

Peer Review

Review of: "Rethinking Practice in Mindfulness-Based Interventions: A Developmental Theoretical Model Integrating Formal Practice, Informal Practice, Practice Quality, and Dispositional Mindfulness"

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Review of the Manuscript: "Rethinking Practice in Mindfulness Based Interventions: A Developmental Theoretical Model Integrating Formal Practice, Informal Practice, Practice Quality, and Dispositional Mindfulness"

The paper addresses a timely and important question: how do the type of mindfulness practice (formal vs. informal), the amount of time invested, and the quality of practice contribute to the development of mindfulness skills? The author rightly points out that current mindfulness research has disproportionately emphasized formal practice duration, often sidelining informal practice and the critical role of practice quality. By proposing a developmental trajectory of mindfulness skill acquisition, the paper offers a promising framework that could significantly advance theoretical understanding and deepen insights into the underlying processes of mindfulness.

While I find the overall approach both important and compelling, I believe the manuscript would benefit from addressing several key issues, which I have linked closely to specific sections of the text.

Formal vs. Informal Practice (page 4)

The distinction between formal and informal practice is central to the argument, yet the manuscript would benefit from concrete examples of informal practices (e.g., mindful eating, walking mindfully, body awareness during routine tasks). Readers may interpret "informal practice" quite differently—

especially across clinical and non-clinical populations—and such examples would enhance clarity and applicability.

I would gently question the assumption that informal practice necessarily represents a transfer from formal practice. While it is common in structured programs (e.g., MBSR) to introduce formal practice first as a foundation, this sequencing may reflect a pedagogical strategy to avoid overwhelming beginners, rather than a necessary developmental progression. In principle, individuals could begin with two simple informal practices (e.g., tying shoes mindfully or mindfully brushing their teeth) and later deepen their attentional and non-reactive capacities through formal practice. People understand what it means to mindfully brush their teeth without having first practiced body scan or breathing meditation. In both formal and informal practice, the core challenge lies in directing and maintaining attention on the task.

Thus, the line of argument might be strengthened by reframing the relationship between formal and informal practice not as a linear transfer, but as parallel, interdependent pathways that mutually reinforce one another through consistent, high-quality engagement.

Practice Quality (page 5)

The emphasis on practice quality is well-placed and timely. However, the discussion appears to apply quality primarily to formal practice. Could informal practice also be performed with high or low quality? To me, it seems plausible to assume that a person's overall practice quality—conceptualized as sustained attention, non-judgmental awareness, and intentionality—may be correlated across formal and informal contexts.

This raises the important question of how practice quality can be assessed in informal settings, which remains methodologically challenging. The author might consider suggesting potential measurement strategies—such as ecological momentary assessment (EMA), self-report scales capturing intentionality and attentional focus, or behavioral coding of practice episodes—to guide future research.

Furthermore, quality itself likely fluctuates based on context, fatigue, and motivation. Acknowledging this variability and proposing ways to capture it dynamically could strengthen the model's realism and applicability.

Dispositional Mindfulness as a Developmental Marker (page 5)

The author notes that formal practice does not uniformly increase all facets of dispositional mindfulness as measured by the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ). However, several facets measured by the FFMQ—such as acting with awareness or describing—are not directly practiced in formal practice,

which mainly comprises observing and not reacting to distractions (e.g., focused attention meditation, as described by Lutz et al., 2008). Therefore, it may not be surprising that early-stage formal practice shows limited effects on some FFMQ domains. Moreover, the temporal sequence of how dispositional mindfulness facets develop remains unclear. For example, observing may precede acting with awareness. Thus, the finding by Soler et al. that formal practice duration correlates weakly with some facets of dispositional mindfulness may not imply that formal practice is unimportant—but rather that current self-report measures may not fully capture the effects of formal practice.

The author's point about distributed practice being more effective than concentrated practice aligns with established principles of cognitive and skill acquisition. However, this principle likely applies to both formal and informal practice. For example, multiple brief mindful moments during a meal may be more beneficial than attempting to eat an entire meal mindfully.

A Developmental Model of Practice in MBIs (page 6)

To enhance the model's utility, I recommend specifying approximate timeframes for the early, intermediate, and maintenance phases. Additionally, the meaning of "quality" in the early phase warrants clarification. At this stage, even sincere effort may be accompanied by frequent distraction and frustration. Is "quality" understood here as consistency, intentionality, or contextual awareness (e.g., avoiding practice when exhausted)? The model might benefit from distinguishing between effort and effective practice, acknowledging that early practice quality may be inherently low due to the steep learning curve.

Regarding the maintenance phase, the claim that the relative contribution of formal practice declines for some individuals is intriguing. But under what conditions? For whom and why? Drawing an analogy to learning a musical instrument, I wonder whether some minimal formal practice is necessary to maintain attentional and emotional regulation skills, even if sessions are brief. I wonder if mindfulness could ever become so embodied that formal practice is no longer required. While informal practice may suffice for maintenance in some cases, I suspect that regular, intentional formal practice—even if only short sessions—may still be essential for deepening and stabilizing core skills, particularly in complex emotional regulation.

Figure 1

I struggled a bit to identify the core message of the text in the figure. The figure would be more informative if it:

- Clearly labeled the three proposed stages (early, intermediate, maintenance) using the terminology from the text.
- Included estimated timeframes for each phase.
- Specified expected skills (e.g., attentional stability, emotional regulation, non-reactivity) and anticipated benefits (e.g., reduced reactivity, improved well-being).

Furthermore, the status of the blue square on the right of the figure was not clear to me.

The figure caption states that dispositional mindfulness increases during the initial phase. However, trait mindfulness is unlikely to show substantial increases within the first 4 weeks of a mindfulness-based intervention. A revised depiction might show modest gains in attentional control early on, with broader dispositional changes emerging later.

Implications for Research (page 9)

The points raised in earlier sections apply here as well. If informal practice is introduced early in training, it likely contributes meaningfully to mindfulness development. Moreover, while informal practice may support skill maintenance, formal practice—even when brief but consistent—may remain indispensable for sustaining deeper attentional and emotional regulation capacities.

Clinical and Pedagogical Implications (page 9)

The author rightly calls for a shift from a sole focus on practice duration toward a more nuanced approach in clinical and pedagogical settings. However, the phrasing of the critique (“instructors may need to move beyond a uniform emphasis on minutes practiced”) risks portraying current instructors as overly rigid or uninformed. In reality, the emphasis in mindfulness research on time may stem from practical measurement constraints—duration is easy to track, whereas quality and informal practice are not. The author could strengthen their argument by offering concrete suggestions for assessing quality and informal practice (e.g., using EMA, practice diaries with quality prompts, or observational coding).

Summary

My understanding of the paper is that practice quality, informal practice, and the development of dispositional mindfulness should receive more attention in mindfulness research. I strongly agree.

To strengthen the manuscript, the author could consider addressing the following:

1. Clarify the relationship between formal and informal practice—not as a transfer, but as parallel, mutually reinforcing pathways.

2. Expand the discussion of practice quality to include informal practice and propose feasible assessment methods.
3. Refine the relationship between dispositional mindfulness and formal practice (e.g., FFMQ subscales may not capture all effects of formal practice).
4. Specify timeframes for the proposed developmental stages.

Final Thoughts

The paper makes a valuable contribution to the field by challenging the dominant focus on formal practice duration and advocating for a more holistic, process-oriented understanding of mindfulness development. I hope I have made clear how the suggested revisions could strengthen the argumentation of the paper.

Minor Issues

- **Title:** "Developmental model" may imply age-related progression. Consider: *"A Theoretical Model of How Mindfulness Skills Develop Over Time, Integrating..."*
- **Page 2, 2nd paragraph:** "Which kind of practice matters..." is a verbatim repetition from the previous section.
- **Page 4, 1st line:** "...rehabilitation, and health behavior change."; please add a brief example and citation here.

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.