

FROM CLASSROOM TO HEART: UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' RECOGNITION OF TEACHING IMPACT THROUGH GRATITUDE JOURNALS

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ABSTRACT: Nowadays, teaching a new language to university students requires new strategies; which must seek to cover the emotional needs that have arisen to limit or hinder the learning dynamics, the behavior of students affected by different complex emotional situations; which could sometimes even indicate a simulation of learning on the part of the students. Aware of this situation, teachers have turned to different areas of knowledge to integrate them into their teaching praxis. Therefore, language teachers in Mexico have included the challenge of learning a new language; they have discovered that all those brief, simple, everyday goals and activities that allow students to visualize their linguistic acquisition, transform this challenge into a possible task. During the last three years at Centro de Idiomas, Universidad Veracruzana, some students have been working with a gratitude journal, they are starting to learn English as a second language and these groups have been willing to understand and consider the learning process and the learning environment as an important part in

the construction of their progress. This is just a brief example of their work and contributions that shows they pay attention to all those efforts teachers do every day.

KEYWORDS: Gratitude, journal, positive psychology, English, learning, teaching languages.

One of these learning dynamics at the Universidad Veracruzana by language teachers has incorporated the gratitude journal. Following the contributions of positive psychology, Emmons, R. A., & McCullough, M. E. and other English professors dealing on second language teaching, such as Einsenstein y Bodman (1986, 1993) who make a first contribution to the analysis of gratitude. The authors believe that expressing gratitude is not easy for second language learners, confirmed during the different applications of this work carried out for more than three years. Some of the factors observed in the students of the Universidad Veracruzana are the following: a) linguistic limitation, b) cultural limitation and c) lack of learning habits.

The different studies on gratitude that involve students of another language can focus on different areas for their analysis such as written and/or oral linguistic production; the academic achievement of students, socio-emotional analysis, among others.

However, this work proposes to show the recognition of the teaching-learning process through the gratitude of the students of the Universidad Veracruzana. A sample of gratitude journals made in Basic English according to the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) mentioned university students and their participation. Although the records presented here could be archived in a personal file, it is of individual interest to share records and disseminate any findings related to this teaching practice and its impact on university students.

Positive psychology focuses on the study of the strengths and virtues that characterize people; this approach gives meaning to life and on the promotion of quality of life, responsibility and ethics in society. (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Now, psychological well-being has been recognized worldwide as an important issue around health. In the general assembly of the United Nations (United Nations General Assembly) (2015), the objective of ensuring a healthy life, promoting well-being in the population at all ages and proposing to promote mental health and well-being has been indicated. The WHO (World Health Organization, 2015) has also established its purpose to urge governments around the world to implement actions to protect and promote mental health at all stages of life.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) considers today; to the science of gratitude a super skill, the quality of being grateful, appreciating the non-materialistic aspects of life and the willingness to recognize the agents that play a role in our emotional well-being. Gratitude is an emotion strongly related to mental health, life satisfaction, optimism, self-esteem, social relationships and happiness that lasts throughout life. It is an essential skill to achieve self-knowledge and self-management.

THE SCIENCE OF GRATITUDE

The Science of Gratitude gains importance from the participation of Robert Emmons, Michael McCullough, among the most prominent. At the beginning of the year 2000, and thanks to the John Templeton Foundation (JTF), a Project started: Expanding the Science and Practice of Gratitude Project (ESPG) and then research on gratitude began to emerge. From then until today there have been a series of serious documents and research on gratitude.

Gratitude has been selected as a tool that can help on learning a second language. Gratitude from Latin: gratia which means gratitude. Emmons and McCullough (2001) define it as “a cognitive affective state resulting from the perception of having been benefited by an external agent, in a supportive, disinterested and free manner.”

Gratitude, according to Watson and Naragon-Gainey (2010), has a protective effect for mental disorders such as depression or anxiety. Furthermore, it reduces the negative emotions that result from comparison and social self-comparison, thus taking precedence over envy and resentment (Emmons and Mishra, 2011) and as a strength, it is positively correlated with self-esteem and satisfaction with life. Gratitude along with the qualities of being able to appreciate, perceive and savor life experiences are considered determining factors for people's well-being (Martínez, 2006).

For McCullough et al. (2002) gratitude has three tasks:

- a) It is a social barometer, when people realize that there are those who are willing to help them selflessly.
- b) A motivator, seeing that other people carry out actions that benefit us, and these actions produce chain actions and feelings of gratitude; and
- c) A Reinforcer, when we thank a person for something, a positive emotion develops to benefit others.

The strength of gratitude and a commitment to discover good things around us generate health benefits by providing positive experiences such as well-being, happiness, positive affect and among other strengths. It also acts as a protective barrier against negative emotions (Emmons and Stern, 2013); gratitude also relieves depression (Seligman et al., 2005) and optimism, joy, and enthusiasm has been connected to Gratitude (Watkins, Cruz, Holben, & Kolts, 2008). In this way, gratitude is involved to personal satisfaction in life.

Recently, several investigations have written and talked about the benefits of gratitude in the educational field, taking into account the interactions of students and teachers. (Howells, 2014). Together with authors such as Emmons and McCullough (2003), Froh, Sefick and Emmons (2008) and Froh, Kashdan et al, (2009) have enriched this area with their contributions.

A study on the relationship between different strengths and life satisfaction conducted by Park et al. (2004) it has been discovered that there is a consistent relationship between gratitude, enthusiasm, hope, love and curiosity. On the contrary, a lower relationship between creativity, judgment and love of learning. Although it is true, when referring to this last element, it seemed important to point out that: it exists. That is part of the students' recognition of their teaching work.

METHODOLOGY

During this research, six groups of students have participated, who are part of the AFBG (General Basic Training Area) of the Universidad Veracruzana. They belong to different areas of knowledge and all of them are studying English at a basic level (A1 and A2). During the semester, they have made a gratitude journal in English, 10 gratitude

journals were selected at random to analyze and report the results obtained. Students have been asked to write a sentence expressing gratitude on school days (from Monday to Thursday) during a school period. At the end of the term, Students will share their gratitude journal with their teacher.

They have been given the following instructions:

- a) Write a statement in English thanking for something.
- b) Make a gratitude journal from Monday – Thursday (class days)
- c) Send a message via WhatsApp if you have questions.
- d) Review the corrections,
- e) In addition, correct if necessary.

It has been shown that gratitude brings benefits in different areas, since it not only generates a feeling of tranquility in the moment, but, by transforming it into a habit, people focus on present well-being and gain greater hope for the future. When giving thanks, students are required to recognize a fact as positive and explain it or express the probable circumstances or difficult moments they face, especially during the year 2021.

THE JOURNAL

The gratitude journal allows students to focus on the positive aspects, leaving the problems for a moment. Even though there are commercial gratitude diaries today, young people have not been asked to buy something else, since students have been asked to participate using WhatsApp, and the gratitude diary will be sent electronically, so it is not necessary to buy any booklet.

Working with a gratitude journal requires 5 minutes a day of student attention, or just a moment; However, when making this gratitude journal in another language it will require more time since it involves thinking about it, writing it, looking up a word in the dictionary if necessary, writing your thanks in English and reviewing, in addition to correcting if necessary.

There are some authors who claim that practicing gratitude regularly brings benefits around physical and mental health. Since by noticing those positive elements in our life we:

- They reduce the negative feelings that generate depression,
- You gain self-confidence,
- They improve health,
- Greater knowledge of oneself is acquired,
- Eliminate self-pity,
- Reduces stress and anxiety in the face of uncertainty,

- Generates empathy in others by perceiving us as kind and pleasant people, and
- You can sleep better.
- It's free!

Gratitude influences academic performance, García (2015) conducted a study with 145 students in order to verify whether experiencing gratitude influences the performance of second language students. The results demonstrated the importance of gratitude in the educational topic to enhance the interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships that are key to the success of learning a second language. With this activity, we can be state that grateful people improve performance when learning a second language.

A SUPER SKILL

Acquiring this super skill requires discipline and perseverance, as well as getting into the habit of writing in your gratitude journal. Generating this habit is difficult at first, but the students are encouraged when they see the participation of their classmates when they are handed over to the teacher every day. Thus, they begin to participate, share their positive experiences, correct their participation little by little and finally generate the habit of giving thanks. This habit of sharing positive experiences gradually spreads to the entire group, and ends up motivating everyone, including the teacher.

It is true that noticing the positive things around us is a difficult habit to obtain, since people are more accustomed to noticing the bad, hearing complaints and criticism or negative comments all the time. Grateful people tend to be happier, healthier, more complete. They generally overcome stress and improve health situations, as well as emotional ones.

Student recognition of the teaching-learning process is not a phenomenon that can occur instantly, sometimes not even in any way. Identifying the participation of otherness in the construction of learning, without normalizing the different situations that allow us to participate in the construction of this in class; Discovering and/or rediscovering it implies a percentage of humanism and respect for the contributions of others, but also for personal contributions.

The improvement in school performance has been proven according to research carried out by different authors, such as García-Ramírez, 2013, who affirm that there is a very close link between gratitude, emotions and intelligence (Goleman, 2006; Fiorini, and García -Ramírez, 2013). In summary, the importance of gratitude in education has been demonstrated, since it is related to the emotions of both students and teachers.

When considering the importance of socialization in language learning, the participation of the teacher and students, technology, the media, social networks, family, etc. is indisputable. Since gratitude is a positive feeling that allows us identification, knowledge and discovery; of the development of the personal and/or individual learning process and the recognition of everyone, including the teacher himself.

This phenomenon turns out to be key to the success of teaching a second language. In the classroom, gratitude can be made intentional. Generally, teachers expect students to identify their participation in this process, which is why we must bring a sample of the evidence obtained during the application of “The Gratitude Diary” for learning basic English at the Universidad Veracruzana, in Mexico.

RESULTS

Even though there are not many students who mention or recognize the contribution of their teacher in the process of their linguistic acquisition, there are those who manage to identify or notice that learning exists and that they are progressing in this process. The intervention of their teachers or external agents during their linguistic progress.

At the beginning, students write short, or brief, notes of gratitude. At the end of the gratitude journal the notes are longer or more extensive, they correct them and little by little their written production improves, so they can express their feelings better.

Today the English teacher gave a very nice speech, I think those were the words I needed to hear today.
Thank you teacher.

MAY 17 TH, 2022

I express my gratitude that I understand English classes.

JUNE 01 ST, 2022

I feel grateful because thanks to my effort I obtained a laudatory note.

JUNE 02 ND, 2022

I express my gratitude to you teacher for being very kind, affectionate and understanding.

70
Jun 2 th, 2022

I feel happy because today I had a very interesting tea time in english class.

10.- I am thankful because today we entered the last class with the teacher and we had a special guest who is a friend of the teacher and we had a tea time, it was a very interesting class and I liked it.

22/02/2022 - I am grateful for my English teacher

I thank you for continuing with my English studies

I am thanks for getting a job I thank you because I'm doing well in English

24/03/2022 - thankful for my English teacher

I'm so thankful with the teacher Claudia because she teaches very well

36 March 17th, 2022

February 13th

thanks to my teacher who teaches me English very well

22/April/2022 I thank God for the new things that I can learn every day, for the doors that have been closed and the doors that God has opened.

29/April/2022 I thank God, first for one more day, for the life of each of my teachers who teach me classes, and for allowing me to continue studying.

25/May/2022 I thank God for another day, for the lives of my loved ones and for the lives of my teachers. Thank God for his sustenance and for the blessing of each day.

5. I thank my tutor Martha Gloria for being with me in the degree.

6. I appreciate the support of my teachers in high school.

3. I thank the English teacher for giving me growth opportunities.

4. I appreciate having worked for my goals.

Itzel Meunier

12.. you teachers are more than an institution. Their commitment to school affairs goes beyond just a job. Thank you for the support provided on each of the necessary occasions.

13.To educate a person is not to make him learn something he did not know, but to make him someone who did not exist. Thank you very much for everything, teacher!

Luis Rodriguez

This month I am grateful because my family and I have health. I express my gratitude for the food that I had every day. I am thankful cause I am going to finish another English course soon. I give thanks to my dad's clients, my neighbors because they are kind persons, and my friends who support me. I am grateful for the privilege that I have the beach nearby. I am grateful for having a family who loves me a lot. I am feeling gratitude for having excellent teachers. I give thanks because I have a house. I am so grateful for the life! By: Lilita Leal Vázquez

12. September 7th, 2022

I am grateful to some teaches because they teach me many new things, it is nice to learn.

41.November 7th, 2022 I am grateful because the teacher congratulated me in class 07/09/22: I am grateful for the attitude of the teacher Claudia today she looked very happy and her happiness spread to me.

12/10/22: I feel grateful for the knowledge that the teachers have given me today, I recognize the effort they make every day to give us the appropriate explanation of the topics.

06/12/22 This diary helped me to write the most beautiful things of my days, weeks and months. I will have it as a memory of my Language II class, I hope in a few years to read it and remember every moment that I wrote here. Thanks to the teacher for giving us her help and understanding, this course helped me improve my English, especially my pronunciation. Thanks for everything!

Jesús Iván Aguirre Guzmán

To my Language II teacher: Thanks for teaching me every day of the semester, thanks for your patience and love towards us, this course helped me a lot with my pronunciation and verbs. I am very happy for this gratitude journal, since reading it makes me nostalgic because in a few days I will see my parents, whom I talked about so much in my gratitude journal. I hope to see teacher Claudia again next semester.

Esmeralda Martínez Chontal

Even though I don't speak much, I don't participate in the class and my presence is not noticed. I was always in all your classes, because my big dream is to know the foreigner; English opens many doors, that's why I am very grateful for your classes so pleasant and enjoyable. I always did the exercises and paid attention, because I want to learn English; I know how necessary it is, how important it is and how beautiful it is to learn a language. So I thank you for your dedication to teach me English 2 Teacher, although I knew a little, I could never understand it 100%, mainly because I was reluctant to learn a new language. I say goodbye wholeheartedly Teacher and wish you the best vibes in life.

Gloria Latour

This month I am grateful because my family and I have health. I express my gratitude for the food that I had every day. I am thankful cause I am going to finish another English course soon. I give thanks to my dad's clients, my neighbors because they are kind persons, and my friends who support me. I am grateful for the privilege that I have the beach nearby. I am grateful for having a family who loves me a lot. I am feeling gratitude for having excellent teachers. I give thanks because I have a house. I am so grateful for the life!

By: Liliana Leal Vásquez

I'm grateful for the life for having a good day, I'm happy because today I didn't procrastinate, and I finished a project. I'm grateful with the life because today was a happy day I'm so grateful with the life, because my family stay together in this "Día de muertos" because for us is the celebration more important of the year. I'm thankful for having some days of rest. I'm thankful because today I finish my homework, my flowers look pretty, and the weather is so nice. I'm grateful for the life because my family is healthy, and I have a good life. I give thanks for everything that happens, I was accepted for a scholarship. I'm grateful with my mom because She stays with me and my siblings always. I am thankful with every person who stay with me in the difficulties. I'm grateful because my family and close friends are healthy. I'm grateful to BTS for making my life happier with its beautiful songs. I'm grateful to myself because every day I try to be better I'm thankful to my parents because they always care about me. I'm so grateful to finish the semester I'm thankful to have a job and to be able to study I'm so Grateful with the teacher Claudia, because she is so kind, I give thanks to had class with she. THANKS TEACHER!

Angela Mariana Arrieta Hipolito

Thank you teacher for all the learning you gave me, for teaching us that we should always give others a smile, especially for teaching us to be grateful for good things and bad things. I hope to continue agreeing with you, you are an excellent teacher. I love her very much and I hope God bless her and her family. Finally, I thank you for having met an excellent teacher. See you soon!

Diego Valencia Rivadeneyra

I am grateful to have great parents who always go out of their way to give me their best to be well and excel. As well as I am also grateful for the brother I have, because he takes care of me and knows how to keep me on the right track, he guides me and keeps me away from things that are not right. I am very grateful for all the good and bad that happens to me because I know that everything is for the better. I want to give thanks for the excellent teacher assigned to me in this subject, English, because thanks to her I will improve every day, because I learned new words, and my English improved. I am also grateful for the good companions I had on this occasion, and although I did not meet them in person, they were very kind and friendly with some. Maybe not talk to everyone. I am very grateful to God, for allowing me one more day of life, for being the girl I am until now, a very good student and hard worker. I am very grateful to my employers for trusting me and giving me the opportunity to be with them, giving my service to clients. I thank my friends because they support me when I need someone, they guide me with the tasks when I have doubts, etc. Although I am also grateful for all those things or moments that did not happen in me. I thank my mom who made me dinner today, for all the days she makes me eat breakfast and lunch. And, to God, since I am grateful for giving us something to eat because there are children who suffer from hunger. I am very grateful and happy with my life; I totally love it.

Fatima Morgado

I am very grateful that my plans are working out well. Today I feel very thankful because I woke up in my bed. I am very grateful to my parents for helping me achieve my goals. Today I am very grateful for my work. I am grateful that my niece is back today. I am very grateful to my parents for supporting me in everything. I am very grateful to be able to eat what I want when I want. I am grateful to my teachers this semester, because they have been very understanding with me and my classmates. I am thankful that I have a home and food on my table every day. I am grateful to be able to see my grandparents every day. I am very grateful to my friends for always supporting me. I am grateful to be able to travel. I am very grateful to be studying at the university. I am thankful for waking up every day and being able to see the world. I am thankful that I did not have coronavirus. I am thankful for my skin color. Today I am thankful that I no longer have depression. Today I am just thankful to be alive. I am grateful to myself for never giving up.

Jesús Ricardo Hernández Rivera

I express my gratitude to all the people who have passed through my life, they have all taught me something, good or bad, they are lessons that will serve me in my future. I am grateful for my fears because thanks to them I am improving day by day. I am grateful to myself because despite how much my grandmother's death has hurt me, I have been strong enough to continue living. I am grateful for each one of my dreams and those of my family because these dreams are the ones that drive me every day. I am grateful to all

my teachers, because thanks to their effort, dedication and love they provide us with their knowledge. I am grateful to my English teacher because in this semester certain things have become clear to me that I did not understand very well. I am grateful for the life I have, with its ups and downs. I am grateful to the people around me who provide me with support, love, care, and understanding. I am grateful to my mother, because whenever she cooks, she does it with a lot of love and is super delicious.

Abigail Ortiz Torres

I am grateful to myself because despite my problems, my sorrows and all my mistakes, I am still a good person. I am grateful to all the people who congratulated me, and who sent me kind wishes and blessings. I really appreciate them a lot. I am grateful for having friends who are there when I need them most, and for being my support when I have needed the strength to get up. I thank life for sending me good wishes and for the joys in my life. I am grateful for the love of those around me, the good and bad moments, what I learned, what I gained and, for what I lost and what I am about to live. Today I thank my best friend for thanks for being my support, for always being by my side and for being my loyal friend. I can only thank you infinitely.

Brando Martínez González

I think that this journal was a good strategy to reinforce my knowledge in this subject, it helped us to learn to write, understand and interpret texts in English. This diary helped us to streamline our learning skills. I think it was an excellent idea that the teacher gave us this activity, without her this subject would not have been so great. I believe that this activity did give us the expected results, because my colleagues and I learned a lot. Personally, I can say that the results were positive especially for me because I was able to learn more about verb tenses in English, use verbs, conjugations, etc. This learning was also due to the great work that the teacher has done by sharing her knowledge and helping us to improve more and more with our skills. The truth is very gratifying to see how my colleagues and I become more agile in this matter by acquiring more practice and with more reason doing this kind of activity. Likewise, I think that the other activities assigned to us by the teacher have helped us to learn and understand this beautiful language and honestly, I already liked it. I love being able to express myself the way I did when performing my tasks. I liked understanding what I wrote when I did my homework.

In conclusion, I can say that all the activities I did in this subject helped my classmates and me to learn English. It was also a good strategy to continue studying throughout the university career because it will be very useful in the future.

As a conclusion, I consider that this activity helps a lot not only in the part of learning more English every day, which in itself is already very good for this, it also makes us aware of the things that surround us, of the moments and people around us, the circumstances we

are in and makes us reflect on what we are lucky to have every day and reminds us how grateful we should be to have them. It was a very good activity that I would certainly like other teachers to repeat later.

ISAAC JOAS MARCIAL ESCOBAR

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