



Gaps between Emotional Intelligence and Breathing Techniques: A Review

Anjana Williams^{1*} and Kapoor G²

¹Principal, Sparsh Himalaya University, India

²Assistant Manager, CPACE, Swami Rama Himalayan University, India

***Corresponding author:** Anjana Williams, Principal, Himalayiya College of Nursing, Sparsh Himalaya University, India, Email: dranjanawilliams@gmail.com

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Abstract

Emotional intelligence (EI) is the ability to perceive, understand, manage, and regulate emotions, both in oneself and in others. It plays a crucial role in personal and professional success, influencing how individuals handle interpersonal relationships, make decisions, and cope with stress. On the other hand, breathing techniques are exercises designed to regulate breathing patterns, often used to reduce stress, improve emotional regulation, and enhance overall psychological well-being. Despite increasing interest in both emotional intelligence and breathing techniques, there remains a significant gap in research connecting these two fields. Specifically, the potential for breathing techniques to improve emotional intelligence and the physiological underpinnings of EI remains largely unexplored. This article aims to review the existing literature on emotional intelligence and breathing techniques, identify gaps between them, and suggest directions for future research to better understand how these domains may intersect and inform each other.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence; Breathing Techniques; Emotional Regulation; Stress Management; Psychological Well-Being; Self-Awareness; Self-Regulation; Empathy; Mindfulness

Abbreviations

EI: Emotional Intelligence

Introduction

Emotional intelligence (EI) has gained increasing recognition as a critical factor in both personal and professional success. Individuals with high EI are often more capable of managing stress, forming positive relationships, and making well-informed decisions [1,2]. On the other hand, breathing

techniques have long been used in practices such as yoga, meditation, and mindfulness to manage emotions, reduce stress, and enhance well-being [3,4]. While both EI and breathing techniques are independently associated with better emotional regulation and psychological health, there is limited research exploring how these two domains intersect. Can specific breathing techniques enhance emotional intelligence? Do individuals with higher EI naturally adopt better breathing patterns under stress? This article examines these questions by reviewing the existing literature on both emotional intelligence and breathing techniques, identifying

key gaps where the two fields could potentially inform and enhance each other.

Understanding Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence, first popularized by Daniel Goleman in the 1990s, encompasses several competencies: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills [1]. The model suggests that emotionally intelligent individuals are better equipped to recognize and understand their own emotions, as well as the emotions of others, enabling them to respond in more constructive and adaptive ways.

Key Components of Emotional Intelligence

- **Self-awareness:** Recognizing one's emotions and their impact on thoughts and behavior.
- **Self-regulation:** Managing emotions in healthy ways to relieve stress, control impulses, and avoid making hasty decisions.
- **Motivation:** Harnessing emotions to pursue goals with energy and persistence.
- **Empathy:** Understanding the emotions of others and responding appropriately.
- **Social Skills:** Managing relationships to move people in desired directions.

Research has shown that higher emotional intelligence is correlated with better psychological well-being, job performance, and interpersonal relationships [5,6]. However, there remains a gap in understanding how physiological factors, such as breathing patterns, influence or are influenced by Xu H [7].

Breathing Techniques and Emotional Regulation

Breathing techniques have long been employed in practices like yoga, mindfulness, and meditation as a means of controlling emotional and physical responses to stress [3,8]. These techniques range from simple diaphragmatic breathing to more complex pranayama exercises used in yoga. Studies have demonstrated that breathing exercises can reduce anxiety, lower blood pressure, and promote a sense of calm [9,10].

Key Breathing Techniques for Emotional Regulation

- **Diaphragmatic Breathing:** Involves inhaling deeply into the diaphragm rather than the chest, promoting relaxation [11].
- **4-7-8 Breathing:** Inhaling for 4 seconds, holding for 7 seconds, and exhaling for 8 seconds to reduce stress [9].
- **Box Breathing:** Involves equal timing for inhaling, holding, exhaling, and holding again, often used to regain focus [12].
- **Alternate Nostril Breathing:** A yoga technique believed to balance the nervous system and calm the mind [13].

Despite the clear link between breathing and emotional regulation, most studies have been conducted in the context of stress reduction or mindfulness training. There is a lack of research exploring how these techniques specifically influence emotional intelligence, particularly in enhancing competencies like self-awareness and self-regulation [14]. Breathing Techniques and Emotional Regulation- Breathing techniques have long been employed in practices like yoga, mindfulness, and meditation as a means of controlling emotional and physical responses to stress. These techniques range from simple diaphragmatic breathing to more complex pranayama exercises used in yoga. Studies have demonstrated that breathing exercises can reduce anxiety, lower blood pressure, and promote a sense of calm [15].

Key Breathing Techniques for Emotional Regulation

- **Diaphragmatic Breathing:** Also known as deep breathing, this technique involves inhaling deeply into the diaphragm rather than the chest, promoting relaxation.
- **4-7-8 Breathing:** Inhaling for 4 seconds, holding for 7 seconds, and exhaling for 8 seconds to promote relaxation and reduce stress.
- **Box Breathing:** Inhaling, holding, exhaling, and holding again for equal amounts of time, often used to regain focus.
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Gaps in the Research between Emotional Intelligence and Breathing Techniques

Lack of Direct Studies on EI and Breathing Techniques

While both emotional intelligence and breathing techniques have been extensively studied independently, there are very few studies directly examining the relationship between the two. Emotional intelligence is often assessed using psychometric tools such as the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i) or the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT), while breathing techniques are typically studied using physiological measures such as heart rate variability (HRV) or self-reported stress levels. However, no robust framework exists to examine how breathing practices might directly influence one's emotional intelligence scores or competencies. For example, there is limited empirical

evidence to suggest that regular practice of breathing exercises leads to measurable improvements in emotional intelligence over time. While it is widely accepted that breathing techniques improve emotional regulation, there is little exploration of how this impacts broader emotional competencies such as empathy or social skills [17-23].

Emotional Awareness and Breathing

One of the primary components of emotional intelligence is self-awareness, or the ability to recognize and understand one's own emotions. It is well-documented that individuals often experience physiological changes in response to emotional stimuli, such as increased heart rate or rapid, shallow breathing. However, it remains unclear whether individuals with higher emotional intelligence are better able to recognize these physiological signals and use breathing techniques to self-regulate. Research is needed to explore whether individuals with high EI are more likely to employ breathing techniques intuitively when under stress, or whether these techniques must be explicitly taught to enhance emotional intelligence. In particular, studies could examine whether training in specific breathing techniques enhances self-awareness, particularly in recognizing early signs of emotional dysregulation [24,25].

Role of Breathing in Empathy and Social Skills

Empathy and social skills are key components of emotional intelligence that are primarily focused on interpersonal relationships. Breathing techniques, especially those used in mindfulness or meditation practices, often emphasize increased present-moment awareness and focus on others' needs. However, few studies have explored the direct impact of breathing techniques on one's ability to empathize with others or improve social skills. It is plausible that the calming and centring effects of breathing exercises could enhance one's capacity to be present with others, listen more attentively, and respond more empathically. However, this hypothesis remains largely untested [26]. Further research could explore whether breathing techniques promote the kinds of emotional states conducive to empathy and whether they can be integrated into emotional intelligence training programs to improve interpersonal skills.

Intervention Studies on Breathing and EI Development

Although there is substantial evidence suggesting that both emotional intelligence and breathing techniques can enhance emotional regulation, there is a significant gap in research on intervention studies that combine the two. While emotional intelligence training programs often include elements like mindfulness or stress management, they rarely incorporate specific breathing exercises as a tool for enhancing emotional

competencies. Intervention studies could explore whether combining emotional intelligence training with regular practice of breathing techniques produces better outcomes in emotional regulation, empathy, and interpersonal relationships than EI training alone. Such studies would help to clarify whether breathing techniques should be a core component of emotional intelligence development [26].

Future Directions for Research

The gaps between emotional intelligence and breathing techniques present several promising avenues for future research. These include:

Longitudinal Studies: Long-term studies could examine whether regular practice of breathing techniques leads to sustained improvements in emotional intelligence over time. Such studies could employ psychometric tools to measure changes in EI before and after interventions involving breathing exercises.

Neuroscientific Exploration: Future research could explore the neural mechanisms linking emotional intelligence and breathing. Techniques like functional MRI (fMRI) could be used to investigate how breathing techniques impact brain areas associated with emotional regulation, such as the prefrontal cortex and amygdala.

Integrative Training Programs: Developing emotional intelligence training programs that incorporate specific breathing techniques could be an effective way to improve both emotional awareness and regulation. Research could assess the effectiveness of these programs in diverse populations, including students, employees, and healthcare professionals.

Cross-Cultural Studies: Breathing techniques are deeply rooted in various cultural traditions, particularly in Eastern practices like yoga and meditation. Cross-cultural studies could explore how different societies approach the intersection of emotional regulation and breathing techniques, and whether cultural differences influence the effectiveness of these interventions.

Conclusion

While emotional intelligence and breathing techniques both play critical roles in emotional regulation, the gap between these two domains remains largely unaddressed in current research. There is a need for more direct studies examining how specific breathing techniques impact emotional intelligence competencies like self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills. Future research should focus on integrating breathing techniques into emotional intelligence training programs and exploring the

long-term effects of such interventions. Bridging the gap between emotional intelligence and breathing techniques has the potential to enhance psychological well-being, emotional regulation, and interpersonal relationships in diverse settings [27-30].

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