



## Reviews

# A systematic review of mindfulness interventions for in-service teachers: A tool to enhance teacher wellbeing and performance



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## HIGHLIGHTS

- We examined five databases to determine the quantum of research reported on mindfulness interventions for teachers.
- The review highlights the nature, effects and underlying mechanisms of mindfulness interventions for teachers.
- The review results are discussed within the framework of evidence-based practice in education.
- The review results signal to readers a basis for their decisions on the value of mindfulness interventions for teachers.

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## ABSTRACT

This systematic review was conducted to report on developments in and implementations of mindfulness-based intervention research for in-service teachers, and the status of that research. The review reported on sixteen studies published up to 2015 from an initial search of 1788 records in PsycINFO, EBSCOhost, Education Source, Scopus, Google Scholar and Mindfulness, a major publication outlet for research in mindfulness. Dimensions of the review included research and intervention design, interventionists, intervention results, intervention fidelity, and measurement validity and reliability. Researchers of quantitative studies predominantly used a randomised-control trial design with a wait-list control group. Analysis of results revealed that (a) relatively few mindfulness-based intervention studies have been conducted, (b) interventions were provided primarily to enhance teacher wellbeing and teacher performance, (c) different definitions of mindfulness and components of practice were incorporated into descriptions of mindfulness-based interventions, (d) intervention fidelity was rarely reported, and (e) researchers seldom used both direct and indirect measures of effects. A secondary analysis was conducted of studies using qualitative methods. This highlighted in-service teachers' experiences of learning and practising mindfulness, and provided potential explanations for the effects of mindfulness-based interventions found in primary quantitative studies. The review results are discussed collectively within the framework of evidence-based practice in education. Limitations of the review and future research directions are discussed.

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## 1. Introduction

Interventions on mindfulness constitute a field of burgeoning interest in professions serving individuals at risk of poor developmental outcomes in critical areas of the community (Brown, Creswell, & Ryan, 2015). The term “mindfulness” comes from the Pali word *sati*, meaning *memory*. It signifies “presence of mind, attentiveness to the present, rather than the faculty of memory regarding the past” (Bodhi, 2000, p. 86). Mindfulness practice is a systematic training of attention and awareness to keep the present in mind (Hwang & Kearney, 2015). Contemporary applications find their origins in the teachings of contemplative Buddhist traditions.

As a pioneer of contemporary adaptations of mindfulness, Kabat-Zinn (1994) operationally defined it as “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally” (p. 4). In the late 1970s he developed the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program to reduce the stress of people with chronic health problems. Referred to as First Generation Mindfulness-Based Interventions (FG-MBIs) that focus on utilising attention processes to regulate maladaptive cognitive and affective processes (Singh, Lancioni, Winton, Karazsia, & Singh, 2014), MBSR and its adaptations (e.g., Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy) have been successfully applied to induce positive changes in the mental and physical wellbeing of people living with various health problems. Frequently noted effects of FG-MBIs include improvements in self-perceived stress (e.g., Baer, Carmody, & Hunsinger, 2012), burnout (e.g., Krasner et al., 2009) and anxiety and depression (e.g., Neece, 2013).

Despite its capacity for enhancing mental and physical wellbeing, the traditional mindfulness community raised concerns about FG-MBIs for approaching mindfulness as a technique for symptomatic relief and the absence of explicit ethics in the teachings (Monteiro, Musten, & Compson, 2015). In response to these concerns, Second Generation Mindfulness-Based Interventions (SG-MBIs) were introduced, which are more closely aligned with traditionally held conceptual understandings of, and practice approaches to, cultivating mindfulness (Shonin, Van Gordon, & Griffiths, 2014). It is taught and practised within a context that includes the cultivation of other key principles (e.g., ethical conduct and concentration) traditionally perceived to be critical for the development of meditation (Shonin & Van Gordon, 2015). In some studies (e.g., Singh, Lancioni, Winton, Karazsia, & Singh, 2013)

adopting SG-MBI models, positive effects (e.g., reduced aggressive behaviour) were also reported for people (e.g., students) with whom participants interacted, in addition to improvements in the psychological and behavioural health of the participants (e.g., teachers).

### 1.1. Teacher wellbeing, performance, attrition and resilience

Education constitutes a field of reporting where mindfulness-based interventions have become a prominent feature in attempts to alleviate personal and professional issues aligned with teacher wellbeing and performance. Teacher wellbeing is a construct involving teachers' models of the quality of their personal, professional and relational selves (Spilt, Koomen, & Thijs, 2011). Teachers may have depleted wellbeing in one or more of these three areas, associated with low levels of physical or mental health. Teacher performance is essentially teachers' action in building students' academic outcomes (Lavy, 2016) and such action, too, can be variable, particularly in schools where high incentives and disincentives are used in attempts to improve teaching quality (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2006).

The literature on teacher wellbeing and performance extends also to challenges in reversing high rates of teacher attrition, particularly for early career teachers and notably for those in challenging schools and circumstances with little support (Borman & Dowling, 2008) to help maintain their resilience and commitment to teaching practice (Brunetti, 2006; Tait, 2008). Teachers' resilience and their commitment to the profession also positively influence students' outcomes. Day (2008) reported that students of resilient, committed teachers are more likely to attain positive outcomes than students whose teachers are less resilient and committed. In an extensive literature review, Mansfield, Beltman, Broadley, and Weatherby-Fell (2016) established that teachers who were equipped with personal resources (e.g., motivation, efficacy), contextual resources (e.g., trusting relationships with leaders, fellow teachers and students) and strategies (e.g., problem solving, self-care, a work-life balance and mindfulness) were likely to have resilience and therefore to experience wellbeing.

### 1.2. Evidence-based practice in education

Evidence-based practice (EBP) refers to the use of current best

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