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Prediction of Wisdom Based on Spiritual Intelligence and Mindfulness in University Students

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A B S T R A C T

Objective: Given the importance of cultivating wisdom as a combination of deep knowledge, critical thinking, and self-awareness for academic success and professional life among university students, this study aimed to examine the predictive roles of spiritual intelligence and mindfulness in fostering wisdom.

Methods: This study employed a descriptive-correlational design and was conducted as a field study during the 2022–2023 academic year. The statistical population included all students at universities in Tehran. A sample of 150 students (87 women and 63 men), aged between 20 and 40 years, was selected using convenience sampling. The instruments used in the study were King's Spiritual Intelligence Questionnaire (2008), the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire by Baer et al. (2006), and Ardelt's Wisdom Scale (2003). After checking the assumptions, data were analyzed using multiple regression analysis in SPSS-26 software.

Findings: The results indicated that the components of "meaning production" (β = 0.44) and "transcendental awareness" (β = 0.17) from spiritual intelligence, as well as the components of "describing" (β = 0.28) and "acting with awareness" (β = 0.38) from mindfulness, significantly predicted wisdom ($p < 0.001$). The spiritual intelligence model explained 29% (27% adjusted) of the variance in wisdom, while the mindfulness model accounted for 36% (34% adjusted) of the variance.

Conclusion: The findings suggest that enhancing spiritual intelligence—particularly the components of meaning production and transcendental awareness—and mindfulness—especially the components of describing and acting with awareness—can contribute to the development of wisdom in students. These results underscore the importance of integrated educational programs in university settings to strengthen these psychological capacities.

Keywords: *Wisdom, Spiritual Intelligence, Mindfulness, University Students.*

1. Introduction

In today's era, marked by increasing complexities in both personal and social life, cultivating wisdom in university students—as the future builders of society—holds particular significance (Ardelt, 2025; Pamungkas & Manaf, 2023). Wisdom, as a multifaceted and complex construct, represents a synthesis of deep knowledge, critical thinking, self-awareness, emotional regulation, and a transcendent perspective on issues (Grossmann, 2017; Grossmann et al., 2020). This psychological construct not only plays a crucial role in students' academic success but also prepares them to effectively face the intricate challenges of future personal and professional life (Alnuaimi et al., 2024; Ardelt, 2019).

Numerous studies have demonstrated that wiser students possess a higher ability to solve complex problems, make prudent decisions, and manage interpersonal relationships. These traits offer considerable advantages in the university context, which is filled with academic, social, and emotional challenges (Bangen et al., 2019).

Among the most recognized predictors of wisdom in students is spiritual intelligence. Spiritual intelligence refers to the ability to utilize spiritual resources to resolve life issues and connect with transcendent dimensions of existence. It relates to wisdom through various mechanisms (King & DeCicco, 2019). Students with higher levels of spiritual intelligence typically perform better in finding life meaning, connecting with existential truth, and confronting core life challenges (Soleimani et al., 2022). These attributes, in turn, provide a fertile ground for the development of wisdom. Specifically, the ability to engage in deeper, more meaningful connections with the universe reduces the likelihood of being involved in superficial matters and leads to more prudent decision-making (Amram, 2022).

Furthermore, traits such as gratitude, forgiveness, and connection to a transcendent reality—which are key components of spiritual intelligence—enable a more comprehensive understanding of life circumstances, which is a hallmark of wise individuals (Vaughan, 2022). Mindfulness, as another factor observed among students, has recently received increasing attention in research. This psychological construct, which refers to the state of conscious, nonjudgmental attention to present-moment experiences (Kabat-Zinn, 2019), can influence the development of wisdom through various pathways. Regular mindfulness practices may significantly reduce rumination and enhance individuals' capacity for reflection. These changes facilitate more objective and holistic evaluations of issues (Garland et al., 2021).

Other advantages of mindfulness include increased acceptance and psychological flexibility, which assist students in coping better with uncertainties and ambiguities inherent in academic life (Glück, 2018). Such traits are especially important in academic environments that are often ambiguous and challenging (Gharibi et al., 2021).

Contemporary research in positive psychology suggests that spiritual intelligence and mindfulness interact through complex mechanisms; spiritual intelligence, as the ability to adaptively apply spiritual information to life problems, and mindfulness, as nonjudgmental awareness of the present moment, are engaged in a reciprocal relationship. Neuroimaging studies have shown that both constructs are associated with increased activity in the default mode network (DMN) and decreased activity in the amygdala (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). This neurobiological pattern results in improved emotional regulation and enhanced cognitive flexibility. From a psychological perspective, mindfulness creates the mental space necessary for spiritual intelligence components such as existential meaning-making and transcendent connection to emerge (Soleimani et al., 2022). In contrast, spiritual intelligence enriches mindfulness practices by providing a broader existential framework. Longitudinal studies have shown that regular mindfulness practice can increase spiritual intelligence scores, suggesting a mutually reinforcing relationship between the two (Vieten et al., 2023). This reciprocal interaction ultimately fosters wisdom traits such as cognitive flexibility, comprehensive perspective-taking, and moral decision-making.

The relationship between mindfulness and wisdom is also explained through enhanced self-awareness. Regular mindfulness practices promote self-knowledge and insight into personal strengths and weaknesses (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). These traits help students adopt a more balanced and realistic perspective when facing major life issues and decisions. Interestingly, the positive effects of mindfulness on wisdom are not limited to the cognitive dimension; they also influence the emotional and interpersonal dimensions of wisdom. For instance, students who engage in regular mindfulness practices generally demonstrate better regulation of negative emotions and more constructive interpersonal relationships (Brown et al., 2022).

Overall, this study was designed to investigate the predictive roles of the emerging constructs of spiritual intelligence and mindfulness in fostering wisdom among

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university students. Although previous studies have emphasized cognitive factors, there remains a significant research gap regarding the simultaneous influence of these two constructs within the Iranian cultural context. The innovation of this study lies in presenting an integrative model that examines both the direct effects and the interaction between these variables on wisdom. The findings of this research can serve as a scientific foundation for designing comprehensive educational interventions in academic environments that simultaneously emphasize the enhancement of spiritual intelligence and the cultivation of mindfulness. Such programs can contribute to educating a generation of graduates who, in addition to possessing academic expertise, are equipped with the capacity for wise reasoning to confront the complex challenges of society.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The present study was applied in nature and employed a descriptive-correlational research design. The statistical population consisted of all students at universities in Tehran during the 2022–2023 academic year. Based on the correlational nature of the study and sampling formulas (Delavar, 2019), a sample of 150 participants was selected through convenience sampling. This number was determined by considering a minimum of 30 participants per main variable (wisdom, spiritual intelligence, and mindfulness) to increase statistical power. Inclusion criteria were: (1) being an undergraduate or graduate student, (2) having at least one year of university study, (3) expressing informed consent and willingness to participate, (4) being aged between 18 and 35 years, and (5) not having any major psychiatric disorders (self-reported). Exclusion criteria included: (1) incomplete questionnaire responses, (2) inconsistent or random answers, (3) use of psychoactive drugs in the past three months, and (4) experiencing major stressful life events in the past six months.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Spiritual Intelligence

This 24-item questionnaire developed by King assesses four main dimensions of spiritual intelligence: Critical Existential Thinking (Items 1–6), Personal Meaning Production (Items 7–12), Transcendental Awareness (Items 13–18), and Conscious State Expansion (Items 19–24). Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Completely False to 5 = Completely True). In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was calculated to be 0.76, indicating acceptable internal consistency. The validity of the instrument has also been previously confirmed.

2.2.2. Mindfulness

This 39-item scale measures five dimensions of mindfulness: Observing (7 items), Describing (7 items), Acting with Awareness (8 items), Non-Judging of Inner Experience (8 items), and Non-Reactivity to Inner Experience (7 items). Responses are given on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always). The total score ranges from 39 to 195, with higher scores indicating higher levels of mindfulness. In Abbasi's (2018) study, the instrument demonstrated good validity and reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values for subscales ranging from 0.75 to 0.91. Additional reliability analyses reported Cronbach's alpha of 0.98 and test-retest reliability of 0.84 (Kendall & Wilcox, 1979). In Mori's (2002) study, reliability was reported as 0.82. In Iran, Hemmati (2011) reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.98. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was calculated as 0.81, indicating good reliability.

2.2.3. Wisdom

Developed by Ardelt (2003), this 39-item questionnaire includes three subscales: Cognitive (14 items), Reflective (12 items), and Affective (13 items), used to assess wisdom. Responses are rated on a 5-point Likert scale: "Strongly Disagree," "Disagree," "Neutral," "Agree," and "Strongly Agree," scored from 1 to 5 respectively. Ardelt reported internal consistency for the total scale as 0.85, and for the cognitive, reflective, and affective subscales as 0.78, 0.75, and 0.74, respectively. Test-retest reliability was 0.56, inter-rater reliability was statistically significant, and convergent validity was supported by correlations with psychological well-being scales. Exploratory factor analysis confirmed the theoretical three-factor structure (Ardelt, 2019). In the study by Asadi et al. (2015), the internal consistency of the three-dimensional scale was reported as satisfactory to good: cognitive (0.80), reflective (0.40), affective (0.60), and total (0.82).

2.3. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using correlation tests and multiple regression analysis with SPSS version 26.

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3. Findings and Results

In this study, 150 students from universities in Tehran (87 women [58%] and 63 men [42%]) aged between 20 and 40 years were surveyed. The highest frequency was observed in the 20–25 age group, with 56 individuals (37.3%), and the lowest frequency was in the 36–40 age group, with 20 individuals (13.3%). In terms of gender distribution, 58% of the respondents were female and 42% were male. This demographic distribution is considered representative of the student population at universities in Tehran during the 2022–2023 academic year.

Regarding educational level, 112 participants (74.7%) were undergraduate students and 38 (25.3%) were graduate (Master's) students. The distribution across academic disciplines revealed that 45 students (30%) were in humanities, 38 (25.3%) in engineering and technical fields, 34 (22.7%) in basic sciences, and 33 (22%) in medical and paramedical fields. Regarding marital status, 107 students (71.13%) were single and 43 (28.7%) were married. The average GPA of participants was 16.8 (SD = 1.4).

Descriptive statistics of the study components and subscales are reported below (Table 1).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables and Subscales

Variable	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Critical Existential Thinking	18.43	5.94	-0.23	-1.55
Personal Meaning Production	17.60	5.60	0.02	-1.19
Transcendental Awareness	17.71	4.49	-0.07	-0.41
Conscious State Expansion	17.07	3.02	0.19	1.55
Spiritual Intelligence	70.82	11.65	0.08	-0.89
Observing	20.17	3.46	-0.34	-0.15
Describing	20.88	3.68	-1.05	-0.21
Acting with Awareness	21.98	3.17	-0.53	1.46
Non-Judging	21.83	3.22	-0.09	-0.20
Non-Reactivity	20.73	3.12	-0.83	0.43
Mindfulness	105.59	10.04	-0.84	0.38
Wisdom	108.67	14.92	-0.91	-1.53

To assess the normality of data distribution, skewness and kurtosis indices were evaluated. According to the criteria proposed by Coolican (2009), if skewness and kurtosis values fall within the range of -2 to +2, the data distribution can be considered normal or approximately normal. The results from the present study (Table 1) show that all variables fall within this acceptable range. This indicates that the data distribution is sufficiently normal to permit the use of parametric tests. Additional tests, including the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, further confirmed the normality of the data.

To examine the relationships between spiritual intelligence and mindfulness with wisdom among students, and to determine the predictive contribution of the subcomponents of spiritual intelligence and mindfulness, multiple linear regression analysis was conducted. Prior to analysis, key regression assumptions were evaluated.

The skewness and kurtosis indices for all variables were within the acceptable range (-2 to +2) (Table 1). The VIF values ranged from 1.07 to 1.26 and tolerance values ranged from 0.79 to 0.93 (Table 2), indicating no serious multicollinearity among predictor variables. The Durbin-Watson statistic was 2.19, which falls within the optimal range (1.5 to 2.5), confirming the independence of errors.

Table 2

Regression Results for Spiritual Intelligence Components Predicting Wisdom

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Sig.
Regression	9500.35	4	2375.09	14.54	0.54	0.29	0.27	.001
Residual	23680.98	145	163.32					
Total	33181.33	149						

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The results of multiple regression analysis indicated that the model predicting wisdom based on the components of spiritual intelligence was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). Model fit indices revealed that the spiritual intelligence components collectively explained 29% of the variance in wisdom ($R^2 = 0.29$). After adjusting for sample size, this value was reduced to 27% (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.27$), suggesting a moderate effect size. Standardized coefficient analysis showed that among the four components of spiritual intelligence, only two were significant predictors of wisdom: Personal Meaning Production ($\beta = 0.44$, $p < 0.001$) and Transcendental Awareness ($\beta = 0.17$, $p < 0.05$). These findings suggest that the individual's ability to create meaning and purpose in life, as well as the capacity for transcendent experiences, play a key role in predicting students' level of wisdom (Table 2).

Table 3

Regression Results for Mindfulness Components Predicting Wisdom

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Sig.
Regression	12236.64	5	2447.33	16.83	0.61	0.36	0.34	.001
Residual	20944.70	144	145.45					
Total	33181.33	149						

The results of multiple regression analysis revealed that the model predicting wisdom based on the components of mindfulness was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). Model fit indices indicated that mindfulness components collectively explained 36% of the variance in wisdom ($R^2 = 0.36$). After adjusting for sample size, this value decreased to 34% (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.34$), suggesting a moderate-to-strong effect. Standardized coefficient analysis showed that among the five mindfulness components, two significantly predicted wisdom: Describing ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.001$) and Acting with Awareness ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$). These findings suggest that the ability to accurately describe and label internal experiences, and the capacity to act with full awareness in the present moment, play a decisive role in predicting students' wisdom (Table 3).

Conversely, the components Observing ($p = 0.15$), Non-Judging ($p = 0.18$), and Non-Reactivity ($p = 0.95$) did not show statistically significant relationships with wisdom. Notably, the non-significant negative coefficient for Non-Reactivity suggests that maintaining a balance between non-reactivity and active engagement in experiences may be essential for the development of wisdom (Table 3).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the present study indicated that the Personal Meaning Production and Transcendental Awareness components of spiritual intelligence significantly predicted wisdom in students. This finding is consistent with the study by King and DeCicco (2019), which emphasized that the ability to attribute meaning to experiences forms the core of wisdom. Additionally, Amram (2020) confirmed that transcendent experiences can broaden individuals' perspectives and contribute to the development of wisdom (Amram, 2022).

A deeper explanation of this finding suggests that meaning-making supports the development of wisdom through multiple psychological mechanisms. First, it enables individuals to interpret disparate life experiences within a coherent framework, leading to a more integrated and comprehensive understanding of life issues (Mostafavi, 2022). Second, meaning-making allows individuals to find meaning even in difficult and challenging experiences—an ability regarded as central to wisdom (Andrei, 2023). On the other hand, transcendental awareness, by broadening an individual's perspective and reducing self-centered focus, facilitates a deeper understanding of the interrelations among phenomena. This type of awareness helps individuals consider issues from multiple angles and within a broader context—essential features of wise reasoning (Amram, 2022). Recent neuroscience studies have shown that these processes are associated with increased connectivity among different brain regions, particularly in the default mode network (DMN), which is responsible for self-referential thinking and the integration of experiences.

Furthermore, the findings of this study showed that among mindfulness components, Describing and Acting with Awareness were identified as the strongest predictors of wisdom. These results are in line with Garland et al. (2021), who found that emotional labeling is a prerequisite for wise thinking (Garland et al., 2021). Similarly, Brown et al. (2022) confirmed that acting mindfully reduces cognitive biases and creates a context for wise decision-making (Brown et al., 2022).

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From a cognitive psychology perspective, these findings support the metacognitive theory, which emphasizes the role of awareness of mental processes in wisdom. In fact, the Describing skill in mindfulness helps individuals identify and articulate their inner experiences with greater clarity and accuracy—an essential prerequisite for deep and wise thinking. When individuals can clearly describe their emotions and thoughts, they are better able to regulate and manage them. On the other hand, Acting with Awareness enables individuals to be fully present in the moment and make decisions without judgment or automatic reactivity (Verhaeghen, 2020). This capacity is especially valuable in complex situations that require comprehensive evaluation. Cognitive research has shown that these mindfulness components are associated with improved executive brain functions such as cognitive flexibility and impulse control, all of which are foundational to wise thinking.

At a deeper level, spiritual intelligence and mindfulness appear to function in a mutually reinforcing relationship. On one hand, spiritual intelligence provides a conceptual framework and broader life orientation; on the other, mindfulness offers practical tools and specific skills to actualize that framework in daily life. This dynamic interaction fosters a type of thinking that is both profound and meaningful, as well as practical and adaptive. Such thinking not only views problems within a broader context but also offers practical and adaptive solutions—defining features of wisdom (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). These findings highlight the importance of simultaneously addressing both spiritual and cognitive dimensions in wisdom development programs.

Limitations of this study include its cross-sectional design, reliance on self-report methods, and sampling constraints, which limit the generalizability of the findings.

Suggestions for Future Research involve conducting longitudinal studies with more diverse samples and employing multi-method assessments to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the constructs.

Practical Recommendations include developing educational programs that simultaneously foster spiritual growth and mindfulness skills to enhance student wisdom. Additionally, training university faculty to create learning environments that support both deep reflection and practical application of knowledge is recommended. These findings offer valuable insight for rethinking academic curricula to shift from merely transferring knowledge to cultivating holistic and wise thinking in students.

5. Limitations & Suggestions

While this study contributes valuable insights into the relationships among spiritual intelligence, positive affectivity, and academic engagement, it is not without limitations. Firstly, the cross-sectional design restricts the ability to infer causality. Secondly, the reliance on self-reported measures may introduce bias, as participants might respond in socially desirable ways. Additionally, the sample was drawn from a single region, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader populations. These limitations underscore the need for cautious interpretation of the results and suggest areas for improvement in future research.

Future research should address the limitations of the present study by employing longitudinal designs to better ascertain the directionality of the relationships among spiritual intelligence, positive affectivity, and academic engagement. Incorporating a multi-method approach, combining self-reports with objective measures of engagement, could also enhance the reliability of the findings. Furthermore, expanding the study to include diverse cultural and geographical contexts would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how these constructs interact across different educational environments. Investigating potential mediators and moderators in the relationship between spiritual intelligence, positive affectivity, and academic engagement could also offer deeper insights into the mechanisms at play.

The findings of this study have several implications for educational practice. Educators and school administrators might consider developing programs and interventions aimed at enhancing students' spiritual intelligence and positive affectivity as a means to foster greater academic engagement. This could involve incorporating mindfulness and emotional intelligence training into the curriculum, as well as creating a supportive and positive school climate that nurtures students' emotional well-being and spiritual development. Additionally, guidance counselors and psychologists working in schools could provide targeted support for students to cultivate these qualities, potentially leading to improved academic outcomes. Recognizing the role of spiritual intelligence and positive affectivity in academic engagement underscores the importance of a holistic approach to education, one that attends to the emotional and spiritual dimensions of students' experiences alongside academic achievement.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this article.

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