

The Effect of Gratitude Journaling on Depressive Symptoms among University Students

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Abstrak

Depresi di kalangan mahasiswa perguruan tinggi telah menjadi masalah kesehatan mental yang menonjol, seringkali diperparah oleh tekanan akademik, transisi sosial, dan gangguan emosional. Studi ini menguji efek intervensi jurnal rasa syukur singkat terhadap gejala depresi di kalangan mahasiswa perguruan tinggi Indonesia. Desain quasi-eksperimental dengan kelompok kontrol non-ekuivalen digunakan, dengan sepuluh mahasiswa keperawatan berusia 17-21 tahun dibagi menjadi kelompok eksperimen (lima peserta) dan kelompok kontrol (lima peserta). Kelompok eksperimen ditugaskan untuk menulis tiga hal yang mereka syukuri setiap malam selama tujuh hari berturut-turut, sementara kelompok kontrol tidak menerima intervensi. Keparahan gejala depresi diukur menggunakan Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9) sebelum dan setelah intervensi. Uji Wilcoxon signed-rank menunjukkan penurunan yang signifikan pada gejala depresi pada kelompok eksperimental ($Z = -2.032$, $p = .042$), sedangkan tidak terjadi perubahan yang signifikan pada kelompok kontrol. Uji Mann-Whitney U mengonfirmasi perbedaan yang signifikan pada skor peningkatan antara kedua kelompok ($U = 0.000$, $p = .009$), dengan ukuran efek yang besar ($r = .83$). Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa penulisan jurnal rasa syukur merupakan intervensi yang efektif untuk mengurangi gejala depresi, bahkan ketika diterapkan dalam periode singkat. Studi ini menyoroti potensi intervensi berbasis rasa syukur sebagai strategi yang efisien dan dapat disesuaikan secara budaya untuk mempromosikan kesejahteraan emosional dalam konteks pendidikan tinggi.

Kata Kunci: Jurnal Rasa Syukur, Depresi; Mahasiswa; Kesehatan Mental.

Abstract

Depression among university students has emerged as a prominent mental health concern, frequently compounded by academic pressures, social transitions, and emotional distress. The present study examined the effect of a brief gratitude journaling intervention on depressive symptoms among Indonesian university students. A quasi-experimental non-equivalent control group design was employed, with ten nursing students aged 17–21 years being assigned to either an experimental group, comprising five participants, or a control group, comprising five participants. The experimental group was tasked with writing three things they were grateful for each night over a period of seven consecutive days, while the control group received no intervention. The severity of depressive symptoms was measured using the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9) before and after the intervention. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test revealed a significant reduction in depressive symptoms in the experimental group ($Z = -2.032$, $p = .042$), whereas no significant change occurred in the control group. The Mann-Whitney U test confirmed a significant difference in gain scores between groups ($U = 0.000$, $p = .009$), with a large effect size ($r = .83$). These findings suggest that gratitude journaling is an effective intervention for reducing depressive symptoms, even when implemented over a brief period. The study emphasizes the potential of gratitude-based interventions as cost-effective and culturally adaptable strategies to promote emotional well-being in higher education contexts.

Key Words: Gratitude Journaling, Depression, University Students, Mental Health.

A. Introduction

Mental health problems have become one of the most significant global public health challenges in the 21st century. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately 280 million people worldwide suffer from depression, making it one of the leading causes of disability and suicide among young people (WHO, 2023). Adolescence and emerging adulthood are particularly vulnerable periods due to developmental transitions, identity formation, and increasing exposure to social and academic pressures. Depression at this stage has been shown to affect not only emotional well-being, but also learning capacity, interpersonal relationships, and long-term productivity (Kementerian Kesehatan RI, Direktorat Kesehatan Jiwa, 2023).

In the Indonesian context, data from the 2018 National Basic Health Research (Risksesdas) reported that 6.1% of Indonesians aged 15 years and above experienced symptoms of depression, with the highest prevalence found among the 15–24-year-old group, indicating that depression often begins in adolescence and early adulthood. The 2024 Thematic Report of the Indonesian Health Behaviour Survey (SKI) further underscores this issue, revealing that one in five young individuals aged 15–24 years reported experiencing emotional problems or depressive symptoms. Additionally, approximately 8% of these individuals had received a depression diagnosis from a health professional (Badan Kebijakan dan Pengembangan kesehatan, 2024).

Furthermore, UNICEF Indonesia (2024) has observed that one in three adolescents in Indonesia encounters emotional or behavioral difficulties, with depression and anxiety being among the most frequently reported conditions. The report indicates that utilization of mental health services among Indonesian adolescents remains low. Less than 10% of adolescents seek professional help due to factors including stigma, a lack of awareness, and limited access to youth-friendly mental health services.

The validity of these national findings is further substantiated by empirical research. Suryaputri et al. (2022) found that the prevalence of depression among Indonesian youth aged 15–24 years was 5.6%, with higher risk among females, smokers, alcohol users, and those with chronic illness or parental mental health problems. These findings underscore the multifactorial nature of depression in Indonesia's youth population. Furthermore, a factsheet published by the Ministry of Health (Kemenkes) in 2023 revealed that adolescents and young adults constitute the demographic most affected by depression, a condition that can lead to a decline in academic achievement, social withdrawal, and the development of suicidal thoughts.

This phenomenon is particularly pronounced among university students. A multitude of factors, including academic demands, financial pressures, social transitions, and uncertainty

regarding future employment, have been identified as contributing to emotional distress. A study by Wira'atmaja & Ricky (2021) found that a substantial proportion of Indonesian nursing students exhibited depressive symptoms, mainly associated with academic workload and clinical practice stress.

A multitude of local studies conducted at Indonesian universities have documented prevalence rates ranging from 20% to 40% among the student population. This observation signifies that depression has emerged as a predominant concern within higher-education settings (Ramadianto et al., 2022; Isella et al., 2022; Rahayu & Wulandari, 2021). The findings, when considered collectively, suggest that depression among adolescents and young adults, particularly university students, is indicative of an escalating mental health crisis in Indonesia. Addressing this issue necessitates clinical treatment as well as preventive and promotive interventions that cultivate positive emotions and resilience.

Depression among adolescents and university students is influenced by a combination of biological and environmental factors, as well as cognitive and emotional patterns that shape how individuals interpret their experiences. According to Putri et al. (2022), the psychological underpinnings of depression among Indonesian adolescents are predominantly characterized by a propensity to dwell on negative experiences, self-blame, and feelings of hopelessness. This tendency is frequently exacerbated by low self-esteem and suboptimal emotional regulation. These factors perpetuate negative thought patterns, thereby maintaining depressive symptoms. Consequently, interventions that promote positive reinterpretation and emotional awareness are imperative for mitigating depressive states.

One evidence-based approach that aligns with positive psychology principles is gratitude journaling. According to NurmalaSari and Sanyata (2021), gratitude journaling is a technique that has been demonstrated to be effective in enhancing resilience and emotional well-being, particularly during periods of stress or uncertainty. Their conceptual framework among Islamic boarding school students (*santri*) highlights that the act of expressing gratitude strengthens optimism, emotional control, and the ability to adapt to adversity. These psychological capacities are inversely correlated with depressive tendencies.

Empirical research has further demonstrated the beneficial effects of gratitude journaling among Indonesian student populations. Ross et al. (2022) conducted a quasi-experimental study that examined the effect of gratitude journaling on academic resilience among a sample of undergraduate students. The findings indicated a substantial enhancement in the resilience scores of the students following their engagement in a gratitude journaling program, suggesting that the cultivation of gratitude can foster adaptive coping mechanisms and alleviate psychological distress. While the study focused on academic resilience, the underlying mechanism mirrors processes associated with decreased depressive symptoms.

The therapeutic role of gratitude journaling in depression has been examined in both clinical and non-clinical settings. For instance, Sucitra, Mar'at, and Tiatri (2019) conducted a study in which they applied gratitude journaling with individuals experiencing depressive symptoms due to cancer diagnoses. Utilizing an *Ecological Momentary Assessment* (EMA) approach, they ascertained that consistent gratitude journaling led to a substantial reduction in depressive symptoms and an enhancement in moment-to-moment emotional equilibrium. This finding suggests that gratitude journaling can serve as a low-cost, flexible, and context-sensitive intervention for reducing depressive mood in diverse populations.

In a similar vein, Wongpy and Dianovinina's (2019) study demonstrated that gratitude therapy resulted in a substantial reduction in depressive symptoms among women grappling with severe emotional distress due to unintended pregnancies. This finding suggests the efficacy of gratitude therapy in improving mood and emotional stability across diverse contexts. This finding aligns with the principles of positive psychology's broaden-and-build theory, which posits that cultivating gratitude broadens an individual's thought-action repertoires and builds enduring personal resources that counter depressive patterns (NurmalaSari & Sanyata, 2021; Ross et al., 2022). In the context of Indonesian university students, where depression rates remain high due to academic stress, social isolation, and uncertainty about the future (Putri et al., 2022), gratitude journaling provides a simple yet impactful psychological tool that students can practice independently or with minimal supervision.

This study is significant because depression among university students has been shown to have a negative effect on academic performance, emotional well-being, and social relationships. Yet, effective and accessible interventions remain limited in Indonesia. Gratitude journaling, a simple, low-cost, and non-stigmatizing technique rooted in positive psychology, offers a practical solution by helping students shift attention from negative experiences to positive

reflections, thereby enhancing emotional resilience and reducing depressive symptoms (Ross et al., 2022; Sucitra et al., 2019). Beyond its psychological benefits, this intervention is highly relevant on a social level. It can be integrated into university-based promotive and preventive mental health programs, aligning with the priorities of the Indonesian Ministry of Health.

The novelty of this study lies in its quasi-experimental approach, which employs an empirical test of the effect of gratitude journaling on depressive symptoms among Indonesian university students. This population has received scant attention in the extant literature concerning such interventions. The primary objective of this study is to determine whether participation in a structured gratitude journaling program effectively reduces depressive symptoms in comparison to a control group. This will contribute to the body of evidence-based strategies for improving student mental health in higher education.

B. Methodology

1. Research Design

The present study employed a quasi-experimental non-equivalent control group design. This design enables the comparison of an intervention (experimental) group and a control group in the absence of random assignment, thereby facilitating the assessment of the intervention's efficacy through the utilization of pretest and posttest comparisons across groups.

2. Participants (Population and Sample)

The participants were 10 second-semester students from the Nursing Study Program at Universitas Pekalongan, who were selected using a purposive sampling technique. The inclusion criteria were as follows: The target population for this study consists of active undergraduate nursing students at Universitas Pekalongan between the ages of 17 and 21 years who are willing to participate for a period of one week. Participants were divided into two groups: five students in the experimental group and five students in the control group. All participants provided informed consent prior to participation.

3. Technique of Data Collection

1. Pretest Phase: The experimental and control groups completed the PHQ-9 scale to establish baseline depressive symptom levels.
2. Intervention Phase: The experimental group was instructed to write three things they were grateful for each night before sleeping for seven consecutive days. The control group received no specific activity or intervention during this period.
3. Posttest Phase: On the eighth day, both groups completed the PHQ-9 questionnaire once more to assess post-intervention depressive symptoms.
4. Data Collection and Management: All data were collected online via secure forms and coded anonymously to maintain confidentiality.
5. Data Analysis: The statistical analysis of the difference between the pretest and posttest scores within and between the groups was conducted to ascertain the intervention effect.

4. Instruments

The severity of depressive symptoms was measured using the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9), a self-report instrument that is used to assess the severity of depression based on DSM-IV criteria (Kroenke et al., 2001). The PHQ-9 comprises nine items, each of which is rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 0 ("not at all") to 3 ("nearly every day"). Total scores on the PHQ-9 range from 0 to 27. The following interpretations have been established for the score: The severity of depression is categorized as follows: 0–4 (minimal depression), 5–9 (mild), 10–14 (moderate), 15–19 (moderately severe), and 20–27 (severe). A study by Khumaidi, et al. (2023) found that all items of the Indonesian version of PHQ-9 showed strong validity, with item-total correlation coefficients ranging from 0.508 to 0.907, and high internal consistency reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.936. These results indicate that the PHQ-9 is a valid and reliable instrument for assessing depressive symptoms in Indonesian populations and can be used with confidence in both research and clinical screening contexts.

5. Technique of Data Analysis

Due to the limited sample size, the Mann-Whitney U test was employed to compare the post-intervention PHQ-9 scores between the experimental and control groups. All statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 22.

C. Result and Discussion

1. Result

The following table presents the demographic information and post-intervention scores of the participants, along with the gain score, which indicates the change in depression levels. The severity of depression was stratified according to PHQ-9 score ranges, with elevated scores denoting more pronounced depressive symptomatology.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics and Depression Scores by Group

Subject	Age (Year)	Gender	Group	Pre Test	Post Test	Gain Score
1	18	Female	Experiment	19	14	5
2	19	Female	Experiment	7	3	4
3	18	Male	Experiment	11	8	3
4	19	Male	Experiment	8	6	2
5	19	Female	Experiment	12	9	3
6	18	Female	Control	2	7	-5
7	19	Male	Control	5	4	1
8	21	Female	Control	1	5	-4
9	18	Female	Control	4	4	0
10	18	Female	Control	2	3	-1

Note. 0–4 (minimal depression), 5–9 (mild), 10–14 (moderate), 15–19 (moderately severe), and 20–27 (severe).

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Depression Scores by Group and Measurement Phase

Variable	Group	M	Md	SD	Range	IQR	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
Pre-test	Experiment	11.40	11	4.72	12	8	7	19	1.25	1.66
	Control	2.80	2	1.64	4	3	1	5	0.52	-1.69
Post-test	Experiment	8.00	8	4.06	11	7	3	14	0.52	0.90
	Control	4.60	4	1.52	4	3	3	7	1.12	1.46
Gain score	Experiment	3.40	3	1.14	3	2	2	5	0.41	-0.18
	Control	-1.80	-1	2.59	6	5	-5	1	-0.36	-2.41

Note. M = mean; Md = median; SD = standard deviation; IQR = interquartile range.

A descriptive analysis indicated that the experimental group demonstrated a marked improvement in depressive symptoms, with the mean depression score decreasing from pre-test ($M = 11.40$) to post-test ($M = 8.00$). Conversely, the control group exhibited a less pronounced reduction. The experimental group demonstrated a greater improvement in gain score results ($M = 3.40$) compared to the control group ($M = -1.80$), suggesting that gratitude journaling effectively mitigates depressive symptoms.

Table 3. Normality Test Results Using Shapiro-Wilk Test

Variable	Group	W	p
Pre-test	Experiment	0.896	0.389
	Control	0.914	0.490
Post-test	Experiment	0.978	0.925
	Control	0.914	0.492
Gain score	Experiment	0.961	0.814
	Control	0.915	0.501

The Shapiro-Wilk test results indicated that all variables (pre-test, post-test, and gain score) in both groups exhibited a normal distribution ($p > .05$). However, given the limited sample size ($n = 5$ per group), subsequent analyses employed non-parametric tests (Wilcoxon Signed-Rank and Mann-Whitney U).

Table 4. Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test Results within Groups

Comparison	Z	p	Interpretation
Experiment (Post – Pre)	-2.032	.042	Significant decrease
Control (Post – Pre)	-1.289	.197	Not significant

The Wilcoxon signed-rank test indicated a statistically significant decrease in depressive symptoms in the experimental group ($Z = -2.032$, $p = .042$). Conversely, in the control group, no statistically significant difference was observed between the pretest and posttest scores ($Z = -1.289$, $p = 0.197$), suggesting that gratitude journaling effectively mitigates symptoms of depression.

Table 5. Mann-Whitney U Test Results between Groups

Comparison	U	Z	p	Mean Rank (Exp)	Mean Rank (Ctrl)	Interpretation
Pre-test	0.000	-2.619	.009	8.00	3.00	Significant difference
Post-test	5.500	-1.471	.141	6.90	4.10	Not significant
Gain score	0.000	-2.619	.009	8.00	3.00	Significant improvement

The Mann-Whitney U test results at the pretest stage demonstrated a significant difference between the experimental group and the control group ($U = 0.000$, $Z = -2.619$, $p = 0.009$). The mean rank of the experimental group (8.00) was higher than that of the control group (3.00), indicating that the initial level of depression in the experimental group was higher prior to the intervention. This baseline difference can be attributed to the non-random assignment of participants, in which the experimental group initially consisted of students with higher levels of depressive symptoms. This selection was intentional to clarify and observe the magnitude of change that could result from the gratitude journaling intervention. Despite this imbalance, the use of gain scores and nonparametric tests allowed for an appropriate comparison of improvement between groups.

The findings further demonstrate that a discrepancy exists in post-test scores between the experimental group and the control group; however, this discrepancy does not attain statistical significance. The calculation results yielded the following values: $U = 5.50$, $Z = -1.471$, and $p = 0.141$ ($p > 0.05$). The mean rank of the experimental group (6.90) was higher than that of the control group (4.10), indicating that the experimental group exhibited superior score changes after the intervention in comparison to the control group. However, the observed difference did not attain statistical significance at the 5% level.

The Mann-Whitney U test results yielded the following values: $U = 0.000$, $Z = -2.619$, and $p = 0.009$ ($p < 0.05$). The findings of this study suggest the presence of a statistically significant discrepancy between the experimental group and the control group with respect to their gain scores. The mean rank of the experimental group was 8.00, while that of the control group was 3.00. This finding indicates that the experimental group exhibited a more substantial shift in scores in comparison to the control group following the intervention. A p -value of 0.009 indicates that the probability of this discrepancy occurring by chance is minimal (<1%), thereby substantiating the robustness and statistical significance of the findings, despite the modest sample size ($n=10$).

Table 6. Effect Sizes (r) for Nonparametric Tests

Test	Z	N	r	Effect Magnitude	Description
Wilcoxon (Experiment)	-2.032	5	0.91	Very large	Effective reduction
Wilcoxon (Control)	-1.289	5	0.58	Medium-large	Non-significant change
Mann-Whitney (Pre-test)	-2.619	10	0.83	Very large	Unequal baseline
Mann-Whitney (Post-test)	-1.471	10	0.47	Medium	Positive but not significant
Mann-Whitney (Gain score)	-2.619	10	0.83	Very large	Strong intervention effect

The calculated effect sizes demonstrate that the gratitude journaling intervention produced a substantial effect ($r = .83$) on depressive symptom reduction, indicating a strong practical significance.

2. Discussion

The present study demonstrated that gratitude journaling significantly reduced depressive symptoms among university students compared to the control group. Subjects who participated in a gratitude journaling exercise on a daily basis for a period of one week exhibited a significant decrease in PHQ-9 scores. In contrast, the control group demonstrated no substantial change in this regard. This finding suggests that a brief, structured gratitude intervention can effectively alleviate depressive mood, even within a short timeframe. The substantial effect size ($r = 0.83$) signifies that the intervention engendered a robust and substantial impact on the emotional well-being of the participants.

These findings underscore the psychological importance of gratitude as a protective factor against depression. It aligns with the meta-analysis conducted by Iodice, et al. (2021), which reported a negative correlation between gratitude and depression across diverse populations, suggesting a robust association between gratitude and mental health. In the context of university students, who are often exposed to academic stress, social uncertainty, and self-evaluative pressures, gratitude journaling has been shown to help redirect attention from distressing experiences toward positive life aspects. This cognitive shift has the potential to disrupt maladaptive rumination and self-critical thought patterns that maintain depressive affect.

Furthermore, gratitude journaling has been shown to promote emotional awareness and positive reappraisal, which aligns with the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. The present study posits that the cultivation of positive affect, as facilitated by gratitude, has the potential to broaden cognitive perspectives and fortify enduring psychological resources, including optimism and resilience (Bohlmeijer, et al., 2022). The emotional broadening that results from daily gratitude reflection likely contributed to the decline in depressive symptoms observed in the experimental group.

The present results align with prior studies showing that gratitude interventions improve emotional well-being and reduce depressive or stress-related outcomes. For instance, Geier and Morris (2022) found that a brief gratitude intervention during the pandemic significantly improved students' mental well-being and reduced negative affect. Concurrently, Fekete and Deichert (2022) reported that gratitude journaling led to a decline in stress and negative emotions among the general population, thereby corroborating the notion that gratitude-based cognitive engagement can act as a mitigating factor against emotional distress.

In an Indonesian context, Andeslan and Uyun (2023) also demonstrated that higher levels of gratitude were associated with lower depression, anxiety, and stress among university students during the post-pandemic transition. The collective findings of these studies corroborate the present findings that gratitude exercises promote adaptive emotional regulation and protect against depressive tendencies in both clinical and non-clinical samples.

Comparable effects were also observed in clinical populations. Ghazali, et al. (2023) study revealed that gratitude training led to a reduction in depression among patients undergoing hemodialysis. This finding suggests that the emotional benefits of gratitude may transcend specific situational contexts. Concurrently, Tomczyk, et al. (2022) unveiled that gratitude facilitates more adaptive acceptance of symptoms among women at risk of depression, thereby enhancing mental well-being. The convergence of these findings across samples suggests that gratitude journaling in the present study operates through similar emotional and cognitive mechanisms.

While the observed reduction in depressive symptoms can be attributed to gratitude journaling, it is imperative to acknowledge alternative explanations. The observed improvement may be partly attributable to placebo or expectancy effects, as participants who engaged in a structured self-reflective activity could experience psychological relief due to perceived support or attention. Furthermore, the act of daily writing, irrespective of its content, may have facilitated emotional processing and mood stabilization. However, the alignment of these results with established gratitude-specific effects in previous research (Fekete & Deichert, 2022; Geier & Morris, 2022) lends substantial support to the notion of gratitude as a distinct psychological factor.

The clinical implications of these findings are significant. Depression among young adults, particularly university students, has emerged as a prominent mental health concern in

Indonesia (Desy et al., 2025). Gratitude journaling is an accessible, cost-effective, and culturally adaptable intervention that can be implemented in university counseling programs and preventive health initiatives. This intervention's minimal supervisory requirements and its capacity to circumvent the stigmatization frequently associated with formal therapeutic interventions suggest its potential as an efficacious early mental health promotion strategy within student populations. The findings from studies examining the efficacy of gratitude-based interventions in high-risk or traumatized groups have yielded encouraging results (Hamka et al., 2023). These outcomes serve to further substantiate the potential applicability of gratitude-based interventions in a wide range of mental health contexts.

It is imperative to acknowledge the limitations inherent in this approach. First, the study's sample size was limited ($n = 10$), which constrained the study's ability to generalize its findings and statistical power. Secondly, the intervention's duration was limited to seven days, which may not have sufficed to elicit long-term effects associated with gratitude practice. Thirdly, the participants were drawn from a single academic discipline, namely nursing, which may have restricted variability in stress exposure and coping patterns. Fourthly, the absence of random assignment introduces the possibility of pre-existing group differences influencing outcomes, despite attempts to regulate for baseline depression levels. Future studies should employ larger randomized samples and longer intervention periods to validate and extend these findings.

It is recommended that subsequent investigations examine the long-term efficacy and sustainability of gratitude journaling, incorporating subsequent assessments to facilitate a comprehensive evaluation of the intervention's effectiveness. Researchers may also compare gratitude journaling with other positive psychology techniques, such as mindfulness-based interventions (Apriliyani et al., 2020), to identify synergistic or differential effects on depression. Furthermore, qualitative approaches have the potential to elucidate participants' subjective experiences and cultural interpretations of gratitude, thereby offering a more profound understanding of the mechanisms underlying emotional improvement. Integrating physiological or neurobiological measures, such as stress biomarkers, would serve to further strengthen the empirical foundation of gratitude-based interventions.

In summary, the study provides empirical evidence that gratitude journaling significantly reduces depressive symptoms among university students. The findings are theoretically consistent, empirically validated, and practically relevant, suggesting that gratitude-focused interventions can serve as effective, scalable strategies to promote emotional well-being and prevent depression in young adult populations.

While the present study focused on university students, the underlying mechanisms of gratitude journaling are not exclusively limited to a specific population. Consequently, the findings may have potential relevance for broader groups, including non-student young adults and other community populations. It is imperative that future research examine the generalizability of gratitude-based interventions across diverse demographic and cultural contexts.

D. Conclusion

This study offers original empirical evidence on the efficacy of a brief gratitude journaling intervention in reducing depressive symptoms among Indonesian university students, a population that has received limited research attention in this context. Contrary to the findings of previous studies that have examined gratitude in clinical or Western populations, this research demonstrates that even a brief, cost-effective, and self-administered gratitude practice can yield substantial emotional benefits in young adults within a collectivist cultural setting. The findings are significant because they underscore the potential of gratitude journaling as a simple, scalable, and non-stigmatizing preventive approach to student mental health promotion. By emphasizing cognitive reframing and emotional awareness, this intervention offers practical implications for universities seeking accessible tools to mitigate depression and enhance well-being. Universities could integrate gratitude journaling as part of student counseling or mental health promotion programs. Future research should extend this work with larger, randomized samples and longitudinal assessments to validate the sustainability and generalizability of these promising results.

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