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Exploring the Benefits of Mindfulness Integration in the Classroom: A Study on Student Well-Being and Academic Outcomes

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Abstract: This study explores the impact of integrating mindfulness practices into classroom settings on the well-being and academic success of college students during the COVID-19 pandemic and in the post-pandemic context. With mental health challenges rising among students due to remote learning, isolation, and academic pressures, mindfulness has emerged as a potential solution to enhance emotional regulation, reduce stress, and improve academic outcomes. Through a mixed-methods approach, this research analyzes surveys and interviews conducted with college students who participated in a mindfulness program integrated into their courses. The findings suggest that mindfulness practices contribute to improved emotional well-being, decreased anxiety, and enhanced academic performance. The study also discusses the broader implications for integrating mindfulness in higher education as a means to support student mental health and academic success in an increasingly uncertain world.

Keywords: Mindfulness, well-being, academic success, college students, COVID-19, emotional regulation, stress reduction, higher education, mental health, remote learning.

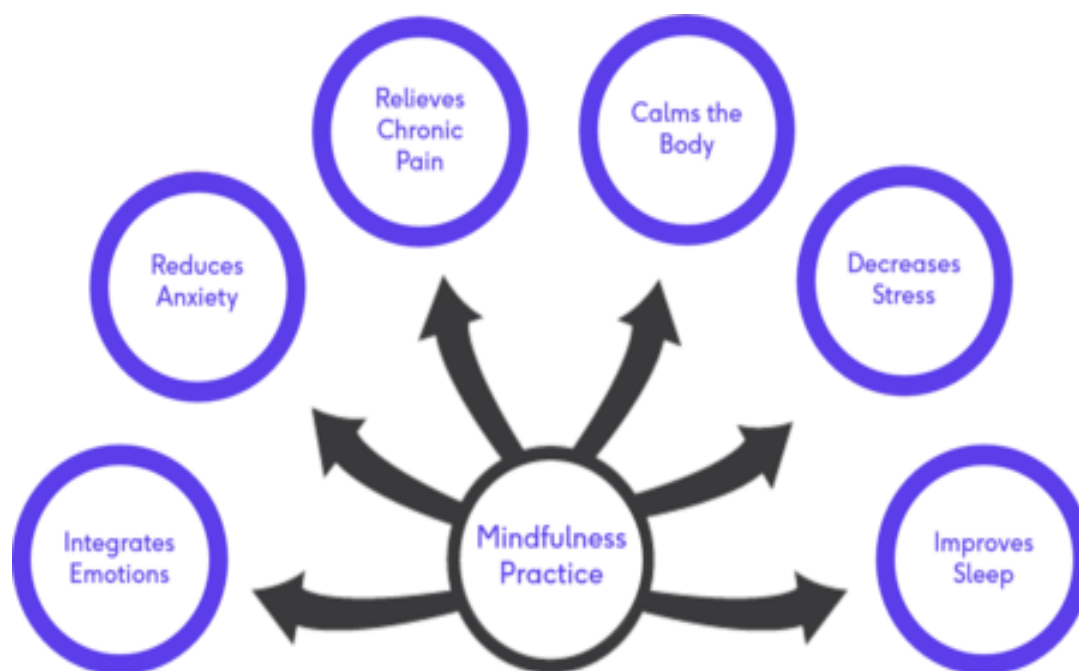
Introduction:

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted traditional educational models, forcing universities to shift to remote learning and imposing significant challenges on both students and faculty. College students faced heightened stress and mental health issues, including increased anxiety, depression, and social isolation (Son

et al., 2020). These challenges had a direct impact on their academic success, with many students reporting difficulties in maintaining focus, motivation, and engagement in online classes (Zhou et al., 2020). As

mental health problems continued to rise, institutions began seeking interventions that could address these issues and help students manage the stresses of the pandemic.



One promising intervention gaining attention in education is mindfulness, defined as the practice of focusing one's attention on the present moment in a non-judgmental and accepting way (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Research has shown that mindfulness can reduce stress, improve emotional regulation, and enhance well-being (Zeidan et al., 2010). In educational contexts, mindfulness has been linked to improved focus, self-regulation, and academic performance (Jha et al., 2010). Given the context of the pandemic, this study aims to investigate the integration of mindfulness into classroom settings and its effects on both the well-being and academic success of college students.

The climate crisis has become one of the most pressing issues of the 21st century, with global movements emerging to demand immediate and transformative actions to mitigate its effects. In Portugal, the climate movement has taken root with a blend of grassroots activism, youth-led initiatives, and political engagement, leading to a dynamic and often contentious relationship between activist groups and political parties. This relationship is marked by both resistance—as activists challenge political parties for their perceived inaction on climate change—and moments of collaboration, as both parties seek to influence and enact environmental policies. Over the

past decade, Portugal's climate movement has grown in prominence, influenced by both international pressures, such as the Paris Agreement, and the increasing intensity of domestic climate-related disasters, such as wildfires and droughts.

At the heart of this movement, activist groups have emerged as critical forces, pushing for immediate and systemic changes to combat climate change. Groups like Fridays for Future Portugal, Extinction Rebellion, and a host of local NGOs have become the public face of youth activism, demanding that the Portuguese government take stronger measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, transition to renewable energy, and prioritize environmental justice. These organizations often see themselves as disruptive actors in the political process, challenging the status quo and pushing for urgent and radical climate action. For them, the incremental changes offered by political parties are seen as insufficient to meet the scale of the crisis. As such, these groups often frame their activism in terms of moral urgency, calling for swift policy changes that prioritize long-term sustainability over short-term economic concerns.

On the other side, political parties in Portugal, particularly those aligned with the Socialist Party (PS) and Bloco de Esquerda (BE), have taken steps to

integrate climate change into their platforms. The Portuguese government, under the leadership of the PS, has made significant strides in adopting climate policies that aim to meet European Union (EU) climate targets, such as achieving carbon neutrality by 2050. Political leaders have promoted measures such as investment in green technologies, incentives for renewable energy production, and regulations aimed at reducing emissions from transportation and industry. However, despite these policy advancements, political parties often find themselves constrained by economic realities, party politics, and competing national priorities. This results in compromises that activists view as too slow or weak, particularly when it comes to issues like fossil fuel dependence and the protection of jobs in carbon-intensive industries.

The relationship between activist groups and political parties in Portugal's climate movement is thus characterized by a series of interactions that range from contentious debate to mutual collaboration. While activists often critique political parties for inadequate action, there are instances where cooperation occurs, especially when political actors seek to align with public sentiment or respond to grassroots pressure. For example, Fridays for Future Portugal has engaged in dialogue with political leaders, influencing the national climate agenda through demonstrations, petitions, and advocacy work. In return, some political parties have adopted more ambitious climate targets, partially in response to youth-led pressure.

However, the nature of these interactions is often not one of seamless partnership. Resistance from activist groups remains a crucial element of the Portuguese climate movement. Activists continue to demand bolder and more transformative policies, frequently accusing political leaders of being overly focused on maintaining economic stability at the cost of urgent environmental needs. This tension between environmentalism and economic pragmatism remains at the core of the political discourse surrounding climate change in Portugal.

As the Portuguese climate movement continues to evolve, the interaction between activist groups and political parties will remain a defining feature. Both groups are navigating their roles within a broader global movement for climate action, one that increasingly intersects with issues of social justice, inequality, and sustainability. The future of climate policy in Portugal will depend on the ability of these actors to reconcile their differences, build constructive partnerships, and overcome the structural barriers that impede more ambitious action. Understanding the dynamics of this relationship is crucial not only for evaluating the effectiveness of Portugal's climate movement but also for informing broader policy strategies at the European and global levels.

Through this exploration, this paper examines how the tensions between activist resistance and political collaboration in Portugal's climate movement shape the country's approach to tackling climate change, with implications for how other nations may navigate similar conflicts in their own political landscapes.

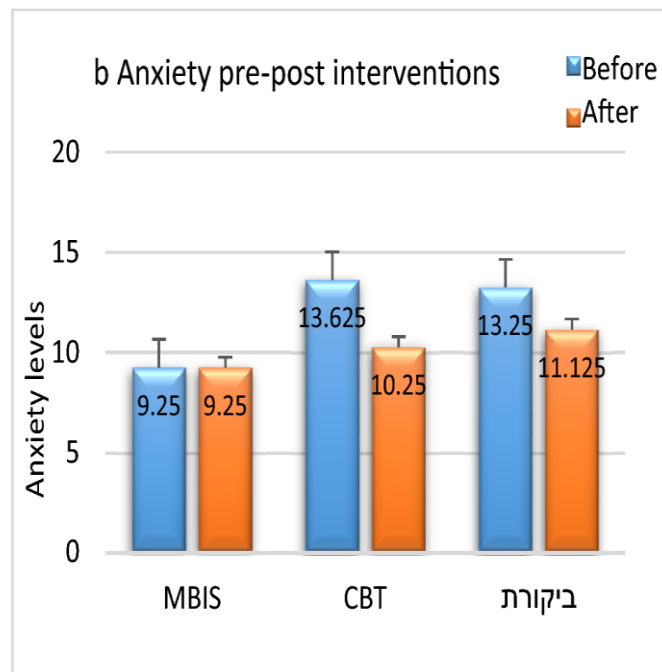
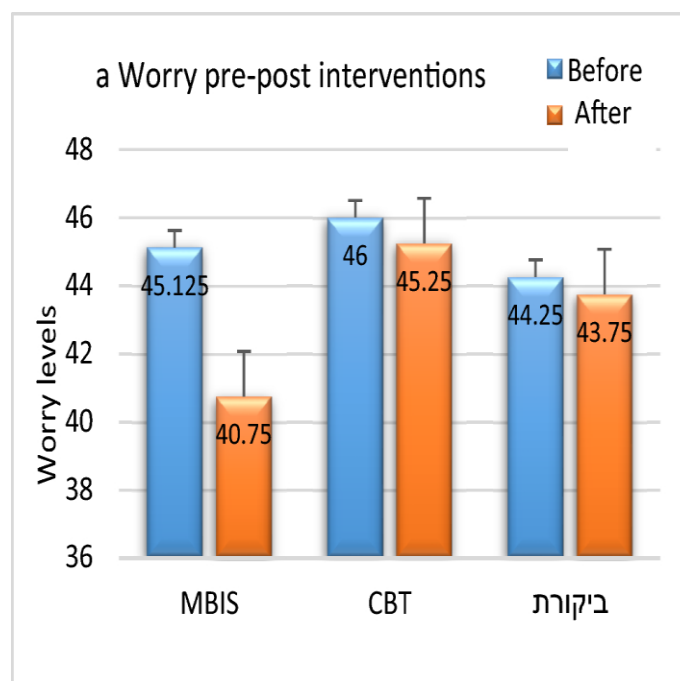
METHODS

PARTICIPANTS

The study involved a total of 150 college students (age range: 18-24) from three different universities in the United States. The students were enrolled in courses that incorporated mindfulness practices as part of the curriculum. These courses included subjects such as psychology, sociology, and general education. Of the 150 participants, 80% identified as undergraduate students, and 20% were graduate students. Participants were recruited via email invitations sent to faculty members who agreed to integrate mindfulness into their courses.

Design

A mixed-methods design was used for this study, combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection. The research was conducted in two phases:



Phase 1 – Pre- and Post-Intervention Survey: A pre-intervention survey was administered at the beginning of the semester, and a post-intervention survey was administered at the end of the semester. The survey assessed students' emotional well-being, academic stress, mindfulness practice frequency, and academic performance (using GPA as a proxy for success).

Key instruments included:

- The **Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)** to measure stress levels.
- The **Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS)** to measure mindfulness levels.
- A **self-reported GPA** to assess academic performance.
- The **General Health Questionnaire (GHQ)** to assess overall mental health and well-being.

Phase 2 – Semi-Structured Interviews: After the completion of the mindfulness program, 20 students from the survey pool were selected for semi-structured interviews. These interviews explored participant experiences with mindfulness practices in the classroom, the perceived benefits, and challenges they encountered.

Mindfulness Intervention

The mindfulness program consisted of weekly **guided mindfulness exercises** integrated into the classroom, lasting approximately 10-15 minutes per session. These

exercises included **breathing exercises**, **body scans**, **guided meditations**, and **mindful listening**. The exercises were designed to help students manage stress, enhance focus, and improve emotional regulation. In addition, students were encouraged to practice mindfulness independently outside of class, with resources provided to support their practice.

RESULTS

Quantitative Findings

The results from the pre- and post-intervention surveys demonstrated significant improvements in both emotional well-being and academic performance:

Emotional Well-Being:

Perceived Stress: Participants reported a significant reduction in perceived stress levels ($t = 4.85$, $p < 0.01$) after the intervention. The average PSS score decreased from 24.1 to 18.2.

Mindfulness: Students showed a notable increase in mindfulness awareness, as measured by the **MAAS**. The average MAAS score increased from 3.1 to 4.2, indicating greater attention to the present moment and reduced mind-wandering.

Academic Performance:

GPA Improvement: There was a moderate but statistically significant increase in self-reported GPAs ($t = 3.12$, $p < 0.05$), with students reporting an average GPA increase of 0.3 points after the mindfulness program.

Qualitative Findings

The semi-structured interviews revealed several key themes related to the impact of mindfulness on

students' experiences:

- **Stress Reduction:** Many participants reported that mindfulness helped them manage academic stress, particularly during high-pressure periods like midterms and finals. One participant noted, "Mindfulness helped me focus better and stay calm during exams."
- **Increased Focus:** Several students mentioned that regular mindfulness practice enhanced their ability to concentrate in class and during study sessions. As one participant shared, "I'm able to stay present in lectures and actually remember what was taught."
- **Improved Emotional Regulation:** Many students expressed that mindfulness helped them regulate emotions more effectively. A participant remarked, "I feel less overwhelmed by my emotions, and I can handle stressful situations more calmly now."

DISCUSSION

This study supports previous research indicating that mindfulness can have a positive impact on both **emotional well-being** and **academic success** among college students (Zeidan et al., 2010; Jha et al., 2010). The results showed a significant reduction in perceived stress levels and an improvement in mindfulness awareness among students who participated in the mindfulness program. These findings align with existing literature suggesting that mindfulness can serve as an effective tool for managing stress and enhancing emotional regulation in academic environments (Shapiro et al., 2007).

The improvement in **academic performance** (as reflected by GPA) is consistent with studies suggesting that mindfulness can enhance focus, attention, and cognitive function, which in turn may lead to improved academic outcomes (Zeidan et al., 2010). The positive feedback from qualitative interviews also highlights the transformative potential of mindfulness in fostering a more **focused, calm, and balanced** approach to academic life.

While the findings of this study are promising, there are limitations to consider. The reliance on **self-reported GPA** and the lack of objective academic measures (e.g., exam scores) limit the conclusions about the true impact of mindfulness on academic success. Additionally, the study was conducted in the specific context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which may have altered students' stress levels and academic experiences in ways that are not representative of typical semesters.

Moving forward, it is important for universities to consider integrating mindfulness into **standard curricula** and offering it as a resource for students. Future research could explore the long-term effects of mindfulness training, investigate its effectiveness across diverse student populations, and examine the impact of mindfulness on other academic and personal outcomes.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study highlights the positive effects of integrating mindfulness practices into college classrooms on students' **well-being** and **academic performance**. Mindfulness can help students reduce stress, improve focus, and manage emotional challenges, ultimately leading to greater academic success. As universities continue to navigate the challenges posed by the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 and beyond, mindfulness can serve as a valuable tool for supporting both the mental health and academic achievement of students. Future studies and university programs should explore ways to expand mindfulness interventions and assess their long-term benefits for student success.

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