

A Study of a Social-Emotional Learning Program for College Students Integrating Mindfulness

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Abstract: *With the increasing attention to psychological problems, the concepts of social-emotional learning and mindfulness have gradually entered people's view. This paper analyzes the possibility of integrating mindfulness and social-emotional learning and confirms the existence of a correlation between the two through practical investigations, on the basis of which a social-emotional learning program integrating mindfulness is explored. The program integrates mindfulness practices with social-emotional learning to provide students with opportunities for holistic development through the development of competencies such as emotional awareness, interpersonal communication, and social adaptation. The study analyzes mindfulness activities and related mindfulness concepts under the five core themes and secondary themes of social-emotional learning. In addition, the study explores the challenges that may arise during implementation and proposes solutions accordingly.*

Keywords: *mindfulness; social-emotional learning; emotional cognition; integrated teaching*

1. Introduction

In recent years, despite the improvement of living standards, the fiercely competitive social environment has led people to generally face emotional problems such as stress, depression, and anxiety. Therefore, global attention to mental health issues has significantly increased, and governments, international organizations, and academia are increasing their efforts to promote the development of research, prevention, and intervention measures for mental health. According to the WHO, mental health issues, especially anxiety and depression, have become a major component of the global disease burden [1]. In addition, mental health is not only related to individual well-being, but also affects economic productivity and social stability. Therefore, enhancing the accessibility and quality of mental health services has become one of the global public health priorities.

On the one hand, it has been found that social-emotional learning (SEL) is increasingly important in education. It can assist children and adults in developing skills and attitudes comprehensively to achieve individual and collective goals. This process involves emotional management, shaping a healthy identity, cultivating empathy, establishing supportive relationships, and making responsible and caring decisions. Through SEL, individuals can not only better understand their own and others' emotions, but also effectively cope with emotions and establish positive interpersonal relationships. This type of learning not only contributes to personal growth, but also provides a foundation for the development and progress of society, as it cultivates more socially responsible and empathetic behavior patterns, driving society towards a more just, equal, and harmonious direction.

In addition, since the 2010s, meditation has become a hot topic in society, with words such as healing and mindfulness frequently appearing. Meditation, especially Mindfulness Meditation, is widely studied and practiced in the fields of mental health, psychotherapy, and personal development. Mindfulness originates from Buddhist tradition, and Kabat defines it as a non-judgmental, present moment consciousness or awareness [2]. This form of meditation has been integrated into various psychotherapy models, such as Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) and Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). Research has shown that meditation and mindfulness training can effectively reduce anxiety, depression, and stress, while improving emotional regulation and self-awareness [3]. These technologies are seen as effective tools for enhancing psychological resilience and personal well-being. The promotion of mindfulness meditation is not limited to personal practice, but it is also adopted by businesses, educational institutions, and healthcare systems to enhance the overall well-being of employees, college students, and patients. For college students, these programs aim to cultivate their mindfulness and effectively combine theoretical knowledge with practical behavior to improve their

psychological well-being and learning outcomes [4]. By implementing mindfulness and counseling programs in the university environment, not only can the mental health of college students be improved, but their learning motivation and academic performance can also be enhanced. Regular mindfulness exercises can improve attention, reduce stress responses, and enhance emotional regulation abilities, thereby bringing positive changes in academic and personal development [5]. Therefore, mindfulness programs are seen as an effective educational tool and a worthwhile educational innovation to invest in.

This study aims to explore the SEL program that integrates mindfulness. By conducting a survey on the mindfulness level and SEL ability of college students, we aim to understand their current state and explore how to enhance their SEL ability by integrating mindfulness. Specifically, the research objectives include: Firstly, evaluating the mindfulness level and SEL ability of college students to understand their performance and needs in these two fields; Secondly, design an SEL program that integrates mindfulness and promotes the improvement of emotional cognition and interpersonal communication skills among college students through mindfulness exercises, emotional management skills training, and other methods. Through these research objectives, we aim to provide effective interventions and support for the mental health and comprehensive development of college students, and to provide theoretical and practical guidance for promoting their personal growth and social integration.

2. The Concept of Mindfulness and SEL and the Possibility of Integration

2.1 The Concept of Mindfulness and SEL

2.1.1 Mindfulness

Mindfulness is an ancient and complex psychological state that primarily involves comprehensive attention to current experiences and non-critical consciousness. This concept originated from the Buddhist tradition, particularly in its practice of meditation, where mindfulness (*Sati* in Pali and *Smṛti* in Sanskrit) is awareness of mental activities and sensations. In Buddhism, mindfulness is the keyway to achieve spiritual enlightenment and liberation. At the end of the 20th century, mindfulness was introduced into the field of Western psychotherapy and personal development. Jon Kabat Zinn was one of the pioneers who introduced mindfulness into the mainstream of Western medicine and psychology. He founded MBSR in 1979 with the aim of helping people manage pain and stress through mindfulness meditation. Kabat Zinn defines mindfulness as "conscious attention to current things within a specific time and space, non-judgmental awareness". Subsequently, this concept has gradually been applied to various clinical psychotherapy methods, such as MBCT, which is a treatment method that combines cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and mindfulness techniques to prevent the recurrence of depression [6]. Research has shown that mindfulness training can effectively reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression, improve attention, enhance emotional regulation abilities, and enhance empathy and interpersonal relationships. In the field of education, mindfulness is used to help college students manage exam pressure and improve learning efficiency; In enterprises, mindfulness training is used to improve employee job satisfaction and productivity. Although mindfulness has gained widespread recognition in clinical and daily applications, its popularity has also sparked some criticism and controversy, mainly regarding its commercialization and detachment from its spiritual roots. Some critics point out that the popularity of mindfulness may lead to the neglect of its deeper spiritual and ethical dimensions. Overall, mindfulness, as a psychological and spiritual practice, has become a widely accepted technique in modern society, helping people find calmness and clarity in fast-paced and high-pressure environments.

2.1.2 SEL

SEL is an educational method that integrates the research results of psychology, education, and neuroscience, aiming to cultivate the emotional intelligence, interpersonal communication skills, and self-management skills of college students. The core of SEL lies in recognizing and managing one's emotions, establishing positive relationships, making responsible decisions, and effectively facing challenges in life. The concept of SEL can be traced back to the works of psychologists such as John Dewey in the early 20th century, who emphasized that education should focus on holistic development, including the cultivation of emotional and social abilities. In the 1960s and 1970s, with the rise of psychological and humanistic education, schools began to pay more attention to the emotional and social development of college students. In 1975, Daniel Goleman's Emotional Intelligence (EI) theory provided the theoretical basis for SEL. Goleman believed that emotional intelligence is a key factor for individual success, including self-awareness, self-regulation, social skills, empathy, and self-motivation [7]. In the early 1990s, the establishment of CASEL marked the formal formation of SEL in the field of education.

CASEL defines the five core areas of SEL: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. CASEL's work has promoted the widespread implementation of school SEL projects and the formulation of related policies. The effectiveness of SEL has been extensively supported by research. A meta-analysis conducted by Durlak et al. in 2011 showed that college students who participated in SEL courses performed better in social behavior, emotional management, and academic performance, showing lower emotional distress and fewer behavioral problems [8]. In addition, Taylor et al.'s research also indicates that SEL not only improves the school performance of college students, but also has a positive impact on their long-term health and behavior [9]. With the increasing global emphasis on mental health and overall education, SEL has been incorporated into school curricula in many countries. For example, in the United States, an increasing number of school districts are implementing SEL courses as part of school education. In other regions such as Europe, Asia, and Australia, SEL has also begun to receive attention, although there are differences in implementation methods and degrees. As a comprehensive educational strategy, the global promotion of SEL foreshadows an important direction for future education, which is to cultivate a more comprehensive, adaptable, and emotionally intelligent next generation.

2.2 The Possibility of Integrating Mindfulness and SEL

Mindfulness and SEL have significant commonalities at multiple levels, particularly in promoting individual emotional management, interpersonal relationships, and self-awareness. Both emphasize the importance of consciousness, especially the awareness of inner experiences, and how this awareness can help individuals more effectively cope with the challenges of daily life.

Firstly, they all focus on how to better understand and handle inner emotions and emotional states, despite differences in their methods and focus. Mindfulness is a psychological practice that emphasizes awareness and acceptance of current experiences, aiming to enhance emotional management skills by enhancing awareness of one's own emotional state. This practice helps individuals to have a clearer understanding of their emotional responses and learn to accept and handle these emotions without making immediate responses. SEL, on the other hand, is a broader educational practice that focuses on cultivating emotional abilities in the interaction between individuals and the social environment, including self-awareness, self-management, social cognition, and interpersonal skills. Mindfulness helps improve emotional regulation and reduce psychological stress by teaching individuals how to pay attention and accept their own feelings and thoughts. This method has been proven to effectively alleviate anxiety, depression, and stress responses, thereby improving the overall mental health and well-being of individuals. SEL teaches college students how to recognize and manage their own emotions, understand the emotions of others, establish positive interpersonal relationships, and make responsible decisions through structured courses and activities [10].

Secondly, mindfulness and SEL both emphasize self-awareness and self-regulation, which are crucial for individual emotional management and social adaptation. Mindfulness helps individuals to regulate their emotions and behaviors more effectively in daily life by enhancing their awareness of their own emotions and thoughts. This method encourages individuals to accept and understand psychological stress or negative emotions through non critical awareness, thereby developing healthier coping mechanisms [11]. SEL provides a more systematic educational framework aimed at helping college students better adapt and succeed in the social environment by teaching self-awareness and self-management skills. This includes identifying and understanding one's emotions, learning to control impulses, setting and achieving personal goals, and taking responsible decisions. Through the cultivation of these skills, SEL can help enhance the social skills and emotional intelligence of college students, thereby improving their interpersonal relationships and academic performance [12].

In addition, mindfulness and SEL also believe that emotions and moods play important roles in individual growth and development. Mindfulness and SEL both recognize the core role of emotions and moods in individual growth and development. Although there are differences in application and goals between the two, they both emphasize the importance of cultivating emotional intelligence in enhancing individual mental health, social adaptability, and overall happiness. Mindfulness training focuses on individuals enhancing their emotional regulation ability and self-awareness by perceiving and non-critically accepting their own emotional experiences. This internal observation helps individuals understand and process emotional responses, thereby promoting mental health and improving quality of life. Research has shown that through mindfulness practice, individuals can more effectively manage stress and anxiety, improve self-control and psychological resilience, which are important components of mental health. At the same time, SEL emphasizes the influence of emotions and moods on individual socialization processes and the establishment of interpersonal relationships. The goal of SEL is to educate

college students to recognize and manage their own and others' emotions, develop empathy and social skills, and thereby enhance their interpersonal skills and sense of social participation. This process not only helps college students adapt to the school environment, but also has a long-term impact on the quality of their career and personal life.

3. The Survey on the Mindfulness and SEL Abilities of College Students

3.1 Survey Design

In addition to demographic characteristics, the survey designed 15 mindfulness related questions, which were divided into 5 themes: Focus and Awareness, Inner Peace and Relaxation, Gratitude and Tolerance, Thinking and Coping, Connection and Balance, measured using the Likert five level scale (completely disagree to completely agree). The internal consistency reliability of this item is 0.756. In addition, college students are required to conduct self-evaluation of their SEL level in five aspects: Self-awareness, Self-management, Social awareness, Interpersonal Skills, and Responsible Decision-making. A total of 16 questions were designed and measured using the Likert five level scale (completely disagree to completely agree). The internal consistency reliability of this item is 0.784.

3.2 Survey Object

The main target of this survey is college students from two universities in western China. A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed, 16 invalid questionnaires were excluded, and 284 questionnaires were collected, with an effective rate of 94.7%. In order to ensure the diversity and representativeness of the sample, we specifically selected students from different grades, genders, and professional backgrounds to participate in the survey, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Basic Population Situation of Survey Subjects

Theme	Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Theme	Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	140	49.3	ethnic group	Han	150	52.82
	Female	144	50.7		Minority	134	47.18
Grade	Grade 1	71	25	major	Humanities and Social Sciences	70	24.65
	Grade 2	67	23.59		Natural Science and Mathematics	66	23.24
	Grade 3	70	24.65		Engineering and Technology	73	25.7
	Grade 4	76	26.76		Life Science and Health Science	75	26.41

3.3 Analysis of Survey Results

3.3.1 Overall Situation of Mindfulness and SEL Ability among College Students

In the survey, participants self-reported a moderate level of mindfulness and social emotional ability, which were measured using a 5-point Likert scale. Specifically, the average level of mindfulness ranges from 2.977 to 3.081. Among them, the average value of focus and awareness is 2.977, inner peace and relaxation is 3.009, gratitude and tolerance are 3.081, thinking and response is 2.991, and connection and balance is 3.03.

Similarly, the average value of social emotional ability ranges from 2.985 to 3.025. The average value in terms of self-awareness is 2.999, self-management is 3.025, social awareness is 2.995, interpersonal skills are 2.985, and responsible decision-making is 3.009.

These data indicate that although the mindfulness and social emotional abilities of college students are at a moderate level, there is still significant room for improvement. This research result emphasizes the importance of further developing these abilities to help students achieve more comprehensive development at both the personal and social levels.

3.3.2 Correlation Analysis between Mindfulness Level and SEL Ability of College Students

In addition, we also examined the effects of different mindfulness behaviors, including focus and awareness, inner calmness and relaxation, gratitude and tolerance, thinking and coping, and connection and balance, on SEL levels. The results showed a significant positive correlation between mindfulness level and SEL level, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Correlation analysis between mindfulness level and SEL level of college students

	Self-Awareness	Self-Management	Social awareness	Relationship skills	Responsible decision making
Focus and awareness	0.140*	0.177**	0.152*	0.055	0.151*
Inner peace and relaxation	0.075	0.11	0.168**	0.014	0.179**
Gratitude and tolerance	0.156**	0.230**	0.129*	0.143*	0.084
Thinking and Coping	0.163**	0.178**	0.162**	0.122*	0.230**
Connection and balance	0.178**	0.119*	0.027	0.077	0.116

* $P < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$

From the above table, it can be seen that: Self-awareness shows significant positive correlations with Focus and Awareness, Gratitude and Tolerance, Thinking and Coping, and Connection and Balance, with coefficients of 0.140, 0.156, 0.163, and 0.178 respectively. Self-management is positively correlated with Focus and Awareness, Gratitude and Tolerance, Thinking and Coping, and Connection and Balance, with correlation values of 0.177, 0.230, 0.178, and 0.119 respectively. Social Awareness has positive correlations with Focus and Awareness, Inner Peace and Relaxation, Gratitude and Tolerance, and Thinking and Coping, with coefficients of 0.152, 0.168, 0.129, and 0.162 respectively. Relationship Skills are positively linked with Gratitude and Tolerance and Thinking and Coping, showing correlation coefficients of 0.143 and 0.122 respectively. Responsible Decision-Making demonstrates positive correlations with Focus and Awareness, Inner Peace and Relaxation, and Thinking and Coping, with coefficients of 0.151, 0.179, and 0.230 respectively.

4. SEL Program that Integrates Mindfulness

4.1 Mindfulness Activities and Related Conceptual Analysis of the Core Theme of SEL

The SEL program that integrates mindfulness represents a novel and comprehensive approach aimed at promoting individuals' emotional cognition, interpersonal communication, and social adaptability. Mindfulness practice cultivates the ability to focus, accept, and reflect on oneself, which helps students better understand and cope with internal emotional experiences, and improves their emotional regulation level. This program aims to guide students to learn how to listen to their inner voices, understand the emotional experiences of others, and use mindfulness techniques to improve interpersonal relationships and resolve conflicts through various methods such as classroom teaching, practical activities, and personal counseling, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Mindfulness Activities and Related Concepts Analysis of SEL Core Themes

Core theme	Unique mindfulness based activities	Concepts related to mindfulness
Self-Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Emotional Awareness Meditation: Through meditation practice, help participants perceive their emotions, thoughts, and inner reactions, and understand their impact on behavior. · Assess self-strengths and weaknesses: Guide participants to conduct self-assessment, objectively and accurately understand their strengths and weaknesses, and cultivate a confident and optimistic mindset. · Value exploration: Through mindfulness exercises, help participants reflect and explore their core values, and understand their guiding role in behavior. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Emotional Awareness · Self Reflection · Self-Acceptance · Self-Regulation

Self-Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·Emotional regulation exercise: Guide participants to learn how to effectively manage and regulate their emotions, including stress and impulsiveness, through mindfulness exercises. ·Goal setting and effort: Through mindfulness, help participants set personal growth and learning goals, and cultivate the quality of perseverance and effort. ·Self-encouragement and self-affirmation: Through mindfulness practice, teach participants to learn self-encouragement and positive self-affirmation, and enhance their confidence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·Emotion Regulation Stress ·Management Impulse ·Control Goal Setting ·Self-Motivation
Social Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·Cultural scenario simulation: Organize participants to participate in cross-cultural scenario simulation activities, helping them enhance their understanding and respect for others from different cultural perspectives. ·Social norms cognition: Through mindfulness exercises, guide participants to recognize and understand social norms and values in different cultural backgrounds and cultivate cross-cultural communication skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·Cross Cultural ·Understanding Empathy ·Social Awareness Cultural ·Sensitivity
Relationship Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·Active Listening Practice: Through mindfulness, cultivate participants to actively listen to others and express understanding and respect. ·Conflict resolution techniques: Guide participants to learn effective conflict resolution techniques, including calm communication, seeking compromise, and collaborative problem-solving. ·Social stress coping: Through mindfulness exercises, help participants resist inappropriate social stress and maintain genuine and firm interpersonal relationships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·Effective Communication ·Collaboration and ·Teamwork Conflict ·Resolution Social Pressure ·Management Helping and Supporting Relationships
Responsible Decision Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·Ethical decision-making discussion: Organize participants to engage in ethical decision-making discussions, consider the consequences of behavior and its impact on the well-being of others, and cultivate rational and responsible decision-making abilities. ·Safety awareness cultivation: Through mindfulness exercises, guide participants to fully consider the safety factors of their behavior and make wise and responsible choices based on actual situations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·Mineral Judgment Ethical ·Decision Making Risk ·Assessment Personal ·Responsibility Social Good

4.2 Implementation Requirements for the SEL Program that Integrates Mindfulness

The implementation of integrated mindfulness SEL programs by schools and teachers requires certain requirements and conditions to ensure the effective implementation of the program and the comprehensive development of students. The following are the requirements that schools and teachers should meet when implementing this program: firstly, the teacher's mindfulness literacy and professional ability. Teachers need to receive mindfulness education and training, master mindfulness theory and practical skills. They should have profound experience in mindfulness practice, be able to integrate mindfulness elements into teaching, and guide students to practice mindfulness. Teachers should also have good emotional management skills, be able to understand and support the emotional development of students and respond promptly to their emotional problems. Secondly, the support and resource guarantee of the school. School leaders and managers need to provide comprehensive support for the SEL program that integrates mindfulness. Schools should provide necessary funding and facilities to support teacher training, curriculum design, and student engagement activities. In addition, schools should also develop relevant policies and guidance documents to provide legal and administrative guarantees for the smooth implementation of the program. Thirdly, student participation and engagement. Students should be actively encouraged and guided to fully participate in the SEL program that integrates mindfulness. Teachers can stimulate students' interest and participation by organizing classroom activities, campus activities, and community services. At the same time, schools should also create a campus culture and environment that supports student development, allowing students to feel the joy and

significance of learning. In summary, the implementation of the integrated mindfulness SEL program by schools and teachers requires comprehensive consideration of factors such as teachers, schools, and students to ensure the smooth implementation of the program and the comprehensive development of students. Only through joint efforts from all parties can we provide students with a positive and healthy learning environment, promoting their comprehensive growth and development.

5. Conclusion

So far, we have studied methods for integrating mindfulness and social emotional learning. Therefore, the concepts of mindfulness and SEL were first explored. Subsequently, the possibility and educational significance of their integration were explored. Next, the relationship between mindfulness and SEL was determined through investigation, and finally, an SEL program that integrates mindfulness was explored. Therefore, we need to clarify that the fusion of mindfulness and SEL is possible, as there are differences and similarities between the two. The SEL program that integrates mindfulness has a positive impact on the emotional intelligence and mental health of college students, but it still faces some challenges and problems in the implementation process. By continuously improving and optimizing the design and implementation of the program, it can better play its role, provide more comprehensive and targeted growth opportunities for college students, and promote their comprehensive development and healthy growth.

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