

Mindfulness and Awareness in Advanced Level Students: An Exploratory Study

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Introduction

Mindfulness, a central tenet of Buddhist teachings, is the practice of maintaining awareness and presence in the current moment, enabling individuals to live with heightened consciousness. In education, mindfulness has emerged as a tool to enhance cognitive functions such as focus, emotional regulation, and stress management (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). These practices are grounded in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (PTS MN 1.56–1.63), which outlines the four foundations of mindfulness: body, feelings, mind, and mental phenomena. In the context of this study, self-awareness and interpersonal awareness are explored as dimensions of mindfulness among commerce students in the Kegalle District of Sri Lanka.

The research focuses on understanding the levels of self-awareness and interpersonal awareness, reflecting how mindful these students are during their learning experiences. These constructs are critical because academic success not only depends on cognitive skills but also emotional and relational intelligence (Goleman, 1995). In the Buddhist canon, the notion of mindfulness is deeply interwoven with ethical conduct and understanding of self and others (Sīla and Paññā).

This study is particularly relevant as Sri Lankan students, especially those pursuing the challenging A/L examinations, face high academic stress. Introducing mindfulness to this setting could lead to improved well-being, concentration, and emotional regulation, which in turn may foster a more harmonious educational environment (Dhammapada Verse 276: "You yourselves must strive; the Buddhas only point the way").

Methodology

The study employed a quantitative approach, using a structured questionnaire designed to assess the levels of self-awareness and interpersonal awareness among the 64 randomly selected A/L commerce stream students. The survey utilized a 5-point Likert scale to capture students' responses on specific

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mindfulness-related behaviours (from "Never true" to "Always true"). Data were analyzed using SPSS 27, with Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) applied to verify the validity and reliability of the constructs.

The selection of the two main constructs—self-awareness and interpersonal awareness—was based on existing mindfulness literature (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Self-awareness focuses on the capacity of individuals to monitor their thoughts and emotions, while interpersonal awareness concerns how they relate to others, particularly in recognizing and managing social interactions. The KMO value and chi-square results indicate the adequacy of these constructs in explaining the variance observed among the variables measured.

Results and Discussion

The study's findings reveal nuanced insights into the levels of mindfulness among students. Table 1 summarizes the descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis, highlighting the distribution of students' responses.

Item	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Q1	3.02	.934	-.393	.064
Q2	2.75	1.069	.201	-.371
Q3	2.73	1.185	.125	-.734
Q4	3.44	1.344	-.369	-1.003
Q5	2.95	1.327	-.122	-1.128
Q6	2.36	1.160	.637	-.262
Q7	3.75	1.321	-.714	-.697
Q8	2.59	1.231	.462	-.689
Q9	3.33	1.392	-.179	-1.289
Q10	3.31	1.367	-.323	-1.063
Q11	3.63	1.254	-.443	-1.004
Q12	3.72	1.278	-.814	-.310
Q13	3.80	1.184	-.835	.156
Q14	2.89	1.595	.087	-1.618
N	64	Std. Error.	.299	.590

The findings are consistent with existing research, which highlights that students often struggle with maintaining mindfulness in stressful educational environments (Shapiro, Brown, & Astin, 2011). The mean scores of the self-awareness items indicate that students operate on "automatic pilot" during their learning, with limited reflective awareness. This aligns with Dhammapada Verse 371: "Make a proper effort, do it earnestly. Strive hard for spiritual awareness, leave not a moment to be wasted."

Self-Awareness

Self-awareness, as reflected in items Q1 to Q6, demonstrates moderate mindfulness among students. The mean values (2.36 to 3.44) indicate that students are often disconnected from their immediate experiences, frequently driven by routine actions without conscious thought. This phenomenon is explained in modern psychology as "mind-wandering" (Smallwood & Schooler, 2006). In Buddhist terms, this lack of mindfulness can be understood as a failure to maintain Sati or constant awareness, which is necessary to avoid suffering and cultivate wisdom (Paññā).

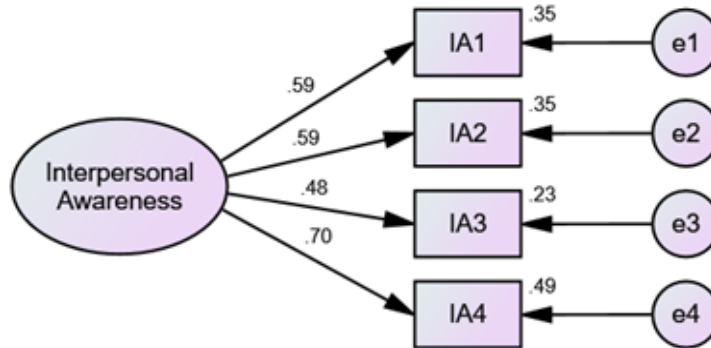
No of items = 5; 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6 explain one variable with KMO = 0.696
Chi-Square = 54.330, df = 6 sig.=<0.001; CA = 0.696

Variable	No of		KMO	Chi-Square	df	sig.	CA
	Items	Items					
		10, 11, 12,					
Interpersonal Awareness	4	13	0.722	37.053	10	<0.001	0.679
Self-Awareness	5	1, 2, 3, 5, 6	0.696	54.330	6	<0.001	0.696

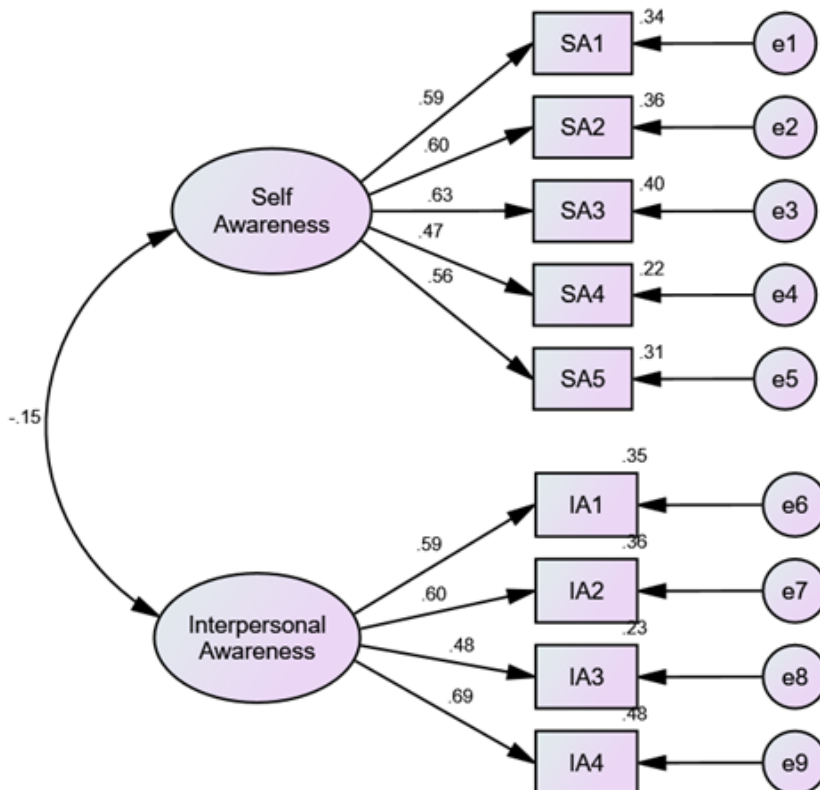
From a practical perspective, interventions such as mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) can be introduced in schools to enhance self-awareness. Buddhist meditation practices, especially Anapana-sati (mindfulness of breathing), offer a foundation for cultivating continuous awareness of the present moment, as outlined in the Anapanasati Sutta (Majjhima Nikāya 118).

Interpersonal Awareness

Interpersonal awareness (Q10-Q13) reflects a higher level of mindfulness, with students scoring higher on these items. This suggests that while students may struggle with personal mindfulness, they are more attuned to their interactions with others. The ability to listen to teachers and respect others' feelings is aligned with the Buddhist practice of compassion (Karuna), as described in Dhammapada Verse 223: "Conquer anger by love, conquer evil by good."



Interpersonal awareness is essential in education, as it fosters an environment of mutual respect and understanding, which enhances collaborative learning. Emotional intelligence, a concept popularized by Goleman (1995), underscores the importance of interpersonal awareness in managing relationships. This dimension of mindfulness can be nurtured through Metta (loving-kindness) meditation, which cultivates empathy and positive regard for others.



Chi-square = 30.950 df = 26, p = .230, GFI = 0.908 CFI = 0.939 TLI = 0.915 ,RMSEA = 0.055 RMSEA 90% confidence interval = [0.000 - 0.119] ,PCLOSE = 0.424 RMR = 0.105

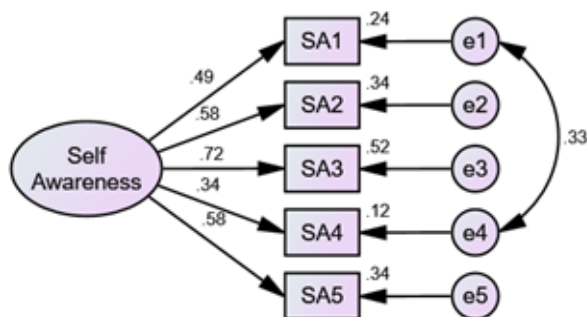
The model fit indices suggest an acceptable fit for the model. The Chi-square value is 30.950 with 26 degrees of freedom and a p-value of .230, indicating that the model fits the data well. The Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI) is 0.908, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) is 0.939, and the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) is 0.915, all of which are above the commonly accepted threshold of 0.90. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) is 0.055 with a 90% confidence interval of [0.000 - 0.119], and the Probability of Close Fit (PCLOSE) is 0.424, indicating a good fit. The Root Mean Square Residual (RMR) is 0.105.

The AVE values for Self Awareness (0.327) and Interpersonal Awareness (0.357) indicate the average amount of variance explained by the latent constructs, while the CR values for Self Awareness (0.649) and Interpersonal Awareness (0.611) reflect the reliability of the constructs, with higher values indicating better reliability. The relationship between the two latent variables, Self Awareness, and Interpersonal Awareness, is represented by a correlation of -0.15, suggesting a slight negative relationship between them. This means that as self-awareness increases, interpersonal awareness slightly decreases, and vice versa. However, the strength of this relationship is relatively weak. This relationship is problematic to explain these two different awarenesses as one construct to form Mindfulness indicating the need for further research.

Factor Analysis

The EFA results supported the distinction between self-awareness and interpersonal awareness, with adequate KMO values of 0.696 and 0.722, respectively, and significant chi-square results. These two factors explained a substantial portion of the variance observed, suggesting that they are reliable constructs for measuring mindfulness in this student population. The CFA further confirmed the model's fit, with excellent fit indices (GFI = 0.977, CFI = 1.000, RMSEA = 0.000) for both dimensions (Results, 2024)(Results).

The findings also revealed a weak negative correlation (-0.15) between self-awareness and interpersonal awareness. This inverse relationship, although small, suggests that an increased focus on others may detract from personal mindfulness. This is an intriguing finding and is consistent with the Buddhist concept of balance between internal and external awareness, as seen in the Satipatṭhāna Sutta, which encourages mindfulness of both oneself and the surrounding environment.



Conclusion

This study highlights the importance of mindfulness, particularly self-awareness and interpersonal awareness, in the educational context of Sri Lankan A/L students. The findings suggest that while students possess a moderate level of interpersonal awareness, they are less adept at maintaining self-awareness during academic activities. The negative correlation between the two dimensions points to the need for a balanced approach to mindfulness training, one that equally emphasizes inward reflection and outward social interactions. Practical recommendations for educators include the introduction of mindfulness-based interventions such as Anapana-sati and Metta meditation into the school curriculum. These practices can improve emotional regulation, reduce stress, and enhance both self-awareness and interpersonal awareness. Furthermore, the application of these mindfulness techniques could lead to more ethical, compassionate, and effective learning environments—key goals of holistic education integrating ethics. Future research should explore the long-term impact of mindfulness training on students' academic performance and emotional well-being, particularly in the context of high-stakes examinations. Additionally, investigating the role of mindfulness in fostering resilience and reducing social fragmentation could provide valuable insights for educational policymakers.

Keywords: Self-awareness, Interpersonal Awareness, Mindfulness, Education, Emotional Regulation

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