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Diploma Thesis

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Possible Uses of Mindfulness Techniques in ELT

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my original authorial work, which I have written on my own. All sources, references, and literature used or excerpted during the elaboration of this work are properly cited and listed in completed reference to the due source.

Prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že tato práce je mé autorské dílo a je vypracována mnou pod vedením vedoucího této práce. Všechna literatura a další zdroje použité v textu jsou náležitě citovány a jejich kompletní seznam je uveden na konci práce.

Bc. Eliška Lajdová

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Abstract

The diploma thesis deals with the topic of mindfulness in the context of English language teaching. The theoretical part provides an introduction to mindfulness and explains its principles as well as its origins. Further it examines the link between mindfulness and education, specifically focusing on ELT. The empirical part provides an overview of findings from action research and offers specific possible ways of implementing mindfulness into ELT classroom. Apart from that the advantages and disadvantages of using mindfulness in ELT are discussed, followed by a collective analysis of participants' feedback.

Keywords

mindfulness, ELT, mental hygiene, mental health, mental illness, relaxation, prevention, awareness, stress, lower-secondary school

Anotace

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá tématem techniky mindfulness v kontextu výuky anglického jazyka. Teoretická část poskytuje základní vhled do tématu mindfulness a vysvětluje principy této techniky společně s jejím původem. Dále pak zkoumá spojitost techniky mindfulness a vzdělávání, a to především výuky anglického jazyka. Praktická část pak poskytuje přehled závěrů získaných na základě akčního výzkumu a nabízí konkrétní možné způsoby začlenění techniky mindfulness do výuky anglického jazyka. Kromě toho se zabývá výhodami a nevýhodami využívání mindfulness ve výuce anglického jazyka a také poskytuje kolektivní analýzu zpětné vazby respondentů.

Klíčová slova

mindfulness, výuka anglického jazyka, duševní hygiena, duševní zdraví, duševní nemoci, relaxace, prevence, všímavost, stres, druhý stupeň základních škol

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INTRODUCTION

Numbers of individuals suffering from mental health issues have been consistently growing over the last years. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown caused by this world-wide epidemic, many children and adolescents started experiencing more and more problems such as anxiety or depression. A meta-analysis of 29 studies from year 2021 shows that after COVID-19 the percentage of youth struggling with symptoms of anxiety or depression has become significantly higher. (Benton, Boyd, & Njoroge, 2021)

The world-wide pandemic brought many new situations to which individuals were forced to adapt, but it is only one of many other aspects, which contributed to worsening of mental health of the young generation. Digital age provides many new opportunities and much easily accessible information, but it has its downsides as well. Wurman, for instance, coined a term “information anxiety” describing the stress caused by an overload of information and the inability to fully process them. (Wurman, 2001) The general condition of mental health can further be demonstrated by numerous studies and publications discussing mental illnesses such as depression or anxiety in reaction to worsening of mental health. (Goodwin, Weinberger, Kim, Wu, & Galea, 2020)

This thesis focuses on the technique called mindfulness, generally known as a helpful tool to manage stress and decrease levels of anxiety or depression. As the thesis further discusses, mindfulness has been proven to improve the general quality of one’s mental health and balance and to increase children’s performance at school. The thesis creates a link between mindfulness and education in order to demonstrate that it is possible to include relaxation techniques into school lessons as a teaching aid as well as a demonstration of methods that can be used when dealing with difficult situations or emotions to regulate intense emotions and calm down.

More and more people seek professional help when feeling overwhelmed by different stimuli or not knowing how to handle intense emotions or situations. We believe that it is crucial to raise the awareness about mental health and mental hygiene as a form of prevention. If methods of self-soothing or self-regulation would

be taught from an early age, ideally in educational institutions, individuals would have at least a certain basic knowledge about the possibility of using various techniques to ease difficult emotions, which could cause a major step forward in preventing occurrence of more serious mental illnesses. Further, the thesis is focused on possible implementation of mindfulness techniques into EFL classroom, which, besides mental health awareness, can have a positive impact on the process of learning a foreign language as well as some other aspects important to education.

This diploma thesis is divided into two parts. The theoretical part provides general introduction of mindfulness, its benefits, origins, and other detailed aspects. Further, it discusses the use of mindfulness in education, particularly in EFL classrooms, and some of the proven benefits of implementing mindfulness in foreign language education. The practical part puts mindfulness into practice and presents findings from English lessons conducted at a lower secondary school, in which specific mindfulness exercises were applied on a group of participants. The research examines some specific ways, in which mindfulness can be used in an EFL classroom and further presents findings based on participants' feedback and an interview with their EFL teacher.

THEORETICAL PART

1. MENTAL HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE

Before opening the main topic of this diploma thesis – mindfulness – it is important to mention more general subjects such as mental health and mental hygiene, which are closely linked to mindfulness. Discussing these topics is beneficial, and perhaps even necessary, when trying to understand the concept of mindfulness.

1.1 Mental Health

It is easy to understand what physical health is – one would probably associate it with a healthy body, absence of any illnesses or diseases, well-functioning organs, and a condition, which does not limit an individual in any area of life. But defining mental health can be slightly more difficult. Similarly, to the physical aspect, a simplified answer might be “a healthy mind with no mental illnesses”. However, the term includes many more aspects. The definition of health in general according to the World Health Organisation (WHO) points out that it is not only about the absence of any diseases (World Health Organization, 2004), and that is valid also in the case of mental health. Mental health is defined by WHO as “a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and can make a contribution to his or her community” (World Health Organization, 2004). In other words, mental health refers to the overall psychological and emotional well-being of an individual consisting of many factors such as thoughts, emotions, behavioural patterns, and social interactions. *A Handbook for the Study of Mental Health* further states: “Mental health is not merely the absence of disease or disorder; it involves self-esteem, mastery, and the ability to maintain meaningful relationships with others.” (Schei & Brown, 2010)

Mental health can be easily affected by various factors such as genetics, environment, or personal lifestyle, and when these factors represent a negative influence, mental health disorders can arise – for example, depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, or bipolar disorder (Bessel van der Kolk, 2015). Such disorders may have a significant impact on the quality of one’s life and the overall ability to

function on daily basis. Therefore, it is essential to pay attention to maintaining good mental health and this can be done through applying various forms of mental hygiene.

1.2 Mental Hygiene and Its Methods

Mental health is closely connected to mental hygiene, which can be reckoned as a complex tool helping to maintain good mental health. Mental hygiene is defined as “the study of sustaining mental health and avoiding the onset of insanity, neurosis, and other mental conditions” (Madox, 2021). The field of possibilities that are being offered in order to improve one’s mental well-being is fairly broad. Minor possible ways of applying principles of mental hygiene can therefore include for example lifestyle changes, while more significant methods can involve therapeutic tools such as meditation or actual therapy under the supervision of a psychologist or a psychotherapist (speaking of therapy as a form of prevention). Mental hygiene in general is about maintaining good mental health by means of developing healthy coping strategies, pursuing professional therapeutical help when needed, and sustaining a balanced lifestyle by means of healthy diet, exercise, or sufficient sleep.

To understand the importance of mental hygiene, it must be emphasized that it belongs to the primary prevention of mental illnesses, meaning that it treats potential issues before they even arise. Apart from that Shatkin (Shatkin, 2015) recognizes two more levels of prevention, but these are applied at the very moment when an illness occurs in its early or more advanced stage. Reasonably, the ideal treatment is provided by the primary prevention, but, sadly, in most cases it is the tertiary prevention (when the illness reaches an advanced stage) that is applied. Instead of taking steps to prevent the occurrence of mental health problems, many people ask for or get help when the problems are already in a developed stage (Shatkin, 2015). This fact makes the further process of treatment more difficult and long-term. Mental hygiene therefore deserves more attention because it represents the prevention of the development of potential mental illnesses.

This diploma thesis introduces mindfulness as one of the methods of mental hygiene, and as a significant tool in the prevention of the arise of mental illnesses.

Mindfulness includes practices that have been proven to be effective in improving the overall mental health of an individual (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). By raising awareness of this method, a major contribution to the primary prevention of mental problems can be made. In the following chapters, mindfulness is presented in more detail.

2. MINDFULNESS

Jon Kabat-Zinn, Ph.D., is a mindfulness teacher, scientist, and author of numerous publications on the topic of mindfulness. He also founded the MBSR (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction) program, a method that is applied by various health centers and hospitals. Kabat-Zinn describes mindfulness as a state of mind when one is fully aware of the present moment through paying attention to their feelings, thoughts, sensations in body and surroundings. As it is further discussed in more detail, the key elements of mindfulness are attitudes that are accepting and open-minded, while absent of any expectations, prejudices, or reactive behaviours (Kabat-Zinn J. , 1994).

Thich Nhat Hanh is a former Vietnamese monk, spiritual leader and activist and author of many publications on the topic of mindfulness. He is viewed as one of the most significant teachers of mindfulness. Later in his life, he left his home country, Vietnam, and moved to the United States. He is the founder of the Plum Village Community of Engaged Buddhism – one of the biggest centres of mindfulness practice. It is a welcoming place, where individuals can attend retreats during which they are introduced to practices such as various kinds of meditation, total relaxation, or mindful breathing. In one of his books on mindfulness *Buddha's Sutra of Mindfulness* he says: “When walking, the practitioner must be conscious that he is walking. When sitting, the practitioner must be conscious that he is sitting... No matter what position one's body is in, the practitioner must be conscious of that position. Practicing thus, the practitioner lives in direct and constant mindfulness of the body.” (Hanh, 1976 p. 7) This excerpt provides an accurate description of the very essence of mindfulness – being aware of one's body, sensing all kinds of perceptions through smell, touch, vision, or hearing, and paying attention to the present moment. In other words, mindfulness “involves simply paying attention to whatever is happening” (Kabat-Zinn, 2013 p. 72). Based on these definitions, another

term that could be used for mindfulness is awareness. Mindfulness and awareness are therefore used in this diploma thesis interchangeably, with the same meaning.

The modern world offers so many distractions that it is becoming more and more difficult to be present in each moment. Not only that – the human mind represents an obstacle on its own – the constant thinking and the number of thoughts and ideas arising with every second can be overwhelming (Tolle, 1999). When commuting to work, for example, one's head is often full of thoughts or worries, which occupy the mind and impede the present state of mind. Another illustration could be a common scenario in which one is trying to fall asleep but is unable to because many intrusive and anxious ideas emerge in their mind and prevent them from sleeping. As mentioned above, mindfulness teaches how to be in the present moment and with patience and training overcome these obstacles. The reward is the ability to control one's mind better and deal with such situations in a more efficient way.

It is also worth mentioning that the ability to be mindful, or in the present moment, is something everyone is capable of. Even without realizing it, one is often so absorbed in a certain activity, without thinking about anything else. This state of mind was described by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, a Hungarian-American psychologist, as the famous psychological concept "flow". Csikszentmihalyi describes it as "...the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seem to matter..." (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 4). This state is based on awareness and all humans are born with the capacity to experience it. With all the distractions and an overload of information around, though, it is difficult to control one's thoughts and go back to this state of mind. (Kabat-Zinn, 2013) Therefore training mindfulness is not about learning a new skill from scratch, but more about recalling what it is like to be mindful.

2.1 Attention, Intention, Attitude

Professor Oren Ergas devoted his academic efforts to the subject of mindfulness in education. His research was focused on the connection between mind and body in education, which demonstrates a title of one of his publications – a book called *Reconstructing Education through Mindful Attention* (Ergas, 2017). This thesis, in

different places, draws from several Ergas' opinions since they provide a very clear, yet practical and innovative perception of mindfulness.

Ergas simplifies the key aspects of mindfulness into three core components: attention, intention, and attitude. The first one, **attention**, means bringing one's awareness to a specific sensation in the body or to any other specific stimulus. Ergas describes the natural tendency of an untrained mind to lose the focus after a while and start wandering in the past or the future. Needless to say, this process can cause feelings of irritation or frustration caused by an unmet expectation of not performing the exercise efficiently. Many practitioners are discouraged by that and, eventually, abandon the intention of mindfulness practice completely. This is the critical point where it is necessary to have the full theoretical understanding of mindfulness prior to the practice itself, because the second core component is in fact **attitude**. Mindfulness requires attitude that is accepting, non-judging and kind. (A description of such an attitude is further developed in the following section.) The third and last component according to Ergas is **intention**, which helps practitioners to persist in the mindfulness practice through the awareness of their intention, and thus returning the attention to a chosen sensation by means of the right attitude. All three core elements therefore co-exist alongside one another and none of them can be neglected (Ergas, 2017).

2.2 Attitudinal Pillars of Mindfulness

To further develop Ergas' theory about attention, attitude and intention, this section describes the attitudinal pillars of mindfulness as described by Kabat-Zinn. This supports the idea previously mentioned that the actual practice of mindfulness is closely connected to the attitude with which mindfulness is being cultivated. In fact, those two aspects are inseparable.

It is highly important not to try to control or change anything while practicing mindfulness. The attitude required for being in the present moment can be described as questioning, but open-minded. It is natural to have doubts about a certain technique or approach – Kabat-Zinn even encourages such a state of mind. But being

critical must be aligned with being honestly open to trying something new and unknown without presupposing it is condemned to be dysfunctional.

Kabat-Zinn, therefore, recognizes seven key attitudinal pillars, which are helpful when setting the right attitude and state of mind prior to applying principles of mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2013 p. 33-40).

2.2.1 Non-Judging

Kabat-Zinn points out the tendency of the human mind to instantly categorize everything and everyone. Without realizing it, judgment is present in human thinking every day. Julia Cameron wrote a creative book called *The Artist's Way* and although the book is of a different focus, there is one thought worth mentioning in the context of mindfulness. Cameron mentions that everyone has a so-called "inner critic" inside them, a voice that always judges or criticizes any idea, thought, or action. She further explains that this inner voice represents an obstacle on one's way to reaching their goals and contributes to a negative state of mind (Cameron, 1992). Kabat-Zinn highlights the importance of learning how to observe the tendencies of one's mind to judge (or the inner critic) and do nothing more. One should only observe it, notice it, and recognize it.

2.2.2 Patience

To cultivate mindfulness, it is critical to adopt the ability to be patient. In general, mindfulness is about acceptance and acknowledging that things are exactly the way they are and by nurturing the quality of patience one can obtain such a way of thinking. Patience helps to understand that mind has its own pace and although one can learn to work with it and control it in a better way, it is not possible to change it entirely or all at once.

2.2.3 Beginner's Mind

Experiencing something for the very first time has its own special thrill, perhaps it can be even described as a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Such an experience is usually less influenced by any preconceptions because it is viewed from an unbiased

point of view. The good news is that such a viewpoint does not necessarily have to emerge only in the real “first” experiences but can be cultivated and consequently applied to any situation. The important part of this practice is leaving behind any encounters from the past and adopting the ability to see something with brand-new eyes. This kind of attitude helps the mind to open itself to new experiences or a different view of life, which can be beneficial and enriching.

2.2.4 Trust

This pillar teaches people to trust their gut or their intuition. Inner feelings are sometimes neglected, often because society places demand on people and therefore awakens an impression that one must do or feel something in a way that is socially acceptable. Mindfulness, on the other hand, trains humans to honor their feelings and to act in accordance with them, no matter what other people might or might not think.

2.2.5 Non-Striving

Focusing too much on achieving goals or getting to a certain destination in life can, in fact, be contra-productive because such a way of thinking often creates tension or a sense of frustration, which hinders potential progress. Mindfulness, on the contrary, is based on letting go of any expectations or goals and simply accepting the process in its wholeness. This leads to a relaxed state of mind without excessive worrying and only in that moment, actual changes start happening naturally.

2.2.6 Acceptance

Acceptance is closely connected to healing. Kabat-Zinn describes healing with these words: “Awareness requires only that we... see things as they are” (Kabat-Zinn, 2013 p. 32). Perception of acceptance can be a bit deceitful since this quality might be viewed negatively – like a passive approach or inactive behavior without any tendency to improve things. For that reason, it is important to accentuate the real essence of acceptance – only when accepting things as they are, actual changes can effortlessly happen, similarly to the previous pillar of mindfulness, because the

burden of expectations and goals is taken away and one can peacefully continue the journey towards improvement.

2.2.7 Letting Go

The art of letting go can be compared to the activity everyone is capable of – sleeping. In order to fall asleep, one must let go of any tasks, duties, or intrusive thoughts and leave them until the next morning. The same is necessary when cultivating mindfulness. It is a skill people naturally have but it needs to be applied in the awake state of mind.

It means freeing the mind of any emotions, both the pleasant and the distressing. It is human nature to try to prolong the emotions we enjoy and to get rid of the ones that are uncomfortable. But these tendencies impede awareness and sensing the present moment. By acknowledging thoughts or emotions that arise, it is then a matter of a decision not to pay attention to them in each moment and simply be.

2.3 Mindfulness in Practice

It was already mentioned that mindfulness in its simplest form is the ability to pay attention to the present moment and being able to handle any disturbing elements in a way that brings the awareness back to observing and feeling the presence. There are multiple practical ways to apply mindfulness. Some of them can be classified as specific exercises, but mindfulness can be used at any time and any place after fully understanding its essence. The fact that mindfulness can be applied in any situation, making such situation a form of meditation on its own, is an important point (Kabat-Zinn, 2013).

The practice of mindfulness consists of three core components: attention, attitude, and intention as it was previously mentioned. If mindfulness is perceived based on this principle, then in case one of the components is missing from the practice, it cannot be perceived as a complex and full mindfulness practice. Nevertheless, mindfulness has been used in many institutions and in many programmes in form of diverse exercises which do belong to the concept of mindfulness, but sometimes may be presented to the practitioners without the complex background of all its

components (Ergas, 2019). This is not necessarily wrong, and, in fact, it can be helpful when trying to mediate the first contact with mindfulness to beginning practitioners. Such exercises are listed below including four major ones which stand at the core of the MBSR (Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction) programme: Meditation, body scan, breathing practices and yoga. MBSR programme (mentioned previously) is a programme created by Jon Kabat-Zinn, and it is an 8-week training for patients suffering from mental issues or chronic pain based on the scientifically proven positive impact of mindfulness practice on one's mental health, as well as physical health. MBSR programme therefore puts aside the spiritual dimension of mindfulness because Kabat-Zinn believed it could discourage some of the practitioners. This programme is therefore solely based on the secularized approach to mindfulness, so that people of all ages and background can benefit from it (Ergas, 2019).

2.3.1 Meditation

There are many myths and misconceptions about meditations, but simply said, meditation can be described as the “cultivation of mindfulness or awareness” (Gunaratana, 2011, p. 21). This definition indicates that mindfulness is closely connected to meditation or, to be more precise, meditation can represent a specific way or exercise to practice mindfulness. It can be said that meditation and mindfulness are inseparable. The aim of meditation is to bring the practitioner to the present moment and to heighten the perception of the surrounding reality as it is. Meditation can be characterized as a purifying process for the mind – through meditating one can learn to cleanse their mind of any negative aspects and thus prepare it for the cultivation of good things. It can be illustrated to a room full of chaos that needs to be cleaned and organized – first, it is necessary to empty it and only then it is prepared to be slowly filled with things that the owner is willing to keep (Gunaratana, 2011).

2.3.2 Body Scan

Body scan is an exercise widely used when practicing mindfulness. It is also another essential part of the MBSR program. The core of body scan exercise is bringing the

awareness to individual parts of a human body, from the top to the bottom or the other way around. It is usually practiced while lying down, but can be performed also when sitting or standing, although the lying position is the most efficient one. The practice is usually performed to the accompaniment of a voiceover. The voiceover guides the practitioner to bring their awareness to the sensations in specific parts of body – head, forehead, ears, neck, and the remaining parts. The practitioner is encouraged to release any tension and dive into a deep relaxing state of mind and body while focusing only on the exercise and trying to let go of any intrusive thoughts that may appear. Again, it is only about noticing the thoughts and the decision not to pay attention to them in a given moment, which is the most essential part of mindfulness. When fully understanding how to perform body scan correctly, the practitioner can certainly apply this exercise on their own without any guidance (Kabat-Zinn, 2013).

2.3.3 Breathing Exercises

Breath is an essential part of human life. The rhythm of breathing may change depending on the situation the human body is in, but it never stops. For example, in stressful situations, breath tends to be more shallow and rapid, which can intensify one's stress response. This cycle can be broken by becoming aware of the breath and intentionally regulating it – that is why breathing exercises are often used as a tool in therapy. Conscious focus on breathing can significantly improve one's physical and mental well-being, but it is advised to perform it regularly in order to get the best results. Breathing is therefore another key element in the MBSR program (Kabat-Zinn, 2013).

Breathing and mindfulness are closely interconnected. It was already mentioned that being mindful means focusing on the present moment and being aware of what is happening within one's body. Sometimes it can be very difficult to bring attention to the present moment due to many distractions, so it can be helpful to use some constant element as an aid to raise awareness of the present moment. Focusing on breathing can be beneficial since it anchors the mind. The practitioner can return to their breath at any place and time and calm the mind (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). In general,

it can be difficult to be mindful because the present moment is not stable but is changing permanently. Hence, breath represents a stable impulse that can help the practitioner to hold onto the present. Compared to the constantly changing environment, it is significantly easier to focus on breathing.

Paying attention to the rhythm of breath is already an exercise on its own. Additionally, there are multiple specific ways to practice mindful breathing. These exercises also use the human ability to control breath to a certain extent. An example of such an exercise can be a 4-3-4 breathing pattern meaning the practitioner breathes in for four seconds, holds the breath for another three seconds, and breathes out for four seconds (Vranich, 2016). This can be performed for a few minutes, ideally five, but can be prolonged for as much as needed. Another popular breathing pattern is 4-7-8 following the same principle, but with different lengths of the individual phases (Weil, 1995). Sometimes, breathing exercises can be combined with visualization, which can be helpful for practitioners of younger age, especially children. An example of such an exercise is laying down, closing eyes, and focusing on breath while visualizing having a balloon in a stomach. While inhaling, the practitioner visualizes the balloon being filled up with air and then, while exhaling, becoming smaller as the balloon deflates (Brown & Gerbarg, 2012).

2.3.4 Yoga

Yoga, namely hatha yoga, represents another key element of the MBSR program. Kabat-Zinn highlights the fact that practicing yoga has many physical, mental, and emotional benefits. Originating in ancient India, yoga has become wildly popular over the last few years as a form of exercise and relaxation in the western world. The term yoga originated in a Sanskrit expression meaning “yoke” and its meaning can be helpful when trying to understand the core of its practice: Yoga is about unifying (or yoking) together the body and the mind, meaning that these two aspects are inseparable. Paying attention to the breath, moving the body and diving into a state of relaxation are the core principles of yoga. The combination of these aspects leads to cultivating a deep sense of relaxation and calmness while increasing physical strength and flexibility (Kabat-Zinn, 2013).

Hatha yoga consists of a series of gentle movements and body positions while the focus is being put on being fully aware of the sensations happening within the body while performing given postures or asanas. The practitioner should perform this exercise with the key elements of mindfulness in mind meaning being patient, letting go of any expectations, being sceptical, yet open-minded and following the rest of mindfulness principles which were mentioned previously (Kabat-Zinn, 2013).

2.4 Origins of Mindfulness

To understand the concept of mindfulness accurately, it is necessary to describe its historical background and evolution. Mindfulness has its roots in the Buddhist tradition in ancient India. The concept of awareness was perceived as a way to reach spiritual awakening (Kabat-Zinn J. , 1994). Mindfulness was described with a different term back then – “sati”, meaning memory or recollection (Hanh, 1976). In the context of the Buddhist religion, it was connected to the ability to recall the teachings of Buddha on daily basis. Mindfulness was broadly applied in Buddhist practices, such as mindful meditation, which is a solid part of the religion.

During the 20th century, mindfulness began to be secularized and presented as a beneficial technique that can be used with no regard to the cultural or religious background of an individual, being recognized as a helpful tool for enhancing the overall well-being of an individual (Kabat-Zinn J. , 1994). Among the famous names promoting mindfulness not only in religious context, but also in a secularized form can be mentioned Thich Nhat Hanh and Jon Kabat-Zinn, both previously mentioned.

One of possible obstacles on the way to mindfulness can be the misconception that it cannot be practiced without its religious practices. While there are some mindfulness teachers, who defend such a view, mindfulness is predominantly (especially nowadays) presented as a technique that can be applied by anyone no matter what their beliefs are. Although it is impossible to neglect the fact that mindfulness does have its origins in Buddhist tradition, it can be easily adapted in other areas such as healthcare, education, or business areas (Baer, 2003).

Over the last decades, the concept of mindfulness has been receiving more and more attention from the public and there are even studies examining the growth of the

mindfulness phenomenon such as the study about mindfulness-based interventions *Mindfulness-Based Interventions: An Emerging Phenomenon* (Cullen, 2011).

Mindfulness has also been included in other specific areas including education. The reasons for implementing mindful practices into educational institutions are numerous – starting from efforts to prevent teachers’ stress levels and burnout syndrome, improve the cognitive functions in learners, transform teaching and learning procedures into something more transformative up to promoting a sense of spirituality. The following chapters examines the connection between mindfulness and education in more detail.

3. MINDFULNESS AND EDUCATION

Oren Ergas has been mentioned previously, as a researcher who studied mindfulness and the link between the human mind and education. His book, *Reconstructing Education through Mindful Attention*, is of a great importance when understanding why mindfulness is worth implementing in education (Ergas, 2017).

The process of education – whether in institutions such as schools, colleges, universities, or in the general conception of conveying norms – relates to a lot of problematic issues, one of them being the fact that real-life problems of students (their personal experiences) are being dismissed. Ergas goes further than that and recognizes the root of all these problems: that the mind is dismissed from education. He supports this statement by Elliot Eisner’s idea that “education itself is a mind-making process” (Eisner, 2005, p. 151). Ergas also states that the most powerful way to develop one’s mind is to use the mind. To further explain Ergas’ point of view, he expresses that from birth, children are being taught in a way that creates an automated habit. If a child sees a ball and their parents teach them that the thing is called “a ball” by repeating the word many times, the child follows this idea and eventually their brain-mind creates an automated habit of associating a bouncing thing with the word “ball”. In the later educational process in institutions, the principle is the same, only individuals are taught that the things they are presented in educational institutions are education itself (Ergas, 2017).

The ideal student in terms of institutionalized education is supposed to pay attention and absorb information that is being transmitted by the authorities. When thoughts drift away or mind wanders, it is considered as “not paying” attention, and therefore not being perceptive to the education. Getting back to Eisner’s idea that in the centre of education is the mind, Ergas debates that such common form of education has in fact very little to do with the mind itself, rather “the embodied life of this very mind is expelled from the game” and the mind is forced to “attend to the world out there – the teacher’s words, the Power Point presentations, the textbooks, the class discussions, the math, the history” (Ergas, 2017, p. viii). Ergas distinguishes the main curriculum (transmitted knowledge itself, “the outer curriculum”) but further describes the mind as the other half of the curriculum (“the inner curriculum”), meaning that in education both the inner world and outer world should have their own respective roles. The key point is that in the current form of education (except for alternative educational institutions) the aspect of mind is often neglected and not taken into consideration. Educational institutions in general offer the second-person experience, while the first-person (and very likely the most important and forming) is put aside.

Ergas presents “the inner curriculum” as a natural state of mind with all its “noise” – perceptions or thoughts, even though they have nothing common with the presented curriculum (educational). Not only that, but he also suggests that “the inner curriculum” has perhaps a more powerful impact on “who we are, who we will come to be, how we will behave with others, and the meaning we find in our lives (or not)” (Ergas, 2017, p. ix).

The process of education is constantly and naturally happening from within and without and the key problem is that education is being generally understood as something that the society does to a human mind (Ergas, 2017). This represents a very simple, yet transformative perception of what education is. Comparing a situation in which an individual is browsing the Internet and stumbles upon an article written in English, not understanding a few words, looking them up and learning their meaning, and a situation of someone sitting in a classroom and attending an English course, it is very likely that the second situation would be in fact addressed

as the “real education”. Nonetheless, it is also likely that the learning experience in the first situation would be much more influential for the individual, because the learning process in this case stems from a personal experience, rather than listening to teacher’s lesson.

3.1 The Role of Attention in Education

Ergas raises the question what the fundamental enabling individuals to experience the reality is? What is the most essential element without which the experience would be gone? There are many possible answers based on individual perceptions, but Ergas’ theory is based on William James’ words “what we attend to is reality” (James, 2007, p. 322). Ergas expands the subject of attention into more details, but the fundamental statement of his is that attention is the very essence of mind as well as of education.

Returning to what has been already written about mindfulness, its essence is “to be present in all our waking moments” (Kabat-Zinn, 2013, p. 64). To be present means to be aware or to pay attention to something. It is clear that the faculty of attention is closely connected to mindfulness, and what is more, mindfulness cannot be performed without the faculty of attention, whether consciously or subconsciously. Attention always plays a crucial role in mindfulness.

To explain it thoroughly: This thesis agrees with the statement that the faculty of attention is the core of education. To understand one’s mind and to learn what is attention and how one can control it, is the only way to be educated in a complex, balanced way, where both “the inner curriculum” (mind) plays as important role as “the outer curriculum” (information). This is crucial not only for students but for teachers as well. Only by means of mindfulness which is based on acceptance, kindness, non-judgment and other virtues, can education become the same – accepting, kind and non-judgemental. Only by means of the principles mentioned above can learners be educated and learn new information in a more efficient way. This can be supported by a citation from the book *Happy Teachers Change the World*: “Why not teach... students the how of paying attention and of deep listening rather than simply exhorting them to pay attention, as so often happens in the

classroom when the teachers themselves are stressed beyond their limits?” (Hanh, et al., 2017 p. 1) A similar question is raised in *Everybody Present – Mindfulness in Education*: “We tell our students that they should pay attention..., but can we show them how to do it?” (Rotne & Rotne, 2013, p. 9) And a not much different note can be found in the description of Multiple Intelligences method in the publication *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*: “The more awareness students have of their own intelligences and how they work, the more they will know how to use that intelligence to access the necessary information and knowledge from a lesson.” (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, p. 237)

Another issue that could be improved by implementing mindfulness in education is that the knowledge transmitted in educational institutions is often presented as something of a greater importance than the problems learners have to face in their personal lives (Ergas, 2017). This is yet another demonstration of the imbalance between “the inner curriculum” and “outer curriculum”. “The inner curriculum” must be addressed as well, and it does not make it a less vital part of education. Perhaps it develops other aspects, which are not measurable in a way that knowledge is but are crucial for the complex development of an individual’s personality. A mindful approach to education means creating a balance between the learners’ mind and the outer aspects. Not speaking about the widely known fact that when children or young learners feel interest, empathy and understanding from teachers regarding them and their problems, they are naturally much more willing to absorb new information.

An interesting addition to the subject of attention is the fact that due to the fast-paced modern life a new phenomenon has been recognized – attention deficit trait (ADT). This is a reaction to an overload of stimuli or input. As an effect, individuals may struggle with losing perspective and having an all-or-nothing thinking, efficiently prioritizing tasks, time management or feeling panic (Hassed, 2016). This only supports the statement that being in control of one’s attention does not always come naturally and needs to be addressed, especially in education, where exposure of new knowledge with the aim to remember is based on the faculty of attention.

This can be done through attention regulation, which is a useful concept summarizing the core principles of learning to control the attention. It consists of

three key parts: recognizing where the attention lies, prioritizing on what the attention should be focused, and, finally, keeping the attention there (Hassed, 2016).

As it was already mentioned, mindfulness, or awareness in the present moment, is a skill all people are born with, but also a skill that needs to be trained in order to work properly and efficiently, as any other skill. There is a direct link between mindfulness and attention training, or regulation, and it is especially important in educational sphere, as attention plays a key role in all knowledge absorption. The problem with general conception of education is that learners are required to pay attention, but rarely they are explained how attention works and how it can be controlled. Introducing mindfulness techniques within education can therefore represent a functional and natural way to help with attention training, which can positively impact the educational process.

3.2 Principles of Mindfulness in Existing Methods and Approaches to Foreign Language Teaching and Learning

There are several existing methods and approaches to a foreign language teaching which have been developed over the course of time in the history, some more traditional and some which might be considered alternative. A common feature of some of these methods (especially the alternative ones such as multiple intelligences theory by Howard Gardner, suggestopedia by Georgi Lozanov and others, which will be mentioned in this chapter) are those, which are very similar to the principles of mindfulness. This part aims to present these methods and highlight some of their practices to show that principles of mindfulness can be found in those.

3.2.1 Suggestopedia

Suggestopedia is a method developed by Dr. Georgi Lozanov, a medical doctor, and a psychotherapist from Bulgaria. Lozanov believed that unconscious mechanisms have a direct and positive impact on the memory. Apart from being a doctor and psychotherapist, he was also a yogi and was interested in studying the yogis' mind and memory capacities. He observed that yogis are able to achieve a state of memory called hypermnesia or "super-memory", which is an unusually enhanced state of

memory or, in other words, the ability to remember an abnormal amount of knowledge in great details. Lozanov recognized that in case of yogis, hypermnnesia is achieved through a continuous practice of yogic exercises, and therefore created an educational system based on similar principles. He came up with an idea to incorporate yoga exercises or breathing techniques within the classroom to enhance the learning process and possibly induce such “super-memory” with his students. Lozanov believed that a state of relaxation generates a willingness to perceive information. In contrast to suggestion, Lozanov also came up with desuggestion – a process of releasing any mental blocks or negative feelings from the mind. Only in such a “desuggested” state of mind are students able to achieve the full potential of memory (Bancroft, 1999).

3.2.2 Multiple Intelligences

Multiple Intelligences (MI) is a methodology developed by Howard Gardner, based on the proposal that education should take into consideration the individualities of learners and accommodate the process of learning to these. The key idea of Gardner’s philosophy is that every human being has several intelligences, apart from the traditional intelligence quotient (IQ) measuring solely logic and language. Gardner therefore created “Multiple Intelligences Model”, which include eight intelligences that everyone possesses in different proportions: Linguistic, logical (mathematical), spatial, musical, bodily (kinesthetic), interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalist. (Later, he added another one, existentialist.) MI is based on combination of these intelligences, or, in other words, on the belief that a learner uses for example not only the linguistic intelligence when learning a language, but naturally also other ones (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

What is important, though, is the connection between the language itself and life, which is believed to lie in the sensory perception. MI theory is therefore also based on the belief that a proper language learning must be accompanied by including multiple senses. Based on this view, MI can be indeed considered to be a holistic approach to learning. To support this statement, an example of a classroom activity based on multisensory perception can be demonstrated. This activity is divided into

four stages, according to the MI methodology, but what is more important is the role of human senses in it. The theme of the activity is the description of objects. In the first stage, learners feel objects using their senses – feeling their structure, their taste, their appearance, or smell. Then, learners are divided into teams and are given an object and a handout. Their task is to describe the object using their sight, smell, hearing and touch. The exercise then proceeds with the two final phases, in which the language is presented in addition to the multisensory activity and, lastly, the whole activity is reflected and applied to the daily life (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

3.2.3 Total Physical Response

Total Physical Response (TPR) was developed by James Asher, a professor of psychology. This method uses physical activity during language learning because Asher believed that the addition of the motor activity (in addition to verbal activity) enhances the learning process and the memory. Asher established three hypotheses about learning, one of them referring to the importance of stress-free learning environment: “Stress ... intervenes between the act of learning and what is to be learned, the lower the stress, the greater the learning.” (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, p. 279) Similarly to Lozanov, Asher believed that stress should be eliminated from the learning process so that it is efficient.

One of the typical activities for TPR is a game called “Simon Says” (Nuraeni, 2019). Interestingly, this game is simultaneously mentioned in the book *Mindfulness Skills for Kids & Teens* (Burdick, 2014) as one of the mindful activities. In this game, the role of Simon is assigned either to the conductor of the class or to one of the learners. “Simon” then performs various physical actions such as standing on one leg, clapping hands, or touching the table. While demonstrating the activity, “Simon” also provides verbal instructions for the other participants, sometimes saying “Stand on one leg.”, and other times saying, “Simon says, stand on one leg.” The participants are to perform the physical action only when hearing the opening phrase “Simon says...”. This activity is a wonderful example of combining more mindfulness skills at the same time: mindful observing (observing “Simon’s” actions), mindful listening (paying attention to the opening phrase “Simon says”

indicating that all participants are about to perform the physical action), and mindful movement (the actual performing of the action).

3.2.4 Waldorf and Montessori (Contemplative) Education

Waldorf education is a complex educational approach, concerning not only teaching foreign languages. It was founded by Rudolf Steiner and the first Waldorf school opened in 1919 in Germany. Steiner's key idea was that education should stem from the real-life people are surrounded with and so Waldorf education is closely connected to the nature or includes teaching practical skills. Steiner was concerned with the idea of the spirit within humans. He admired the education of ancient Greeks, who based their understanding of human being on the human body. However, Steiner emphasized that the situation has changed the ancient times: "Once we understand history, we realize that, just as the Greeks had to direct all of their education from the body, we must now direct ours from spirit." Further he provides an explanation for his statement: "..., humanity has come to the point where we must take hold of the spirit as such..." (Steiner, 2004). If we look at it from the perspective of previously mentioned Ergas' understanding of curriculum, we can see that Steiner took into consideration what Ergas calls "the inner curriculum. (Ergas, 2017).

Montessori method is another concept of alternative education founded by Maria Montessori, who was an Italian physician and later an educator. Montessori herself experienced a very traditional approach to education during her childhood, but later conceived an educational method that turned the traditional education upside down. Montessori Method is focused on learners and their individuality, whilst the teacher is there to guide them without any pressure through the whole educational process. Maria Montessori devoted time to studying resources on mental illnesses and psychological phenomena, which helped her to understand learners' minds better and more in-depth. Even in Montessori education, not only "the outer curriculum" but also "the inner curriculum" is respected, because Montessori believed that every child has a spiritual soul, which plays a role just as important as the physical human body and therefore needs to be addressed in the education. Montessori claimed that

children are being born with a natural capacity to concentrate, which comes naturally when they are deeply interested in their activity. Ahead of her time, she was essentially describing the importance of “flow” state and was using methods that naturally help children to reach such a state of mind. An important part of Montessori education is sensory education, or activities based on sensory perception during which the learners naturally acquire new knowledge based on their own experience (Montessori & Gutek, 2004).

3.2.5 Conclusion

It is clearly visible that those methodologies for foreign language teaching, which deflected from the traditional approach to education, were based on a more complex perception of the learners’ roles. In the examples given above, it is possible to find similar core principles to those of mindfulness.

The core idea of suggestopedia is that mind in a relaxed and calm state has a greater capacity to absorb new knowledge and, most importantly, to remember it. As it was previously explained, mindfulness is considered to be a relaxing or grounding technique, often working with one’s breath or movement in order to reach a better and relaxed state of mind. Therefore, it is possible to say that Lozanov’s Suggestopedia reflects the principles of mindfulness and that implementing mindful practices within education can help the students to reach such a relaxed state of mind, which leads to a more efficient learning process and enhanced memory capacity.

Multiple Intelligences works on the presumption that multiple senses should be used in language learning so that the educational process is complex and effective. Mindfulness, or awareness, teaches how to perceive the present moment, often using all of human senses. One of typical mindful exercises is a sensory activity called “54321”. In this activity, the practitioner is to notice 5 things they can see (sight), 4 things they can hear (hearing), 3 things they can feel (touch), 2 things they can smell and 1 thing they can taste. It is a very simple grounding technique, and again, there is a link to MI theory about the advantages of including sensory perceptions into a foreign language teaching.

In Total Physical Response, an emphasis is being put on physical actions or bodily movement which also lead to a more relaxed and stress-free state of mind, enhancing the process of learning a foreign language. One of the typical mindful activities is yoga, as it was previously mentioned, or a conscious bodily movement. Interestingly, a typical classroom activity for TPR is the game “Simon Says”, which is simultaneously listed as one of mindful activities for children and teenagers (Burdick, 2014). Therefore, it is clear that some principles of TPR are also based on mindfulness or awareness, and, again, this methodology is based on the positive impact of those within the learning process.

Lastly, Waldorf and Montessori education can be perceived as contemplative forms of education. Within these approaches, learners often observe the surroundings or use their other senses in the learning process, that is playful and based on individual experiences, similarly to mindful exercises which allow individuals to experience and feel life itself. Both approaches also do not neglect “the inner curriculum” and respect learners’ souls.

3.3 Benefits of Implementing Mindfulness into Education (ELT Classroom)

Over the course of the last decades, many studies have been conducted in order to demonstrate and prove the benefits of mindfulness techniques on brain’s structure, emotion regulation, improvement of stress levels, anxiety, or depression, and many more. Apart from the general benefits, there are also studies examining the effects of mindfulness practices within the education. This part presents findings of several studies and provides specific examples of some of the advantages of incorporating mindfulness into education, specifically ELT classroom.

3.3.1 Structural Changes in Brain

The structure of a human brain has an incredible capacity to be transformed, regenerated, and changed. This process is known as “neuroplasticity” through which it is possible to change the pathways in brain and create new neurons. As a result, natural responses to external stimuli or stressors can be changed for the better. For

example, an automatic response to danger is called the “fight or flight” mode – recognition of a possible threat sends a signal to the body to either fight or escape, while the body experiences sensations such as sweating or fast-paced heartbeat. A similar reaction can be triggered by any other negative stressor, making it difficult to address the situation calmly and rationally (Greenberg, 2017). While the role of genetics within these natural responses certainly cannot be denied, it is also true that it is possible to create new synapses in brain, and, therefore, change its structure to a certain extent (Rock, 2006).

There are several studies examining the connection between mindfulness practices and structural changes in the brain, or the process of neuroplasticity. One study was based on undergoing an 8-week MBSR programme (previously mentioned Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction programme developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn) and at the end, it was proven that applying mindfulness resulted in changes in the brain’s structure of the participants (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Another study showed that already after eleven hours of mindfulness applications, it was possible to observe significant structural changes in parts of the brain closely connected to concentration and self-regulation (Sinclair & Seydel, 2016).

3.3.2 Stress and Anxiety Reduction

Another target of studies on mindfulness is the ability to handle stress. A study conducted at the University of Wisconsin examined healthy but stressed corporate employees and the changes they experienced after undergoing an 8-week MBSR programme in comparison with a control group of employees who did not participate in this programme. The result of the study was a finding that those who participated in the MBSR programme experienced shift of activity in their brain from prefrontal cerebral cortex (connected to emotions) to parts of the brain which enable better handling of difficult emotions (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Another study proved that people who regularly applied mindfulness in their daily lives developed better coping strategies to deal with stressors than those who did not practice mindfulness (Sinclair & Seydel, 2016).

As it was mentioned earlier, the element of stress often represents an obstacle in the process of learning. Many educators realized that, and concluded that for efficient learning, it is crucial that learners are in a relaxed state of mind and that stress is eliminated as much as possible.

3.3.3 Attention

The faculty of attention is a crucial element within education, as it was mentioned in the previous chapters. Oren Ergas emphasizes that “active attention can be cultivated” and provides an overview of several studies that show the impact of mindfulness intervention on the ability to control one’s attention (Ergas, 2017).

A study conducted by Tang and his colleagues examined the effects of meditation practice on participants’ attention. The experimental group of 40 students participated in 20-min long mindfulness meditation practice for 5 consecutive days, whilst the control group was taught a simple relaxation technique. At the end of the research, the experimental group showed a significant improvement in attention, apart from improvement in other areas such as stress control, anxiety, or depression levels in comparison to the control group (Tang, et al., 2007).

There are also studies inspecting the impact of mindfulness practice on attention capacities of people with ADHD diagnosis. An example of such a study is an experiment conducted by Zylowska and colleagues, which examined the impact of mindfulness applied on a group of 24 adults and 8 adolescents with ADHD symptoms. The experiment was conducted over a period of 8 weeks, during which the participants attended one weekly session of meditative practices followed by daily individual practice. The individual practice consisted of guided meditations and other awareness exercises. The results show a significant improvement of the ADHD symptoms (30% reduction) and in attentional capacities. Although this study involved a specific group of participants (with ADHD symptoms), the results demonstrate the positive effect of mindfulness practice on attention. (Zylowska, et al., 2008)

EMPIRICAL PART

1. INTRODUCTION

The empirical part of this diploma thesis examines the specific ways of possible implementation of mindfulness techniques in EFL classroom, precisely in the 6th grade of a lower secondary school. A design pilot project consisting of five mindfulness exercises was created and further conducted among a group of English learners in the 6th grade. After performing these activities with participants, their feedback was collected in the form of a simple questionnaire. Collected data were analysed and the findings of these are further discussed. Lastly, an interview with an EFL teacher was conducted, which provides instructive outcomes and presents an important viewpoint of an educator when it comes to discussing the advantages or disadvantages of implementing mindfulness within EFL classroom, together with possible obstacles or challenges in the process.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted in the month of April 2023 at the lower secondary school Demlova in Olomouc in the Czech Republic. Over the course of 9 days short mindfulness activities were performed at the beginning of five consecutive EFL lessons under the supervision of the class's English teacher. All the activities took place in the same group of learners.

3. RESEARCH AIMS AND QUESTIONS

The research aims to explore the practical possibilities of implementing mindfulness techniques in a sample EFL classroom through appropriately curated selection of mindful activities regarding the age, attention span and level of English of the participants. Such design pilot project was applied to a group of thirteen learners during five consecutive lessons, while each mindful exercise took form of a short relaxing introduction into English lesson, being conducted at the beginning of each lesson. Moreover, the research investigates the impact of mindfulness on learners through evaluation of the data collected from participants in the final feedback and

discusses the findings. The final aim is to present an opinion from an educator's third-party viewpoint.

Following are the research questions:

1. In what specific ways can mindfulness be implemented in EFL classroom?
2. What findings does the collective analysis of participants' feedback provide?
3. What are the advantages and/or disadvantages of implementing mindfulness techniques in EFL classroom from educator's point of view?

4. RESEARCH METHOD

Because of a smaller number of participants, a qualitative research method was chosen. We aimed to gather participants' personal opinions and feedback in order to create a detailed collective analysis.

Qualitative research allows to go into more detail and ask open-ended questions during an interview with the individual participants, with the advantage of not limiting the respondents with a fixed range of possible answers, but rather allow them to express their opinion freely. Regarding the age of the learners and their time limitations, though, it was not possible to conduct an individual interview with each one of them, so their feedback was collected in a form of a questionnaire at the end of the experiment. In case of the English teacher, an in person semi-structured interview was conducted.

Apart from participants' feedback, a method of observation also played an important role, both from the side of the conductor of the research, as well as from the English teacher of the group of learners.

5. CHARACTERISTICS OF RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT

5.1 The Main Research Group

For the research, an EFL classroom of learners in the 6th grade at the lower secondary school was chosen. This classroom consists of thirteen learners, both male and female, under the supervision of their English teacher. Because of the sensibility of personal information at such young age, any further details about the respondents are omitted. The class is heterogenous and there are visible differences in knowledge of English. For example, one of the learners has moved to the Czech Republic from Ukraine because of the war situation there and such a specific situation makes it difficult for them to catch up on the curriculum. Another pupil has been diagnosed with ADHD and another one is talented and excels in English. The fact that the research group is a mixed-ability group should be taken into account in the whole research.

Although the research group is rather small, it provided an opportunity for an individualistic approach and space for any further explanation. The group was selected specifically because of their age suitability for chosen mindfulness activities as well as their level of English, making it possible to perform all the exercises in their target language.

The respondents were in their natural environment during the whole experiment, which prevented any unnecessary stress caused by new elements they would have to face. Another advantage was that the participants had known the conductor of the research prior to its execution because she had been teaching some of their EFL lessons during her teacher's practice previously that year. This was yet another element that contributed to a relaxed atmosphere between the conductor and the participants.

5.2 Teacher's Profile

Apart from the learners (participants), their English teacher was present throughout the whole experiment. The teacher kindly agreed with the research and was selected based on her positive and open-minded attitude to mental hygiene and mindfulness techniques. She allowed the conductor of the research to enter the English lessons under her supervision and to devote the initial five to ten minutes of the lessons to the mindfulness activities.

During the mindfulness exercises, the EFL teacher transitioned from the role of the facilitator into the role of the observer while sometimes also participating with the rest of the class.

In the research, she represents another important subject, and although she was not the direct target of the activities, later she was interviewed to provide constructive feedback for this research.

6. REALISATION OF THE RESEARCH

6.1 Preparation

At the beginning of the experiment, a large number of various resources on the topic of mindfulness activities was reviewed, including those specifically targeted at the use of mindfulness techniques within an EFL classroom. It was a natural process happening during the writing of the theoretical part of the thesis and at the end, there was a collection of mindfulness exercises suitable for the EFL classroom environment.

The collection was carefully curated, final five exercises that appeared to be the most simple and efficient were chosen and the design pilot project for implementing mindfulness into EFL classroom was created.

6.2 Design Pilot Project

The design pilot project consisted of five mindfulness activities carefully chosen regarding learners' age and level of English. Each of these exercises took five to ten minutes to conduct and were primarily focused on sensory perception or breathing. They were performed at the beginning of the EFL lesson in a form of relaxing introduction in order to eliminate any stress and make the learners feel relaxed and prepared for the rest of the lesson. Further, the design pilot project and each of the mindfulness exercises are described and explained in more detail.

Before the first session, learners were also introduced to the topic of mindfulness, mental hygiene and the concept of awareness was explained to them using simple visual aids.

6.2.1 Sensory Exercise

This activity involves using all human senses and represents a very simple way of implementing mindfulness into the lesson without being time consuming. It is also descriptive meaning that it offers a natural way of using English language and enhances the communication in targeted language as well as the use of daily vocabulary.

Learners are given a piece of blank paper and asked to have something to drink or eat prepared on their tables. Then they receive the following instructions:

1. Write 5 things you can see.
2. Write 4 things you can hear.
3. Write 3 things you can touch.
4. Write 2 things you can smell.
5. Write 1 thing you can taste.

The conductor makes sure everyone understands the instructions and eventually explains unknown vocabulary. Then the participants perform the exercise, while being observed by the conductor. After three minutes (or when everyone is finished), some of the learners are asked to share their answers and feelings.

6.2.2 Box Breathing

Box breathing is an exercise focused on breathwork, as its name suggests. Breath is an essential part of many mindfulness activities, being a constantly flowing element within every human body (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). This technique is interestingly used by Navy SEALs (The United States Navy Sea, Air, and Land Teams) to remain still even during very intense situations (Nestor, 2020) .

The activity is carried out as follows: The conductor draws a square on the white board to demonstrate the principle of the box breathing exercise, explaining that the square represents the pattern of breathing: Inhaling while counting to 4, holding breath while counting to 4, exhaling for another 4 and finally again holding breath for 4. The conductor performs one round of the breathing pattern while counting to 4 using fingers to visually demonstrate the process. Then, learners are asked to sit back and relax and perform the exercise together with the conductor for at least five rounds.

6.2.3 Getting Rid of Worries

Journaling is another way of implementing mindfulness into daily life. It offers an opportunity to notice emotions and feelings happening under the surface, to connect to oneself and recognize what is happening in a given moment. Recognizing emotions and writing about them is a great method to release those and not suppress them (Burdick, 2014).

This exercise is an adaptation of the journaling technique. Learners are given a piece of paper and asked to write on it something that is making them worried. To make sure they understand the task, they are provided a few examples – such as being worried about a bad mark or a conflict they are experiencing with their friends or family. After a confirmation that all learners understand the task, the conductor gives them a few minutes to write down their worries. When everyone is finished, they are invited to tear up the paper with the worry written on it and imagine it going away. The exercise is followed by a brief discussion about their feelings afterwards.

The activity is concluded by explaining that this exercise teaches a lesson that sometimes it is more constructive to postpone worrying to another time since often it is not possible to solve the problems in each situation. Instead of being absorbed in the worries and thus not paying attention to the present moment, each human being has the possibility to decide not to pay attention to it just now (if it is not constructive). The visualisation of tearing up the paper represents the choice not to pay attention to it. It is also highlighted that it is not about being passive to one's problems, but rather about realizing when the right time is to deal with it.

6.2.4 Gratitude

Another journaling exercise that was included in the design pilot project is the gratitude activity. Prior to the activity itself, learners are at first asked to try to explain the word gratitude. The whole group under the guidance of the conductor then comes to a conclusion – gratitude represents the quality of being thankful for or appreciating things we have. The conductor further explains that as one can postpone negative thoughts (the previous exercise), being thankful for the good things helps to realize the positive aspects of life and remain optimistic even when not feeling well.

After the introduction, learners are given a piece of paper and asked to write three good things they can see in their life. Again, to make sure all participants understand the task, they are given specific examples such as: The sun is shining today, I am going out with my friends in the afternoon, etc. When the learners are ready, they are given a few minutes to write down their reasons to be grateful and the activity is concluded by a brief discussion while some of the participants are invited to share their answers if they are willing to. Again, at the very end the lesson of this exercise is highlighted – noticing the positive aspects of our life can contribute to an overall well-being (Vaughn, 2005).

6.2.5 Muscle Relaxation

One more possible application of integrating mindfulness into a classroom in a simple way is muscle relaxation. According to Dialectical Behavioural Therapy, which integrates mindfulness skills aiming to help patients with negative behavioural

patterns as well as teach acceptance and the awareness of the present moment, a possible way to deal with arising distress is muscle relaxation. It is based first on tightening a certain group of muscles as much as possible for a few seconds and then releasing the tension while observing the sensations in the body as the tension leaves (Linehan, 2015). It can be done anywhere in several adaptations. For the research, fists relaxation was chosen as it does not require any additional aids and is not time consuming.

The participants were asked to squeeze fingers into a fist with as much strength and tension as possible as well as comfortable while counting to 5. Then they are asked to release any tension and loosen the fist while noticing the physical sensations and sensing the feeling of relaxing hands and fingers. The conductor performs the activity to demonstrate how it should be performed and then invites the participants to conduct the exercise on their own. The activity consists of five rounds altogether. At the end, the participants are invited to share their feelings and experiences.

7. DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

The primary goal of the research was to find out in what specific ways mindfulness can be implemented in EFL classroom. To answer this question, a design pilot project was put together consisting of five mindfulness exercises. These activities were chosen according to the age of participants and their level of English was also taken into consideration. Intentionally, exercises that are not time consuming were selected, so that they could be easily implemented into the lessons.

After the research, participants were asked to fill in questionnaires so that their feedback could be reflected and provide insights on implementing mindfulness in EFL education. The questionnaire consists of 10 questions, some of them being closed-ended while some open-ended, and when creating the questionnaire our intention was for it not to be too extensive considering the age of respondents. The language used in it is Czech, as it is respondents' mother tongue, and it was secure that everyone would comprehend the questions. The answers of participants were analysed, and the key findings were defined.

Participants were asked the following questions:

1. Did you find the mindfulness exercises enjoyable?
2. Which exercise did you like the most and why?
3. Do you experience any problems focusing at school?
4. If a short mindfulness exercise was included in a lesson, do you think it would help you to focus better?
5. Did mindfulness exercises help you to feel more relaxed in the lessons?
6. How would you explain what mindfulness is using your own words?
7. Did you understand the English instructions to the exercises?
8. Did the exercises help you to remember any new vocabulary or phrases?
9. If yes, write down the word or phrase you remembered.
10. What is your honest opinion on mindfulness exercises?

The last part of data collection was an interview conducted with the EFL teacher of the classroom, in which the experiment was carried out. The interview provides answers to the final research question: What are the advantages and/or disadvantages of implementing mindfulness techniques in EFL classroom from educator's point of view? The interviewer and the interviewee met in person at school and discussed in advance prepared questions. The interview was semi-structured, which enabled the interviewee to freely express herself. With consensus of the interviewee a recording, and later a transcript, of the interview was made in order to analyse the answers and draw conclusions from it to answer to the last research question.

The teacher was asked the following questions:

1. How did pupils react to the mindfulness exercises in your point of view?
2. Do you think that the exercises had some impact on their concentration levels during the rest of the lessons?
3. Do you think the exercises helped pupils to feel more relaxed?
4. What is your opinion on the possible impact of mindfulness exercises on English language skills (vocabulary, comprehension)?
5. Are there any advantages and/or disadvantages of implementing mindfulness in ELT classroom in your opinion?

6. Do you think that implementing mindfulness in education can raise the awareness about mental hygiene?
7. In what specific ways is it possible to implement mindfulness in ELT from your perspective?
8. Are there any possible obstacles in implementing mindfulness in ELT?

8. INTERPRETATION OF COLLECTED DATA

8.1 Collective Analysis of Participants' Feedback

The analysis of the survey among the participants provided findings in several areas, which were generalized into following topics: Concentration, relaxation, language skills, mindfulness awareness, and finally the most efficient exercises.

The findings are summarized in the table below (excluded the most efficient exercises which cannot be quantified) and further discussed in more detail.

Respondents' Answer	YES	NO
Improvement in Concentration	10	3
Improvement in Relaxation	8	5
Improvement in Vocabulary Range	6	7
Comprehension of the Instructions	9	4
Ability to Explain the Concept of Mindfulness	9	4

8.1.1 Concentration

All 13 respondents admitted that they experience difficulties concentrating. Further, 10 respondents out of the total 13 stated that a short mindfulness exercise included in EFL lesson helped them to concentrate during the rest of the lesson.

8.1.2 Relaxation

8 respondents felt more relaxed after a mindfulness exercise, while 5 respondents expressed that they did not experience a heightened state of relaxation after performing a mindfulness activity.

8.1.3 Language Skills

Another area of focus was the impact of mindfulness on foreign language skills, namely on vocabulary range and listening.

6 respondents stated that the mindfulness exercises helped them to remember some new vocabulary. Based on participants' answers in the questionnaire, the specific examples are "mind, see, hear, touch, taste, breathing". The rest of the respondents expressed that they did not encounter any impact of mindfulness activities on their range of vocabulary.

Regarding listening skills, 9 respondents said that they understood the instructions to the mindfulness exercises and experienced no difficulties with comprehension them. The remaining 4 respondents stated that they did not understand all the commands in the target language.

8.1.4 Mindfulness Awareness

In the questionnaire, respondents were asked to attempt to explain the concept of mindfulness using their own words. 9 respondents were capable of doing that, describing mindfulness as "a technique to relax", "a long break", "relaxation of the brain", "an exercise to relax", "calming down and be relaxed", "a technique to calm down", "to relax as much as possible when you don't feel well", "calming down" or "relaxing the mind and the body". The rest of the respondents (4) were not able to explain the concept of mindfulness.

8.1.5 The Most Efficient Exercises

Participants' feedback also offered a practical viewpoint on what exercises tend to be the most efficient in the EFL classroom. The most popular exercise was **Box**

Breathing, which was marked as the most liked by 6 respondents, followed by the **5 – 4 – 3 – 2 – 1 (Sensory Exercise)** favoured by 3 participants and by the **Getting Rid of Worries** activity popular among 2 respondents.

8.2 Advantages and Disadvantages of Implementing Mindfulness in EFL Classroom

The interview with the EFL teacher was based on her observations of the mindfulness activities that were conducted in the lessons. Following, the key ideas are discussed. The Advantages are marked under “A”, while the disadvantages are referred to as “D”.

8.2.1 A: “Catching a breath”

One of the major advantages according to the interviewee is the possibility mindfulness offers, described by her as the opportunity “to stop and catch a breath”. She expresses her concern with the fact that nowadays there is a large number of stimuli surrounding the children, and therefore it is getting more and more difficult for them to concentrate, focus or calm down. Apart from different stimuli, she also talks about the pressure to be very productive often caused by parents having unrealistic expectations of their children or about the normality of multitasking among the young generation. The interviewee states: “And in my opinion, it is too much, and the kids may lose themselves in all of this.” She concludes: “I think mindfulness can at least be the reminder that it is ok to sit in silence for a few minutes.”

She sums it up: “Sometimes it is better to ... devote a moment to something similar like a mindfulness exercise, because ... the kids are very unfocused and unable to calm down.”

8.2.2 A: Relaxation

According to the interviewee, the mindfulness activities helped the pupils to feel more relaxed during the lessons. She mentions that the placement of the activity in the lesson procedure plays an important role: “Because the exercises were always at

the beginning of the lesson, it helped them to slowly get into the lesson's flow and they seemed more relaxed and calmer." She also adds that the choice of the activities is important, and one should be careful about it: "I remember that one exercise had an opposite effect – they were unfocused and had a tendency to fool around". The interviewer inquired which exercise exactly it was, and it turned out to be the Getting Rid of Worries activity, which involved tearing apart a piece of paper with participants' worries written on it. The interviewee comments: "After that they were a little bit wild." According to the interviewee, the exercises with the most impact on pupils' level of relaxation were those activities connected to the breath (Box Breathing) or journaling (Gratitude). In conclusion, the interviewee mentions another instructive insight: "As far as I know, relaxation should even be a part of the education according to the official documents, especially on the primary level."

8.2.3 A: Impact of Mindfulness on Language Skills

The interviewee sees another advantage of implementing mindfulness in EFL classroom in the positive impact it can have on learners' language skills, especially on speaking and listening skills or vocabulary. She comments: "It definitely helps that the more English they hear, the better. I also noticed they learned some new vocabulary during the mindfulness activities." The teacher was also asked to share her own ideas on specific ways of implementing mindfulness in the lessons regarding the improvement of language skills: "Maybe as a part of some imaginative exercises, for example in the 7th grade there is vocabulary on the topic of vacation, so as pupils learn the vocabulary, you can use the imagination as a way to calm down and relax while describing the things and using the words they need to learn... Pupils hear the vocabulary whilst trying to imagine it."

8.2.4 A: Destigmatization of Mental Health

It is nothing new that a lot of stigmas is still connected to the topic of mental health in spite of many continuous attempts to improve this situation. To the question how mental health is presented to the learners within the curriculum the interviewee answers: "It is part of the civics curriculum at the lower secondary level. But it is explained in connection to some mental health problems such as anorexia and

others.” She further discusses that the fact that mental health is usually mentioned in connection to mental illnesses can represent a problem in how mental health is being perceived by learners in general, and also when participating in activities such as mindfulness exercises: “They might be worried that something is wrong with them... and it might discourage them from doing some sort of mindfulness or any other relaxational techniques.” Implementing mindfulness can in her opinion contribute to the destigmatization of these topics and raise the awareness about mental health: “I think it is important to present the topic out of the context of mental illnesses and rather present it as something normal, as a form of prevention.” She concludes: “I believe that they would remember these exercises in difficult moments.”

8.2.5 D: Time Management

In the interviewee’s opinion, one of the major disadvantages of implementing mindfulness in lessons is related to time management of the lessons. Because of the syllabus that teachers have to follow and the number of topics that needs to be covered in EFL lessons, it is difficult to find extra time for extra-curricular activities, including those focused on relaxation. The interviewee states: “There is simply not enough time for it... I cannot imagine doing it in every lesson. It is unrealistic in my opinion.” She further suggests that a possible solution is to find some balance between the curriculum and the mindfulness activities: “I would maybe pay attention to how the pupils feel throughout the year and implement mindfulness techniques at times they start to feel tired, burnt out or demotivated. For example, before the Christmas or right before the end of the school year.”

8.2.6 D: Pupils’ Willingness

Another disadvantage that was mentioned during the interview is that not every learner might be willing to participate in mindfulness exercises or might not find it appealing. The interviewee says: “It is not interesting to everyone. I felt that from my pupils’ feedback.” She adds an instructive observation from her perspective: “I noticed that girls were in general more perceptive to the topic of mindfulness than boys... Of course, it is not possible to generalize this and even in my class there were

a few boys who reacted to the mindfulness exercises well, but it is connected to their personality, they are a bit more sensitive.”

8.2.7 D: Cooperation with Parents

Another possible obstacle which was mentioned by the interviewee is parents’ opinion on using mindfulness techniques in the lessons: “I can imagine some parents might create a huge problem out of it only because it was not explained properly or misinterpreted by a pupil. Some people are just not open-minded when it comes to similar things.” In another words, the concept of mindfulness can be easily misinterpreted as something bordering with religious teachings (since it originates from the Eastern philosophy) if not explained well, which can lead to objectives raised by the parents. The interviewee suggests a way to avoid such eventual conflicts: “I think you have to choose words carefully, maybe not using the term meditation.”

9. DISCUSSION

The main research aim was to examine the use of mindfulness technique in EFL classroom in practice and, based on the experiment, to demonstrate specific examples of implementation of mindfulness exercises during EFL lessons. Our next aim was to create a collective analysis of participants’ feedback and draw constructive conclusions that can be helpful for further research or the implementation of mindfulness in practice. The final aim of the research was to present the advantages and/or disadvantages of implementing mindfulness in EFL classroom from a viewpoint of educator.

Following, the results of the research are categorized according to their respective research question for a clear arrangement.

In what specific ways can mindfulness be implemented in EFL classroom?

To answer this question, the design pilot project consisting of five carefully curated mindfulness exercises suitable for EFL classroom was created. Further, observations

of the activities together with respondents' feedback and the interview conducted with their teacher helped us to answer this question in more detail.

Mindfulness can be easily implemented into EFL lessons in a form of a short exercise, which can take between 5 to 10 minutes. To demonstrate this, the pilot project was designed, consisting of 5 mindfulness exercises suitable for EFL classroom.

When implementing mindfulness into EFL classroom, it is crucial to pay close attention in the process of choosing the right exercises. It is important to remember that the activities should not require unrealistic amount of time, which might interfere with the rest of the lesson and other content that needs to be covered. The research has shown that the timing between 5 to 10 minutes was adequate, although according to the EFL teacher it would not be possible to conduct such mindfulness exercise in every lesson due to time limitations. The final finding therefore is that the shorter the mindfulness activity is, the better. A big advantage is that mindfulness technique can be applied in a form of a very simple and short exercise, so it is possible to fit it into EFL lessons. Another key factor that should be considered is the age suitability of the exercises. The pilot project was created considering the age group of participants, therefore it was efficient because the learners were able to understand it and perform it.

The research has also shown the importance of the lesson stage, in which mindfulness exercises are conducted. In our pilot project, the activities were placed right at the start of each lesson. During the experiment, it was visible that learners had an opportunity to calm down and mentally prepare for the upcoming lesson by performing a mindfulness exercise. At the very start of each lesson, pupils were lively and restless while after participating on a mindfulness activity, they seemed to be much more grounded and calmer. This observation was also supported by the EFL teacher's reflection during the interview. (At the same time, it is important to mention that the exercises must be carefully chosen so that they have a positive effect on pupils and do not cause unwanted disturbances.)

The pilot project represents a demonstration of how mindfulness can be put into practice in EFL classrooms. The project consists of 5 individual exercises that were chosen regarding the age and level of English of the participants and time limits. The activities were as follows: 5 – 4 – 3 – 2 – 1 (Sensory Exercise), Box Breathing, Getting Rid of Worries, Gratitude, and Muscle Relaxation. The participants expressed that the exercises they enjoyed the most were connected to sensory stimulation (5 – 4 – 3 – 2 – 1 or Getting Rid of Worries) and to breathing (Box Breathing). The findings are not surprising since for young practitioners of mindfulness technique it is helpful to practice mindfulness in a form that is not too abstract, such as meditation. Human senses or the breath are elements allowing practitioners to hold onto something and to pay attention to a specific perception.

The research hasn't focused only on the use of mindfulness technique solely in the context of mental health, but also on its use within EFL education. Therefore, we also examined the impact of mindfulness exercises on learners' language skills. The findings are that the activities can serve as a listening training activity and provide possibilities for the enhancement of vocabulary. The feedback from participants as well as the EFL teacher showed that mindfulness activities helped learners to learn new vocabulary and remember it and that most of them were also able to comprehend the English instructions, so they were able to train their listening skills.

What findings does the collective analysis of participants' feedback provide?

The collective analysis of participants' feedback offered insights in several areas, which were divided into following categories: Enjoyment, concentration, relaxation, language skills, mindfulness awareness and the most efficient exercises.

At the end of the research, all participants stated that they enjoyed the mindfulness activities. Therefore, we can say that when choosing the right activities, mindfulness can be implemented within EFL classroom in a way that brings joy to majority of learners.

The whole research group also admitted that they experience difficulties concentrating in the lessons. Majority of them also stated that mindfulness activities conducted at the beginning of the lesson helped them to focus better. The finding in

this area therefore is that implementing mindfulness into EFL classroom can have a positive impact on learners' levels of concentration, which further impacts the whole learning process. This was previously supported in the theoretical part by presenting studies that show the impact of mindfulness on cognitive functions.

Apart from concentration, a greater part of the research group stated that they experienced an enhanced state of relaxation after participating in the mindfulness exercises. For that reason, we can say that the research indicate that mindfulness improves the state of relaxation, which was discussed previously in the theoretical part as well.

Another category is the impact of mindfulness activities on language skills. The research has shown that mindfulness can, to a certain extent, have a positive impact on the improvement of language skills, especially when it comes to remembering new vocabulary or training listening skills, although our results are debatable. 6 participants out of the total 13 agreed that mindfulness exercises helped them to learn and remember new vocabulary. This finding shows the potential impact mindfulness can have in this area, but still a larger half of the research group did not experience any changes. Of course, this can be caused by the fact that each classroom is heterogenous, and each learner has their own individual needs. Some pupils require more time, repetition, and explanation to fully comprehend and remember new information. It is therefore recommended to focus on easily comprehensible explanation of mindfulness exercises and highlighting the key outcomes through sufficient repetition. When it comes to listening skills, the finding of the research is that 9 out of 13 participants were able to comprehend the instructions provided during mindfulness activities. The result of the survey seems adequate to the previously mentioned fact of the class being a heterogenous environment. In order to make sure that all learners are able to understand the instructions to the mindfulness activities, the exercises must be carefully prepared, and the instructions must be conveyed simply and clearly, so that everyone can understand them.

The last area of focus within this research question is mindfulness awareness. The collective analysis of participants' feedback has shown that at the end of the research, the majority (9) of participants were capable of providing a simple

explanation to the question what mindfulness is. Although the remaining four respondents were not able to answer the question, the results are still promising, regarding the fact that prior to the experiment, none of the learners had any understanding of the concept of mindfulness. Therefore, we can say that the implementation of mindfulness in EFL classroom does not only bring the advantages in areas such as cognitive functions or the learning process in general but raises the awareness about mental hygiene as well. Respondents' answers in the final questionnaire have shown that learners identify mindfulness as a moment to relax or an intentional break. Although such an explanation is, of course, very simplified, it is also very adequate, and respondents' feedback shows that it is possible to teach young pupils the key element of mental hygiene – to take a moment to relax or calm down when they might be feeling overwhelmed or overstimulated.

To conclude, the collective analysis of participants' feedback has shown that because of the design pilot project created prior to the experiment consisting of carefully chosen mindfulness activities, the respondents evaluated the whole mindfulness experience as enjoyable. A bigger half of the respondents also admitted that because of mindfulness practices, they experienced improvement in concentration levels and in the state of relaxation. While the findings of the research regarding the impact of mindfulness on language skills are debatable due to the heterogeneity of the classroom, we can still deduce from the results that mindfulness does have an impact on language skills, although it may be to a certain extent. The final finding is that even only 5 mindfulness activities can raise the awareness about mental hygiene, and, of course, mindfulness.

What are the advantages and/or disadvantages of implementing mindfulness techniques in EFL classroom from educator's point of view?

The answer to the final research question was drawn from the interview with the EFL teacher of the classroom, in which the experiment was conducted. Within the dialogue, we were able to detect several advantages and disadvantages of implementing mindfulness into EFL classroom according to the EFL teacher herself. The advantages are “catching a breath”, relaxation, the impact of mindfulness on language skills and destigmatization of the topic of mental health. The interview has

been of a significant help because it provides a realistic viewpoint of an experienced educator. Therefore, we were able to recognize a several possible disadvantages as well. We decided to categorize these into the following areas: Time management, pupil's willingness, and cooperation with parents.

The major advantage of the use of mindfulness technique within EFL classroom is, according to the interviewee, the possibility the technique provides – to slow down and “catch a breath”. This is especially helpful and needed in these days because children from an early age must face an overwhelming amount of stimuli and there is a significant pressure being put on them from the side of their parents or teachers. Mindfulness represents a reminder that one can, and perhaps even needs to, slow down from time to time.

Another advantage is that mindfulness activities conducted during an EFL lesson can help learners to feel relaxed prior to the lesson, so that they are more grounded and focused during the rest of the lesson. The interviewee was able to observe such an impact of mindfulness interventions herself and stated that the effect on her pupils was visible. Additionally, it is crucial to highlight that the choice of mindfulness exercises is of a high importance. The interviewee stated that while some activities (especially those focused on breathwork or journaling) had the impact of calming learners down, with some exercises she observed the opposite impact (this was the case of an activity which included tearing apart a piece of paper). The exercises must be carefully chosen, so that they target the coveted aims and do not cause unwanted distractions. Apart from choosing the right activity, another aspect to consider is where to place a mindfulness exercise within the lesson's staging. Our research has shown, supported by the same observation by the EFL teacher, that placing a mindfulness activity right at the beginning of the lesson helps to set the right tone for the remaining time.

Mindfulness exercises conducted during the research had also an impact on participants' EFL skills. This was yet another positive impact observed by the interviewee, who stated that she noticed that learners remembered a range of new vocabulary and evaluated the mindfulness exercises as useful within EFL education, namely when teaching vocabulary or training listening or speaking skills. We also

believe that the principles of mindfulness can eliminate speaking anxiety and promote willingness of learners to actively communicate in respective foreign language, although due to the time limitations of our research it was not possible to draw conclusions in this particular area (Ersanli & Ünal, 2022).

Finally, mindfulness can represent a very powerful tool not only in its elementary function of relaxation and other benefits, but also when it comes to destigmatization of the topic of mental health in general. During the interview with the EFL teacher, she expressed that implementing mindfulness technique within education can be a natural way to promote principles of mental hygiene without connecting such topic to areas which might feel intimidating for the learners and contribute to unnecessary stigma. Although the subject of mental health is included within curriculum, it is often being presented in connotations of mental illnesses such as anorexia, depression, or anxiety. Therefore, it is crucial to talk about mental health in other contexts as well, so that the subject is not being stigmatized or wrongly interpreted by young learners. Mindfulness in its secularized form offers a great solution to this because it can be easily implemented into education as a teaching aid as well as a demonstration of what mental hygiene can look like, illustrating the normality of such relaxing exercises.

While the interviewee mentioned four key advantages of implementing mindfulness into EFL lessons, she also shared some of the possible disadvantages that may occur, one of them being the time management. Because of a given syllabus that every teacher of any subject must follow, it is challenging to find time for extra-curricular activities. That goes for mindfulness exercises as well. According to our interviewee, who can provide a realistic opinion from her own experience as an educator, it is not possible to include a mindfulness exercise into every single lesson. She suggests including mindfulness activities at times when it is most needed (e.g. when learners experience more stress than usual or lack motivation). On the other hand, many studies examine the implementation of mindfulness within EFL classroom on a regular basis, so we would like to mention that whether it is possible or not is dependent on many factors (school management, classroom environment, etc.), but

under certain circumstances it can be feasible to include mindfulness activities on a regular basis.

Another disadvantage, or perhaps an obstacle, is the willingness of learners to participate in mindfulness activities. According to our interviewee, not every pupil will be willing to take part in practicing mindfulness. There are many factors affecting one's attitude towards such practice including their personality, understanding of the subject, motivation, and many more. In this matter, it is crucial to provide a complex and intelligible explanation of the concept of mindfulness prior to its execution, so that learners understand its essence, while taking into consideration their age and other factors. Another key principle is to help them find motivation to perform these practices, whether it is the enhancement of foreign language skills and/or their own well-being. Following these steps prior to performing mindfulness exercises with pupils can set solid foundations for the right attitude to these practices.

Education is not only about teachers and learners, but additionally about parents who also represent an inevitable part of it. As stated by our interviewee, implementing mindfulness into classroom might initiate a dissent from parents' side. Although mindfulness is nowadays being presented mostly in its secularized form, it is not difficult to detect that its origins are connected to the Eastern philosophy or the practice of religious meditation. To prevent such conflicting situations, it is vital to inform the parents as well and to be careful when describing mindfulness, choosing the right words which do not cause unnecessary misunderstanding. The secularization of the practice should be highlighted alongside with its positive impact on well-being or academical performance supported by valid research or studies. Only then a potential conflict can be evaded.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

It is recommended to conduct similar research on a larger group of respondents over a longer period of time in order to acquire a larger amount of data to analyse. This would secure a more reliable conclusion with clearer outcomes. Our research does

have certain limitations especially in these aspects. We were able to conduct the experimental part only on a limited number of respondents and were provided restrained time possibilities because the EFL teacher in the classroom where the research was conducted has to strictly follow curriculum and there is not much of excess time for extracurricular activities.

Also, we suggest looking specifically into how mindfulness can eliminate speaking anxiety and enhance the willingness to actively communicate in EFL classrooms. Because of time limitations during our research, we were unable to examine this area of focus in particular, but we do believe it would be of a great benefit to investigate this area more since there are some existing studies, which observe the effects of mindfulness on these specific matters (Ersanli & Ünal, 2022).

11. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Worldwide, the popularity of mindfulness interventions has been significantly growing not only in general, but also within educational areas, and, specifically, as a part of EFL education. In the Czech Republic, though, this trend has not yet been put into practice to the extent it could be. Based on previous research and numerous studies which demonstrate the positive impact of mindfulness on foreign language education, we wanted to examine its possible uses more closely by means of this research and demonstrate that the implementation of mindfulness in EFL is feasible.

We hope the research will inspire EFL educators to consider implementing mindfulness into their lessons after evaluating its benefits described in the theoretical part and further in the practical part based on our experiment. Some educators might have a distorted idea about techniques such as mindfulness, whether due to its historical context or the misconception that it is impossible to fit such methods into lessons without disturbing the official curriculum. Through our research we aimed to show that these misconceptions can be disproved, although, of course, a large number of factors must be taken into account and there should be enough preparation prior to the actual attempt to implement mindfulness into education. We hope our research can demonstrate that the mindfulness technique does not need to require an unrealistic amount of time and can be added to EFL lessons in an efficient and

effortless way, having the benefit of positively impacting the process of foreign language learning.

In our belief, more attention should be paid to methods of mental hygiene when educating children and adolescents. Mindfulness represents a simple tool to do so when comprehended fully and correctly. Above that, we are convinced that any stress or tension should not have its place in foreign language teaching and that relaxation can greatly improve the learning process as discussed previously in the theoretical part. Because of that, and many other reasons, we notice how mindfulness can positively impact the EFL classroom climate and enhance the process of acquiring a foreign language.

We hope that relaxation and mental hygiene will become an essential part of education, namely foreign language teaching in the future, and want to offer a practical solution – the mindfulness technique – for that.

12. CONCLUSION

This diploma thesis consists of the theoretical part and the practical part.

In the theoretical part, mindfulness was introduced as one of possible methods of mental hygiene, which has been becoming more and more important for the maintenance of mental health in the context of modern society, which is facing a major number of stimuli and stressors. Further, history of mindfulness was presented to provide a complex and clear explanation of its origins, which form an inevitable part of the technique, although they have been pushed away over the last decades and mindfulness has been majorly presented in its secularized form. While the thesis is more focused on the secularized form of mindfulness, the awareness about its origins is still considered to be of a high importance, so that the technique can be understood and explained thoroughly. In the remaining chapters, the key principles of mindfulness were explained, along with attitudinal pillars, which shape its essential structure and provide an overview of the most important principles for the right practice. Because the thesis is primarily focused on the use of mindfulness in EFL classroom, the following chapters discussed the placement of the technique within

education and specifically an EFL classroom. We aimed to create a link between the mindfulness technique and existing methodologies for EFL teaching and demonstrate that in essence, principles of mindfulness can be found in many approaches to EFL teaching which have been used over time in history and have appeared to be efficient. For example, mindfulness was presented as a tool to create a more relaxed learning environment, which consequently, can reflect in the enhancement of learners' memory capacity or attention span. Lastly, research of existing studies on mindfulness and its positive effects on the learning process was presented to provide a summary of proven benefits of the technique in several areas.

The knowledge from the theoretical part was then put into practice in the practical part, which aimed to examine how mindfulness can be implemented into EFL classroom specifically. Further, feedback from the respondents and the EFL teacher enabled us to answer the remaining research questions defined at the beginning of our experiment. The findings were as follows: The experiment showed that it is possible to implement certain mindfulness activities into EFL classroom, although timing and alignment of the exercises with lesson goals must be taken into consideration. Our previous theoretical research also revealed a large number of resources to choose from when searching for mindfulness activities suitable for EFL classroom, which makes it easier when it comes to implementing mindfulness in lessons. The feedback from participants was in general positive and the results showed that even a short-term mindfulness training can have a positive impact on areas such as mental health awareness, cognitive functions, or foreign language skills. Lastly, the interview conducted with the EFL teacher provided an outline of possible advantages and disadvantages of implementing mindfulness into EFL education from a viewpoint of an educator who has a personal experience with teaching English as a foreign language. Our interviewee stated that in her opinion mindfulness used in classroom offers an opportunity to slow down or take a pause in an otherwise high-functioning school environment, further that it can make learners more relaxed, there is an impact on foreign language skills and, finally, the use of mindfulness helps to destigmatize the topic of mental health. On the other hand, she also shared her concerns in certain areas – specifically when it comes to time management (not enough time to conduct mindfulness activities in lessons), potential

unwillingness of some learners to participate or parents' disapproval. In the discussion, a summary of the findings was provided, as well as the answers to the research questions and we also suggested possible solutions to problematic areas or obstacles that arose during the research.

To conclude, we offered specific recommendations for further research as well as practice. By these we want to encourage other educators to explore the possibilities of mindfulness implementation into EFL education and to raise awareness about this matter.

We hope the thesis will inspire other teachers or educators of English language to experiment with mindfulness technique more and to experience the positive effects the technique can have not only on learners, but on the whole classroom atmosphere including teachers themselves. The main goal was to practically demonstrate and give an idea of how mindfulness can be included into EFL lessons, and we strongly hope that this goal was met.

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APPENDIX – Questionnaire Example

DOTAZNÍK MINDFULNESS

Zakroužkuj svou odpověď (ano/ne) nebo odpověz vlastními slovy. Děkuji!

1. Bavila tě cvičení mindfulness?

ANO NE

2. Které cvičení se ti líbilo nejvíce a proč? (Zkus si aspoň na jedno vzpomenout.)

To první Technika 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 Všímavost

3. Máš někdy problémy se ve škole soustředit?

ANO NE

4. Soustředilo by se ti lépe kdyby součástí vyučovací hodiny bylo krátké cvičení mindfulness?

ANO NE

5. Pomohla ti cvičení mindfulness cítit se v hodině více uvolněně?

ANO NE

6. Jak bys jednou větou někomu vysvětlil, co technika mindfulness znamená?

Uvolnění mysli a těla

7. Rozuměl jsi anglickým pokynům k mindfulness cvičení v hodinách?

ANO NE

8. Pomohla ti cvičení zapamatovat si nějaká anglická slovíčka nebo výrazy?

ANO NE

9. Pokud ano, napiš, které anglické slovíčko nebo výraz sis zapamatoval:

Mind - Mysl

10. Zde můžeš napsat úplně upřímně, co si o mindfulness myslíš:

Je to perfektní s naší praktičností
mne mindfulness velmi bavilo 10/10