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Mindfulness, Sustainability, and Future Employability: A Triadic Conceptual Framework for Higher Education

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Abstract

The contemporary higher education landscape faces an unprecedented imperative to equip graduates not merely with technical competencies but with the deeper inner capacities that sustainable, meaningful careers demand. This conceptual paper investigates the triadic relationship among mindfulness, sustainability orientation, and future employability within higher education. Drawing upon an integrative review of 126 Scopus-indexed articles and the philosophical wisdom embedded in Indian traditions, particularly the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali and the Purushartha framework, the paper argues that mindfulness serves as a foundational inner capacity that cultivates sustainability consciousness, which in turn enhances the future employability of higher education graduates. Three hypotheses are posited: (H1) Mindfulness will be positively related to Sustainability Orientation; (H2) Sustainability Orientation will be positively related to Future Employability; and (H3) Mindfulness will be positively related to Future Employability. An original triadic conceptual framework illustrating these relationships is presented. The findings carry significant implications for curriculum design, pedagogical strategy, and institutional policy in higher education, particularly for Distance and Online Education in India where scalable, technology-mediated mindfulness-based learning holds transformative promise. The paper contributes to the growing interdisciplinary dialogue between contemplative science, Education for Sustainable Development, and workforce preparedness.

Keywords: Mindfulness, Sustainability Orientation, Future Employability, Higher Education, Sustainable Development Goals-4,8.

Introduction

It is a universal wisdom that the quality of one's attention shapes the quality of one's life. Across civilizations and spiritual traditions, the cultivation of present-moment awareness has been regarded as the bedrock of purposeful human action. The ancient Indian concept of Chitta-Vritti-Nirodha, the cessation of mental fluctuations described in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, speaks to the same inner clarity that modern psychology now recognizes as Mindfulness: a non-judgmental, moment-to-moment awareness of one's experience (Owen-Smith, 2017). This contemplative model, embedded in centuries of Indian philosophical heritage, now finds striking empirical resonance in the management, education, and psychology literatures, pointing toward a profound integration of ancient wisdom and modern science in the service of human development.

Higher education institutions across the globe grapple with a paradox of unprecedented proportions - the world simultaneously confronts a graduate employability crisis and an existential sustainability emergency. Graduates leave universities ill-prepared that the future demands, while the planet cries out for citizens and professionals whose values and behaviors align with ecological and social sustainability. Contemporary research consistently identifies

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creativity, critical thinking, emotional intelligence, resilience, adaptability, and systems thinking as the core competencies of the future workforce - capacities that mindfulness training has been empirically shown to cultivate (Kassie, 2023; Tian, Qi & Derakhshan, 2025; Liu, Cai & Rawal, 2025; Lucero-Romero & Arias-Bolzmann, 2023). Simultaneously, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) has moved from the margins to the mainstream of higher education policy globally (Fekih Zguir, Dubis & Koc, 2021), as institutions strive to embed the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into their curricula and institutional culture.

The Indian higher education landscape presents a particularly compelling context for this inquiry. India is home to one of the largest higher education systems in the world, with over 1,000 universities and 40,000 colleges serving more than 40 million students. Yet concerns about graduate employability have persisted for decades, with surveys consistently revealing that a significant proportion of Indian engineering and management graduates are not considered job-ready by industry standards (Govender & Vaaland, 2022). At the same time, India's commitment to the SDGs, including SDG-4 (Quality Education), SDG-8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG-13 (Climate Action) places sustainability at the heart of its educational policy agenda. This confluence of challenges creates a historic opportunity for higher education institutions to reconceive their mission: not merely to produce technically skilled graduates but to nurture whole, mindful, and sustainability-oriented professionals.

Yet a critical intellectual bridge remains unbuilt: the explicit, theoretically grounded connection between the inner cultivation of mindfulness, the development of sustainability orientation, and the enhancement of future employability, particularly within the Indian higher education context. While individual studies have explored the mindfulness-wellbeing link, the sustainability-employability link, and the mindfulness-performance link in isolation, no integrated conceptual framework has been proposed that articulates the triadic relationship among all three constructs. The present paper addresses this gap. It argues that mindfulness is not merely a wellbeing intervention or a stress-management tool but a foundational pedagogical orientation that, when cultivated in higher education, naturally fosters sustainability consciousness and thereby enhances the employability of graduates in an increasingly green and purpose-driven economy.

The paper draws from both contemporary management and educational literature and from the deep wells of Indian philosophical heritage—particularly the Purushartha framework (the four aims of human life: Dharma, Artha, Kama, and Moksha), which elegantly integrates mindful living, ethical action, purposeful work, and transcendence. In this framework, Artha (purposeful livelihood) pursued through Dharma (ethical, mindful action) is the highest form of employability: a career that contributes to both individual flourishing and societal well-being. The vision of Lok Sangraha - working for the welfare of all, embedded in the Bhagavad Gita's teaching on Nishkama Karma (desireless, mindful action) provides a uniquely Indian philosophical grounding for the sustainability-employability nexus.

The study contributes at two levels. First, it systematically maps the extant literature on mindfulness, sustainability orientation, and future employability, utilizing a bibliometric dataset of 126 peer-reviewed Scopus-indexed articles and supplementary literature from the linked article corpus. Second, it proposes an original triadic conceptual framework positing mindfulness as the antecedent, sustainability orientation as the mediating construct, and future employability as the outcome, while also recognizing a direct path

from mindfulness to employability. Three research hypotheses are proposed and discussed, and the paper concludes with implications for higher education institutions, curriculum designers, and policymakers.

In consideration of the ongoing state of the field, the contemporary research works involving mindfulness, sustainability orientation, and future employability have been used in different disciplines of management and education research. On the other side, there exist meagre evidence of their interrelationship particularly in the context of Indian higher education. Hence, the current research work tries to address the gaps at two different levels. Firstly, to identify the presence of mindfulness, sustainability orientation, and employability constructs in contemporary literature. Further, no integrative framework is available till date that tries to bind and justify the triadic interrelationship among these three constructs and draw meaningful conclusions anchored in Indian wisdom traditions available.

Literature Review

Mindfulness

Mindfulness, at its most foundational level, refers to a state of conscious, non-judgmental attention to the present moment, encompassing one's thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment (Owen-Smith, 2017). While the contemporary academic discourse on mindfulness derives substantially from the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) programme, its conceptual origins are far older, rooted in Buddhist traditions of Sati (awareness) and in the ancient Indian Yogic concept of Dharana (concentration) and Dhyana (meditation) from Patanjali's Yoga Sutras. In management and leadership literature, mindfulness has been positioned as a critical competency for authentic leadership (Kelly, 2023), creative problem-solving and flourishing (Kayyali, 2026), resilient organizational behaviour (Garipagaoglu, 2025), and innovation-driven digital transformation (Wang & Wu, 2025).

In higher education specifically, mindfulness has emerged as a significant determinant of student wellbeing, academic performance, professional preparedness, and holistic development. Egan, O'Hara, Cook and Mantzios (2021) demonstrated strong associations between mindfulness and better academic performance through a quantitative study of 206 undergraduate students, with mindfulness positively related to resiliency, self-compassion, and consideration of future consequences. Lucero-Romero and Arias-Bolzmann (2023) conducted a quasi-experimental study in a university setting and demonstrated that mindfulness training exerts a significant positive influence on learning capacity, improving both retention and comprehension - outcomes fundamental to graduate preparedness. Sarzhanova and Nurgabdeshov (2025), in a systematic review mapping psychological well-being in education, identified mindfulness as one of the key dimensions of educational psychological well-being, mediating between institutional stressors and productive academic outcomes.

The impact of mindfulness extends beyond individual students to encompass faculty development and institutional resilience. Nguyen, Dang, Le Cao and Huynh (2025) found that mindfulness interventions significantly improved university teachers' well-being and professional development, with downstream benefits for the quality of learning environments they create. Wang (2023) established that teacher's mindfulness positively influences teacher-student relationship quality through the mediation of emotional intelligence, suggesting that mindfulness infuses the pedagogical fabric of institutions that cultivate it. Garipagaoglu (2025) demonstrated that mindfulness, mediated by job crafting and moderated by trust, builds organizational resilience in higher education institutions, pointing to its

capacity to strengthen the entire institutional ecosystem.

Rivers (2024) positions mindfulness as an indispensable component of business education, arguing that self-aware future leaders require contemplative practices embedded in their professional formation rather than as an afterthought. Le, Kinh and Douang (2019) found through a randomized study in Vietnam that combining mindfulness training with service-learning enhanced students' civic awareness and prosocial behaviors outcomes directly relevant to employability in a purpose-driven economy. Bao, Phong and Tho (2023) demonstrated that mindfulness significantly enhances co-creation quality in higher education, improving student-lecturer and student-student interactions - collaborative competencies foundational to professional readiness in team-oriented workplaces. Masry-Herzallah and Watted (2024) established that mindfulness ability is a key driver of effective learning in Distance and Online Education environments, making it especially relevant for India's rapidly expanding DOE sector.

In the Indian context, mindfulness finds a rich parallel in the Yogic tradition of Sakshi Bhava (witness consciousness) - the capacity to observe one's thoughts and feelings without identification or reaction. Krishna's instruction to Arjuna (in Bhagvad Gita), to perform his duty with complete inner clarity and non-attachment (Nishkama Karma) is, in essence, a prescription for mindful professional action. Zheng, Hong, Wang, Sun and Xu (2025), while studying mindfulness in healthcare workers, established the mediating role of emotional intelligence between mindfulness and worker effectiveness - a finding with clear implications for graduate professional development. The concept of mindfulness, thus, transcends its Western psychological framing to become a deeply Indian educational ideal.

H1: Mindfulness will be positively related to Sustainability Orientation.

Sustainability Orientation

Sustainability orientation in higher education refers to the degree to which students, institutions, and graduates internalize values, attitudes, and competencies aligned with sustainable development—encompassing ecological, social, and economic dimensions (Brundiers et al., 2021). The concept has gained considerable traction since the United Nations' adoption of the 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs, which have prompted higher education institutions globally to reimagine their curriculum, pedagogy, and institutional culture (Fekih Zguir, Dubis & Koc, 2021). The shift is from sustainability as an add-on topic to sustainability as a pervasive orientation, a way of seeing and acting in the world that shapes every professional decision.

Brundiers et al. (2021), through a Delphi study with 14 international experts, established a key competencies framework for sustainability in higher education encompassing systems thinking, anticipatory thinking, normative thinking, strategic thinking, and interpersonal competence, each of which is demonstrably cultivated through mindfulness practice. Plietzsch, Brunmayr, Brunner and Lehmann (2024) provided direct empirical evidence for the mindfulness-sustainability link by demonstrating that an eight-week MBSR programme significantly increased participants' dispositional mindfulness and overall attitudes toward sustainable development among future professionals. This quasi-experimental finding, involving pre-, post-, and longitudinal testing, provides the strongest available evidence for H1.

Hensley (2020) argued theoretically and empirically that mindfulness cultivates the creativity and reflexivity necessary for engaging

with sustainability challenges in higher education—specifically, that flipped classroom approaches combining mindfulness and ESD can transform students from passive recipients of sustainability knowledge into active agents of sustainability change. Hok Ko Pong and Lai Chun Man (2024) found through a longitudinal study that sustainability education combined with work-integrated learning (WIL) enhanced students' sustainability consciousness across knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors—pointing to the importance of embodied, experiential learning in cultivating sustainability orientation. Khuadthong, Taweephol, Promsivapallop and Imjai (2025) introduced the construct of green mindfulness, the capacity to sustain ecological attention and demonstrated its role in shaping sustainable tourism behaviors among Gen Z students, illustrating how mindfulness and sustainability are not merely associated but mutually constitutive.

Saini, Jena, Gupta and Mahale (2025) examined green behaviors through the lens of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), establishing that individuals engage in sustainable practices when their basic psychological needs such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met. Mindfulness training directly cultivates these psychological resources, creating a theoretically coherent pathway from mindfulness to intrinsically motivated sustainable behaviour. Lu, Xu, Zhang, Pi, Chen and Wu (2025) established that green innovation behaviors in organizations are driven by cognitive-affective processes that can be cultivated through mindful leadership approaches, providing organizational-level evidence for the sustainability orientation construct. Penzenstadler (2020) articulated the concept of individual sustainability in professional contexts, arguing that where one directs one's attention determines one's capacity for sustainable professional action - a compelling philosophical bridge between mindfulness and sustainability orientation.

In the Vedic tradition, sustainability resonates powerfully with the concept of Dharma - the principle of righteous, harmonious, and sustainable living in accordance with the cosmic order. The Panchabhuta philosophy of the five elements insists on ecological balance and interdependence. The concept of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the world is one family) articulates a sustainability orientation that is simultaneously ecological, social, and spiritual. Higher education institutions that cultivate sustainability orientation through mindfulness are, in essence, reviving an ancient Indian understanding of purposeful, dharmic living that is both personally fulfilling and ecologically responsible. Rebecchi, Todd and Hagege (2024) reinforce this view, arguing that education must cultivate responsible creativity, grounded in ethical principles and societal well-being, as a foundational professional competency for the 21st century.

H2: Sustainability Orientation will be positively related to Future Employability.

Future Employability

Future employability in the context of higher education refers not merely to the immediate probability of securing employment upon graduation but to the sustained capacity of graduates to adapt, contribute meaningfully, and thrive across evolving career landscapes throughout their professional lives (Jabeen, Nadeem, Raziq & Sajjad, 2022). The construct has undergone significant reconceptualization in recent years, moving away from static skill inventories toward dynamic capability frameworks that emphasize self-regulation, adaptability, ethical reasoning, continuous learning, and psychological resilience (Donald & Manville, 2023). This reconceptualization is particularly urgent in the context of India's rapidly transforming labour market, where automation, green economy expansion, and the rise of knowledge-intensive

industries are reshaping the skills landscape.

Govender and Vaaland (2022), in a systematic literature synthesis on business students and work-integrated learning, identified significant gaps between business school education and work-life realities, underscoring the need for curricula that bridge inner development with professional competence. Donald and Manville (2023) proposed a Positive Psychology Sustainable Career (PPSC) framework that integrates mindfulness with life coaching as a pathway for cultivating career self-efficacy - a key determinant of future employability. Alharethi, Awan and Saleem (2025) directly demonstrated that student mindfulness moderates the relationship between internship experience and work readiness, establishing that mindful students extract significantly more professional learning from practical experiences - a finding with profound implications for work-integrated learning design in Indian higher education.

Pandya (2025) established a direct empirical link between mindfulness training and self-perceived employability among doctoral students in arts and humanities, finding that mindfulness enhanced the soft skills crucial to career success, including communication, resilience, and reflective practice. Kassie (2023) identified a significant mismatch between employer expectations and graduate competencies and argued that mindfulness-based social-emotional learning (MBSEL) is a promising institutional response, positioning mindfulness not as a luxury but as a graduate employability imperative. Khanna and Dutta (2023) proposed design thinking as a pathway for sustainable career development among Gen Z students, with mindful reflection as a core element of iterative career prototyping.

Xu, Chen and Ma (2025) explored mindfulness cultivation models specifically for entrepreneurship and employment in the context of the new energy industry, a sector at the forefront of sustainability-driven economic transformation, finding that mindfulness significantly enhanced entrepreneurial intention and employment readiness through structural equation modelling. Their work is particularly relevant to India's green energy ambitions under the National Solar Mission and the broader sustainability-oriented employment growth agenda. Bai, Tian and Sanchez (2025) demonstrated, drawing on Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, that mindfulness buffers the negative effects of job complexity and enhances job crafting behaviour, the proactive reshaping of one's role to align with personal strengths and values, a key predictor of sustainable employability in fluid, knowledge-intensive careers.

Jabeen et al. (2022), drawing on COR theory and social information processing theory, established that individual psychological resources, particularly self-regulation and resilience capacities cultivated through mindfulness, are the key predictors of sustainable employability across volatile career environments. Baluku (2024) provided complementary evidence by demonstrating that mindfulness, in combination with psychological capital, significantly enhanced entrepreneurial abilities and intentions among individuals facing precarious employment situations, suggesting that mindfulness is not merely a tool for optimizing already-privileged career trajectories but a democratic resource for building employability capital across diverse socioeconomic contexts. Donald and Jackson (2022) established that subjective wellbeing, closely linked to mindfulness, is a significant predictor of graduate career motivation and engagement, reinforcing the psychological foundations of future employability.

Within the Purushartha framework, Artha (economic sustenance and purposeful livelihood) represents one of the four aims of human life. Critically, the Purushartha framework positions

Artha not as an end in itself but as a means to be pursued through Dharma - ethical, mindful action in service of the greater good. This reframes future employability not as mere job acquisition but as the capacity for dharmic work: purposeful, sustainable, and contributing to societal well-being. An Indian higher education system that embeds this vision of dharmic employability, cultivated through mindfulness and sustainability orientation, would produce graduates who are not merely job-ready but world-ready.

H3: Mindfulness will be positively related to Future Employability.

Mindfulness and Future Employability: The Direct Link

The direct relationship between mindfulness and future employability, independent of the sustainability orientation pathway, is supported by a substantial and growing body of literature. Stuart-Edwards (2023), drawing on the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, demonstrated that mindfulness mobilizes subjective vitality, an energy construct closely linked to career motivation, proactive behaviour, and performance, both directly and through positive coping mechanisms. The upward spiral created by mindfulness-vitality-coping is precisely the kind of self-reinforcing developmental dynamic that underpins sustainable career trajectories.

Algaidi (2025) established mindfulness as a significant predictor of professional development among Saudi university faculty members, with mindful attention and openness toward new experiences being particularly influential predictors. Liu, Cai and Rawal (2025) found that mindfulness significantly enhanced both positive academic emotions and cognitive flexibility among Chinese undergraduates - dual outcomes that map directly onto the creativity, adaptability, and problem-solving demands of future workplaces. Tian, Qi and Derakhshan (2025) established that mindfulness interventions significantly improved critical thinking and self-efficacy among multilingual learners, two of the most consistently cited employability competencies in employer surveys globally.

Zheng et al. (2025) demonstrated in the healthcare context that mindfulness enhances employee effectiveness through the mediation of emotional intelligence and job satisfaction, a pathway that is equally operative in higher education and graduate employment contexts. Wang and Wu (2025), in the restaurant industry context, established that mentorship combined with mindfulness drives innovation capability and digital transformation readiness, competencies increasingly central to graduate employability across sectors. Rivers (2024) argues compellingly that business schools embedding mindfulness in their curriculum are producing self-aware, ethically grounded leaders capable of navigating VUCA landscapes. Kayyali (2026) frames mindfulness as a Mindflourish, a creative, transformative force that cultivates the artistic and intellectual capacities foundational to professional innovation and entrepreneurship.

The Indian philosophical tradition adds a further dimension to this direct relationship. The Yoga Sutras' progression from Yama (ethical principles) through Niyama (personal disciplines), Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, and Dhyana to Samadhi represents a complete curriculum for professional human development: ethical conduct, disciplined practice, physical vitality, breath-regulated focus, sense withdrawal, concentration, meditation, and integration. Each stage cultivates precisely the competencies such as ethical grounding, self-regulation, attention, focus, and creativity that the contemporary employers identify as hallmarks of an ideal graduate. In this sense, the Indian educational heritage, when properly understood, is itself a framework for mindful, sustainable, and enduring employability.

Conceptual Framework

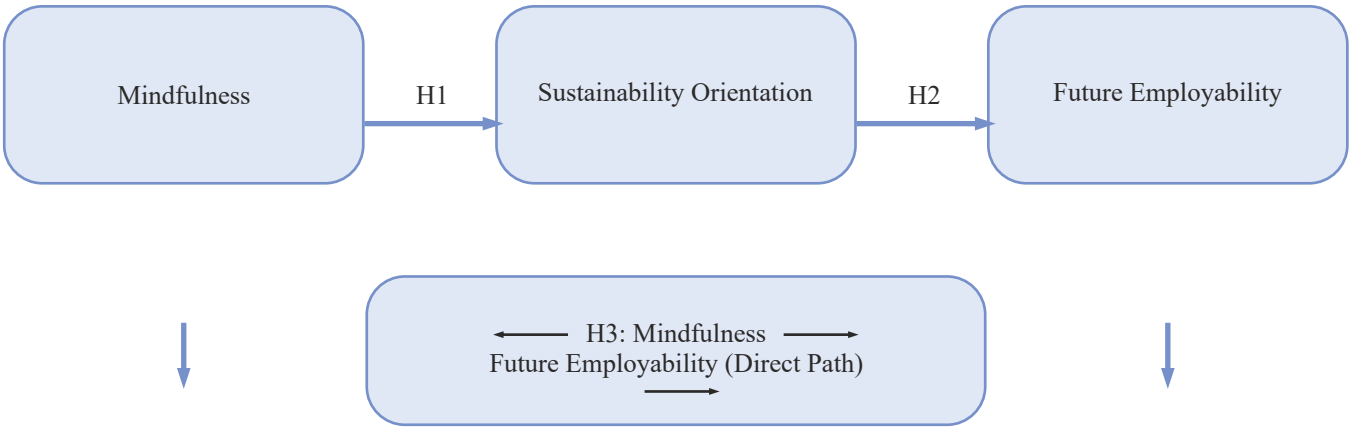


Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework (Source: Authors' Own)

The conceptual framework presented in Fig. 1 illustrates the triadic relationship at the core of this paper. Mindfulness serves as the independent variable, positioned at the originating node of the framework. Sustainability Orientation functions as the mediating construct, receiving the influence of Mindfulness (H1) and transmitting it forward to Future Employability (H2). Future Employability is the primary outcome variable. In addition, a direct path from Mindfulness to Future Employability (H3) is posited, acknowledging that mindfulness enhances employability not only through the sustainability pathway but also directly through the cultivation of cognitive, emotional, and relational capacities. The framework thus reflects both a mediated (indirect) and a direct mechanism of influence, providing a comprehensive account of how mindfulness contributes to graduate career preparedness.

Methodology

The present research adopts a qualitative, conceptual approach rooted in the tradition of integrative literature review and philosophical hermeneutics. Such an approach is appropriate for papers that seek to propose theoretical frameworks by synthesizing and interpreting extant knowledge across multiple disciplines (Owen-Smith, 2017). Hermeneutics, as a methodology, involves the detailed interpretation of texts in this case, academic literature and philosophical works within their contextual and philosophical settings, and is widely employed in studies related to management, sociology, theology, philosophy, and education (Kelly, 2023; Garipagaoglu, 2025). It is all about detailed investigations of our ancient literary and modern scholarly works and their relative interpretation in management-related research.

The current study proceeded in three stages. In the first stage, a systematic search of relevant literature was conducted using databases including Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and Emerald Insight. Search terms included 'mindfulness,' 'higher education,' 'sustainability orientation,' 'Education for Sustainable Development,' 'future employability,' 'sustainable employability,' 'contemplative pedagogy,' and combinations thereof. The bibliometric data from Scopus comprising 126 peer-reviewed articles provided the empirical foundation for the literature mapping, supplemented by 10 targeted articles from a linked article corpus assembled by the author based on DOI review.

In the second stage, a two-phase relevance filtering process was applied. In the initial phase, all 126

bibliometric articles were reviewed for thematic relevance to the three constructs of mindfulness, sustainability orientation, and future employability. Articles were included if their primary focus involved at least one of the three constructs in an educational, professional development, or organizational context. In the second phase, the most directly relevant articles were selected for in-depth engagement, prioritizing recent empirical studies (2019–2026) that offer measurable outcomes and theoretical frameworks. Conceptual and philosophical works were included where they provided foundational theoretical grounding or Indian wisdom tradition connections.

In the third stage, the philosophical dimension was introduced by situating the three constructs within the Indian wisdom tradition—specifically the Patanjali Yoga Sutras, the Bhagavad Gita's teachings on Nishkama Karma and Lok Sangraha, and the Purushartha framework. This integration with Indian Ethos in Management (IEM) aligns with the growing body of interdisciplinary research that positions classical Indic thought as a source of management and educational innovation (Kassie, 2023; Rivers, 2024).

The study rotates around three important constructs, namely, mindfulness, sustainability orientation, and future employability, and their interrelationship. Initially, in the identification stage, the exploration of stated constructs is done via texts available in existing literature. In the later stage, the meaningful information of the knowledge constructs was drawn, and their respective information was stated via citing valid relative literatures. By using the hermeneutic approach and interpretation of philosophical texts, this study draws upon a rich and established tradition of qualitative inquiry in management education research. A key strength of the methodology is its integrative character: it bridges Western empirical scholarship and Indian philosophical inquiry, producing a framework that is simultaneously evidence-based and culturally resonant.

The limitations of the present methodology are acknowledged. As a conceptual paper, the framework proposed here has not been empirically tested in the form of a survey instrument or experimental design. The selection of literature, while systematic, reflects the author's interpretive judgement regarding relevance and significance. The philosophical hermeneutic approach, by nature, involves interpretive choices that another researcher might make differently. These limitations are inherent to conceptual scholarship and are addressed by the Future Direction section, which outlines the empirical studies that would be needed to test the proposed relationships.

Discussion and Analysis

The foregoing literature review and the conceptual framework together illuminate three critical pathways through which mindfulness, sustainability orientation, and future employability are intertwined in the higher education context. The analysis proceeds systematically along the three hypothesized relationships, weaving together empirical evidence, theoretical reasoning, and Indian philosophical insight.

The first pathway, from Mindfulness to Sustainability Orientation (H1), is supported by both compelling empirical evidence and deep philosophical reasoning. Plietzsch et al. (2024) demonstrated that an eight-week MBSR programme measurably increased dispositional mindfulness and overall attitudes toward sustainable development, providing the most direct empirical test of H1 available in the current literature. This finding suggests that the inner quality of attention cultivated through mindfulness practice naturally extends outward to encompass ecological and social dimensions, a phenomenon theoretically grounded in the broaden-and-build

theory (Stuart-Edwards, 2023), which predicts that positive psychological states expand the scope of attention and awareness. Hensley's (2020) argument that mindfulness cultivates the creative reflexivity essential for ESD is further supported by Saini et al. (2025), who established that sustainable behaviors are intrinsically motivated when psychological needs cultivated by mindfulness, autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fulfilled.

Khuadthong et al.'s (2025) construct of green mindfulness provides a particularly elegant integration of the mindfulness and sustainability literatures, suggesting that mindfulness practice, when directed toward ecological attention, cultivates a form of environmental present-moment awareness that naturally generates sustainability-oriented behaviors. In the Indian philosophical tradition, this relationship is captured in the concept of Ahimsa (non-harm) and Sarvabhuta Hita (welfare of all beings), natural expressions of a mind trained in present-moment, non-judgmental awareness. A mindful graduate, in other words, naturally develops an orientation of care for the world that is the very foundation of sustainability consciousness. This philosophical insight provides a culturally resonant foundation for H1 that transcends any specific empirical study.

The second pathway, from Sustainability Orientation to Future Employability (H2), reflects a fundamental structural shift in the global economy that is rapidly gathering pace. Brundiers et al.'s (2021) competencies framework establishes that the same sustainability competencies - systems thinking, anticipatory thinking, normative reasoning, and interpersonal effectiveness, are precisely what contemporary employers increasingly demand across sectors, from finance and consulting to manufacturing, hospitality, and technology. Hok Ko Pong and Lai Chun Man (2024) demonstrated through a longitudinal WIL study that sustainability-integrated education enhances the actionable sustainability behaviors and professional readiness of graduates. Rebecchi, Todd and Hagege (2024), writing on responsible creativity as a professional competency, reinforce the argument that the ethical, sustainability-oriented graduate is simultaneously the most employable graduate for a world that demands responsible innovation.

The sustainability-employability link is further strengthened by Lu et al.'s (2025) demonstration that green innovation behaviors - a direct expression of sustainability orientation, are increasingly valued by organizations navigating the ecological transition. Saini et al. (2025), drawing on SDT, established that green behaviors sustained by intrinsic motivation - the kind cultivated through mindfulness—are more durable and professionally consequential than those driven by external compliance. The Indian philosophy of Lok Sangraha (collective welfare as professional ethic) articulates the employability of the sustainability-oriented graduate in profound terms: one who works not merely for personal advancement but for the upliftment of society is, in the deepest sense, the graduate that the 21st century demands.

The third pathway, the direct relationship from Mindfulness to Future Employability (H3), finds its most compelling articulation in the convergence of cognitive science, positive psychology, and professional development research. Pandya (2025) established that mindfulness training enhances soft skills and self-perceived employability; Algaidi (2025) confirmed mindfulness as a predictor of professional development; Stuart-Edwards (2023) demonstrated the vitality-enhancing effect of mindfulness on career motivation through the broaden-and-build mechanism. Alharethi et al. (2025) took this further by showing that mindfulness moderates the internship-work readiness relationship - mindful students extract more professional learning from practical

experiences, making them demonstrably better prepared for employment. Xu, Chen and Ma (2025) established that mindfulness-oriented training models directly enhance entrepreneurial intention and employment readiness in new-economy contexts. Bai, Tian and Sanchez (2025), grounding their analysis in self-regulation theory, showed that mindful graduates handle job complexity better and craft their work roles more effectively.

The Purushartha framework brings a uniquely integrative and culturally resonant lens to all three pathways. The four Purusharthas - Dharma (ethical, mindful action), Artha (purposeful livelihood), Kama (authentic fulfilment), and Moksha (transcendence and liberation), together constitute a complete model of mindful, sustainable, and meaningful career development that Indian higher education can aspire to cultivate. A graduate who internalizes this framework is not merely employable but flourishable and equipped to contribute to society with wisdom, sustainability, and purpose across a lifetime of meaningful work.

The contemporary global context amplifies the urgency of the arguments advanced in this paper. Climate change, the fourth industrial revolution, the rapid evolution of artificial intelligence, and deepening social inequalities collectively demand a new kind of graduate: one who is not only technically skilled but also self-aware, ecologically conscious, and ethically grounded. The higher education institutions, particularly Distance and Online Education institutions in India, which serve millions of students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, are uniquely positioned to democratize access to this transformative form of education.

The three-construct framework proposed in this paper is more than an academic exercise - it is a call to institutional action. It invites curriculum designers, academic leaders, and policymakers to reimagine higher education as a space where mindfulness is not an optional wellbeing add-on but a foundational pedagogical orientation (Owen-Smith, 2017; Rivers, 2024). It challenges educators to embed reflective practices, contemplative exercises, and sustainability-focused learning across every discipline, from management to engineering, from health sciences to social work. And it reframes the measurement of institutional quality not merely in terms of placement rates but in terms of graduates' capacity for purposeful, sustainable, and mindful professional contribution.

Garipagaoglu (2025) reinforces this vision by demonstrating that mindfulness, when institutionally cultivated through job crafting and trust, builds organizational resilience in higher education itself, suggesting that the benefits of mindfulness extend beyond individual students to the institutional fabric. Donald and Manville (2023) provide a positive psychology sustainable career framework that mirrors the Purushartha model's integration of inner strengths with outward career pathways, bridging Western positive psychology and Eastern contemplative wisdom. Govender and Vaaland (2022) highlight the enduring gaps between business education and work-life realities that mindfulness-integrated WIL can help address.

The DOE context deserves particular emphasis. India's National Education Policy-2020 envisions a significant expansion of online and flexible learning pathways. Distance and Online Education institutions that embed mindfulness and sustainability into their digital curricula through micro-learning modules, contemplative practices integrated into course design, sustainability case studies, and reflective assessment methodologies, can reach learners in tier-2 and tier-3 cities who may not otherwise have access to premium higher education experiences. The scalability, accessibility, and flexibility of online education thus become vehicles for the democratization of mindful, sustainable, and employability-enhancing

higher education at national scale (Masry-Herzallah & Watted, 2024; Fekih Zguir, Dubis & Koc, 2021).

The integration of the Purushartha philosophical framework with contemporary management and educational research also represents a significant contribution to the Indian Ethos in Management (IEM) literature. By demonstrating that the four Purusharthas - Dharma, Artha, Kama, and Moksha, map elegantly onto the mindfulness-sustainability-employability triad, this paper positions classical Indian wisdom not as historical artefact but as living resource for contemporary educational innovation. Higher education institutions in India have a unique opportunity and a philosophical responsibility to honour this heritage by making it actionable in the lives of 21st-century graduates.

Conclusion

This study concludes that mindfulness, sustainability orientation, and future employability constitute a dynamic, mutually reinforcing triad of human capabilities that higher education institutions have both the opportunity and the responsibility to cultivate. The integrative conceptual framework proposed here identifies mindfulness as the foundational inner capacity from which sustainability consciousness naturally emerges, and through which the adaptive, creative, and ethically grounded competencies demanded by the future economy are developed. The triadic model is supported by a robust body of contemporary empirical literature spanning positive psychology, education for sustainable development, organizational behaviour, and graduate employability research.

More specifically, the analysis of extant literature reveals that mindfulness training in higher education enhances students' sustainability attitudes and behaviors (H1); sustainability-oriented education equips graduates with the competencies demanded by a green, purpose-driven economy (H2); and mindfulness directly enhances the psychological, cognitive, and interpersonal capacities central to future employability (H3). The ancient Indian wisdom of Purushartha illuminates this triad with profound depth, positioning the integration of mindfulness, sustainability, and purposeful livelihood not as a novel pedagogical innovation but as the fulfilment of an ageless Indian educational vision that is urgently relevant to the present moment.

The paper makes several significant contributions to the literature. First, it provides the first integrated conceptual framework connecting mindfulness, sustainability orientation, and future employability in the higher education context. Second, it draws on a bibliometric dataset of 126 Scopus-indexed articles to ground its literature review in a systematic foundation. Third, it situates the framework within Indian philosophical tradition, particularly the Purushartha framework, contributing to the growing body of scholarship on Indian Ethos in Management and contemplative approaches to higher education. Fourth, it draws explicit implications for Distance and Online Education in India, a context that has been largely underserved in the international mindfulness and sustainability in education literature.

Implications

The implications of the present study can be seen from triadic dimensions. From the philosophical point of view, this paper bridges classical Indian wisdom with contemporary educational imperatives, demonstrating that the Purushartha framework, developed millennia ago, provides a uniquely integrative vision for 21st-century higher education. It invites Indian higher education institutions to reclaim their philosophical heritage as a source of genuine pedagogical innovation, positioning ancient concepts of Dharma (ethical action), Artha (purposeful livelihood), and Moksha

(self-transcendence) as living guides for modern graduate development. The paper also contributes to the growing interdisciplinary dialogue between theology, philosophy, and management and education studies, consistent with the tradition of Purushartha - A Journal of Management, Ethics and Spirituality.

From the psychological point of view, the paper underscores the importance of cultivating mindfulness as a core psychological capacity for students - not merely as a stress-management tool but as a foundation for self-awareness, resilience, cognitive flexibility, creative thinking, and emotional intelligence. These are not soft skills peripheral to the academic mission; they are the very capacities that make graduates adaptive and employable in a rapidly changing world (Kelly, 2023; Tian, Qi & Derakhshan, 2025; Liu, Cai & Rawal, 2025; Lucero-Romero & Arias-Bolzmann, 2023). Institutions that invest in mindfulness-based pedagogy are not diverting resources from academic excellence, but are deepening it.

From the educational and institutional point of view, this paper calls on higher education institutions, particularly Distance and Online Education institutions, to embed mindfulness and sustainability as core threads running through their curricula, pedagogical approaches, assessment methodologies, and co-curricular activities. Specific recommendations include: integrating mindfulness-based interventions (such as MBSR modules or contemplative exercises) into foundational courses; embedding sustainability case studies and project-based sustainability learning across disciplines; redesigning internship and WIL programmes to include mindful reflection components (following the evidence of Alharethi et al., 2025; Govender & Vaaland, 2022); and developing faculty mindfulness training programmes consistent with the findings of Nguyen et al. (2025). The scalability of online education makes this particularly powerful: an institution that embeds mindfulness and sustainability in its digital learning environments can reach students across geographical and social boundaries (Masry-Herzallah & Watted, 2024; Fekih Zguir, Dubis & Koc, 2021), contributing to the democratization of transformative education at national scale.

For policymakers at the national level, this paper provides a rationale for including mindfulness and sustainability competencies in the NEP 2020 implementation frameworks for higher education. The National Curriculum Framework for Higher Education could incorporate contemplative learning approaches and sustainability-oriented graduate profiles as outcome standards, creating systemic incentives for institutions to embed these capacities in their programme designs. International bodies such as UNESCO's Education for Sustainable Development framework and the UN Global Compact's Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) provide additional scaffolding for these recommendations.

Future Direction of the Study

The present conceptual paper invites a rich and multi-faceted agenda of future empirical research. Longitudinal studies that track the development of sustainability orientation and employability outcomes among students who have undergone structured mindfulness training in higher education settings would provide the most valuable empirical grounding for the framework proposed here. Such studies should include pre-, post-, and follow-up assessments at multiple time points to capture both immediate and enduring effects, consistent with the rigorous quasi-experimental design employed by Plietzsch et al. (2024).

Randomized controlled trials (RCTs) of mindfulness-based interventions specifically designed for higher education contexts, and measuring sustainability orientation and

employability outcomes as primary dependent variables, would constitute the gold standard of empirical evidence. Structural equation modelling (SEM) studies that test the full triadic framework, including the mediating role of sustainability orientation between mindfulness and employability, would provide rigorous quantitative validation of the three hypotheses proposed here, consistent with the quantitative methodologies employed by Xu, Chen and Ma (2025) and Bai, Tian and Sanchez (2025).

Studies conducted specifically in the Indian higher education context, including both residential and Distance and Online Education institutions, would contribute significantly to the globalization of this literature, which currently skews heavily toward Western and East Asian contexts. Comparative studies between different types of Indian institutions – the central universities, state universities, deemed universities, and open universities, would illuminate how institutional context mediates the mindfulness-sustainability-employability pathway. Cross-cultural comparisons of how the Purushartha framework shapes graduate values, sustainability behaviors, and career orientations, comparing Indian students with counterparts in other philosophical traditions, would also be particularly valuable.

Furthermore, bibliometric and scientometric analyses of the evolving intersections among mindfulness, sustainability, and employability research clusters, mapping co-citation networks, keyword co-occurrence, and intellectual structure, could provide a systematic overview of the intellectual trajectory of this interdisciplinary field and identify emerging sub-themes for focused empirical inquiry. Mixed-methods studies that combine quantitative measurement of the three constructs with qualitative exploration of students' lived experiences of mindfulness-integrated education would enrich the empirical evidence base with the depth and texture necessary for practical educational design.

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