

The development of emotion regulation competence for in-service teachers through mindfulness-based interventions: a literature review

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Abstract

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This article advocates for a reconceptualization of teacher development - one that centers emotional competence as a personal and pedagogical imperative. While pedagogical strategies and curricular design are widely recognized as foundational in teacher preparation, considerably less emphasis is placed on cultivating the internal resources teachers require to navigate the emotional demands of the profession. Addressing this gap, the present literature review investigates the role of mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) in supporting the development of emotion regulation among in-service teachers. Rather than framing emotion regulation solely as an individual tool for stress reduction or professional composure, this review explores it as a dynamic, relational, and evolving competency essential to the emotional ecology of teaching. The central aim is to synthesize and evaluate the empirical evidence on the impact of MBIs on teachers' emotion regulation skills, illuminating both the psychological mechanisms involved and their potential implications for classroom practice. A comprehensive literature search across three electronic databases (Scopus, PsychInfo, and Web of Science) was conducted. To be included in the review, studies had to: 1) be published in English, 2) discuss interventions for in-service teachers, 3) assess aspects of the emotional regulation process, and 4) evaluate both proximal and distal effects of mindfulness-based practices. The search identified 14 studies that met the inclusion criteria. The analysis revealed a significant shift in how emotion regulation is conceptualized: from a private, internal coping strategy to a public, embodied pedagogical practice that actively shapes classroom environments, teacher-student dynamics, and the professional identities of educators. Drawing on interdisciplinary research from psychology, education, and affective neuroscience, this review synthesizes current findings on mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) designed to enhance teachers' emotion regulation capacities.

1. Introduction

Education is undergoing a conceptual shift — one that increasingly acknowledges the emotional and relational dimensions of teaching and learning (Savina et al., 2025; Yin et al., 2025; Gimbert et al., 2023; Pekrun, 2021; Immordino-Yang & Gotlieb, 2017; Immordino-Yang & Damasio 2007). Despite the critical importance of pedagogical strategies and curricular expertise, teacher preparation programs have placed comparatively less emphasis on the inner lives of teachers — their emotional capacities, regulatory strategies, and relational resilience (Schonert-Reichl et al. 2015; Jennings & Frank 2015; Jennings & Greenberg 2009). Yet, teaching is not a neutral or purely cognitive act. It is a profoundly human and emotionally charged profession. Every day, educators engage with complex interpersonal dynamics, competing responsibilities, and moments of emotional strain that require more than instructional expertise — they demand emotional awareness,

adaptability, and presence (Chang, 2009; Schutz & Zembylas, 2009).

In this context, emotional competence emerges not as a soft skill or peripheral asset, but as a core professional capacity. It encompasses the ability to recognize, understand, express, and regulate one's own emotions while also responding empathetically to the emotions of students and colleagues (Brackett et al., 2011). Research increasingly shows that emotional competence is strongly linked to teacher well-being, classroom climate, instructional effectiveness, and student outcomes (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Taxer & Frenzel, 2015). However, the cultivation of such skills is rarely integrated into teacher training in an intentional or sustained way (Grazanni et al., 2024; Osher et al., 2018). This disconnect reflects a broader limitation in how teacher development is conceptualized — as an outward-facing endeavor focused on content knowledge, assessment literacy,



and classroom management, rather than a developmental process of becoming, one that includes self-regulation, emotional depth, and reflective capacity (Roeser, 2014; Zembylas, 2007). As such, there is a need to reframe teacher learning to include the emotional and intrapersonal domains as essential sites of professional growth (Oliveira et al., 2021).

It is within this evolving understanding of teacher development that mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) have gained traction. Initially introduced in clinical and therapeutic settings (Kabat-Zinn, 2004), mindfulness has been progressively adapted for use in educational environments, not only as a stress-reduction technique but as a pathway to emotional literacy, self-awareness, and professional sustainability (Meiklejohn et al., 2012; Roeser et al., 2012; Jennings et al., 2017). By fostering moment-to-moment awareness, non-reactivity, and compassion, MBIs directly target the emotional regulation capacities educators need to thrive in emotionally demanding environments. They offer both an experiential method and a conceptual bridge between personal well-being and pedagogical effectiveness — linking the internal development of the teacher with their external professional practice.

Although several literature reviews have synthesized the effects of mindfulness-based interventions on teacher well-being and performance, few have focused specifically on the development of emotion regulation as a distinct and central competency. The current literature review synthesizes empirical research on mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) implemented with in-service teachers, with particular attention to how these interventions support the cultivation of emotional regulation. While previous literature has documented the broader benefits of MBIs for teacher well-being and instructional performance, this review narrows its focus to examine emotion regulation as a distinct and foundational competency.

Building on this targeted focus, the review examines how MBIs foster emotional regulation not simply as an individual stress management technique, but as a developmental process intricately tied to teachers' relational presence, instructional clarity, and classroom responsiveness. This perspective positions emotional regulation as a bridge between internal self-awareness and external professional practice, emphasizing how internal developments cultivated through mindfulness may translate into professional

functioning within the emotionally dynamic context of the classroom.

2. Theoretical foundation

2.1. Emotional regulation as a core professional competence for teachers

Historically, teacher training has focused on subject-matter knowledge and instructional techniques, with minimal attention to teachers' own social-emotional capacities (Roeser, 2014). Indeed, the education system often assumes that teachers already possess the requisite emotional skills to navigate the demands of the job (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). Fifteen years of empirical evidence, classroom practice, and conceptual refinement have brought us to a clearer understanding: the classroom is an emotionally dynamic system, shaped by the ongoing affective exchanges between teachers and students (Frenzel et al., 2021). In this complex environment, teachers are more than mere transmitters of knowledge; they are emotional regulators, co-creators of climate, and anchors of relational safety (Jennings and Greenberg, 2009). Their emotional responses are constantly shaped by challenging conditions: managing student misbehavior, navigating unmet instructional goals, confronting disengagement, and coping with limited institutional support. These experiences often elicit frustration, anxiety, or anger—emotions which, when unregulated, can impair instructional quality and diminish warmth in teacher-student interactions (Frenzel et al., 2009; McLean & McDonald Connor, 2015). Indeed, teachers who frequently experience anger are more likely to perceive students as disengaged (Wang et al., 2023). In contrast, educators who can skillfully regulate the experience and expression of their emotions are more effective in managing behavioral disruptions and interpersonal tensions, responding with empathy rather than reactivity (Grossman et al., 2004).

To better understand these differences in teacher response, it is essential to clarify what is meant by emotion regulation. As defined by Gross (2015), emotional regulation refers to both conscious and unconscious processes by which individuals influence their own emotions — including which emotions they have, when they have them, and how these emotions are expressed. In order to properly define the term, we conceptualize it through the following aspects: ability to sustain and control attention to body sensations, emotional awareness, emotional recognition (in self and others), emotional acknowledgment, and engagement in emotion exploration processes.

Emotional regulation, therefore, is not simply a private coping mechanism—it is a professional capacity that enables teachers to maintain clarity, connection, and compassion in the moments when it matters most. Without it, teachers risk not only their own well-being but the very climate of the classroom itself (Garner, 2010). Despite the clear importance of emotion regulation for teaching, there remains a notable lack of systematic integration of this competency in most teacher preparation and professional development programs.

2.2. Conceptualizing Teacher Mindfulness in Educational Settings

Conceptualized as a multifaceted psychological capacity, mindfulness involves the intentional regulation of attention and awareness toward present-moment experiences with an attitude of openness, curiosity, and nonjudgment (Kabat-Zinn, 2004). Expanding on this widely-cited definition of Kabat-Zinn, Shapiro et al. (2006) deconstructed it into three key “axioms” or aspects: *intention* (i.e., a teleological motivation for paying attention in this way, e.g., a commitment to psychological development); *attention* (i.e., the cognitive processes and mechanisms through which said attention is enacted); and *attitude* (i.e., the emotional qualities with which one imbues one’s attentive focus, like compassion). Importantly, mindfulness encompasses an awareness that is directed both outward—toward events and interactions in the environment—and inward—toward internal experiences such as bodily sensations, thoughts, and emotions—thereby fostering a more integrated and responsive engagement with the present moment.

As both a state and a trait that can be cultivated through practice, mindfulness engages key cognitive control systems—such as sustained attention, working memory, and executive function—while simultaneously activating affective regulatory networks, including the prefrontal cortex and limbic structures involved in emotional processing (Tang et al., 2015; Chambers et al., 2009). This integration of attentional and emotional processes has positioned mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) as increasingly relevant in educational contexts, where they are being recognized for their potential to enhance teacher well-being and professional effectiveness.

Mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) are comprehensive programs designed to cultivate mindfulness skills that support emotional regulation

and enhance individuals’ ability to manage stress and anxiety effectively (Lensen et al., 2021; Taylor et al., 2016). Core components of MBIs typically involve training in attentional control, emotional awareness, bodily awareness, and shifts in self-perception. These programs often incorporate experiential learning methods such as guided meditation, mindful movement, and interactive inquiry to foster the development of mindfulness competencies (Crane et al., 2017). For teachers, these programs help regulate the autonomic nervous system, quiet the stress response, and activate prefrontal circuits associated with reflective functioning—biological shifts that, over time, give rise to an inner stance of stability and presence (Hwang et al., 2017; Jennings et al., 2021).

Within the unpredictable ecology of the classroom, this neurophysiological grounding enables educators to respond rather than react, to navigate complexity with compassion, and to engage students with clarity, care, and emotional resilience (Carroll et al., 2022; Oliveira et al., 2021; Emerson et al., 2017; Lomas et al., 2017).

3. Research methodology

The central research question that guided the present study is as follows: *What empirical evidence exists regarding the impact of mindfulness-based interventions on in-service teachers’ emotion regulation skills?*

3.1. Search Strategy

The search occurred in April 2025 and there were no criteria regarding publication timeframe, in order to comprehensively cover the literature. Following the PICOS framework (Population, Intervention, Comparison, Outcome, and Study design), the inclusion criteria for this review were defined as follows: the *population* of interest comprised in-service teachers, excluding pre-service or trainee educators that work in a normal educational setting as opposed to a special needs one; the *interventions* included any structured program grounded in mindfulness, emotional awareness, or metacognitive awareness of emotions; the *outcome* targeted was a direct impact on emotion regulation, whether self-reported, observed, or physiologically measured; and the study design included any empirical study involving primary data collection, regardless of methodology (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods). No formal *comparison* group was required for inclusion, allowing for both controlled and uncontrolled intervention studies to be considered.

The search strategy was informed by previous systematic reviews on mindfulness interventions for educators (e.g., Hwang et al., 2017; Emerson et al., 2017; Lomas et al., 2017) and was tailored to identify studies that explicitly addressed the development of emotion regulation for teachers. Searches were conducted using a combination of Boolean operators and keyword variations. Specifically, the term “*teacher**” OR “*educator**” was applied to the Title field to ensure that the central population of interest—in-service teachers—was the primary focus of each study. Within the Title, Abstract, and Keywords fields, the following terms were used: “*mindful**” to capture references to mindfulness or mindfulness-based interventions; “*intervention**” OR “*program**” OR “*training**” to retrieve empirical studies implementing structured practices; and “*emotion* regulat**” OR “*regulat* emotion**” to identify studies reporting on emotion regulation outcomes. Truncation symbols “***” were used to capture all relevant word forms (e.g. *regulation, regulating, regulatory*).

3.2. Study Selection

Table 1 presents an overview of the selected studies.

Table 1

Overview of intervention studies

Study/ Code	Intervention type/ Study design	Objective & Duration	Intervention components	Outcome Measure/ Subscales	Emotional regulation related outcomes
Wilson et al. (2022) (A)	MBHP-Educa Randomized controlled trial	assess effects of MBHP-Educa on psychological measures, emotion regulation, and biomarkers 8 weeks	psychoeducation, practice	PWBS, PSS, RISC, PANAS	decreased stress and negative affect; increase in resilience positive affect; indirect support for enhanced emotion regulation
Hwang et al. (2019) (B)	mindfulness-based intervention, yoga, empathy, theory Cluster randomized controlled trial	assess the effectiveness of a mindfulness-based intervention on educator wellbeing; 8 weeks	pre/post/follow-up surveys, classroom observations, interviews, and student feedback	Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ)	significant increase in teachers' use of cognitive reappraisal (improved ER) at post-test (also reduced stress and improved mindfulness/self-compassion).
Taylor et al. (2016) (C)	SMART, forgiveness, compassion, Q&A Mixed-methods randomized controlled trial	reduce stress, improve coping with stress, increase efficacy, increase compassion 9 weeks	verbal instruction, self-practice discussion	Efficacy for Regulating Emotions at Work (EREW) Occupational Stress Survey (OSS) Efficacy for forgiving others at work (EFOW) Dispositional Compassion (DC) Dispositional and situation-specific forgiveness (DSSF)	“moderate” to “quite a lot” of benefit regarding how to understand and regulate emotions (Cohen's $d = 0.52$)
Tsang et al., (2021) (D)	.b Foundations Randomized controlled trial	examine the effectiveness and mechanisms of mindfulness training in a non Western educated,	baseline (T1), post-intervention (T2), two-month follow-up (T3)	6-item Mood Repair subscale of the Trait Meta-Mood Scale (TMMS)	Improved emotion management, medium-large effect

We reviewed peer-reviewed sources only, thus excluding books, dissertations, and conference papers. The initial database search identified 79 papers – Web of Science 30, Scopus 29, PsycInfo 20. After removing duplicates, we screened a total of 38 paper titles and abstracts for relevance. 21 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility using the inclusion/exclusion criteria, leaving 14 studies to be included in the review synthesis. Among the reasons for exclusion, we mention: theory paper (protocol paper, master's thesis), focused on students, not on teachers, and case studies. A data extraction table was developed and tested. The extracted data included information about the following: (1) primary author and year of publication; (2) intervention type and study design; (3) objective and duration; (4) intervention components; (5) outcome measure/ scales and subscales; (6) emotional regulation-related outcomes.

4. Results

This review analyzed 14 studies that applied mindfulness in interventions for in-service teachers.

		industrialized, rich, and democratic society 8 weeks			
Jennings et al., (2019) (E)	CARE program Cluster randomized trial	5 weeks + 30 hours over five 6-hour days; in-person group plus individual coaching	Not addressed in the paper.	Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ)	Significant increase in adaptive emotion regulation (cognitive reappraisal) for CARE group vs. control;
Matiz et al., (2025) (F)	Mindfulness-Oriented Meditation training course Quasi-experimental	investigate the effects of mindfulness training on school teachers' psychological and professional well-being 9 months	Group sessions, mindful practice at home, journaling	Heidelberg Form for Emotion Regulation Strategies (H-FERST) - Timing of measurements: Baseline (T0), mid-intervention (T1), post-intervention (T2)	Increased interoceptive awareness, Decreased anxiety
Carroll et al., (2022) (G)	Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction vs. Health Enhancement Program Quasi-experimental	The study aims to assess the effectiveness of MBSR compared to HEP in reducing stress and burnout among teachers 8 weeks	Intensive training in mindfulness meditation, body awareness training, gentle yoga, lectures on stress physiology and well-being, emotion regulation, and self-care	Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS)	MBSR showed a subtle benefit over HEP in emotion regulation, particularly in sustained attention and neural activation; fMRI analysis showed reduced neural reactivity to negative stimuli for MBSR participants
Hatton-Bowers et al., (2022) (H)	CHIME, social-emotional learning, mindful movement Mixed-methods	support EC teachers in enhancing their emotion regulation and overall psychological and workplace well-being. 8 weeks	Mindfulness techniques (mindful breathing, mindful body movements, mindful listening), social-emotional learning (self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision-making, self-management, relationship skills)	Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS) Analysis of teachers' perceptions of CHIME (written open ended feedback)	Significant multivariate effect on emotion regulation, improvements in non-acceptance of emotions, goal-directed behavior, emotional awareness, strategies to regulate emotion, and emotional clarity.
Berkovich-Ohana et al., (2020) (I)	Applied Mindful Pedagogy for Educators Quasi-experimental	the study sought to contribute valuable insights into how mindfulness practices can impact teachers' emotional well-being and teaching effectiveness in a culturally specific context. 3 months	Group activities, mindfulness practices (e.g., attentional focus on the breath, body scan), homework assignments (e.g., daily formal mindfulness practices, journaling); pre/post/follow-up measurements	Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ)	Increased use of Cognitive Reappraisal.
Cheng et al., (2022) (J)	Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) and CARE Mixed-methods quasi-experimental	help kindergarten teachers improve their present moment awareness; enhance their emotion regulation; and show more compassion and acceptance. 4 weeks	Body scans, mindfulness movement, self-acceptance, guided meditations	Regulation of emotion subscale of the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS)	Teachers showed significant improvements in emotional intelligence and reductions in burnout and depression.
De Carvalho et al., (2021) (K)	AtentaMente, a mindfulness-based program (MBP) Randomized controlled trial	evaluate the proximal and distal effects of a mindfulness-based program, specially developed to promote teachers' social-emotional competencies (SEC) 10 weeks + booster	Mindfulness practices, emotional self-regulation, compassion exercises	Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ)	Increased reappraisal, Decreased suppression

Braun et al., (2020) (L)	Mindfulness-Based Emotional Balance Quasi-experimental	Evaluate experience improvements in skills and mindsets, well-being, occupational health, and teaching practices over the course of the program 8 weeks	Mindfulness-based emotion skills, mindfulness-based stress reduction, mindfulness-based prosocial dispositions	Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ)	Effect sizes for within-person change in cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression from pre-program to post-program
Schussler et al., (2020) (M)	CALM a mindfulness based yoga program Mixed-methods study (includes Randomized controlled trial (RCT) and qualitative focus groups)	explore the mechanisms of change associated with participation in a mindfulness-based yoga program 17 weeks	Centering and intention setting, breathing practices, movement practice, final relaxation and meditation practice	Perceived stress, emotional exhaustion	Participation in CALM stimulated emotional awareness, and higher attendance was associated with improved emotion regulation through informal mindfulness practice and increased awareness.
Kerr et al. (2017) (N)	Learn to Breathe – mindfulness training program Randomized controlled trial	assess whether mindfulness training can support pre-service teachers in managing negative emotions and improving emotional clarity. Highlights the importance of incorporating mindfulness training into teacher education programs to foster emotionally balanced educators. 6 weeks	six core themes focusing on body awareness, thoughts, feelings, and mindfulness practices Weekly sessions featured presentations, group activities, discussions, and mindfulness practices L2B workbooks and CDs for voluntary home practice	The Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS), Perceived Stress Scale	Experimental group was better able to control impulsive behaviors, respond more flexibly to emotions and experience less emotion dysregulation.

5. Discussions

Most of the studies reviewed found that mindfulness-based interventions effectively supported in-service teachers in developing stronger emotional regulation skills within mainstream educational settings. However, the evidence is heterogeneous in design, reporting, and context. Regarding study quality and reporting, the most rigorous evidence available comes from randomized controlled trials (A, B, C, D, E, K); however, many studies included in the literature employed uncontrolled or quasi-experimental designs (F, G, H, I, L). Furthermore, the reporting of intervention procedures and outcome measures was often incomplete (J, K, L).

In terms of effectiveness, most studies reported improvements in emotional regulation and related psychological constructs, with effect sizes generally ranging from small to moderate. Some studies identified more pronounced gains among particular subgroups of teachers, especially those experiencing elevated baseline stress. However, in several cases, comparable benefits were also observed in active control conditions, raising the possibility that non-specific factors—such as increased attention, social support, or structured reflection—may contribute to observed outcomes.

Several intervention-level and participant-level moderators were identified. Longer and more intensive interventions—typically those exceeding 30 hours or including booster sessions—tended to produce more substantial and enduring effects (C, E, F, I, K). Both in-person and online delivery formats showed promise, although some challenges were reported with digital implementation, particularly under pandemic-related constraints. Additionally, teacher characteristics such as baseline distress, teaching experience, and cultural context appeared to influence responsiveness to intervention, with more distressed participants often deriving greater benefit.

Program content also shaped outcomes. Interventions that explicitly targeted emotion regulation strategies (B, E, H, I, K), fostered self-compassion, and introduced decentering practices (i.e., the capacity to observe internal experiences without immediate reaction) were generally associated with stronger effects. Moreover, studies with longer follow-up periods were more likely to report sustained improvements, though most evaluations did not extend beyond three to six months.

With regard to implementation and contextual factors, the success of mindfulness-based interventions appeared to depend not only on content

and delivery but also on broader systemic variables such as instructor training and cultural alignment. These programs have been implemented across diverse educational and geographic contexts (Hong Kong, Israel, Netherlands, Portugal, Italy, Australia, Canada), with early findings indicating a general pattern of feasibility, acceptability, and positive participant engagement. The professional role and educational setting were also influential; studies spanned early childhood, elementary, secondary, and special education contexts, and reported that both implementation challenges and intervention outcomes varied accordingly (H, L, K). Finally, some evidence suggested that baseline levels of well-being and individual personality traits shaped intervention outcomes, with greater benefits observed among teachers who initially presented lower well-being or certain dispositional characteristics (D, F). Professionally, numerous studies reported reductions in stress, burnout, and emotional exhaustion, which were interpreted as indicators of improved occupational health (A, D, K, M). In addition, teachers demonstrated improvements in self-efficacy and classroom management, with some findings suggesting strengthened teacher–student relationships as a result (C, K, M).

On a personal level, teachers consistently described a heightened awareness of their own emotional states and triggers, which allowed for more adaptive and intentional responses to challenging situations (F, J, M). Interventions that integrated self-compassion practices were associated with reductions in self-criticism and increases in personal resilience (B, F, H). In terms of classroom application, teachers reported an enhanced capacity to model emotional regulation for their students, which contributed to a more positive and supportive classroom climate (K, M). Furthermore, some studies documented spillover effects, noting that improvements in teacher well-being and emotional competence were linked to better emotion regulation and well-being among students themselves (K, M).

Finally, there are notable limitations across the body of research. Many studies did not clearly define the measures used to assess emotional regulation or failed to report sufficient methodological detail in their summaries (D, L). The generalizability of results is further limited by considerable variation in study design, intervention content, and reporting practices. Perhaps most critically, the predominant reliance on self-reported data introduces potential bias and constrains the validity of conclusions drawn about

changes in well-being, emotional regulation, and mindfulness among teachers.

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, this review demonstrates that mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) hold significant potential in enhancing the emotion regulation competencies of in-service teachers, thereby addressing a growing need to support educators' psychological resilience and classroom functioning. Across the reviewed studies, MBIs were associated with reduced stress, burnout, and emotional exhaustion among teachers, alongside improvements in teachers' self-efficacy and classroom management. By learning to observe and modulate their emotions through mindfulness, teachers in these studies became better equipped to model calm and constructive emotional responses for their students, contributing to more positive classroom climates. MBI practices like body scan, conscious breathing, meditation, foster decentering and non-reactivity, enabling teachers to observe and manage their emotional responses with greater awareness and intention. Positioned within a broader research agenda, this study lays important groundwork for the development of a comprehensive emotional development framework tailored to the needs of educators.

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