

The Enhancing and Intermediating Effects of a Gratitude Course among Nursing Students

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Abstract

A partially investigational study, this paper is aimed at determining the effects of a gratitude course on nursing undergraduates' gratitude temperament and subjective satisfaction. It was conducted among 54 first- and second-year students majoring in nursing, with a six-session gratitude program applied to the experimental group. At this juncture, gratitude temperament and subjective happiness improved significantly after the program was run, and gratitude disposition continued for six months after the program. Concisely, a gratitude program improves gratitude disposition and subjective happiness in nursing students.

Keywords: Nursing student, Gratitude, Happiness, Program

1. Introduction

1.1. Need for study

In South Korea, the demand for nurses has recently increased with the constant surge in nursing services due to the aging population and the changing healthcare environment [1]. An increasing number of students apply to the Department of Nursing, regardless of gender, because of the ease of getting a job, compared with other majors, and the relatively high level of wage [2]. However, because nursing students are required to possess various qualifications as healthcare providers, they tend to need help in campus life, compared with students from other majors [2].

Gratitude is a feeling typical of optimistic human beings [3], and one of the emotions frequently felt and expressed daily [4]. Gratitude is a useful concept, especially for nursing students, because it reportedly reduces negative emotions [5] and strongly affects anger control [6][7]. However, intervention programs for nursing students have been limited to key skills, patients and caregivers, communication interdisciplinary cooperation [8], and capability reinforcement [9], which are primarily associated with clinical nursing; thus, it is necessary to develop a program based on the understanding of the emotional experiences of nursing students, to improve positive emotions among them. This study has developed a gratitude program, taking into account the finding of the literature review that gratitude

Article History:

Received (November 3, 2019), Review Result (December 17, 2019), Accepted (January 22, 2020)

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disposition affects subjective satisfaction among nursing undergraduates [10], in keeping with the conceptual probing, identifying the characteristics of gratitude and emotional experience [2] among nursing students [5]. It likewise aims to develop and apply a gratitude program reflecting the emotions of nursing students, playing the leading role in future clinical sites, and determining the program's effects on their subjective happiness.

1.2. Purpose

This study seeks to develop and apply a gratitude program and determine its effects on the gratitude mentality and subjective satisfaction among nursing students.

2. Methods

2.1. Study design

Partially experimental research, this paper is designed to determine the effects of a gratitude course on gratitude temperament and individual satisfaction among nursing students.

2.2. Subject and ethical consideration

This study underwent a research ethics review at D University (1041495-201703-HR-04-01), followed by a relevant officer's written consent before it started. G*Power indicated the target group size of 26 students. Twenty-seven students were randomly sampled first in the experimental and control groups, discounting the dropouts. Finally, 24 participated in the experimental group and 26 in the control group the inquiry.

2.3. Instruments

2.3.1. Gratitude disposition

The Korean rendering of the Gratitude Questionnaire-6 (GQ-6), conceived by McCullough et al. (2002) [11] and translated by Kwon, Kim, and Lee [12], was used. Cronbach's α was estimated at .813 for reliability in this experiment.

2.3.2. Subjective happiness

The Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS), initiated by Lyubomirsky and Lepper (1999) [13] and translated and validated by Kim (2007) [14], was employed. In this study, Cronbach's α was estimated at .737 for reliability.

2.4. Program development and running

The gratitude program was developed through a literature review on adolescents' emotional experiences and management based on the conceptual analysis of "gratitude." The program was run in the experimental group—for about 60 to 90 minutes per session—and the abbreviated program was provided to the control group after the study for ethical deliberation and gratitude for research participation.

In running the program, each session involved reflection on the previous session and climate creation through a "gratitude journal" presentation before it started, followed by guidance about the current session, thematic activity, and consolidation. Session 1 was

directed to explain the purpose and progression of the program, let the participants greet one another, and allow them to perform a pretest—session 2 intended to promote self-awareness and conduct the “self-auction” activity to recognize their values. Session 3 sought to recollect and relieve the feelings and situations of their own “anger” and share impressions and cases. Session 4, Gratitude Awareness and Expression, endeavored to perform a role play related to a grateful situation. Session 5, Habit Formation for Emotional Management Skills, permitted participants to practice expressing gratitude, experience its positive effects, be motivated, and take part in a completion ceremony in the last session.

2.5. Data collection

Data were collected from April to May 2018, while a pretest was performed in Session 1, and a post-test was performed in Session 6 when the program ended.

2.6. Data analysis

The gathered data were scrutinized through the χ^2 -test, Fisher’s exact test, independent t-test, and paired t-test upon employment of the SPSS 24.0 program.

3. Results

3.1. Participants’ homogeneity test

The experimental and control groups were uniform, with the homogeneity test ascertaining no statistically noteworthy inter-group disparity in any of the wide-ranging attributes and such dependent variables as gratitude disposition and subjective happiness [Table 1].

Table 1. Homogeneity assay on general attributes and conditional variables

Division		The experimental group (n=24)			Control group (n=26)			t	p-value
		n	(%)	M±SD	n	(%)	M±SD		
Age				19.67±1.58			20.96±3.50	-	.103†
Religion	Protestant	3	(12.5)	-	7	(26.9)	-	-	.343*
	Buddhist	1	(4.2)	-	3	(11.5)	-		
	Catholic	1	(4.2)	-	2	(7.7)	-		
	Other	19	(79.2)	-	14	(53.8)	-		
Living with parents	Yes	21	(87.5)	-	22	(84.6)	-	-	1.000*
	No	3	(12.5)	-	4	(15.4)	-		
Major satisfaction	Very satisfied	7	(29.2)	-	4	(15.4)	-	-	.159*
	satisfied	14	(58.3)	-	13	(50.0)	-		
	Average	3	(12.5)	-	9	(34.6)	-		
Self-rated health	Good	14	(58.3)	-	9	(34.6)	-	-	.078*
	Average	10	(41.7)	-	13	(50.0)	-		
	Bad	0	(.0)	-	4	(15.4)	-		
Financial level	High	4	(16.7)	-	2	(7.7)	-	-	.501*
	Medium	17	(70.8)	-	16	(61.5)	-		
	Low	3	(12.5)	-	8	(30.8)	-		
Gratitude disposition		-	-	30.92±4.70	-	-	30.69±5.75	.150	.881†

Subjective happiness		-	-	24.33±3.74	-	-	24.08±4.57	.216	.830†
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† : t test, *:Fisher's exact test

3.2. Effect test of the gratitude program

H1. The experimental group participating in the gratitude program would see their gratitude temperament and subjective satisfaction surge vis-a-vis the control group.

The experimental group registered a substantially higher tally for gratitude temperament and subjective satisfaction than the control group [Table 2].

Table 2. Changes in scores for gratitude temperament and subjective satisfaction in the experimental and control groups

Division		Pretest	Post-test	t	p-value
		M±SD	M±SD		
Gratitude disposition	The experimental group (n=24)	30.92±4.70	36.29±4.36	-5.245	.000
	Control group (n=26)	30.69±5.75	30.04±5.01	.593	.558
Subjective happiness	The experimental group (n=24)	24.33±3.74	27.54±3.60	-4.866	.000
	Control group (n=26)	24.08±4.57	23.00±3.31	1.697	.102

H2. The experimental group participating in the gratitude program would see the effectiveness in improving gratitude disposition, and subjective happiness persists for six months following the course.

The experimental group scored significantly higher for gratitude disposition six months after the program trial than prior one's partaking, evidencing no considerable variance in subjective satisfaction between six months after the program's conclusion and before participation in the program [Table 3].

Table 3. Changes in scores for gratitude disposition and subjective happiness among pretest, post-test, and follow-up in the experimental group

Division	Pretest	Post-test	Follow-up	Post-test and follow-up		Pretest and follow-up	
	M±SD	M±SD	M±SD	T	p-value	t	p-value
Gratitude disposition	30.92±4.70	36.29±4.36	33.79±6.03	1.830	.080	-2.076	.049
Subjective happiness	24.33±3.74	27.54±3.60	25.67±4.30	1.771	.090	-1.630	.117

4. Discussion

The experimental group participating in the gratitude program scored significantly higher for gratitude disposition after running the program (36.29) than before (30.92). This result is coherent with the discovery that university undergraduates performed substantially higher in the gratitude disposition score after the gratitude program [4]. The control group scored lower for gratitude disposition after the program, suggesting the need for continuous stimulation through intentional activity because personal and environmental factors can reduce gratitude disposition.

This study tried to be differentiated from most of the previous studies by determining if the effects of gratitude disposition remained six months after the application of the gratitude program, verifying if the effects persisted six months after the conclusion of the course, given that the gratitude course constructed and applied in this study helped form a habit through an improvement in gratitude disposition and the daily practice of gratitude based on the properties of gratitude [5]. The experimental group experienced subjective happiness statistically, which significantly improved after the experiment compared to the control group. Improving subjective happiness is significantly meaningful to nursing students, who will be at the forefront of others' healthcare after graduation. Hong and Song [2] reported that nursing students experienced anxiety and stress due to a tight daily life in studying nursing and had negative emotions, such as academic stress, anger, depression, and difficulty in emotional control, due to the curriculum that combined theoretical lectures and clinical training [15][16]. Therefore, nursing students are more likely to require a gratitude program that can reduce negative emotions and improve positive ones.

5. Conclusion

This partially experimental probe verifies a gratitude program's influence on gratitude temperament and subjective satisfaction among nursing undergraduates. In summary, a gratitude program contributes to improving gratitude disposition and subjective satisfaction among nursing undergraduates and is expected to provide valuable data for their emotional management.

Acknowledgment

This experiment was assisted by the Research Program to Solve Social Issues of the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF), subsidized by the Ministry of Science and ICT (No. 2017R1C1B1005347).

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