

ISSN online 2707-7292

ISSN 2220-6310

DOI: 10.33216/2220-6310/2026-112-1-82-95

UDC: 378.147:811.111:159.944.4

PRACTICING MINDFULNESS DURING ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING AT HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN UKRAINE

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The article examines the potential of mindfulness exercises for promoting students' well-being and improving the effectiveness of English language teaching in higher education institutions of Ukraine. The relevance of the study is due to the increasing levels of stress, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and reduced motivation among students, particularly in the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine, which highlights the need for educational approaches that support both academic achievement and psychological well-being. The paper reviews contemporary theoretical and empirical research on mindfulness, outlines its core principles, and analyses their application to the foreign language classroom. Particular attention is paid to the contribution of mindfulness to reducing foreign language anxiety, strengthening emotional regulation, increasing resilience, motivation, self-efficacy, concentration, memory, communication skills, and speaking performance. The article also discusses the pedagogical principles underlying effective mindfulness instruction, including intention, attention, attitude, inquiry-based learning, and the creation of a supportive and non-judgemental learning environment. Furthermore, the principles of non-judgement, acceptance, beginner's mind, patience, non-striving, trust, letting go, and compassion are interpreted in relation to English language learning. Based on the analysed literature, the paper proposes a set of practical mindfulness activities that can be integrated into English language lessons, including mindful breathing, listening, writing, conversations, body scanning, movement, grounding, visualisation, art practices, and savouring. These activities may

be used as lesson warm-ups, fillers, transitions, or independent learning tasks to foster students' emotional well-being while simultaneously developing their communicative competence. It is concluded that mindfulness represents a valuable pedagogical approach capable of creating psychologically safe and engaging learning environments that support both language acquisition and personal development.

Key words: *mindfulness, mindfulness exercises, foreign language teaching and learning, English language classroom, higher education, student well-being.*

Problem statement in a general view and its connection with important scientific and practical problems. Contemporary society is characterised by increasing levels of stress, anxiety, and psychological pressure. An increasingly fast-paced lifestyle, constant exposure to social media, pervasive advertising, and societal expectations of continuous achievement and multitasking contribute to a range of mental health problems, including anxiety, cognitive fatigue, insomnia, and depression. These challenges are particularly acute in Ukraine, where the ongoing war has further intensified psychological distress. Consequently, university students are required to cope not only with academic demands but also with displacement, adaptation to new living conditions, and the persistent threat posed by military actions. Such circumstances often result in reduced motivation, impaired concentration, emotional exhaustion, and diminished psychological well-being. Promoting student well-being has therefore become an important priority within higher education, a need also recognised by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), whose report *The Future of Education and Skills: Education 2030* identifies well-being as a key component of quality education [OECD, 2018, pp. 3-4]. One promising approach to addressing this challenge is the integration of mindfulness exercises into the English language classroom.

Analysis of the latest research and publications in which the problem has been addressed and on which the authors ground their research. The practice of mindfulness traces its roots to Buddhism, Daoism, and yoga. Mañas et al., explain that the word “mindfulness” is the English translation of the Sanskrit term “sati”, which means “consciousness”, “attention”, and “memory” (Mañas et al., 2014, p. 40). However, it was Kabat-Zinn who transformed this practice and introduced it to treating patients with mental health issues. He opened a clinic and developed a program called M.B.S.R (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction) and M.B.C.T (Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy). Being a founder of the mindfulness movement not related to any religion, Kabat-Zinn defines mindfulness as “the awareness that arises from paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally” (Kabat-Zinn, 2013, p. 35). Thus, mindfulness can be

understood as the ability to maintain awareness and openness toward present-moment experience, including both internal mental states and aspects of the external world, with acceptance and without judgment. Kabat-Zinn also identified the key principles of practicing mindfulness, namely, non-judging, patience, the beginner's mind, trust, non-striving, acceptance, non-attachment, gratitude, and compassion (ibid, p. 27), which we will consider further in the context of their application in the English language classroom.

Except for Kabat-Zinn, who became a pioneer in implementing mindfulness for psychological benefits and developing mindfulness exercises, a number of other foreign (Bryant, F., Creswell, J., Fallah, N., Fayerberger, S., Feldman G., Greeson J., Hayes A., Kumar S., Laukkonen, R., Laurenceau, J., Segal, Z., Shapiro, S., Siegel, D., Tisdahl, J., Veroff, J., Williams, J., Zeilhofer, L.) and Ukrainian scientists (Bondarenko, L., Davydova, O., Khrystuk, O., Maksymovych, M., Mykolaychuk, M., Romanchuk O., Tverdokhvalova, Yu., Varyvoda, K.) have devoted their works to the study of the essence mindfulness and application of different mindfulness exercises not only in psychology but also education.

Various researchers described the essence and the meaning of mindfulness in different ways that nonetheless have some common features. Brown and Ryan (2003, p. 824) define mindfulness as a natural and essential state of consciousness when a person is consciously concentrated on the present moment experience. For Bishop et al., mindfulness is related to a metacognitive process that involves a "control of cognitive processes (i.e., attention) and monitoring the stream of consciousness" (Bishop et al., 2004, p. 233). Mykolaychuk claims that mindfulness "contains a number of techniques aimed at awareness of the real moment of a person's existence, of what is currently happening in his or her inner or outer world" (Миколайчук, 2014, p. 293). This point lies in the fact that "a person enters the role of a benevolent and interested observer who contemplates internal processes, but does not identify with them and does not allow himself or herself to be absorbed by them. This practice makes it possible to consciously experience, rather than suppress, negative thoughts and feelings" (ibid, p. 295). In the work of Khrystuk, mindfulness is described as a method of psychotherapy, which consists of meditative techniques, contains relaxation and developmental effects, and teaches to be fully present "here and now", to notice habitual states of consciousness (Христук, 2018, p.156). In such a way, scholars agree that mindfulness can be described as a state or practice of conscious, present-moment awareness that involves focused attention to one's internal and external experiences with an observing, non-judgemental attitude, promoting greater self-awareness and regulation of thoughts and emotions.

Research Gap. As the existing research shows, mindfulness proves itself to be a beneficial practice in both psychological and educational contexts. However,

the use of mindfulness specifically in English language teaching and learning at higher educational institutions remains insufficiently studied, especially in Ukraine. Ukrainian research has mainly focused on mindfulness from psychological, therapeutic, and general educational perspectives, while its potential in English language classrooms has received less attention. In particular, there is a lack of research on practical ways of incorporating mindfulness techniques into English language teaching and learning at Ukrainian universities. Therefore, the presented research is promising since it provides practical ideas for using mindfulness to support students' attention, engagement, emotional well-being, and language learning.

The purpose of this article is to examine the positive effects of mindfulness in the context of the English language teaching and learning at Ukrainian higher education institutions and to propose practical ways of integrating mindfulness exercises into foreign language instruction.

Presentation of the Main Research Findings. Mindfulness has been proven to have positive effects on both physical and mental well-being by many scholars. Siegel (2007) states that as a result of using mindfulness exercises, the course of chronic diseases and disorders (cardiovascular, oncological, accompanied by chronic pain syndrome) is facilitated due to increased tolerance to pain, increased levels of general stress resistance and emotional balance, and increased recovery rates and overall quality of life. Moreover, the immune system is boosted; interpersonal relationships improve (showing increased level of empathy); depressive and anxiety symptoms are reduced (especially "anxious rumination"). Creswell (2016) also emphasizes that mindfulness exercises provide especially valuable benefits in populations with high levels of trauma and stress, which is highly relevant for Ukraine nowadays.

Speaking about students, mindfulness exercises are effective in reducing their stress and anxiety, decreasing mind wandering, enhancing attention, promoting cognitive flexibility and creativity, supporting emotional regulation among adolescents, enhancing reflection and discussion, and contributing to improved academic performance (Laukkonen et al., 2020). Thus, mindfulness exercises ensure better concentration and mood, and more energy, awareness, and control. In particular, Varyvoda shows that better indicators of mental health and well-being are especially found in late adolescence (15–18 years) compared to early school age (6–10 years) (Варивода, 2022), which is the age of high school and first/second-year university students. Bondarenko and Tverdokhvalova also emphasize that mindfulness is an important factor in stress resistance and socio-psychological adaptation of youth. It ensures a healthy response to stress, contributing to the development of socio-emotional competencies; increases readiness to overcome difficulties and develop productive responses to stress through adaptive evaluation and effective use of coping resources and healthy

reflection after overcoming challenges (Бондаренко, Твердохвалова, 2022, p. 33). In other words, mindfulness provides substantial benefits for students in educational settings. In addition, mindfulness produces measurable physiological benefits, including improved immune function, better sleep quality, and increased gray matter density in brain regions associated with learning, memory, empathy, and emotional regulation, highlighting its value as a holistic approach to promoting educational success and psychological well-being (Integrating Mindfulness in the Classroom: Benefits and Seven Activities for Students). In fact, mindfulness extends beyond being a simple concentration exercise; it helps students enhance their well-being while developing an awareness of the importance of happiness. By fostering these qualities, mindfulness equips them with valuable personal resources that can support their resilience and help them cope with future challenges long after they have graduated from university (Hanh, 2017). Mindfulness also helps responsible and reasonable decision-making through the practice summarized in the acronym SOBER, which stands for Stop, Observe (body, emotions, thoughts), Breathe, Expand (awareness of self and environment/circumstances), and Respond (in a reasonable manner) (Mindfulness in Context: English Language Arts). This short procedure makes it possible to speculate on a way out of potentially high-stress situations.

If we look specifically at using mindfulness exercises in foreign language learning and teaching, which, according to Zeilhofer & Sasao (2022), has been an expanding area of research recently that is still open to investigation, we can also see a number of benefits. First of all, as Fallah's (2017) study shows, mindfulness contributes to lower language anxiety, i.e., a fear of using or learning a foreign language. Charoensukmongkol (2019) argues that mindfulness can enhance students' English-speaking performance by increasing their awareness of negative emotions and improving their ability to regulate them. As a result, learners are better able to manage speaking-related challenges, creating conditions that support more effective and meaningful language learning. Mozzon-McPherson (2019) highlights that mindfulness supports neuroplasticity, thereby enhancing cognitive processes essential for learning, including memory, attention, problem-solving, and verbal reasoning. Collectively, these findings underscore the potential of mindfulness as a valuable approach in education and encourage further research into its applications in foreign language teaching and learning. Ghanizadeh et al. (2019) have found that mindfulness and resilience enhance learners' motivation, self-efficacy, and goal orientation, enabling students to remain focused on their language learning objectives and overcome challenges in the foreign language classroom.

However, certain rules and principles ought to be observed in order to have positive effects of mindfulness exercises. For instance, Fayerberger (2023, p. 5) claims that mindfulness exercises are effective in terms of cultivating students'

self-awareness but only if they are done with an attitude of care, kindness, curiosity, open-heartedness, and non-judgment. Shapiro et al. created a theoretical model of mindfulness, which helped to identify three main rules used in mindfulness practice. The first one is intention, i.e., knowing why the student wants to practice mindfulness. The next one is attention, i.e., paying attention and helping to stay focused on the present moment. The third one is attitude, meaning being compassionate and loving towards oneself and others. When these three rules are applied simultaneously, they give positive results (Shapiro et al., 2006, pp. 373–386). According to Santorelli (2016), effective mindfulness teaching requires recognizing students as unique individuals and fostering learning through inquiry (e.g., with the help of open-ended questions) rather than providing ready-made answers.

The mindfulness principles developed by Kabbat-Zinn can be applied to foreign language (FL) learning in the following ways, according to Gönen (2022). Non-judgement involves refraining from labeling learning experiences, events, or situations as good or bad and instead cultivating an objective and understanding perspective toward English language learning. Acceptance refers to acknowledging feelings such as fear, anxiety, and sadness without avoiding them, allowing learners to face negative emotions related to FL learning openly and to recognize possible solutions to learning difficulties. Beginner's mind encourages approaching language learning with curiosity, experiencing each lesson and challenge as if for the first time, without being constrained by concerns about past failures or future outcomes. Patience emphasizes that language learning is a gradual process that unfolds in the present moment, rather than becoming trapped in negative past experiences, trying to control future expectations, or drawing conclusions about situations that have not yet occurred. Non-striving involves observing thoughts, feelings, and sensations as they arise and pass away with full awareness, rather than avoiding challenging aspects of English learning or expecting complete mastery after a single lesson. Trust means taking personal responsibility for learning, having confidence in oneself and in the opportunities provided by the present moment, recognizing one's abilities and limitations, and consciously directing attention toward FL learning. Letting go refers to understanding through mindful awareness that all experiences are temporary, releasing negative language-learning experiences, and focusing on the present instead of repeatedly reliving worries from the past. Finally, compassion involves adopting a kind and supportive attitude toward one's thoughts, feelings, and internal experiences, thereby fostering emotional resilience and self-understanding throughout the FL learning process.

Having reviewed the theoretical foundations and pedagogical value of mindfulness in English language teaching and learning, it is important to consider how these principles can be translated into classroom practice. While numerous

mindfulness exercises have been described in the literature, the present article focuses on a selection of activities that can be readily integrated into English language lessons. These exercises may be used as warm-up activities, fillers, transitions between lesson stages, or independent learning tasks, depending on the instructional context and learners' needs.

Mindful breathing. Mindful breathing represents one of the most accessible and widely used mindfulness exercises, requiring minimal preparation while demonstrating considerable potential for reducing stress and anxiety and enhancing concentration. It involves directing deliberate attention to the breathing process, thereby promoting present-moment awareness and physiological relaxation. In the English language classroom, a variety of breathing techniques can be incorporated, including diaphragmatic breathing with prolonged exhalation, square breathing (inhaling for four seconds, holding the breath for four seconds, exhaling for four seconds, and pausing for four seconds before the next inhalation), the 4–7–8 breathing technique (inhaling through the nose for four seconds, holding the breath for seven seconds, and exhaling slowly through the mouth for eight seconds), and *Five-Finger Breathing*, in which students synchronise slow breathing with tracing the outline of each finger. Such practices may serve as effective lesson warm-ups or transitions between cognitively demanding tasks.

Mindful listening. Mindful listening aims to cultivate attentive, non-judgemental, and empathic communication. During pair or group work, students are encouraged to listen actively without interrupting, evaluating, or preparing an immediate response, while attempting to understand their interlocutor's perspective and emotional state. This practice promotes empathy, mutual respect, and more effective interpersonal communication, while simultaneously developing learners' interactive speaking and listening skills.

Mindful writing. Reflective writing activities foster students' self-awareness while simultaneously providing opportunities for meaningful language production. Such activities may include responding to reflective prompts (e.g., *One thing I am proud of today is...*), keeping gratitude journals, or maintaining emotion diaries in which learners describe and analyse their thoughts and feelings. Besides encouraging emotional reflection, these activities contribute to the development of productive language skills, particularly written fluency, vocabulary use, and self-expression.

Mindful conversations. Meaningful classroom dialogue can be facilitated through reflective discussion prompts implemented individually or using collaborative learning techniques such as *Think-Pair-Share*. Questions addressing personal values, emotions, aspirations, or hypothetical situations encourage learners to engage in deeper self-reflection while expressing their opinions in the target language. Such discussions create authentic communicative situations that

promote speaking fluency, critical thinking, empathy, and intercultural awareness alongside greater self-understanding.

Mindful body practices. Body scan exercises encourage learners to develop awareness of bodily sensations by systematically directing attention to different parts of the body. Students may be guided to intentionally tense and subsequently relax individual muscle groups while observing physical sensations without judgement. Such practices facilitate relaxation, reduce physical manifestations of stress, and strengthen the connection between bodily awareness and emotional regulation.

Mindful movement. Gentle physical activities, including stretching exercises or simple yoga movements, may be integrated into language lessons to reduce muscular tension, restore concentration, and increase body awareness. These activities are particularly beneficial following prolonged periods of sitting and may serve as an effective transition between classroom tasks requiring sustained cognitive effort.

Mindful grounding. Grounding techniques are designed to redirect attention from distressing thoughts to immediate sensory experiences. One commonly applied exercise is the *5-4-3-2-1* technique, in which students identify five things they can see, four they can feel, three they can hear, two they can smell, and one they can taste. By anchoring attention in the present moment, grounding exercises reduce anxiety, interrupt patterns of rumination, and prepare students for focused participation in subsequent learning activities.

Mindful visualisations. Guided visualisation constitutes a relaxation technique based on the deliberate use of mental imagery to evoke feelings of calmness and psychological comfort. Under the guidance of the teacher or an audio recording, students imagine peaceful natural environments or other soothing scenarios while maintaining focused attention on the unfolding imagery. Such practices contribute to emotional regulation, stress reduction, and improved readiness for learning.

Mindful art practices. Artistic mindfulness activities provide learners with opportunities for non-verbal emotional expression and focused attention. Examples include illustrating verbally described scenes, visually representing personal emotions, or colouring mandalas. These creative activities encourage concentration, reduce anxiety, and stimulate imagination while offering an alternative mode of self-expression within the language classroom.

Savouring. Savouring refers to the mindful appreciation and prolongation of positive experiences, emotions, and sensations in order to enhance psychological well-being (Bryant & Veroff, 2007). It involves consciously attending to pleasant moments – for example, appreciating the beauty of nature, recognising personal achievements, enjoying positive social interactions, or

noticing sensory experiences – thereby intensifying positive emotions and fostering gratitude, optimism, and emotional resilience.

Conclusions and Prospects for Further Research. The present study has demonstrated that mindfulness is a promising approach to enhancing both students' well-being and the effectiveness of English language teaching and learning in higher education. A review of contemporary research indicates that mindfulness exercises contribute to reducing stress, anxiety, language-learning anxiety, mind-wandering, and emotional distress while improving attention, memory, emotional regulation, resilience, motivation, self-efficacy, communication skills, and overall academic achievement. These benefits are particularly significant in the Ukrainian educational context, where students are exposed to prolonged stress caused by the ongoing war and require additional psychological support alongside academic instruction.

The analysis also shows that mindfulness has considerable potential for foreign language teaching, particularly in developing productive skills. By helping learners become more aware of and regulate their emotions, mindfulness reduces fear of making mistakes, increases confidence, and encourages more meaningful engagement in communicative activities. The successful implementation of mindfulness in the English language classroom, however, requires adherence to its core principles, including non-judgement, acceptance, compassion, patience, and trust, as well as the teacher's ability to create a supportive, reflective, and psychologically safe learning environment.

Based on the theoretical review, the paper has proposed a range of practical mindfulness activities that can be easily integrated into English language lessons, including mindful breathing, listening, writing, conversations, movement, grounding, visualisation, art practices, body scanning, and savouring. These techniques can be incorporated as warm-up activities, lesson transitions, fillers, or independent tasks, making mindfulness both accessible and adaptable to different teaching contexts. Their implementation not only supports learners' psychological well-being but also creates favourable conditions for developing language competence, particularly productive communication skills.

Further research is needed to study the effectiveness of specific mindfulness exercises in English language classrooms, their long-term impact on different language skills, and the factors influencing successful implementation across diverse educational settings. Such studies would contribute to developing evidence-based recommendations for integrating mindfulness into foreign language curricula and teacher education programmes.

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ЗАСТОСУВАННЯ ПРАКТИК МАЙНДФУЛНЕС ПІД ЧАС ВИКЛАДАННЯ І ВИВЧЕННЯ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ У ВИЩИХ НАВЧАЛЬНИХ ЗАКЛАДАХ УКРАЇНИ

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У статті розглядається потенціал інтервенцій, заснованих на усвідомленості (УМ), для сприяння благополуччю студентів та підвищення ефективності викладання англійської мови у вищих навчальних закладах України. Актуальність дослідження зумовлена зростанням рівня стресу, тривожності, емоційного виснаження та зниження мотивації серед студентів, особливо в контексті війни, що триває в Україні, що підкреслює необхідність освітніх підходів, що підтримують як академічні досягнення, так і психологічне благополуччя. У статті розглядається сучасний теоретичний та емпіричний аналіз усвідомленості, окреслюються її основні принципи та аналізується їх застосування на уроках іноземних мов. Особлива увага приділяється внеску усвідомленості у зниження тривожності, пов'язаної з іноземною мовою, посилення емоційної регуляції, підвищення стійкості, мотивації, самоефективності, концентрації, пам'яті, комунікативних навичок та говоріння. У статті також обговорюються педагогічні принципи, що лежать в основі ефективного навчання усвідомленості, включаючи намір, увагу, ставлення, навчання на основі дослідницьких досліджень та створення сприятливого та неупередженого навчального середовища. Крім того, принципи неупередженості,

прийняття, початкового мислення, терпіння, прагнення, довіри, відпускання та співчуття інтерпретуються у зв'язку з вивченням англійської мови. На основі проаналізованої літератури в статті пропонується набір практичних вправ на усвідомленість, які можна інтегрувати в уроки англійської мови, включаючи усвідомлене дихання, слухання, письмо, розмови, сканування тіла, рух, заземлення, візуалізацію, художні практики та насолоду. Ці вправи можна використовувати як розминку уроку, заповнення, переходи або самостійні навчальні завдання для сприяння емоційному благополуччю учнів, одночасно розвиваючи їхню комунікативну компетентність. Зроблено висновок, що усвідомленість є цінним педагогічним підходом, здатним створювати психологічно безпечні та захоплюючі навчальні середовища, що сприяють як вивченню мови, так і особистісному розвитку.

Ключові слова: усвідомленість, вправи на усвідомленість, викладання і вивчення іноземної мови, заняття з англійської мови, вища освіта, благополуччя студентів.

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Стаття надійшла до редакції 01.08.2026.

Стаття прийнята до друку після рецензування 11.09.2026.

Стаття опублікована 30.10.2026.



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