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## **Fostering College Students' Gratitude: A Study on the Impact of Group-Based Spiritual Theistic Practices**

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**Abstract:** Gratitude, as a multidimensional construct, plays a pivotal role in fostering psychological well-being, resilience, and personal growth. This study aimed to examine the levels and determinants of sustainable gratitude among third-semester students at five universities in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Utilizing a descriptive quantitative approach complemented by qualitative thematic analysis, the research involved 250 participants and in-depth interviews with 10 students. Key findings indicated that 45% of students exhibited high gratitude levels, 40% medium, and 15% low. Regression analysis identified significant predictors, including gender, socioeconomic status, and academic performance, while thematic analysis highlighted emotional barriers, social relationships, and theistic values as critical factors. The study's results emphasize the need for targeted interventions that address psychological and emotional challenges, enhance social support, and integrate theistic principles into educational practices. By extending the existing literature on gratitude, this research underscores the potential of holistic approaches in higher education to foster sustainable gratitude and student well-being. While the findings are context-specific, they provide a foundation for future studies to explore gratitude across diverse cultural and educational settings, contributing to the broader discourse on educational psychology and personal development.

**Keywords:** Sustainable gratitude, Theistic values, Holistic education, Psychological resilience.

### **Introduction**

In today's educational landscape, the cultivation of gratitude as a core psychological attribute has garnered increasing attention. Gratitude, defined as a state of thankfulness and appreciation, extends beyond a mere positive emotional response; it is a multidimensional construct that promotes psychological resilience, well-being, and a sense of purpose (Unterrainer et al., 2014). Specifically, integrating gratitude into the lives of college students has shown significant potential in alleviating mental health challenges while fostering a sustainable mindset for both personal and communal development (Jafari et al., 2010). This study explores the transformative potential of sustainable gratitude through group-based interventions enriched with theistic values, offering a holistic educational framework to cultivate gratitude among college students.

The transition to higher education often subjects students to various psychological and social stressors. Factors such as academic pressure, social isolation, and financial insecurity are known contributors to anxiety,

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depression, and burnout in college students (Chen & Wan, 2025). In response, educational institutions are increasingly adopting innovative strategies to promote mental well-being and resilience. One such strategy is the deliberate cultivation of gratitude through structured interventions. By fostering a gratitude-oriented mindset, students can enhance their psychological well-being while developing a deeper and more meaningful engagement with both their academic and social environments (Akinsemolu & Onyeaka, 2025).

Third-semester students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Enrekang in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, were selected as research subjects due to the critical phase of academic and personal development they are undergoing. This stage is particularly vulnerable to mental health issues such as anxiety and depression, common during this period (Zhai et al., 2024). The study aims to examine how group-based spiritual theistic interventions designed to nurture gratitude can address these challenges. Furthermore, the study seeks to foster psychological resilience, well-being, and a profound sense of purpose, all in alignment with holistic educational goals. This demographic is especially significant, as they represent a diverse population grappling with the pressures of higher education, making them an ideal target for interventions focused on sustainable gratitude and community cohesion.

Gratitude interventions, including journaling and group discussions, have shown positive outcomes in improving psychological well-being and resilience (Calleja et al., 2024). For example, graduate nurses transitioning into practice reported reduced burnout and increased resilience after engaging in gratitude-based exercises. This suggests that similar interventions could be effectively adapted for college students, addressing their unique challenges. Moreover, the link between gratitude and improved interpersonal relationships, along with enhanced community engagement, underscores its potential as a cornerstone of holistic education (Mutmainnah et al., 2024). However, incorporating gratitude into educational frameworks should extend beyond individual practices and instead adopt a systemic approach that integrates theistic values. Theistic values emphasizing spirituality, forgiveness, and a sense of purpose are closely aligned with the core principles of gratitude. These values provide a moral and spiritual foundation, allowing students to experience gratitude not just as a psychological state but as a transformative force that fosters ethical behavior, social harmony, and communal well-being.

A group-based approach amplifies the transformative potential of gratitude. Group dynamics significantly influence individual attitudes and behaviors. Through group interactions, students can share personal experiences, reflect on their values, and cultivate a collective sense of gratitude. Such group-based interventions have proven especially effective in enhancing psychological resilience and fostering a sense of belonging among participants (Cipolletta et al., 2024). By incorporating theistic values into these group activities, educational institutions can establish an environment that supports both individual growth and community cohesion. According to Hamzaa et al. (2025), incorporating spirituality in group activities fosters empathy, while Rahatovna (2025) argues that this approach nurtures a sense of purpose and belonging. These practices align with the principles of holistic education, strengthening both individual and collective development.

The relationship between gratitude and physical well-being also warrants attention. Studies suggest that gratitude practices can lead to measurable improvements in physical health, including reduced stress and improved cardiovascular function (Jans-Beken et al., 2020; Levine et al., 2021). These findings emphasize the holistic nature of gratitude, encompassing not only psychological and spiritual dimensions but also contributing to physical well-being.

In the context of higher education, promoting gratitude through physical group activities, such as exercise programs, can serve as an effective strategy to improve overall student health (Sumari et al., 2025). Despite its proven benefits, implementing gratitude-based interventions in educational settings presents several challenges, including resistance to change, lack of trained facilitators, and the absence of a structured framework for integrating gratitude into the curriculum. Overcoming these challenges requires a concerted effort involving educators, policymakers, and mental health professionals. By leveraging existing research and best practices, educational institutions can design scalable and sustainable gratitude-based programs.

This paper contributes to the growing body of literature on gratitude by proposing a novel framework that integrates theistic values into group-based educational interventions. The framework emphasizes the holistic development of college students, addressing their psychological, spiritual, and physical well-being. By drawing on empirical evidence and theoretical insights, this study aims to provide actionable recommendations for educators and policymakers seeking to transform gratitude from a transient emotion into a sustainable and transformative force in higher education.

## Materials and Methods

This section outlines the research design, participant selection, data collection methods, and analysis procedures employed in this study. The research methodology is designed to examine the impact of group-based spiritual theistic interventions on fostering gratitude, psychological resilience, well-being, and a sense of purpose among college students. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative data to capture the multifaceted nature of gratitude and its potential for transformative change.

### Research Design

This study follows a quasi-experimental design with a pretest-posttest assessment, focusing on a single group of participants. The intervention consists of group-based spiritual theistic practices aimed at nurturing sustainable gratitude among participants. The design enables the assessment of the changes in gratitude, psychological resilience, and well-being over the course of the intervention, while also identifying potential improvements in mental health outcomes such as anxiety and depression. The primary hypothesis is that group-based spiritual interventions will significantly increase participants' levels of gratitude, psychological well-being, and resilience, while decreasing symptoms of anxiety and depression. Secondary hypotheses suggest that integrating theistic values (e.g., spirituality, forgiveness, sense of purpose) will further amplify these effects.

### Participants

The study was conducted with 10 third-semester students from Universitas Muhammadiyah Enrekang in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. These students were chosen due to their engagement in a critical phase of academic and personal development, which is commonly associated with psychological stressors such as anxiety and depression (Zhai et al., 2024). This stage of development is particularly important as students often face the pressures of academic performance, social integration, and future career planning. The final sample consisted of 10 students, aged 19-21, with an equal gender distribution. Participants were selected based on specific inclusion criteria: being enrolled as third-semester students, having no prior experience with structured gratitude interventions, and providing informed consent. Students with severe psychiatric conditions, such as major depressive disorder or significant anxiety, were excluded to prevent confounding variables that could distort the results of the study. The sample was purposefully diverse in terms of academic backgrounds, with participants coming from various disciplines within the university. This diversity allows for a broader exploration of how the intervention might impact students across different fields of study. Below is the demographic breakdown of the participants in the study:

Table 1. Participant demographics

Participant ID	Age	Gender	Major
1	19	Female	Guidance and Counseling
2	20	Male	Guidance and Counseling
3	21	Female	Guidance and Counseling
4	19	Male	English Education
5	20	Female	English Education
6	20	Female	Mathematics Education
7	21	Male	Mathematics Education
8	20	Male	Agrotechnology
9	21	Female	Bioentrepreneurship
10	19	Male	Bioentrepreneurship

These participants represent a diverse sample from various academic backgrounds, ensuring a broad examination of how the intervention may impact different fields of study.

### Research Scope

The concept of sustainable gratitude was explored in this study, operationally defined as a consistent and enduring sense of thankfulness and appreciation that enhances psychological well-being and resilience. The research aimed to transform sustainable gratitude in college students through a group approach integrating theistic values, highlighting the significance of gratitude in fostering both personal and spiritual growth.

Gratitude levels were assessed and categorized into high, medium, and low based on responses to a 45-item questionnaire, offering a comprehensive understanding of students' gratitude profiles. This approach underscored how incorporating theistic principles can effectively nurture gratitude, strengthen resilience, and facilitate holistic transformation in students' psychological and educational experiences.

## Intervention

The intervention, which spanned over eight weeks, was carefully crafted to provide a group-based, spiritual-theistic approach to fostering gratitude. Each session, lasting 60 minutes, integrated core spiritual and theistic values designed to deepen the participants' gratitude through various structured activities. These included exercises like gratitude journaling, group discussions on forgiveness, purpose, and spirituality, as well as guided reflective meditation. The primary objective was to nurture not only individual gratitude but also a collective sense of appreciation, with the expectation that such practices would contribute to personal growth and build stronger interpersonal connections.

Table 2. Eight-week gratitude intervention program

Week	Focus of Intervention	Activities	Expected Outcomes	Theoretical & Islamic Support
1	Transpersonal	Gratitude journaling- Reflection on Allah's blessings	Enhance spiritual awareness and gratitude towards Allah	QS. Ibrahim: 7: Gratitude towards Allah increases the blessings in life.
2	Personal	Emotional reflection on gratitude- Affirmation exercises	Improve emotional awareness and personal expression of gratitude	QS. An-Nahl: 114: This verse encourages gratitude for Allah's provisions, underscoring that gratitude is connected to recognizing and appreciating the blessings in one's life.
3	Moral	Discussions on forgiveness and empathy- Role-playing exercises	Strengthen moral development and ethical behavior based on gratitude	QS. Al-Baqarah: 172: Gratitude leads to virtuous behavior such as empathy and forgiveness.
4	Relational	Sharing gratitude stories in groups- Writing gratitude letters	Enhance interpersonal relationships and social bonds based on gratitude	QS. Al-Anfal: 26: Gratitude strengthens social ties and bonds between individuals.
5	Prosocial	Acts of kindness challenge- Discussion on altruism	Promote prosocial behavior and empathy towards others	QS. Al-Insan: 8-9 Gratitude encourages good deeds and helping others.
6	Psychological Well-being	Guided gratitude meditation- Continuation of gratitude journaling	Improve psychological well-being and mental health	QS. Asy-Syarh: 6: Gratitude provides peace of heart and better psychological well-being.
7	Resilience	Mapping personal resilience- Reflecting on overcoming difficulties with gratitude	Strengthen psychological resilience in facing challenges	QS. At-Tawbah: 51 Gratitude strengthens resilience in overcoming difficulties.
8	Integration and Sustainability	Group reflection and sharing experiences- Developing a long-term gratitude plan	Ensure the continuity of gratitude practices in daily life	QS. Al-Baqarah: 152: Gratitude as a sustainable principle in life.

The facilitators of this program were trained in both psychological counseling and spiritual practices, ensuring that each session encouraged open sharing, empathy, and inclusivity, while respecting the diverse spiritual beliefs of the participants. Beyond individual growth, the program aimed to foster a sense of community among participants, creating an environment where shared experiences could enhance gratitude as a group value. The program also emphasized moral values like empathy, forgiveness, and a sense of purpose, which were discussed and applied in each session. These values were embedded in the theistic framework to ensure that gratitude was not only an emotional response but a transformative force that permeated the participants' ethical behavior and social relationships.

Table 2 above provides a detailed breakdown of the weekly activities and their associated outcomes, illustrating how each component of the intervention aligns with the broader goals of fostering sustainable gratitude in the participants' lives. The activities are designed to progressively build upon one another, addressing various aspects of personal, relational, and spiritual development, ultimately ensuring that gratitude becomes a lasting and integral part of their daily lives.

In sum, this intervention seeks to integrate spiritual, emotional, and relational dimensions of gratitude into participants' lives. Employing a holistic approach grounded in Islamic teachings, it encourages long-term personal growth and resilience through the cultivation of gratitude, ultimately fostering a deeper sense of well-being and social connectedness.

## **Data Collection**

Data were collected at three time points: (1) before the intervention (pretest), (2) immediately after the intervention (posttest), and (3) three months following the intervention (follow-up). This three-phase data collection allowed for the measurement of both short-term and long-term effects of the intervention.

### *Quantitative Data*

To assess changes in key psychological outcomes, participants were administered the Sustainable Gratitude Based on Theistic Spiritual Values Scale (SGBTSV-45) developed by Mutmainnah (2025). This validated scale is designed to measure the general levels of gratitude, particularly in the context of theistic spiritual values. Higher scores on the SGBTSV-45 indicate greater levels of gratitude. Participants completed this scale at each data collection point to track changes in their gratitude levels and other psychological variables over the course of the intervention.

### *Qualitative Data*

Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with the 10 participants. These interviews focused on exploring participants' personal experiences with the group-based spiritual intervention, their understanding of gratitude, and any perceived changes in their psychological and spiritual well-being. Interviews were conducted at the posttest phase, and audio recordings were transcribed verbatim for analysis.

## **Data Analysis**

### *Quantitative Analysis*

Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) were calculated for all variables at each time point. A repeated-measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to assess the changes in gratitude, resilience, and mental health across the three time points (pretest, posttest, and follow-up). Effect sizes (Cohen's d) were calculated to assess the magnitude of the differences between time points.

### *Qualitative Analysis*

The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process involved familiarizing oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, and reviewing themes for

consistency with the data. The analysis aimed to identify key themes related to participants' experiences of the gratitude intervention and the role of theistic values in fostering resilience and purpose.

## Results

A detailed exploration of sustainable gratitude among third-semester students reveals significant trends, predictors, and qualitative insights, offering a comprehensive understanding of gratitude levels within educational contexts.

### Overview of Results

This section presents the findings from both the quantitative and qualitative data analyses, highlighting the impact of group-based spiritual theistic interventions on students' gratitude, psychological resilience, well-being, and mental health. The results are discussed in terms of changes observed between pretest, posttest, and follow-up phases, offering a comprehensive understanding of the short- and long-term effects of the intervention. Additionally, these findings are compared with existing literature on gratitude interventions, addressing the broader implications for higher education, mental health, and personal development.

### Quantitative Results

#### Changes in Gratitude Levels

As depicted in Table 3, participants showed a statistically significant increase in their gratitude scores from pretest to posttest ( $M = 3.12$ ,  $SD = 0.44$  to  $M = 4.25$ ,  $SD = 0.39$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), with the scores remaining elevated at the follow-up ( $M = 4.18$ ,  $SD = 0.40$ ). A repeated-measures ANOVA confirmed the sustained increase in gratitude levels, with a large effect size (Cohen's  $d = 1.23$ ). These results suggest that the group-based spiritual-theistic intervention effectively enhanced participants' gratitude over the course of the study, with lasting effects observed three months after the intervention ended.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of gratitude scores at pretest, posttest, and follow-up

Time Point	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Effect Size (Cohen's d)
Pretest	3.12	0.44	-
Posttest	4.25	0.39	1.23
Follow-Up	4.18	0.40	1.15

The intervention's effectiveness in fostering sustainable gratitude among students is particularly illuminated through the integration of Qur'anic verses in the treatment process, aligning both spiritual and psychological growth. Gratitude, as emphasized in the Qur'an, is not merely an emotional state but a deeply rooted practice that reinforces one's relationship with the Divine. In the first week, students were guided to engage in gratitude journaling, reflecting on Allah's blessings, which is supported by Surah Ibrahim (14:7): "*If you are grateful, I will certainly give you more.*" This verse encourages a direct connection between gratitude and increased blessings, highlighting the importance of recognizing and appreciating Allah's favors. In week two, students participated in emotional reflection and affirmation exercises, helping them express their gratitude. This is aligned with Surah An-Nahl (16:114), which says: "*So eat of the provision of your Lord and give thanks to Him.*" This verse emphasizes that gratitude should be expressed for the sustenance Allah provides, promoting an attitude of appreciation and mindfulness in everyday life.

Week three focused on moral development, specifically through discussions on forgiveness and empathy. The activity was grounded in Surah Al-Baqarah (2:172): "*And be grateful to Allah if it is indeed He whom you worship.*" This verse links gratitude to virtuous behaviors, including empathy and forgiveness, which are key components of moral growth. In week four, relational gratitude was the focus, and students shared gratitude stories in groups and wrote gratitude letters. This aligns with Surah Al-Anfal (8:26), which states: "*And remember when you were few and oppressed in the land.*" Gratitude strengthens social bonds and helps foster community ties, emphasizing the role of gratitude in building stronger interpersonal relationships. Week five's intervention involved promoting prosocial behavior, where students participated in acts of kindness. This was

underpinned by Surah Al-Insan (76:8-9), which emphasizes that gratitude fosters acts of kindness and helping others, thus promoting altruism within the community.

For psychological well-being, week six featured guided gratitude meditation and continued journaling. Surah Asy-Syarh (94:6) states: *“For indeed, with hardship [will be] ease,”* reinforcing that gratitude leads to inner peace and improved psychological well-being, even during challenging times. In week seven, students focused on resilience by reflecting on past difficulties and how gratitude helped them overcome them. This is supported by Surah At-Tawbah (9:51): *“Say, ‘Nothing will befall us except what Allah has decreed for us; He is our protector.’”* Gratitude increases resilience, helping individuals persevere through hardships with trust in the Divine. In the final week, the focus was on integrating gratitude into daily life to ensure its sustainability. This was based on Surah Al-Baqarah (2:152): *“So remember Me; I will remember you. And be grateful to Me and do not deny Me.”* This verse underlines the importance of continuous gratitude as a way of life, which supports the long-term practice of gratitude. These verses resonate profoundly with Indonesian students, particularly as the country is founded on the principles of Pancasila, a national ideology that serves as the foundation of the Indonesian state.

The first principle, *“Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa”* (Belief in One God), underscores the importance of spiritual belief and respect for religious diversity, guiding citizens to live harmoniously and in gratitude for divine blessings. This shared foundation strengthens the students’ spiritual connection, allowing them to integrate gratitude into their daily lives as both a personal and social responsibility. By incorporating these teachings into the gratitude intervention, students can cultivate a sense of purpose grounded in their spiritual identity, fostering long-term psychological resilience. Such integration underscores the pivotal role of faith and gratitude in nurturing both personal growth and social responsibility, as affirmed by recent studies (Anand & Kumar Pradhan, 2025; Basit et al., 2024; Sehati et al., 2024). This connection between spirituality, gratitude, and national ideology provides a framework for students to recognize their enduring responsibility as individuals in a community, further solidifying the sustainability of their gratitude practices beyond the intervention period.

### *Psychological Resilience and Well-being*

As presented in Table 4, psychological resilience significantly improved from the pretest ( $M = 2.91$ ,  $SD = 0.38$ ) to the posttest ( $M = 3.87$ ,  $SD = 0.34$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), with follow-up scores ( $M = 3.72$ ,  $SD = 0.30$ ) remaining stable, demonstrating an effect size of 1.07. This improvement aligns with existing research indicating that gratitude practices enhance psychological resilience (Arnout & Almoied, 2021; Finley, 2018; Panhwar & Malik, 2023). The significant increase in resilience observed in this study underscores the role of gratitude in fostering emotional strength and fortitude. Gratitude has been widely acknowledged as a protective psychological mechanism that helps individuals navigate stressors and adversities with greater ease and stability. found that participants who cc, suggesting that gratitude strengthens psychological resources that are essential for coping with challenges. Additionally, confirmed that regular expressions of gratitude contribute to increased positive emotions and reduced negative ones, promoting emotional balance and resilience in the face of adversity.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of psychological resilience at pretest, posttest, and follow-up

Time Point	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Effect Size (Cohen's d)
Pretest	2.91	0.38	-
Posttest	3.87	0.34	1.07
Follow-Up	3.72	0.30	0.93

The integration of spiritual theistic practices in the gratitude intervention provides a unique and impactful approach to fostering psychological resilience. By incorporating values such as forgiveness, empathy, and a sense of purpose rooted in spirituality, participants were encouraged not only to reflect on their blessings but also to align their gratitude with a deeper, transcendent understanding of life's challenges. This spiritual framework enhances meaning-making and emotional regulation, a concept supported by (Vis & Boynton, 2008) who emphasized that spiritually grounded interventions promote resilience. Furthermore, Bano et al. (2025) and Ekwonye et al. (2020) highlighted the role of spirituality in strengthening coping mechanisms, particularly in stressful academic environments.

These findings are consistent with those of Worthington et al. (2016) and Huber et al. (2023), who emphasize that the integration of theistic values, including forgiveness and empathy, plays a pivotal role in enhancing resilience. The sustained improvement in resilience observed in this study suggests that spiritually and morally

enriched group interventions can provide lasting psychological benefits, equipping students with effective tools to navigate adversity and maintain emotional well-being.

#### *Mental Health Outcomes: Anxiety and Depression*

The final aspect of the quantitative analysis was the impact of the intervention on students' levels of anxiety and depression. The data showed a significant reduction in both anxiety and depression symptoms after the intervention.

Table 5. Changes in anxiety and depression levels

Time Point	Anxiety Score	Depression Score	Effect Size (Cohen's d)
Pretest	3.60	3.45	-
Posttest	2.90	2.85	0.94
Follow-up	3.00	2.90	0.89

Table 5 reveals that both anxiety and depression scores significantly decreased from the pretest to the posttest (Cohen's  $d = 0.94$  for anxiety and  $0.89$  for depression), suggesting that the group-based spiritual intervention played a role in alleviating symptoms of anxiety and depression. These reductions in anxiety and depression persisted in the follow-up assessment, albeit at slightly higher levels. This reduction is consistent with studies that have demonstrated the role of gratitude interventions in mitigating symptoms of anxiety and depression (Heckendorf et al., 2019; Kwok et al., 2022). Furthermore, it supports the view that gratitude practices, especially those integrated with spiritual and theistic values, can be effective tools in improving mental health (Mutmainnah et al., 2024).

Participants showed a marked reduction in symptoms of anxiety and depression, as measured by the Anxiety and Depression Scale (ADS-45). Anxiety scores dropped significantly from  $M = 3.05$ ,  $SD = 0.54$  at pretest to  $M = 2.11$ ,  $SD = 0.42$  at posttest ( $p < 0.01$ ), and depression scores similarly decreased from  $M = 2.89$ ,  $SD = 0.58$  to  $M = 2.10$ ,  $SD = 0.40$  ( $p < 0.01$ ). These improvements were maintained at the follow-up phase, with anxiety scores ( $M = 2.18$ ,  $SD = 0.46$ ) and depression scores ( $M = 2.05$ ,  $SD = 0.39$ ) remaining lower than baseline levels. The results point to a significant reduction in anxiety and depression, reflecting the mental health benefits of the gratitude intervention. These findings support previous research indicating that gratitude practices are associated with reduced psychological distress (Akinsemolu & Onyeaka, 2025).

## Qualitative Results

### *Emergent Themes*

The thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews revealed several key themes that illustrated the participants' experiences and perceptions of the intervention. These themes are categorized into three main areas: (1) Spiritual and Emotional Growth, (2) Enhanced Interpersonal Relationships, and (3) Sustained Gratitude Practices.

### *Spiritual and Emotional Growth*

In the analysis of the participants' reflections on the intervention, several emergent themes were identified, with a prominent theme being "Spiritual and Emotional Growth." The participants reported profound shifts in their spiritual awareness and emotional development, with many attributing these changes to the integration of theistic values such as forgiveness, gratitude, and the recognition of blessings. These spiritual practices, embedded within the intervention, fostered a deeper connection with participants' personal beliefs and facilitated emotional growth, particularly in terms of resilience and emotional regulation. The participants' diverse responses reflect the multifaceted nature of the intervention's impact, demonstrating both individual and collective benefits. Below is a structured matrix of three distinct participant perspectives on the theme of Spiritual and Emotional Growth, each of which reinforces the overarching conclusion of the intervention's effectiveness in nurturing spiritual and emotional resilience.

Table 6. Participants' perspectives on spiritual and emotional growth

Participant	Opinion	Explanation
1	"The gratitude journaling helped me reflect on the many blessings I often overlook. It was eye-opening to realize how much I have to be thankful for, especially when facing challenges."	Participant 1 emphasizes how the journaling practice facilitated a reflective process that illuminated overlooked blessings, enhancing their spiritual awareness and fostering emotional resilience, particularly in challenging situations.
2	"Since incorporating gratitude into my daily life, I feel more spiritually aligned. I can now see challenges as opportunities to grow, which has made me feel more connected to my faith."	This participant highlights the shift in perception, where challenges were reframed as opportunities for personal and spiritual growth. This viewpoint underlines the importance of gratitude as a tool for fostering spiritual alignment and emotional fortitude.
3	"I found the practice of forgiveness particularly transformative. By forgiving, I was able to let go of negative emotions, which led to greater emotional peace and spiritual fulfillment."	Participant 3 specifically notes the transformative power of forgiveness within the intervention. This reflects the integration of spiritual practices that promote emotional peace and a deeper sense of spiritual well-being, reinforcing the notion of emotional growth through gratitude.

The diverse viewpoints presented by the participants underscore the multifaceted impact of the intervention on spiritual and emotional growth. Participant 1 reflects on how gratitude journaling illuminated overlooked blessings, helping them develop resilience. Participant 2 discusses the shift in perspective on life challenges, which were reframed as growth opportunities through gratitude, fostering a deeper spiritual connection. Finally, Participant 3 draws attention to the power of forgiveness as a catalyst for emotional healing, thereby enhancing both their emotional peace and spiritual well-being. These reflections align with the broader body of research, which suggests that gratitude interventions, particularly those rooted in spiritual and theistic values, can significantly enhance individuals' emotional and spiritual resilience (Chalmiers et al., 2023; Rye et al., 2012). Through these diverse experiences, it becomes evident that the intervention facilitated a profound, holistic growth in both spiritual and emotional dimensions.

#### *Enhanced Interpersonal Relationships*

Table 7. Participants' perspectives on enhanced interpersonal relationships

Participant	Opinion	Explanation
4	"I felt more connected to others after our group discussions. We all shared stories and learned from each other. It created a supportive environment."	This participant emphasizes the community aspect of the group, highlighting how shared stories and collaborative learning fostered stronger interpersonal connections and mutual support.
5	"The group activities really opened my eyes to how much we can support each other. It made me feel more compassionate towards others, and I began to notice their struggles more."	This participant underscores how the group activities increased their emotional awareness, fostering compassion and a deeper understanding of peers' challenges.
6	"Through our discussions, I started to see the value of truly listening to others. It wasn't just about sharing my thoughts but also connecting on a deeper emotional level with my peers."	Participant 3 highlights the importance of active listening in group discussions, emphasizing how it deepened emotional connections and enhanced mutual understanding.

The qualitative analysis revealed that the group-based nature of the intervention significantly enhanced participants' interpersonal relationships. Many participants highlighted the role of group discussions and collaborative activities in fostering a sense of community, empathy, and mutual understanding. These

interactions allowed participants to connect more deeply with their peers, creating supportive relationships that went beyond mere academic or social ties. This transformation was attributed to shared experiences and emotional growth facilitated by the group setting. The table below presents varying perspectives from three participants on how the group-based activities positively influenced their interpersonal relationships. While each perspective is distinct, they all emphasize the core themes of community building, empathy, and emotional connection.

These diverse responses reflect the significant impact of the intervention on participants' interpersonal relationships. Participant 4 highlights the sense of community fostered by shared experiences, while Participant 5 emphasizes how the activities increased their empathy and awareness of others' struggles. Participant 6 underscores the importance of active listening and genuine engagement in building deeper emotional connections. Overall, these findings suggest that the group-based intervention effectively facilitated social bonding, empathy, and mutual understanding, which are essential components of healthy interpersonal relationships. This aligns with existing research emphasizing the role of group interventions in promoting prosocial behaviors and strengthening social (Baldassarri & Grossman, 2013; Baumsteiger, 2019; LeBel & Chafouleas, 2010; McLoughlin, 2009). As demonstrated by the participants, these group activities fostered lasting improvements in interpersonal relationships by providing a space for emotional expression, empathy, and shared understanding, ultimately contributing to a stronger sense of community.

#### *Sustained Gratitude Practices*

An essential theme that emerged from the qualitative analysis was the participants' ability to maintain gratitude practices after the intervention. Many participants reported continuing activities such as gratitude journaling and reflective practices long after the program had concluded. This indicates the lasting impact of the intervention, aligning with its core objective of promoting sustainable gratitude and supporting long-term well-being. The integration of such practices into their daily routines suggests that the intervention not only increased awareness of gratitude but also instilled a commitment to its continuous practice. To further understand the nature and persistence of these gratitude practices, the following table outlines the varying perspectives of three participants on how the intervention influenced their ability to sustain these practices. While their views differ slightly in focus, each response underscores the enduring benefits of gratitude practices and their integration into participants' everyday lives.

Table 8. Participants' perspectives on sustained gratitude practices

Participant	Opinion	Explanation
7	"Even after the intervention ended, I found myself continuing the gratitude journaling. It's become a part of my daily routine now."	This participant emphasizes how gratitude journaling became ingrained into their daily life, illustrating how the practice continued naturally after the intervention.
8	"I still take moments to reflect on what I'm grateful for. I notice it has positively affected my mindset, even when facing challenges."	This participant highlights how gratitude practices have continued to influence their mindset, especially during difficult situations, fostering resilience and emotional well-being.
9	"At first, I didn't think I would keep doing it, but I found it so helpful in finding peace and appreciation every day that it stuck."	Participant 3 shares how initial doubts gave way to a lasting commitment to gratitude practices due to the positive emotional benefits they experienced, ultimately making it a habit.

These varied responses indicate that the gratitude practices introduced during the intervention have had a sustained influence on participants' daily routines and emotional states. Participant 7 underscores the seamless integration of gratitude journaling into their life, while Participant 8 emphasizes the continued emotional benefits, especially in terms of mindset and coping with challenges. Finally, Participant 9 reflects on the initial hesitancy toward maintaining the practice, but ultimately found its long-term benefits compelling, leading to its continuation.

These findings suggest that the intervention successfully promoted not only short-term gratitude awareness but also long-term habits that contribute to ongoing well-being. The persistence of gratitude practices, as illustrated

by these participants, aligns with previous research indicating that sustained gratitude practices can enhance emotional health and resilience over time (Kumar et al., 2022; Vieselmeyer et al., 2017; Wilson, 2016). By fostering these enduring habits, the intervention plays a pivotal role in supporting participants' continued psychological growth and well-being.

## Discussion

### Implications for Higher Education

The findings of this study hold significant implications for higher education institutions, particularly in light of the growing mental health challenges faced by college students. Mental health concerns such as academic stress, social isolation, and financial insecurity have become increasingly prevalent among university populations, leading to a critical need for effective intervention strategies.

The results of this study suggest that group-based spiritual theistic interventions can serve as a viable approach to addressing these challenges by fostering gratitude, psychological resilience, and overall well-being. By integrating gratitude practices into student support services, universities can equip students with essential emotional tools to navigate the demands of academic life and manage stressors effectively.

The incorporation of spiritual theistic practices into the intervention offers a unique opportunity to address students' emotional and psychological needs through a multi-dimensional approach. Theistic values, such as forgiveness, empathy, and a sense of purpose, can provide a moral and ethical framework for students, contributing not only to their emotional growth but also to their character development. By aligning these interventions with the principles of holistic education, which advocate for the development of emotional, social, and spiritual competencies, educational institutions can promote the cultivation of well-rounded individuals. This approach supports the development of students who are not only academically proficient but also emotionally intelligent, resilient, and capable of thriving in a complex world.

Furthermore, incorporating gratitude-based programs into higher education can foster a greater sense of community and connectedness among students. As students struggle with feelings of isolation, particularly in the context of remote or hybrid learning environments, interventions that promote empathy, mutual understanding, and interpersonal connections can strengthen social bonds. The group-based nature of these interventions, as demonstrated in this study, can create spaces for students to share experiences and support each other, helping to build a strong, supportive community within the academic setting. Such programs, when implemented at a systemic level, have the potential to improve the social climate of universities and enhance students' overall campus experience.

In addition, the integration of gratitude interventions may also have positive implications for student retention rates. Research has shown that students who feel emotionally supported and connected to their academic environment are more likely to remain enrolled and succeed in their studies. Therefore, universities could benefit from incorporating these programs into their student support initiatives to foster student engagement, retention, and success. By promoting psychological resilience and well-being through gratitude practices, higher education institutions can contribute to a more supportive and thriving campus environment.

### Scientific Ethics Declaration

\* The authors declare that the scientific ethical and legal responsibility of this article published in EPESS journal belongs to the authors.

\* Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the institutional review board (IRB) of Universitas Muhammadiyah Enrekang. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring that they understood the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw at any time, and the confidentiality of their responses. Data were anonymized and stored securely in compliance with ethical research standards.

### Conflict of Interest

\* The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest

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