

Exploring the impacts of mindfulness training for an EFL teacher: Insights from a narrative inquiry study

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The present study investigates how an English as a foreign language (EFL) teacher's mindfulness training transforms her interactions with students, resilience and wellbeing. An EFL teacher who had mindfulness training participated in the study over one term. A narrative inquiry approach was adopted to record the perceived impact of the training on the teacher's resilience, wellbeing, and teacher-student interactions. Semi-structured interviews and a reflective teacher diary were used to record the experiences of the teacher. The storied mindfulness experiences are presented under two themes: student-teacher interactions, and resilience and wellbeing. Analysis of the data revealed that the EFL teacher has experienced positive changes in her teaching, found it easier to cope with the stress-generating sources effectively both in class and out of class, and observed improved student-teacher interactions and less conflict in the classroom. This small-scale study aims to broaden a growing understanding of the potential of mindfulness practice as a training mechanism for in-service teachers. Mindfulness, as a positive psychology strategy can offer tools to support teachers in their demanding profession.

Introduction

The interest in mindfulness has risen dramatically in numerous fields in the recent past. Today, psychology, healthcare, neuroscience, business, military, and education enjoy the cognitive, social, and psychological benefits of 'the intentional cultivation of moment-by-moment non-judgmental focused attention and awareness' (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). Kabat-Zinn (2003) described mindfulness as 'the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment.' In other words, instead of dwelling in the past and worrying about the future, Kabat-Zinn's simple advice is to focus our conscious attention on the 'right here, right now'. The benefits of mindfulness practice can be summarised as improved working memory, lower levels of anxiety, reduced rumination, reduced emotional reactivity, reduced stress, improved overall wellbeing and life satisfaction, effective communication in relationships, improved focus and better cognitive flexibility (Davis & Hayes, 2011).

Being present is a considerable challenge for many people in the digital era. Being surrounded by distractors and stimuli at any moment, our attention wanders, and we find it challenging to be present. It is quite crucial for teachers to be present as the teaching profession requires high levels of attention. Focusing on the content, paying attention to students, and checking their engagement level and behaviour are some of the responsibilities that require attention. When teachers experience challenges related to attention, teaching can turn into an upsetting and frustrating experience. Consequently,

teachers find themselves anxious, stressed, and surrounded by negative emotions, which cause burnout (Waldman & Carmel, 2019).

In the field of education, Jennings (2015) pointed out why teachers need to give special attention to moment-to-moment awareness of thoughts, feelings, and surroundings, and summarised seven ways mindfulness can help teachers:

- understand their emotions better
- communicate more effectively with students
- manage students that they find difficult
- set up a positive learning environment
- strengthen their relationship with students
- slow down when they need to
- build community

When we look at the situation from a language teacher's perspective, things get more problematic. Language learning is compulsory in many institutions. Learners with different proficiency levels and abilities are taught together. Teacher autonomy suffers from mandated reforms, and teachers cannot get support from their institutions. Combined with the responsibilities of the profession, challenges and pressurised conditions threaten teachers' wellbeing (Hiver, 2018).

Research findings from neuroscience, medicine, and psychology confirm that teachers can get personal and professional benefits from the discipline of mindfulness (Meiklejohn et al., 2020). In the light of the accumulating evidence for the efficacy of mindfulness practices and considering the demanding profession, the role of mindfulness training and mindful practices have the potential to improve teachers' overall life quality and educational practices.

Roberts (2017) discussed the concept of mindfulness and its application to the lives of language instructors and learners. Accepting that instructors are not therapists, Roberts (2017) argued that mindfulness helps teachers in some particular ways. Interacting with large numbers of learners and making decisions about format and content simultaneously are the challenges facing teachers in the class. The situation is worsened by the potential of troubled students in the class. Instead of an automatic reaction of being angry with themselves or with their students, teachers are able to respond to troubling and stress-generating situations reasonably with calm nerves through mindfulness.

Research provides accumulating evidence that mindfulness has beneficial effects on educators. Studies showed that mindfulness intervention is effective in reducing psychological distress and burnout of teachers (Fabbro et al., 2020; Flook et al., 2013; Franco et al., 2010; Frank et al., 2015). Fabbro et al. (2020) compared the training group that received mindfulness meditation to a waiting list group and assessed the participants' stress levels, burnout, personality characteristics, and dispositional mindfulness. Dispositional mindfulness is a construct that includes both focus and quality of attention

(Rau & Williams, 2016). The participating teachers were employed at different levels of education from kindergarten to middle school. Fabbro et al. (2020) reported that teacher participation in the mindfulness program led to reduced neurotic tendencies and reduced perceived burnout and job-related stress after 8-week mindfulness training. Similarly, Frank et al. (2015) conducted a quasi-experimental study to assess the effectiveness of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBRS) on educator stress and wellbeing in a high school setting. The treatment group demonstrated significant improvements in efficacy in engaging in mindfulness-related practices and in several dimensions of self-compassion. In a similar vein, Franco et al. (2010) investigated the impact of mindfulness training on the psychological distress of a group of teachers in secondary school contexts. Participants reported significant reductions in various dimensions of psychological distress. Another study of MBRS for elementary school teachers included 15 participants. The results of Franco et al. (2013) show the benefits of a mindfulness intervention tailored for teachers, including improvements in self-compassion and mindfulness, a decrease in psychological symptoms and burnout, an increase in effective teaching practices, and a reduction in attentional biases.

In language teaching, Yuan et al. (2020) investigated how language teachers' mindfulness affects their professional practices and development through semi-structured interviews and teacher-generated reflections. Their qualitative case study included two participants who exhibited explicit evidence of mindfulness in teaching. The results indicated that mindfulness as a state of mind helped language teachers to reflect on their personal values and practices and stay positive and optimistic in the face of distractions and challenges such as mandated curriculum reforms. Their mindfulness enabled them to see language development as a gradual process and embrace the challenges and negative emotions encountered in this process. A mindfulness mindset also helped teachers to be open and curious about professional development and join continuous learning. Waldman and Carmel (2019) compared the self-efficacy levels of undergraduate students in a teacher education program who received mindfulness practices to those who did not receive the mindfulness practices. The treatment group reacted positively to the integrated mindfulness practices in a teaching EFL writing course and demonstrated significant improvements in self-efficacy for teaching writing.

Studies in second/foreign language learning mainly focus on learner psychology with the aim of looking for ways to enhance their learning experiences. Little attention has been directed to understanding teacher psychology and how improved psychology helps them both to overcome difficulties they face in their daily teaching lives and thrive professionally (Castle & Buckler, 2009).

Reduced rumination (Chambers et al., 2008), reduced stress (Baer, Carmody & Hunsinger, 2012; Farb et al., 2010; Hofmann et al., 2010; Williams, 2010), reduced burnout (Krasner et al., 2009), anxiety, and depression (Neece, 2013) and improved focus (Moore & Malinowski, 2009), improvements in mental wellbeing, development in calmness, clarity and concentration (Walsh & Shapiro, 2006), are among the benefits of mindfulness-based interventions that are empirically supported. The scarcity of research on mindfulness in language teaching and positive gains reported in other fields such as the sectors of

business, healthcare, neuroscience, psychology, and education (Meiklejohn et al., 2012) indicates a need to understand the various perceptions of EFL teachers regarding mindfulness. Moreover, it is also beneficial to examine the potential for mindfulness to support teachers. This study aims to understand what impact teachers perceive in their teaching related to resilience, wellbeing, and interactions with students after mindfulness training. In this study, impact refers to the perceived changes experienced by the participating teacher. This study sets out to develop our understanding of the potential that mindfulness training offers for teachers in EFL contexts by giving voice to an EFL teacher.

The research question guiding this study is: What impact does mindfulness training have on an EFL teacher's (a) wellbeing; (b) resilience; and (c) student-teacher interactions?

Methods and materials

This research is rooted in the qualitative paradigm, and the methodology adopted is narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Initially employed by Connelly and Clandinin (1990) as a research methodology to represent personal stories of teachers, narrative inquiry has been used by researchers to understand and describe real-life experiences with the help of stories told by the participants.

In this study, the participating teacher attended an 8-week mindfulness program called *MindLight* offered by an internationally approved mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) instructor from a UK-based University Mindfulness Network (<http://mindlight.com.tr/>). The program was based on the anatomy of stress and stress reduction, cognitive approach and mind modes, self-compassionate mindfulness approach, Zen approach, Buddhist psychology, Dharma (morality, developing awareness and wisdom), nervous system and brain, neuroplasticity, and trauma-informed approach. The participant attended the program from 16 July to 3 September 2020, and received the *MindLight Mindfulness Program* participation certificate.

The participant also attended a Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC) course once a week for eight weeks and a half-day silent retreat. The course was developed by Dr Chris Germer, a clinical psychologist, and Dr Kristin Neff, an associate professor in the Educational Psychology Department at the University of Texas (<https://self-compassion.org/the-program/>). Connected to the Center for Mindful Self-compassion, the course is offered locally in Turkey by an international mindful self-compassion trainer (<https://schoolofcompassion.com.tr/ekibimiz.html>). Mindfulness-Based Self-Compassion Program (Mindful Self-Compassion, 2023) is a scientifically-supported group program that focuses on gaining self-compassion skills within the context of meditation teachings and positive psychology literature. By means of the program, participants cultivate self-compassion to foster their wellbeing. The participating EFL teacher joined the course online from 12 May to 30 July 2020, receiving an internationally accredited certificate.

Upon completing an 8-week Mindfulness training and an 8-week Mindful Self-Compassion training, the participating EFL teacher was asked to keep a reflective diary to note her reflections and critical incidents in the 2020-21 fall semester. When the term was over, semi-structured interviews were held. Both of the data collection tools were used to explore what impact mindfulness training had on her teaching practices, resilience and wellbeing, and student-teacher interactions. The participant was encouraged to provide stories related to the aspects mentioned above. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Data collection tools

The teacher's oral and written stories were collected through two sets of data, a teacher journal and three semi-structured interviews.

Teacher journal

The participating teacher was asked to keep a journal for recording incidents worthy of note related to the effects of mindfulness and self-compassion training on her teaching, resilience and wellbeing, and interactions with students. She wrote her journal every week in an unstructured form. The incidents were critical and informative as they were signs of the teacher's ability to transfer the gains from the two courses to classroom practices in language teaching. Her task was to write down everything she considered important from her point of view. She kept the journal in English as she wished to do so.

Semi-structured interviews

The interview questions were adopted from Schussler (2016) and Napoli (2004) and adapted for the present study. The nature of the semi-structured interview allowed the researcher to have a clear picture of the topics that she would cover and be sensitive to potential areas/aspects that the participant might bring up during the interviews. The interview questions inquired about the benefits of the training related to her profession as a language teacher. The impact the programs had on her was explored, and she was also asked about stress, teacher wellbeing and resilience, student-teacher interactions, and transferring mindfulness into her teaching. Three interviews were held, each taking 30 to 40 minutes. The interviews were conducted in Turkish to allow the participant to express herself better. The interviews were first transcribed verbatim and then translated into English. The English translations were sent to her to make sure the stories were translated correctly.

The participant

The participating teacher chosen through purposeful sampling, Hazel (pseudonym), was an EFL teacher who worked at a preparatory school in a state university in northeast Turkey. She held a degree in American Culture and Literature. At the time of the study, she had been teaching English for 14 years and was a masters student working on her thesis at a private university. As a trainee of mindfulness and a practising teacher, she was considered to be information-rich and someone who would provide insights into the research question.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006) was applied to data from interviews and the teacher's diary. After looking at oral and written data as a holistic unit, the main themes that emerged from the participant's storied experiences were traced. We sent the findings to Hazel and asked whether they were accurate, and descriptions were complete. We followed the following steps suggested by (Braun & Clark, 2006) to conduct data analysis.

Phase 1: Familiarising with our data

After collecting data, verbal data from interviews were transcribed into written form in order to conduct a thematic analysis by the researchers which enabled them to familiarise themselves with interview data. The researchers immersed themselves into the data by reading the transcripts and diary entries multiple times. Repeated reading of data was thought to enable the researchers to identify meanings in the data.

Phase 2: Generating initial codes

Coding was done manually by highlighting the segments of data on Microsoft Word by means of colour highlighting. A two-column table was formed, and data was pasted into the first column. Codes corresponding to the parts of data were put into the second column. The segments of data were coloured the same if they were labelled with the same code. General themes were provided in the comments section later.

Not being seen as a member of the faculty, not having a room at the faculty, being an outsider in the faculty, waiting in the canteen for the class, carrying her stuff around, not having adequate equipment in the class for a language class, not being able to find a remote for the projector and being mistaken for a student and being told not to drink coffee in the class were coded blue. They were considered challenging experiences while visiting other faculties to teach. These codes were grouped under a sub-theme named 'Coping with stress-generating incidents'.

Phase 3: Searching for themes

In this phase, different codes that had been identified across the data set were organised into potential themes. A close analysis of the generated codes, which entailed studying the relationships between codes, was conducted to see how these codes could come together to form the overall themes.

Phase 4: Reviewing themes

In this phase, the researchers looked at the generated themes and decided whether they supported data, whether different themes might be combined, or whether some themes needed to be divided into different ones.

Phase 5: Defining and naming themes

The researchers made necessary modifications by defining and naming the themes.

Phase 6: Producing the report

The last step was writing up the analysis.

Researcher position

The relationship between the researcher and the participant is mutual, and both learn from each other by exchanging experiences in narrative inquiry (Craig & Huber, 2007). The researcher does not have a distant stance to observe the participant but immerses into the social world of the researched (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Consequently, the narratives that are constructed collaboratively and stories that represent personal and professional experiences hold a central position in the research. Through Hazel's story construction, the first researcher had an active collaboration with the participant, discussed the stories, and re-storied the narratives of the participant. The participant and the researcher taught at the same school when the study was carried out, so the researcher was familiar with the teaching and learning environment and the challenging and stressful elements by and large. This familiarity provided the researcher with an insider view to elicit and understand Hazel's stories.

Findings and discussion

Two broad themes emerged from the analysis of field texts. These were impact of mindfulness training on Hazel's student-teacher interactions, and on her resilience and wellbeing. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) proposed the three-dimensional space approach to analyse the data for three elements in the stories: interaction (personal and social), continuity (past, present, and future), and situation (physical places or the storyteller's places). Following the Clandinin and Connelly (2000) framework, Hazel's stories were set into the framework of a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), with the school where she worked and teaching contexts as the spatial dimension, her previous, present and future teaching experiences as the temporal dimension, and her interactions with colleagues, her students, her administrators as the socio-personal dimension. The stories were used to explore her mindfulness journey's impacts on various dimensions of her profession as a language teacher.

The impact of mindfulness on student-teacher interactions

On analysing data, the following themes related to improved student-teacher interaction emerged in Hazel's narrative accounts: decreased conflict in class, welcoming attitudes of students, showing empathy, being more student-centred, and creating a safe environment for students.

Decreased conflict in class

Hazel, who had been teaching for 14 years, indicated that she had met some students she got on well with and some she could not. Adopting a friendly attitude as a teacher did not necessarily enable good relationships with the students, and from time to time, she lost control in the classroom. The moments when she got furious because of something a student said or did in the classroom had caused her to react aggressively before. Concerning these moments, Hazel noted:

I couldn't help but speak cruelly when I got angry in the class. That kind of attitude never solved anything; instead, it made the situation worse. After getting mindfulness and mindful self-compassion training, I could observe a meaningful change in my attitude towards problematic scenes in the class. I began to realise that I was getting so angry as a result of my past experiences. I was trying to avoid experiencing the problems that I had in the past and overreacting. Mostly, I was losing communication possibilities with the students that I was trying to deal with. They either acted rebelliously or just shut the doors between themselves and me forever (Journal entry; 2 October 2020).

Hazel maintained that she used to believe that speaking cruelly when she was angry in the class would make her feel better, and the problem student would be defeated. However, she experienced long-lasting negative feelings related to that incident for hours and sometimes days. Students also reacted in the way she did, and they ended up being distant and hateful. Hazel indicated that she did not have such incidents anymore. However, she added that she needed more time to decide whether it was just a coincidence to have fewer management and behavioural issues in the classroom. She stated she would certainly have some difficult students in her classroom; however, the presence of such students did not mean that she would have problems with these students. She believed how she expressed herself determined how students behaved. Besides, she added:

Here is the thing, you need a little spark to start a fire. The spark may come from students. However, as a teacher, will you fuel the fire or not? That is the point (Interview I, 4 January 2021).

From her comment above, it was clear that Hazel was aware that allowing emotions like anger to control her as a teacher was a mistake. She stated that being so easily manipulated by students' behaviour and attitude limited her in the past. Deciding how to respond rather than blaming students for being difficult seemed a better strategy in a difficult situation.

Welcoming attitudes of students

Another emerging sub-theme related to teacher-student interactions was the attitudes of students when she made a mistake. Hazel started self-compassion mindfulness training as her therapist at that time pointed out that she had difficulty forgiving herself and providing compassion to herself. Another issue was that she found it very difficult to receive criticism from people and, naturally, from students. With the training, she learned how to befriend herself, a strategy that helped her to forgive herself easily. When she could be less hard on herself, she could be more easy-going with her students, which manifested itself in her relationships with the students. In the excerpt below, Hazel was having difficulty understanding the instructions in the textbook simply because she had not looked at the activity before the class. When she made it evident to the students, they at once helped her as they figured it out. Regarding the student's help, she explained:

One of the students told me what to do when I felt lost, and I said, 'Ok. Now I see. Let's start'. If things like that happened in the past, I used to feel inadequate as a teacher. But it definitely doesn't feel like that right now, and I see it clearly. So when you don't have such feelings of inadequacy, in fact, the students don't treat you in a way that makes you

feel so. When I can approach myself in such a friendly manner, they also behave accordingly (Interview I, 4 January 2021).

Hazel stated that she also had incidents in the classroom when students tried to prove her wrong and humiliate her in the past. Being concerned about how she looked in front of her students, she wanted to look competent, and making a mistake would mean she was incorrect. After discovering that the underlying reason was her own intolerance of wrongdoing and lack of self-compassion, she tended to regard her weaknesses as less threatening and students as co-operators. This result supports previous research into mindfulness which shows that enhanced self-compassion can decrease teachers' negative appraisals of their competency as a teacher and boost their confidence in their abilities to teach (Neff, 2003).

Showing empathy

Hazel believed that being compassionate to students did not mean feeling sorry for the students, accepting whatever they did, or letting them violate her limits in the class. To her, it meant showing more empathy to her students, and as a strategy, she implemented it to connect to students, understand the drives behind their behaviour and come up with strategies to help. She explained one incident when she could show empathy to a student with poor attendance:

One day when he joined the class in the morning to check if there was anything new, I talked to him for a while and tried to understand why he didn't want to join classes. It turned out that he had some negative thoughts about himself, like he was not a consistent person to keep up with the class. He said he lacked motivation because of the current situation, the pandemic. He talked about personal problems that made him become hopeless. I asked him to take a deep breath, close his eyes, and think about some five years later in his life. I wanted him to think about who he wanted to be. He said he wanted to be the person who tried hard for himself. He promised to attend classes, and he really does it every day now (Journal entry, 15 December 2020).

When Hazel reflected on the incident, she indicated that what she felt and saw as a teacher was frustrating since the student was there to check if something important came up; however, she did not see the challenge for the student. Taking a different perspective, putting judgment aside, and understanding the student's feelings made a huge difference, and the student felt motivated to change. She thought if she questioned the student's absence and thought he was already a lazy and pragmatic student, the story would be quite different. Reframing the situation enabled Hazel to see the problem with the student and possible reasons for student behaviour. Mindful compassion gave her a chance to offer loving kindness to the student.

Being more student-centred

Teaching requires being attuned to students' necessities, wants, and lacks naturally. In Hazel's case, it would not be correct to say she did not attend to student needs before the mindfulness training; however, being present and giving students her undivided attention was a new experience. She regarded her journey as an eye-opening practice since mindfulness showed her that establishing connections with students was essential to

running a class. Hazel gave an example to explain how her instruction became more student-oriented:

Early in my teaching career, one of my students told me that I taught the class assuming that students already had some background knowledge. He said it looked like I was not cognisant of the student group I was teaching. This criticism came to my mind during the mindfulness training process, and I felt the urge to look at my current teaching practice. I believe I can now empathise with students who really know nothing about the subject, giving all my attention to them so that I can take action considering the requirements of the current situation (Interview 1, 4 January 2021).

Hazel revealed that the ability to see things from different perspectives, from a student's perspective in that case, could be developed with training. When she was open and attentive to others, she could be aware of their expectations, fears, embarrassment, and thoughts. In the following entry, Hazel explained how understanding her students by concentrating her attention on them enabled her to manage the difficult times.

Understanding makes everything easier. I give myself enough time to understand both myself and the others. After that, I choose to speak in a clear way to express what I need in order to solve the problem and ask them to do the same. When we understand each other, there is no need to give each other hard time. It doesn't always mean that we compromise, but if both parties state what they want and specify their limits and boundaries, everything becomes clear enough to end the conflict and find appropriate ways to deal with the situation. (Journal entry, 25 September 2020)

This result reflects that of Bernay (2014), who also found that three years of mindfulness training enhanced teachers' capacities to better focus their attention on students' needs.

Another positive change in Hazel's case was in the area of teacher cognition. Hazel referred to herself as 'a competent elder' who could create space for learning and consequently for students in her narratives. However, her opinions of being a teacher had been far different in the past before she received training. She stated that she was a responsible teacher who did what she needed to do in the classroom; however, she regarded teaching as her duty. Her need to control the class was based on her beliefs that she was the source of the knowledge in the classroom. The shift in cognition was reflected in her attitude to her students.

Creating a safe environment for students

Hazel put emphasis on feeling safe emotionally and intellectually in the classroom during the storytelling process. Years ago, Hazel went to Denmark on a scholarship to learn Danish. Her language learning adventure that started well turned out to be a boring and inefficacious experience since her relationship with her teacher and classmates got worse. So the enthusiastic and hardworking language learner in the beginning started to do poorly and get mediocre grades in the exams. What demotivated her was the attitudes of people in the learning environment. Reflecting on this unsuccessful language learning attempt and readings on mindfulness helped her gain a broader perspective on what students need to succeed in anything they do. She considered enjoyment and stress as two legs of language

learning. When the stress component in language learning was predominant, learners were affected negatively. When stress-generating elements were eliminated, students enjoyed what they were doing, which created a state of flow in the classroom. Flow is described as being fully immersed in a task, focused and present, fuelled by intrinsic motivation to achieve something and characterised by focused mental energy (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). In her opinion, one of the most critical ingredients of flow was building positive relationships in the class. Communicating respectfully and showing students their contributions were strategies mentioned.

To illustrate better, Hazel talked about two students, Baris and Deniz (both pseudonyms). Both of them had their own ways of enjoying the class. Baris was an easy-going student who at the beginning of the class liked to tell stories about his life, to cheer up his friends. His stories were a bit self-humiliating, but he liked his friends' reactions, and by telling these stories, he could get Hazel's attention. Hazel used to join the class and make fun of Baris. However, she said that she could now see the harm she was causing by letting his classmates laugh at him. Hazel met Deniz after she took mindfulness courses. Deniz talked about lots of different topics like an expert and dominated the class. Instead of behaving in a way to encourage others to look down on him, Hazel chose to listen to him nonjudgmentally this time. By doing so, she hoped to raise awareness on listening to somebody attentively without disdain and judgment.

Hazel also reported implementing practices in order to help students concentrate and relieve stress. In one incident, when students expressed their concerns about the future, she played a guided mediation, and everybody in the class participated. Incorporating mindfulness exercises like that made it possible to create a calmer and more focused class.

The impact of mindfulness on resilience and wellbeing

The impact of mindfulness on resilience and wellbeing was another theme that emerged from field texts. Hazel moved to a new city three years ago. Leaving her family behind, she started a new life, which was not easy for her since she had difficulty adapting to the new city. While the trauma of being away from family and friends in a new city was troubling enough, the outbreak of Covid-19 made things harder with school closures. She believed the training was timely as it helped her through that difficult time of her life. She reported frequently that the training was helpful to develop her capacity to cope better with the challenges and stressors in her life in general.

Hazel's narratives focused on sources of stress at work, her coping with stress generating incidents, and her improved wellbeing.

Realising sources of stress at work

When asked to describe stress sources in her professional life, Hazel listed two factors, namely challenging relationships with students and colleagues, and school administration related responsibilities. Hazel articulated that when her capacity to teach was challenged by students in the past, she tended to overreact and got angry. Similarly, she used to find students' lack of interest in the class, their attempts to depreciate her, and disrespectful

student behaviour quite disturbing. Besides, Hazel mentioned somatic signs of anger caused by inappropriate student behaviour, such as trembling and sweating.

Hazel also mentioned challenging relationships with colleagues. When she needed to work collaboratively with co-workers, her colleagues' lack of commitment and their hard-to-please personalities used to make her feel quite uncomfortable. When her work was not appreciated, such as an exam she prepared being criticised, she had a tendency to question her competencies. Apart from that, colleagues who talked about what they did in the classroom used to cause a strong feeling of guilt when there was a lack of alignment. She even questioned her commitment to her profession and her teaching skills. Hazel exemplified her uncomfortable feelings when she realised the inconsistency between her classroom practices and her colleagues' practices. Her comments represented a lack of efficacy when she listened to her colleagues before training:

For years, I have listened to my colleagues telling that they did not sit at all during the class, that they were constantly active, and therefore they were very tired, and that they did not leave any blank space on the board. Whenever I witnessed someone telling something like this, I had such a feeling of guilt and felt that something was wrong with me. Because I thought I didn't do well enough in the class. But now, I quit judging myself for not doing things in the way that others do. I can see that I have my own teaching techniques, and they really work well in my context (Interview 3, 18 January 2021).

Another source of stress for Hazel was school administration-related responsibilities. Hazel found the heavy workload, extra responsibilities such as exam preparation and teaching in other departments, stress-filled. Most of the time, she had to teach a minimum of 24 hours a week. She was pursuing her masters degree, which she found difficult to manage along with her busy schedule. Besides, teaching in another department where she did not have equipment in large classes was stress-provoking. In these faculties, as she was not a member of the department, she felt that she was not welcomed, and the course she taught was undervalued by students.

Coping with stress generating incidents

Hazel stated experiencing resilience in handling challenging relationships with students and colleagues and school administration related responsibilities after mindfulness training. Her main strategy was to initially accept the present situation, as there was nothing she could do to change it, and be careful not to attribute other people's behaviour to her value or position. Hazel told about the changes in her viewpoint as:

The most important thing that mindfulness taught me is to be able to look for ways to feel satisfied instead of expecting others to make me feel good, comfortable, and valued. The important thing is to find out how to serve myself best and at the same time minimise my disturbance by others. It was very troublesome to be disturbed by someone else's words and actions. Such huge unnecessary loads. These students' disrespectful attitudes, indifference to lessons, etc., would have irritated me before. However, I have acquired the resources to minimise or eliminate successfully these unwanted student behaviours with this training. Now I realise the reasons behind their actions. They need

to be seen. I think they did not receive the affection they needed in the past (Interview 2, 8 January 2021).

This result seems to be consistent with previous research (Burrows, 2015), which found that teachers had increasing acceptance, compassion, and kindness for the students that caused difficulty in the class after mindfulness training.

Hazel explained a challenging situation and how she behaved differently after training. Due to the pandemic, attendance was not compulsory, and the attendance was quite low with no student participation in one of her courses. Hazel told the rest as:

When students did not attend my class, I used to assume that they didn't like my lecture in the past. I could write scenarios. I can see the reality now. No student attends a course that she or he can pass easily without attendance. Secondly, I do not blame myself. I have a book in front of me and a syllabus to cover, and I have to go through it. (Interview 2, 18 January 2021).

She maintained that she did not jump to conclusions when students did not attend the class and did not feel inadequate as a teacher. Hazel stated that she used decentering, detaching herself from her own mental events as a strategy to manage difficult situations. She exemplified an incident when she felt like getting angry as students did not participate in online classes, and she was the only one doing the talking. Students did not even try to answer her questions. In such cases, she became aware of the difficult emotion by focusing on her breathing. However, instead of responding to the situation as she did before, she managed the situation skilfully by looking at the situation from students' perspectives and telling them she could understand it was difficult to focus in online education. The speech turned into a counselling event that motivated students, rather than teacher scolding. This finding was also supported by Napoli (2004) who found that teachers used mindfulness practices to manage difficult situations in their classes.

Improved wellbeing

Hazel reported adaptation problems after moving to a northeast city from her hometown in central Anatolia and leaving her family behind. As a rain hater, the gloomy weather of the new city caused her to fall into a state of melancholy and depression. Besides, she stated that she found it difficult to understand and connect to people in the new city. With a limited social circle consisting of five or six friends, she found everyday activities and responsibilities quite dull. She could not find the motivation to get up in the morning. Thinking that she would have to repeat the same pattern every day, waking up, peeking out of the window to see the weather, grumbling and getting dressed, teaching, coming back home, etc., made her feel even more desperate.

Hazel maintained that she experienced changes in her thoughts and feelings with the help of the training. The previous negative thoughts faded away. Hazel thought she did not work on these negative thoughts purposefully; they disappeared without effort. Regarding her personal wellbeing, Hazel added:

Not being able to go out due to restrictions, being away from mum, and being lonely. Normally these conditions would lead to serious depression. But, I don't mind anymore. I am ready for anything life presents me. I can successfully handle them, and I am already doing that (Interview 3, 18 January 2021).

From Hazel's statements, it can be understood that the existence of situations that normally could depress her, did not influence her as they used to, thanks to skills she learned from mindfulness, and the self-care strategies she implemented. Even though improved personal wellbeing is not directly related to teaching, as it influences teachers' overall wellbeing and manifests itself in teacher behaviour and attitudes at school, it needs to be regarded as important. Hazel pointed out that positive change in overall wellbeing indirectly influenced her engagement with learners and effectiveness as a teacher.

Conclusion

This narrative inquiry was undertaken to explore the transforming impacts of two mindfulness courses on an in-service EFL teacher's profession. The narrative inquiry of Hazel's experiences as an EFL teacher shows that mindfulness training contributed to her professional life significantly, even though her primary aim was not professional development. Mindfulness training was reported to have an indirect influence on teaching practices. Non-reactivity, which was characterised by mindful responses, being more attuned to students' needs, and an emotionally and intellectually safe learning space, were among the observed changes in teaching.

Another prominent finding that emerged from this study is improved student-teacher interactions. Increased teacher self-compassion was accompanied by increased compassion for students, which aided positive student-teacher interaction. A decrease in conflict, positive attitudes of students, and increased empathy were among the highlighted impacts of the mindfulness training.

The study has shown that the mindfulness training improved the teacher's ability to observe and be aware of the stress-generating sources and her capacity to handle work-related stress, accompanied with awareness and ability to regulate emotions. This result is significant in the sense that effective teaching practice is either facilitated or inhibited by stress and emotion regulation (Emerson et al, 2017). Her perceived self-efficacy and confidence in her own capacity had left her susceptible to stress. Changes in thoughts and perceptions minimised the difficult moments. Mindfully managing stress and difficult emotions that entailed turning off the autopilot mode helped Hazel when she faced these difficult situations. The research has also shown that the teacher's personal wellbeing increased even when confronted with adversity such as a pandemic.

These findings have significant implications for teachers who have a demanding and stressful profession and who think they do not receive the appreciation they need. With the help of mindfulness, individuals are able to look at a situation from different perspectives and pay their attention to the immediate context where learning and teaching take place. Teaching and learning practices will be more meaningful when both educators and learners improve their attention paying skills.

The study is limited to the perceptions of a language teacher. Notwithstanding the relatively limited sample, this work offers valuable insights into implementing mindfulness training as a form of professional development for teachers.

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Please cite as: Çiçek, M. & Gürbüz, N. (2023). Exploring the impacts of mindfulness training for an EFL teacher: Insights from a narrative inquiry study. *Issues in Educational Research*, 33(2), 471-487. <http://www.iier.org.au/iier33/cicek.pdf>