്കുന്നു.)</p>				
9	<p>I certainly feel useless at times.</p> <p>(ചില സമയങ്ങളിൽ എന്ന് കൊണ്ട് ആർക്കും ഒരു പ്രയോജനമില്ലെന്ന് തോന്നുന്നു.)</p>				
10	<p>At times I think that I am no good at all.</p> <p>(ചിലപ്പോൾ എനിക്ക് ഞാൻ അത്ര നല്ലതല്ല എന്ന് തോന്നുന്നു.)</p>				