

Mindfulness in Schools: Global Research on Child Outcomes and Local Perceptions, Practices, and Needs

Khng Kiat Hui, Li Chunxiao, Kee Ying Hwa and Tan Ser Hong

KEY IMPLICATIONS

- Mindfulness-based programmes or practices (MBPs), both direct child MBPs and indirectly through MBPs for teachers and school leaders, have a promising place in schools to enhance child outcomes.
- There are necessary considerations for school implementation, including establishing clear definitions of mindfulness, standards for ascertaining programme quality and training of facilitators, and monitoring and crisis management plans to minimize possible harm. Facilitators are recommended to have sound training in education, child development, mindfulness, and mental health.
- Developing a conceptual and implementation framework and locally informed shared guidelines and resources may help school efforts.

on MBSR practices (e.g., mindful-breathing, -eating, -walking/ movement, body scan, loving kindness practice) and have been adopted across various settings for a wide age range, and also generated a large volume of research examining their efficacy and effects.

With rising recognition of the importance of holistic development and the need to equip children with future-ready skills, schools worldwide are incorporating MBPs to support the development of competencies such as socio-emotional skills, emotional/behavioural self-regulation, cognitive abilities, and academic achievement in students. Though the adoption in Singapore schools has been slower and less widespread compared to countries such as in the UK, USA, and Australia, there is rising interest from stakeholders in understanding how mindfulness can be applied to help with the holistic development of and to improve outcomes in children (see Khng, 2018).

BACKGROUND

The concept of mindfulness and mindfulness-based intervention (MBI) were introduced into clinical therapy in the late 1970s under the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program (Kabat-Zinn, 1982). Since, interest in the benefits of MBPs (i.e., using predominantly sensorial exercises to cultivate moment-by-moment, nonjudgmental attention and awareness to cultivate mindful attention) has been growing steadily. Most MBPs are based

FOCUS OF STUDY

With an overarching goal of enhancing child development and outcomes, the study seeks to understand (a) what the current global research says about how mindfulness in schools can contribute to child development, and its implications for education research, policy and practice, and (b) interest in and knowledge of mindfulness and MBPs in school leaders and teachers, including their resource needs and preferences.

KEY FINDINGS

Mindfulness-based practices, both through direct child MBIs and indirectly through MBIs for teachers and school leaders, have a promising place in schools to enhance child outcomes. There is a growing sector of schools in Singapore with clear interest in implementing MBPs. However, some issues need careful consideration for school implementation (e.g., establishing clear definitions of mindfulness, standards for ascertaining programme quality and training of facilitators, and monitoring and crisis management plans to minimize possible harm). Schools need guidance and resources. A resource website is a suitable platform for this purpose.

SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS

Implications for practice

A preliminary resource website (<https://libguides.nie.edu.sg/mindfulnesseducation>) has been set up for schools/stakeholders interested in accessing information, research, and resources on implementing mindfulness in schools. It will be updated as information becomes available, including the rich and detailed findings from the current study, post-publication.

Implications for policy and research

There are definite merits to incorporating MBPs in schools but a sound framework and guidelines based on a strong policy-research-practice nexus is indicated.

Proposed follow-up activities

Developing a conceptual and implementation framework and locally informed shared guidelines and

resources may help school efforts. Further research investigating moderators and mechanisms, especially for indirect child effects through teachers and the larger school environment are needed.

PARTICIPANTS

Data from 144 preschool to pre-university level education personnel from at least 74 schools/educational/student care organizations in Singapore were included (out of 196 attempted surveys). An email was sent to all accessible K-12 schools in Singapore inviting education personnel (e.g., school leaders, teachers, counsellors and allied educators) to participate in the anonymous online survey.

RESEARCH DESIGN

1. Two systematic reviews of literature published in peer-reviewed journals were conducted: (a) on direct school-based MBIs for children, and (b) on indirect child interventions – MBIs for teachers and school leaders.
2. A survey study on the perceptions, practices and needs on school-based MBIs of educational personnel in Singapore schools.

REFERENCES

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About the authors

KHNG Kiat Hui, KEE Ying Hwa and TAN Ser Hong are with the National Institute of Education, Singapore.

LI Chunxiao is with the South China Normal University, China.

Contact Khng Kiat Hui at kiathui.khng@nie.edu.sg for more information about the project.

This brief was based on OER 08/19 KKH: Mindfulness and Child Development—An Integrative Review and Implications for Education.

How to cite this publication

Khng, K. H., Li, C., Kee, Y. H., & Tan, S. H. (2022). *Mindfulness in Schools: Global Research on Child Outcomes and Local Perceptions, Practices, and Needs* (NIE Research Brief Series No. 22-026). Singapore: National Institute of Education.

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