



## Review Paper

# The Impact of Mindfulness on Enhancing Social and Emotional Intelligence

Nalinee Yadav<sup>1\*</sup> and Nidhi Mishra<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Psychology, Dr. Rammanohar Lohia Avadh University, Ayodhya, UP, India

<sup>2</sup>Department of Psychology, K.S. Saket PG College, Ayodhya, UP, India  
yaduvanshinalinee1310@gmail.com

Available online at: [www.isca.in](http://www.isca.in), [www.isca.me](http://www.isca.me)

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## Abstract

*The effects of mindfulness practices on improving social and emotional intelligence (SEI) are discussed in this paper. The social and emotional intelligence can be defined as the capability to identify, comprehend, and control the feelings of oneself, and the capability of noticing and manipulate the feelings of others. Mindfulness or awareness in the present moment and understanding without judgment has been demonstrated to contribute to emotional regulation, empathy, and self-awareness which are some essential elements of SEI. This paper focuses on the role of mindfulness interventions like mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) or mindfulness meditation in the process of developing these skills. The paper explores the processes by which mindfulness has an impact on emotional regulation, interpersonal communication and empathy by examining the available literature and empirical research. It also deals with the way mindfulness can support people to handle social life, cope with stress, and overcome conflicts in a more efficient way. Moreover, the paper will explain the possible advantages of applying mindfulness interventions to education, organizational, and clinical contexts to enhance the general social and emotional skills. Its results indicate that regular mindfulness meditation can contribute to improving the emotional awareness of an individual, self-regulation ability, and interpersonal effectiveness of the individual considerably, which eventually results in better emotional intelligence and social functioning.*

**Keywords:** Mindfulness practices, mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), self-regulation ability, interpersonal effectiveness.

## Introduction

Over the past three decades, mindfulness has become one of the most influential constructs in contemporary psychology, gaining widespread acceptance across clinical practice, education, leadership studies, and social sciences. Mindfulness is originally based on contemplative traditions, mostly Buddhist meditation practices, which have since been secularized in the literature of psychology, being defined operationally as paying attention in a specific manner: deliberately, in the present and without judgment<sup>1</sup>. This modern form of framing highlights mindfulness as a cognitive skill that can be trained and not as a religious or other metaphysical idea. It is characterized by constant focus on the here-and-now experience, emotional acceptance, cognitive flexibility and deliberate perception of internal and external stimuli<sup>2</sup>.

With the psychological science community becoming more aware of the constraints of the strictly cognitiveist approaches to human functioning, mindfulness studies have become the focus of attention regulation, emotion regulation, interpersonal attunement, and prosocial behavior<sup>3</sup>. Such abilities are related to the multidimensional theories of Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Social Intelligence (SI). Mayer and Salovey argued that emotional intelligence is a skill that involves the capacity to perceive emotions properly, apply emotions to enhance thought,

comprehend emotional meaning, and manage emotions properly<sup>4</sup>. To further widen this scheme, Goleman added the following categories of competencies: self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, motivation, and social skills. Although conceptually similar, social intelligence is more specifically concerned with the capacity to negotiate social situations, comprehend social signals and ensure that interpersonal interactions remain effective<sup>5</sup>.

Over the last few years, researchers have been more and more interested in the junction of mindfulness and emotional/social intelligence, noting that mindfulness could be used as the underlying process to build both abilities. Experience shows that mindfulness can make one more emotionally clear, less impulsive, more likely to be empathic, and better at taking a perspective, which are the primary skills of EI and SI<sup>6</sup>.

In addition, mindfulness facilitates meta-awareness, which helps people monitor their thoughts and feelings without necessarily acting on them and, therefore, develops positive emotional and interpersonal reactions. The neuroscientific literature also indicates that mindfulness meditation results in structural and functional alterations in the emotional processing, empathy, and social cognition areas of the brain. Frequent mindfulness meditation has been indicated to enhance the density of the gray

matter in the anterior cingulate cortex which participates in attention and self-regulation as well as the insula which is linked to interoceptive awareness and empathy<sup>7</sup>. These neurobiological results can support the theoretical arguments that mindfulness improves the processes underlying emotional and social intelligence. The growing entrapment of interpersonal conflicts, psychological suffering, and social disintegration in contemporary societies has increased the concern over strategies that help in the promotion of emotional strength and social adaptive conduct. Examples of mindfulness-based programs that have shown such positive effects on well-being, relationship satisfaction, prosocial behavior, and effective communication include Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) programs<sup>8</sup>.

As a result, mindfulness is currently being applied to school curricula, corporate leadership education, healthcare, and mental health intercession as an intervention to improve emotional and social functioning. Considering these advances, the following paper will focus on offering an opportunity to analyze in detail the processes by which mindfulness leads to improvements in emotional and social intelligence on the basis of the information in cognitive psychology, affective neuroscience, behavioral studies, and contemplative science. Through a combination of theoretical framework and empirical evidence, the paper points to the fact that mindfulness enhances emotional regulation, empathy, interpersonal sensitivity, and prosocial engagement, which are the competencies that can be used to succeed in a personal, social, and professional setting.

### Understanding Mindfulness

Mindfulness in modern psychology is generally characterized as a metacognitive skill comprising of purposeful control of

attention to current experiences alongside taking a curious and open-minded approach to the experiences<sup>2</sup>. The attentional component highlights a long-term attentional tracking of immediate sensory, cognitive, and affective events so that individuals become aware of the internal events as they occur without getting caught in them, whilst the attitudinal component encourages an accepting and nonjudgmental attitude to cognition and emotions which reduce the patterns of habitual judgments<sup>9</sup>.

These foundational processes underpin mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs), most prominently Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), which integrate formal practices such as sitting meditation, body scanning, and mindful movement with informal practices that extend mindful awareness into daily behaviours<sup>10</sup>. Empirical research has consistently shown that MBIs enhance attentional stability, cognitive flexibility, and emotional regulation by strengthening meta-awareness and reducing automatic reactivity to stressors<sup>11</sup>.

The neurocognitive evidence also evidence-based that mindfulness training is linked to structural and functional changes in the brain regions that are involved in self-regulation, including the anterior cingulate cortex, prefrontal cortex, and insula, making it implicated in enhancing interoception, executive functioning, and emotion-processing pathways<sup>12</sup>. Taken together, these results highlight the importance of mindfulness as a complex set of psychological skills facilitating the improvement of mental health and create the theoretical basis of the discussion of its role in social and emotional intelligence.



Figure-1: Flowchart Showing How Mindfulness Enhances Emotional and Social Intelligence.

## Emotional Intelligence and Social Intelligence: Conceptual Frameworks

Emotional intelligence (EI) has become one of the focus points in the field of affective and social psychology, and in general terms, this construct can be described as a pattern of interconnected cognitive skills that allow one to recognize, comprehend, use, and manage emotions in adaptive manners<sup>13</sup>. Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso<sup>13</sup> explain four hierarchically structured branches of emotion perception, emotion assimilation problem-solving, emotion understanding, and emotion regulation that represent more complex cognitive-emotional processing processes needed to manage oneself and interact with others effectively. In its turn, the mixed-model conceptualization of EI developed by Goleman<sup>5</sup> exemplifies the use of EI as a complex of intrapersonal and interpersonal skills comprising self-awareness, impulse control, empathy, motivation, and social skills that correlate the abilities with well-being, leadership qualities, job performance, and conflict management. Social intelligence (SI) is closely related but a different concept since it is the skill of maneuvering in social situations by appropriate social perception, sensitivity to others emotions and intentions, and the skill of sustaining economically beneficial social relationship. SI refers to the elements of social awareness, social facility, perspective taking and interpersonal influence, which are facilitated by cognitive empathy and behavioural adaptability, making it an excellent predictor of prosocial behaviour, team cohesion, and interpersonal satisfaction<sup>14</sup>. Empirical research findings have consistently indicated that EI as well as SI are positively related to psychological and mental health, academic achievement and satisfaction in life<sup>15</sup>. Notably, the basic processes underlying EI/SI such as improved attentional monitoring, emotional clarity, interoceptive accuracy, and empathic concern which in turn limit emotional reactivity, enhance cognitive flexibility and facilitate more responsive interpersonal behaviors are directly addressed by mindfulness practices<sup>7</sup>. Mindfulness enhances the fundamental competencies inherent in EI and SI frameworks by helping to build up heightened self-awareness and social cue sensitivity to improve adaptive emotional functioning and socially intelligent behavior in everyday life.

## Theoretical Link between Mindfulness and Emotional/Social Intelligence

Mindfulness improves emotional intelligence (EI) and social intelligence (SI) by interacting with a complex set of interdependent cognitive, affective and neurobiological processes that work together to reinforce intrapersonal and interpersonal functioning. At the base, mindfulness develops greater emotional awareness through teaching individuals to maintain attention in the present moment and to form emotionally sensitive attention to affection signals, whereby the specificity of emotional recognition and interpretation and this ability is known as emotional differentiation or clarity<sup>16</sup>.

This kind of awareness interrupts habitual, automatic processing routes, permitting individuals to observe minor changes in mood, physical sensation and cognitive assessments prior to them turning into detrimental responses<sup>17,18</sup>. This increased meta-awareness is a direct contributor to EI elements of accurate emotion perception and self-awareness. Mindfulness also helps to regulate emotions better, as repeated practice lowers the baseline emotional reactivity by downregulating amygdala activation and enhancing connections between the prefrontal cortex and the limbic system, becoming more reflective than impulsive to external and internal stress<sup>11</sup>. Such neurocognitive alterations facilitate adaptive coping measures of acceptance, decentering and cognitive reappraisal, so that people can better manage interpersonal conflict and emotionally-driven social events. Also important is the effect of mindfulness on empathy and compassion, in which practices of compassion and open-monitoring increase the ability of individuals to experience affective and cognitive empathy. Evidence of neuroimaging studies has shown that mindfulness enhances activation in the anterior insula, temporoparietal junction, and the medial prefrontal cortex areas which are associated with empathic resonance, perspective-taking, and social cognition, therefore, promoting emotional sensitivity, lessening egocentrism, and promoting compassion-related prosocial responses<sup>19,20</sup>.

These transformations enhance such aspects of SI as social awareness and the possibility to be responsive to the emotional conditions of others. Lastly, mindfulness leads to more social attunement and communication abilities, facilitating via non-reactive listening, diminishing self-referential thought processes dominance, and cognitive flexibility to read interpersonal communication, speak clearly, and to regulate feelings in interpersonal exchanges. This kind of attentive interpersonal presence leads to a better level of relational satisfaction, less miscommunication, and cooperation. Together, these processes demonstrate that mindfulness is not a stress-reduction method but a complex system of attentional and emotional training that will progressively enhance the psychological abilities inherent in EI and SI, leading to more sensitive, empathetic, and socially intelligent behavior under a variety of conditions.

## Empirical Evidence Linking Mindfulness to EI and SI

The empirical evidence concerning the beneficial effects of mindfulness on emotional intelligence (EI) and social intelligence (SI) is supported convergently by a significant amount of empirical studies, showing that it is beneficial at the psychological, neurocognitive, interpersonal, educational, and workplace levels. To begin with, psychological research has repeatedly found that trait and trained mindfulness both improve emotional clarity, empathy and self-compassion, and greatly enhance regulatory abilities vital to EI; an example is a systematic meta-analysis, which found mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) to have a positive, consistent, and

significant effect on adaptive emotion regulation, prosocial behavior, and interpersonal functioning. Similarly, Brown et al.<sup>3</sup> indicated that the dispositional mindfulness is positively associated with emotional awareness, lower emotional suppression and enhanced compassionate responding which also support the core EI competencies. Second, neuroscientific investigations offer good mechanistic evidence, showing that mindfulness meditation can lead to structural and functional alterations in the brain to improve processing of emotions and social interactions<sup>3</sup>. Tang et al.<sup>12</sup> established that not only short-term mindfulness training results in increased connectivity of the prefrontal cortex, which supports executive control and regulation, but also reinforced activity of the anterior cingulate cortex, the crucial part of EI and SI, which monitors conflicts, enables cognitive flexibility, and regulates attention<sup>12</sup>. Third, interpersonal studies reveal that mindfulness plays a great role in improving relationship functioning, where results indicate that empathy, emotional sharing, mutual responsiveness are improved by mindfulness-based relationship enhancement programs; Carson et al. found that relationship satisfaction, interpersonal conflict, and emotional intimacy were promoted through mindfulness, implying that mindfulness promotes social attunement and prosocial interactions<sup>21</sup>. Fourth, the results of educational contexts indicate that mindfulness combined with social-emotional learning (SEL) interventions result in decreases in aggression, better peer relationships, greater empathy, and increased prosocial behavior in students, including those that were reported by Schonert-Reichl and Lawlor, who reported statistically significant improvements in emotional control and social skills in elementary school populations<sup>22</sup>. Lastly, in the workplace, it has been shown that mindfulness is an indicator of better leadership, increased emotional stability, improved communication, and other team functioning behaviors, where Reb et al. find that mindful leaders have superior emotional control, interpersonal sensitivity, and performance among their subordinates<sup>23</sup>. Taken together, these results support the idea that mindfulness is empirically supported as a strong boost of EI and SI in various situations, which makes it an important intervention in personal growth, interpersonal operation, and interpersonal welfare.

**Table-1:** Applications of Mindfulness in Enhancing Emotional and Social Intelligence.

| Domain                          | Key Mindfulness Effects  | Outcomes Related to EI and SI                                  |
|---------------------------------|--|--|
| Clinical & Therapeutic Settings | Improves emotional awareness, reduces anxiety & depression, enhances acceptance. | Better emotion regulation, improved interpersonal functioning. |
| Educational Settings            | Strengthens attention, empathy, and classroom behavior; reduces student stress.  | Enhanced empathy, prosocial behavior, academic engagement.     |

|                               |  |  |
|-------------------------------|--|--|
| Workplace & Leadership        | Improves self-regulation, ethical decision-making, and perspective-taking.         | Emotionally intelligent leadership, better teamwork, reduced conflict. |
| Digital & Online Interactions | Reduces impulsive responses, increases mindful communication.                      | Clarity in emotional expression, reduced misunderstandings online.     |
| Neuroscientific Development   | Strengthens PFC and ACC connectivity, increases empathy-related neural activation. | Enhanced emotional clarity, decision-making, and empathic accuracy.    |
| Interpersonal Relationships   | Promotes attentive listening, compassion, and emotional sharing.                   | Increased relationship satisfaction and social attunement.             |

### Applications of Mindfulness in Enhancing EI and SI

Mindfulness as a phenomenon has since become an evidence-based and multifunctional tool to enhance emotional intelligence (EI), social intelligence (SI), and different areas, including clinics, education, workplace, and online settings. The use of mindfulness-based interventions such as Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) has proved to decrease the level of anxiety, depression, emotional dysregulation, and interpersonal reactivity by improving the ability of the clients to become mindful of their emotions without judging and reaction with more<sup>10</sup>. This kind of intervention promotes emotional stability, improved affect-regulation, empathic responsiveness between clients and therapists which develops therapeutic alliances. Mindfulness-based Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programs reveal considerable effects of emotional awareness, empathy, attention, prosocialness, and academic achievement in students, and reduced burnout, reduced stress, and improved classroom atmosphere and conflict management in teachers who practice mindfulness<sup>24</sup>. Mindfulness at the workplaces has come to be a substantial contributor of emotionally intelligent leaders—leaders who are mindful exhibit superior self-management, ethical judgments, perspective-taking, and relationship transparency, which have given rise to healthier relations within workplaces and organizations with stronger cultures<sup>17,23</sup>. The stress assists in eliminating stress, enhancing job satisfaction, and fostering positive communication at the workplace due to mindfulness-based programs, which are employee-centered. Mindfulness, due to minimalization and easy misinterpretation of emotional reactions during the communication process, which occurs online and through the electronic environment, helps to reduce the number of impulsive or emotionally driven reactions, enables digital empathy and brings clarity and civility to the communication process, which is conveyed by means of texts<sup>25</sup>.

All these applications indicate that mindfulness can be used to enhance the level of emotional and social skills, as well as to stimulate performance in any inter-personal and educational, professional, and online environment.

### Limitations and Future Directions

Although there are significant data indicating that mindfulness is a working mechanism to increase emotional intelligence (EI) and social intelligence (SI), multiple methodological, conceptual, and practical shortcomings render the necessity of conducting more rigorous research in the future. One of the most critical shortcomings of the current literature is the excessive use of self-report measures, which can also cause the social desirability bias and overestimate the perceived benefits of mindfulness because of the subjective way of interpreting the emotional or social changes by the participants<sup>26</sup>. Several studies also use short-term interventions and cross-sectional designs, that is why it is not possible to make a causal conclusion about long-term modifications in the emotional control, the empathy or the interpersonal functioning. There should therefore be longitudinal, randomized controlled trials with multi-method measures, behavioral tasks, biological measures, and informant reports to test the sustainable and external validity of mindfulness related gains<sup>27</sup>. The other gap is the cultural and contextual diversity of the mindfulness practices; most of the studies are carried out in the western contexts yet the origins of mindfulness can be traced back to the Asian schools of contemplation implying the need of carrying out cross-cultural comparative studies to determine how the cultural norms, values, and perceptions are involved in determining the EI and SI outcomes<sup>28</sup>. In addition, digitally and technology-mediated mindfulness programs, including mobile applications, virtual reality applications, and emotionally-training AI-based systems, have not been studied extensively, but have the potential to provide scalable, personalized emotional skill-building programs. Combining mindfulness and the innovative artificial intelligence systems could potentially discover new opportunities to improve emotions awareness, empathic performance, and interpersonal sensitivity in physical and online settings. All in all, future studies need to be more eclectic, incorporate both the cultural and technological backgrounds, and explore the ways mindfulness can be successfully correlated with recent technologies to develop emotional and social intelligence in the ever-expanding contemporary communities.

### Conclusion

Mindfulness has been found as a revolutionary psychological ability that has deep impressions to the advancement of emotional and social intelligence in modern society. By its essential elements of mindfulness in the present, non-judgmental acceptance, mindfulness helps individuals to develop stronger emotional clarity, stability and responsiveness to internal and external experiences. This greater awareness

promotes important aspects of emotional intelligence such as the ability to recognize and label emotions correctly, emotional triggers and to manage affective states adaptively and constructively. At the same time, mindfulness develops the required social intelligence capacities, such as empathy, compassion, and perspective-taking, since it opens people to be more open and responsive to each other. Psychological research, neuroscientific research, educational interventions, and workplace application findings can all point to the observation that mindfulness has been shown to increase attentional control, resilience of neural networks involving emotion and social cognition, promote healthier communication patterns, and lead to more harmonious and prosocial relationships. With the growing complexity and technological mediation of societies, the ability to guide oneself through emotional states and social relationships clearly and compassionately is becoming more important than ever, which makes mindfulness a skill to be considered with regard to personal health, relationship health, and professional performance. Despite the measurement issues, cultural generalizability, and technological adaptation, the interdisciplinary support is growing, which means that mindfulness will take over an increased responsibility in advancing emotional and social skills. Continuous study, innovation with practical applications, and use with online resources and education systems will continue to expand the range of mindfulness benefits, and it will be an invaluable tool of emotional stability, interpersonal relationships, and overall human growth in the future.

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