

CULTIVATING GRATITUDE IN AN ACADEMIC SETTING THROUGH A VIRTUAL PLATFORM: A DIGITAL GRATITUDE SHOW

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ABSTRACT: A growing number of academics, educators, and thought leaders suggest that gratitude is one of seven key character strengths alongside grit, zest, self-control, optimism, social intelligence and curiosity that predict students' success both in academic settings and in the corporate world. This research project aimed at enhancing the attitude of gratitude among a group of polymer technology students in their final academic semester. To achieve this, a Digital Gratitude Show was conducted as the culminating event of an online mock interview program designed to prepare students for real-world professional interviews. According to the qualitative analysis conducted using descriptive statistics of panelists' feedback based on a satisfaction scale, the panelists felt highly appreciated for their dedication in helping students succeed in a realistic interview setting. As defined by the Concise Oxford Dictionary gratitude is "the quality of being thankful; readiness to show appreciation and to return kindness." In line with this definition, the students expressed sincere and profound gratitude to the panelists for their invaluable guidance during online mock interviews which played a crucial role in their preparation for actual interviews. The Digital Gratitude Show can be regarded as an innovative, student-centered pedagogical approach that effectively fosters an attitude of gratitude in students as they transition into the corporate world.

Keywords: digital gratitude show, gratitude, graduate attributes, online mock interviews

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of digital tools for online education began well before the COVID-19 pandemic; however, widespread adoption occurred only after the onset of the pandemic. In response to COVID-19, educational institutions worldwide were compelled to shift to online and hybrid models, leveraging alternative teaching methods. Even after strict lockdowns were lifted, many universities have continued to utilize these tools due to their convenience, efficiency, and time-saving benefits (Aleksandr, 2022). The evolving economic landscape has placed a premium on higher education's role in producing graduates equipped with both knowledge and skills that align with workforce demands. Today, graduates are assessed not only on their subject matter expertise but also on the breadth of their skills which significantly enhances their employability. Among the most highly sought-after attributes by employers are soft skills—such as interpersonal abilities, work ethic, self-direction, and communication proficiency (Cimatti, 2016). These qualities are highly valued, as they reflect an individual's capacity to thrive in both personal and professional settings.

1.1. Gratitude

An increasing number of academics, educators, and thought leaders recognize gratitude as one of seven essential character strengths alongside grit, zest, self-discipline, optimism, social intelligence and curiosity proven to drive students' success, not only in academic settings but also in the corporate world (Wilson, 2016).

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines gratitude as "the quality of being thankful; a readiness to show appreciation and to return kindness." When equated with the act of giving thanks, gratitude takes on a universal significance, understood and valued across all cultures. Its meaning transcends a fleeting thought or emotion—it calls for intentional expression. This expression often manifests as "gratitude to someone" or "gratitude for something or someone." True gratitude permeates one's entire being, requiring the engagement of intellect, will, and emotions to transform simple acknowledgment into genuine thanksgiving (Alex, 2008).

Gratitude serves as a fundamental cohesive force within society (Howells, 2004). It is often referred to as the "moral memory of mankind," as when we feel gratitude toward someone or for something, we internalize it as a memory, compelling us to act upon it when given the chance. Dispositional

gratitude is linked to a more positive, appreciative outlook on life, fostering a constructive bias in how we interpret social interactions (Emmons and Crumpler, 2000).

Gratitude can be expressed toward peers, objects, or acts of kindness that elicit positive emotions in the recipient (Tsang, 2006). Individuals vary in their propensity to feel gratitude (McCullough et al., 2003), and this variation can be distinguished by four key facets: intensity, frequency, span, and density. These dimensions refer to the strength and regularity of one's gratitude, the breadth of situations that evoke it, and the depth of appreciation experienced across different contexts.

1.2. Importance of Expressing Gratitude

Gratitude, often regarded as the quintessential positive psychological trait, fosters a life orientation that actively seeks and acknowledges the good in the world. Its emotional and psychological benefits are closely linked to enhanced physical vitality. Gratitude is an appreciation for continuous experiences of life. Experience is defined as something one undergoes and gratitude in this context refers to the appreciation elicited by events or occurrences that an individual encounters or feels (McCullough et al., 2003). Gratitude is described as a 'constant experience of life' because it must be cultivated and felt daily to appreciate positive events and avoid being overwhelmed by negative ones. Individuals who do not consistently practice gratitude in their daily interactions may find it challenging to develop a genuine sense of appreciation. This difficulty can also extend to expressing gratitude in social interactions.

The learning process operates within a triad of interconnected domains: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. To achieve optimal learning outcomes, it is essential to integrate these three domains seamlessly. However, the affective domain, often sidelined, represents a crucial aspect of education. This domain encompasses the emotional experiences of learners, including their attitudes, beliefs, impressions, and sentiments, as well as behavioral attributes such as gratitude, empathy, interest, and responsibility (Noor et al., 2020). By prioritizing the affective domain, educators can enhance student engagement and foster a more holistic approach to learning (McCullough et al., 2004). The benefits of cultivating an enhanced attitude of gratitude extend beyond improving mood and well-being. Gratitude serves as an indicator of effective functioning and aids in the achievement of concrete life goals.

1.3. Aims and Objectives of the Research

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many leading employers in the polymer industry transitioned to conducting online interviews for internship recruitment—a practice they continue to favour for its convenience and time-saving benefits. This research project aimed to equip final-semester Polymer Technology students with a heightened sense of gratitude by organizing a Digital Gratitude Show as the culminating event of an online mock interview program.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Conducting Online Mock Interviews for Semester IV Polymer Technology Students

The initial step of the project was to identify suitable panelists for the online mock interview sessions. Through a combination of emails and phone conversations, six leading companies in the polymer industry were selected to participate. A total of 10 distinct interview panels were formed, and the online mock interviews were conducted over six sessions, following a structured 10-step process. Each panel consisted of a minimum of three Polymer Technology experts, a human resources manager, and the researcher. To enhance the experience, a customized flyer was created for each session with the support of the students. All 41 Semester IV Polymer Technology students participated in the program. Each student was interviewed for 30 minutes, covering various aspects including technical knowledge and fundamental interview questions. After each interview, constructive feedback was provided to help students improve. Additionally, recordings of all

individual mock interviews were uploaded to Moodle, allowing students to review their performance and further prepare for success in real-world interviews.

2.2. Conducting a Digital Gratitude Show as the Culminating Event of an Online Mock Interview Program

As the culminating event of an online mock interview program, a Digital Gratitude Show was organized facilitating all Semester IV Polymer Technology students to express their appreciation to the panelists for their voluntary commitment in making the program a success. An invitation flyer with an eye-catching design and the event agenda, and customized Zoom background were created and shared with all panel members via email. In addition to the panelists, the Director of ITUM, academic staff, and all students from the Polymer Technology discipline were invited to participate in this event.

2.3. Collecting Feedback from Panelists

Feedback from the panelists was collected to recognize their invaluable guidance during the mock interview sessions, which will aid students in succeeding in real interview contexts. This feedback was gathered through a self-administered, close-ended questionnaire based on a satisfaction scale (1 = Very Low; 5 = Very High). It covered 14 appreciation aspects of the Digital Gratitude Show: invitation flyer, Zoom background for the digital gratitude show, welcome speech by a student, introductory speech to the digital gratitude show by the chief organizer (researcher), group photo for the ITUM Newsletter, speech by the Director/ITUM, speech by the Head of the Division of Polymer and Chemical Engineering Technology, entertainment item by the students, students' perspectives on mock interviews, speech by a panelist, speech by the Head of Industrial Training, Career Guidance, and Post-Diploma Center of ITUM, speech delivered by a student to express gratitude, vote of thanks speech by a student, and appreciation letters. Feedback obtained for the above items was analyzed to qualitatively evaluate whether students successfully expressed gratitude and enhanced their attitude of gratitude.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Feedback from all 20 panelists was analyzed qualitatively using descriptive statistics as shown in Table 1. According to the descriptive statistics on appreciation aspects of the Digital Gratitude Show, all panelists reported feeling highly appreciated for invaluable guidance they provided during the mock interview sessions, which will aid students in succeeding at actual interviews. For elements such as the invitation flyer, students' perspectives on mock interviews, a heartfelt message of gratitude from a student and the appreciation letters, all panelists expressed a very high level of satisfaction. Additionally, over 80% of the panelists felt very highly valued during various segments of the Digital Gratitude Show, including the use of the Zoom background, the welcome speech by a student, the event introduction by the chief organizer, and the speech by the Director of ITUM. These gestures effectively highlighted students' gratitude for the guidance received. For aspects such as the speech by the Head of the Division of Polymer and Chemical Engineering Technology, the group photo for the ITUM Newsletter, the entertainment item by the students, the speech by a panelist, and the speech by the Head of the Industrial Training, Career Guidance, and Post Diploma Center of ITUM, approximately 50% of the panelists felt highly appreciated, while the other 50% felt very highly appreciated by the students. For the vote of thanks delivered by a student, more than 75% of the panelists felt deeply appreciated for their volunteer dedication in supporting students' success in real interview scenarios.

Table 1. Panelists' feedback: Descriptive statistics and frequencies (N=20)

Aspects of appreciation in Digital Gratitude Show	Contribution Frequency and Percentage				
	Satisfaction scale)1 =Very Low; 5 =Very High(
	Very Low	Low	Moderate	High	Very High
Invitation flyer for the digital gratitude show	00	00	00	00	20 (100%)
Zoom Background for the digital gratitude show	00	00	00	04 (20%)	16 (80%)
Welcome speech by a student	00	00	00	03 (15%)	17 (85%)
Introduction to the digital gratitude show by the chief organizer (researcher)	00	00	00	02 (10%)	18 (90%)
Group photo for the ITUM Newsletter	00	00	00	10 (50%)	10 (50%)
Speech by the Director/ITUM	00	00	00	02 (10%)	18 (90%)
Speech by the Head of the Division of Polymer and Chemical Engineering Technology	00	00	00	11 (55%)	09 (45%)
Entertainment item by the students	00	00	00	10 (50%)	10 (50%)
Students 'perspectives on mock interviews	00	00	00	00	20 (100%)
Speech by a panelist	00	00	00	10 (50%)	10 (50%)
Speech by the Head of the Industrial training, Career Guidance and Post Diploma Center of ITUM	00	00		10 (50%)	10 (50%)
Heartfelt Honourable Gratitude by a student	00	00	00	00	20 (100%)
Vote of thanks by a student	00	00	00	05 (25%)	15 (75%)
Appreciation letters	00	00	00	00	20 (100%)

Notably, no panelists reported feeling a very low, low, or moderate level of satisfaction for any of the appreciation aspects in the Digital Gratitude Show. Overall, the results reveal that students expressed sincere gratitude to all panelists for their commitment to helping them prepare for real-world interviews.

4. CONCLUSION

Gratitude, a valuable attitude within the affective domain, plays a critical role in both personal and interpersonal development. A Digital Gratitude Show serves as a transformative platform, uniquely positioned to instill a lasting attitude of gratitude in an academic setting. Through this virtual experience, a culture of appreciation and mutual respect flourishes, enriching the educational journey. By embracing this heightened sense of gratitude, students are not only empowered to navigate the complexities of an ever-evolving world but are also inspired to lead with resilience, confidence, and purpose—laying a strong foundation for both personal and professional success.

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