

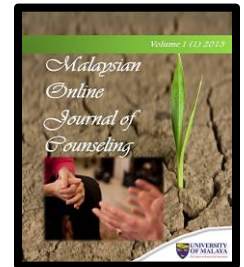
## ACCEPTANCE, FORGIVENESS, AND GRATITUDE: PREDICTORS OF RESILIENCE AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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### ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to examine whether acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude are significant predictors for resilience among university students. An electronic mailed questionnaire which consisted of demographic information, Acceptance and Action Questionnaire-II, Heartland Forgiveness Scale, The Gratitude Questionnaire and Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale was sent to students at one of the public universities in Malaysia, of which 162 students responded. Results revealed a statistical significant result supported the hypothesis that acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude were significant predictors for students' resiliency. The three predictors contributed 56% of the total variance of students' resilience model whereby gratitude illustrates the highest predictive value for resilience, followed by forgiveness and acceptance.

*Keywords:* resilience, acceptance, forgiveness, gratitude



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## INTRODUCTION

What makes some people flourish despite facing adversity or stressful life events while the others stagnate in such condition? According to Tugade and Fredrickson (2004), demonstrating the ability to thrive in the face of negative stressors illustrates the concept of resilience. More specifically, resilience can be defined as “the personal qualities that allow one to thrive in the face of adversity” (Connor & Davidson, 2003, p.76). Resilience is considered as a dynamic process whereby people exhibit the capacity to adapt to negative life events over time. Thus, resilience involves the adaptation to adversity with opportunity for positive growth and development while returning to the optimal functioning level which is known as a process of reintegration (Connor & Davidson, 2003). The concept of resilience is grounded in the paradigm of positive psychology, which is a strength based approach that assists people to obtain well-being in order to live a fulfilling life (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Over the years, growing attention on positive psychology which shifts the attention away from pathology provides an opportunity for mental health researchers and practitioners to explore the role of resilience in predicting one’s psychological health (Connor & Davidson, 2003). This encourages researchers to identify the resources available on human in conjunction with the process involved that are crucial to nurture human strengths rather than merely attending to deficiencies. This strengths based perspective allows mental health practitioners to obtain a more positive approach towards human psychological health in order to enhance human’s general quality of life in the aspects such as happiness, life satisfaction, and well-being. As such, the present study examines the predictors of resilience, primarily focusing on a number of personal qualities which hypothesized to be associated with resilience.

## ACCEPTANCE, FORGIVENESS, GRATITUDE AND RESILIENCE

By reviewing past researches regarding the study of resilience, two types of factors have been identified to be involved in overcoming adversity, namely risk and protective factors. Risk factors are known as the variables that enhance the possibility of negative outcomes while protective factors enhance the possibility of positive outcomes (Werner, 2000). The central focus of early resilience studies were focused on examining various risk factors such as parental impacts, caregiver and children relationship in conjunction with socioeconomic status (Axford, 2007).

Nonetheless, recent resilience research has placed greater interest on further exploration of protective factors as it helps to examine specific elements or conditions that foster the process of resilience. For example; reintegration, high expectancy/self-determination, positive relationships, social support, flexibility, sense of humor, self-esteem/self-efficacy, positive emotionality, hardiness, cognitive flexibility, altruism and religious beliefs are some identified attributes that are associated with resilience (Earvolino-Ramirez, 2007; Thompson, Arnkoff, & Glass, 2011).

Among the wide variety of protective factors that have been recognized, acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude appear to be three personal characteristics that have been found to be closely related to psychological well-being (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002; Nakamura & Orth, 2005). Specifically, a number of studies supported the premise that forgiveness and gratitude are related to resilience (Broyles, 2005; Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004) in which forgiveness and gratitude play a part as effective adaptive coping in order to deal with negative stressors.

Forgiveness is conceptualized as an adaptive behavior or trait that might be one of the possible reactions to interpersonal harm as well as a positive response which encourages one to let go anger and give up the thought to seek for revenge (Bono & McCullough, 2006; McCullough, 2000). Forgiveness is known as the motivational changes of oneself toward a transgressor. It involves adjustment of negative emotions and enhancement in positive thoughts when the desire to seeking revenge or avoiding offenders has been overcome. As interpersonal transgressions are commonly known as a source for personal distress resulting in resentment, forgiveness can also be understood as a way that individuals attempt to cope with hurt following a relational conflict (Bono & McCullough, 2006; Breen, Kashdan, Lenser, & Fincham, 2010; Sandage & Jankowski, 2010). The current study conceptualized forgiveness as “the framing of a perceived transgression such that one’s responses to the transgressor, transgression, and sequel of the transgression are transformed from negative to neutral or positive. The source of a transgression, and therefore the object of forgiveness, may be oneself, another person or persons, or a situation that one views as being beyond anyone’s control (e.g., an illness, “fate,” or a natural disaster)” which is based on Thompson, Snyder, Hoffman, Michael, Rasmussen, Billings, Heinze, Neufeld, Shorey, Roberts, and Roberts’s (2005, p.318) definition of forgiveness.

Previously, the study of forgiveness has been confined to religious teachings until its association with psychological well-being and therapeutic values have been supported by empirical research within the last decade (Hong & Jacinto, 2011). A number of recent findings demonstrated that forgiveness is related to positive physical and mental health outcomes such as greater self-rated

health, lower risk for cardiovascular disease, greater life satisfaction, lower level of depression, anxiety and anger as well as higher self-esteem (Bono & McCullough, 2006; Younger, Piferi, Jobe, & Lawler, 2004).

Not only that, several studies have suggested that forgiveness is closely associated with people's mental well-being, by proposing that forgiveness acts as a source of human strengths to assist people to sustain well-being (Karremans, Lange, Ouwerkerk, & Kluwer, 2003). In a study conducted by Thompson, et al. (2005), the researchers found that high dispositional forgiveness seemed to be related to lower level of depression, anger and anxiety along with high life satisfaction. The results demonstrated that forgiveness appeared to be a coping method which allowed participants to deal with adverse life experiences and moved towards achieving higher satisfaction in life. This finding is in line with the study of Maltby, Day, and Barber (2005) which reported that forgiveness plays a role as a protective factor which fosters people's ability to deal with psychological stressors.

As for gratitude, it is known as a cognitive-affective state that is associated with attitude, emotion, moral virtue, personality trait as well as coping response. Gratitude generates a number of benefits in terms of personal or collective, monetary or nonmonetary, material or interpersonal. It can be defined as a "generalized tendency to recognize and respond with grateful emotion to the roles of other people's benevolence in the positive experiences and outcomes that one obtains" (McCullough, et al., 2002, p.112). Based on this definition, gratitude is known as an enduring characteristic which prompts the grateful individuals to elicit certain emotional responses. Therefore, grateful individuals are those who have a lower threshold for experiencing gratitude and there is greater likelihood for them to experience gratefulness in their daily life (McCullough, et al., 2002).

Emmons (2010) further elaborated that gratitude allows people to celebrate the present by amplifying positive emotions. As researches on emotion reported that positive emotion wear off easily, gratitude enables people to appreciate the value of goodness, celebrate the goodness instead of adapting to it. Besides, gratitude helps to block toxins such as envy, resentment and regret which might be harmful to happiness. The logic is that people cannot feel envious and grateful at the same time as they are incompatible feelings. A number of studies discovered grateful people are able to recover quicker from trauma as they are perceived as more stress resistant. Their ability to interpret negative life events differently guards them against lasting stress and anxiety.

In a study conducted by Ong, Bergeman, Bisconti, and Wallace (2006) to investigate the association between resilience and positive emotions, they found that positive emotion acts as a protective factor for people who are facing stressful situations. Positive emotions are more commonly identified among high resilient individuals than low resilient individuals. Individuals who display lower level of resilience exhibit higher reactivity in response to daily stressors in conjunction with greater difficulties to regulate negative emotion. As time goes by, positive emotions appear to facilitate high resilient individuals to deal with adversity effectively. Research findings by Wood, Maltby, Gillett, Linley, and Joseph (2008) illustrated that participants who showed higher level of gratitude demonstrated higher level of perceived social support, lower level of stress and depression at the end of their first term of study. This implies that gratitude serves as a factor to foster resilience at a period of life transition.

There is no study to date examines the direct relationship between acceptance and resilience although acceptance is commonly accepted as an important construct in the process of coping with negative life events. According to Bond, Hayes, Baer, Carpenter, Guenole, Orcutt, Waltz, and Zettle (2011), acceptance refers to “the willingness to experience (i.e., not alter the form, frequency, or sensitivity of) unwanted private events, in order to pursue one's values and goals” (Bond, et al., 2011, p.678). This is particularly essential for those who are attempting to cope with unchangeable life events due to the fact that accepting things as they are and not to linger on the incidents appear to be an effective coping method.

Consistent with this belief, several researches investigated this particular personal quality in a wide variety of psychological issues which included depression, suicide, substance abuse and psychological trauma (Hayes, Wilson, Gifford, Follette, & Strosahl, 1996). Due to the positive association between acceptance and favorable psychotherapy outcomes, acceptance-based interventions are currently been formulated and applied in dealing with various psychological problems (Bond & Bunce, 2003; Hayes, et al., 1996). Specifically, Carver, Pozo, Harris, Noriega, Scheier, Robinson, Ketcham, Moffat, and Clark (1993) reported that acceptance served as an important predictor of the psychological adaptation and well-being among a group of breast cancer patients. Conversely, denial which is regarded as the opposition of acceptance was associated with higher level of stress in conjunction with resulting in detrimental impact on participants' psychological well-being.

Thompson, et al. (2011) have postulated if mindfulness and acceptance promote resilience to trauma, the present mindfulness and acceptance based interventions might help to reduce negative

psychological outcomes among individuals who are potentially experiencing traumatic events as well as those who have recently exposed to trauma. More specifically, they proposed that “nonjudgmental acceptance of and compassion for temporary psychological symptoms, increased willingness to experience fear-laden internal and external events, decentering from anxious and ruminative cognitions, heightened distress tolerance, and increased emotional processing of the event through contact with the present moment” (Thompson, et al., 2011, p.231) might be some of the pathways to foster resilience. This suggests the importance of further investigation for the association between acceptance and resilience.

Having known the important implications of acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude on one’s mental health outcomes as well as their therapeutic effects, a question has been raised – are these variables play a part as predictors of resilience?

## **PRESENT STUDY**

Despite various empirical studies to support the therapeutic values of acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude in assisting people to cope with negative life stressors, limited studies have been conducted to examine their relationship with resilience which is regularly regarded as an adaptation or coping ability to handle threatening circumstances. Furthermore, there was a lack of resilience study which carried out on population that is experiencing less extreme stressors although massive amount of researches have been conducted to examine the underlying mechanism of resilience in a variety of populations that face with extreme hardship in life. For instance, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) pointed out that psychologists demonstrate insufficient knowledge of how non-clinical or normal population thrives under more benign conditions.

University students have been identified as a population who are in the midst of facing with various challenges, changes and adversity in life. This is due to a number of significant life adjustments involved such as the experience of entering university, transition period to enter adulthood along with the need to assume greater responsibility in terms of all aspects in life which might be resulting in higher level of stress and anxiety (Noradilah Md Nordin, Mansor Abu Talib, & Siti Nor Yaacob, 2009).

Hence, the proposed study addressed the existing gaps in empirical research to deal with the construct of acceptance, forgiveness, gratitude, and resilience among undergraduate population in Malaysia. More specifically, two primary objectives of the current study are:

- 1.To measure the level of resiliency among university students.
- 2.To identify the predictors of resilience among university students.

Based upon the objectives formulated, the present study intends to seek answers for the following research questions:

- 1.How resilient are university students?
- 2.What are the predictors of university students' resiliency?

As such, the present study hypothesizes acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude are significant predictors of resilience in which higher level of acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude predict higher level of resilience.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

The present study is referred to as a quantitative study which employs a survey design with three predictors and one criterion variable. The predictors are acceptance, forgiveness and gratitude while criterion variable is resilience.

## **SAMPLE**

For multiple regressions study, sample size plays an important role whereby insufficient number of sample might violate the statistical results. Thus, a rule of thumb was adopted to determine the minimum number of participants required for the present study:  $N \geq 50 + 8(\text{no. of predictors})$  (Green, 1991).

An electronic mail regarding the current study was sent to all undergraduate students at a public university in Malaysia, of which 162 responded. Participants' age ranged from 19 to 28 years old and their mean age was 21.42 years old. Out of the 162 participants, 113 were females which

constituted to 69.75% and 49 were males which constituted to 30.25%. The ethnicity compositions were 82 (50.62%) Malay, 54 (33.33%) Chinese, 12 (7.41%) Indians, 8 (4.94%) native Sarawak, and 6 (3.70%) native Sabah.

## INSTRUMENTS

A total of five major instruments were employed for data collection as stated below:

### *Demographic information sheet*

Participants' background information such as age, gender, and ethnicity was collected through demographic information sheet.

### *The acceptance and action questionnaire-II (Bond, et al., 2011)*

The Acceptance and Action Questionnaire (AAQ-II) was developed by Bond and colleagues in the year 2011. AAQ-II is a self-report measure to assess both psychological flexibility and inflexibility. AAQ-II consists of 10-item with 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 which signifies never true to 7 which indicates always true. It is a unidimensional measure, with experiential avoidance loading at one end and acceptance loading at the other end. Higher scores reflect greater acceptance and action. The preliminary evidence suggests that AAQ-II has strong psychometric properties with mean alpha coefficient of .84. The 3- and 12-month test-retest reliability has been found to be .81 and .79 respectively (Bond, et al., 2011).

### *Heartland forgiveness scale (Thompson, et al., 2005)*

The Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS) is an 18-item self-report scale which aims to measure people's dispositional forgiveness of self, others and situations. Respondents rate their levels of forgiveness on a 7-point Likert scale, with 1 reflects almost always false of me and 7 reflects almost always true of me. Higher scores on HFS indicate higher levels of forgiveness. HFS demonstrates desirable psychometric properties with adequate internal consistency reliability, test-retest



reliability, and convergent validity. The test-retest reliability is .82 and the range of alpha coefficient is .84 to .87 for the total HFS scores (Thompson, et al., 2005).

### *The gratitude questionnaire (McCullough, et al., 2002)*

The Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6) is a self-report instrument which consists of 6-item, on a 7-point Likert scale range from 1 which reflects strongly disagree to 7 which reflects strongly agree. Higher scores on GQ-6 signify higher levels of grateful disposition. GQ-6 has strong psychometric properties with high internal consistency and a robust one-factor structure. The alpha coefficient of GQ-6 has been found to be ranged from .76 to .84 and the mean score of GQ-6 on a sample of 238 undergraduate students was found to be 5.92 (SD = .88) (McCullough, et al., 2002).

### *Connor-Davidson resilience scale (Connor & Davidson, 2003)*

Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) is a self-report measure which consists of 25-item on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not true at all, 4 = true nearly all of the time). The total score range from 0 to 100 whereby higher scores reflect higher levels of resilience. The CD-RISC has been tested in both clinical and non-clinical samples. A satisfactory overall internal consistency with alpha coefficient of .89 was established by using the community sample. High test-retest reliability was yielded, with intraclass correlation coefficients of .87 (Connor & Davidson, 2003).

## **PROCEDURE**

Data collection was conducted through electronic mailed questionnaire. A questionnaire packet which consisted of general demographic information sheet, Acceptance and Action Questionnaire-II, Heartland Forgiveness Scale, The Gratitude Questionnaire and Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale was sent to all undergraduate students at one of the public universities in Malaysia. Explanation regarding the nature of the study and specific instruction to complete the questionnaires were attached in the email. A disclaimer states that participants who agreed to answer the survey constituted informed consent for their participation in the study was enclosed. A follow-up email was sent to all potential participants two weeks later, reminding them to participate in the study.

Another two weeks later, a second follow-up email was sent to all potential participants to attain a higher response rate.

## DATA ANALYSIS

The method of data analysis was multiple regressions analysis which defined as making prediction of the association between two or more predictors and a criterion variable (Aron, Aron, & Coups, 2006). A simultaneous method known as Enter method in Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) regression analysis was utilized to investigate how much variance in the criterion variable (resilience) was explained by the predictors (acceptance, forgiveness and gratitude) on the basis of statistical criteria. Simultaneous method appears to best suit the nature of the current study as there is a lack of theoretical model in determining the sequence of predictors (Brace, Snelgar, & Kemp, 2012).

## RESULT

The descriptive statistics revealed that the mean scores for resilience, acceptance, forgiveness and gratitude were 2.78 (SD = .64), 4.36 (SD = .97), 4.82 (SD = .81) and 5.36 (SD = .95) respectively. This indicates that participants exhibited average level of resiliency whereby their total mean score was 69.46.

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine if acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude significantly predicted participant's resilience level. By adopting the Enter method in SPSS, results revealed that a significant model emerged,  $R^2 = .57$ ,  $F(3, 158) = 69.23$ ,  $p = .000$ . The three predictors accounted for 56% of variance in the resilience scores with an Adjusted R Square value of .56. More specifically, it was found that gratitude ( $\beta = .39$ ,  $p = .000$ ) was illustrating higher relative importance in predicting resilience compared to acceptance ( $\beta = .19$ ,  $p = .011$ ) and forgiveness ( $\beta = .31$ ,  $p = .001$ ) which were also significant predictors for participants' resilience level. In short, statistical results supported the notion that acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude appear to be significant predictors for resilience among university students.

Table 1.  
Model summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
1	.75	.57	.56

Table 2.  
ANOVA

Model		df	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3	69.23	.000
	Residual	158		
	Total	161		

\*p< .05

Table 3.  
Coefficients

Model		B	Std. Error	Standardized	
				Beta	Sig
1	Constant	-.39	.22		.079
	Acceptance	.13	.05	.19	.011
	Forgiveness	.25	.07	.31	.001
	Gratitude	.27	.05	.39	.000

\*p< .05

Further analysis was conducted to test for mediation. In the first mediation analysis, acceptance and forgiveness were entered as predictor variables and resilience as the outcome variable. Forgiveness's relationship with resilience remained significant while controlling for acceptance; Beta = .59, t = 7.34, p = .00. The relationship between acceptance and resilience was weaker in this analysis (Beta = .13, t = 1.57, p = .12) compared to the direct relationship (Beta = .54, t = 8.07, p = .00). These results suggest full mediation in which the relationship between acceptance and resilience was mediated by forgiveness.

Table 4.  
Mediation effect (model 1)

Step	DV	IV	Beta	t	p
1	Resilience	Acceptance	.54	8.07	.00
2	Forgiveness	Acceptance	.70	12.28	.00
3	Resilience	Forgiveness	.68	11.67	.00
4	Resilience	Acceptance	.13	1.57	.12
		Forgiveness	.59	7.34	.00

\*p< .05

In the second mediation analysis, forgiveness and gratitude were entered as predictor variables and resilience as the outcome variable. Gratitude's relationship with resilience remained significant while controlling for forgiveness; Beta = .37, t = 5.59, p = .00. The relationship between forgiveness and resilience reduced slightly in this analysis (Beta = .46, t = 6.85, p = .00) compared to the direct relationship (Beta = .68, t = 11.70, p = .00). These results suggest there was a partial mediation in the second model of mediation analysis.

Table 5.  
Mediation effect (model 2)

Step	DV	IV	Beta	t	p
1	Resilience	Forgiveness	.68	11.70	.00
2	Gratitude	Forgiveness	.60	9.49	.00
3	Resilience	Gratitude	.65	10.69	.00
4	Resilience	Forgiveness	.46	6.85	.00
		Gratitude	.37	5.59	.00

\*p< .05

As for mediation analysis which gratitude and acceptance were entered as predictor variables and resilience as the outcome variable, acceptance's relationship with resilience remained significant while controlling for gratitude; Beta = .36, t = 6.31, p = .00. The relationship between gratitude and resilience showed a slight decrease (Beta = .52, t = 9.12, p = .00) compared to the direct relationship (Beta = .65, t = 10.69, p = .00). These results suggest that the relationship between gratitude and resilience was partially mediated by acceptance.

Table 6.  
Mediation effect (model 3)

Step	DV	IV	Beta	t	p
1	Resilience	Gratitude	.65	10.69	.00
2	Acceptance	Gratitude	.33	4.49	.00
3	Resilience	Acceptance	.54	8.07	.00
4	Resilience	Gratitude	.52	9.12	.00
		Acceptance	.36	6.31	.00

\* $p < .05$

Sobel test was used to determine the significance of the mediation effects observed in the three models. Results of the Sobel test revealed that there was a statistical significant full mediation effect in model 1 whereby forgiveness was mediating the relationship between acceptance and resilience. Furthermore, Sobel test supported the significant partial mediation effects as observed in model 2 and 3.

## DISCUSSION

Results obtained in the present study showed that acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude were significant predictors for resilience among a sample of undergraduate students. Thus, the hypothesis which states higher level of acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude predict higher level of resilience was supported. The current result was relatively consistent with previous findings which proposed by Thompson and colleagues (2011) who found the association between trait acceptance and positive psychological adjustment followed by traumatic events. In the study, people who showed greater acceptance reported better psychological functioning in life. Carver, et al. (1993) reported that acceptance was a significant predictor for psychological adaptation and well-being among cancer patients. This implies acceptance serves as a protective factor which assists people to cope with hardship in life.

According to Thompson, et al. (2011), being able to keep in touch with present moment appears to be the first step of acceptance. It is characterized by the willingness to keep in contact and experience both internal and external events without making judgment. More specifically, the mindful focus on the present moment protects people from ruminating about the past and the

future which are likely to result in distress (Follette, Palm, & Pearson, 2006). By placing the focus on the here-and-now, it helps people to perceive the unpleasant feelings or stress as expectable reactions to deal with adversity in life. This attitude prevents people from engaging in emotional or behavioral avoidance in order to increase the psychological flexibility (Thompson, et al., 2011).

Consistent with past research, the present findings supported the concept that forgiveness appears to be one of the significant predictors for resilience among university students. Thompson, et al. (2005) found that forgiveness is associated to positive psychological well-being and it seems as an effective coping mechanism to deal with negative life events. This is further supported by another study which proposed that forgiveness fosters people's capacity to cope with psychological stressors (Maltby, et al., 2005).

McCullough (2000) suggested that the therapeutic effects of forgiveness might be mediated by two major mechanisms. One possible explanation of the predictive value of forgiveness for resilience underlies on the restoration of supportive relationships, either with oneself or the transgressors. More specifically, forgiveness helps to facilitate the reestablishment of caring relationship between offender and victim. As social support and caring relationships have been found to be contributing to the development of well-being, it is understandable that forgiveness which fosters reconnection with others might in turn contribute to preserving one's well-being as well as resiliency.

The second forgiveness mechanism indicates that forgiveness assists in monitoring people's hostility. People who are forgiving demonstrate a reduction in terms of their motivation to cause harm or avoid the others especially the offenders. Hence, there is less likely that the negative events will place an impact on the relationships with others in which there are less people who can induce negative feelings or motivations on hostility among the forgiving people. By experiencing reductions in revenge and avoidance, people are capable of preserving positive interpersonal relationship with others in conjunction with building up their resiliency to deal with negative events in life (McCullough, 2000).

Considering the predictive value of gratitude to resilience, current finding was consistent with several findings from past researches. Ong, et al. (2006) proposed that positive emotions play a role to foster people's ability to deal with stressors in life and positive emotions are commonly identified among high resilient individual. Therefore, this implies gratitude which appears to be a form of positive emotion serves as a protective factor to enhance people's capability to thrive under adverse life experiences. Wood, Joseph, and Linley (2007) also reported that gratitude serves as a

buffer of stress by fostering higher level of social support and lower level of stress among undergraduate students during their first term of study.

According to Broaden-and-Build Theory, positive emotions which experience by people during the times of stress encourage people to practice creative thoughts and actions after which assist them to build an effective coping strategy that might help to bounce back against negative life events (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). Hence, knowledge and effective use of positive emotions might result in a number of advantages in coping with adversity in life. As the Broaden-and-Build Theory postulates a prediction that positive emotions are beneficial in numerous ways, gratitude which is found to be able to elicit several positive emotional responses is likely to operate based on this particular theory in fostering one's resiliency.

Gratitude facilitates the broadening of mindsets in conjunction with building personal resources which might be adopted during the times of adversity. By experiencing gratitude, it inspires people to direct their focus on benefits that they have received from others. This helps to foster friendships along with the social bonds which perceive as important sources of social support when people are facing with negative life events. Furthermore, expressing gratitude encourages flexible thinking through broadening the scope of cognition. This is particularly important when people are in the midst of coping with stress and adversity so that they are capable of generating effective coping strategies to thrive under the stressful circumstances (Emmons & McCullough, 2003).

A study conducted by Wood, et al. (2007) provided empirical support to this theory whereby their research showed that gratitude was correlated with a number of positive coping approaches such as seeking for emotional social support and utilization of positive reinterpretation. As grateful people generate a more pleasant perception towards the world and tend to focus on the positive aspects in life, it is more likely to increase their willingness to deal with problems by implementing a more active cognitive and behavioral action. Therefore, it shows that gratitude serves as a protective factor which strengthens people's resiliency in handling with stressors in life.

In terms of university students' resilience level, it was found that the current sample demonstrated a mean score of 69.46, which represents a close to the mean. This indicates that participants were exhibiting average to good level of resiliency. The result obtained was consistent with other studies which utilized the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale as the instrument to measure resilience level. For instance, Singaporean adolescents with the age range of 12 to 16 years old illustrated mean score of 71.13 in terms of their resiliency (Lim, Broekman, Wong, Wong, & Ng, 2011). Another study

revealed a resiliency mean score of 69.1 among a sample of Australian undergraduate students (Bitsika, Sharpley, & Peters, 2010).

The mediation analysis result demonstrated a full mediation effect when acceptance and forgiveness were entered as predictors and resilience as criterion variable. As abovementioned, the standardized regression coefficient between acceptance and resilience decreased substantially when controlling for forgiveness. This indicates that the relationship between acceptance and resilience is mediated by forgiveness. Hence, the result implies that forgiveness is the key factor to resilience in which forgiveness is essential in order for acceptance to be statistically correlated to resilience.

The importance of forgiveness to resilience among this sample can be discussed from different perspectives. To begin with, one of the possibilities might be due to the fact that undergraduate students who participated in the current study are filled up with high level of hatred. As the undergraduate school experience itself might be associated with vast amount of stress, the challenges that they have encountered during their university life might be directly or indirectly result in anger or dissatisfaction in life. Hence, forgiveness is essential to assist them to let go of grudges and bitterness in order to cope with their difficulties in life.

Another possible reason underlies on the impact of education which emphasizes on the importance of forgiveness in a multiracial country. Malaysia is known as a multiethnic, multicultural, and multilingual country in which people from different ethnic groups have learned to live peacefully with each other while maintaining separate cultural identities. The teaching that one shall learn to forgive the unintentional offences caused by another party due to the lack of understanding about the cultural differences has been blended in the local education system from primary to tertiary education. This helps Malaysians to develop an ability to maintain a respect to the differences among people who are from different cultural background in order to maintain social harmony. As such, forgiveness is vital to the current sample.

## **LIMITATIONS**

The present study reveals several limitations that might possibly impair the credibility of the findings. First, the exclusive use of self-report measures appears to be one of the limitations. Information obtained might not be as deep as those obtained through other more thorough



methods such as interviews, observations, and journals. There is a possibility that participants' responses were influenced by their mood when responding to the questionnaires. Also, acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude are somewhat considered as abstract concepts which required participants to develop a sensible degree of self-understanding in order to be able to report them in a meaningful manner (Kollman, 2008).

Another limitation of this study is associated with the sample used which was university students in a Malaysian local university. As undergraduate students might exhibit significant differences from the general population in terms of their achievement, intelligence, and perceptions toward acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude (Axford, 2007), the results might not be generalized to other populations.

The lack of control over the other additional variables which might affect undergraduate resilience seems to be a flaw in the present study. Based on the findings from previous researches, a number of personal characteristics as well as external factors place an impact on one's resilience level. However, environmental or other social factors such as attachment, self-efficacy, parental factors, social support, socioeconomic status, and locus of control that might interfere with resilience are not directly measured in the current study (Axford, 2007; Parker, 2006). In fact, the nature of the present study placed the major focus on the predictive values of several personal characteristics which are acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude which operated on the individual level. Hence, it is crucial for the future study to broaden the investigation by including other external variables in order to provide a more comprehensive finding regarding undergraduate's resilience level.

## **IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

The significant findings from the present study have added to the growing body of research in the field of positive psychology. Resilience research plays an important role in examining and identifying protective factors which lead to the development of one's resiliency in order to cope with hardships in life. Hence, current finding has strengthened the previous finding which suggests that acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude are protective factors that enhance people's resiliency. More specifically, current research serves as groundwork for future resiliency research particularly in the Malaysian context. This is predominantly essential to develop a more comprehensive

resilience framework on campus which encompasses the utilization of both internal and external protective factors that fosters resiliency.

Various resilience interventions can be developed based on current finding which suggests that enhancing students' level of acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude may assist to increase their ability to cope with adversity in life. As acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude were found to be significant predictors for resilience among university students, psychological interventions which incorporate these components can be implemented to increase students' resilience level. Therefore, it is crucial to focus on the replication of current study in order to validate the current findings. Replication of the present research can be conducted by incorporating a larger population which involves undergraduate students across different universities in Malaysia.

As current study placed the major focus on personal qualities which contribute to resiliency, a more integrative model of resiliency which incorporates broader range of variables might provide a better idea about the variables which predict people's resilience level. First, this can be done by including more personal qualities which might be associated with resilience as an expansion of current research. For instance, optimistic, self-esteem, self-efficacy, creativity and a sense of humor appear to be other human characteristics that are worth to be examined in terms of their predictive values of resilience among young adults in Malaysia.

Other than merely focusing on personal qualities, numerous demographic and psychological factors which might be associated with resiliency can be explored in the future research. This can be done by integrating family, community and social factors in the model of resiliency. By doing so, the production of a more comprehensive resiliency model for young adults in Malaysia is possible.

Another feasible direction for future research is to focus on examining the effectiveness of implementing various positive psychology interventions which integrate the components of acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude with the intention to enhance resilience. By taking into consideration of the preliminary finding about the predictors of resilience, it provides a clearer direction for future research which intends to design resilience intervention program in Malaysian context.

## **CONCLUSION**

The young adult years can be considered as a time of adversity whereby attending university might be associated with moderate amount of stress. This transition period in young adults' life requires them to cope with various adjustment, financial, and academic issues in order to adapt to the new phase of life. Therefore, a deeper understanding regarding the variables involved in coping with adversity appears to be crucial for university students. The proposed study of examining predictors for resilience helps to achieve the goal. By enhancing the knowledge base regarding factors which influence resilience among university students, interventions for this particular population can be implemented in order to assist them to overcome the hardships in life.

Considering the findings of current study, acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude were found to be significant predictors of resilience among university students. Although the impact of the predictive values differed across the three predictors, gratitude demonstrated highest importance in predicting resilience level among the participants. Hence, interventions which aimed at enhancing students' resilience can benefit from incorporating strategies to increase one's level of acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude. In a nutshell, more future researches should be conducted to validate current findings as well as to introduce relevant interventions which can improve one's resilience.

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## **BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE**

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