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Sonaj Bilal

International Balkan University, Skopje, North
Macedonia

<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-3000-3136>

Correspondence concerning this article should be
addressed to Sonaj Bilal,

Email: sonaj.bilal@ibu.edu.mk



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Mindfulness, Motivation, and Wellbeing in Primary School Teachers

Sonaj Bilal

Abstract

The main aim of this research was to examine the relationship between subjective well-being and mindfulness. That is, to examine whether there is a difference between primary school teachers with higher and lower levels of intrinsic motivation in relation to these variables. The research was done on a convenient sample of 280 female teachers from different schools in the R. N. Macedonia.

Three instruments were used: *MAAS: Mindful Attention Awareness Scale* (Brown & Ryan, 2003), *PERMA Profiler* (Butler & Kern, 2016), and *Aspirations Index* (Kasser & Ryan, 1996).

The results of the study showed that, as individual factors, mindfulness and intrinsic motivation have an effect on subjective well-being. The joint effect of the two factors was not confirmed. Subjective well-being was found to be higher in teachers with low levels of intrinsic motivation and high levels of mindfulness, compared to those with low levels of intrinsic motivation and low levels of mindfulness. A difference in subjective well-being was not confirmed for teachers with a high level of intrinsic motivation and different levels of mindfulness.

Keywords: mindfulness, intrinsic motivation, subjective wellbeing, teachers

Introduction

In science, the term *subjective well-being* is often equated with terms that have a similar meaning or are used in a similar context, but which actually represent terms with perhaps a broader or more specific or different meaning. This most often happens with the term *happiness*. Many authors use the terms happiness and subjective well-being interchangeably or as synonyms. In this research, subjective well-being is defined according to Martin Seligman's five-component theory: positive emotions, engagement, positive social relationships, meaning in life, and accomplishment. Seligman distinguishes between the terms happiness and subjective well-being. According to him, the term happiness is very often used in different contexts and is one-dimensional, which means that the emphasis is placed only on feeling good and trying to maximize that feeling. Subjective well-being, on the other hand, is much more than that. It is a combination of the five components mentioned above, and the emphasis is on maximizing all of them (Seligman, 2011).

Subjective Well-Being and Mindfulness

The psychological literature shows that there is no single, simple, straightforward definition of mindfulness, but rather that there are differences in defining its nature. Thus, some view mindfulness as a mental state, others as a personality trait, or as a set of skills and techniques. Common to all these definitions is the emphasis on complete focus on the present, i.e. on the current moment. Mindfulness as a state refers to being in a state of awareness of current/ongoing events in the present. It implies a temporary state in which an individual is aware of their thoughts and feelings and is able to remain "present" when distractions arise (Brown et al., 2007). On the other hand, mindfulness as a trait refers to the tendency of an individual to enter more often and remain more easily in states of mindfulness, i.e., it is a disposition (Gehart, 2012). Most instruments that have been developed to measure mindfulness refer to mindfulness as a trait.

The existing literature on the connection between mindfulness and well-being suggests that mindfulness can foster self-regulatory emotional mechanisms, which subsequently improve an individual's health and well-being. Studies emphasize the effectiveness of mindfulness in addressing psychological distress, rumination, anxiety, worry, fear, anger, and other related issues (Hayes & Feldman, 2004).

Subjective Well-Being and Intrinsic Motivation

The individual is a proactive being who is in constant interaction with the environment. His behavior in the environment is related to needs. He is internally or intrinsically driven or motivated to satisfy those needs. However, since the individual is also a social being, the satisfaction of needs can also be related to external factors. Hence, science speaks of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation implies an internal incentive to do something because it causes us pleasure or because it is interesting, and not for other external reasons. Extrinsic motivation implies doing something because of external factors such as rewards, pressures, etc. (Ryan & Deci, 2000b).

Research shows that there is a connection between intrinsic motivation and subjective well-being. Intrinsic motivation, the internal desire to engage in activities solely because they provide pleasure and interest, has been shown to be related to various dimensions of subjective well-being. People who participate in activities for intrinsic reasons tend to experience greater happiness and fulfillment than those motivated by external rewards or pressures (Ryan & Deci, 2000a).

Method and Instruments

This study aims to explore the relationship between mindfulness, intrinsic motivation, and subjective well-being. The research was carried out with a convenience sample of 280 female participants, with an average age of 41.31 and of different ethnicities: Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish, Vlach, and Ukrainian. The respondents were all primary school teachers from different primary schools and cities in the Republic of North Macedonia.

The following instruments were used to assess the variables: The Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (Brown & Ryan, 2003) measures mindfulness. Respondents rate their agreement with each statement on a Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 ("almost always") to 6 ("almost never"). The scale score is derived by averaging the 15 items, with higher scores indicating greater levels of dispositional mindfulness. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient for this instrument in the current study is 0.71.

The Aspirations Index (Kasser & Ryan, 1996) consists of 7 categories of aspirations. These include extrinsic aspirations related to wealth, popularity, and image, as well as intrinsic aspirations for personal growth, meaningful relationships, and

community contribution. Additionally, an aspiration for good health is included, which is neither strictly extrinsic nor intrinsic. Respondents rate the importance, likelihood of fulfillment, and current achievement of each goal on a scale from 1 (“not at all”) to 7 (“very much”). In this study, Cronbach’s alpha for intrinsic aspirations are as follows: Personal Growth ($\alpha=0.79$), Meaningful Relationships ($\alpha=0.83$), Contribution to Community ($\alpha=0.81$), and Total Intrinsic Motivation ($\alpha=0.88$). Only the intrinsic motivation items were used in the analysis.

The PERMA Profiler (Butler & Kern, 2016) consists of 7 subscales and a total of 23 items. The instrument measures the five dimensions of Seligman’s theory of well-being and provides scores for: positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, accomplishment, as well as for negative emotions and health. A score for overall subjective well-being is also obtained. Respondents rate their level of agreement on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0, means never/terrible/not at all, while 10 means always/great/completely. The Cronbach alpha coefficients calculated for the data in this study are as follows: Positive Emotions $\alpha=0.92$, Engagement $\alpha=0.90$, Relationships $\alpha=0.84$, Meaning $\alpha=0.79$, Accomplishment $\alpha=0.81$, total Subjective Well-being $\alpha=0.88$

Results

Table 1 presents descriptive measures for the variables: mindfulness, subjective well-being, and intrinsic motivation.

Table 1.

Descriptive measures of the studied variables

Variables	Subscales	N	M	SD	Min. score	Max. score	Sk	Ku
Mindfulness		280	4.13	.83	1	5.93	-.62	1.39
Subjective well-being	Positive emotions	280	7.68	1.51	2.33	10	-.84	.68
	Engagement	280	7.33	1.53	1.33	10	-.71	.90
	Relationships	280	7.83	1.68	0	10	-1.06	1.89
	Meaning	280	7.90	1.45	2	10	-.94	1.30
	Accomplishment	280	7.43	1.48	2.33	10	-.59	.72
Total subjective-wellbeing		280	7.66	1.28	2.87	10	-.99	1.41

Variables	Subscales	N	M	SD	Min. score	Max. score	Sk	Ku
Intrinsic motivation	Personal growth	280	5.62	.80	2.20	7.00	-.88	1.46
	Meaningful relationships	280	5.67	.89	1.86	7.00	-.90	1.17
	Contribution in the community	280	5.72	.81	2.26	7.00	-.98	1.58
Total intrinsic motivation		280	5.67	.71	2.75	7.00	-.98	1.76

Results on the Relationship Between Mindfulness, Intrinsic Motivation, and Subjective Well-Being

Table 2.

Results of a two-way ANOVA obtained from comparing groups with different levels of mindfulness and intrinsic motivation in relation to subjective well-being

Subscales		Sum of squares	df	Mean of squares	F	Sig
Positive emotions	Mindfulness	17.38	1	17.38	9.30	.003
	Intrinsic motivation	82.75	1	82.75	44.26	.001
	Mindfulness* intrinsic motivation	8.19	1	8.19	4.77	.030
Engagement	Mindfulness	.184	1	.184	.08	.776
	Intrinsic motivation	26.13	1	26.13	11.56	.001
	Mindfulness* intrinsic motivation	.010	1	.010	.004	.947
Relationships	Mindfulness	14.20	1	14.20	6.26	.013
	Intrinsic motivation	120.21	1	120.21	52.98	.001
	Mindfulness* intrinsic motivation	6.36	1	6.36	3.06	.082
Meaning	Mindfulness	10.92	1	10.92	6.34	.012
	Intrinsic motivation	82.94	1	82.94	48.16	.001
	Mindfulness* intrinsic motivation	3.83	1	3.83	2.23	.137

Subscales		Sum of squares	df	Mean of squares	F	Sig
Accomplish-ment	Mindfulness	9.01	1	9.01	4.76	.030
	Intrinsic motivation	68.18	1	68.18	35.99	.001
	Mindfulness* intrinsic motivation	6.03	1	6.03	3.18	.075
Subjective well-being	Mindfulness	7.98	1	7.98	6.18	.014
	Intrinsic motivation	78.14	1	78.14	60.45	.001
	Mindfulness* intrinsic motivation	3.82	1	3.82	2.95	.087

The results show that for the *Positive Emotions* subscale, statistically significant values were obtained for the main effects of mindfulness and intrinsic motivation, as well as for their interaction effect. Post-hoc LSD (Least Significant Difference) comparisons show that teachers with low levels of intrinsic motivation and high levels of mindfulness have 0.87 higher scores than those with low levels of mindfulness ($p < 0.01$, 95% CI = 0.41–1.32). Among teachers with high levels of intrinsic motivation, there is no difference in positive emotions between the groups with low and high levels of mindfulness.

For *Engagement*, a statistically significant value was obtained only for the main effect of intrinsic motivation. A statistically significant value was not obtained for the main effect of mindfulness and the interaction effect; therefore, no post-test with LSD was performed.

For *Relationships*, a statistically significant value was obtained for the main effects of mindfulness and intrinsic motivation, but not for the interaction effect. LSD comparisons show that teachers with low intrinsic motivation and high mindfulness have 0.78 higher scores than those with low ongoing awareness ($p < 0.01$, 95% CI = 0.27–1.28). Among teachers with high levels of intrinsic motivation, there is no difference in positive relationships between the low and high levels of mindfulness groups.

For *Meaning*, a statistically significant value was obtained for the main effects of mindfulness and intrinsic motivation, but not for the interaction effect. LSD comparisons show that teachers with low intrinsic motivation and high mindfulness have 0.64 higher scores than those with low mindfulness ($p < 0.01$, 95% CI = 0.20–1.08). Among teachers with high levels of intrinsic motivation, there is

no difference in meaning in life between the groups with low and high levels of mindfulness.

For *Accomplishment*, statistically significant values were obtained for the main effects of mindfulness and intrinsic motivation, but not for the interaction effect. LSD comparisons show that teachers with low intrinsic motivation and high mindfulness have 0.66 higher scores than those with low mindfulness ($p < 0.01$, 95% CI = 0.20–1.12). Among teachers with high levels of intrinsic motivation, there is no difference in accomplishment between the low and high levels of mindfulness groups.

For *Subjective Well-being*, statistically significant values were obtained for the main effects of mindfulness and intrinsic motivation, but the interaction effect was not significant. LSD comparisons show that teachers with low intrinsic motivation and high mindfulness have 0.58 higher scores than those with low mindfulness ($p < 0.01$, 95% CI = 0.20–0.96). Among teachers with high levels of intrinsic motivation, there is no difference in subjective well-being between the low and high levels of mindfulness groups.

Discussion

The research aimed to examine the relationship between mindfulness and subjective well-being among primary school teachers with different levels of intrinsic motivation.

The results show that there are differences between groups of respondents with different levels of mindfulness and intrinsic motivation in terms of subjective well-being, but they do not show that respondents with a high level of intrinsic motivation and a high level of mindfulness also have the highest level of subjective well-being. On the subscales of positive emotions, relationships, meaning in life, and accomplishment, as well as on the overall subjective well-being, mindfulness and intrinsic motivation individually have an effect, while for the subscale of engagement, only the effect of intrinsic motivation is confirmed. The results do not confirm the joint role or joint effect of the two factors. Individually, higher levels of mindfulness are associated with higher scores on the mentioned subscales and overall subjective well-being among teachers with low intrinsic motivation, compared to teachers with low levels of intrinsic motivation and low levels of mindfulness. Among teachers with high levels of intrinsic motivation and different levels of mindfulness (high and low), no difference was shown in relation to the above-mentioned subscales.

This research contributes to the literature by measuring subjective well-being as a conglomerate of five dimensions (positive emotions, engagement, positive social relationships, meaning in life, and accomplishment), unlike previous studies that consider it through its aspects of life satisfaction and positive and negative affect, or the absence of negative emotions, symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress. The results suggest that mindfulness as a trait may play an important role in subjective well-being, but its interaction with intrinsic motivation does not provide an additional effect. Whether mindfulness is treated and measured as a state, trait, or skill in a particular study may play an important role in the results obtained. In many studies, mindfulness is measured after the implementation of a special program that aims to develop the skill of mindfulness, while in the current study, mindfulness is measured as a trait in terms of how present it is in each subject. The application of mindfulness in interventions aimed at reducing stress and enhancing positive emotions may be beneficial, but the role of mindfulness as a trait requires further research.

Conclusion

In conclusion, teachers with high levels of mindfulness, even when intrinsic motivation is low, show higher levels of subjective well-being across most dimensions. This highlights the importance of mindfulness as a stable trait in promoting subjective well-being. Intrinsic motivation primarily influences engagement and plays a crucial but independent role in fostering well-being. The lack of a significant interaction between mindfulness and intrinsic motivation suggests that these factors operate independently rather than synergistically in relation to well-being. In terms of practical implications, it can be said that programs that cultivate mindfulness as a trait/characteristic (e.g., mindfulness-based interventions) could help improve subjective well-being in teachers, especially those with lower intrinsic motivation. Also, strategies to foster intrinsic motivation could further support teachers' well-being in professional and personal contexts.

The use of a convenience sample can be considered a limitation of the research because it prevents generalization to a wider population. In the future, the research can be expanded to include a larger number of respondents as well as respondents of the opposite sex. Also, in the future, it can be complemented by research on the interaction of mindfulness with other psychological traits or contextual factors in terms of shaping subjective well-being, as well as by researching the potential effects of mindfulness training programs on subjective well-being among teachers with different levels of intrinsic motivation.

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