

# **Gratitude and Well-being in Emergent Adults**

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# Gratitude and Well-being in Emergent Adults

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## Abstract

### Keywords:

gratitude, well-being, emergent adult

Gratitude is one of the most studied aspects within the field of positive psychology in recent years and the interest in exploring gratitude and its effects on well-being has increased considerably. The period of emerging adulthood, a transitional phase characterized by numerous changes and challenges, poses risks to maintaining well-being, which justifies the importance of researching protective factors such as gratitude. This paper analyzes the relationship between gratitude and well-being among emerging adults, through a systematic review, using the PRISMA methodology, a standardized and rigorous protocol for study selection and 17 relevant studies were included in the analysis. The results clearly indicate a positive and significant relationship between gratitude and well-being, with gratitude having a positive impact on several dimensions of well-being: hedonic and eudaimonic, subjective (life satisfaction, positive and negative affect), and psychological and social well-being. This association is supported by several mediators identified in the literature, with time perspectives being among the most important. The literature reviews align with Fredrickson's Broaden-and-Build Theory, which posits that positive emotions, such as gratitude, contribute to the development of psychological and social resources. This is a significant contribution to the field of positive psychology with an updated and comprehensive synthesis of existing work on gratitude among young adults. This research can be a theoretical framework for future enquiries aimed at developing gratitude-based interventions for students, a group prone to high levels of stress as well as research targeting the entire stage of emerging adulthood, beyond the academic context.

## 1. Introduction

Positive psychology is a branch of psychology officially recognized as such in 1998 by Martin E. P. Seligman, former president of the American Psychological Association (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This marked a paradigm shift that redirected psychologists' and researchers' attention toward identifying and supporting the positive aspects of human beings: qualities, well-being, and human potential. According to Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), positive psychology focuses on the individual's positive personal traits (such as the ability to love, courage, interpersonal skills), positive emotions (e.g., happiness, hope, gratitude), and positive institutions that contribute to the development of human potential (such as compassion, civic spirit, responsibility). The beneficial effects of positive emotions on well-being have been well documented (Gruber et al., 2014; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014).

Gratitude has been studied especially over the last 25 years (Portocarrero et al., 2020), drawing attention in the field of positive emotions research due to its role in connecting with others (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013; McCullough et al., 2002; Wood et al., 2010), forming and maintaining

social relationships (Algoe et al., 2008), resolving interpersonal conflicts and increasing prosocial behavior (Baron, 1984; Kardas et al., 2019; Tsang, 2006), enhancing relationship satisfaction (Algoe et al., 2010; Bono & Sender, 2018), decreasing loneliness (Hittner & Widholm, 2024; Caputo, 2015; Ni et al., 2015; O'Connell et al., 2016), ensuring social support (Xiang et al., 2018), supporting emotional regulation (Boggio et al., 2019; Demichelis et al., 2024), reducing stress (Rash et al., 2011; Demichelis et al., 2024), lowering levels of depression and anxiety (Cunha et al., 2019; Diniz et al., 2023; Petrocchi & Couyoumdjian, 2015), increasing self-esteem (Rash et al., 2011), and enhancing life satisfaction (Salvador-Ferrer, 2017). All of these factors contribute to both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being, integrating psychological, subjective, and social well-being (Czyżowska & Gurba, 2022; Watkins et al., 2014; Hill et al., 2012; McCullough et al., 2002; Tan et al., 2021; Watkins et al., 2003; Wood et al., 2010).

Emerging adulthood, spanning from ages 18 to 29, is recognized as a distinct and often challenging period in life. It is characterized by identity exploration, instability, the feeling of being "in between," self-focus, and a multitude of opportunities. Although it is



a stage of personal growth and development (Arnett, 2023), it is also associated with numerous stressful life events, potential exposure to traumatic events (Galatzer-Levy et al., 2012), and role transitions that increase the risk of psychopathology—making it a period of heightened vulnerability (Duprey et al., 2018; Bali et al., 2022) and impacting the well-being of emerging adults (Sakala et al., 2020). A large portion (approximately 75%) of mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders appear by the age of 24 (Kessler et al., 2005; Kirwan et al., 2024; Wood et al., 2017).

In this context, the relationship between gratitude and well-being becomes particularly relevant. There is a positive and significant association between gratitude and psychological well-being in emerging adults (Bali et al., 2022; Măirean et al., 2018). Gratitude is suggested as a factor that can play a crucial role in improving the well-being of individuals in this age group (Bali et al., 2022). Duprey et al.'s (2018) study linked stressful events to internalizing symptoms through mindfulness. The idea that cognitive resources mediate the relationship between stressful events and well-being supports the potential protective role of gratitude.

Given the high rates of stressful experiences during this life stage and the growing prevalence of psychopathology among emerging adults (Duprey et al., 2018), gratitude, as a cognitive resource, is associated with positive mental health outcomes. It can help manage the psychological stress specific to this developmental stage (Bali et al., 2022). Developmental transitions, which involve significant changes both on an individual level and in social roles and environments, can influence mental health and the risk of psychological disorders (Schulenberg et al., 2004). Recognizing this vulnerability is important for providing adequate support and interventions (Wood et al., 2017).

Gratitude-based interventions, such as writing gratitude journals or verbal expressions of gratitude, are easy to implement (Davis et al., 2015) and can be integrated into educational or community-based programs aimed at emerging adults. These interventions may serve as valuable tools for promoting mental health in universities or other educational settings.

### 3. Method

The study selection process included in this research was carried out according to the PRISMA methodology (Preferred Reporting Items for

Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses), ensuring rigor and transparency in the identification and screening phases of the academic literature. For the search of scientific articles, the PubMed and Web of Science databases were used, as they are recognized for the quality of the academic publications they include. These two databases were chosen based on criteria of scientific relevance (they mainly include peer-reviewed articles), international recognition (they are the most frequently used databases in systematic reviews and meta-analyses), and broad thematic coverage (offering access to research in psychology, education, social sciences, etc.).

The following keywords were applied to the title and abstract of the articles: gratitude OR grateful OR thankful\* OR bless\* OR "gratitude intervention\*" AND wellbeing OR "well-being" OR "well being" OR "psychological well being\*" OR "subjective well being\*" OR "happiness" AND student\* OR college OR university OR undergrad\* OR "emerging adult\*" OR "young adult\*". This resulted in 171 articles from PubMed and 515 from Web of Science, totaling 686 articles.

Next, inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied using the databases' automated tools. Inclusion: studies published in English, within the last 10 years. Exclusion: review articles, meta-analyses, book chapters, or non-peer-reviewed documents. After these filters, 135 articles (27 from PubMed and 108 from Web of Science) were automatically marked as ineligible. Following the removal of duplicate entries (135), the total number of eligible articles was 416. Based on title and abstract evaluation, 132 articles were selected for full-text reading. Of these, 14 articles were inaccessible in full text, despite legitimate academic access attempts (via Google Scholar, ResearchGate, university library, and contacting the authors). These were excluded from the final analysis. The final number of articles included in the systematic review was 17. Inter-rater agreement was high, with a concordance rate of over 90%.

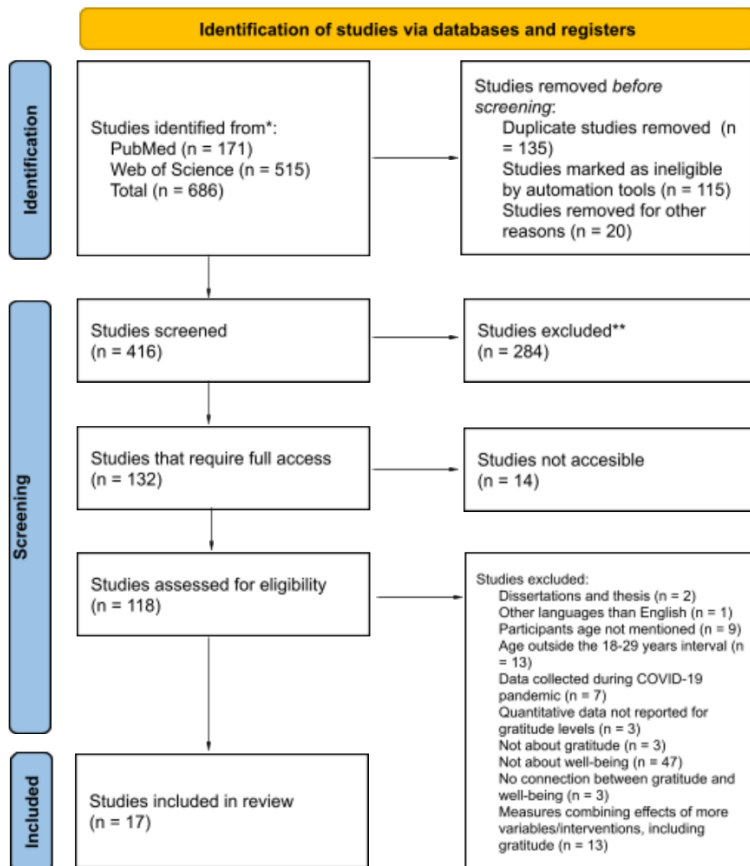
The following inclusion criteria were used to determine final study eligibility: the average age of participants had to be between 18 and 29 years, corresponding to the stage of emerging adulthood; the study had to explicitly focus on gratitude or include it as a variable in a positive psychology intervention, with separately reported results for gratitude; a direct relationship had to exist between gratitude (independent variable) and well-being (dependent variable); studies had to quantitatively measure

gratitude using psychometric scales, enabling direct comparison of results.

Only studies addressing general well-being were included, specifically: (a) Subjective/hedonic well-being (represented through a composite score including life satisfaction, positive and negative affect); (b) Psychological, social, emotional, eudaimonic well-being, and the PERMA model.

**Figure 1**

*PRISMA flow diagram*



This focus was chosen because general well-being encompasses multiple components, offering a more comprehensive view. Studies that focused on only certain aspects of well-being (e.g., just life satisfaction or only affect) were excluded. Additionally, studies that did not compose a subjective well-being score from life satisfaction and affective measures were excluded. Also excluded were studies where gratitude or well-being acted as a mediator or moderator, as the aim was to investigate the direct relationship between the two constructs; Studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic (considered March 11, 2020 – May 5, 2023, according to WHO), due to the psychological functioning in crisis contexts being fundamentally different, marked by instability, social isolation, and major changes; Case studies, dissertations, and doctoral theses, as the goal was to

include only peer-reviewed articles to ensure high quality in the systematic review; Studies that did not report the average participant age, or where the average age exceeded 29 years. The entire selection process is visually summarized in the PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1), highlighting the stages of the process and reasons for article exclusion.

## 4. Results

The 17 selected articles cover a variety of methodologies and international samples, offering a diverse perspective on gratitude and well-being. These studies include quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational, longitudinal, and experimental research, conducted in China (5 studies), Canada (1), India (1), South Africa (1), Taiwan (3), Romania (2), Poland (1), Austria (1), USA (1), and Turkey (1). The average age of participants ranges from 18 to 29 years (minimum mean age: 18.96; maximum mean age: 24.83), reflecting the age range specific to emerging adulthood. The studies addressed various types of gratitude—as a state, trait, practice, emotion, or character strength. Additionally, they explored the frequency of expressing gratitude, what people are grateful for, to whom, and the effects of gratitude on well-being. Among the instruments used to measure gratitude, we identified: Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6) (McCullough et al., 2002), consisting of 6 items (Zhang et al., 2022); 5-item Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ)—an adapted version of GQ-6 for the Chinese population by Chen et al. (2008) (C. Lin, 2015a); Gratitude, Resentment and Appreciation Test – Short Form (GRAT-SF) (Watkins et al., 2003; Măirean et al., 2018); Inventory of Undergraduate Gratitude (IUG) (Lin & Yeh, 2011), which includes 5 dimensions: gratitude toward others, gratitude toward God, appreciation of what one has, awareness and appreciation of hardship, and joy in the present moment (C. Lin, 2015b); VIA-120 Character Strengths Inventory (Institute on Character, 2014), developed by Littman-Ovadia (2015) from the original 240-item version (Hausler, Strecker et al., 2017); Gratitude Scale (Kardas & Yalçın, 2019) — 25 items grouped into 6 dimensions (Kardas et al., 2019); Gratitude Adjective Checklist (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Zhang et al., 2024); Gratitude Evaluation (GE-Si) (Proctor et al., 2009), a single-item assessment focusing on gratitude for life (Balgiu & Sfeatcu, 2021).

In addition to these, several studies used custom-designed scales to measure gratitude and the frequency of its expression or practice (Charzyńska, 2019;

Tolcher et al., 2022). The analyzed studies utilized the following dimensions of well-being:

Hedonic well-being (represented by subjective well-being) measured through: Satisfaction With Life Scale-SWLS (Diener, 1985; Al-Seheel & Noor, 2016); Scale of Positive and Negative Experience - SPANE (Diener et al., 2010; Zhang et al., 2022); Three subscales targeting life satisfaction, positive and negative affect (Diener, 2000; Wang, 2020); 20-item Student Well-Being Scale (Lin & Huang, 2015); Well-Being Inventory-IW (Lin, 2011) which includes life satisfaction and positive emotions (Lin, 2015b).

Eudaimonic, psychological, social, and emotional well-being measured by: Questionnaire for Eudaimonic Well-Being (QEWB) by Waterman et al., 2010 (Mason, 2019); Psychological Well-Being Scale by Ryff (1989) ("International Journal of Early Childhood Special Education", 2020); Psychological Well-Being Scale (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Măirean et al., 2018); Flourishing Scale (Diener et al., 2010; Lin,

2015a); General Well-Being Scale (GWS) (Aldbyani et al., 2025); Mental Health Continuum – Short Form (MHC-SF) (Keyes et al., 2009; Zhang et al., 2022).

General well-being measured through: World Health Organization Well-Being Index (WHO-5) (Tolcher et al., 2022); Comprehensive Inventory of Thriving (CIT; Su et al., 2014; Hausler, Huber et al., 2017), a 54-item instrument that includes both SWB (life satisfaction, positive and negative affect) and PWB (based on Ryff’s model, 1989) (Hausler et al., 2017); Short Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS) (Fung, 2024).

In Table 1, we synthesized the main characteristics of the analyzed studies, such as study type, sample, type of gratitude, targeted dimensions of well-being, and the relationships identified between gratitude and well-being. This table serves as a starting point for the subsequent discussion, aimed at clarifying and highlighting the relationship between gratitude and well-being among emerging adults.

**Table 1**

*Conclusions of selected articles about the connection between gratitude and well-being*

Study	Study Type	Sample (n, gender, age, countries)	Gratitude Type	Gratitude Measurement	Well-being Type	Effect Size
Aldbyani et al. (2025)	Quantitative  (transversal design)	1766 students, 39.52% male, 60.48% female, average age 20.08 years, age range: 18-22 years, China	trait	GQ-6 (Chinese version)	psychological well-being	$\beta = 0.66, p < 0.05$
		325 students, 45.85% male, 54.15% female, average age 19.29 years, age range: 18-30 years, Romania				$r = .58, p < 0.01$
		765 students, 36.2% male, 63.8% female, average age 20.53 years, Poland				
Balgiu & Sfeatcu (2021)	Quantitative  (transversal design)		N/A	Through a single item	subjective well-being  (satisfaction with life, positive and negative affects)	$\beta = 0.34, p < 0.01$  $r = .46, p < 0.01$

					emotional, social, psychological well-being	
Charzyńska (2019)	Quantitative (transversal design)		trait	Through a unique item for each form of gratitude (gratitude towards mother, etc.)		Emotional state: M3 = 13.25, Wald = 47.90; Social: M3 = 18.23, Wald = 52.28; Psychological: M3 = 25.38, Wald = 26.84, p < 0.001
Fung (2024)	Quantitative (transversal design)	903 participants, 12.29% male, 87.71% female, average age 20.56 years, China	trait	GQ-5 (Chinese adapted version of GQ-6)	hedonic and eudaimonic well-being	r = 0.32, p < 0.001
Hausler, Strecker, et al. (2017)	Longitudinal	117 students, 34% male, 66% female, average age 20.3 years (at T1), 21.4 years (at T2), Austria	trait	VIA-120 (German version with 120 items)	subjective well-being (satisfaction with life, positive and negative affects), psychological well-being	Subjective well-being: T1: r = 0.45 T2: r = 0.27 Psychological well-being: T1: r = 0.48 T2: r = 0.41 p < 0.01
Kardas et al. (2019)	Quantitative (transversal design, correlational)	510 students, 29.60% male, 70.40% female, average age 21.5 years, age range: 17-30 years, Turkey	N/A	Gratitude Scale (Kardas & Yalcin, 2019)	psychological well-being	r = 0.596, p < 0.01
Lin (2015a)	Quantitative (transversal design, correlational)	235 students, 38.29% male, 61.71% female, average age 20.04 years, Taiwan	trait	GQ (Chinese form of GQ-6, with 5 items)	psychological and social well-being	$\beta = 0.51$ , p < 0.001
Lin (2015b)	Quantitative (transversal design)	750 students, 35.2% male, 64.8% female, average age 20.31 years, age range: 18-22 years, Taiwan	trait	IUG	subjective well-being (satisfaction with life, positive affects)	$\beta = 0.43$ , p < 0.001
Lin Huang (2015) (Study 2)	Quantitative (transversal design, correlational)	1260 students, 45.1% male, 54.9% female, average age 21 years, age range: 19-25 years, Taiwan	trait	GRAT (Chinese short form with 18 items)	subjective well-being	r = 0.65, p < 0.00

Măirean et al. (2018)	Quantitative (transversal design)	135 students, 24.40% male, 75.60% female, average age 21.35 years, age range: 20-35 years, Romania	trait and state	GRAT - short form	psychological well-being	lack of feeling of deprivation: $\beta = 0.94$ , $p < 0.001$  AS: $\beta = 0.08$ , $p = 0.714$  AC: $\beta = 0.74$ , $p = 0.023$
Mason (2019)	Quantitative (descriptive design, correlational)	198 students, 30.31% male, 69.69% female, average age 20.04 years, South Africa	affect	GQ-6	psychological and social well-being, eudaimonic well-being, subjective well-being	$r = 0.41$ , $p < 0.01$  $r = 0.44$ , $p < 0.01$  $r = 0.54$ , $p < 0.01$
Pragyendu et al. (2022)	Quantitative (transversal design, descriptive, correlational)	146 students, 45.20% male, 54.80% female, average age 20.63 years, age range: 18-24 years, India	trait	GQ-6	psychological well-being	$\beta = 0.36$ , $p < 0.01$ , $r = 0.345$ , $p < 0.01$
Tolcher et al. (2022)	Experimental	T1: 132 students, 25.75% male, 74.25% female,  T2: 108 participants, 24.07% male, 75.93% female, mean age 19 years, age range: 18-24 years, Canada	N/A	GQ-6, a question about the frequency of practicing gratitude	general well-being	Gratitude journal: $d = 0.60$ , $p < 0.01$  Reflectie: $d = 0.37$ , $p < 0.05$  Reflection through mobile app: $d = 0.87$ , $p < 0.05$
Wang (2020)	Quantitative (transversal design)	481 students, 56.96% male, 43.04% female, average age 18.96 years, age range 17-20 years, China	trait	GQ-6	subjective well-being (satisfaction with life, positive and negative affects)	$\beta = 0.25$ , $p < 0.01$
Zhang (2019) Study 2	Study 2: Quantitative (transversal design, correlational)	392 students, 24.1% male, 75.9% female, average age 24.83 years, USA	trait	GQ-6	subjective well-being (satisfaction with life, positive and negative affects)	$\beta = 0.14$ , $p < 0.05$
Zhang et al. (2024)	Quantitative (daily journal design)	243 students, 9% male, 91% female, average age 19.12 years, China	trait and state	GQ-6, GAC	psychological well-being (eudaimonic)	$r = 0.346$ , $p < 0.001$

Zhang et al. (2022)	Quantitative (daily journal design)	363 participants, 15.42% male, 84.58% female, average age 19.77 years, age range: 17-27 years, China	trait and state	GQ-6, GAC	hedonic well-being (satisfaction with life, positive and negative affects), eudaimonic well-being (psychological)	hedonic well-being: $\beta = 1.879$ , $d = 2.200$ (GQ-6) $\beta = 1.772$ , $d = 2.231$ (GAC) eudaimonic well-being: $\beta = 0.856$ , $d = 1.739$ (GQ-6), $\beta = 0.814$ , $d = 1.903$ (GAC) $p < 0.001$
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Note. GQ-6 = Gratitude Questionnaire; GRAT = Gratitude, Resentment, and Appreciation Scale; GAC = Gratitude Adjective Checklist; VIA - 120 = Values in Action Strengths Inventory; IUG = Student Gratitude Inventory; T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2; AS = Simple Appreciation, AC = Appreciation of Others.

The  $\beta$  coefficients in the "Effect Size" section report the direct relationship between gratitude and well-being.

## 5. Discussions

According to our analysis, the relationship between gratitude and well-being is positively associated, with gratitude being an important predictor of well-being. Surpassing inspiration, meaning in life, optimism, hope, life satisfaction, forgiveness of others, self-forgiveness, or forgiveness of situations, gratitude stands out as a strong predictor of well-being. It is positively correlated with subjective well-being, being associated with positive affect and life satisfaction, and negatively correlated with negative affect. Regarding psychological well-being, gratitude is positively associated with dimensions such as environmental mastery, purpose in life, self-acceptance, personal growth, engagement, positive relationships, autonomy, and optimism. These positive associations are also found in the case of both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being.

The relationship between gratitude and well-being is explained through several mediating variables. These include the fulfillment of basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, relatedness), coping styles, stress factors, self-esteem, social support, positive and negative affect, and temporal perspectives (positive reflection on the past and reduced focus on negative events). However, the effect of gratitude on well-being remains significant even when these mediating mechanisms are taken into account. As for the role of gratitude as a moderator, research has not identified significant effects. Trait gratitude has not been shown to moderate the relationship between state gratitude and both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being (Zhang et al., 2022), nor has state gratitude been

shown to moderate the relationship between trait gratitude and psychological well-being (Măirean et al., 2018).

Although most studies are observational, it is important to mention that gratitude-based interventions have proven effective and easy to implement among student populations. This highlights the practical potential of gratitude in psychological interventions aimed at students (Tolcher et al., 2022). Further research in this direction is needed, as this work includes only one experimental study. The literature review reveals a consistently positive association between trait gratitude and well-being. In contrast, state gratitude is less studied, which may represent a research gap. Nevertheless, state gratitude is positively correlated with both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being (Zhang et al., 2022), although further studies are needed to support these findings.

An important issue noted in this analysis—and present in some studies—is the lack of a clear conceptualization of gratitude. Some studies do not explicitly state the theoretical perspective adopted regarding the type of gratitude, which can limit the comparability and interpretation of results across studies (Balgıu & Sfeatcu, 2021; Kardas et al., 2019; Tolcher et al., 2022). In some cases, there is a mismatch between the type of gratitude being examined and the tools used for measurement. For example, some studies claim to investigate gratitude as an affect (Mason, 2019), but use the GQ-6 questionnaire, which measures gratitude as a trait (McCullough et al., 2002).

An interesting but under-researched aspect is the differential impact of gratitude on well-being depending on the target of the gratitude. Research indicates that gratitude toward family has a significant positive effect on well-being, suggesting the existence of meaningful differences depending on the “target” of gratitude. This topic deserves more detailed investigation in future research to better understand the mechanisms through which gratitude contributes to well-being. A strength of this review is the inclusion of studies from diverse cultural contexts—both Western (America, Europe) and Eastern and African. This cultural diversity provides a broader perspective and may contribute to a better understanding of how gratitude and its effects manifest in different cultural settings, which is a significant advantage for the generalizability of the conclusions. Despite the valuable contributions of the current research to the specialized literature, it also presents several limitations. The work focused on general dimensions of well-being, particularly the hedonic and eudaimonic dimensions, while well-being is an umbrella concept that can be defined and approached in various ways. For example, the physical component of well-being was not included in this approach, even though there is research showing that gratitude can positively influence physical health, including cardiovascular function (McCraty, 2004). Another limitation is the presence of only one experimental study included in this systematic review (Tolcher et al., 2022), with the rest of the research being based on participants’ self-reports, which involve a high degree of subjectivity in the results. Additionally, most of the included studies have student participants, which limits the generalizability of the results to the entire emerging adult population, considering that the university phase represents only a part of the emerging adulthood experience.

As future research directions, besides those already mentioned, a systematic review is proposed that would take into account a broader definition of well-being and analyze its various components in relation to gratitude. This review could contribute to a more comprehensive perspective on the effects of gratitude on well-being. Another important aspect is that future studies should include more varied samples, representative of the entire population of emerging adults. Additionally, another research direction could explore potential new mediators in the relationship between gratitude and well-being, such as self-compassion (Wu et al., 2018) or meditation (Rao & Kemper, 2017). These directions could bring a more

nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms through which gratitude supports well-being. Given the rapid pace of technological development, expressing gratitude through photography or digital applications could be an easy way for emerging adults to experience gratitude and could have a significant impact on their well-being. This new direction is promising for future research. In this context, during the period of December 2024 – January 2025, we conducted a study that aimed to enhance student well-being through expressing gratitude via photography. Based on these results, a possible continuation of the research could involve the development of simple and accessible digital interventions tailored to the needs of students—a category often vulnerable and exposed to high levels of stress (Duprey et al., 2018).

## 6. Conclusions and Recommendations

This systematic review highlights the essential role of gratitude in maintaining and enhancing overall well-being—emphasizing the importance of focusing on the positive aspects of life, appreciating people and events in everyday life, interpreting events in a positive manner, recognizing the benefits received from others, feeling a sense of abundance in life, and the absence of a sense of deprivation. All these aspects of gratitude have a significant and positive influence on various dimensions of well-being, such as: Hedonic well-being (subjective well-being): life satisfaction, positive and negative affect, self-confidence, interpersonal harmony, family integrity, mental health, academic achievement; Eudaimonic well-being (psychological well-being): self-acceptance, personal growth, interpersonal relationships, engagement, meaning in life, environmental mastery, autonomy, and optimism; Social well-being.

Gratitude has been shown to be a positive predictor of well-being, with multiple mechanisms through which it acts: self-esteem, coping style, stress factors, temporal perspectives, fulfillment of basic psychological needs, social support, positive and negative affect. The people toward whom gratitude is directed also play an important role in determining well-being, with gratitude directed toward family having a particularly significant contribution.

The research presents some limitations regarding the generalizability of the results. Most studies involve student participants, while university life represents only a narrow phase within the broader period of emerging adulthood. Although the method used—systematic review—provides a broad and integrative

perspective, it may not capture all the nuances of the relationship between gratitude and well-being.

For future research directions, longitudinal and experimental studies are recommended to explore the evolution and dynamics of gratitude and well-being throughout the entire span of emerging adulthood, not just the university years. In terms of application, the results of this research can be used in the development of programs aimed at cultivating gratitude in educational and professional contexts for emerging adults. Additionally, digital applications that promote the practice of gratitude could be effective tools for supporting student well-being, a population often prone to high levels of stress.

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