



Research Article

# Effectiveness of an MPPI: Gratitude-Based Spiritual Group Guidance Program (GSGGP)

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## Abstract

This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of the Gratitude-Based Spiritual Group Guidance Program (GSGGP), a spiritually oriented group guidance process, on gratitude expression, intrinsic spirituality, and sense of meaning and peace. Using a pre-test-post-test control group design among quasi-experimental designs, the study examined an experimental group that received GSGGP and a control group that did not receive any interventions. The experimental group consisted of 44 university students (5 male, 39 female), with participants' ages ranging from 18 to 30 ( $\bar{X} = 21.55 \pm 2.16$ ). The study findings revealed subtle differences in post-test gratitude expression scores between the groups, suggesting a potential impact of the intervention. Intra-group analysis within the experimental group showed statistically significant increases in gratitude expression and intrinsic spiritual experiences. Moreover, the experimental group exhibited enhancements in dimensions of spiritual well-being, including peace-related experiences and the perception of meaning. Overall, the GSGGP demonstrates potential to influence various dimensions of gratitude expression, internal spirituality, and spiritual well-being, offering insights into its multifaceted impact and role in personal growth.

## Keywords:

Group guidance • Gratitude intervention • Quasi-experimental design • Spiritual guidance

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Gratitude can be defined as expressing gratitude to God (Göcen, 2014), expressing thanks for perceived goodness (Kardaş & Yalçın, 2018), creating awareness of the value of a situation that is important and meaningful for oneself, and experiencing emotions of gratitude for a kindness received (Akın & Yalnız, 2015). Scientific studies and interventions related to gratitude are significantly influenced by the research conducted by Robert Emmons and his colleagues in the early 2000s, sponsored by the John Templeton Foundation. Emmons defines gratitude as a two-stage process: (1) recognizing the attainment of a positive outcome and (2) acknowledging an external source as the origin of this positive outcome. Moreover, Emmons has developed interventions to enhance gratitude, including maintaining a gratitude journal and conveying gratitude messages (as cited in Allen, 2018).

Gratitude contributes to emotional, physical (Uzun & Karataş, 2021), social, and psychological well-being. It brings about increased joy and vitality in individuals (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2018), fostering healthier individuals by enabling forgiveness, positive social behaviors, cultivating optimistic thoughts, and reducing depression risk over time through positive cognitive patterns. Moreover, it aids in diminishing narcissistic tendencies, enhancing problem-solving skills, and shaping positive perceptions of the world (Başerer, 2018). Consequently, gratitude facilitates awareness of the positive and beautiful aspects of life and nurtures the development of gratitude by allowing individuals to experience and appreciate such moments (Carr, 2016).

### **Spiritual Guidance and Gratitude**

Spirituality is defined as an active and passive process that unveils the innate power within an individual's life and beyond existence, fostering inclinations toward intuition, knowledge, creativity, and understanding (Göka, 2021). This inclination in spirituality propels individuals towards intuition, knowledge, creativity, and understanding (Ekşi, 2022). The terms spiritual care, spiritual counseling, spiritual guidance and spiritually oriented counseling or psychotherapy can sometimes be used interchangeably and disambiguating them robustly is beyond the scope of this paper. We will prefer the term spiritual guidance as the broadly delineated area of practice that is primarily focused on the spiritual domain. Spiritual guidance is understood as a process that potentially assists individuals in their faith journeys, crisis scenarios, and significant transitions, potentially contributing to their exploration of existential inquiries and adaptive problem-solving (Toprak, 2022; Ağılkaya, 2020). This guidance centers on the potential clarification of values pertaining to one's worldview and ethical standpoints, potentially influencing choices and identity formation (Altaş & Köylü, 2017). The core intentions encompass facilitating the exploration of one's inherent divine potential, aiding individuals in self-discovery and self-awareness, accompanying them as they seek meaning in the face of life's challenges, promoting autonomy and accountability within counseling, and

reinforcing personal agency (Ekşi & Kaya, 2016). This approach's potential impact lies in its potential to encourage a more holistic understanding of self and worldview. This domain involves theological, psychological, psychiatric, and psychological counseling aspects, potentially aiming to address physical, cognitive, psychological, and spiritual dimensions to unearth intrinsic potential (Ceylan & Özeydin, 2020). Spiritual guidance might evoke a sense of shared humanity by fostering unity and cohesion across diverse interactions, possibly serving as a “navigational aid” within the realm of spiritual exploration (Yasa, 2017).

Gratitude holds a spiritual/religious foundation as well, as viewed through the lens of spirituality. It assesses the individual's relationship between themselves, gratitude, transcendent self, and divine power. Spiritual gratitude is examined in the transpersonal psychology literature, contributing meaningfully to an individual's life (Kaplaner & Ekşi, 2020). Consequently, it instills a lasting sense of gratitude within devout individuals who find a sacred presence in all aspects of life (Davis et al., 2023). The sentiment of gratitude in religious contexts is a fundamental state that shapes the relationship between the individual and the Divine.

According to Krause et al. (2014), gratitude is associated with spirituality, along with various character strengths. For those who believe that God created both them and this unique life, expressing gratitude for everything seen becomes an embodiment of their faith. Gratitude often operates as a discipline with supernatural connotations. For instance, in theistic religions, where God is perceived to have created everything for humanity's benefit, gratitude is closely intertwined with spirituality. Expressing gratitude to God has been identified as linked to an individual's religiosity and has been found to enhance psychological benefits, contributing to well-being among religious individuals. Gratitude positively impacts life satisfaction, well-being, and happiness levels, emphasizing the significance of valuing the present moment and even improving life satisfaction during challenging times. The emotion of gratitude influences happiness and well-being positively by encouraging individuals to make positive appraisals of themselves and value their life experiences (Ayten, 2022).

### **Positive Psychology Interventions**

Positive psychology is a discipline that contributes to individuals' connection with life and their advancement from their current position to a better one by focusing on their strengths (Demir & Türk, 2020). One of the most significant contributions of positive psychology lies in its interventions. Positive psychology interventions aim to cultivate positive emotions, enhance well-being, foster meaningful relationships, and develop strengths (Carr, 2016). These interventions encompass three crucial dimensions: (1) a focus on cultivating positive emotions, (2) shifting from weakness and vulnerability to a state of flourishing, and (3) structuring the intervention to yield

positive outcomes (Eryılmaz, 2017). Positive psychology interventions serve five fundamental functions: (1) displaying acts of kindness, (2) expressing gratitude, (3) savoring positive experiences, (4) endorsing the meaning and purpose of life, and (5) nurturing positive relationships (Schueller & Park, 2014).

Gratitude is closely tied to acts of kindness and is associated with an increased sense of well-being. Practicing gratitude involves expressing appreciation, focusing on fortunate circumstances, and fully enjoying experiences. These practices can help overcome barriers to accepting things as they are, fostering a positive outlook and embracing the present moment. Gratitude also serves as an effective coping strategy, allowing individuals to find positive meanings in challenging events. Positive psychology interventions play a crucial role in enhancing well-being, promoting positive emotions, and encouraging positive behaviors (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009).

In the realm of positive psychology, a new strand of multi-component interventions is designed to enhance the positive aspects of two or more relevant components, with the aim of reducing negative thought patterns rather than the one-component classical interventions (Gallardo & Belled & Alsinet, 2022). It's important to distinguish multi-component positive psychology interventions from approaches that focus on a single intervention (Hendriks, 2019).

This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of a group-focused spiritually oriented guidance process called the Gratitude-Based Spiritual Group Guidance Program (GSGGP) on gratitude expression, intrinsic spirituality, and sense of meaning and peace. The GSGGP is not only spiritually guided but can also be viewed as a gratitude-focused multi-component positive psychology intervention due to the interaction between gratitude and the spiritual domain. This study will test the feasibility of implementing gratitude interventions in more comprehensive programs with a multi-component approach and a spiritual focus.

## **Method**

### **Research Model**

The present study aimed to test the effectiveness of the GSGGP. The experimental group and the control group were assessed in pre-tests and the experimental group received GSGGP and the control group did not receive any interventions. This study has the characteristics of a pre-test-post-test control group design among quasi-experimental experimental designs (Creswell, 2009). Table 1. summarizes the stages of the study. In the pre-test and post-tests the control and the experimental groups were both assessed on measures of gratitude expression, spiritual peace and meaning and intrinsic spirituality. The experimental group received GSGGP whereas there was no intervention in the control group.

**Table 1.**  
*Design of the study*

Groups	Pre-test	Intervention	Post-test
Experimental	Gratitude Expression Scale	GSGGP	Gratitude Expression Scale
Control	Spiritual Well-Being Scale (meaning and peace subscales) Intrinsic Spirituality Scale	No intervention	Spiritual Well-Being Scale (meaning and peace subscales) Intrinsic Spirituality Scale

### **Study Group**

The study was conducted on university students. All participants were selected from undergraduate students from different departments at Ondokuz Mayıs University in the 2022–2023 Spring Term. These students were all staying in dormitories due to the fact that their education was switched to distance education due to the earthquake disaster in Kahramanmaraş on the 6<sup>th</sup> of February, 2023. The following inclusion and exclusion criteria for selecting participants are presented in Table 2. Adherence to the criteria was ensured through the application forms as well as in the informed consent interviews.

**Table 2.**  
*Inclusion and exclusion criteria*

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being an undergraduate student</li> <li>• Volunteering to participate in research</li> <li>• Filling information form the scales</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actively seeking psychological help for an important problem at the time of the research</li> <li>• Having experienced a significant loss in the past 6 months</li> <li>• Absence: In the experimental group, those who did not attend three or more sessions were excluded from the experimental review; in the control group, those who did not fill out the post-test form were excluded</li> </ul>

The demographic characteristics of the students assigned to the experimental and control groups are given in Table 3. As seen in Table 3, the participants coded K16, and K17, dropped from the experimental group by not attending the sessions, and K29, K48, and K49 from the control group dropped out from the study for not completing the post-tests, following the exclusion criteria. Their data is excluded from the analyses, yet their demographics are presented in Table 3. There were 24 participants (4 females, 20 males) in the experimental group and 20 (1 male and 19 females) participants in the control group. Ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 30 ( $\bar{X} = 21.55 \pm 2.16$ ). GPA intervals and perceived income levels of families were also presented for each participant in Table 3.

**Table 3.**  
*Demographic Characteristics of Participants*

Experimental Group						Control Group					
ID	Gender	Age	Program	GPA Interval	Perc. In-come Level	ID	Gender	Age	Program	GPA Interval	Perc. Income Level
K1	M	24	Medical Doc. and Secretariat	3.00 - 4.00	High	K10	F	23	Public Rel. and Promotion	3.00 - 4.00	Mid.-High
K11	M	18	First Aid and Emer. Care	2.00 - 2.99	High	K20	F	22	Law	3.00 - 4.00	Mid.-High
K12	M	20	English Lang. and Literature	1.00 - 1.99	Low-Mid.	K21	F	21	Nursing	3.00 - 4.00	Mid.-High
K13	M	20	Journalism	2.00 - 2.99	Mid.-High	K22	F	21	Medical Doc. and Secretariat	3.00 - 4.00	Low
K14	M	23	History	3.00 - 4.00	Low	K23	F	21	Nursing	2.00 - 2.99	Low-Mid.
K15	M	23	Public Rel. and Promotion	3.00 - 4.00	Mid.-High	K28	F	19	History	1.00 - 1.99	Mid.-High
K18	M	20	Call Center Services	2.00 - 2.99	Low-Mid.	K30	F	22	Journalism	3.00 - 4.00	Low
K19	M	23	Radio TV Cinema	3.00 - 4.00	Low-Mid.	K32	F	20	Medical Doc. and Secretariat	1.00 - 1.99	Mid.-High
K2	M	21	Computer Programming	2.00 - 2.99	Mid.-High	K33	F	21	Justice	2.00 - 2.99	Mid.-High
K24	M	18	Inf. Security Technology	3.00 - 4.00	Low-Mid.	K36	F	23	Journalism	2.00 - 2.99	Mid.-High
K25	M	22	History	2.00 - 2.99	Mid.-High	K37	F	23	Medical Laboratory	2.00 - 2.99	Low-Mid.
K26	M	27	History	2.00 - 2.99	High	K38	F	21	Medical Doc. and Secretariat	2.00 - 2.99	Low-Mid.
K27	M	21	Public Rel. and Promotion	2.00 - 2.99	Mid.-High	K40	F	22	Nursing	3.00 - 4.00	Mid.-High
K3	M	21	Communication and Design	2.00 - 2.99	Low-Mid.	K41	F	22	Elderly Care Technician	3.00 - 4.00	Mid.-High
K31	M	22	History	2.00 - 2.99	Mid.-High	K42	M	20	Mechanics	2.00 - 2.99	Mid.-High
K34	M	20	Inf. Security Technology	2.00 - 2.99	Mid.-High	K43	F	20	Radio TV and Cinema	2.00 - 2.99	Mid.-High
K35	F	30	Nursing	3.00 - 4.00	High	K45	F	21	Public Rel. and Promotion	3.00 - 4.00	Mid.-High
K39	F	21	Medical Secretariat	1.00 - 1.99	Mid.-High	K7	F	18	History	2.00 - 2.99	Mid.-High
K4	M	21	History	3.00 - 4.00	Mid.-High	K8	F	21	Science Education	3.00 - 4.00	Mid.-High

**Table 3.**  
*Demographic Characteristics of Participants*

Experimental Group					Control Group						
K44	M	19	Inf. Security Technology	2.00 - 2.99	High	K9	F	23	Public Rel. and Promotion	3.00 - 4.00	Low-Mid.
K46	M	22	Radio TV Cinema	3.00 - 4.00	Low-Mid.	K29*	F	22	Industrial Engineering	3.00 - 4.00	Mid.-High
K47	M	22	Journalism	2.00 - 2.99	Mid.-High	K48*	F	24	Food engineering	3.00 - 4.00	Mid.-High
K5	M	22	History	2.00 - 2.99	Low-Mid.	K49*	F	21	Nursing	3.00 - 4.00	Mid.-High
K6	M	24	Radio, TV and Cinema	3.00 - 4.00	Mid.-High						
K16*	F	21	Public Rel. and Promotion	3.00 - 4.00	Mid.-High						
K17*	F	21	Justice	2.00 - 3.00	Low-Mid.						

\*Dropouts

### Data Collection Tools

**Information form.** An information form accompanied by an informed consent form prepared by the researchers was used to collect data on the gender, age, grade level and GPA interval. Also, a preferred contact e-mail was collected in order to plan the sessions and measurements. The same forms were used for both control and the experimental group.

The spiritual well-being scale (FACIT-Sp). The Spiritual Well-being Scale, developed by Peterman et al. (2002), provides a measure of spiritual dimensions of “peace,” “meaning,” and “faith.” Respondents rate 12 items on a 0 to 4 scale, with subscale scores ranging from 0 to 16 and a total score spanning 0 to 48, reflecting spiritual well-being. The original validation study by Peterman et al. established construct validity and acceptable levels of internal consistency, with Cronbach’s alpha coefficients of 0.81 to 0.83. Aktürk et al. (2017) adapted the scale for Turkish use, validating the original factor structure through exploratory factor analysis. Their study reported Cronbach’s alpha of .81 for the “peace” subscale and .78 for the “meaning” subscale. This study solely utilized the “peace” and “meaning” subscales since the faith subscale had items related to illness conditions, and the present study addressed an undergraduate sample.

**The gratitude expression scale:** The Gratitude Expression Scale developed by Araz and Erdugan (2017) evaluates gratitude expression across three subscales: Verbal Expression (5 items), nonverbal expression (3 items), and other-focused expression (3 items), constituting a total of 11 items. Respondents employ a four-category Likert scale (1 = never, 2 = sometimes, 3 = often, 4 = always) to rate items, where higher

scores reflect heightened frequency of gratitude expression. The findings reveal a three-component, single-factor structure. Confirmatory factor analysis confirmed model fit ( $\chi^2 = 77.45$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.03$ , CFI = .97, GFI = .96, AGFI = .94, RMSEA = .05, SRMR = .05). Each item exhibited significant factor loadings. The reliability analysis yielded consistent Cronbach's alpha values: .80 for the total scale, .74 for verbal expression, .72 for nonverbal expression, and .70 for other-focused expression.

**Intrinsic spirituality scale.** Intrinsic Spirituality Scale was originally developed by Hodge (2003) and subsequently adapted into the Turkish language by Ekşi et al. (2018). This scale encompasses a single factor and comprises 6 items, utilizing a rating scale from 0 to 10. The expressions corresponding to each value differ across the questions. To test its validity, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted, which affirmed the scale's preservation of its original factor structure within the context of Turkish adult respondents, demonstrating satisfactory validity, as indicated by favorable fit indices ( $\chi^2/df = 2.285$ , CFI = .994, NFI = .989, NNFI = .977, GFI = .979, IFI = .994, SRMR = .061, RMSEA = .075). A concurrent validity study revealed a significant correlation between the Intrinsic Spirituality Scale scores and the transcendence subdimension of the Spiritual Well-being Scale. Furthermore, an assessment of reliability using Cronbach's alpha coefficient yielded a robust value of .96 for the entire scale (Ekşi et al., 2018).

### **Data Collection**

Firstly, official permissions were acquired through collaboration with university dormitory administrations. Announcements about employment opportunities within the dormitories were delivered through both in-building voice announcements and dedicated social media groups. Concise study details were provided along with the link to the Google Docs application. Upon receiving completed application forms, communication was initiated with prospective volunteers. The allocation process for the experimental and control groups was based on feedback obtained through phone calls and informed consent. Since there weren't enough participants for a randomized selection, a non-randomized allocation method was employed. A pre-defined timeline was developed to facilitate the implementation of scaling procedures and sessions for both the experimental and control groups. For the experimental group, pre-test assessments were integrated into the informed consent interviews, while post-test assessments were scheduled for the final session. For maximum flexibility and usability, all assessments in both groups were conducted using Google Docs. This approach was chosen to enhance the overall adaptability of the assessment process.

### **Data Analysis**

Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was utilized to assess the significance of variations between pairs of temporal measurements. Additionally, the Mann-Whitney U test was



employed to evaluate whether noteworthy disparities existed in pre-test and post-test scores when comparing the experimental and control groups. The effect size for notable disparities identified in the Mann-Whitney U Test and Wilcoxon Signed Rank Tests was computed using the formula  $r =$ , as outlined in Pallant (2011). The interpretation of effect sizes followed the categorization established by Cohen (1988). To conduct the analysis, the IBM SPSS 21 (IBM Corp., 2012) software package was employed.

### **Compliance with Ethical Standards**

Participants voluntarily engaged in all the research processes, providing thorough informed consent. In the experimental group, clear verbal explanations about GSGGP were given, followed by detailed written consent. Privacy was maintained using a manual blinded coding technique to conceal participant identities. Data were exclusively employed for research purposes, with actual names removed from files. The review conducted prior to the implementation by the Kütahya Dumlupınar University Social and Human Ethics Board found no ethical concerns regarding the study's scientific research ethics. (Meeting Number: 2022/08, Date: 05.10.2022).

### **GSGGP Intervention**

The Gratitude-Based Spiritual Group Guidance Program (GSGGP) can be classified both as a group spiritual guidance process and as a multi-component positive psychology intervention (MPPI). The program consisted of six sessions (each 60 min.) heavily relying on gratitude work but also exploring intersections with spirituality and personal growth. GSGGP's final protocol draft underwent meticulous analysis by a group of esteemed experts, each contributing insights from various disciplines. Notably, two experts specialized in Psychological Counseling and Guidance, both holding Ph.D.s. One of them is an Assistant Professor, and the other is an Associate Professor, both with expertise in Positive Psychology and practical experience in counseling. In addition to these experts, a Full Professor specialized in religious education provided invaluable faith-based insights. Another Full Professor, specialized in sociology of religion, enriched the analysis with a sociocultural context. Each expert engaged with the embedded structured evaluation form in the initial protocol, which was designed to gather targeted feedback on the protocol's content and structure. The interdisciplinary team's collaboration facilitated a thorough evaluation, encompassing psychological, educational, faith-related perspectives, and embedded protocol feedback. The authors carefully refined the GSGGP based on expert critiques and suggestions.

### **Outline of GSGGP**

*Session 1: Orientation to Spiritual Guidance Group.* The initial session aimed to cultivate a comprehensive understanding among group members, establish group

norms, provide insights into the group dynamics, and share essential details about the group. Through an ice-breaking activity (Voltan, 2021), participants were introduced to one another and encouraged to interact. Moreover, participants were prompted to reflect on the multifaceted concept of “gratitude” and its connections. The session concluded with participants being invited to share their contemplations about “gratitude,” paving the way for a feedback evaluation process.

*Session 2: Concept of Gratitude.* The second session revolved around grasping the intrinsic essence of gratitude. Participants explored the intricate components of gratitude, including thankfulness, recognizing blessings, setting intentions, and expressing gratitude. Diverse forms of expressing gratitude were discussed to foster a multifunctional perspective. The session incorporated materials such as social media thank-you expressions and the story “Dervish’s Remedy” (as retold by Şenyıldız, 1998) to provide depth. Engaging in group discussions enabled participants to share their insights and experiences related to gratitude and its influence on their functioning.

*Session 3: Relationship between Spirituality and Gratitude.* The third session aimed to illuminate the symbiotic relationship between spirituality and gratitude, encompassing defining spiritual guidance, examining both its affirmative and challenging dimensions, and addressing the limits of its application. Participants were encouraged to recognize spiritual encounters in their daily lives and to recall moments of engagement in gratitude. A thought-provoking material entitled “What does an economist say about 300 hamburgers?” (Schwartz, 2019) is used to stimulate understanding of the labor and resources spent on things that seem as ordinary on a superficial look. A “backward calendar page activity” (Voltan-Acar, 1986) initiated discussions that underscored the functional aspects of spirituality and gratitude integration.

*Session 4: Self-Transcendence, Self-Awareness.* The fourth session transitioned towards exploring self-transcendence and self-awareness as catalysts for holistic positive functioning. Participants delved into the multifaceted nature of these concepts, developing the ability for enriched interpersonal interactions, future-oriented thinking, and spiritual reflection. Activities and discussions facilitated the expansion of self-perception boundaries, ensuring a broader and more adaptive self-awareness. Furthermore, participants engaged in the documentary “Beating Cancer” and shared reflections. Before closure next session was introduced with reference to two Hadiths that highlighted the importance of showing gratitude to God and others.

*Session 5: Gratitude and Spirituality.* This session encouraged the cultivation of gratitude as a catalyst for enriched functional capacities. Concepts such as loyalty, appreciation, and attachment were explored through discussions, aiming to foster an enriched functional landscape. Activities like the “Love Bombing” (Voltan, 1980) exercise were implemented to amplify the functional aspects of gratitude. Participants

watched the documentary “Guardian of Angels” (Altay, 2018) and subsequently participated in the Gratitude Letter activity, emphasizing gratitude’s contribution to holistic positive functioning.

*Session 6: Conclusion with Focus on Putting Gratitude Skills into Practice.* The final session focused on the practical application of gratitude skills to enhance holistic positive functioning in daily life. Participants were encouraged to reflect on the comprehensive impact of interventions and to share their experiences in terms of enhanced functional capacities. By maintaining Gratitude Journals and writing Gratitude Letters, participants were equipped with tools to augment their functional experiences, promote positive functioning, and nurture gratitude and thankfulness towards diverse aspects of life. The session marked the conclusion of the program, signaling the integration of functional gratitude into participants’ ongoing journeys.

## Results

The Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was utilized to test intra-group differences in pre-test and post-test scores. The results, as presented in Table 5, provide valuable insights into the impact of the intervention across the pre-test and post-test interval.

**Table 4.**  
*Intra-group differences: Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test Results*

Measure Group		n	<i>M</i> ± <i>SD</i>			Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Tests	
			Pre-test	Post-test		<i>T1-T2</i>	
						Z	p
Gratitude Expression	Verbal expression	Exp.	24	16.67 ± 2.65	17.96 ± 2.99	-2.071	<b>.038*</b>
		Cont.	20	17.65 ± 2.00	18.05 ± 2.21	-1.044	.296
	Nonverbal expression	Exp.	24	9.13 ± 2.15	10.58 ± 2.15	-3.117	<b>.002**</b>
		Cont.	20	10.25 ± .45	10.40 ± 1.70	-.360	.719
	Other-focused expression	Exp.	24	8.25 ± 2.47	9.88 ± 2.58	-2.901	<b>.004**</b>
		Cont.	20	8.55 ± 1.54	8.90 ± 2.02	-.992	.321
	Gratitude Total	Exp.	24	34.04 ± 6.48	38.41 ± 7.22	-2.665	<b>.008*</b>
		Cont.	20	36.45 ± 4.00	37.35 ± 5.09	-1.038	.299
Intrinsic Spirituality Cont.	Exp.	24	30.09 ± 7.67	36.67 ± 13.51	-1.993	<b>.046*</b>	
	Cont.	20	34.86 ± 5.49	37.25 ± 13.30	-.498	.619	
Spiritual Well-Being	Peace	Exp.	24	9.33 ± 3.33	11.75 ± 2.74	-2.904	<b>.004**</b>
		Cont.	20	8.60 ± 3.02	9.60 ± 3.37	-1.865	.062
	Meaning	Exp.	24	9.25 ± 2.81	12.54 ± 2.81	-3.125	<b>.002**</b>
		Cont.	20	9.05 ± 2.84	9.70 ± 3.21	-.950	.342

\* p < .05, \*\* p < .005

When Table 4 is examined, it is seen that in the context of gratitude expression, the analysis revealed noteworthy findings across different subcategories. In the experimental group, verbal expression demonstrated a significant difference between

pre-test and post-test scores ( $Z = -2.071, p = .038, r = .375$ ), indicating an increase in verbal gratitude expression. Conversely, no significant difference was observed in the control group ( $Z = -1.044, p = .296, r = -0.23$ ). Similarly, nonverbal expression exhibited significant changes in the experimental group ( $Z = -3.117, p = .002, r = -0.57$ ), reflecting an elevation in nonverbal gratitude expression, while no significant difference emerged in the control group ( $Z = -0.360, p = .719, r = .15$ ). For other-focused expression, the experimental group displayed a significant difference ( $Z = -2.901, p = .004, r = .53$ ), while the control group exhibited no significant change ( $Z = -0.992, p = .321, r = -0.231$ ). Moreover, the gratitude total revealed a significant difference in the experimental group ( $Z = -2.665, p = .008, r = .45$ ), indicative of an overall increase in gratitude, with no significant variation in the control group ( $Z = -1.038, p = .299, r = .20$ ).

Turning to intrinsic spirituality, the experimental group showed a significant difference ( $Z = -1.993, p = .046, r = -0.362$ ) in pre-test and post-test scores, reflecting heightened intrinsic spiritual experiences. In contrast, the control group did not display a significant change ( $Z = -0.498, p = .619, r = -0.090$ ). Regarding spiritual well-being dimensions, the peace scores exhibited a significant difference in the experimental group ( $Z = -2.904, p = .004, r = -0.530$ ), signifying enhanced peace-related experiences, whereas no significant change was observed in the control group ( $Z = -1.865, p = .062, r = -0.341$ ). For the meaning dimension, the experimental group demonstrated a significant difference ( $Z = -3.125, p = .002, r = -0.571$ ), indicating an elevated sense of meaning, while the control group did not exhibit significant variation ( $Z = -0.950, p = .342, r = -0.173$ ).

The Mann-Whitney U Test was employed to systematically investigate potential inter-group discrepancies in pre-test and post-test scores, serving as the focal point of comparison between the experimental and control groups. The results, as presented in Table 5, provide valuable insights into the impact of the intervention across various dimensions.

**Table 5.**  
Inter-group differences: Mann Whitney U Test Results

Measure	Pre-test						Post-test				
	Group	n	$M \pm SD$	U	Z	p	$M \pm SD$	U	Z	p	
Gratitude Expression	Verbal Expression	Exp.	24	16.67 ± 2.65	185.50	-1.301	.193	17.96 ± 2.99	208.00	-.783	.434
		Cont.	20	17.65 ± 2.00				18.05 ± 2.21			
	Nonverbal Expression	Exp.	24	9.13 ± 2.15	170.00	-1.686	.092	10.58 ± 2.15	204.50	-.878	.380
		Cont.	20	10.25 ± 1.45				10.40 ± 1.70			
	Other-focused expression	Exp.	24	8.25 ± 2.47	215.50	-.587	.557	9.88 ± 2.58	174.50	-1.577	.115
		Cont.	20	8.55 ± 1.54				8.90 ± 2.02			
	Gratitude Total	Exp.	24	34.04 ± 6.48	183.50	-1.335	.182	38.41 ± 7.22	175.00	-1.545	.122
		Cont.	20	36.45 ± 4.00				37.35 ± 5.09			
Internal Spirituality	Exp.	24	30.08 ± 10.36	159.50	-1.900	.057	36.67 ± 13.51	239.50	-.012	.991	
	Cont.	20	34.85 ± 1.90				37.25 ± 13.30				
Spiritual Well-Being	Peace	Exp.	24	9.33 ± 3.33	232.50	-.178	.858	11.75 ± 2.74	122.50	-2.802	<b>.005*</b>
		Cont.	20	8.60 ± 3.02				9.60 ± 3.37			
	Meaning	Exp.	24	9.25 ± 2.81	217.50	-.534	.594	12.54 ± 2.81	144.50	-2.275	<b>.023*</b>
		Cont.	20	09.05 ± 2.84				9.70 ± 3.21			

\* p < .05

Notably, the initial pre-test comparisons did not reveal statistically significant differences between the two groups (all  $p > .05$ ). It is worth noting that the control group exhibited marginally higher pre-test scores across dimensions, although these variations did not achieve statistical significance. This aspect may have influenced the non-significant findings observed in some dimensions during the post-test phase. As the study progressed, the post-test evaluations began to unveil distinctive trends. Particularly, the experimental group showcased notable enhancements in dimensions of “peace” and “meaning.” In these dimensions, the experimental group’s post-test means exceeded those of the control group. For instance, the experimental group’s post-test mean of 11.75 ( $\pm 2.74$ ) in “peace” was higher than the control group’s mean of 9.60 ( $\pm 3.37$ ;  $U = 122.50$ ,  $Z = -2.802$ ,  $p = .005$ ). Similarly, in the “meaning” dimension, the experimental group’s post-test mean of 12.54  $\pm 2.81$  surpassed the control group’s mean of 9.70 ( $\pm 3.21$ ;  $U = 144.50$ ,  $Z = -2.275$ ,  $p = .023$ ). Other scores of “verbal expression,” “nonverbal expression,” “other-focused expression,”

and “gratitude total” exhibited non-significant post-test differences, potentially influenced by the control group’s slightly higher pre-test scores.

### **Discussion**

The objective of the study was to investigate the potential impact of GSGGP on gratitude expression, internal spirituality, and spiritual well-being within two distinct groups: an experimental group and a control group. The analytical approach encompassed both inter-group and intra-group comparisons to elucidate the potential effects of the intervention. With regard to gratitude expression, the inter-group analysis revealed indications of subtle differences in post-test scores between the experimental and control groups. Although statistical significance was not strongly observed, a slight elevation in verbal and nonverbal gratitude expression was apparent within the experimental group. Meanwhile, the control group exhibited relatively less pronounced changes. Conversely, the intra-group analysis disclosed more prominent shifts within the experimental group. Specifically, statistically significant increments were detected in verbal and nonverbal gratitude expressions, as well as other-focused expressions. This lends credence to the notion that the intervention could conceivably influence various dimensions of gratitude expression.

As for internal spirituality, the inter-group analysis suggested marginal differences in the impact of the intervention on intrinsic spiritual experiences when comparing the two groups. In contrast, within the experimental group, the intra-group analysis unveiled a significant upswing in intrinsic spiritual experiences. For spiritual well-being dimensions, the inter-group analysis suggested significant differences in peace-related experiences and the perception of meaning between the experimental and control groups. The intra-group analysis conducted within the experimental group showed substantial enhancements in both dimensions of spiritual well-being. This suggests that the intervention might contribute to heightened feelings of tranquility and a deeper sense of significance in the lives of participants. It’s relevant to acknowledge that the minor disparities observed in the initial scores of the control group might have exerted an influence on the inter-group findings. This underscores the significance of accounting for baseline characteristics.

To summarize, the inter-group analysis unveiled slight disparities, while the noteworthy intra-group findings provide tentative insights into the potential positive influence of the intervention on gratitude expression, internal spirituality, and spiritual well-being within the experimental group. This composite perspective accentuates the multifaceted nature of the intervention’s impact and its potential role in nurturing personal growth in these dimensions.

Drawing from our findings, it’s essential to contextualize our results within the existing body of research. The alignment between our study and prior investigations

underscores the intricate dynamics between gratitude, spirituality, and well-being. The study conducted by Geier and Morris (2021) strongly corresponds with the methodology and findings of our own study. They investigated the impact of gratitude interventions on the psychological well-being of university students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their results confirm that gratitude interventions effectively improved the mental health of university students in this context. The group exposed to the gratitude intervention displayed significantly elevated levels of well-being after engaging in a 10-week gratitude journaling practice. When comparing the post-intervention outcomes of the treatment group to the control group, the effect of the gratitude intervention was statistically significant and of moderate magnitude. In the study by Kalamatianos et al. (2023), the focus was on understanding how the emotion of gratitude influences various aspects of positive psychology, such as positive and negative emotions, happiness, and optimism. They examined engineering undergraduate students as their study cohort. The findings indicate that the intervention notably increased the experience of gratitude among the experimental group, while there was no considerable change observed in the control group. Cunha et al. (2019) explored the effects of gratitude interventions on a sample of adults within a community context, investigating dimensions of well-being and mental health. Their study reveals that gratitude interventions can enhance positive emotions, subjective well-being, and life satisfaction while simultaneously decreasing negative emotions and depressive symptoms. These changes were more pronounced within the gratitude intervention group as compared to the control group. The results of Geier and Morris (2021) bear close resemblance to both the framework and outcomes of our own study. Similarly, the findings of Kalamatianos et al. (2023) and Cunha et al. (2019) align with our conclusions. Furthermore, a notable parallel across these studies and ours is the inclusion of experimental and control groups.

Perez's (2021) study aimed to unravel the intricate connections between gratitude, spirituality, and subjective well-being, with a focus on discerning how spirituality and gratitude contribute to the diverse dimensions of subjective well-being, encompassing both positive and negative aspects. The findings affirm a substantial direct relationship between gratitude and spirituality, along with a significant direct correlation between spirituality and positive affect. Moreover, the study provides evidence that gratitude acts as a mediator in the relationship between spirituality and positive affect. Gabana et al. (2019) examined the association between athletes' levels of gratitude and their religious and spiritual identities. The findings suggest that athletes with higher gratitude tendencies also demonstrate a heightened interest in religious practices. Komase et al. (2021) conducted a comprehensive exploration of gratitude interventions within the context of employee well-being. They implemented gratitude interventions among employees and observed noteworthy enhancements. Their study underscores the potential impact of workplace gratitude on overall well-being. Kirca et al.'s (2023)

study, involving a substantial participant cohort and multiple samples, investigated the effectiveness of gratitude interventions on psychological well-being indicators. The findings suggest that expressing gratitude towards others can significantly enhance psychological well-being, encompassing happiness, life satisfaction, and positive emotions. The studies by Perez (2021), Gabana et al. (2019), Kirca et al. (2023) and Komase et al. (2021) collectively reinforce our study's findings due to the similarity in their sample groups.

Uher's (2016) study explored the effects of gratitude within a Christian faith community, offering unique insights that, while distinct from our study, contribute to the broader understanding of gratitude within a religious context. In the study by Mills et al. (2015), the investigation examined whether gratitude plays a role or functions as a mechanism in individuals with heart failure. According to the research findings, gratitude was found to fully mediate the positive effects of psychological well-being on sleep and depressive mood. Additionally, it was found to partially mediate the relationships between psychological well-being and fatigue, as well as psychological well-being and cardiac-specific self-efficacy.

In the research conducted by M. Loi and Ng (2021), they explored the roles of gratitude and spirituality in the relationship between various psychological and subjective well-being measures and meaningful work experiences. The study findings indicated that the use of gratitude and spirituality scales had a positive impact. Gratitude was associated with multiple indices of well-being, including positive effects, hope, and life satisfaction. The study also demonstrated that gratitude not only enhances well-being but can also transform the workplace. However, upon examining the results, the hypothesis was not supported. Both spirituality and gratitude showed a positive relationship with meaningful work experiences. Nonetheless, the relationship between spirituality and gratitude did not yield statistically significant results.

### **Limitations Suggestions and Conclusion**

The study's quasi-experimental design lacks the randomization seen in controlled trials, introducing potential biases and confounders that limit the internal validity. Non-random assignment to groups raises concerns about establishing strong causal relationships and controlling for unaccounted variables. Additionally, the initial baseline differences in the control group could bias inter-group comparisons, impacting the accuracy of assessing intervention effects. The gender imbalance between groups, with more males in the experimental and more females in the control group, could introduce gender-related biases that may hinder generalizability. Despite a comprehensive analysis, marginal post-test differences between groups raise questions about the practical significance of the intervention's impact. Intra-group analysis helps mitigate limitations but doesn't fully counter inter-group disparities,



impacting result robustness. The study was conducted amidst unique environmental factors like seismic events and disrupted education, potentially affecting participant responses.

In summation, our study presents valuable insights into the potential impacts of gratitude interventions on internal spirituality and spiritual well-being. While the quasi-experimental design introduces limitations in terms of randomization and potential biases, and the gender imbalance between groups might affect generalizability, our findings contribute to the broader understanding of the intricate relationship between gratitude, spirituality, and well-being. The integration of our study with existing literature enhances the comprehensiveness of knowledge in this field. Acknowledging these limitations, our study encourages future research to address these challenges, fostering more robust and conclusive outcomes.

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**Author Contributions.** Both authors jointly determined the aims of the study and the research design. Şule Hatipoğlu did a literature review,

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