
The Impact of Mindfulness on The Relationship Between Goal Conflict and Subjective Well-Being Among University Students

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Abstract

The current study sought to investigate the moderating role of mindfulness in the link between subjective well-being and goal conflict among university students. 320 university students (160 males and 160 females) were selected from various educational institutions. Their ages range from 18 and 24 years. The Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory (Walach et al., 2006), which measures mindfulness, the Goal Conflict Scale (Schnelle et al., 2006), which measures goal conflict, and the Student Subjective Well-Being Questionnaire (SSWQ) (Renshaw, 2015), which measures subjective well-being, were employed. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients were used to determine the psychometric qualities. Results showed that all the research instruments are reliable. Correlation matrix showed that mindfulness is positively correlated with all the types of student's subjective well-being, whereas goal conflict is negatively correlated with all the components of student's subjective well-being and mindfulness. Regression analysis indicated that school connectedness, academic efficacy, educational purpose and joy of learning are working as significant moderator between mindfulness and goal conflict. It was suggested to consider some demographic details like gender, age and education to study the research variables among students.

Keywords: Mindfulness, goal conflict, subjective well-being

The key moment in the educational trajectories of student is the shift from secondary school to post-secondary education where the student needs to make important career choices and personal goals. He tends to make important goals on the base of his interest and capabilities. There is no doubt that goals can give meaning and structure to individual's life (Boudreaux & Ozer, 2013). Conflict arises when an individual chooses or is assigned such goals which are found to be incompatible with each other (Leela & Omiko, 2007). It's not always simple to detect goal conflict at very start. Goal conflict is encountered during the course of pursuing a plan which achieves one goal while ceasing the achievement of another goal. It is found that usually limited resources are the cause of goal conflict (Slade, 1994). Goal conflict might also be occurred when an externally imposed goal go contrary to one's personal goal (Leela & Omiko, 2007). When two goals, plans or projects contest for the same resource such as time or money, goal conflict is occurred (Seegerstrom & Solberg Nes, 2006). Researchers and educationists are developing intervention plans to resolve conflicting situation.

Numerous researches showed that goal conflict causes negative affect and also reduces positive affect (Kehr, 2003; Miller & Brickman, 2004). Basically, the transition from secondary school, to higher education negatively affect the well-being of students due to the differences in expectations of students from the academic environment are found to be quite dissimilar from the actual demands of university (Tinto, 1997). In the new environment of university, unexpected failures in academic tasks further worsen the task of goal achievement (Wrosch, Scheier, Carver, & Schulz, 2003). Failure in the achievement of desired goal gives rise to depressive feelings (Brandtstädter & Rothermund, 2002). Moreover, when the person holds several desirable goals, there might be chances of conflict arousal, because one can't be able to attain several goals at the same time. Pursuit of one goal might hinder the attainment of other valued goal due to which goal conflict occurs which is going to undermine subjective wellbeing. Incompatibility of plans and behaviors for two goals may also give rise to goal conflict. It was found that individuals facing more conflict in their goals are less likely to progress successfully towards goal attainment, thus goal conflict is associated with low wellbeing (Boudreaux & Ozer, 2013; Emmons & King, 1988; Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001; Sheldon & Kasser, 1995).

Buffering hypothesis suggests that the coping resources and social support significantly decrease the psychological effects of stressful life events and on on-going strains (Kaplan, Cassel, & Gore, 1977). Growing literature explains that coping tactics can better provide defense from the effects of life stresses (House, 1981; LaRocco, House, & French, 1980). Brown, Ryan, and Creswell (2007) suggested that variety of positive outcomes like enhanced mental health and effective management of pain is

achieved by higher level of mindfulness. Research studies have found a correlation between subjective wellness and mindfulness, including enhanced good emotions, decreased negative emotions, and higher life satisfaction (Baer et al., 2006; Brown et al., 2009; Brown & Ryan, 2003). Mindfulness is defined as a flexible state of consciousness that involves an open and attentive attention on one's inner state and the external world (Brown and Ryan, 2003; Brown et al., 2007). It promotes self-regulation and lowers automatic thinking, habits, and undesirable behaviours (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Mindfulness promotes prosocial ideals while improving quality of life and subjective well-being (Jacob et al., 2004). Scientific evidence suggests that mindfulness promotes positive emotions linked to subjective well-being. Various scientific fields indicate that self-control can effectively manage negative feelings related to conflicts (Inzlicht et al., 2015). Cognitive neuroscience research proposes that conflict-related negative emotions act as signals, indicating the need to adjust behavior to achieve goals.

The analysis of past studies indicates that conflict in achieving goals harms an individual's overall well-being, requiring various intervention methods. Recently, the focus on students' well-being, contentment, and happiness has piqued the interest of educators, researchers, counselors, and policymakers. Students frequently encounter goal conflicts throughout the learning process, leading to decreased self-assurance and adverse effects on their overall well-being. Kinard (1998) proposed that students can effectively manage the nature of such conflicts by comprehending them. As a trait, mindfulness has garnered significant interest in enhancing awareness, acceptance, and managing goal conflicts (Mandal et al., 2011). This study not only replicates earlier findings regarding the correlation between goal conflicts and subjective well-being but also explores the favorable impact of mindfulness techniques in mitigating the detrimental effects associated with goal conflicts.

Method

Hypotheses

To achieve the above mentioned objectives the following hypotheses were formulated:

1. Goal conflict is negatively related to mindfulness and subjective wellbeing.
2. Mindfulness is positively related to subjective wellbeing.
3. Mindfulness works as moderator between goal conflict and connectedness with institute.
4. Mindfulness works as moderator between goal conflict and academic efficacy.

5. Mindfulness works as moderator between goal conflict and educational purpose.
6. Mindfulness works as moderator between goal conflict and joy of learning.

Instruments

Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory.

The Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory (FMI) (Walach et al., 2006) is a reliable and valid questionnaire for evaluating mindfulness. It has 14 items with responses ranging from 1 (sometimes) to 4 (nearly usually). The FMI assesses trait mindfulness and has good psychometric features, including a high degree of internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.86$ in the original validation research) (Sauer et al., 2011; Eisendrath et al., 2008; Leigh et al., 2005).

Goal Conflict Scale.

Schnelle, Job, and Stieger developed the Goal Conflict Scale (2006). It is a single-factor scale with six items that assess experienced goal conflict. The goal conflict scale showed a substantial, predicted association with wellbeing indices, self-efficacy, and neuroticism. The goal conflict scale explained extra variance in subjective well-being, suggesting that controlling personal objectives is important for perceived well-being. The alpha reliability coefficient is 0.89.

Student Subjective Well-Being Questionnaire (SSWQ).

The SSWQ is a 16-item self-assessment instrument meant to examine school connection, enjoyment of learning, educational motivation, and academic performance (Renshaw et al., 2015). Each item is scored on a four-point scale: 1 = seldom, 2 = occasionally, 3 = frequently, and 4 = very constantly. The dependability of all factors varies from .71 to .93.

Sample

The study's sample included 320 students, 160 men and 160 females, from various colleges and universities in Islamabad and Rawalpindi, Pakistan. The students' ages ranged from 18 to 24, with an average of 21 and a standard deviation of 2.18. The participants were selected via convenient sampling.

Procedure

Participants were approached after receiving approval from their universities. All participants were adequately informed of the study's goal and importance. They completed a series of questionnaires, including the Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory, Goal Conflict Scale, and Student Subjective Well-Being Questionnaire, to assess their metacognition knowledge and regulatory abilities, study habits, and learning techniques. Participants received both verbal and written instructions to ensure they understood how to complete the questions.

Results

Table 1

Correlation of Mindfulness, Goal conflict, School connectedness, Academic efficacy, Educational purpose, Joy of learning, and Total Subjective wellbeing. (N=320)

	N	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mindfulness	14	35.87	6.18	-	-.19*	.35*	.34*	.32*	.32*	.87**
Goal conflict	6	12.97	3.09	-	-	.17*	.18*	.18*	.15*	.46**
School connectedness	4	10.40	2.93	-	-	-	.45*	.42*	.37*	.35**
Academic efficacy	4	11.04	2.79	-	-	-	-	.55*	.49*	.34**
Educational purpose	4	11.60	2.84	-	-	-	-	-	.52**	.32**
Joy of learning	4	11.47	2.83	-	-	-	-	-	-	.32**

**p < .01, *p < .05

Table 1 shows relationship among studied variables. Mindfulness is significantly positive related with subjective well being and its types. Goal conflict is significantly negative correlated with mindfulness and subjective well being.

Table 2

The moderating effect of Mindfulness on Goal Conflict and School Connectedness (N=320)

	School Connectedness		
	Model 1	Model 2	
Predictors	B	B	95% CI
Constant	28.32*	29.57*	[23.32, 28.72]
Goal conflict	-.36**	-.39**	[-.09, -.47]
Mindfulness	.52*	.52*	[.03, .57]
Goal conflict× Mindfulness		.13*	[.03, .58]
R ²	.23	.47	
F	45.67**	43.73**	
ΔR ²		.24	
ΔF		1.94	

**p < .01, *p < .05

Table 2 depicts the moderating role of mindfulness in the link between goal conflict and a component of student subjective well-being known as school connectedness. Goal conflict and mindfulness interact

significantly to explain 23% to 47% of the variation in the association with school connection ($\Delta R^2=.24$).

Table 3

Moderating effect of Mindfulness on Goal Conflict and Academic Efficacy (N=320)

	Academic Efficacy		
	Model 1	Model 2	
Predictors	B	B	95% CI
Constant	27.37*	28.57*	[21.32, 23.72]
Goal conflict	-.67**	-.69**	[-.07, -.70]
Mindfulness	.62*	.62*	[.09, .65]
Goal conflict× Mindfulness		.53*	[.05, .67]
R ²	.33	.49	
F	57.67**	56.73**	
ΔR^2		.16	
ΔF		.94	

**p < .01, *p < .05

Table 3 depicts the moderating influence of mindfulness on the link between goal conflict and academic effectiveness, which is a component of student subjective wellbeing. Goal conflict and mindfulness interact significantly to explain 33% to 49% of the variance in academic effectiveness ($\Delta R^2=.16$).

Table 4

Moderating effect of Mindfulness on Goal Conflict and Educational Purpose (N=320)

	Educational Purpose		
	Model 1	Model 2	
Predictors	B	B	95% CI
Constant	25.36*	31.33*	[21.97, 30.32]
Goal conflict	-.42**	-.45**	[-.07, -.53]

Mindfulness	.63*	.64*	[.09, .74]
Goal conflict× Mindfulness		.19*	[.09, .55]
R²	.25	.46	
F	55.43 **	52.32 **	
ΔR²		.21	
ΔF		.31.	

**p < .01, *p < .05

Table 4 depicts the moderating influence of mindfulness on the link between goal conflict and an aspect of student subjective well-being known as educational purpose. Goal conflict and mindfulness interact significantly to explain 25% to 46% of the variation in the association with educational purpose ($\Delta R^2 = .21$).

Table 5

Moderating effect of Mindfulness on Goal Conflict and Joy of Learning (N=320)

	Joy of Learning		
	Model 1	Model 2	
Predictors	B	B	95% CI
Constant	32.74 *	33.57 *	[27.21, 38.72]
Goal conflict	-.57**	-.59**	[-.02, -.60]
Mindfulness	.61**	.63*	[.07, .76]
Goal conflict× Mindfulness		.39*	[.09, .62]
R²	.23	.47	
F	54.35 **	53.89 **	
ΔR²		.24	
ΔF		.46	

**p < .01, *p < .05

Table 5 depicts the moderating role of mindfulness in the link between goal conflict and a component of student subjective well-being known as joy of learning. Goal conflict and mindfulness interact significantly to explain

23% to 47% of the variation in the association with joy of learning ($\Delta R^2=.24$).

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to enhance the level of subjective wellbeing of the students who face goal conflict during their study process. Results showed that goal conflict has negative relationship with subjective wellbeing. Previous researches also revealed negative association between goal conflict and psychological distress, psychosomatic complaints, and negative affect (Emmons & King, 1988; Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001). Control theory proposed that when the conflict occurs between high level goals or conflict that remains unresolved and persist for long time, this leads to psychological distress (Powers, 1973). It means that in order to enhance subjective wellbeing of the students, they must be empowered with the coping skills and strategies.

Present study also meant to assess the association between goal conflict and four elements of subjective wellbeing that are school connectedness, joy of learning, educational purpose and academic efficacy. Results demonstrated that academic efficacy and educational purpose are negatively affected by goal conflict. Joy of learning and school connectedness revealed no significant relationship with goal conflict. Previous research also demonstrated that destructive conflicts might destroy effectiveness, disrupt work performance, delay and decrease learning efforts, and distress individual commitment to an organization's goals (Janz & Tjosvold, 1985). It was also found that if the conflict is avoided, suppressed or denied then it might become destructive. Due to this reason, the main interest of educationists and researchers is to empower students with skills and strategies to manage goal conflict which is negatively affecting their subjective wellbeing and academic performance.

Empirical evidence revealed that mindfulness has positive effect on subjective wellbeing (Baer et al., 2008; Brown & Ryan, 2003; Brown et al., 2009; Falkenstrom, 2010). People who have elevated awareness of their current surroundings and present situations are more likely to experience higher level of subjective wellbeing (Brown & Ryan, 2003). In line with the previous researches, current study also showed positive relationship between mindfulness and subjective wellbeing. It was also found that mindfulness moderated the relationship between goal conflict and subjective wellbeing. It means that subjective wellbeing of students experiencing high level of mindfulness is less affected by goal conflict. On the other hand, goal conflict disrupts subjective wellbeing of those students who have slight experience of mindfulness. Findings of current study are consistent with the previous research on effectiveness of mindfulness. Brown et al. (2007) suggested that people who practice mindfulness technique in their daily routines or in their assigned tasks, experience

several benefits including improvement in mental wellbeing, physical health, behavioral regulation and interpersonal interactions.

In a nut shell, these findings thus provide evidence of the relationship between goal conflict and subjective wellbeing among adolescents. Current study also suggested solution to resolve goal conflict and to enhance subjective wellbeing of the students so that they can better be able to attain their full potential. As mindfulness exerts variety of beneficial effects including better mental health, effective management of pain, and enhancement of subjective wellbeing, therefore in order to resolve goal conflict, mindfulness might play an important role. Current study also provided evidence of the efficacy of mindfulness in the improvement of subjective wellbeing and reducing the destructive effects of goal conflict.

Practitioners and counselors need to consider the effects of goal conflict on the subjective wellbeing of students. Hickey and McCaslin stated that context convey information that might encourage or discourage sense-making process within the individual. This reasoning and relating process directly affects goal orientation and self-efficacy. Therefore, counselors and educationist try to develop friendly educational environment so that students can better be able to set their goals. In addition to it, students must be empowered with various coping skills and techniques to resolve their goal related conflicts. The technique of mindfulness is of great interest in this regard as it is characterized as elevated attentiveness of both inner state and outside's world. Therefore, students must be familiarized with the facilitative effects of mindfulness on self-control and mental health and they use this intervention not only in daily routines but also in stressful conflicting situations.

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