

## **Efectos del Mindfulness o atención plena en la ansiedad lingüística de un idioma extranjero en preadolescentes**

### **Effects of Mindfulness on Foreign Language Anxiety in Preadolescents**

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### **RESUMEN**

El presente estudio examina el grado de ansiedad relacionada con los idiomas extranjeros en niños de séptimo grado con edades entre 11 y 12 años y los beneficios de los ejercicios de mindfulness en la reducción de la ansiedad. Se aplica un test basado en la Escala de Ansiedad en el Aula de Lenguas Extranjeras (FLCAS), modificada, con una escala Likert de cinco puntos (Nunca, Rara vez, A veces, A menudo, Siempre), esta se utilizó para recopilar datos de una muestra de 88 estudiantes seleccionados de una población de 113 utilizando un enfoque de estudio cuantitativo y correlacional, estableciendo una diferencia entre los niveles de ansiedad en los estudiantes que participaron regularmente en ejercicios de mindfulness y aquellos que no lo hicieron. Los resultados mostraron el impacto de la atención plena en la preadolescencia en el entorno escolar, especialmente en relación con las habilidades de producción y la ansiedad lingüística que enfrentan los estudiantes. Un número significativo de estudiantes que aplicaron mindfulness mostraron un manejo considerable de la ansiedad en contraste con los estudiantes que no practicaron ninguna técnica de mindfulness.

**Palabras claves:** atención plena, ansiedad lingüística, regulación emocional, aprendizaje del inglés como lengua extranjera.

### **ABSTRACT**

This study examines the degree of anxiety related to foreign languages in children of seventh grade with ages between 11 and 12 years old and the benefits of mindfulness exercises in reducing of the anxiety. The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) modified with a five points Likert scale (Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often, Always), was used to collect data from a sample of 88 students selected from a population of 113 using a quantitative, correlational study approach. Anxiety levels in students who regularly participate in mindfulness practice and those who do not were to be compared in this study. Results showed the impact of mindfulness in early adolescence around the scholar environment, especially about production skills and the linguistic anxiety that students face. A meaningful number of students that applied mindfulness showed a considerable management of anxiety in contrast to students that didn't practice any mindfulness techniques.

**Keywords:** mindfulness, foreign language anxiety, emotional regulation, EFL learning.

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## 1. INTRODUCCIÓN

The study of mindfulness in the educational field has been extensive due to its beneficial effects on students' emotional well-being and academic performance. The use of mindfulness gained popularity following the clinical research conducted by Jon Kabat in the 1980s, which reported numerous physical and psychological benefits.

Schools should implement programs that teach mindfulness skills to cultivate and sustain strong connections, manage emotions, detect others feelings, and successfully express their own, according to research conducted in New Zealand by Kenwright (2021). In this regard, implementing mindfulness training in educational institutions has become a successful way to improve classroom coexistence, emotional management, and attention.

Students often face complex situations in the classroom that generate anxiety, especially in relation to acquiring a foreign language. Tan (2020) mentions how students become nervous when confronted with tasks that test their oral communication skills. Similarly, there are recurring challenges when working with preadolescents, such as peer pressure, speaking in front of others might be unconfident, and the anxiety generated by these situations all of which significantly impact their ability to engage in productive language skill activities. As noted by Castro Vaca (2023), it is possible to reduce anxiety by modifying the learning environment.

Students in the seventh grade of elementary school, who are usually between the ages of eleven and twelve, show particular traits and struggle with learning a foreign language. In the upcoming academic year, a number of pupils who previously demonstrated a desire to learn may show apathy towards new information.

Those with behavioral issues tend to intensify such tendencies, while students who had previously behaved appropriately often reveal noticeable changes in their behavior. They may begin to imitate more popular classmates in an effort to fit in with their peer group and often give in to peer pressure. According to Tinatini

(2020), decisions are frequently made based on what the majority of the group wants or under the influence of the group leader.

Education today requires innovation. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to be aware of the best alternatives for delivering knowledge, as emphasized by Belluigi, D. (2020). This is particularly critical for this age group, which requires a blend of pedagogical, technical, and emotional regulation tools to be adequately prepared.

According to Mauricio Cortés and Nancy Jiménez (2020), emotional skills can be trained. For this reason, it is essential to identify the most appropriate strategies for working with preadolescents, who are going through a transitional stage influenced by various factors that affect their learning process. In this context, studies such as that of Kander, T. N., & Becerra, R. (2024) demonstrate the effectiveness of mindfulness in the educational field.

## **Literature Review**

Aspects of early adolescence

### **Physical**

Growth that occurs between ages 10-14 is marked by further aging sophistication, as affirmed by contemporary literature (Breehl & Caban, 2023). Sociologists note the fundamental characteristics of this period, including changes in body composition due to organ and physiological system development, bone mass attainment, body maturation, and sexual developments maturation.

### **Psychological**

Self-steering of feelings during pre-adolescence is not functional as pruning of the prefrontal cortex is still underway (Blakemore, 2020).

At this age, there is a potential change in adolescents' sensitivity to how they are perceived by other people, therefore, self-esteem becomes vulnerable, which

both parents and teachers need for understanding in order to manage them effectively (Harter, 2020).

Also, the combination of emotional changes and new experiences can strengthen the intensity of emotions (Steinberg, 2021).

## **Social**

By far the most important objectives when in the teenage stage are to gain dependence and acceptance of self, body, identity, and peers. As such, according to Zumba (2020), social and emotional skills serve to build, forge, or maintain relationships. This attribute of social interaction allows a young person to adapt to multiple situations effortlessly, enabling them to transform from children into self-sufficient adults.

## **Mindfulness exercises**

### *Conscious Breathing*

Following self-awareness theory of Kabat-Zinn (2021), stress, anxiety, and difficult emotions are best managed through self-awareness, which can greatly be enhanced via conscious breathing.

A simpler version put forth for students aged 11 and 12 was proposed by Siegel Bryson in 2020:

- Sit upright with your back straight, and place your feet flat on the floor.
- Close eyes or concentrate on one area to reduce outside distractions.
- Concentrate on your breath and notice whether air flows through the nose or if the abdomen rises and falls.
- Inhale and exhale, mentally counting up to ten.
- When one's thoughts drift, gently guide them back to where the focus was.

### *Guided Meditation*

Students also need to be in a calm state at certain intervals during the lesson, something that used to be overlooked. García-Taibo O. et al. (2023) incorporated

the use of mindfulness and relaxing activities toward the end of physical education classes. These short sessions allowed students to refocus and regulate their emotions and mental state effectively and quicker.

### *Gratitude Journal*

A sustained focus results in many positive outcomes for pre-adolescents such as better emotional health and concentration.

In Bono et al.'s (2023) study, the use of a mobile application focusing on gratitude, paired with a curriculum for high school students, showed a positive increase in their general wellbeing and a reduction in anxiety levels.

## **2. METODOLOGÍA**

The study uses a quantitative methodology since it concentrates on gathering and analysing numerical data to determine correlations between its variables. The use of mindfulness and students' anxiety levels about learning English as a foreign language are examined using a correlational design.

The population consists of 113 seventh-grade students from Unidad Educativa La Salle Conocoto during the 2024–2025 academic year, aged between 11 and 12 years. A non-probability purposive sample of 88 students was selected, based on criteria such as regular attendance and participation in English classes, as well as the practice of mindfulness techniques in the case of the experimental group. The sample was divided into two groups: students who participated in the implementation of mindfulness techniques and those who did not.

### **Formula**

$$n = (N \cdot Z^2 \cdot p \cdot q) / (e^2 \cdot (N - 1) + Z^2 \cdot p \cdot q)$$

To collect the data, a survey was used based on the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), developed by Elaine K. Horwitz in 1986 and widely applied with modifications, as noted by Amalia, N. L., & Ma'mun, N. (2020), who used the test to assess students' anxiety levels related to the challenges of

oral presentations. In this case, the test was adapted for better comprehension by seventh-grade students.

The FLCAS measures the level of anxiety students experience while acquiring a foreign language specifically English. The instrument involved of 15 items, written in a clear and appropriate for students aged 11 and 12. The goal was to explore their emotions, perceptions, and reactions to various classroom situations in English lessons.

Each item was answered using a Likert scale (never, rarely, sometimes, often, and always), where 5 corresponded to “always” and 1 to “never.” This scale measured the frequency with which students experiment determined situations, allowing the identification of low, medium, and high levels of language anxiety.

The responses were quantified and showing to statistical analysis, allowing comparisons between students who practiced mindfulness and those who did not.

### 3. RESULTADOS Y DISCUSIÓN

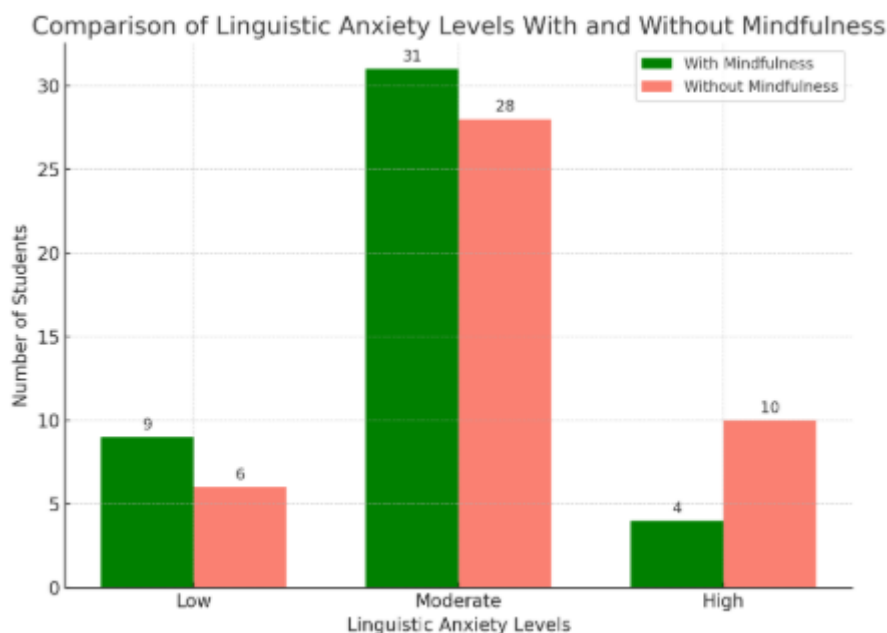
The following section presents the combined results obtained through the research, based on the scoring range and the condition of each group. The FLCAS test was applied to two groups: the first group practiced mindfulness techniques, while the second group did not.

**Table 1.** *Anxiety levels*

| Mindfulness         | Linguistic Anxiety Levels<br>(Students numbers) |          |      |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------|----------|------|
|                     | Low                                             | Moderate | High |
| With Mindfulness    | 9                                               | 31       | 4    |
| Without Mindfulness | 6                                               | 28       | 10   |

Source: Author's own elaboration

**Figure 1. Linguistic Anxiety Levels**



## Comparative Analysis

### *Low Anxiety*

Among the students who practiced mindfulness, low levels of anxiety were noted in 20.5%, that is, 9 out of 44 students. On the other hand, the percentage of students exhibiting low levels of anxiety in the group that did not engage in mindfulness practice was lower: only 13.6%, or 6 out of 44 students. It appears that the application of mindfulness techniques has some effect on anxiety reduction, especially during oral activities which require more productivity.

### *Moderate Anxiety*

The remaining 70.5% of the sample from the mindfulness group and 63.6% in the non-mindfulness group reported moderate levels of anxiety. The proportions were 31 out of 44 students and 28 out of 44 students respectively. The increased proportions in the mindfulness group imply that although learning anxiety is still present, it supported a moderate and more tolerable level of anxiety through the use of mindfulness strategies.

### *High Anxiety*

A remarkable difference was identified between the two groups with regard to high anxiety. In the mindfulness group only 9% (4 of 44 students) reached this level, while in the non-mindfulness group version, 22.7% (10 of 44 students) reported high anxiety. This gap indicates the positive influence of mindfulness techniques in alleviating severe anxiety in students aged 11 and 12, particularly with regards to the intense fear of making mistakes and being judged by peers.

### **Discussion**

Given the rising levels of anxiety among students in educational settings, particularly in the context of foreign language acquisition, one of the study's strengths is the topic's relevance, especially in connection to the age group studied. The study also showed that students' emotional regulation improved when mindfulness practices were used, and that they are both accessible and simple to use. This is an important consideration while doing production tasks in other languages, especially speaking exercises. Furthermore, the gathering of trustworthy data was guaranteed by the use of a verified and modified instrument, like the FLCAS. Establishing objective links between the variables under study was made possible by the use of a quantitative and correlational research design.

Mindfulness is an effective strategy for students in this age group and should be included in their curriculum. Gao (2023) also supports this idea, noting that mindfulness techniques led to moderate anxiety levels in foreign language learning and recommending that time be set aside for such practices in education.

In order to validate the results in various situations, it is advised that the sample be enlarged to include students from different grade levels and institutions while accounting for other variables. The results indicate that it is critical that educators be trained in the application of the suggested methods. Continuous observation and psychological help should be given to pupils who are displaying excessive levels of anxiety because this problem might seriously impair their capacity to learn. The study should also be expanded to examine additional tactics that can improve instruction in the classroom and provide students the skills they need to better control their emotions.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONES**

According to the study, anxiety levels were higher among students who did not practice mindfulness. This demonstrates a direct correlation between heightened stress during foreign language learning and a lack of emotional control. Anxiety levels were lower among students who engaged in mindfulness exercises. This supports the findings of Morgan and Katz (2021), who demonstrated that mindfulness helps language learners feel less anxious. Those who exercised mindfulness had a negative link with anxiety from the beginning and reported pleasant experiences, despite the fact that anxiety levels changed following a 13-week intervention.

Strong evidence for assessing the impacts of mindfulness in educational contexts, particularly in foreign language learning, was found in test data. Quispe Sanca (2024) supported the validity of the exam by confirming that the FLCAS is a viable tool for assessing anxiety levels in Latin American English classes. This is essential for evaluating the ways in which mindfulness can enhance emotional control and language acquisition.

Relating these findings to Castellanos and Díez (2022), lower language anxiety was also noted among mindfulness practitioners. Regular practice enhances emotional regulation by strengthening the frontolimbic network and reducing amygdala activity linked to anxiety. This biological basis explains why students who practiced mindfulness had better emotional control in high-stress situations, like public speaking or speaking a foreign language.

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