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Impact of self-esteem and gratitude disposition on happiness in pre-service early childhood teachers

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship among the Self-esteem , Gratitude disposition and Happiness in Pre-service Early Childhood Teachers. The subjects in this study were 192 Pre-service Early Childhood Teachers in Busan in South Korea. The findings of the study were as follows: First, the early childhood teachers considered the level of their own Happiness, Self-esteem and Gratitude disposition to be above average. Second, there was a significant positive correlation among their total scores of Happiness, Self-esteem and Gratitude disposition. And there was a significant positive correlation among the subfactors of Happiness, Self-esteem and Gratitude disposition. Third, the independent variable that made the largest prediction of Happiness was Self-esteem , followed by Gratitude disposition.

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Keywords: Pre-service Early Chldhood Teachers, Self-esteem , Gratitude disposition, Happiness

1. Introduction

True Happiness can be defined as a happiness that enjoys positive emotion of joy and value and is meaningful (Ben-Shahar, 2007). That changes negative mind-set into positive one, and shows how to change one's life (Lopez, 2008). Individuals can achieve this Happiness through their own efforts, and it's consequently required to pay attention to individual people's inner, positive psychological characteristics that can promote their Happiness.

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Early childhood teachers who take care of infants, toddlers or preschoolers, who are in a critical period of development, on behalf of their parents have a primary impact on their growth and development, and their emotional status should be taken seriously. Happiness plays a crucial role in success at work(Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2008). A happy teacher is satisfied with what he or she do, and that is linked to the improvement of his or her productivity as a member of society (Streimikiene & Grundey, 2009). Happy early childhood teachers who are satisfied with their job can bring various sorts of Happiness to preschoolers and their parents(Lopez, 2008), and can exert a direct influence on preschoolers as well (Mäntylä, Uusiautti & Määttä, 2012). Indeed, Happiness is more vital for the improvement of early childhood education than anything else. The positive psychological state of early childhood teachers such as love, gratitude, optimism and hope, which are necessary for being happy, makes it possible to predict or ensure the success of early childhood education(Yang, 2013), and those who want to be early childhood teachers should check and develop their own positive psychological characteristics that could make themselves happy.

The purpose of this study was to examine the Self-esteem and Gratitude disposition of pre-service early childhood teachers, among their various positive psychological characteristics, as inner personal characteristics affecting Happiness. It's basically meant to determine what factors could improve the Happiness of pre-service early childhood teachers in an effort to be of use for their happy, positive role performance and make some suggestions about pre-service education.

There are various Happiness-affecting inner personal characteristics. Among them, Self-esteem could be said as a positive evaluation of oneself. This consists of self-value, which is to consider oneself to be worth loving, and of confidence, which is to believe that one is competent enough to do what he or she have to do(Coopersmith, 1967). Self-esteem becomes better when the two elements are combined. Specifically, the Self-esteem of parents has an impact on that of their children, and it's very worth doing to look into the Self-esteem of early childhood teachers who raise preschoolers on behalf of their parents.

A lower Self-esteem is more likely to be concurrent with negative psychological experience such as depression, anxiety, fury or fear. One who has a higher Self-esteem is less likely to experience such negative psychology or can easily overcome it even if he or she experiences it(Son, 2011). Furthermore, a higher Self-esteem serves to relieve stress and bring Happiness(Baumeister, Campbel, Krueger & Vohs, 2003), and that makes it easier to lead a more successful life by respecting others as well as oneself, and exerts a positive influence on every part of life(Hooper, 2012). Everybody is bound to experience negative emotion in their lifetime such as difficulties, adversity, fury or despair, and those whose Self-esteem is better can lead a healthier and happier life at that time.

Another psychological characteristic on which this study focused is Gratitude disposition. Gratitude is a noun for the adjective Gratitude. As for the lexical meaning of gratitude, that is a word that stemmed from Latin 'gratia' or 'gratus' that denotes favor, and that means graciousness, grace or Gratitude(Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Smith(2007) defined it as a word of greeting that offers the most immediate and direct compensation. Gratitude disposition is what conceptualizes gratitude into a dimension of emotional personality trait, and refers to a generalized emotional disposition of thanking others(McCullough, Emmons & Tsang, 2002).

Teachers who have a better Gratitude disposition find a more positive meaning in not only positive incidents but neutral or negative incidents and elaborate it, and negative incidents exercise a less lasting influence on them(Kang, Lee & Jang, 2014; Kim & Lee, 2011; Adler & Fagley, 2005). In a study, the selected pre-service early childhood teachers were asked to keep a gratitude journal, and that was found to affect their Gratitude disposition, Self-esteem and Happiness(Yang, 2013). Another study found that writing thank-you letters made the subjects happy for nine months even after the study was completed(Lyubomirsky, 2008), and a better Gratitude disposition was found to be concurrent with better subjective wellbeing(Kim, 2012; Watkins, Woodward, Stone & Kolts, 2003), and with better Self-esteem and better physical health(Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Indeed, Gratitude disposition can be regarded as one of vital characteristics that promotes the Happiness of early childhood teachers and has a positive impact on their Self-esteem and physical health.

In a word, it could be inferred that the Self-esteem and Gratitude disposition of pre-service early childhood teachers have an impact on their own Happiness, and the two were key factors for true Happiness. So it's required to analyze how the Self-esteem and Gratitude disposition of pre-service early childhood teachers affect their Happiness.

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of the Self-esteem and Gratitude disposition of pre-service early childhood teachers on their Happiness in an effort to justify the necessity of the improvement of the Self-esteem and Gratitude disposition of pre-service early childhood teachers. This study is expected to make a

contribution to the development of programs geared toward promoting Self-esteem and Gratitude disposition and to make some suggestions on the importance of the Happiness of pre-service early childhood teachers and how to help them lead a happy life as early childhood teachers.

Three research questions were posed:

1. What are the Self-esteem, Gratitude disposition and Happiness of pre-service early childhood teachers?
2. What is the relationship of Self-esteem and Gratitude disposition to Happiness in pre-service early childhood teachers?
3. What is the relative explainability of the Self-esteem and Gratitude disposition of pre-service early childhood teachers about their Happiness?

2. Method

2.1. Subjects

Bulleted lists may be included and should look like this: The subjects in this study were 200 pre-service early childhood teachers who were selected by random sampling from the city of Busan, South Korea. After a survey was conducted, the answer sheets from 192 respondents(96%) were selected for analysis except for eight ones that included some errors or were incomplete. As for the general background of the subjects, 59 respondents who were 19 years old(30.7%) made up the largest age group, and 49 respondents who were 21 years old made up the second biggest group(25.5%). 150 respondents were attending three-year-college(78.1%). By academic year, 84 respondents were freshmen(43.8%), and 60 respondents were in their senior year(31.3%). Thus, the rates of the freshmen and the seniors were relatively higher.

2.2. Instrumentation

1) Self-esteem Scale

The instrument used to assess Self-esteem was Rosenberg(1965)'s Self-esteem Scale, which was adapted for use in this study. This consisted of five positive Self-esteem items and five negative Self-esteem items, and a five-point Likert scale was utilized. Concerning the answers to negative items 3, 5, 8, 9 and 10, reverse operation was done, and a higher Self-esteem score meant a better Self-esteem .

2) Gratitude Disposition Scale

The Gratitude Disposition Scale used in this study was composed of six items and took a prosocial and challenging approach to Gratitude disposition(McCullough, Emmons & Tsang, 2002). A five-point scale was utilized, and reverse operation was done as to items 3 and 6. A higher score meant a better Gratitude disposition.

3) Happiness Scale

Kwon and Kim's unpublished scale was utilized based on Seligman(2002)'s method that made it possible to assess Happiness in a scientific way. This scale consisted of three sections and 21 items. The three sections were pleasure life, meaningful life and engagement life, and a five-point scale was used.

2.3. Procedure

After questionnaire was produced based on theories about the self-esteem, Gratitude disposition and Happiness of pre-service early childhood teachers, a pilot survey was conducted to test the adequacy of the content construction of the questionnaire. And then a main survey was conducted on the 200 pre-service early childhood teachers with their consent for three weeks from November 15 to December 3, 2013.

2.4. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed by a statistical package PASW WIN 18.0. Descriptive statistics analysis was made to obtain statistical data on mean and standard deviation to find out their awareness, and Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were calculated to look for the correlation between the variables. A stepwise multiple regression analysis was made to compare the relative influence of the variables, and Durbin-Watson value and VIF value were calculated to see if the basic assumptions of regression analysis were satisfied or not.

3. Results

3.1. Awareness of Self-esteem , Gratitude Disposition and Happiness

When the awareness of the pre-service early childhood teachers about their own Self-esteem, gratitude disposition and Happiness was analyzed, they got a mean of 3.63(SD=.65) in Self-esteem and a mean of 3.92(SD=.63) in gratitude disposition, which were both above average. In terms of Happiness, they got a mean of 3.44(SD=.54) in total happy life. To be specific, they scored highest in meaningful life(M=3.56, SD=.58), followed by engagement life(M=3.55, SD=.55) and pleasure life(M=3.32, SD=.69). Thus, the pre-service early childhood teachers sought after more relationship-oriented meaningful life than the pleasure of life.

Table 1. An example of a table

Sub-factor	M	SD
Self-esteem	3.63	.65
Gratitude disposition	3.92	.63
Pleasure life	3.22	.69
Meaning life	3.56	.58
Engagement life	3.55	.55
Happiness	3.44	.54

3.2. Correlation of Self-esteem and Gratitude Disposition to Happiness

When the correlation of the Self-esteem and gratitude disposition of the pre-service early childhood teachers to their Happiness was analyzed, happy life had a positive correlation with Self-esteem($r=.71$, $p<.001$) and gratitude disposition($r=.38$, $p<.001$), and that was especially correlated a lot with Self-esteem. Regarding the correlation between Self-esteem and Happiness, Self-esteem was most correlated to engagement life($r=.66$, $p<.001$), followed by meaningful life($r=.64$, $p<.001$) and pleasure life($r=.61$, $p<.001$). As for Gratitude disposition, this had the closest correlation with meaningful life($r=.42$, $p<.001$), followed by engagement life($r=.37$, $p<.001$) and pleasure life($r=.25$, $p<.01$). Self-esteem was highly linked to feeling happy by pursuing a purpose of life and trying to attain it in an immersive manner, and gratitude disposition was bound up with feeling happy by seeking after relationship-oriented meaning in life.

Table 2. Correlation of Self-esteem and Gratitude Disposition to Happiness

Sub-factor	Pleasure life	Meaning life	Engagement life	Happiness
Self-esteem	.61 ^{***}	.64 ^{***}	.66 ^{***}	.71 ^{***}
Gratitude disposition	.25 ^{**}	.42 ^{***}	.37 ^{***}	.38 ^{***}

^{***} $P<.001$, ^{**} $P<.01$

3.3 The Impact of Self-esteem and Gratitude Disposition on Happiness

To determine how much the Self-esteem and Gratitude disposition of the pre-service early childhood teachers affected their Happiness, the relative influence of the variables was analyzed in relation to Happiness, pleasure life, meaningful life and engagement life.

The following table shows the influence of the Self-esteem and Gratitude disposition of the pre-service early childhood teachers on overall Happiness. To check the multi-collinearity of the variables, VIF value was calculated, and Durbin-Watson value was calculated as well, which indicated the mutual influence of measurement errors of dependent variables. As a result, Durbin-Watson value stood at 2.00, which came close to base line 2 which meant a normal distribution curve. And VIF value stood at 10 or less as well. Thus, the prerequisite of multiple regression analysis was satisfied.

Table 3. *Impact of Self-esteem and Gratitude Disposition on Happiness*

	B	β	<i>t</i>	R ²	Δ R ²	VIF	F
The constant	.58						
Self-esteem	.54	.65	12.41***	.53	.50	1.11	105.61***
Gratitude disposition	.28	.18	3.38**		.03	1.11	

*** $P < .001$, ** $P < .01$,

As a result of analyzing the influence of the Self-esteem and Gratitude disposition of the pre-service early childhood teachers on their Happiness, the two variables had an approximately 53% explainability about Happiness. Out of the two, Self-esteem had a 50% explainability, and when Gratitude disposition was added, they had a 53% explainability in total. When F value was calculated to determine the adequacy of the regression model, that stood at 105.61, which was significant at the $p < .001$ level of significance. The findings implied that Self-esteem was a more influential variable than Gratitude disposition for the happy lives of the pre-service early childhood teachers.

Second, the following table shows the influence of the Self-esteem and Gratitude disposition of the pre-service early childhood teachers on pleasure life. When the multi-collinearity of the variables was checked, Durbin-Watson value stood at 1.73, which came close to base line 2 that denoted a normal distribution curve. VIF value stood at 10 or less as well. Thus, the prerequisite of multiple regression analysis was satisfied.

Table 4. *Impact of Self-esteem and Gratitude Disposition on Pleasure life*

	B	β	<i>t</i>	R ²	Δ R ²	VIF	F
The constant	.53						
Self-esteem	.62	.60	9.84***	.38	.37	1.11	57.77***
Gratitude disposition	.13	.07	1.09		.01	1.11	

*** $P < .001$

As a result of analyzing the influence of the Self-esteem and Gratitude disposition of the pre-service early childhood teachers on their pleasure life, the two had an about 38% explainability about it. Out of the two, Self-esteem had a 37% explainability, and when Gratitude disposition was added, they had a 38% explainability in total, as there was an increase of one percent. When F value was calculated to grasp the adequacy of the regression model, that stood at 57.77, which was significant at the $p < .001$ level of significance. The findings signified that Self-esteem was a more influential variable than Gratitude disposition for the joyful lives of the pre-service early childhood teachers.

Third, the following table shows the influence of the Self-esteem and Gratitude disposition of the pre-service early childhood teachers on meaningful life. When the multi-collinearity of the variables was checked, Durbin-Watson value stood at 2.08, which came close to base line 2 that meant a normal distribution curve, and VIF value stood at 10 or less as well. Thus, the prerequisite of multiple regression analysis was satisfied.

Table 5. *Impact of Self-esteem and Gratitude Disposition on Meaning life*

	B	β	<i>t</i>	R ²	Δ R ²	VIF	F
The constant	.43						
Self-esteem	.50	.56	10.03***	.46	.41	1.11	81.38***
Gratitude disposition	.41	.25	4.41***		.05	1.11	

****P*<.001

As a result of analyzing the influence of the Self-esteem and Gratitude disposition of the pre-service early childhood teachers on meaningful life, the two variables had an approximately 46% explainability about it. Out of the two, Self-esteem had a 41% explainability, and when Gratitude disposition was added, there was an increase of 5 percent, and the variables had a 46% explainability in total. To check the adequacy of the regression model, F value was calculated, and that stood at 81.38, which was significant at the *p*<.001 level of significance. The findings implied that Self-esteem was a more influential variable than Gratitude disposition for the meaningful lives of the pre-service early childhood teachers.

Fourth, the following table shows the influence of the Self-esteem and Gratitude disposition of the pre-service early childhood teachers on engagement life. When the multi-collinearity of the variables was checked, Durbin-Watson value stood at 2.10, which came close to base line 2 that meant a normal distribution curve, and VIF value stood at 10 or less as well. Thus, the prerequisite of multiple regression analysis was satisfied.

Table 6. *Impact of Self-esteem and Gratitude Disposition on Engagement life*

	B	β	<i>t</i>	R ²	Δ R ²	VIF	F
The constant	.78						
Self-esteem	.51	.60	10.77***	.46	.43	1.11	82.23***
Gratitude disposition	.29	.19	3.30***		.03	1.11	

****P*<.001

As a result of analyzing the influence of the Self-esteem and Gratitude disposition of the pre-service early childhood teachers on engagement life, the two variables had an about 46% explainability of it. Out of the two, Self-esteem had a 43% explainability, and when Gratitude disposition was added, there was an increase of three percent, and they had a 46% explainability in total. When F value was calculated to check the adequacy of the regression model, that stood at 82.23, which was significant at the *p*<.001 level of significance. The findings implied that Self-esteem was a more influential variable than Gratitude disposition for the active lives of the pre-service early childhood teachers.

4. Discussion

In this study, how the Self-esteem and Gratitude disposition of the pre-service early childhood teachers affected their Happiness was investigated. The level of their self-perceived Self-esteem, Gratitude disposition and Happiness were above average, and the former two had a positive correlation with the latter. As for relative influence, Self-esteem exerted a larger influence on the happy lives of the pre-service early childhood teachers, and Gratitude disposition was less influential.

Self-esteem is identified as a variable that makes it possible to feel good about one's past, present and future, to make the most use of personality strengths and potential by being immersed in life in pursuit of self-realization, to find meaning in daily life and to consider oneself worthwhile. This is a variable to predict subjective well-being (Seligman, 2002), to view oneself as competent and valuable, and to have a positive impact on amicable interpersonal relationships, caring and prosocial behavior (Rayn & Deci, 2000). Gratitude disposition is a variable to boost positive emotion, life satisfaction, vitality and optimism and to relieve depression and stress (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), and that was found to exercise a positive influence on the Happiness of the pre-service early childhood teachers. Given the findings of the study, the improvement of college courses that are offered to provide pre-service education for pre-service early childhood teachers is required. The kinds of courses that can foster Happiness, Self-esteem and Gratitude disposition should be offered, and personality education should be more

strengthened as well. In addition, how pre-service early childhood teachers could be helped to improve their Gratitude disposition and Self-esteem in everyday life in association with their future job to ensure sound, successful job performance should carefully be considered.

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