

ACADEMIC CONFIDENCE AND MINDFULNESS: A STUDY ON GENDER DIFFERENCES

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ABSTRACT

Academic confidence is an integral part of overall self-confidence for an individual particularly for the student population. It adds on to the self-perception of an individual and focuses on one's competence, skills, and capabilities to deal effectively with a variety of situations. In addition, it also makes them better students. At the same time, students with higher academic confidence are expected to be more attentive; and observe, describe and participate in the present moment effectively, with non-judgmental awareness, which is defined as mindfulness. Hence, they are expected to be high, not only on confidence (academic) but also on mindfulness. Therefore, the present empirical investigation has been conducted with the objective to assess the level of academic confidence and mindfulness for male and female under-graduate students. Additionally, it was also expected that female under-graduate students would report a higher academic confidence and mindfulness as compared to male students. For this purpose, between-group design was adopted, and standardized tools pertaining to academic confidence and mindfulness were administered on 60 under-graduate students. Descriptive statistics were computed followed by t-test for an independent sample to find out the gender differences. The results revealed no significant differences between the two genders (male and female) on academic self-confidence and mindfulness.

Keywords: Academic confidence, Mindfulness, Gender differences

INTRODUCTION

Being completely in touch with one's current situation and being aware of the present moment, has gained immense significance in the current competitive world. The student population, in particular, is expected to meet the expectations of many people i.e. parents, teachers, relatives, friends, peer-groups and so on. Hence, to be actively working on academics and other co-

curricular activities they have to perform well on various tasks simultaneously. At the same time, they also have to perform each of these tasks with mindfulness.

First of all, mindfulness involves paying attention “on purpose” i.e., it involves a conscious direction of an individual’s awareness. Most of the times people use the terms “mindfulness” and “awareness” interchangeably, but that is not a good habit to get into. An individual may be aware that he is irritable, but that wouldn’t mean he is being mindful of his irritability. In order to be mindful, one would have to be purposefully aware of oneself, rather than being just vaguely or habitually aware.

Therefore, purposefulness is a very important and unavoidable aspect of mindfulness. Having the purpose of staying with one’s experience, whether that’s the breath, or a particular emotion, or something as simple as eating, means that one is actively shaping the mind. By purposefully directing one’s awareness away from negative or unwanted thoughts and towards some “anchor”, one decreases their effect on one’s personal life and instead creates a space of freedom where calmness and contentment can grow. There are several definitions which best describe that mindfulness has been proposed by several researchers in the field of psychology (Nyanaponika Thera, 1972; Hanh, 1976; Martin, 1997; Marlatt & Kristeller, 1999; & Baer, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

Broadly conceptualized, mindfulness is a kind of non-elaborative, non-judgmental, present-centered awareness in which each thought, feeling, or sensation that arises in the attentional field is acknowledged and accepted, as it is (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, 1998; Shapiro & Schwartz, 1999, 2000; Teasdale, 1999; Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002; as cited in Bishop et al., 2004). Furthermore, it is a process of regulating attention in order to bring a quality of non-elaborative awareness to current experience and a quality of relating to one’s experience within an orientation of curiosity, experiential openness, and acceptance.

Out of many personal experiences of psychological states like, self-esteem, self-worth, self-identity; self-confidence is one such state, which has been defined “*as an element of one’s self-perception, and refers to one’s sense of his/her competence, skills, and capabilities to deal effectively with a variety of situations*” (Shrauger & Schohn, 1995). Hence, self-confidence can be stated as a perceived positive state about one-self, of which the individual is aware, acknowledges and accepts it the way it is. Thereby, one acts more mindfully when one is aware about his or her level of self-confidence.

One of the most crucial domains of self-confidence, for the student population, is academic self-confidence as it is also self-assurance in one's personal judgment, ability, power, etc. about his or her academic performance. An individual’s academic self-confidence escalates from practices of

having mastered various activities particular to academic performance. It is a positive belief that, in the future one can generally accomplish what one wishes to do. Self-confidence is not the same as self-esteem, which is an evaluation of one's own worth, whereas self-confidence is more specifically trust in one's ability to achieve some goal. Abraham Maslow and many others after him, have emphasized the need to distinguish between self-confidence as a generalized personality characteristic, and self-confidence with respect to a specific task, ability or challenge (i.e., self-efficacy).

When an individual slows down, he actually makes better decisions and feels more confident in his choices. This doesn't mean one has to hit the yoga mat. Rather, mindfulness can be a quick tool that brings the individual into the here and now. It allows the individual to recognize the moment and step away from habitual, often unconscious emotional and physiological reactions to everyday events. It will not eliminate life's pressures but, with practice, it can help the individual respond to them in a calmer manner that benefits one's mind and body.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Alispahic and Hasabegovic-Anic (2017) conducted an empirical investigation on a sample of 200 males and 223 females from the general population of twelve cities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The results of the statistical analysis (t-test for independent sample) revealed no significant gender differences on mindfulness ($t = -0.06$, NS). Whereas, out of the five components of mindfulness questionnaire (FFMQ, Baer, Smith, Lykins, et. al., 2008), significant gender differences were reported on observing ($t = -0.2.259$; $p < .05$) and acting with awareness ($t = 2.197$; $p < .05$).

In another study, Wage & Chopel (2017) in a pilot study concluded that female students from the field of information system (IS) reported a wider variance in mindfulness disposition as compared to their male counterparts. In a sample ($N = 398$) of college students which includes 165 male and 233 female participants researchers (concluded significant gender differences on mindfulness and found male participants scored high ($M = 4.08$) on mindfulness as compared to the female participants ($M = 3.89$).

Similar to mindfulness, there are very few studies available for academic confidence to be reviewed. Like, de la Fuente, J., Sander, P., & Putwain, D. (2013). conducted a study on a sample ($N = 2429$) of undergraduate students from the discipline of Psychology in Spain and the UK. Results of the study revealed that in terms of academics, male students were found high on verbalizing confidence, whereas, female students reported high self-confidence in studying and attendance. Another study concluded that there exist no significant gender differences among

post-graduate students, rather students from public universities significantly differ on academic-confidence ($t = 11.41$; $p < .01$) from private university students (Shaukat & Bashir, 2014).

In a similar line of research, Blanch, Hall, Roter, and Frankel (2008) found that male medical students scored high on perceived self-confidence ($F = 4.45$; $p < .05$) as compared to the female medical students. One of the earlier research works by Sander & Sanders (2007) revealed significant gender differences on academic behavioral confidence among under-graduate students.

There is also very little research looking at whether males and females report similar or different levels of mindfulness. In most of the existing studies, gender differences in mindfulness are not found (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Catak, 2012; De Petrillo, Kaufman, Glass, & Arnkoff, 2009; Feldman, Hayes, Kumar, Greeson, & Laurenceau, 2007; MacKillop & Anderson, 2007; Malcoun, 2008). But, according to the results of very few previous researches, females show higher levels of mindfulness than males, (Bryant, 2003; Tamres, Helgeson, & Janicki, 2002). Additionally, the idea that females generally lack academic confidence has been supported by some of the previous studies (Leman, 2004; Robson, Francis & Read, 2004). Hence, reviews are available that highlight gender differences on mindfulness and academic confidence, but most of the studies revealed a mix kind of findings. Therefore, the available review of literature on mindfulness and academic confidence revealing gender differences among undergraduate students led to the decision of initiating the current piece of research work. Additionally, a gap in the available researches and lack of researches in the Indian socio-cultural context originates the present investigation.

RESEARCH QUESTION

1. Do female under-graduate students report higher level of academic confidence as compared to male under-graduate students?
2. Do female under-graduate students report higher level of mindfulness as compared to male under-graduate students?

OBJECTIVES

1. To assess the level of academic confidence and mindfulness for both the genders.
2. To study the gender differences on academic confidence and mindfulness among under-graduate students.

HYPOTHESES

H₁ = Female under-graduate students would score high on academic confidence, as compared to male under-graduate students.

H₁ = Female under-graduate students would score high on mindfulness, as compared to male under-graduate students.

METHOD

Design:

A between-group (quasi- experimental) research design has been followed for the present investigation.

Sample:

For the purpose of the present empirical investigation, 83 college students were randomly selected on the basis of availability and informed consent. The age range is between 16 and 21 years, who were enrolled in the regular, under-graduate science courses within Bangalore city. The sample includes members of both the genders. An attempt was made to form a representative sample across all levels of society. For the final analysis, only responses of 60 participants were utilized, 30 each from both the genders. The remaining responses were rejected due to blank responses, and over-responses (response to more than one option, for more than 2 statements).

Tools used:

1. Academic Self-Confidence [ASC; Shrauger & Schohn, 1995]:

To assess the academic self-confidence the Personal Evaluation Inventory (PEI) has been used which is a self-report questionnaire to assess the perceived confidence. It is developed around common domains of skills related to college students' experiences. Six specific sub-scales are assessed: Academic, Appearance, Athletics, Romantic, Social and Speaking. Further, a sub-scale of general confidence and a sub-scale to assess the mood state at time of testing is also included, resulting in a total of 54 items on a four-point scale from strongly agree (4) to strongly disagree (1). Higher scores indicate greater perceived confidence within each domain and a global sense of competence, such as "When I take a new course, I am usually sure that I will end up in the top 25% of the class (Academic sub-scale)." Shrauger and Schohn (1995) reported that internal consistency, as measured by co-efficient alpha, was 0.81 for women and 0.77 for men. They also reported one-month test-retest reliabilities as 0.80 for women and 0.93 for men.

2. Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory [FMI; Walach, Buchheld, Bultmann, Kleinknecht, Schmidt, (2006)]:

The FMI is a useful, valid and reliable questionnaire for measuring mindfulness. It is most suitable in generalized contexts, where knowledge of the Buddhist background of mindfulness cannot be expected. It includes 14 items to cover all aspects of mindfulness with the purpose to characterize the subject's experience of mindfulness. Responses are from a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (rarely) to 4 (almost always). Validation in patients who suffer from a life-threatening medical illness is needed, to investigate the FMI's validity in medical psychology, research and practice. Internal consistency was good for the whole scale (Sample 1 $\alpha = 0.83$ and Sample 2 $\alpha = 0.85$). The two-factor model showed acceptable to good internal consistency (Presence: $\alpha = 0.82$; Acceptance $\alpha = 0.74$). Construct validity was acceptable.

Procedure:

To fulfil the objective of the present investigation, participants were contacted personally. Rapport was established initially, and later they were made aware of the purpose of the investigation. Confidentiality of the information was assured. After establishing a rapport with the individual participant, (s)he was asked about the information related to demographic variables. The instructions for each scale were provided separately.

Statistical Analysis:

It was decided by the investigators to follow the procedure to convert raw scores into standard scores because of two reasons. First of all, the numbers of statements vary in the questionnaire to assess mindfulness (14 items) and academic self-confidence (7 items). Secondly, the scoring was different for both the questionnaires. In other words, mean values have to be calculated to obtain a final raw score on mindfulness, whereas for academic self-confidence, the cumulative raw score was the final score. Hence, there could be chances of error in interpreting the two scores on different parameters. Therefore, before running the final statistical tools, the raw scores were converted into standard (i.e., T-scores) scores. Descriptive statistics were computed followed by a t-test for the independent sample.

Results:

The primary objective of the present investigation was to assess the level of academic confidence and mindfulness among under-graduate students. Additionally, the second objective was to study the gender differences on both the psychological constructs under the investigation. To accomplish the same, standardized psychological tools pertaining to academic confidence

(Shrauger & Schohn, 1995) and mindfulness (Walach, Buchheld, Buttenmuller, Kleinknecht, Schmidt, 2006) were administered to the under-graduate (N = 60), students which includes equal number of participants under each gender.

On the obtained data, descriptive statistics have been computed followed by the t-test for the independent sample. The results of the same have been exhibited in the Table 1 and 2 as follows:

Table 1: Summary table of descriptive statistics on academic self-confidence for under-graduate students (male v/s female)

| Variable | Gender | Mean | S.D. | t-value | Sig. |
|---------------------------------|--------|-------|-------|---------|------|
| ACADEMIC SELF-CONFIDENCE | Male | 49.91 | 10.58 | -0.28 | .78 |
| | Female | 50.69 | 11.19 | | |

The above table exhibits the descriptive statistical values on academic self-confidence for male (n =30) and female (n = 30) undergraduate students along with the t-value for independent sample. The mean value obtained by male undergraduate students on academic self-confidence is 49.91 (S.D. = 10.58), whereas, the obtained mean value on academic self-confidence by female participants is 50.69 (S.D. = 11.19). The raw scores have been converted into standard scores (i.e. T- scores) where the expected mean value is 50. For the present sample, the mean values fall at the expected mean value (approximately). Therefore, it could said that male and female undergraduate students in the present study reported moderate level of academic self-confidence.

Additionally, the computed t-test is -0.28 between the two gender groups for the independent sample was found to be non-significant. Therefore, the hypothesis (H₁) stating that “*female under-graduate students would score high on academic self-confidence as compared to male under-graduate students*” has been rejected. The descriptive statistical values have also been graphically represented as follows:

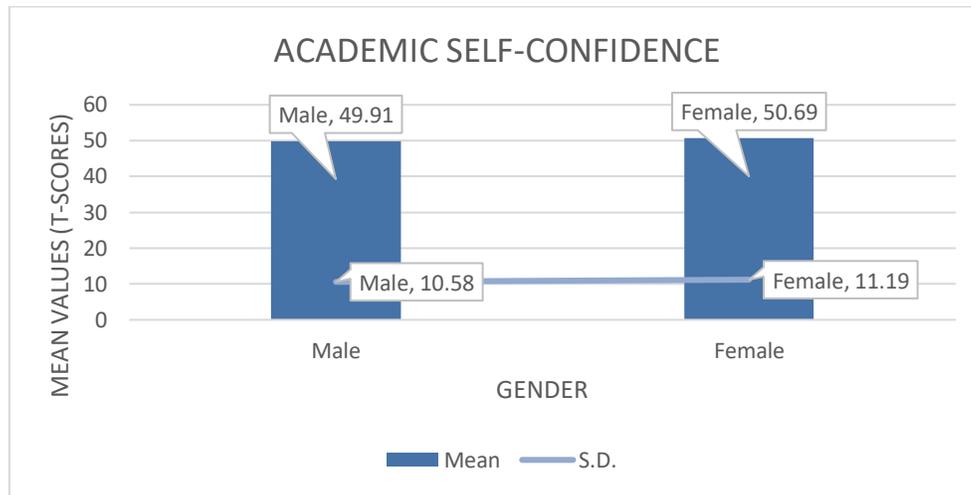


Figure 1: Histogram for descriptive statistics on academic self-confidence for undergraduate students (male v/s female).

Table 2: Summary table of descriptive statistics on mindfulness for undergraduate students (male v/s female)

| Variable | Gender | Mean | S.D. | t-value | Sig. |
|-------------|--------|-------|-------|---------|------|
| MINDFULNESS | Male | 50.88 | 8.17 | 1.37 | .18 |
| | Female | 47.31 | 11.67 | | |

Table 2 reveals the descriptive statistical values on mindfulness for male and female (each group n = 30) undergraduate students along with the t-value for the independent sample. The mean value obtained by male undergraduate students on mindfulness is 50.88 (S.D. = 8.17), whereas, female participants scored a mean of 47.31 (S.D. = 11.67). The raw scores have been converted into standard scores (i.e. T- scores) where the expected mean value is 50. For the present sample, the mean values fall at the expected mean value (approximately) therefore, it could be said that male and female undergraduate students in the present study reported a moderate level of mindfulness.

Further, the computed t-test value is 1.37 between the two gender groups for the independent sample and was found to be non-significant. Therefore, the hypothesis (H₁) stating that “*female undergraduate students would score high on mindfulness as compared to male undergraduate*

students” has been rejected. The descriptive statistical values have also graphically represented as follows:

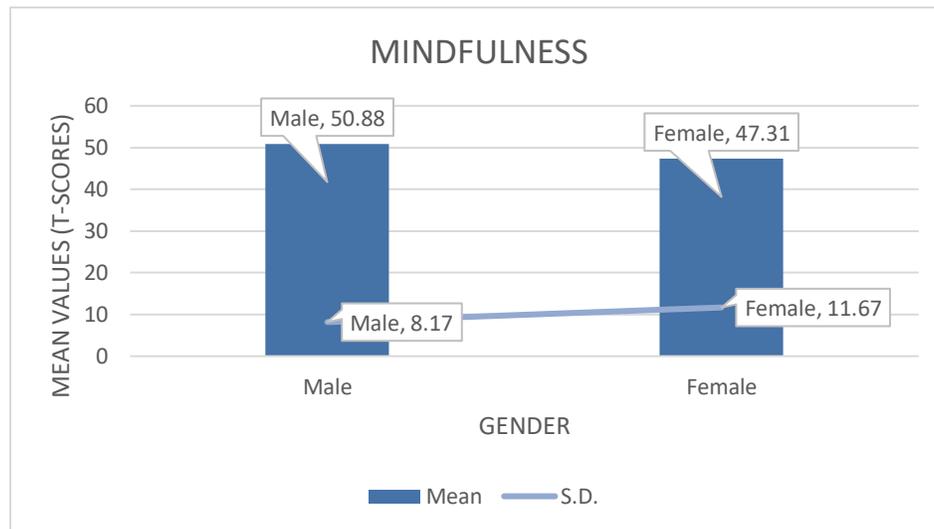


Figure 2: Histogram for descriptive statistics on mindfulness for under-graduate students (male v/s female).

DISCUSSION

With the elevation in the standards of education and the increased competition among students to perform better than others in their academics, majority of the students after their school education strive for self-assurance in their personal judgment, abilities, strengths etc. about their academic performance. Hence, academic self-confidence is a positive belief about oneself that in the future they can generally accomplish what they wish to do. Self-confidence is not the same as self-esteem, which is an evaluation of one's own worth, whereas self-confidence is more specifically trust in one's ability to achieve some goal.

Moreover, to do well and being an effective performer in terms of academics one has to be actively working on academics and other co-curricular activities and have to perform well on various tasks simultaneously. At the same time, they have to perform each of these tasks with mindfulness. Furthermore, it is a process of regulating attention in order to bring a quality of non-elaborative awareness to current experiences and a quality of relating to one's experience within an orientation of curiosity, experiential openness, and acceptance.

However, the results of the present findings highlight that participants of both the genders reported almost moderate level of academic self-confidence and mindfulness. Additionally, no

gender differences were found between the two groups of under-graduate students on academic self-confidence and mindfulness. The findings of the present study are in line with very few of the past empirical findings such as, in one of the research studies Alispahic and Hasanbegovic-Anic (2017) concluded no significant gender differences on mindfulness ($t = -0.06$, NS). In most of the existing studies gender differences in mindfulness are not found (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Catak, 2012; De Petrillo, Kaufman, Glass, & Arnkoff, 2009; Feldman, Hayes, Kumar, Greeson, & Laurenceau, 2007; MacKillop & Anderson, 2007; Malcoun, 2008). With regard to academic confidence, only one single study was found which concluded that there exists no significant gender differences among post-graduate students on academic confidence (Shaukat & Bashir, 2014).

But there are a majority of research evidences from the past which contradict with the present findings and confirm gender differences on mindfulness (Wage & Chopel, 2017) and academic self-confidence (Putwain & Fuente, 2013; Blanch, Hall, Roter, & Frankel, 2008; Sander & Sanders (2007). Additionally, the idea that females generally lack academic confidence has been supported by some of the previous studies (Leman, 2004; Robson, Francis & Read, 2004).

CONCLUSION

The findings of the present empirical research work confirm that the male and female under-graduate students reported moderate level of academic self-confidence and mindfulness. Additionally, no gender differences were obtained on both the variables of the interest of the study. Though there are very few studies available to support the present findings but still it could be concluded that the present results are in line with some strong support. Further, it can also be concluded that male and female under-graduate students hold positive but moderate belief about themselves, that in the future they can generally accomplish what they wish to do. On the other hand, male and female participants under the present investigation hold moderate level of mindfulness and regulate their attention in order to bring a quality of non-elaborative awareness to their current experience and a quality of relating to their experience within an orientation of curiosity, experiential openness, and acceptance.

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