

Inter-generational Transmission of Mindfulness Traits: A Mindfulness-Based Parenting Approach

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Abstract. In recent years, Chinese scholars have gradually recognized the possibility and necessity of applying mindfulness to primary school students' education. Currently, mindful parenting has been proven to be related to children's behavioral and emotional problems. However, there is a certain research gap in the inter-generational transmission of traits. Based on this, the main research question of this study is whether trait mindfulness can be passed down across generations, and further to explore the correlations among the three variables of parents' mindfulness level, children's mindfulness level, and parents' mindful parenting level. This study adopts a cross-sectional research method and conducts an exploration of the above questions through the data collection means of distributing questionnaires. From the data results, there is a correlation between mindfulness levels and mindful parenting levels, and there is no correlation in mindfulness levels between parents. However, there is a correlation between the level of mindful parenting and the mindfulness levels of parents and children respectively. This study explores the relationship between mindful parenting and inter-generational mindfulness levels and affirms the importance of applying mindful parenting in family education.

1 Introduction

Mindfulness refers to the mental development based on the meditation practices such as seated meditation (zazen) and contemplative activity which is based on Buddhist traditions that may date back to about 2,600 years [1]. Considering such a significant difference in the definitions of mindfulness in the works of different academic assertions and different philosophical orientations, this paper adopts the conceptual framework of Jon Kabat-Zinn, which takes the psychological viewpoint. In his definition, Kabat-Zinn describes mindfulness as the perception and focus on the current experiences in a non-judgmental way. It involves watching all thought and feeling as though at some psychological distance without judgment of it as either good or bad, right or wrong [2]. The practice of mindfulness in the parent-child relationship is known as mindful parenting. It includes the focus on both intra-personal and interpersonal processes: intrapersonal refers to the parents' consciousness of their internal processes, as well as, their mental and emotional reactions to the consciousness; interpersonal

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refers to the focus on the relational activity in parent and child interactions, the current-awareness of the relationship itself. [3,4]

Primary education is a significant stage where learners learn the basic information and develop good behavioral patterns [5]. Under the six years of primary education system, lower primary grades refer to students in the 1st and 2nd grades, typically between 6 and 8 years of age. Children in this age category are mostly in a critical stage of development in their growth process and can easily be manipulated by meaningful people in their life like their teachers and parents [6]. Therefore, the role of parental participation is critical in the lower primary school education.

Recent studies have come up with various conceptual models aimed at explaining the processes of mindful parenting in the domestic and international context [7]. Still, empirical support of the connection of mindfulness with mindful parenting competencies in parents remains a shortcoming. Moreover, other studies have mainly investigated the processes involved in mindful parenting using mindfulness-based parenting training that is usually comprised of a combination of various intervention strategies thus may confound the actual investigations into the working mechanisms of mindful parenting [8]. Existing studies on the mindfulness topic have majorly given attention to individual level interventions, but there is a broad gap as well on intergenerational transfer of mindfulness characteristics in the parent-child relationship. As a result, the research methodologies, as a questionnaire-based research, are utilized in the presented study to examine the pathways of mindfulness traits intergenerational transmission with the use of mindful parenting strategies, wherein the aim is to prove the correlation between the extent of mindful parenting and general mindfulness.

2 Methodology

2.1 Research hypotheses

This study, which is based on the existing models of mindful parenting, has found that three main aspects within intergenerational transfer of mindfulness characteristics are the degree of mindful parenting in parents, the degree of mindfulness in children, and the degree of mindfulness in parents themselves. Hence, the current research rejects that parents have no levels of mindfulness, and as such that mindful parenting practice is not correlated with children mindfulness levels. Moreover, there is a meaningful positive relationship between the levels of parental mindfulness and the levels of mindfulness in their children, which means that the latter quality can also be intergenerational.

2.2 Research design

The present study aims to investigate the intergenerational transmission of mindfulness traits within a general educational context through a cross-sectional quantitative research design. As an example using High School Affiliated to Nanjing Normal University Xianlin Department of Primary School, the mindfulness level of primary school lower level students, mindfulness level and mindful parenting level of their parents were measured through questionnaire. The three hypotheses advanced were confirmed and explained by using the correlational relationship of the variables.

2.3 Variables and questionnaire design

Accordingly, this study employs the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) to assess recent behavioral and emotional conditions in children [9]. Mindfulness levels in early

elementary school children are measured by assessing the dependent variable of behavioral and emotional difficulties. The main aspects of this study are mainly focused on such aspects as parental mindful parenting levels, children mindfulness levels and parental mindfulness levels. Mindfulness parenting competence and the mindfulness level of the adults can be determined by means of well-structured standardized scales. Nevertheless, the available instruments of testing the mindfulness levels in children include the Child and Adolescent Mindfulness Measure (CAMM) and the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale-Children (MAAS-C) at the moment. These questionnaires are aimed at the following age groups 11-15 and 8-15 years of age, respectively making them inappropriate to the study population they are going to investigate [1, 10]. Since mindfulness training may alter the problem of behavior and levels of emotional states in children, the extent of mindfulness would also appear in the externalizing behavior problems and internalizing emotional dilemmas [11, 12]. Therefore, this research usages Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), which is used to determine current behavioral and emotional situations in children [9]. The level of mindfulness among elementary school children in the early stages is also evaluated through the dependent variable of behavioral and emotional problems.

Under the above analytical framework, the author has narrowed down on the questionnaire to be used in the current research. The initial part of the questionnaire included a brief demographic questionnaire that included such data as age of the children, their gender, and level of education of their parents. In part two, the Chinese adapted form of Mindfulness in Parenting Questionnaire (C-MIPQ) whose overall measurement is an expression of the levels of parental mindfulness was used. Next, on the third section, the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) was used to measure behavioral issues and emotional manifestations among children wherein the total difficulties score is used as a measure of the problems. It was a dependent variable that was used to show the level of mindfulness of lower grade primary school students. The fourth section utilized the Chinese Revised Version of the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (C-FFMQ), and the scores of FFMQ were used by the Chinese participants as a measure of their mindfulness. The scales mentioned above have been updated and validated by Chinese scholars with good reliability and validity being shown.

2.4 Questionnaire distribution and data processing

In the current study, students and parents of lower grades of the High School Affiliated to Nanjing Normal University Xianlin Department of Primary School in Jiangsu province were chosen as the research participants. The elementary section was randomly sampled by three classes at the second grade. Questionnaire distribution and collection were conducted via class group chats, with parents completing the surveys by scanning QR codes linked to the Wenjuanxin, a platform providing functions equivalent to Amazon Mechanical Turk. The questionnaire distribution process took one week whereby 126 questionnaires were distributed. The sample size that was finally retained after the removal of invalid responses which had incomplete entries was 111 valid questionnaires with an effective response rate of 88.09. The data collected in this survey was analyzed using SPSS 27.0. Degenerative statistics was used to make a summary of demographic features of the participants, parental mindfulness rating, total child difficulties rating, and overall rating of mindful parenting. Moreover, the Pearson correlation analysis was used to conduct tests of the proposed research hypotheses.

3 Results

3.1 Descriptive statistics

3.1.1 Demographic characteristics

As shown in table 1, the data collection results reveal a gender distribution of 46.8% male and 53.2% female children in this survey, indicating a slightly higher proportion of girls than boys, though the overall ratio remains relatively balanced. The age distribution of the participating children shows a predominance of 7-year-olds, who constitute the largest proportion at 42.3%. This aligns appropriately with the typical age range for lower primary school grades. Parental education levels in the sample ranged from junior high school or below to postgraduate degrees or above, with 72% of parents holding bachelor's, associate, or postgraduate qualifications. This indicates a generally high level of parental education in the study population. Furthermore, from the perspective of parent-child relationships, mothers constituted 64.0% of the respondents, significantly surpassing the proportion of fathers. This reflects a slight gender bias in the survey participation, with mothers being the predominant group.

Table 1. Basic Information of Participants

	Variable	Category	N%
Child gender	Male	52	46.8
	Female	59	53.2
Child age (years)	6	26	23.4
	7	47	42.3
	8	38	34.2
Parental education	Junior high or below	4	3.6
	High school/vocational	27	24.3
	Associate degree	40	36.0
	Bachelor's degree	37	33.3
	Master's or above	3	2.7
Relationship to child	Father	40	36.0
	Mother	71	64.0

3.1.2 Primary variables

As shown in table 2, the statistical analysis reveals that the mean parental mindfulness score was 117.15, with minimum and maximum values of 98 and 133 respectively. When compared with the normative reference range, the findings indicate a relatively lower level of parental mindfulness among participants in this study, suggesting potential issues related to parenting burnout and emotional distress. The total difficulty score for children averaged 18.52, with a minimum value of 2 and a maximum value of 30, indicating considerable variability in behavioral and emotional levels among the children surveyed. The overall mean score of parental mindful parenting was 71.55, with a range of 69 points between the minimum and maximum values, indicating significant variability among the sample.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Variables

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Parental Mindfulness Score	98	133	117.15
Total Difficulties Score for Children	2	30	18.52
Overall Parental Mindful Parenting Score	39	108	71.55

3.2 Correlation analysis

As shown in table 3, based on the aforementioned data, this study conducted a correlation analysis of the variables. The correlation between variables is assessed using the correlation coefficient (r) and the statistical significance (p-value). The correlation analysis reveals no significant relationship between parental mindfulness scores and the total difficulties scores of children, as indicated by a correlation coefficient $r > 0$ that did not reach statistical significance ($p > 0.05$). The correlation coefficient between parental mindfulness scores and overall mindful parenting scores was statistically significant, with $r > 0$ and $p < 0.05$, indicating a notable positive correlation between these two variables. The total score of children's difficulties exhibits a statistically significant positive correlation with the overall score of mindful parenting, as evidenced by a correlation coefficient of $r > 0$ and a significance level of $p < 0$.

Table 3. Variable Correlation Analysis

Correlation				
Variables		Parental Mindfulness Score	Total Difficulties Score in Children	Overall Mindful Parenting Score
Parental Mindfulness Score	Pearson Correlation			
	Significance (2-tailed)			
	N			
Total Difficulties Score in Children	Pearson Correlation	.050		
	Significance (2-tailed)	.603		
	N	111		
Overall Mindful Parenting Score	Pearson Correlation	.189	.339	
	Significance (2-tailed)	.047	.000	
	N	111	111	

4 Discussion

4.1 Interpretation of finding

The paper demonstrates that the level of parental mindfulness shows a strong positive portrait with the mindful parenting practices. More mindful parents are likely to practice mindful parenting. The parents are more permissive with regard to parent child relationships and show greater levels of emotional control that allow them to react to their children in a conscious manner and hence watch their actions without letting judgment slip. This will make it easier to learn more about children and establish a dialogue with them, without haste. On the other hand, mindful parenting also contributes to the parental self-compassion as well as to psychological well-being of family education settings, thus leading to the heightened awareness of their own feelings and thoughts and, by extension, making them even more mindful parentally [13].

Generally, significant positive relationships were also found between mindfulness of children and levels of mindful parenting. The information also supports the available literature that shows that integration of mindfulness in education diminishes behavioral and

emotional challenges in children and facilitates adaptation and growth. Caregivers ensure acceptance and empathy in the family by means of mindful parenting. In these environments, children at lower grades in the elementary schools learn to replicate the patterns of emotional regulation in their parents and thus end up acquiring their own. Accordingly, the level of mindfulness among children increases, and thus making them more receptive to mindful parenting styles [14].

Nevertheless, this research did not indicate any significant relationship between the level of parental mindfulness and their children mindfulness. It is possible that such a result can be determined by personal situations of respondents. The Strength and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ) subsector of the survey questionnaire was answered by parents basing on their findings and interpretations of children and their conduct and feelings in the past six months. The level of parental attention and accuracy of observation influences such subjective measurements which can create differences between the data that is reported and the level of mindfulness in children. Furthermore, ex post facto studies indicate that the mindfulness of children is affected by various factors, emotional regulation skills being among them, which could pose the reason of the absence of the direct link between parental and children mindfulness [15].

4.2 Limitations and future research directions

The design that was used in this study was cross-sectional and the sample size was relatively small. Future studies may use longitudinal methods, and larger samples could be used in the continued study to better determine the intergenerational transmission genres of mindfulness. Additionally, although mindfulness was evaluated indirectly, through the SDQ as the total difficulties score, in lower-grade elementary school children, future researchers may make use of the Child and Adolescent Mindfulness Measure (CAMM) to test students in other age groups and confirm generations of mindfulness transmission [1].

5 Conclusion

This paper examines how mindfulness attributes are passed across generations between parents and children. The results of research have shown that even though trait mindfulness is not directly intergenerational, increased levels of parental mindfulness generally correlate with high levels of mindful parenting. Moreover, mindful parenting has a positive influence in the context of decreasing behavioral and emotional problems in children and shows a significant positive correlation with the levels of mindfulness in children. The given finding suggests that exhibiting mindfulness characteristics to children is not necessarily directly the outcome of systematic and standardized mindfulness programs or training, but indirectly due to the parenting styles employed in the family educational setting. Therefore, this finding highlights the importance of mindfulness parenting on family education and early childhood development. To those professionals working with mindfulness-based parenting programs, this translates that the notion of mindful parenting may not be reduced to typically developed curricular models or externally facilitated mindfulness training conducted on an infrequent basis. Specific educational courses to teachers would be able to increase the levels of mindfulness of parents, which would result in better mindful parenting by parents. This aids the smooth adaptation of mindful parenting into real-life settings of families, which promotes the gradual and long-term development of the mindfulness abilities in children, through delicate, continuous training.

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