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Fear of Negative Evaluation and Thought Suppression Among Adolescence: The Moderating Role of Mindfulness

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Abstract: This review synthesizes work on fear of negative evaluation (FNE), thought suppression, and the possible moderating role of mindfulness. FNE is a social-cognitive vulnerability marked by worry over others' judgment, rejection, or devaluation. Suppression, in turn, refers to deliberate eff orts to exclude unwanted cognitive content from awareness. Recent work has tied evaluative fear to maladaptive regulation strategies—rumination, avoidance, and suppression—particularly in adolescence, when social feedback sharpens in salience. Concurrent research on mindfulness suggests that present-centered, nonjudgmental awareness may reduce the compulsion to counter unwanted thoughts. The evidence is grouped across fi ve domains: conceptual foundations, adolescent and vocational-student samples, the FNE–suppression pathway, intrusive-thought research, and mindfulness-based protection. A central argument here is that mindfulness should theoretically weaken the positive FNE–suppression association: it alters the student's relationship to evaluative cognitions, rather than simply lowering their frequency. Even so, the current literature has notable limitations: cross-sectional designs, overlapping measures, inconsistent mindfulness definitions, a scarcity of vocational-school data, and weak causal evidence for the moderating eff ect. Future studies would benefi t from longitudinal, experience-sampling, and intervention designs to clarify when—and for whom—mindfulness buff ers the cognitive eff ects of evaluative fear.

Keywords: Fear of Negative Evaluation; Thought Suppression; Mindfulness; Adolescence; Social Anxiety; Emotion Regulation; Vocational Students

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1. Introduction

Fear of negative evaluation (FNE), thought suppression, and mindfulness converge around social anxiety, cognitive control, and adolescent emotion regulation. Why does this convergence matter? Socially evaluative situations do more than make students nervous. They can turn ordinary thoughts into threats. A student might think: "My classmates will laugh," "My teacher thinks I am weak," or "People will see I do not belong." These thoughts can be brief. They can also become sticky. Once a student treats them as dangerous, the natural response is to push them away. That response is thought suppression. It seems practical. Yet it makes the mind behave like an overactive alarm system. Very human, but costly.

FNE is the persistent worry that others will judge the self negatively. Recent studies treat this worry as a core cognitive feature of social anxiety, not a minor trait. Chiu et al. (2021) found that negative cognitions, safety behaviors, self-focused

attention, and post-event processing predicted adolescent social anxiety over time. Leigh et al. (2023) reported similar cognitive-behavioral processes in adolescents with social anxiety disorder, mirroring adult models. For this review, these findings locate evaluative fear within a broader system. That system includes threat interpretation, self-monitoring, and avoidance. FNE is not just a feeling. It shapes how students read their social environment.

Development adds urgency. Adolescence amplifies peer feedback, teacher judgment, identity comparison, and belonging needs. Sisk and Gee (2022) call adolescence a sensitive window. Stress exposure during this period can create vulnerability, but also opportunity. Fombouchet et al. (2023) note that emotion regulation continues developing across adolescence. Young people may still be learning to handle difficult internal states. Evaluative fears often appear before regulation skills mature. Students may then rely on control-oriented strategies. These strategies offer short-term relief. They also create long-term rigidity. Thought suppression fits this pattern exactly.

Thought suppression means deliberately trying not to think a specific thought, image, memory, or concern. Here, the suppressed content is evaluative and self-relevant: criticism, rejection, humiliation, low status, or imagined failure. Recent work rejects the simple claim that suppression always produces rebound. Mamat et al. (2024) argue for a more nuanced view. Suppression effects depend on monitoring, cognitive load, context, and the type of unwanted content. Niczyporuk (2026) adds that suppression's adaptiveness partly hinges on how researchers define and measure it. Treating suppression as uniformly harmful would oversimplify the evidence. A more precise argument is this: suppression becomes maladaptive when students repeatedly monitor for unwanted evaluative thoughts, fuse those thoughts with self-worth, and rely primarily on avoidance.

Mindfulness follows a different logic. It does not ask students to erase unwanted thoughts. Instead, it asks them to notice thoughts as mental events. It encourages present-moment awareness. It also reduces automatic judgment and reactivity. Chems-Maarif et al. (2025) highlight wide variation in mindfulness definitions, but they identify core elements: awareness, present-centered attention, and a nonjudgmental or allowing attitude. Karl and Fischer (2022) describe dispositional mindfulness as a broad field with ongoing conceptual and measurement challenges. These cautions are worth heeding. Mindfulness is not a conceptual panacea. Its relevance here is specific. It may change how students relate to evaluative thoughts. That change may reduce the urge to suppress.

The proposed relationship follows a clear logic. Higher FNE predicts more unwanted self-threatening thoughts. These thoughts cause discomfort. Some students suppress them. But higher mindfulness may reduce the perceived urgency of these thoughts. A mindful student might notice the thought, label it, and continue without internal struggle. Mindfulness thus acts as a boundary condition, not just a direct protective factor. It may weaken the positive link between FNE and suppression.

Three aims guide this review. First, synthesize recent evidence on FNE and thought suppression. Second, assess whether mindfulness is theoretically and empirically defensible as a moderator. Third, identify major gaps for future research, particularly in adolescent and Chinese vocational-student contexts. The review focuses on literature since 2021. The field has moved quickly in measurement, adolescent social anxiety, mindfulness interventions, and cognitive control. The conclusion remains cautious. The model justifies empirical testing, but the causal story is not yet proven.

2. Theoretical Background

The first building block is fear of negative evaluation (FNE). Recent psychometric work supports the Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale-Straightforward Items (Baldanzini et al., 2025). This tool reliably assesses worry about negative social judgment in nonclinical samples. Measurement may seem like technical housekeeping, but it matters. Reverse-worded items and poorly specified models can create noise, especially with adolescents. If researchers use FNE as a predictor, they need confidence that they are measuring a coherent construct. Otherwise, they might capture a mix of evaluative fear, general anxiety, acquiescence, and wording effects. Good measurement is not glamorous, but poor measurement collapses the bridge.

Conceptually, FNE has three related components. Anticipatory worry comes first: the student expects criticism before it appears. Interpretive bias follows: ambiguous cues are read as disapproval. Self-protective behavior comes third: the student avoids, monitors, rehearses, hides, or overcontrols performance to prevent judgment. Chiu et al. (2021) found that negative social cognitions and related processes prospectively predicted adolescent social anxiety. Leigh et al. (2023) also showed that adolescents with social anxiety display the cognitive and behavioral processes emphasised in adult models, including negative

social cognitions and safety behaviours. These findings support the view that evaluative fear operates within a regulatory system, not as an isolated worry.

The second building block is thought suppression. The term sounds simple, but current work shows it is not. Suppression can mean deliberate thought avoidance, a habitual avoidance pattern, a distraction tendency, or the experience of unwanted intrusions. This is why measurement matters. Niczyporuk (2026) argues that questionnaire studies often link suppression propensity to psychopathology, yet the White Bear Suppression Inventory has a heterogeneous structure. It often mixes intrusion and suppression factors. Mamat et al. (2024) similarly warn against mechanically applying the traditional ironic-process account. Some direct suppression may reduce unwanted memories in specific contexts, whereas monitoring-heavy suppression can keep unwanted content active. The theoretical lesson is uncomfortable but useful: suppression is not one process, and ignoring that fact yields weak models.

For this review, thought suppression is treated as maladaptive when it is repetitive, evaluatively loaded, and linked to monitoring. A student who briefly redirects attention before a presentation may not be harmed. A student who spends days checking whether the thought "everyone thinks I am stupid" has disappeared is in a different position. That student is not merely suppressing. They are organising attention around the possible return of that thought. This is the more plausible pathway from FNE to chronic suppression.

The third building block is mindfulness. Chems-Maarif et al. (2025) review diverse definitions and argue that conceptual heterogeneity weakens synthesis across studies. Karl and Fischer (2022) make a related point: dispositional mindfulness research is large, but measurement and conceptual boundaries remain uneven. For this review, mindfulness is best defined narrowly as present-centred awareness with openness, non-judgment, and non-reactivity. Attention alone is not enough. A highly anxious student can pay intense attention to bodily signs of embarrassment and become more distressed. The protective element is not attention by itself. It is attention combined with a less judgmental, less reactive stance.

The Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire tradition is relevant here because its facets map onto plausible mechanisms. Hu et al. (2024) validated a short-form FFMQ among Chinese early adolescents and stressed the need for valid multifaceted measurement across cultural contexts. Facets such as acting with awareness, observing, non-judging, and non-reactivity can link to different parts of the proposed model. Acting with awareness may reduce automatic avoidance. Non-judging may reduce the shame attached to unwanted thoughts. Non-reactivity may reduce the impulse to push thoughts away immediately. Observing may help students notice that evaluative thoughts arise and fade. The model becomes clearer when mindfulness is treated as a set of mechanisms, not a decorative label.

The fourth building block is emotion regulation. FNE creates emotional arousal, but the outcome depends partly on regulation. Fombouchet et al. (2023) emphasise that adolescence is a key period for developing emotion regulation. Tsarpalis-Fragkoulidis et al. (2025) provide more direct evidence. They examined within-person associations among fears of evaluation, social anxiety, and emotion-regulation strategies in adolescents. Their longitudinal design moves closer to dynamic process evidence than cross-sectional correlations do. Their focus on acceptance, suppression, and rumination fits the present model: when evaluation fears rise, regulation choices matter.

An integrated model can now be stated. FNE increases the likelihood that social situations trigger unwanted self-threatening thoughts. Those thoughts produce discomfort. Students with low mindfulness may judge the thoughts as unacceptable, identify with them, and attempt suppression. Students with higher mindfulness may still notice evaluative thoughts, but they may interpret them as passing mental events, not as evidence of social failure. Therefore, mindfulness should weaken the positive association between FNE and thought suppression. This is a moderation model, not a mediation model. The claim is not simply that fear reduces mindfulness or that mindfulness reduces fear. The claim is that the strength of the link between evaluative fear and suppression depends on the student's capacity to relate to thoughts with awareness, non-judgment, and non-reactivity.

3. Current Research

The strongest entry point for understanding FNE is recent research on adolescent social anxiety. Chiu et al. (2021) found that several cognitive processes predicted future adolescent social anxiety. These included negative social cognitions, safety

behaviors, self-focused attention, and post-event processing. This pattern matters because FNE often operates through these same mechanisms. A student expects judgment from others. The student watches for signs of personal failure. The student uses safety behaviors to avoid embarrassment. Later, the student replays the interaction. Leigh et al. (2023) extend this logic. They showed that cognitive and behavioral maintaining processes appear among adolescents with social anxiety disorder. Together, these studies support a specific view: evaluative fear is not a vague mood state. It is part of a structured cognitive-behavioral loop.

A useful classification separates the recent literature into four types: antecedent studies, process studies, outcome studies, and intervention studies. Antecedent studies ask where FNE comes from. They usually focus on inferiority feelings, peer rejection, stigma, family climate, or prior social failure. Process studies ask what students do once evaluative fear is activated. This group covers self-focused attention, safety behavior, post-event processing, rumination, suppression, and acceptance. Outcome studies ask what FNE predicts, such as social anxiety, avoidance, depressive symptoms, suicidal ideation, or impaired academic engagement. Intervention studies ask whether cognitive-behavioral, mindfulness-based, or acceptance-based programs reduce evaluative distress. This classification prevents a common mistake: treating every association as if it operated at the same explanatory level. A predictor is not a mechanism. A mechanism is not an outcome. A treatment effect does not automatically prove the mechanism.

The time trend since 2021 also matters. Earlier work on social anxiety often treated FNE as a stable symptom or trait. Recent studies increasingly treat it as dynamic and context-sensitive. They also connect it to regulation processes. Chiu et al. (2021) and Leigh et al. (2023) focus on adolescent cognitive and behavioral maintenance processes. Tsarpalis-Fragkoulidis et al. (2025) go further. They examined within-person longitudinal links between evaluation fears and regulation strategies. This shift is important. If FNE changes across situations, a student may not be simply a “high-FNE person.” The student may become highly fearful when facing a particular audience, assignment, teacher, online comment thread, or practicum evaluation. This dynamic view fits secondary vocational students especially well. Their evaluative threat may shift across classroom learning, skills training, internship placement, and family comparison.

Chinese adolescent evidence points in the same direction. Li et al. (2023) examined Chinese junior high school students. They found that FNE mediated the relationship between inferiority feelings and social anxiety. The implication is direct: negative self-appraisal may become socially disabling when students expect others to confirm that negative view. Chen et al. (2024) found bidirectional longitudinal associations between FNE and suicidal ideation among Chinese adolescents. Interpersonal need factors were involved in the pathway. This finding should not be casually imported into every school study. However, it does show that evaluative fear can sit inside a serious risk network. Zhang et al. (2024) also reported that FNE and social anxiety helped explain the association between campus interpersonal exclusion and adolescent suicidal ideation. Within this research cluster, FNE appears as a bridge between interpersonal threat and psychological distress.

The vocational education context adds another layer. Chinese secondary vocational students occupy a position shaped by educational tracking, status comparison, and career uncertainty. Wang et al. (2022) developed a scale for stigma toward secondary vocational students. This shows that such stigma can be measured, not merely assumed. Leng et al. (2025) developed and validated a self-stigma scale for secondary vocational students. This suggests that external devaluation may be internalized. Xiang et al. (2024) examined career adaptability among secondary vocational nursing students in China. They showed that career development is a meaningful psychological issue for this group. Ye et al. (2024) found that anxiety and depression were important in a network analysis of Chinese higher vocational students. These studies do not directly test the FNE-suppression pathway, but they make it plausible. Students positioned as less academically prestigious may be especially alert to negative judgment.

Evidence on thought suppression is more mixed, and therefore more interesting. Goodman et al. (2021) examined how people with social anxiety disorder manage daily stressors. They found that socially anxious individuals rely on disengagement strategies such as suppression more than healthy controls. This finding supports a connection between social anxiety and avoidant regulation. Tsarpalis-Fragkoulidis et al. (2025) provided adolescent longitudinal evidence that fears of evaluation are tied to emotion-regulation processes. These include suppression, rumination, and acceptance. These studies do not prove that

FNE causes thought suppression in every case. However, they do support the idea that evaluative fear and suppression belong to the same regulatory ecosystem.

The cognitive-control literature complicates the picture. Mamat et al. (2024) argue that thought suppression should be reconsidered. The classic rebound story is incomplete. Their review distinguishes unwanted thought suppression from memory suppression. They emphasize that cognitive control can sometimes be adaptive. Niczyporuk (2026) similarly argues that suppression can be effective or maladaptive. It depends on task conditions and measurement. It also depends on whether researchers separate suppression effort from intrusive thought experience. This controversy should improve, not weaken, the present model. It forces the model to specify that the harmful form of suppression is likely rigid, repetitive, self-relevant, and monitoring-heavy. FNE creates exactly this kind of self-relevant material. When a student worries about being judged, the thought touches belonging, competence, and status.

Ashton et al. (2023) provide evidence directly relevant to mindfulness and unwanted thoughts. They found that higher dispositional mindfulness was associated with fewer intrusive thoughts. It also predicted better downregulation of intrusive thoughts over time. This finding supports the idea that mindfulness changes the management of unwanted mental content. It also fits the moderation hypothesis. When evaluative fear triggers unwanted thoughts, mindful students may have a greater capacity to let those thoughts pass without escalating into suppression. Smith-Russell and Bowen (2023) found that thought suppression partly mediated the relationship between mindfulness and craving. They also reported negative associations between trait mindfulness and thought suppression. Although this study focused on substance use craving rather than adolescent evaluation fear, it is theoretically useful. It places thought suppression inside the mechanism linking mindfulness to self-regulation.

Mindfulness-based intervention studies strengthen the case, especially where evaluation is central. Yılmazer et al. (2024) conducted a meta-analysis showing that mindfulness-based interventions reduce test anxiety. They also cautioned that publication bias may affect interpretation. Dundas and Nygård (2024) found that mindfulness-based stress reduction was promising for reducing test anxiety and self-judgment in high school students. It may encourage students to observe thoughts as mental events rather than facts. Dundas and Binder (2024) used qualitative methods to explore how adolescents used mindfulness when facing exams. Their findings show how students can step back from anxiety-inducing exam thoughts. Sun et al. (2025) reported that a brief five-day mindfulness training reduced test anxiety and improved exam performance among high school students. These studies are not identical to FNE research, but test anxiety contains a strong evaluative component. Exams tell students that they are about to be judged.

Studies on mindfulness and social anxiety provide even closer evidence. Noda et al. (2024) tested a low-intensity mindfulness and cognitive-behavioral program for people with high social anxiety. They reported support for the usefulness of a brief program. Jiang et al. (2025) found that mindfulness-based intervention reduced social anxiety among high-school leavers. Effects operated through increases in mindfulness and decreases in intolerance of uncertainty and emotion dysregulation. Morrison et al. (2024) examined fear of negative and positive evaluation as mediators and moderators of treatment outcome in social anxiety disorder. They used data from CBT and mindfulness-based stress reduction trials. Their work shows that evaluative fears are important treatment-process variables, not merely baseline symptoms. Zhong et al. (2024) found that mindfulness was associated with lower social evaluation anxiety and better self-regulation among athletes. This athlete sample is not a school sample. However, competitive sport is saturated with public judgment, making it a useful neighboring context.

Across these studies, a coherent pattern emerges. FNE is linked with adolescent social anxiety, interpersonal risk, and negative self-appraisal. Thought suppression is linked with maladaptive regulation and intrusive thought problems. This is especially true when measured as a chronic tendency rather than a brief task strategy. Mindfulness is linked with lower social anxiety, lower test anxiety, fewer intrusive thoughts, and less reliance on suppression. The exact moderation model has not been tested enough, particularly among Chinese secondary vocational students. However, the surrounding evidence supports it. The literature has built the walls and installed the wiring. It has somehow forgotten to test whether the lights turn on. That is the gap.

The current research also suggests that the moderation effect should not be assumed to operate uniformly across all mindfulness facets. Nonjudging and nonreactivity are likely to be especially important. A student high in observing but low in nonjudging might notice every anxious sensation and evaluative thought. That student might then panic with greater precision. That is not protection. That is surveillance. Hu et al. (2024) remind researchers that adolescent mindfulness measurement needs careful validation. Chems-Maarif et al. (2025) and Karl and Fischer (2022) make the broader point that mindfulness definitions and measures remain uneven. Future studies should therefore avoid using a total mindfulness score without examining facets. A total score may hide the very mechanism that explains the moderation effect.

The research base is strongest for the separate links. It is weakest for the integrated model. FNE has strong ties to social anxiety. Social anxiety has ties to suppression and avoidant regulation. Mindfulness has ties to reduced anxiety, less judgment, and better management of intrusive thoughts. What remains underdeveloped is direct evidence that mindfulness changes the slope between FNE and thought suppression. That is not a minor missing detail. It is the difference between a plausible model and a tested model. The literature supports the hypothesis, but a competent researcher should not oversell it as established fact.

4. Research Challenges and Controversies

The first challenge is measurement overlap. FNE, social anxiety, inferiority feelings, self-judgment, rumination, and thought suppression are conceptually distinct. Self-report scales can make them look closer than they are. Baldanzini et al. (2025) provide useful psychometric evidence for the BFNE-S. Even a reliable FNE measure captures a construct deeply connected with social anxiety. Thought suppression measures create a different problem. Niczyporuk (2026) note that the White Bear Suppression Inventory often contains both suppression and intrusion components. A researcher using a total score may find a positive association between FNE and thought suppression. That association could partly reflect intrusive evaluative thoughts rather than pure suppression effort. The scale may be catching both the fire and the fire alarm.

A second challenge is causal direction. Cross-sectional studies can show that students with higher evaluative fear report more suppression. They cannot show that fear caused suppression. Suppression may also maintain or intensify FNE. A student who suppresses thoughts about judgment may fail to learn that such thoughts are tolerable. That avoidance may make the next evaluative situation more threatening. A third variable could influence both fear and suppression. Neuroticism, low self-esteem, intolerance of uncertainty, or emotion dysregulation are plausible candidates. Tsarpalis-Fragkoulidis et al. (2025) improve the evidence base using longitudinal within-person analyses. Still, the specific FNE-suppression-mindfulness model requires more direct longitudinal testing.

A third challenge concerns suppression itself. Mamat et al. (2024) warn against treating thought suppression as a single universally harmful process. Some forms of direct suppression may help people reduce the accessibility of unwanted memories under certain conditions. This creates a useful controversy. If suppression can sometimes be adaptive, researchers need to specify when it becomes maladaptive. The answer likely depends on context. Suppression of a neutral distraction during a timed task differs from suppression of a shame-laden thought about social worthlessness. The latter is more self-relevant and emotional. It is also more likely to trigger monitoring. FNE is therefore a plausible context where suppression becomes costly. That cost must be tested rather than assumed.

A fourth challenge involves mindfulness. Mindfulness is often used too broadly. Some studies define it as attention. Others define it as awareness plus acceptance. Others operationalize it through five facets. Still others use intervention attendance as a proxy. Chems-Maarif et al. (2025) argue that definitional heterogeneity limits synthesis. Karl and Fischer (2022) make the same warning from dispositional mindfulness research. For the moderation hypothesis, this is not an abstract concern. The model depends on the assumption that mindfulness reduces judgment and reactivity toward unwanted thoughts. If a study uses a mindfulness measure that mainly captures attention, the moderation effect may disappear or even reverse. Observing internal states without nonjudgment can become anxious monitoring.

A fifth challenge is cultural and educational specificity. Much of the strongest social anxiety literature uses general adolescent, university, clinical, or adult samples. Chinese secondary vocational students are rarely the direct focus. Yet recent work shows that vocational education in China carries stigma and self-stigma (Leng et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2022). Career adaptability

research suggests vocational students face distinctive developmental tasks (Xiang et al., 2024). Mental health research points to anxiety and depression as relevant concerns (Ye et al., 2024). These studies justify research in the vocational context. They also expose a gap. Researchers cannot simply assume that findings from Western university or clinical adult samples transfer cleanly to Chinese vocational adolescents. Educational status, family expectation, face concerns, teacher authority, and career pressure may change how negative evaluation is experienced.

A sixth challenge is developmental stage. Adolescents are not small adults with worse time management, though they often make a heroic effort to appear that way. They are in a period of changing identity, emotion regulation, peer sensitivity, and cognitive control. Sisk and Gee (2022) frame adolescence as a period of vulnerability and opportunity under stress. Fombouchet et al. (2023) emphasize the continuing development of emotion regulation. This means the FNE-suppression link may be stronger or more unstable in adolescence than in adulthood. It also means mindfulness may work differently. Younger students may benefit from concrete mindfulness practices that teach noticing and labeling. Older adolescents may benefit from more explicit decentering and self-compassion components. The literature has not mapped these developmental differences adequately.

A seventh challenge involves method. Many studies rely on single-time self-report questionnaires. This is convenient, cheap, and epistemologically fragile. Students may not accurately report suppression. Suppression involves processes that occur quickly and sometimes outside reflective awareness. FNE fluctuates across contexts. Classroom presentations, online interactions, exams, internships, and peer conversations may trigger different fear levels. Ecological momentary assessment would allow researchers to test whether evaluative fear predicts suppression in daily life. It would also test whether mindfulness weakens that moment-level association. Experimental designs would allow researchers to manipulate evaluative threat and observe subsequent suppression. Intervention designs would allow researchers to test whether increases in mindfulness reduce the FNE-suppression slope over time.

An eighth challenge is common method bias. If FNE, thought suppression, and mindfulness are all measured through the same questionnaire, at the same time, under the same response format, correlations may be inflated. Procedural remedies help, such as anonymity, careful item order, and neutral instructions. Statistical checks also help, but they do not solve the problem completely. A stronger design would include behavioral tasks, peer or teacher context variables, repeated measurement, and perhaps physiological or attention measures where feasible. Researchers do not need to turn every school study into a neuroscience circus. They do need more than one self-report sitting for causal credibility.

A ninth challenge concerns interpreting moderation. A significant interaction between FNE and mindfulness would support the hypothesis that mindfulness changes the strength of the association with thought suppression. Interpretation must be careful. A weaker slope at high mindfulness could mean mindful students suppress less when afraid of evaluation. It could also mean high mindfulness students interpret scale items differently, report internal experience with less defensiveness, or have lower general distress. Simple slope analysis is necessary but not sufficient. Researchers should probe whether nonjudging and nonreactivity explain the buffering effect more strongly than observing or describing. They should also report effect sizes, confidence intervals, and robustness checks. A statistically significant interaction with a tiny effect should not be sold as a theoretical revolution.

A tenth challenge is intervention translation. Mindfulness-based programs show promise for test anxiety, social anxiety, and intrusive thoughts (Ashton et al., 2023; Jiang et al., 2025; Noda et al., 2024; Sun et al., 2025; Yılmazer et al., 2024). Still, a moderation model based on dispositional mindfulness does not automatically prove that a mindfulness intervention will reduce suppression among high-FNE students. Dispositional mindfulness may reflect personality, family environment, prior training, or broader emotional competence. Intervention effects may depend on teacher delivery, practice adherence, school climate, and student motivation. This is why intervention research should measure mechanisms directly. If a program reduces thought suppression, researchers should test whether increases in nonjudging or nonreactivity explain that change.

These challenges do not invalidate the proposed model. They make it researchable. A weak review would pretend the field is settled. A stronger review shows where the model is supported, where it is vulnerable, and where future studies can contribute. The most defensible position is that FNE probably increases reliance on maladaptive cognitive control among

vulnerable students. Thought suppression is a plausible form of that control. Mindfulness is a theoretically coherent buffer. The least defensible position is to claim that the exact moderation pathway has already been conclusively demonstrated among Chinese secondary vocational students. It has not. That gap is precisely why the topic is worth studying.

5. Conclusion and Future Directions

Recent evidence supports a coherent but incomplete model. FNE is a meaningful social-cognitive vulnerability, especially during adolescence. It links to social anxiety, inferiority feelings, interpersonal exclusion, and broader psychological risk in Chinese adolescent samples (Chen et al., 2024; Li et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2024). Thought suppression is a plausible maladaptive response to unwanted evaluative thoughts. This is particularly true when suppression becomes repetitive and monitoring-heavy (Mamat et al., 2024; Niczyporuk, 2026). Mindfulness is a plausible moderator because it alters how students attend to and evaluate unwanted thoughts. Evidence from intrusive-thought research, test-anxiety interventions, social anxiety interventions, and adolescent mindfulness studies supports this logic (Ashton et al., 2023; Dundas & Nygård, 2024; Jiang et al., 2025; Noda et al., 2024; Sun et al., 2025; Yılmazer et al., 2024).

The moderation model has theoretical strength. Students who fear negative evaluation likely experience more unwanted thoughts about judgment, rejection, and inadequacy. Those with low mindfulness may respond by forcing these thoughts out of awareness. Those with higher mindfulness may notice the same thoughts without judging them as dangerous or treating them as facts. The positive relationship between FNE and thought suppression should therefore weaken when mindfulness is high. That is the central claim.

Still, the empirical base has obvious gaps. Direct studies integrating FNE, thought suppression, and mindfulness in a single adolescent model remain limited. Chinese secondary vocational students are especially underrepresented. This is concerning because recent evidence shows that stigma, self-stigma, career adaptation, anxiety, and depression are relevant in vocational education contexts (Leng et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2022; Xiang et al., 2024; Ye et al., 2024). Vocational students may experience evaluative threat not only as ordinary peer pressure but also as status-based educational comparison. A student positioned as academically inferior may interpret criticism as confirmation of a social label.

Future research should pursue five directions. First, longitudinal designs should test whether FNE predicts later thought suppression. They should also test whether mindfulness weakens that link over time. Second, ecological momentary assessment could capture real-time evaluative fear and suppression in daily school situations. Third, researchers should separate suppression effort from intrusive thought frequency. Total suppression scores may blur cause and consequence. Fourth, studies should examine mindfulness facets rather than relying only on total scores. Nonjudging and nonreactivity likely matter more than mere observing. Fifth, school-based mindfulness interventions should be tested among students with high FNE. Researchers should measure whether changes in mindfulness reduce reliance on suppression.

The practical implication is straightforward. If students respond to evaluative fear by suppressing thoughts, support programs should avoid thin advice like “stop worrying.” That response is psychologically inadequate. A better approach would teach students to notice evaluative thoughts, name them, reduce judgment, and stay engaged with the task or interaction. Mindfulness may help because it does not fight thoughts on their own battlefield. It changes the student’s stance toward internal experience.

In summary, the literature suggests that FNE can push students toward thought suppression. Mindfulness may reduce the need for that defensive control. The model is coherent, current, and worth testing. It is also unfinished. The next wave of research must stop treating these constructs as isolated questionnaire scores. Researchers should test them as dynamic processes unfolding in specific developmental and educational contexts. That is how this topic can move from plausible theory to useful evidence.

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