

Enhancing Foreign Language Enjoyment and Well-Being Through a Mindfulness Based Intervention Program in the Efl High School Classroom - Teacher's Insights

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Abstract

Keywords:

EFL teaching and learning; Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE); Mindfulness; Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBI)

This paper presents findings from research that aimed to see how a mindfulness-based intervention program in an EFL high school classroom can enhance student's foreign language enjoyment and well-being. Students from a 10th grade EFL class in a high school in Israel, participated in a mindfulness-based intervention program held during a ninety-minute EFL lesson each week over a period of thirteen weeks. The research employed qualitative methodology to collect and analyze student's perception of their English studies, their feeling of well-being in the classroom and their foreign language enjoyment. Semi-structured interviews were used for fourteen participants in the program who were interviewed at two points in time: during the program and a week after the program had ended. Additionally, insights emerging from my teacher's log, which documented the process of the mindfulness program at the end of each lesson are also discussed and shed light on future pedagogical implications. All of the participants interviewed reported on an increased level of enjoyment and well-being as well as perceiving an improvement in their EFL learning.

Zusammenfassung

Schlüsselworte:

EFS-Lehren und -Lernen; Fremdsprachengenuss (FSG); Mindfulness; Mindfulness-basierte Interventionen (MBI).

In diesem Artikel werden Forschungsergebnisse vorgestellt, die darauf abzielen, herauszufinden, wie ein auf Mindfulness basierendes Interventionsprogramm in einen EFS (Englisch als Fremdsprache) Stunden in einer Oberschule die Freude und das Wohlbefinden des Schülers an der Fremdsprache steigern kann. Schüler einer 10. Klasse einer High School in Israel nahmen während des EFS-unterrichts an einem auf Mindfulness basierenden Interventionsprogramm teil, das jede Woche über einen Zeitraum von dreizehn Wochen im Rahmen einer neunzigminütigen EFS-Unterrichtsstunde stattfand. Die Forschung nutzte eine qualitative Methodik, um die Wahrnehmung der Schüler über ihr Englischstudium, ihr Wohlbefinden im Klassenzimmer und ihre Freude an der Fremdsprache zu erfassen und zu analysieren. Halbstrukturierte Interviews wurden für vierzehn Teilnehmer des Programms verwendet, die zu zwei Zeitpunkten interviewt wurden: während des Programms und eine Woche nach Programmende. Zusätzlich werden Erkenntnisse aus dem Tagebuch meines Lehrers, welche den Ablauf des Mindfulnessprogramms am Ende jeder Unterrichtsstunde dokumentierten, ebenfalls besprochen und diese beleuchten zukünftige pädagogische Implikationen. Alle befragten Teilnehmer berichteten von einem gesteigerten Maß an Freude und Wohlbefinden sowie einer Verbesserung ihres EFS-Lernens.

1. Introduction

Learning a foreign language (FL) can be a challenging and complex task for many high school students considering that often the only available environment students get to learn in, is the FL classroom (Ellis, 2015). The process of acquiring new vocabulary, mastering complex grammar structures, pronunciation and dealing with complexities of transfer from L1 to the L2 (Birch & Fulop, 2021) often requires grit, dedication and enjoyment (Zhao, 2023). Further, learning English as a foreign language has become increasingly important in today's globalized world. English is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world and is the dominant language of international communication, commerce, and

diplomacy. Learning English is the key to career opportunities (Education First, 2019), opens doors to higher education and research and is vital for global communication. Thus, EFL learning can become a stressful ordeal and can often lead to foreign language learning anxiety (Gopang et. al., 2016). No less important is how EFL is taught in the classroom. The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) promotes meaningful and purposeful language learning and sees language learning as a vehicle by which more purposeful, collaborative tasks in the classroom can be taught, i.e., using the language through other mediums as opposed to viewing English as a school subject that needs to be



learned (CEFR 2001, 2020). By making language learning more purposeful and enjoyable, students are more likely to improve their academic achievements (Demir & Okyar, 2021).

As an EFL teacher for the past thirty years, finding ways to motivate EFL high-school learners has been of great significance for successful teaching and learning. This article explores how implementing a thirteen-week mindfulness program in the EFL classroom can contribute to enhancing high-school students' perception of their EFL studies, foreign language enjoyment (FLE) and a feeling of well-being in the EFL classroom, all of which, create an important springboard for EFL learning.

2. Theoretical foundation

2.1. Mindfulness in Education and FL learning

Mindfulness, known as *Sati*, the Pali word for mindfulness (Goldstein, 2016) is a practice that involves paying attention to the present moment without judgment. It helps individuals develop awareness of their thoughts, emotions, sensations, fostering a sense of calm and clarity (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, 2011, 2013). Mindfulness programs have also gained popularity in education to help pupils reduce anxiety and become more engaged in their studies (Ergas, 2021). Research has reported on the positive effects of mindfulness programs in schools such as self-regulation, improved attention, creativity and cognitive flexibility (Laukkonen et al., 2020). Tan (2021), suggests that implementing mindfulness in the classroom is essential for reviving student's motivation and social and emotional ability which suffered at the outbreak of the Covid pandemic. In addition to psychosocial benefits, mindfulness in the classroom has been found to enhance metacognitive skills (Bishop et al., 2004; Hussain, 2015; Jankowski and Holas, 2014), attention span (Mrazek et al., 2013; Zanesco et al., 2016), self-efficacy (Cashwell and Greason, 2009; Lightsey, 2006; Vidic and Cherup, 2019), and executive functions in students (Flook et al., 2010).

Mindfulness Based Intervention programs (MBIs) aim to cultivate mindful awareness by practicing moment-to-moment sensations, objects, and emotions with care, kindness, curiosity, open-heartedness, and non-judgment. Various MBI programs have been developed and implemented globally, such as the Mindfulness in School Program (MiSP) in the UK and MindUp in the United States, Learning to Breathe (Brodrick, 2013) and Mindful Schools in the US (2012). In Israel, there are three main programs used

to date: The Mindfulness language, *Pashosh* and Purple school program taught at the Reichman University.

Studies on the above-mentioned programs have shown promising results, including improved well-being, stress reduction, and gains in social and emotional skills among participants (Kuyken et al., 2013; Maloney et al., 2016; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). Further, several meta-analyses and reviews have examined the effects of MBIs on children and youth, showing benefits such as decreased anxiety and stress, improved cognitive performance, social-emotional skills, and a sense of well-being (Meiklejohn et al., 2012; Zenner et al., 2014; Zoogman et al., 2015; Felver et al., 2016; Emerson et al., 2020). However, challenges in assessing the true benefits of MBIs arise from the heterogeneity of interventions, variability in teacher expertise and methodology, and lack of standardized research designs. Despite research limitations, the consensus from a wealth of research indicates that mindfulness practices and interventions in education are beneficial for students' well-being (Van dam, 2018).

To date, there is limited research exploring the impact of mindfulness practices on second and foreign language learning (Koçali & Asik, 2021; Zeilhofer, 2020). However, several studies have been conducted on mindfulness intervention programs or mindfulness meditations in higher education to examine the potential improvements in students' attitudes and academic achievement in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts or other Foreign Language contexts (Mrazek et al., 2013; Wang & Liu, 2016; Zeilhofer, 2020). Other studies have investigated the connection between mindfulness and anxiety or mindfulness and FL self-efficacy or mindfulness and class management (Jenkins, 2015; Fallah, 2016; Morgan & Katz, 2021; Onem, 2015). In conclusion, it is evident that more research is required to fully understand the effects of mindfulness on foreign language learning. This paper sets out to explore how mindfulness enhances foreign language enjoyment, pupils' perception of their EFL studies and pupils' well-being in the EFL classroom.

2.2. Foreign language enjoyment (FLE)

Foreign Language Enjoyment is a growing field of research that focuses on the positive emotional experiences of foreign language learners and stems from positive psychology theories, such as Martin Seligman's PERMA model for well-being (positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaningfulness

and accomplishment) and Barbara Fredrickson's "broaden-and-build theory", which provide a foundation for understanding the importance of positive emotions in language learning (Fredrickson, 2004; Seligman, 2018). FLE is defined as a comprehensive positive feeling that arises when psychological needs are met in the language classroom (Botes et al., 2022). Researchers, including Jean-Marc Dewaele, emphasize that FLE is more than pleasure and involves a sense of challenge, hard work, and fulfillment in overcoming difficulties (Dewaele, 2022). The *Empathics approach*, proposed by Oxford (2016), advocates for a holistic approach to language learning that considers learners' psychological well-being. This approach highlights the importance of factors such as emotion, empathy, motivation, perseverance, autonomy, and self-concept in enhancing language learners' well-being and proficiency. Research on FLE has shown that learners experience more enjoyment than anxiety in language classrooms, and fostering enjoyment can have positive effects on language learning outcomes (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). FLE has been found to be a multidimensional construct influenced by individual and contextual factors which fluctuates over time (Elahi Shirvan et al., 2021). Studies have also linked FLE to better language proficiency and academic achievement, mediated by factors such as trait emotional intelligence, willingness to communicate, and self-efficacy (Li, 2020; Demir & Okyar, 2021). Overall, FLE has gained recognition as an important aspect of language learning, and educators and researchers are exploring ways to promote enjoyment in language classrooms by creating positive environments, fostering learner autonomy, and using engaging activities (Gkonou et al., 2017).

To date, little research focuses on the effect that mindfulness has on FLE. Huang (2022) found that mindfulness and compassion in EFL teachers can play a role in promoting students' FLE. Fibriasari & Tambunan (2022) examined the effects of strategy-based instructions and mindfulness on foreign language anxiety and enjoyment among Indonesian students learning French. Furthermore, the researchers found that mindfulness played a moderating role in this context, although the specific nature of this moderation is not mentioned in the summary. It is likely, therefore, that incorporating a mindfulness program in EFL classrooms can help learners to be more present and aware during their language learning activities, thereby reducing anxiety and enhancing their enjoyment.

3. Research methodology

3.1. The Mindfulness Based Intervention Program (MBI)

The MBI program used in this research is based on the author's own experience of teaching mindfulness and a program that was created as part of the author's studies to become a mindfulness instructor. This program is called *Attention Please*. The English mindfulness curriculum that was used for this study is a combination of *Attention Please* and Broderick's (2013) mindfulness program for adolescents called *Learning to Breathe* which is based on Kabat-Zin's mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) programs. *Attention Please* has been adapted to suit Israeli culture and lifestyle considering the extra stress that Israeli students encounter due to the conflicted region they live in.

3.2. MBI Goals

1. To improve the way students perceive their EFL studies.
2. To improve students' well-being by helping them to obtain a calm and less stressful classroom experience which may influence their general lifestyle.
3. To provide foreign language enjoyment in the EFL classroom.

The program was designed to be taught over a period of thirteen weeks. Each session was ninety minutes and included meditations, presentations, clips, literature and articles for discussion and practice in English. The students learned how to breathe in order to calm themselves, how to deal with difficult emotions, stress and automatic behavior and responses that often cause conflict in their lives. For example, if the session dealt with how thoughts are not necessarily facts, small clips from YouTube were used to show how we can easily misinterpret actions, behavior and suggestions because of their beliefs. The program also included activities, learning key words, discussions, presentations and reflection writing. The main topics that were covered included *surfing the waves of life, self-compassion, focusing on the present moment, how to deal with distractions, being judgmental, attitude of gratitude, dealing with troubling thoughts and stress*. Students practiced different types of meditations including guided imagery. In addition, several metacognitive strategies were implemented during English lessons such as the use of KTN charts (What I know, What I think I know, and what I want or need to know (Campbell & Campbell, 2009) as a pre-reading activity. This type of exercise engages the

student's reflective processes which are enhanced by mindful meditations. Further, meditations that focused on new lexical items learned were conducted. Students were asked to close their eyes and imagine themselves drawing the word/ or seeing a green background with the word written in blue or white or the lexical items were slowly spelled out in a meditation. Reflections at the end of each lesson using a reflection notebook were used. For example, learners were asked what particular aspect of the lesson they were most aware of or asked to write down one important thing they had learned in that lesson, words or expressions that were salient, exercises they enjoyed. Pupils who wanted to share what they had reflected were encouraged to do so.

3.3. Research goals

This current study which is part of a doctoral thesis in process, investigates how a thirteen-week mindfulness-based intervention program conducted in an EFL classroom in Israel enhances perceived FLE and well-being among 10th grade EFL students. The study aims to answer the following questions:

1. Do students feel that the mindfulness program affects their feeling of enjoyment in the EFL classroom?
2. Do students feel that the mindfulness program affects their feeling of well-being in the classroom and at school?
3. How has the mindfulness program influenced the students' perception of their English studies?

This study is based on action research (AR). Richard Sagor (2000:3) defines action research as research which is a structured and systematic investigation carried out by teachers involved in the action itself. The main purpose of participating in action research is to assist the researcher taking the action to enhance and perfect their own actions or teaching methods. Since AR involves a teacher's reflection process and a thorough investigation of what works and doesn't work in the classroom (Burns, 2010), it only seems appropriate to use AR methodology to research the effects of mindfulness which, in its own right, is a reflective process. Qualitative data were collected during the program and at the end of the program in the form of fourteen semi-structured interviews. In addition, my written log which recorded the events at the end of each session was also analysed. Qualitative data seemed most appropriate since this study aims to observe pupils in natural surroundings which, in this case, is the

classroom (Tenowski & Damico, 2001, as cited in Mackey & Gass, 2016). The application of AR using qualitative data helped decide on whether or not the practice of mindfulness in the EFL classroom is suitable for future language teaching and whether or not it creates a feeling of well-being and enjoyment among the participants. For these reasons, action research is suitable for teacher researchers (Wallace, 1998)

3.4. Research population

All fourteen participants were from a 10th grade heterogeneous EFL class of 28 pupils. Seven participants were male and seven were female. The participants are from a well-known school in the north of Israel which runs from kindergarten through to 12th grade. The reason for choosing the 10th grade is because in Israel students begin the process of learning the material for the national English matriculation exam as they enter high school (10th grade) but still have two full years of English studies before they take their first English matriculation exam at the end of 11th grade. Therefore, choosing 10th grade as an experiment group does not interfere with their matriculation grades at the present time. All of the participants agreed to participate in the study.

3.5. Research tools

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data from fourteen randomly picked pupils. Further, my log was used to record my reflections at the end of each lesson. The reflections related to the students' focus and attention during class, the lesson plans, their participation or antagonism towards the program that had occurred. Lesson plans were also recorded as well as strategies that were used in the lessons.

3.6. Data analysis: content analysis

Semi-structured interviews were given half way through the MBI program to eight pupils out of the class, seven weeks into the program. Four of the interviewees were male and four were female all in a heterogeneous EFL class. At the end of the program six more interviews were conducted to look for progress or changes: Three of the interviewees were male and three were female. All fourteen interviews underwent content analysis. First, the interviews were transcribed and then coded and labeled into themes, categories and sub-categories according to reoccurring utterances and statements by the participants (Burns, 2010). Each theme and category were interpreted and conceptualized by the researcher's interpretation. The guided questions are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Semi-structured interview guide

- 1) Have you ever practiced mindfulness prior to learning the MBI program in English?
- 2) Do you practice mindfulness outside of the classroom as a result of learning this MBI program?
- 3) Describe your experience of learning mindfulness in the English classroom.
- 4) How do you feel about learning mindfulness in the English classroom?
- 5) How has the program influenced your life in general if at all?
- 6) In what way has the MBI program helped you with your English studies?
- 7) In what way had the MBI influenced your attitude towards learning English at school?
- 8) What strategies do you enjoy learning in the classroom?

4. Results

Content analysis collected from the fourteen semi-structured interviews produced three main themes which correlate with the main questions of this research. Each theme has its related categories. I reiterated before each interview that the pupils should feel free to say whatever they feel. Table 2 presents the findings from the first eight interviews conducted seven weeks into the program. Each theme and category are discussed separately.

Table 2 – Emergent themes and their constituent categories during the program for 8 participants

Theme	Category
Well-being	<p>Benefits of practicing mindfulness: “it helps me before a test”</p> <p>Help with anxiety: “I was constantly stressed so practicing meditations started to lessen the stress. The more I practice the less anxious I feel”</p> <p>Ability to focus: “The program makes us more focused sitting in class and that is important for me to sit quietly in class so that I can concentrate.”</p> <p>Dealing with emotions: “knowing how to function with different emotions is important to me”.</p>
Pupils’ interest and enjoyment from the MBI	<p>Useful strategies learned in the program: “I enjoy ranking our level of concentration at the beginning and end of the lesson”</p> <p>EFL enjoyment: “It is so cool learning English this way”</p>
The influence of mindfulness on pupils’ perceptions of	<p>The connection between learning English and enjoying the program: “I learn English better when I like it. I enjoy the</p>

their English studies

program very much; therefore, I feel as though I am learning better”.

EFL vocabulary learning: “I have learned a lot of new words in English.... words like ‘observe, chattering minds, slow down’.”

Thinking in English: “The fact that we do mindfulness in English, I’m sure everyone, like me, thinks about English more while we are doing mindfulness meditations in English”.

Speaking in English: “We learn through speaking and I learn much better from speaking and listening to someone speaking in English”.

4.1. Theme 1: Well-Being

Category 1: Benefits of practicing mindfulness

The findings revealed that all participants interviewed (n=8) found that the mindfulness program was beneficial for them. Only one participant claimed that she found it difficult to relate to the meditations and said that “although I don’t relate to the meditations, I find it beneficial to take a step back and just, you know, go through what is happening to me right now at the present moment”. Although she did not participate in the meditations throughout the program, she began to sit quietly in the third week of the program and participated in discussion. Others claimed that they had found the MBI so far to be beneficial before a sports competition or game: “I practice meditations before running 1,500 meters and before a basketball match”, before a test or learning for a test: “It helps me before a test”, to concentrate during class; “I have started to see that even my level of concentration in lessons has changed”, setting goals: “Making us think about are goals for the lesson at the beginning of the lesson is very helpful. Setting long-term goals are difficult for me so breaking them down to small goals for each lesson helps me” or just feeling calm: “what calms me most is learning to place myself right now”. To conclude, the content analysis shows that all of the participants find the MBI beneficial so far in one way or another.

Category 2: Help with anxiety

The content analysis indicates that seven out of eight participants (n=7) stated that the MBI has helped them deal with anxiety so far. All seven claimed that it helped them before math tests. One said “it [the MBI] calmed me down before the math test” and another claimed that she “started to panic before the math test and then started taking deep breaths the way you taught us and thinking about breathing.....I calmed myself down and went back to the test”. The words “relax”, “calm” and “stressed” were repeated in

all testimonies, including the one participant who does not completely relate to the mindfulness meditations in the program.

From the content analysis it can be said that the participants interviewed feel that the program has helped them deal with anxious moments so far.

Category 3: help pupils to focus

The mid-way interviews show that five out of the eight participants (n=5) specify that the MBI has helped them to focus on either listening to others or on class work. One pupil claimed that participating in the MBI has *“really helped me to focus on listening to everything my coach said before a basketball game and understand fully what he means and even implement what he said during the game”*. He went on to say *“I have already started to see that even my level of concentration during lessons has changed”*. Others repeated that they were able to focus more in class and during tests.

To conclude, five pupils out of the eight interviewed feel that the MBI has helped them with their ability to focus on different aspects of their routines in life.

Category 4: Dealing with emotions

Pupils mentioned that it was important for them *“to learn how to function with emotions”* or that the program has helped them *“be more aware of how [they] feel”*. One pupil went into great detail how one particular unit in the program which compares emotions to guests that come to visit our minds has helped him to be able to accept his thoughts with more ease. To conclude, dealing with emotions is an integral part of well-being, thus, important to mention.

4.2. Theme 2: Pupil's interest in and enjoyment from the MBI

Category 1: Useful strategies learned in the program so far

The data show that all eight interviewees (n=8) enjoyed using at least one of the strategies taught during the program. Seven out of eight (n=7) claimed that they most enjoyed the different types of meditations such as the body scan or ocean wave meditations. Others (n=5) noted other strategies that they enjoyed such as using the reflective notebooks at the end of the lesson (n=2), or ranking their level of focus before and at the end of the lesson (n=2) or enjoyed the activity of setting goals for the lesson (n=1).

To sum up, all the interviewees found at least one useful strategy, if not more, so far during the program where the majority reported enjoying the mindful meditations the most.

Category 2: EFL enjoyment

Content data analysis revealed that four out of the eight interviewees (n=4) stated that the way the program was conducted was appealing because *“it was different than anything [they] had ever done in an EFL classroom”*. One pupil claimed: *“I like the variety in the program”* while another said that the way she sat in the classroom, in a circle, changed her perspective and found it *“a refreshing way to learn English”*. Further, the pupil who felt that she had not really improved her English due to her already high level of English claimed that she liked coming to class because of the different way of learning the language. In addition, she claimed that the main reason she did not wish to move from my class to an advanced English class when she had the option to do so, was because the program generated interest. To sum up, four out of the eight pupils saw the MBI as a different way of learning English which in turn generated interest.

4.3. Theme 3: The influence of mindfulness on pupil's perception of their English studies

Category 1: The connection between learning English and enjoying the program

The content data analysis indicates that seven out of the eight (n=7) interviewees feel that they are learning English because the program is interesting. For example, one pupil specifically stressed: *“I learn English better when I like it and I enjoy the program very much, therefore I feel I am learning better”*. Another pupil, who had lived in Singapore for several years and studied at an American international school, claimed that although she did not feel that her English has improved so far, she *“finds the program fun and positive”*. All pupils (n=8) mentioned that they felt that because the program was held in the English language, it was helpful with their English studies.

To sum up, the findings show that the majority of the participants interviewed felt a significant connection between enjoyment from the program and their feelings towards learning English, in particular, stressing the fact that because the program was delivered in the English language it had a positive effect of their English studies.

Category 2: vocabulary learning

Content analysis findings show that all eight interviewees (n=8) claim that their English vocabulary has improved faster compared to previous years. They claim that the way it was taught through the mindfulness exercises helped them remember the words better. When asked how the program has helped in their English studies, they unanimously mentioned vocabulary learning: *“vocabulary, is the first thing. Words like ‘observe, chattering minds, slow down’”* claimed one interviewee. Another said *“the course seems to expand vocabulary mainly and I learn how to use the words in a new context. When I hear a word several times with relatively high frequency in your mindfulness meditations, I remember it better and I will know how to use it in a conversation”*. Even the pupil who had lived abroad stated *“that the course offers a different kind of vocabulary than the regular lists that the other classes are given and I think that it is a nice change to learn new words”*.

To sum up, when asked how the students felt the program had helped them in English, the most salient answer (n=8) was that they felt their vocabulary learning had improved.

Category 3: Thinking in English

Another category that emerged from the content analysis findings was the way the pupils felt that they were able to “think more in English” (n=4). For instance, one pupil said *“I’m thinking about thinking in English”* while another claimed *“it [the MBI] pushes me to think in English”*. Another pupil claimed that she thinks in English when the meditations are spoken to her. To conclude, this category can be viewed as a sub-category about the effects of the program on the pupil’s English studies. The content analysis indicates that four out of the eight participants felt that as a result of learning mindfulness in English they are thinking more in English.

Category 4: Speaking in English

The content analysis findings show that some pupils also feel that their spoken abilities in English have developed since the beginning of the program (n=3). For example, a pupil claimed that the program *“gets us to speak and open up in English and [she] learns better through speaking”*. Another two participants claimed that because the program is taught in English *“the course gives [them] ample opportunities to talk”* thus, creating a sense of improvement in their speaking skills. To sum up, content analysis shows that improvement in spoken English is another category which falls under the

theme of the influence of the program on the pupil’s English studies.

4.4. Post program Interviews

The same themes and categories emerged from the content analysis employed on the data collected from the six interviewees that were randomly sampled at the end of the thirteen-week mindfulness program. The words *anxiety, focus, paying attention, enjoyment, cool, interesting, tools for life, vocabulary learning* repeated themselves throughout all six interviewees (n=6) strengthening the themes that had previously emerged: well-being, interest and enjoyment and the way pupils perceive their English studies. As for the theme of *well-being* all six interviewees mentioned one of the categories previously mentioned. One pupil said *“mindfulness helps me with anxiety in general.....it is a tool for life”*. Another pupil said *“I think everyone needs to do mindfulness, if you start the day with stress, as I used to, and do mindfulness, your day is just going to get better and you feel happy”*. A third interviewee said *“our mindfulness lessons really relaxed me. It gave me quality time with my self and to think about thinking, just relaxing and focusing on my breath really helped me calm down”*. Another interviewee talked about how the course had been helping her fall asleep at night when she is stressed. One interviewee whose English is on a high level mentioned that he felt *“more at ease”* and *“calm”* during English lessons. To conclude the most prominent category of well-being were the benefits of practicing mindfulness, help with anxiety and the ability to focus. Only one interviewee (n=1) mentioned how the mindfulness course had helped her deal with troubling thoughts during exams.

The theme of *interest and enjoyment* was the most prominent theme that emerged during these interviews. All six interviewees mentioned that their level of enjoyment and interest was high during English lessons because of the program. Two interviewees used the expression *“we got two for the price of one”* claiming that they felt they not only learned English but they were able to do it an interesting way through the MBI. The words *interesting, enjoy, fun, great, nice and cool* were repeated throughout all six interviews. Interviewees said they thought *“it was a really cool way to learn English”*, *“we learned with enjoyment and I could relate to the content of the lessons and looked forward with anticipation to come to every lesson”* or *“it was really fun learning mindfulness in English”*. One pupil said *“mindfulness gave our English lessons a*

twist and broke the monotony of the whole day at school". One pupil mentioned that there was a pleasant atmosphere in class and because of that he enjoyed coming to class.

As far as the theme of *the influence of mindfulness on pupil's perception of their English studies*, the most prominent category in this set of interviews was vocabulary learning. Five out of the six interviewees (n=5) said that they felt that the program had helped them learn new vocabulary. Further, they felt that the strategy of mindfulness vocabulary meditations was most effective. One student reported *"the program helped me most with learning vocabulary"* another said *"I have learned a lot of new vocabulary. I liked the way we used and repeated the words through conversation and reading and even in the meditations"*. Another claimed *"I think this program has expanded my vocabulary especially through the word meditations"* and another said *"I think that I learned a lot of new words which I didn't need to revise because we meditated using them so often that I just remembered the spelling and images of the words and got good grades on our vocabulary quizzes."* Others mentioned that the program had improved their speaking skills and listening skills due to listening a lot to meditations and talking about the content of the program. Unlike the mid-term interviews, one interviewee stressed that the program had helped him with his spelling issues in English: *"I believe the program has helped me improve in my spelling. I pay more attention to how I spell and take my time. maybe it is because of mindfulness because we learn to pay more attention and slowdown"*.

5. Discussions

As far as pupils' feeling of well-being is concerned (research question no.2) all fourteen participants (n=14) felt that the program benefited them in one way or another. All fourteen (n=14) claimed the program helped them with anxiety, four (n=4) felt the program helped them to deal with difficult emotions, and eight (n=8) felt that it helped them focus more in the classroom. Mindfulness programs in education conducted in student's L1 have been found to be effective in reducing anxiety, stress and help with difficult emotions (Ergas, 2021; Kuyken et al., 2013; Tan, 2021). Findings in this study show that the same benefits occur when the program is conducted in English as a foreign language.

As far as the influence of mindfulness on pupil's perception of their English studies (research question no.3), the findings show that the program particularly

helped them with vocabulary learning. This can be explained by the way vocabulary was taught during the program by using vocabulary meditations, i.e., meditations where the instructor mentions the words and asks the pupils to imagine the word written on a red or green background or by incorporating learned words into the meditations, i.e., the teacher uses words such as observe, curious, nurture, focus, accept, sensations within the spoken meditations. Since mindfulness practice improves attention, awareness, the ability to focus on the present moment, notice explicit input and reduce anxiety (Bishop et al., 2004; Hussain, 2015; Mrazek et al., 2013), it is not surprising that the students all mentioned how the program was helping them learn vocabulary, think more in the target language and develop their spoken abilities in the target language.

As far as the theme of interest and enjoyment of the MBI program is concerned (research question 1), the theme of enjoyment was even more prominent in the post-program interviews. Foreign language enjoyment (FLE) has been correlated to academic achievement and also higher proficiency levels (Dewaele et al., 2019; Elahi Shirvan et al., 2021). It will therefore, be interesting to see if the pupils' FLE from the MBI program will positively influence their grades at the end of the school year. Although there are limitations to this study due to the size of the experiment group (n=29) and the small number of interviews conducted (n=14), from the data analyzed it can be tentatively concluded that the program has enhanced feelings of well-being and FLE. Further, the pupils felt that the mindfulness program had enhanced their English studies as well as felt a sense of improvement in their vocabulary, oral and listening skills.

6. Conclusions and pedagogical implications

Several insights about teaching mindfulness in English are important to note. These insights stemmed from my log which I used to reflect after each mindfulness session. Some of the main issues that emerged from the log pertained to the challenges and progress of the program, for example, getting the pupils to participate and respond to the program. Several pupils began the program with antagonism but as the program progressed become less resistant. Further, I had to deal with the tension of holding two positions: the official EFL teacher and the mindfulness instructor. As a mindfulness instructor, one needs to show patience and understanding to any pupil who does not wish to participate. On the other hand, the

program is also instructed in English, the target language being taught and it is the responsibility of the English teacher to make sure her pupils are learning. Time was also a challenge. I met the experiment group 3 times a week – twice a week I had a 90-minute lesson with them and once a week I had a 45-minute single lesson with them. Only one 90-minute session was dedicated fully to the mindfulness program, “Attention Please”. One 90-minute session, a week was often not enough to convey the messages of mindfulness learning. The maturity of the pupils was a further challenge. Although most of the pupils settled into the course after three weeks and reported on enjoying it and learning from it, there were still two pupils who refused to relent until the last few lessons of the program.

The teacher’s log provided evidence of the challenges that an English language teacher faces when implementing a mindfulness program and are important to take into account before incorporating an MBI in the EFL classroom. Perseverance, belief in the program and belief in the student’s readiness to take part in it, are vital elements to ensure that the program succeeds. Further, English teachers who want to implement a mindfulness program in the EFL classroom need to have enough training in mindfulness as well as practice mindfulness on a regular basis.

In conclusion, the goals of the mindfulness intervention program were to enhance pupil’s perception of their English studies, improve their feeling of well-being in the classroom and provide foreign language enjoyment. The way the participants perceived their English studies was positive. They felt that they were learning, improving and enjoying all at the same time. The findings from the study show that teaching mindfulness in the EFL classroom by a trained mindfulness instructor and EFL teacher may offer pupils not only meaningful life-long skills to improve a feeling of well-being, but may also improve their over-all enjoyment in the classroom. Moreover, practicing mindfulness in the EFL classroom influences the way participants positively perceive their English studies which may in turn influence their language proficiency. Using a mindfulness program in English can make language teaching more purposeful and meaningful as well as a less stressful ordeal which are some of the language teaching goals set by the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*.

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