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Research Paper

Relationship between Dispositional Mindfulness and Critical Thinking Among Young Adults in India

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ABSTRACT

Background: Mindfulness and critical thinking are both considered important for adaptive functioning and academic achievement in young adulthood, yet their association has rarely been examined in India. **Objectives:** To examine the relationship between dispositional mindfulness and critical thinking among young adults in India, and to assess whether mindfulness predicts critical thinking. **Methods:** A quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational design was used. A convenience sample of 119 young adults aged 18 to 30 years, residing in India and drawn from university student and early-career professional populations, completed an online survey comprising a short form of the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire and the Critical Thinking Questionnaire. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson's product-moment correlation and simple linear regression. **Results:** Skewness and kurtosis values indicated approximately normal distributions. Mindfulness showed a significant positive correlation with critical thinking ($r = .238$, $p = .009$). Mindfulness significantly predicted critical thinking, $F(1, 117) = 7.00$, $p = .009$, $\beta = .238$, explaining approximately 5.6% of the variance in critical thinking scores ($R^2 = .056$). **Conclusion:** Young adults with higher dispositional mindfulness reported stronger habits of analysis, evaluation and reflective reasoning, although the effect was small. The study extends evidence on mindfulness and higher-order cognition to an Indian young-adult sample. Because the design was cross-sectional and relied on self-report measures, causal conclusions cannot be drawn. Longitudinal and intervention studies using performance-based measures of critical thinking are recommended to clarify whether cultivating mindfulness strengthens critical thinking.

Keywords: *Dispositional Mindfulness, Critical Thinking, Young Adults, Higher-Order Cognition, India*

The transition into young adulthood in India is marked by intense academic competition, rapid technological immersion and shifting social expectations, all of which place heavy demands on how effectively individuals process information and regulate attention. Two psychological constructs have drawn growing interest as potential resources for navigating this period: mindfulness and critical thinking. Mindfulness is

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commonly understood as sustained present-moment awareness combined with a non-judgmental, accepting stance toward one's thoughts and experiences, and it has been operationalized as a multifaceted disposition that can be assessed through self-report (Baer et al., 2006). Critical thinking refers to the deliberate, evaluative use of cognitive skills such as analysis, interpretation and self-regulated reasoning to reach sound judgments. Although the two constructs are conceptually distinct, both are increasingly recognized as central to adaptive functioning, academic achievement and informed decision-making among young adults (Raj et al., 2022).

Interest in the link between these constructs has grown for several reasons. Concern about the erosion of independent analytical ability in an age of constant digital stimulation and algorithmically curated information has made the cultivation of reflective, evaluative thinking an educational priority (George et al., 2024). At the same time, Indian education has historically emphasized rote memorization over analytical engagement, leaving many students under-prepared for the evaluative demands of contemporary academic and professional life (Thankachan, 2024). Within this landscape, dispositional mindfulness (the naturally occurring tendency to be attentive and non-reactive, as distinct from mindfulness cultivated through structured training) may represent a low-cost cognitive resource on which educational institutions could draw without extensive infrastructural investment.

The question is particularly relevant in India, where contemplative practices resembling mindfulness have deep historical roots, yet empirical, psychometrically grounded research on the cognitive correlates of mindfulness remains limited (Singha & Singha, 2024). Much of the existing literature on mindfulness in Indian samples has focused on stress reduction, emotional regulation and general academic adjustment rather than on higher-order cognitive processes such as analysis, evaluation and synthesis (Antony & Neelakantan, 2025). Meanwhile, discussions of critical thinking in Indian education have tended to center on curricular reform and pedagogy (Raj et al., 2022) rather than on individual dispositional traits, such as mindfulness, that might support its development. Bringing these two strands of inquiry together, the present study examined whether dispositional mindfulness is associated with critical thinking among Indian young adults, a population situated at the intersection of academic pressure, career transition and rapid technological change.

In this study, mindfulness is defined operationally as a dispositional trait encompassing five interrelated facets: observing, describing, acting with awareness, non-judging of inner experience and non-reactivity to inner experience. Critical thinking is conceptualized as a set of habitual cognitive processes, such as remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing and evaluating information. Examining the association between these constructs with standardized instruments within a correlational framework can clarify whether mindfulness functions as a meaningful cognitive resource for young Indian adults navigating a demanding academic and professional landscape.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

International research has increasingly examined how mindfulness relates to higher-order cognition. In a cross-sectional study, Noone et al. (2016) found that dispositional mindfulness was positively associated with critical thinking performance and that executive functioning, particularly inhibition, mediated this relationship. Experimental evidence, however, is less consistent. In a randomized active-controlled trial with university students, Noone and Hogan (2018) found that six weeks of guided online mindfulness practice did not improve critical thinking, executive functioning or thinking dispositions relative to a sham

meditation condition, and the effect of the intervention did not depend on baseline thinking dispositions. Soliemanifar et al. (2022) reported that metacognitive awareness mediated the relationship between trait mindfulness and critical thinking, suggesting that mindfulness may support critical thinking indirectly, by strengthening individuals' awareness of their own thought processes, rather than by acting on reasoning ability directly.

Similar patterns have emerged outside Western settings. Salim et al. (2024), studying Indonesian first-year undergraduates, found that academic motivation mediated the relationship between mindfulness and critical thinking skills, indicating that the pathway from mindfulness to critical thinking may involve motivational as well as executive mechanisms. Yeh et al. (2026) reported that critical-thinking dispositions mediated the effect of an integrative mindfulness intervention on creative problem-solving ability, while Molbassynova et al. (2026) found that mindfulness training enhanced both critical thinking and emotional intelligence among students. Tian et al. (2026) extended this line of work to multilingual learners, showing that a mindfulness intervention improved both critical thinking and self-efficacy. Together, these studies suggest a broadly positive, cross-cultural association between mindfulness and critical thinking that appears to operate largely through intervening cognitive, motivational or affective mechanisms rather than through a direct pathway. The null findings of a rigorously controlled trial (Noone & Hogan, 2018), however, indicate that the strength and causal direction of this link remain open questions.

Within India, research remains comparatively sparse. Antony and Neelakantan (2025) reported on the effectiveness of a mindfulness-based intervention among college students in India, and Singha and Singha (2024) compared mindfulness-based interventions across Western and Indian psychological frameworks, noting that Indian contemplative traditions offer a culturally resonant foundation for such work. Recent commentary has emphasized the relevance of mindfulness to student well-being and to sustainable, holistic educational development in India (Rajauria, 2026), and Hegde and Anil (2026) proposed a conceptual framework linking mindfulness interventions to student well-being. These contributions reinforce the practical value of mindfulness-based approaches in Indian educational settings, although their cognitive implications remain comparatively underexamined.

On the critical thinking side of the literature, Rivas et al. (2022) highlighted the role of metacognitive strategies in developing critical thinking in higher education, reinforcing the theoretical link between self-regulatory awareness and evaluative reasoning that also underlies mindfulness research. Rodrigues et al. (2024) found that critical-thinking-oriented reading instruction delivered through computer-assisted language learning was reflected in the mindfulness, resilience and academic growth of English-as-a-foreign-language learners, offering indirect evidence that these constructs co-occur in applied educational settings. Arhip (2022) and Škobalj (2018) further argued that mindfulness should be treated as a foundational element of the educational process, given its capacity to support reflective, evaluative engagement with learning material.

Taken together, this literature points to a largely consistent association between mindfulness and critical thinking, but also to a gap: to the authors' knowledge, no published study has examined dispositional mindfulness and critical thinking together within an Indian young-adult sample using standardized psychometric tools. Given that Indian educational culture combines a historical emphasis on rote learning (Thankachan, 2024) with a contemplative tradition that predates most Western mindfulness research, this gap represents both a theoretical and a practical opportunity.

Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between dispositional mindfulness and critical thinking among young adults (aged 18–30 years) in India.
2. To assess whether mindfulness significantly predicts critical thinking in this population.

Hypotheses

- **H1:** There will be a significant positive correlation between dispositional mindfulness and critical thinking among young adults in India.
- **H2:** Mindfulness will significantly and positively predict critical thinking among young adults, such that higher mindfulness scores will be associated with higher critical thinking scores.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational design. A correlational approach was selected because the aim was to examine the naturally occurring association between dispositional mindfulness and critical thinking without manipulating either variable. Comparable non-experimental designs have been used in previous research on trait mindfulness and critical thinking (Noone et al., 2016; Soliemanifar et al., 2022), and such designs are appropriate when the variables of interest are naturally occurring dispositions that cannot be randomly assigned.

Participants

The sample comprised young adults aged 18 to 30 years residing in India, drawn from university student and early-career professional populations. Participants were recruited through convenience sampling, with the survey link circulated across academic and social media networks. To be eligible, participants had to fall within the specified age range and reside in India. Of the 120 responses received, one had missing scale data and was excluded through listwise deletion, leaving a final sample of 119. Participation was voluntary, and no monetary or academic incentive was offered. Given the online recruitment strategy, the sample was likely skewed toward urban, digitally connected and relatively well-educated young adults, a characteristic that should be considered when interpreting the generalizability of the findings.

Tools and Measures

Two standardized self-report instruments were used.

1. **Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire – Short Form.** Dispositional mindfulness was assessed using a short form of the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ), derived from the original instrument developed by Baer et al. (2006). The questionnaire captures five interrelated facets of mindfulness: observing, describing, acting with awareness, non-judging of inner experience and non-reactivity to inner experience. Higher total scores indicate greater dispositional mindfulness. The original instrument has demonstrated good internal consistency and construct validity (Baer et al., 2006).
2. **Critical Thinking Questionnaire.** Critical thinking was measured using the Critical Thinking Questionnaire (CThQ) developed by Kobylarek et al. (2022). The CThQ is a 25-item self-report instrument grounded in Bloom's revised taxonomy that assesses habitual cognitive processes such as remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing and evaluating information. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with higher total scores indicating stronger critical thinking habits.

Both instruments were administered in English, the primary medium of instruction for most of the target population. A brief demographic section recorded participants' age, gender and educational background.

Procedure

Data were collected through a single online survey administered via Google Forms. The form began with an informed consent statement outlining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality and the participant's right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. This was followed by the demographic section, the FFMQ and the CThQ, presented in a fixed order to all respondents. Participants were instructed to respond honestly and were informed that there were no right or wrong answers, in order to minimize socially desirable responding. Completion took approximately 20–25 minutes. All responses were collected anonymously; no personally identifying information was gathered, and the data were stored on a password-protected platform accessible only to the research team.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to standard ethical guidelines for psychological research involving human participants. Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Ethics Committee [TO CONFIRM: committee name, approval number and date]. Informed consent was obtained electronically from every participant before data collection, and participants were explicitly informed of their right to discontinue participation at any point without consequence. Because both questionnaires address personal habits of attention and reasoning rather than sensitive clinical content, the anticipated risk to participants was minimal. Confidentiality was maintained by collecting data anonymously and reporting only aggregate, de-identified results.

Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 21. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, skewness and kurtosis) were computed for mindfulness and critical thinking scores. Normality was examined using skewness and kurtosis values, with values within ±2 considered indicative of an acceptable approximation to normality (George & Mallery, 2010), and with the Shapiro–Wilk test. Pearson's product-moment correlation was used to test the strength and direction of the linear relationship between mindfulness and critical thinking (H1). Simple linear regression, with critical thinking as the criterion and mindfulness as the predictor, was then used to test whether mindfulness significantly predicted critical thinking (H2), and 95% confidence intervals were computed for the regression coefficients. The level of statistical significance was set at .05 for all analyses.

RESULTS

A total of 119 participants were included in the analyses. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics, normality indices and the correlation between mindfulness and critical thinking. The mean mindfulness score was 47.00 (SD = 5.73), and the mean critical thinking score was 89.81 (SD = 11.69). Skewness and kurtosis values for both variables fell within the acceptable range of ±2 (George & Mallery, 2010), and Shapiro–Wilk tests were non-significant for both mindfulness, $W(119) = .992$, $p = .767$, and critical thinking, $W(119) = .980$, $p = .079$, indicating approximately normal distributions suitable for parametric analysis.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics, normality indices and inter-correlation of study variables (N = 119)

Variable	M	SD	Range	Skewness	Kurtosis	1	2
1. Mindfulness	47.00	5.73	31–62	−0.135	0.118	—	.238*
2.Critical thinking	89.81	11.69	49–119	−0.413	1.216	.238*	—

Note. Mindfulness = total score on the short form of the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire; Critical thinking = total score on the Critical Thinking Questionnaire; Range = observed minimum–maximum. *p < .01 (two-tailed).

Pearson's product-moment correlation revealed a significant positive correlation between mindfulness and critical thinking, r(117) = .238, p = .009, indicating that higher levels of mindfulness were associated with higher critical thinking scores. H1 was therefore supported.

A simple linear regression was then conducted with critical thinking as the criterion and mindfulness as the predictor (Table 2). The model was statistically significant, F(1, 117) = 7.00, p = .009, and mindfulness accounted for approximately 5.6% of the variance in critical thinking (R^2 = .056, adjusted R^2 = .048). Mindfulness was a significant positive predictor (B = 0.485, SE B = 0.183, 95% CI [0.122, 0.848], β = .238, t = 2.65, p = .009): each one-point increase in mindfulness was associated with an increase of approximately 0.49 points in critical thinking scores. H2 was therefore supported, although the effect size was small.

Table 2 Simple linear regression predicting critical thinking from mindfulness (N = 119)

Predictor	B	SE B	95% CI for B	β	t	p
Constant	67.022	8.673	[49.846, 84.198]		7.73	< .001
Mindfulness	0.485	0.183	[0.122, 0.848]	.238	2.65	.009

Model summary: R = .238, R^2 = .056, adjusted R^2 = .048, F(1, 117) = 7.00, p = .009

Note. Criterion = critical thinking. B = unstandardized coefficient; SE B = standard error of B; CI = confidence interval; β = standardized coefficient; R^2 = proportion of variance in critical thinking explained by mindfulness.

Overall, both hypotheses were supported: mindfulness was significantly and positively correlated with critical thinking (H1), and it significantly predicted critical thinking, accounting for approximately 5.6% of the variance (H2).

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the relationship between mindfulness and critical thinking among young adults in India and assessed whether mindfulness predicted critical thinking. The results supported both hypotheses: mindfulness was positively associated with critical thinking and significantly predicted it, although the effect was small. These findings are consistent with theoretical frameworks linking metacognition and executive functioning to higher-order cognition, and with earlier reports that dispositional mindfulness is positively related to critical thinking in other populations (Noone et al., 2016; Soliemanifar et al., 2022).

Several psychological mechanisms may explain this association. First, mindfulness may strengthen attentional control and the inhibition of automatic, reactive processing; inhibition has been shown to mediate the link between dispositional mindfulness and critical thinking (Noone et al., 2016), and such control may allow individuals to engage more deliberately with information rather than relying on habitual assumptions. Second, mindfulness is closely

linked with metacognitive awareness (Soliemanifar et al., 2022). Mindful individuals may be more likely to notice and examine their own thought processes, reinforcing the self-monitoring that underlies effective critical thinking (Rivas et al., 2022). Third, mindfulness is thought to support emotional regulation and to reduce cognitive overload under stress, and mindfulness-based intervention has shown benefits among college students in India (Antony & Neelakantan, 2025); calmer, better-regulated individuals may think more clearly rather than defaulting to rapid, unexamined judgments under academic or professional pressure. Finally, academic motivation has been found to mediate the relationship between mindfulness and critical thinking (Salim et al., 2024), which may help explain why mindful individuals are more likely to engage in the sustained, effortful cognitive work that critical thinking requires. Because none of these mediators was measured in the present study, these explanations remain tentative and should be tested directly.

CONCLUSION

This study found a significant positive correlation between dispositional mindfulness and critical thinking among young adults in India, with mindfulness emerging as a statistically significant but modest predictor of critical thinking. Individuals with higher dispositional mindfulness tended to report stronger habits of analysis, evaluation and reflective reasoning, consistent with prior research linking mindfulness to attentional control and metacognitive awareness. By extending this evidence to the Indian context, the study addresses a gap in a literature that has largely focused on the role of mindfulness in emotional well-being rather than higher-order cognition. Given the cross-sectional design and small effect size, controlled intervention studies are needed before firm recommendations can be made.

Limitations

Several limitations should be noted. First, the cross-sectional, correlational design precludes causal inference; "prediction" in the regression analysis denotes statistical prediction only, and with a single predictor the regression is mathematically equivalent to the bivariate correlation. Second, the sample was drawn largely through online convenience sampling, which may have skewed representation toward urban, digitally connected young adults and limits generalizability to rural or offline populations. Third, both constructs were assessed by self-report, so the results may be affected by social desirability, limited introspective accuracy and shared-method variance; moreover, the CThQ measures self-reported habits rather than demonstrated critical thinking performance. Fourth, the sample was modest in size, and the questionnaires were administered in a fixed order. Fifth, possible differences in mindfulness and critical thinking across demographic groups, such as age, gender and education, were not examined.

Implications

The study contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence that mindfulness is associated with, and statistically predicts, critical thinking among Indian young adults, a population in which mindfulness research has largely focused on well-being rather than higher-order cognition (Singha & Singha, 2024; Antony & Neelakantan, 2025). Nevertheless, the small effect size, together with evidence from a rigorously controlled trial in which brief online mindfulness training did not improve critical thinking (Noone & Hogan, 2018), cautions against assuming that increasing mindfulness will by itself produce meaningful gains in critical thinking. The findings may, however, inform the design of interventions that evaluate mindfulness as one component of broader efforts to strengthen critical thinking in this population.

Practically, the findings suggest that simple mindfulness practices, such as mindful breathing or reflective journaling, merit evaluation as a complement to, rather than a replacement for, explicit critical thinking instruction.

Future Directions

Future research could employ longitudinal or intervention-based designs to establish causal relationships between mindfulness and critical thinking, and could examine potential mediating variables such as executive functioning, metacognitive awareness or academic motivation. Extending the study to larger and more demographically diverse Indian populations, examining demographic differences, and incorporating performance-based measures of critical thinking alongside self-report tools would further strengthen the generalizability and robustness of the findings.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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