

## The Role of Trait Emotional Intelligence in Mediating the Relationship Between Mindfulness and Thriving in Students

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Mindfulness has been a highly researched topic among school psychologists in recent decades because it affects students' academic performance and psychological well-being. Psychological well-being is an umbrella term recently operationalized in terms of thriving. When anything works positively at its highest level—mentally, physically, and socially—it is called thriving. Students' perception, understanding, management, and utilization of their and others' emotions also affect their well-being. The role of trait emotional intelligence and trait mindfulness in predicting thriving among senior secondary school students was investigated by administering the Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale (R), the Brief Inventory of Thriving, and the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (SF) to a sample of 120 female students. It was also investigated how trait emotional intelligence mediates the association between mindfulness and well-being. Correlation and regression analysis confirmed a significant positive association between trait mindfulness, trait emotional intelligence and thriving. The student who was high in mindfulness and trait emotional intelligence showed a high thriving level. Results of the analysis also revealed that trait emotional intelligence partially mediated the relationship between trait mindfulness and thriving. The results were discussed in consideration of available theory and research. Future research directions and limitations of the current study are also suggested.

**Keywords:** Trait mindfulness, Trait emotional intelligence, Well-being, and Girl Students.

The study of mindfulness as a psychological construct and a type of clinical intervention has attracted significant attention in recent years. A condition of active and open attention to the present is called mindfulness. When we are attentive, we take a detached look at our thoughts and emotions and do not assign them a positive or negative value. This means living in the moment and awakening to experience. According to Kabat-Zinn, (2003) "Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally."

It is now understood that mindful awareness is a cultivatable skill with broad applications across all aspects of society, including education, the prison system, politics, business, and even the training of

soldiers. Thus, mindfulness is the psychological process of paying attention to internal and external experiences. Studies have indicated that the practice of mindfulness is strongly correlated with greater well-being and perceived health.

Well-being is an important factor in the life of an individual. Some individuals can maintain satisfactory well-being despite the presence of psychological symptoms. The study of well-being is based on two approaches: eudemonic and hedonic. Eudemonic denotes psychological well-being, whereas hedonic denotes happiness which refers to subjective well-being. Su, Tay, and Diener, (2014) stated that the construct of well-being is multifaceted and made up of seven fundamental theoretical dimensions: (1) Subjective Well-Being (2) Supportive and

Enriching Relationships; (3) Interest and Engagement in daily activities; (4) Meaning and Purpose in life; (5) Sense of Mastery and Accomplishment; (6) Feelings of Control and Autonomy; (7) Optimism. These theoretical dimensions are conceptualized to measure as Thriving. Beyond simple survival, thriving denotes positive development and growth. Thriving denotes the state of positive functioning at its fullest range—mentally, physically, and socially (Su, Tay & Diener, 2014).

Emotional intelligence (EI) has gained attention as a focus of research and intervention because of its promise as a set of skills that can be taught to enhance coping resources and promote well-being (Fernandez-Berrocal, & Cabello, 2016). Various social and individual resources, such as resilience, positive self-evaluation, and social support, have been linked to emotional intelligence (DiFabio & Kenny, 2016). EI is beneficial to gains in psychological well-being, subjective health, and quality of social relationships (Nelis et al., 2011). “The capacity to harmonize thought and emotion” is a succinct way to describe emotional intelligence (EI), which is the ability to comprehend and regulate one’s own emotions as well as identify and regulate those of others. To do this, one needs to be self-aware, have perspective, and be able to control one’s emotions in a variety of social contexts.

In their previous model, Salovey and Mayer defined emotional intelligence (EI) as the “ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions to assist thought” (Salovey & Mayer, 1997). Dr. K. V. Petrides later developed the trait EI, also known as “trait emotional self-efficacy.” According to Petrides, Pita, and Kokkinaki (2007), trait EI is “a constellation of emotional self-perceptions located at the lower levels of personality hierarchies.” People’s self-

perceptions of their emotional intelligence are referred to as trait EI.

### **Mindfulness and Well-being**

Klussman, Curtin, Langer, and Nichols, (2020) stated that mindfulness practitioners report several long-lasting benefits, such as enhanced compassion and well-being (Baer, Lykins, & Peters, 2012), better-coping mechanisms, reduced anxiety and depression, reduced physical and chronic pain, and enhanced quality of life (Grossman, et al., 2004). Conversely, studies indicate that short-term mindfulness therapies are beneficial in enhancing a range of well-being metrics, such as compassion, work burnout, quality of life, and sleep (Fortney, Luchterhand & Zakletskaia, 2013; Hülshager et al., 2014). Overall, there is compelling evidence to suggest that enhanced mindfulness is positively correlated with high-level well-being.

### **Mindfulness and Emotional Intelligence**

Several studies have examined the relationship between emotional intelligence and mindfulness. Based on an insightful analysis of the available literature Charoensukmongkol (2014) concluded that the correlation between EQ and mindfulness is favorable. Furthermore, mindfulness practice improves one’s ability to manage emotions (Hill & Updegraff, 2012). In addition, mindfulness promotes the development of emotional regulation (Koole, 2009). Key mindfulness components can influence the development of EI capabilities (Schutte & Malouff, 2011). The goal of mindfulness meditation is to increase mindfulness; thus, it can significantly aid in the development of emotional intelligence.

### **Emotional Intelligence and Well-being**

Austin, Saklofske, and Egan’s (2005) study revealed that EI was a strong predictor of outcomes related to health and positively correlated with life satisfaction. Higher EI

people had better psychological well-being and could handle work-related stress (Folkman, 2013). According to a meta-analysis by Mikolajczak, Petrides, and Hurry (2009), those with higher EI report feeling better about themselves subjectively, experiencing less anxiety and sadness, and having a higher quality of life.

Higher emotional intelligence (EI) was linked to better emotional regulation skills and a lower likelihood of experiencing unpleasant emotions, according to research on college students (Extremera, Durán, & Rey, 2007). The majority of the research suggests that emotional intelligence is a potential key factor in the promotion of psychological well-being.

### Current research

Despite the fact that earlier research has linked mindfulness to well-being, it has not yet offered an explanation for this relationship. We looked into how trait emotional intelligence might be able to explain this relationship in the current study. Specifically, we investigated the possibility that trait emotional intelligence has a substantial mediating role in the relationship between mindfulness and well-being (refer to

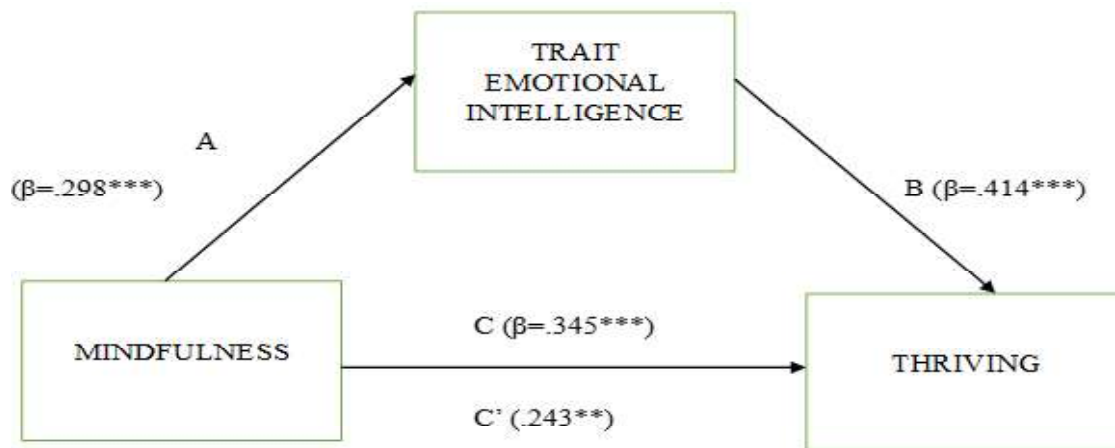
Figure 1 for the suggested model). We anticipated that emotional intelligence would play a role in mediating the relationship between mindfulness and well-being. Stated differently, the association between mindfulness and well-being can be partially explained by an improvement in emotional self-efficacy.

We operationalize eudemonic and hedonic well-being in the current research as thriving, in line with modern conceptions of well-being (Su, Tay & Diener, 2014).

We developed the following hypothesis for the current investigation based on previous research:

### Hypotheses

- H<sub>1</sub> Students' well-being will increase with their level of mindfulness.
- H<sub>2</sub> Becoming more mindful leads to higher emotional intelligence in students.
- H<sub>3</sub> The more emotionally intelligent students are, the better their overall well-being.
- H<sub>4</sub> The association between mindfulness and the well-being of students is mediated by trait emotional



\*\*<0.01 \*\*\*P<0.001

Figure 1. Study model

## Method

### Participants

This study was conducted with 120 senior secondary female students. Participants belonged to the schools of the Varanasi region. Their ages ranged from 15 to 19 years (age mean= 16.89; SD=.73). A correlation design was used for the study, whereas purposive sampling was used for sample selection.

### Tools

The following tools were used for data collection in the present research work.

*Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale –R (CAMS-R; Feldman et al., 2007)*: Mindfulness was assessed using the Hindi version of CAMS-R, which was originally developed by Feldman, G., Hayes, A., Kumar, S., et al. (2007). It is a uni-dimensional 12-item inventory that measures mindfulness during general occurrences on four components allegedly needed to reach a mindful state (i.e., attention, awareness, present focus, and acceptance/non-judgmental). In the present study, we used a 10-item version of the scale that used a Four-point response format. The reliability of this Hindi version of the scale was 0.730 (Cronbach Alpha).

*Brief Inventory for Thriving (Su, Tay & Diener, 2014)*: The Hindi version of the Brief Inventory for Thriving was used to measure the broad range of psychological well-being. The BIT comprises ten items in total and can be used as a quick mental health screening tool as well as an indication of psychological well-being. The BIT has 10 items in total and can serve as an indicator of psychological well-being and a brief screening tool for mental health. It uses a 5-point Likert scale. Response format varied from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' and the

psychometric properties for the Hindi version scale were found satisfactory, with Cronbach's alpha=0.731.

*TEI Questionnaire (TEIQue-SF; Petrides, 2009)*: The TEIQue-SF is a 30-item questionnaire designed to measure global trait emotional intelligence (trait EI). It is based on the full form of the TEI Que. Two items from each of the 15 TEI Que facets were selected for inclusion, based primarily on their correlations with the corresponding total facet scores (Cooper & Petrides, 2010; Petrides & Furnham, 2006). The scale uses a five-point response format. The internal consistency reliability of the Hindi version of the scale (Alpha) was found to be 0.752.

### Procedure

Target subjects were contacted personally. The purpose of the study was explained. When participants agreed to participate in the study a questionnaire booklet was given to them. When they responded to all the sections of the questionnaire completely, the booklets were taken back. Scoring of the responses was done according to the instructions of the concerned manual. Obtained data were tabulated and analyzed using correlation and regression analysis.

### Results

To examine the relationship between mindfulness, trait emotional intelligence, and thriving a correlation analysis was performed. The obtained results are presented in Table 1. Results show that mindfulness was significantly positively correlated with trait emotional intelligence and thriving. Table 1 further indicates that trait emotional intelligence was significantly positively correlated with thriving.

Table 1. Mean, standard deviation, and correlations among variables (N=120)

Variables	Mean	SD	Mindfulness	Trait Emotional Intelligence	Thriving
Mindfulness	31.325	4.2469	(.730)		
Trait Emotional Intelligence	97.500	8.2421	.298**	(0.752)	
Thriving	37.575	5.2463	.345**	.414**	(.731)

\*\*P<0.01; Cronbach's alpha is represented along the diagonal in parentheses

To test the proposed hypotheses, we followed Baron and Kenny's (1986) steps to test mediation. First, we regressed thriving on mindfulness, trait emotional intelligence

on mindfulness, and thriving on both mindfulness and trait emotional intelligence (as simultaneous predictors). Obtained results are reported in table 2.

Table 2. Mediated regression analysis

Independent Variables	Dependent Variables
	Thriving
Mindfulness	Mediating Variable – Trait Emotional Intelligence
Step 1 (Mindfulness>Thriving)	0.345***
Step 2 (Mindfulness> Trait Emotional Intelligence)	0.298***
Step 3a (Trait Emotional Intelligence >Thriving)	0.414***
Step 3b (Mindfulness > Thriving)	0.243**
Sobel Test (z value)	2.592*
Aroian Test (z value)	2.546*

\*P< 0.01      \*\*P<0.005      \*\*\*P< 0.001

Note: Standardized  $\beta$  value is reported in the table

In regression analysis, all the hypothesized predictors were significantly associated with each outcome. Thriving and mindfulness were significantly correlated ( $\hat{\alpha} = .345, p < .001$ ), supporting Hypothesis 1. In a similar vein, Hypothesis 2 was validated due to a substantial correlation between trait emotional intelligence and mindfulness ( $\beta = .298, p < .001$ ). Consistent with Hypothesis 3, trait emotional intelligence was correlated with thriving, even after controlling for mindfulness ( $\beta = .414, p < .001$ ). The relationship between mindfulness and thriving remained significant as well ( $\beta = .243, p < .005$ ). However, in support of Hypothesis

4, the Sobel test score of mediation confirmed that trait emotional intelligence partially mediated the relationship between mindfulness and thriving ( $z = 2.592, SE = 0.049, p < .001$ ). In general, mindfulness is strongly associated to thriving. Our findings support our expectation that greater mindfulness leads to greater well-being, which is partially due to mindful people being more emotionally intelligent (see Table 2). That is, the more mindful people are, the greater their experience of thriving, in part because they are more emotionally intelligent

## Discussion

Several studies have explored the relationship between mindfulness and wellbeing in the past (Baer et al., 2008; Brown et al., 2009; Falkenstrom, 2010). The purpose of the present research was to examine whether trait emotional intelligence mediates the well-established relationship between mindfulness and well-being. Here, we explored how mindfulness enhances individuals' well-being through trait emotional intelligence. As expected, and, consistent with past research, mindfulness significantly predicted thriving. Mindfulness was a strong predictor of thriving, as was to be expected and consistent with earlier findings. Our results also demonstrate that mindfulness is significantly positively associated with trait emotional intelligence. A significant positive relationship between mindfulness and emotional intelligence was also reported by earlier studies (Baer et al., 2004; Brown & Ryan, 2003).

Higher EI levels are associated with greater psychological well-being. A meta-analysis of 38 studies, which indicated that people with higher EI had better well-being, lower levels of anxiety and depression, and higher life satisfaction, supports our findings (Mikolajczak, Petrides, & Hurry, 2009). In addition, trait emotional intelligence partially explains the association between mindfulness and thriving. That is, the more mindful people were, the more emotionally intelligent they were; the more emotionally intelligent they were, the greater their thriving. These findings suggest that trait emotional intelligence is an important result of developing an effective mindfulness practice and helps explain how mindfulness fosters overall thriving.

Chu (2010) reported that greater meditation experience was associated with higher EI, less perceived stress and, less negative mental health. Schutte and Malouff

(2011) investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence, mindfulness, and subjective well-being. They observed that higher trait emotional intelligence, higher positive affect, lower negative affect, and higher life satisfaction were all correlated with higher mindfulness characteristics. Three distinct strategies were identified by Charoensukmongkol (2014) regarding how mindfulness improves Emotional Intelligence (EI). First, practicing mindfulness regularly can improve our comprehension of our emotions. Second, individuals who consistently engage in mindful practice can readily develop the capacity to recognize and comprehend the emotions of others. Third, the capacity of individuals to manage and regulate their emotions may be markedly improved by engaging in regular mindful meditation practice (Cahn & Polich, 2006).

Emotional Intelligence may protect against the negative effects of stress on psychological well-being. Studies have shown that individuals with high emotional intelligence, can successfully manage stress (Petrides & Furnham, 2001) and, have a positive impact on mental health overall (Martins, Ramalho & Morin, 2010). Emotional intelligence (EI) has the potential to improve psychological health by helping people better control their emotions. Higher EI people are better at controlling their emotions and are less likely to feel bad (Salovey et al., 1995; Extremera, Durán, & Rey, 2007). EI may play a role in resilience and adaptation to life stressors, leading to greater psychological well-being. It has been found that a person with higher EI had greater resilience and better psychological well-being (Sarrionandia et al., 2018). Overall, trait emotional intelligence is an important factor through which mindfulness promotes well-being.

## Implications

Mindfulness and Trait emotional intelligence play an important role in

predicting thriving. Mindfulness was also significantly positively associated with emotional intelligence. Therefore, practicing mindfulness not only increases a person's emotional self-efficacy and improves their well-being. People are encouraged to perceive and regulate emotions more precisely and skillfully by engaging in mindfulness practices. Additionally, mindfulness includes a non-evaluative element that helps people have a better knowledge of both their own and other people's emotions. Self-regulated functioning is one aspect of mindfulness that is similar to emotion regulation, another essential element of emotional intelligence. Lastly, mindfulness can help one become more conscious of their present emotions, which may help with a crucial component of EI—that is, managing emotions (Schutte & Malouff, 2011).

### Limitations

Our study is not free of limitations. A small sample size and the inclusion of only female participants may be a limitation of this study. This cross-sectional study used short versions of scales (e.g., BIT-10; CAMS-R-10; TEI Que- short form), which may hamper the external validity of the study. Reliance on only self-reporting may be another imperfection of the present study.

### Conclusion

According to this research, trait emotional intelligence has a strong correlation with both mindfulness and thriving. Additionally, the association between thriving and mindfulness can be partially explained by trait emotional intelligence. A promising mechanism that merits more research is trait emotional intelligence, especially in light of the practical and empirical significance of enhanced well-being. Investigating trait emotional intelligence may enable academics and professionals to support initiatives aimed at enhancing people's lives by elevating several

facets of individual wellbeing. All things considered, our research contributes to a deeper understanding of how trait emotional intelligence, which underpins mindfulness, promotes thriving. In sum, we can say that our study provides a better understanding of how mindfulness enhances thriving through trait emotional intelligence.

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