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Mindfulness-based approaches and their influence on reducing foreign language anxiety in EFL learners 🔓

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Abstract

This study explores how mindfulness-based strategies, including guided breathing, reflective pauses, meditation, and mindful journaling, influence English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' experiences of foreign language anxiety (FLA) and oral communication in a Polish university. Using a qualitative interpretive design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, reflective journals, and classroom observations from 10–15 undergraduate students. Thematic analysis revealed four central themes: calming the mind to ease language anxiety, building confidence through inner awareness, mindfulness as a tool for focus and clarity, and persistent doubts and uneven effects. Learners reported that mindfulness reduced stress, slowed physiological signs of anxiety, and created a sense of calmness that supported oral participation. Many participants described greater self-confidence, reduced fear of mistakes, and improved attentional focus, with some noting enhanced memory and clarity during tasks. However, others expressed skepticism or experienced only temporary relief, citing feelings of strangeness, sleepiness, or continued exam-related anxiety. These findings suggest that mindfulness can be a valuable supplementary practice in EFL classrooms, supporting emotional regulation, confidence, and focus, while also highlighting the need for flexible and context-sensitive integration. The study contributes to growing evidence on mindfulness as a promising pedagogical tool for addressing affective barriers in language learning.

Introduction

Foreign language learning is often accompanied by considerable affective barriers, among which FLA stands out as one of the most pervasive and detrimental. FLA has been shown to hinder learners' willingness to communicate, impair their performance during oral tasks, and restrict their overall engagement with second language acquisition (Toyama & Yamazaki, 2021; Shen, 2022). Defined as a specific form of anxiety triggered in the context of foreign language learning, FLA manifests through fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and stress during examinations. For many learners, these experiences lead to avoidance behaviours and diminished self-confidence, which in turn prevent them from achieving their full linguistic potential (Hardacre & Güvendir, 2020). As English language courses involve frequent participation and communication, FLA has emerged as an urgent teaching priority in EFL contexts. A promising intervention to lower FLA is mindfulness-based practice. Grounded in Buddhist tradition but today used in non-spiritual pedagogic and therapy settings, mindfulness is the cultivation of awareness in the here and now characterised by non-judgmental acceptance of thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations (Li et al., 2019). With regard to foreign language instruction, mindfulness has been associated with an increased emotional regulation, concentration of attentional resources, and cognitive keenness of students, fundamental elements of efficient verbal communication (Zeilhofer, 2023). By focusing students in the here and now and pulling them away from dwelling on mistakes or fearing mistakes, exercises in mindfulness provide mental assistance in meeting the obstacles within foreign-language acquisition.

Empirical evidence confirms the usability of mindfulness in EFL contexts. Charoensukmongkol (2019) found that English language anxiety was reduced among Thai university undergrads through mindfulness training, while Wang and Liu (2016) showed that Chinese English learners were able to read and interpret texts at an in-depth level and construct their own opinions through classroom-based mindfulness. Similarly, Fallah (2017) found that mindfulness facilitated taking objective points of view and thus coping behaviours in the face of stressful tasks. The subsequent studies have multiplied these results and correlated them with gains in confidence levels, levels of resilience, and long-term academic motivation (Jin, Dewaele, & MacIntyre, 2021; Zhu, 2022). The benefits of mindfulness extend from the affective domain to cognitive processes critical to language acquisition. The literature finds that mindfulness enhances attention, working memory, and executive functioning (Zeilhofer, 2023), and helps the learner to remain focused while performing complex tasks. Russell (2020) adds to this insight by observing that mindfulness offsets distractibility in online teaching contexts so that students are able to retain concentration even in the face of digital and psychological disturbances. These findings in general suggest mindfulness as an integrated intervention by acting on the cognitive and affective domains of FLA at the same time.

But bringing mindfulness into the classroom in EFL is never simple. Students might be alien to or even culturally incompatible with the exercises or consider them less applicable compared to the time-tested speaking exercises (Mantzios & Egan, 2019). Additionally, the efficacy of mindfulness is never long term; students are usually temporarily reassured but relapse once pressure is applied in examining or other highly stressful scenarios (Lopez-Maya, Olmstead, & Irwin, 2019). These factors render qualitative exploration into how students perceive mindfulness in classroom scenarios highly relevant in under substantiated regions like Poland, in which English is a foreign and not a secondary language.

The present research explores the way mindful processes like guided breathing work, contemplative pauses, meditation, and mindful journaling build learners' perceptions of FLA and oral proficiency in the learning environment of a Polish university. Drawn from tape-recording of learners' voices as well as positive and ambivalent reactions analysis, the present research contributes towards the idea of implementing mindfulness as an additional tool within EFL teaching.

Research purpose

The aim of the current study is to analyse the influence of implementing mindfulness-based approaches, like guided breathing exercise, pauses for classroom interaction for reflection, meditation exercise, and mindful journaling on learners' experiences of FLA as well as their oral proficiency while learning EFL.

The study seeks specifically to identify to what extent such strategies invoke states of greater present-moment consciousness, greater emotional control, and greater cognitive focusing that might reduce learners' nervousness and raise their communicative willingness. By way of qualitative investigation of learners' experiences and classroom environment, the current study seeks to identify whether mindfulness-based interventions could invoke greater positive emotional states, greater self-confidence, and greater spontaneous communicativeness that is effective in EFL contexts. Further, the study aims to shed light on how these strategies might become integrated into daily pedagogical practice and deliver students and teachers real-world tools to break down psychological barriers to second language acquisition.

Literature review

Buddhist-originated mindfulness meditation has become increasingly well-referenced in mainstream education in recent decades, particularly in foreign language education and foreign language teaching and learning. Historically employed for religious and psychological purposes, mindfulness

meditation itself has come over time to be redescribed for application within school teaching contexts as a means of overcoming foreign language anxiety (FLA) and attaining higher effective learning outcomes. Researchers explain that mindfulness is a tool of multiple facets of learning acquisition by combining cognitive, emotional, and behavioural procedures paramount to learners' scholarly success (Charoensukmongkol, 2019; Li et al., 2019; Zeilhofer, 2023). The concept of mindfulness is that of an increased degree of awareness and presence of the here and now. Li et al. (2019) expound upon the manner by which such awareness makes focusing upon learning tasks more intensive while simultaneously reducing reactivity towards sources of stress characteristic of language lessons. Focusing on the present, the student is no longer deterred by outside influences (e.g., fear of negative judgment) but inwardly attentive to classroom activity. This allows for staying focused and relaxed and is particularly necessary in the case of a second or foreign language. Similarly, Zeilhofer (2023) quotes the connection of mindfulness and cognitive functioning and comments on the manner that attention, memory, and executive functioning—three of the key processes of paramount importance for learning—have been strengthened by mindfulness exercises. These are particularly necessary in the case of learning a second language, where the student is compelled to sort large amounts of data and work within several paradigms of culture and language.

Another important input of mindfulness is in emotional regulation. Aşik (2022) notes that emotional regulation helps students to manage feelings of frustration, fear, or doubt so prevalent in foreign language acquisition. By cultivating emotional balance, mindfulness meditation allows students to approach issues differently--in a resilient rather than a reactive way. Rather than perceive errors or miscomprehension as failure, educationally well-instructed mindfulness learners are best suited to perceive them as an instrument of getting better. That way, sustained drive towards learning materials is facilitated. Empirical data also speaks towards such benefits. Wang and Liu (2016), for example, examined Chinese English learners and established that learners who participated in mindfulness meditation activities over three months registered higher-levels of comprehension. Focusing narrowly on textual facts only and nothing else apart from them, they were able to develop their independent critical views and demonstrated higher-thinking orders from their experiences practicing mindfulness. Similarly, Thai scholarship determined that higher levels of mindfulness were linked with lower levels of FLA (Charoensukmongkol, 2016). Fallah (2017) also reached consistent conclusions, referencing the thought that mindfulness provides learners with the capacity to adopt a more unselfish approach in anxious circumstances to reduce their foreign language anxiety. Hardacre and Güvendir (2020) then analysed past work on second language anxiety and summative determined that mindfulness is amongst the most constructive strategies with which to address this long-running issue. Foreign language anxiety itself is an extremely subtle construction with tremendous potential for adverse implications wherein academic success is concerned as well as

psychological well-being. Toyama and Yamazaki (2021) document FLA as comprised of an assortment of dimensions like fear of negative evaluation and communication anxiety. The dimensions impede learners' willingness to interact, overall performance, and urge to undertake linguistically demanding tasks. Shen (2022) observes that anxiety is not just de-motivational but even prompts learners to avoid certain activities and thus hinder their attaining of proficiency in a foreign tongue. This is where a practical solution is presented by mindfulness. Through the cultivation of non-judgmental, present-oriented awareness, learners are able to reduce the intensity of anxiety and participate in class constructively (Nadrag & Buzarna-Tihenea, 2022).

The psychological benefits of mindfulness go beyond mitigating FLA. Wielgosz et al. (2019) theorise that mindfulness reduces anxiety's symptomatic and non-symptomatic characteristics, like depression and pressure, often simultaneous to poor academic performance. Through the adoption of mindfulness into ESL classrooms, teachers introduce innovation to mitigate students' achievement's emotional and cognitive barriers. Lopez-Maya, Olmstead, and Irwin (2019) note how mindfulness creates classroom environments appreciative of acceptance and presence so that students will have greater access to academic content with less barriers. Zhu (2022) provides further how mindfulness shapes teachers' professional selves to foster quieter and less adversarial classroom spaces. The increased emphasis on digital and internet-based resources in language acquisition raises the challenge in meeting FLA. Bashori et al. (2022) report how online educational environments are either able to aggravate or ease language anxiety depending on how these environments are managed. The lack of face-to-face communication is usually implicated in feelings of isolation, but these cases present the potential of creative interventions in the form of approaches based on mindfulness. The addition of mindfulness to online educational platforms may then prove key to offsetting these new challenges and achieving positive results in ESL. There is evidence to prove how effective anxiety reduction and participation increase through mindfulness meditation. Wang and Zhang (2021) argue that the affective elements in online courses need systematic treatment and introduce mindfulness as a motivational cure. The evidence confirms the conclusion arriving at the idea that mindfulness reduces stress and anxiety and mainly in online courses where loneliness always magnifies these challenges. In support, Saul and Fish (2019) present through their study a 57% reduction in anxiety among participants in the use of meditation. Park, Riley, and Branch (2020) further emphasise students' ability to cope with their stresses and exercise emotional control through the contribution of mindfulness in second-language acquisition. In addition to performance enhancement through anxiety reduction, mindfulness positively impacts learners' performance in other areas of FLs. Morgan and Katz (2021) note a downward trend in FLA while an upward trend in speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills through mindfulness. Teacher perception is equally vital. Wang (2022) notes that affective elements in teaching tend to impact climate in the classroom

significantly, while teachers using mindfulness are noted by Song and He (2021) to create an affirmative climate in the classroom. Jin, Dewaele, and MacIntyre (2021) further link mindfulness and emotional intelligence to learners' subsequent proficiency and posit that it is advantageous in the long run-in providing learners with long-lasting proficiency in FLs and other subject areas. Cognitive benefits become equally apparent in the literature. Alnuzaili and Uddin (2020) note that attention and working memory—key skills in language acquisition—are enhanced by mindfulness. Russell (2020), in consideration of online language learning challenges, conjectures that distractibility is reduced and attentional control is strengthened through mindfulness and thus enriches learners' experiences in online classrooms. These findings collectively illustrate the diversified ways in which mindfulness supports language learners by focusing on cognitive and affective spaces.

Integration of mindfulness while teaching ESL is a holistic approach towards teaching. No longer viewing language acquisition as an exclusive skill-based phenomenon, those integrating mindfulness adopt a holistic view that fosters wellbeing alongside linguistic competence. In agreement that mindfulness contributes towards focus, emotional control, and strength—traits that become invaluable when confronting the stresses of learning an alien language—Frank et al. (2021) and Coleman et al. (2019) believe that its use creates an improved learning atmosphere. Coleman et al. (2019) go so far as recommending commencing lessons with brief instances of one-minute mindfulness exercises designed to create an attentive relaxed classroom environment. Proven strategies like these will transform the learning environment such that learners approach tasks with greater awareness but with lowered stress. But putting mindfulness into practice is never a straightforward endeavour. Mantzios and Egan (2019) stress the requirement for individual mindfulness experience by the teacher himself or herself, as professionals who have had such experiences personally are best placed to model and actually integrate the same within their teaching approaches. They also note that cultural interpretations of mindfulness, logistical issues, and institutional requirements can become roadblocks for widespread implementation. Frank et al. (2021) also stress issues related to time constraint and external academic compulsions. These factors mean that putting mindfulness in place requires a delicate multi-dimensional approach on an individual-case basis.

Teacher and student perspectives still lie at the foundation of the effectiveness of mindfulness programs. Lopez-Maya et al., (2019) report that depressive symptoms are reduced and resilience enhanced among learners and educators alike such that classroom practices become more cooperative. Giraldi (2019) feels that mindfulness is beneficial for preservice teachers because they become more considerate and acquire student-centred approaches, while Giraldi (2020) also

identifies that mindfulness provides learners with strategies for overcoming emotional stress and anxiety. Brendel and Cornett-Murtada (2019) follow this by suggesting that mindfulness also has the potential for changing education practices more broadly within holistic learning approaches. Ultimately, the reading discloses that mindfulness meditation assumes a transformational role within ESL contexts by accomplishing three things simultaneously--ameliorating foreign language anxiety while enhancing cognitive and emotional command--and establishing positive learning environments. Students and instructors alike gain from its addition, if deployment is contextualised at the culture-institution interface. Mindfulness does not only contribute towards attainment of linguistic goals but also promotes intellectual, emotional, as well as social adulthood. Owing to Giraldi's (2020) advocacy of the same along with that of other proponents, mindfulness becomes an influential teaching tool within the shifting and dynamic world of language education. The current study ventures an attempt at answering the following questions:

RQ1: How do mindfulness-based strategies shape EFL learners' experiences of foreign language anxiety during oral communication in a Polish university context?

RQ2: In what ways do these strategies influence learners' attentional focus, perceived self-confidence, and willingness to communicate during classroom speaking tasks, including any reports of uneven or temporary effects?

Methodology

Design

The present study adopted a qualitative, interpretive approach to exploring the contribution of mindfulness-based strategies towards foreign language anxiety of EFL learners and speaking interaction experiences. Qualitative design was adopted because only then learners' personal narratives, insights, and reflections could be examined at an intimate level that is crucial in unearthing the emotional and mental processes of learning a foreign language. In an interpretive framework, the study is mindful of the fact that learners' experiences are mediated by personal, social, and classroom factors such that meaning gets negotiated from their tales and reflections. To examine the data, thematic analysis was applied following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, offering a flexible yet systematic means of identifying recurring themes as well as subtle differences across learners' accounts.

Participants

It was a university-based sample of 15 undergraduates who were enrolled in EFL courses. It is a comparatively low figure because the aim was to reach richly descriptive and finely-grained knowledge about learners' lives rather than produce results amenable to statistical generalisability. It is a purposive selection where students were recruited who were familiar with communicative tasks beforehand and who were open to mindfulness-based interventions. An attempt was made to match a mix of gender, year of study, as well as language ability to ensure a number of different perspectives would be represented. Students volunteered and gave their informed consent beforehand to take part. All procedures conformed to commonly accepted ethics where they maintained confidentiality, anonymity, as well as freedom to withdraw at any time.

Materials

The study employed three broad categories of materials: mindfulness-based classwork tasks, data collection instruments, and standardised observation tools. Mindfulness tasks were uniquely created for EFL contexts and included short breathing tasks to start lessons with a sense of relaxation and attentiveness, reflective pauses folded into speaking tasks to enable emotional regulation, brief meditations from five to ten minutes long, and directed journaling tasks where students noted their feelings, difficulties, and communicative occurrences. Semi-structured interview schedules were developed with open-ended questioning that would enable participants' input of rich descriptive information regarding their personal experiences. Pro forma journal worksheets were also provided for the students so that weekly reflections following their mindful activity could be standardised. Observation schedules were also adopted to gain data on class interaction strictly, participation levels, observable manifestations of a decline of their state of anxiety levels or an increase of their state of anxiety levels.

Procedure

The intervention continued over a period of six weeks within normal EFL classes at the university. Students were made acquainted at the very beginning of the programme with the idea of mindfulness and its possible usefulness for learning a foreign language, particularly for improving present-

moment awareness, easing anxiety, and developing speaking confidence. Throughout the six weeks, oral communicative activities were integrated with mindfulness-based activities. Students were also encouraged to start speaking activities with guided breathing, incorporate short reflective pauses during speaking, and take short meditation classes on releasing tension. Further, they maintained mindful journals in which they noted their reflections of the implications of such practices on their emotions as well as communicative experiences.

Data collection accessed a range of complementary sources. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with respondents at the mid-point of the intervention and at its close, providing an indication of the development of their experiences over time. Students' reflection journals offered an ongoing record of their feelings and reflections over the six weeks, whilst classroom observations—performed when possible—documented observable changes such as greater willingness to participate, fewer avoidances of speaking tasks, and greater fluidity of delivery. All interviews were tape-recorded and fully transcribed word-for-word; journals were retrieved weekly; observation notes were kept systematically. The analysis then adopted Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step protocol of thematic analysis: becoming familiar with the data, coming up with initial codes, identifying possible themes, shortlisting them again for re-examination, explaining them and giving them labels, and developing the final report. In doing so, there was an opportunity of integrating evidence from various sources towards a consistent interpretation of the influence of mindfulness-based activities on learners' experiences of oral communication and language anxiety.

Ethical considerations

This research followed recognised ethical standards throughout its design and implementation. Students were given a clear explanation of the study's aims, what participation would involve, and both the possible advantages and risks. They signed written consent forms and were reminded that their participation was voluntary, with the right to withdraw at any point without penalty. To protect their privacy, pseudonyms were used in all transcripts, and identifying details were omitted from reports. Data were securely stored on password-protected devices and accessible only to the researcher. Mindfulness tasks were introduced with sensitivity, and students could choose not to take part in any

activity they felt uncomfortable with. Approval for the project was granted by the university research ethics committee in Poland.

Results

The qualitative data Table 1 reveal four overarching themes that illustrate how mindfulness-based approaches influenced students' experiences of foreign language anxiety in the EFL classroom. These themes are: calming the mind to ease language anxiety, building confidence through inner awareness, mindfulness as a tool for focus and clarity, and persistent doubts and uneven effects. Each theme is supported by subthemes, codes, and student voices.

The first theme of soothing the mind to lower language anxiety reflected the application of mindfulness for emotional control as well as body calmness. Students depicted instances of breathing exercises as stress-reducing experiences that left them feeling relaxed while facing oral communications. Emotional control was observed after learners reported slow heartbeats alongside low panicking before presentations. Physical calmness was portrayed as a body sensation of lightness as well as low tension while speaking.

The second theme, developing confidence from reflection within oneself, illustrated the manner in which mindfulness broadened learners' confidence in themselves and served to reduce their fear of doing something incorrect. Students felt bold enough to give it a try at speaking despite possible hesitation over grammar, and were more concerned over errors. Inner reflection served here too, as learners reflected that mindfulness prompted them to listen rather than think before speaking aloud in English.

The third theme, mindfulness as a resource for clarity of focus, mirrored the manner by which mindfulness contributed to learners' attention in lesson as well as mental clarity. In their observations, respondents indicated that short meditation made them more attentive and present while focusing on the instructor, while the exercise of relaxation helped them remember vocabulary and stay focused while performing tasks. Reduced distractibility and improved memory were common of the accounts.

The fourth theme, continued doubts and unequal effects, found that mindfulness was not equally effective for every student. Some reported temporary relief only because, they stated, the anxiety re-emerged in test-like situations such as tough teacher questions or tests. Others expressed scepticism, finding the practices strange or ineffective compared to direct speaking practice. A few participants

reported negative reactions such as sleepiness, discomfort, or embarrassment when classmates reacted during activities.

Table 1
The qualitative data Table 1 reveal themes, subthemes, codes, and student voices on mindfulness-based approaches in reducing foreign language anxiety.

Theme	Subthemes	Codes	Student sample quotes
Calming the mind to ease language anxiety	Emotional regulation	Breathing reduces stress; relaxation before speaking	S1: "When I closed my eyes and breathed, I felt my heart slow down. It was easier to speak without shaking." S5: "Normally I panic before presentations, but after mindfulness I felt lighter, like my body was relaxed."
	Physical calmness	Body feels lighter; reduced tension	S12: "Breathing gave me a small moment of peace, so I was not too stressed when I answered in English."
Building confidence through inner awareness	Reduced fear of mistakes	Less worried about errors	S7: "I felt less worried about mistakes. I spoke more freely, even if my grammar was not perfect."
	Self-belief	Feeling braver; courage to try	S2: "I usually avoid answering because I think my English is bad, but mindfulness made me braver to try."
	Inner reflection	Listening to one's own thoughts	S15: "Mindfulness made me listen to my own thoughts first. That gave me confidence to share them."
Mindfulness as a tool for focus and clarity	Classroom attention	Staying focused on teacher/task	S3: "After the short meditation, I could focus on the teacher's words better, not on my phone."
	Mental clarity	Improved memory; less distraction	S9: "It was easier to remember vocabulary when I was calm and focused." S11: "My mind was not jumping everywhere; I stayed with the task and felt more clear."
Persistent doubts and uneven effects	Limited effectiveness	Anxiety returns; temporary relief	S10: "I calmed down, but when the teacher asked me a difficult question, my anxiety came back." S13: "Mindfulness was nice, but the effect did not last long. I still worry about exams."

Resistance/scepticism	Feels strange; not useful	S6: "I don't think mindfulness works for me. I prefer practising more speaking instead."
		S8: "It felt strange at first. I was not sure how closing my eyes could help with English."
Negative reactions	Sleepiness, discomfort	S4: "Breathing exercises helped a little, but when classmates laughed, I still felt nervous."
		S14: "I felt sleepy instead of focused. Maybe mindfulness is not for me."

Discussion

This study set out to explore how mindfulness-based strategies shape learners' experiences of foreign language anxiety (FLA) and oral communication in the EFL classroom. The findings demonstrate that mindfulness practices provided several learners with tools for regulating emotions, building self-confidence, and enhancing classroom focus. At the same time, the study also revealed that mindfulness was not a universally effective solution, as some students experienced only temporary relief, scepticism, or even negative reactions. These findings both support and extend the growing body of literature on mindfulness in language learning contexts.

Calming the mind and regulating emotions

Calming the mind in order to lower language anxiety is aligned with research that identifies mindfulness as an emotion regulator (Li et al., 2019; Zeilhofer, 2023). Students from our study repeatedly referred to guided breathing as calming them down and decreasing their heartbeat before speaking. These examples coincide with those of Charoensukmongkol (2019), who reported that mindfulness decreased English language anxiety for Thai learners. By focusing on their breathing, learners could regulate physiological symptoms of anxiety—shaking, rapid heartbeat, or tension—that always hinder oral proficiency.

The theme also confirms existing research by Wang and Liu (2016), who indicated that mindfulness interventions enhanced learners' comprehension by helping them read texts calmly and focus attentively. The alleviation of the participants' state before presentation/oral tasks in the present study reveals the way that mindfulness offers an immediate safeguard against sources of stress from language performance. However, the findings also extend this evidence by highlighting physical

sensations of lightness and peace as critical to the perceived effectiveness of mindfulness. Such embodied experiences suggest that mindfulness reduces not only cognitive but also somatic aspects of FLA.

Building confidence through inner awareness

The second theme, building confidence through inner awareness, demonstrates that mindfulness can support learners in developing self-belief and reducing their fear of mistakes. Students reported speaking more freely despite grammatical imperfections, which reflects the shift toward self-acceptance noted in Fallah's (2017) study of mindfulness and coping self-efficacy. This aligns with Zhu's (2022) discussion of how mindfulness influences EFL teachers' and learners' identities by cultivating resilience and openness. What is particularly noteworthy in this study is the emphasis on inner reflection. Several participants explained that mindfulness enabled them to pause and listen to their thoughts before speaking. This introspective process echoes the findings of Jin, Dewaele, and MacIntyre (2021), who highlighted the link between mindfulness, emotional intelligence, and language competence. By listening to their inner voices, learners were not only more confident but also more intentional in how they expressed themselves. The connection between reflection and confidence suggests that mindfulness does not simply suppress anxiety but transforms the learners' relationship to it, allowing them to act with greater courage.

This dimension has implications for oral communication pedagogy. Instead of focusing solely on error correction, instructors may consider incorporating mindfulness activities that cultivate self-belief and tolerance of imperfection. Such practices could shift the focus from linguistic accuracy to communicative willingness, thereby enhancing participation.

Enhancing focus and mental clarity

The third theme, mindfulness as a tool for focus and clarity, reflects the cognitive benefits of mindfulness for language learning. Students described staying more attentive to the teacher and remembering vocabulary more effectively after mindfulness activities. These findings are consistent with Zeilhofer's (2023) claim that mindfulness enhances cognitive functions such as attention and memory, which are vital in second language acquisition. Moreover, the observation that learners were less distracted and more present aligns with Russell's (2020) analysis of how mindfulness helps online learners manage anxiety by supporting attentional control. The present findings demonstrate that even in face-to-face classrooms, mindfulness can mitigate distractibility and strengthen concentration. This suggests that mindfulness practices may serve as a valuable counterbalance to the

multiple distractions—both digital and psychological—that learners often face in university classrooms. The notion of clarity also links with broader discussions in applied linguistics about the importance of focus in task-based learning. As Morgan and Katz (2021) illustrated, classroom anxiety is lowered by mindfulness and promotes language proficiency indirectly on speaking, reading, listening, and writing tests. Here, the link between calmness and memory provides evidence of the entwinement of cognitive and emotional processes: reduced anxiety created the condition for stronger memory and comprehension.

Uneven effects and persistent doubts

While the majority of the participants greatly benefited, the fourth theme warns that mindfulness does not work for all. Some of the learners reported temporary relief only such that the anxiety recurred when subjected to more stressful situations. Other learners remained skeptical of the transferability of mindfulness, while preferring traditional speaking practice. These findings verify Hardacre and Güvendir's (2020) report that anxiety over language is intricate and deeply-seated within learners' selves such that there exists a very low chance that any intervention shall completely eliminate the anxiety. The experiences of scepticism among some learners also resonate with those of Mantzios and Egan (2019), who argued that the success of mindfulness interventions greatly depends on learners' openness and cultural conceptualisations of mindfulness. Meditation or closing one's eyes felt strange for some learners in our study, again echoing that mindfulness may conflict with learners' prior learning expectations. Similarly, narratives of negative reactions such as drowsiness resonate with Lopez-Maya, Olmstead, and Irwin's (2019) warning that mindfulness interventions bring unintended side effects if mis-contextualised. These unequal effects mean that mindfulness must be made available as an elective resource instead of an across-the-board requirement. Reluctant learners will tune out, reducing potential benefits for the class at large. Educators should also be mindful of contextualising practices in ways that reduce embarrassment or self-consciousness, for instance by normalising brief breathing exercises rather than emphasising meditation as a foreign or unusual activity.

Implications for EFL pedagogy

The findings of this study hold several implications for EFL teaching. First, mindfulness can be seen as a complementary strategy that addresses the affective barriers of language learning. Consistent with Nãdrag and Buzarna-Tihenea (2022), who advocated guided meditation for language learning, this study shows that even short activities can reduce FLA and support oral participation. However,

the uneven effects highlight the need for flexibility: mindfulness should be offered alongside, rather than in place of, communicative practice.

Second, the results emphasise the importance of teacher training and modelling. As Song and He (2021) demonstrated, teachers' dispositions toward mindfulness strongly shape classroom environments. In this study, learners responded positively when they perceived mindfulness as purposeful, but doubts arose when practices seemed disconnected from language learning. Teachers therefore need to integrate mindfulness carefully, linking it to communication goals and modelling its use as part of classroom culture.

Third, the findings suggest that mindfulness may have cumulative rather than immediate effects. For some learners, the calming influence faded quickly under pressure, suggesting that longer-term integration might be necessary for sustained benefits. This aligns with Wielgosz et al. (2019), who found that mindfulness reduces not only anxiety but also related psychological stressors when practised regularly. Designing EFL curricula that weave mindfulness across multiple sessions may therefore create more lasting change.

Contribution to theory and research

This study contributes to the literature by confirming and extending the link between mindfulness and FLA reduction. It confirms existing findings that mindfulness supports emotional regulation (Charoensukmongkol, 2019; Fallah, 2017), enhances attention (Zeilhofer, 2023), and builds confidence (Jin et al., 2021). At the same time, it extends the field by documenting learners' embodied experiences of lightness, their reflective processes of listening to inner thoughts, and their scepticism about mindfulness. These nuances illustrate that mindfulness is not a uniform experience but a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by learners' expectations, personalities, and classroom contexts. The study also highlights the potential of integrating mindfulness research with phenomenography. While thematic analysis illuminated common patterns, a lens could further capture the qualitatively different ways in which learners experienced mindfulness—ranging from transformative to sceptical. Such methodological pluralism could enrich future research and deepen understanding of variation in learner responses.

Limitations and future directions

The study's limitations must also be acknowledged. The sample size was small, limited to one university in Poland, and therefore the findings cannot be generalised to all EFL contexts. The six-week duration may have been too short to observe long-term effects, particularly for learners who

reported temporary relief. Furthermore, the reliance on self-reported data, while valuable for capturing perceptions, may not fully reflect actual performance outcomes in oral communication. Future studies could extend this research by incorporating mixed-methods designs that include quantitative measures of anxiety and oral performance alongside qualitative reflections. Longitudinal studies would make clearer whether mindfulness provides sustained benefits when developed over longer periods. Cultural comparison studies could also shed light on the way learners' cultural propensities regulate their susceptibility towards mindfulness training.

Conclusion

The present study set out to discover the contribution of mindfulness-based interventions towards reducing FLA and building oral communications experiences for EFL learners at a Polish university. The findings revealed that guided breathing exercises, reflective pauses, meditation, and mindful journals assisted most learners to control their emotions, calm their bodily response, acquire self-confidence, and listen keenly to classroom activities. These findings are consonant with the growing body of evidence that mindfulness is an effective learning resource for language learning but particularly for managing the affective areas that typically inhibit learners (Charoensukmongkol, 2019; Zeilhofer, 2023). One of the key discoveries of the present study was that mindfulness assisted learners in managing the physiological as well as emotional types of worry such as rapid heartbeat, tension, and panicking while delivering presentations. Students reported that breathing exercises and moments of calm helped them present with increased confidence and composure. That is in agreement with previous discoveries that asserted that mindfulness fortifies emotional control while reducing FLA (Fallah, 2017; Li et al., 2019). Of concern to them were the manners by which such practices not only did not merely offer relief from stress at the time but also assisted in cultivating an environment of being prepared to engage, thereby transforming the classroom atmosphere to become an open oral proficiency space. Equally interesting was the finding that mindfulness increased learners' confidence while reducing their fear of mistakes. Some learners reported that they felt more courageous and less concerned about grammatical correctness but only about conveying meaning. Just such an evolution harmonises with positive psychology frameworks that highlight the need for resilience, courage, and self-confidence as key components of successful foreign/second language learning (Jin, Dewaele, & MacIntyre, 2021). Mindfulness, by nurturing inner reflection and self-acceptance, helped learners to approach communication tasks with greater confidence and willingness.

Cognitively, mindfulness exercises also appeared to enhance attention and clarity of mind. Students indicated paying greater attention to instructors' directions, recalling vocabulary easily, and keeping

their concentration on tasks without break. Such findings verify the cognitive impact of mindfulness indicated by earlier studies, particularly its effects on working memory and control of attention (Zeilhofer, 2023; Russell, 2020). In reducing emotional and cognitive barriers alike, mindfulness created an atmosphere that facilitated greater learning and participation. However, the study also reported the unequal and sometimes limited results of mindfulness. Some of the learners benefited only from temporary relief, with their anxiety recurring in high-stakes situations such as tests. Some of them also indicated scepticism towards mindfulness as strange, unrelated, or even awkward. These responses recall the difficulties of implementing mindfulness in EFL classes, replicating issues cited by Mantzios and Egan (2019) concerning cultural perceptions as well as learner receptivity. Such findings caution against perceiving mindfulness as panacea; instead, it must be offered as an elective as well as flexible tool complementary to communicative exercise.

This study's findings have three practical uses. First, mindfulness is easily incorporated into EFL classes as an affordable, easily accessed intervention for reducing anxiety while enhancing confidence. Teacher training could include such easy practices as one-minute breathing exercises that will yield calmer, more focused learning environments (Coleman & Coleman, 2019). Teacher training is also essential. As Song and He (2021) note, educators' personal inclinations towards mindfulness significantly decide its classroom outcomes. Teachers must therefore be prepared not only to guide learners through practices but also to model mindfulness authentically. Third, sustained and context-sensitive integration is necessary. Mindfulness practices should be woven into classroom routines over time, allowing learners to build familiarity and resilience, while also respecting cultural and individual differences in receptivity.

Ultimately, the study underscores mindfulness as a promising but contextually contingent pedagogical tool. It affirms that mindfulness can alleviate anxiety, support confidence, and improve focus, thereby enhancing oral communication in EFL settings. Yet it also recognises that learners' experiences vary widely, and that effective implementation requires sensitivity, flexibility, and ongoing reflection. For researchers, this highlights the value of further qualitative and longitudinal inquiry into mindfulness in diverse cultural and educational contexts. For practitioners, it suggests that mindfulness, when integrated thoughtfully, offers a pathway toward more inclusive and emotionally supportive language classrooms.

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Conflict of interest

The researcher confirms that there is no conflict of interest associated with this study.

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