Increasing Student Motivation in a Foreign Language Classroom Through Mindfulness

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Increasing Student Motivation in a Foreign Language Classroom Through Mindfulness

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore how mindfulness practices help increase motivation in high school students in a foreign language classroom. This study was conducted at a small school in an urban area in Texas. Nineteen students between the ninth and tenth grades were the participants in this research. The data collection included a pre and post motivational questionnaire that helped identify how motivated the students felt in the classroom. Data was collected on each participant through weekly self-assessments. The results of this action research showed that the implementation of mindfulness practices helped to increase the motivation of the students in the high school Spanish class. The action research project was conducted at the beginning of the second semester of the school year with a duration of four weeks.

Keywords: motivation, mindfulness, MindUp, high school
Introduction

Many high school students struggle to be motivated in school. Factors such as home issues, cultural background and lack of healthy relationships with adults generate stress and anxiety, affecting the motivation of students in the school environment. Furthermore changes in adolescence like changing emotions, problems at home, lack of support, and lack of healthy relationships with adults, are some of the factors that affect student motivation in high school, and that makes the level of stress and anxiety increase (Englund, M. M., Egeland, B., & Collins, W. A. 2008). Motivation is the individual’s effort to fulfill his/her duties, devoting the needed effort, and continuing it (Celikoz, 2009). Spouling (1992) considers “motivation” key to students’ learning, and McClelland (1989) believed the future of the society is dependent on the level of motivation and the current progress that its students have.

Recent studies found that meditation practices in educational settings have demonstrated benefits such as improvements in attention, social skills, mood, academic functioning, and school motivation (Yamada & Victor, 2012). Mindfulness practices refer to a family of self-regulation practices that focus on training attention and awareness in order to bring voluntary control to mental processes. These practices foster general mental well-being and the development of specific abilities such as calm, clarity, and concentration (Walsh & Shapiro, 2006).

Guided by questions such as what motivates students, and what affects student motivation at school, this study will investigate how mindfulness practices help high school students increasing motivation in a Spanish class. The intervention used was MindUp curriculum. Interventions were twice a week for the first 15 minute of class. This study took place in a public charter school setting. Among the 19 ninth graders, many faced difficult issues at home, poverty, stress, anxiety, lack of healthy relationships with adults, and lack of motivation
in the school setting. The school is in a low-income neighborhood in an urban region. The school population is 90% African American and 10% Latino.

**Theoretical Framework**

Motivation is one of the most important factors that educators can target in order to improve learning. Many theories have been postulated to explain motivation. According to Williams (2011), the five key ingredients impacting student motivation are student, teacher, content, method/process, and environment. The literature review explains key factors that can affect a student’s motivation in class. Motivation is defined as the stimulus, or influence; incentive; drive; something (such as a need or desire) that causes a person or student to act (Merriam-Webster, 1997); and "the expenditure of effort to accomplish results" (Williams & Williams, 2011, p. 2).

Palmer (2007) argued that student motivation is an essential element that is necessary for quality education. Many factors can impact motivation including, low academic achievement and performance, and low-income home background which can lead to poor educational outcomes (Usher & Kober, 2014). Another factor that may influence student motivation is cultural issues. Cultural context can have a bearing on students’ motivations or aspirations (Graham & Hudley, 2005). Examples of cultural issues can be cultural differences in parents’ values, cultural stereotypes, discrimination, and the perceptions of others. Research does suggest that how students see themselves—as well as any particular group to which they belong—in the context of their school and community can influence students’ identity formation, values, feelings of competence and relatedness, and goal setting (Murdock, 2009).

How does the teacher know when students are motivated? The students pay attention, they begin working on tasks immediately, they ask questions and volunteer answers, and they
appear to be happy and eager” (Williams & Williams, 2011, p.2) When teachers show that they care about their students it can help to improve students’ motivation because of the positive relationship that they have formed with their teachers (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018, p.15). Students are more likely to be motivated in a class when their teacher is confident teaching their content and projects that joy of teaching and learning on the student (Fennelly & Luxton, 2011). Consistency in classroom routines and procedures is also likely to increase student motivation because it makes students feel a sense of safety and stability in the classroom (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018, p. 17).

I choose this theatrical framework because my own experience with teaching High School Spanish has shown me how lack of motivation impacts the classroom. For the most part, my students do not come to class with the materials they need which contributes to their lack of motivation to be prepared for class. They fail to pay attention or engage in learning when they are not interested in the content. Instead, some students put their head down and zone out when I am teaching.

In conclusion, this framework is essential for my research project because it will help to convey the factors that lead to a lack of motivation in high school students such as academic motivation, self-determination, parent involvement and the teacher-student relationships. It will also help to determine the best practices to apply when trying to increase motivation in the classroom.

**Review of Literature**

The focus of this action research project is to study the factors that affect high school students’ motivation to engage in the learning process. My project emphasis is on high school
Spanish courses. This literature review discusses research on academic motivation, self-determination, parent involvement and the teacher-student relationships of high school students.

**The Importance of Student Motivation in Academic Success**

Student-centered learning is central to a student's motivation to learn, and to their success. (Baeten, Dochy, & Struyven, 2013). Baeten et al. (2013) explored the effects of changes in the traditional lecture-based learning environments to a more student-centered learning environment to determine students’ interest and incentives for learning and success, while also considering the support needed as indicated by the students. The researchers’ hypothesis was that gradually releasing students from the lecture-based teaching model to a case-based learning model which is an established approach used across disciplines where students apply their knowledge to real-world scenarios, promoting higher levels of cognition, depending on the type of support that students identified, leads to higher achievement. The results of the study conveyed that students taking more ownership and responsibility for their own learning and success was greater in the classroom that gradually applied a case-based learning environment over time. Student-perceived needs were positively related to self-directed motivation, but negatively related to controlled motivation. The study found that acquainting students with a case-based learning environment overtime proved to be impactful to students’ success, and that perceived need support is essential for students to be motivated.

Legault, Green-Demers, and Pelletier (2006) focused their research on motivation within students and the factors that lead to students’ lack of motivation. Legault et al., suggest three main factors that affect academic motivation in high school students: motivation, social support and self–determination. Based on the research, Legault et al., (2006) found that the students are not motivated in class because of a lack of belief in their effort capacity, lack of belief in their
ability, and lack of value placed on the task. "One of the most prominent academic problems plaguing today’s teenage youth is a lack of motivation toward academic activities." (Green-Demers & Pelletier, 2003, 485 - 492). The first study by Legault, Green-Demers, and Pelletier found that students tend to have a lack of motivation due to their lack of confidence in their academic abilities, lack of effort to complete the task, characteristics of the academic task that lack interest to the student, and lack of value placed on the task. Their second study found that the four dimensions of academic motivation was positively correlated to behavioral and psychological constructs such as academic anxiety and feelings of indifference towards school. The third study focused on the interpersonal relationships between support from teachers, parents, and friends of students with academic motivation, and found that the interpersonal relationship was negatively related to a lack of academic values for all three social groups.

**Parent and Teacher Relationships to Encourage Student Motivation**

Teacher-student relationships are essential to achieving success within the classroom. Barile, Donohue, Anthony, Baker, Weaver, and Henrich (2012) center their study around the relationship between teachers and students, based on student evaluations of their teachers. The researchers proposed three hypotheses: Teacher evaluation and reward policies are based on the students' perceptions of the relationships held with teachers and the relationships that students have with teachers are associated with both gains in math scores but also the risk of student drop out. The study hoped to determine if associations between teacher policies and student outcomes are mediated by the climate of teacher-student relationship.

The study found the following of the first hypothesis: good teachers who are assigned the better students had a poorer school climate, financial rewards did not affect a negative or positive school climate, schools that allow students to evaluate their teachers may also result in a positive
Increasing Student Motivation in a Foreign Language Classroom Through Mindfulness

school climate because students believe that they have a voice and their teachers care about their feedback. In regard to the second hypothesis, the study found there was a negative correlation between the teacher-student relationships to the odds of student dropout rates by their senior year. They also found no correlation between the teacher-student relationship and gains in math scores. The third hypothesis showed that there was no correlation between teacher rewards and an increase in math scores or student dropouts.

Student Attitudes Towards Learning and Course Engagement Expectations

Stewart and Chen (2003) conducted a study on motivation and attitudes of high school students to help educators to construct practical approaches to teaching foreign language class electives. Their research highlights eight factors that can impact the choice of foreign language classes: interest in language/culture, career advantages, how much a student likes the teacher, parents' preferences, family heritage, friends in class, or counselor advice. Results showed that most of the students chose a foreign language class because they were interested in either the class or the culture and wanted to take advantage of future career opportunities.

Leaner and Kruger (1997) conducted a study about the contribution of teacher and parent relationship and self-concept to academic motivation. They studied how adolescents are motivated when they have a good relationship with both their parents and their teachers. They also studied how self-concept contributes to the student’s motivation to be successful in the academic setting. Academic motivation was composed of two factors: self-regulation and intrinsic value. Intrinsic value was defined by several features, including a preference for challenging work, curiosity, and interest in work, independent attempts at mastery, and internal criteria for success (Harter, 1981). They found when parents respect students’ feelings and have a good relationship with them the students are more likely to be motivated in an academic
setting. They found the same to be true with their teachers. When students felt like the teachers cared about them, they were successful and motivated in the school setting.

The impact of mindfulness practices

Wilson and Dixon (2010) focused on how mindfulness practices can have an impact on students’ attention. Their study was with 12 elementary students. The participants had a different exercise such as: breathing exercises, noticing self exercises and mindful eating exercises (Wilson & Dixon, 2010, p. 139-140). This study and the behavior observations were in a regular and daily core subject class. Wilson and Dixon recorded important observable behaviors to measure how mindfulness practices help the students such as: paying attention, engagement in class, completing their work and following instructions. Data was collected using an observation chart. (Wilson & Dixon, 2010, p. 138). They found that 18% of the students experienced an increase in paying attention in class and also in completing their work.

Gould, Dariotis and Mendelson (2012) conducted a study about urban youth and how mindfulness had an impact on their lives when they had no motivation and exhibited depression symptoms. Urban youth exposed to chronic stress such as community violence are at high risk for impaired cognitive and affective regulation and developmental outcomes (Engle & Black, 2008; Lemstra et al., 2008; Keenan et al., 1997). The study consisted of 97 participants from four urban public schools that were randomly assigned. The yoga and mindfulness practice lasted for a 12-week period. The data of this study was from a pilot randomized control trial testing. The data proved that students who had mindfulness intervention were more engagement in class. Also, mindfulness practices and yoga helped students to be engaged and to have fewer students exhibiting symptoms of depression. Mindfulness practices that utilized yoga and other
contemplative techniques are a promising approach for enhancing key aspects of self-regulation (e.g., Chiesa & Serretti, 2009; Greenberg & Harris, 2011; Lutz et al., 2009; Tang et al., 2009).

Shahidi, Akbari and Zargar (2017) focused their study on how mindfulness practices helped students with test anxiety. In the process of development, children and adolescents experience a broad spectrum of anxieties, which are sometimes so powerful that they can create problems in their daily life and education. Among these anxieties, test anxiety is a common problem, Shokrkon (2004). They used Mindfulness Base in Stress Reduction to reduce the anxiety in students before testing. 50 female students between two high schools participated in the study. These fifty students were examined and were part of the intervention of MBSR. The results showed that treatment of MBSR on test anxiety and emotion regulation variables were effective. They also recommended that counselors include yoga as interventions in the daily schedule for all the students in order to reduce anxiety during the testing season.

Blotcher, Druker, and Frisard (2018) conducted a pilot study in two high schools in central Massachusetts (2014–2015). Their goal was to offer health education as part of their 9th-grade curriculum. In this curriculum, they included mindfulness practices that lasted 8 weeks for 45 minutes each session. The curriculum was based on the widely known Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program to meet the needs of adolescents (Prince et al., 2011). Students received interventions about how to cultivate attention to bodily and breathing sensations, sounds, visual objects, thoughts, and emotions; and to practice mindful movement exercises and yoga. The data showed that students improved in their ability to focus via practices directing attention to body sensations and to the entire body. The students were more active and more aware of their bodies and somewhat “primed” to mindfulness practice.
Methodology

Design

The research question was: How do mindfulness practices affect student motivation in a ninth and tenth-grade Spanish class? The hypothesis was when students are open and engaged in mindfulness practices, their motivation in class would increase over time. The variables are mindfulness exercises and motivation. This study collected both qualitative and quantitative data. The independent variable in this study was mindfulness practice. The dependent variable was student motivation; it is conditioned because it is autonomous to the student. Extraneous variables included the grade levels of the students, instructional resources such as the lessons provided, and materials applied, such as anchor charts, journals, and notecards.

Population

After getting approval from the school leader, the researcher sent consent forms home to parents (see Appendix A). The form included a letter from the researcher stating her role at the school, the purpose of the study, and a description of her research. The researcher described what mindfulness was and how she planned to measure if mindfulness practices helped to increase student motivation in class. The researcher stated that confidentiality would be upheld by removing participants’ names from the study. All students’ parents consented to them participating in the study.

The researcher surveyed 19 students in grades nine and ten. Students’ ages ranged between 14 and 15 years old. There were eight female students. Of the eight female students, six were African American, and two were LatinX. Both of the LatinX females were English language learners (ELL). One of the African American female students was in special education (SPED) and received special education services. There were ten male students. Of the eleven
male students, eight were African American, and three were LatinX. The LatinX male students were all three ELL and SPED. One of the African American male students was SPED. All 19 students ate free-reduced lunch and were from low socio-economic households.

**Intervention**

The intervention was conducted over the course of four weeks in a combined 9th and 10th-grade Spanish class. The researcher followed the Mind Up curriculum from the Goldie Hawn Foundation for all the mindfulness lessons. Each lesson typically lasted about 15 to 20 minutes; the class duration was 60 minutes each day. These interventions replaced warm-up activities.

During the first week, three lessons were given. The first focused on how the brain works, the second introduced focused awareness, and the third concentrated on calming down plus paying attention. Students also began to learn ways to help their brains work more mindfully by paying attention and focusing in on specific sounds and objects.

During the second week, the students learned exercises for sharpening senses through smelling, seeing, and listening. This lesson allowed participants to concentrate on how to apply the concept of mindful awareness to their own lives. An example of this lesson was counting to 10 when they felt angry or much stress. The students also practiced honing their skills and focused listening by participating in mindful listening, expanding on lessons two and three. Students also concentrated on mindful seeing. This lesson emphasized the importance of paying close attention to detail and using visual memory.

During the third week, the students and the researcher began to work on understanding stress. The researcher focused on mindful smelling, where students used their sense of smell to help focus their attention and gain access to crucial memories and feelings. The researcher then
introduced attitude exercises. The researcher discussed perspective by looking at a particular event from different angles and learning to consider viewpoints other than their own mindfully.

During the fourth week, the center of this practice was on attitude exercises. The researcher and students focused on choosing optimism. Students were able to explore the meaning of optimism and pessimism and discover how those two attitudes affect our relationships and ability to learn. The researcher and the students then focused on appreciating happy experiences. The lesson demonstrated how recalling happy memories could help students regulate their emotions and maintain an optimistic attitude.

Procedure

One of the data tools used was a questionnaire. The students completed self-assessment questionnaires (see Appendix B) that focused on school motivation, how motivated they were in Spanish class, how many times they used their phones during instruction, and how many times they put their heads down during education. The questionnaire also asked participants about how they thought mindfulness practices would help them to be motivated in class. The students completed a weekly self-assessment (see Appendix C), where they answered the following questions: Do you think mindfulness practices are helping you focus in Spanish class? Do you want to incorporate mindfulness practices into your daily routine? How do you feel after mindfulness practices? Another data tool used was a tally for observing student behaviors. Behavior categories were focused on observable physical signs of motivation, such as students checking their phones in class, raising their hands, putting their heads down, etc. (see Appendix D). The researcher added a tally mark on the observation sheet each time a participant displayed behaviors that exhibited motivation, such as paying attention during instruction and each time a
participant displayed behaviors that exhibited non-motivation such as phone use during instruction.

**Results**

The purpose of this research was to study how mindfulness practices affected high school students’ motivation over time in Spanish class. The design of this study was quantitative and qualitative. The data tools that used were tally marks (Appendix B) when observing behavior, pre and post questionnaires (Appendix C) about motivation in class, and a mindfulness weekly self-assessment (Appendix D) for participants. The context of this study was a Spanish course at the high school level. There were 18 participants between the ages of 14 and 15 years old. The racial demographics of the participants were LatinX and African American.

I used the tally marks sheet (Appendix A) for observational notes about students’ motivations and I used tally marks to record the students’ behaviors (Appendix B). Beginning at the start of class to the end of class, at 30-minute increments, I would tally each student’s exhibited motivation in class. Behaviors that conveyed motivation included students participating in the lesson and paying close attention by giving eye contact when the teacher was teaching. Behaviors that did not convey motivation included cell phone usage, head down, and talking while the teacher is teaching. I administered mindfulness interventions twice a week and I made behavior observations daily during the four weeks of this study.

Below is the behavior observational data over 4 weeks. Figure 1 reflects a slight trend in an increase in motivational behaviors and a decrease in unmotivated behavior after mindfulness interventions in class. The colors in Figure 1 illustrate the teacher’s observation notes during the 4 weeks of interventions. There was a big positive jump in positive motivation behaviors between week 1 and the other three weeks. There was a low motivation of students on week 3.
This decline was possibly brought because of the activities that were happening during that particular week at the school. That week was Valentine’s Day, and the school celebrated different activities each day. So, I think that is why the students’ motivation, participation and behaviors were not as normal days.

![Student Motivation](image)

Figure 1 Student Motivation: Break down of motivation and non-motivation each week

Participants completed a pre-intervention and post-intervention questionnaire (Appendix C) shown in Figure 2 and Figure 3. When asked during the pre-questionnaire how much do you enjoy Spanish class, 27.8% of the students responded not at all, 33.3% responded a little, and 38.8% responded a lot. During the post-questionnaire the number of students who responded not at all decreased to 0%, the number students who responded a little increased 5.6%, and the number of students who responded a lot increased by 22.2%. The data from the pre and post-questionnaire showed a positive increase in students enjoying Spanish class.
When asked during the pre-questionnaire how comfortable do you feel in Spanish class, 50% of the students responded somewhat comfortable, 33.3% responded very comfortable, and 16.7% responded not comfortable. During the post-questionnaire the number of students who responded somewhat comfortable decreased by 11.1%. The number students who responded very comfortable increased 27.8%, and the number of students who responded not comfortable decreased by 16.7% resulting in zero students feeling uncomfortable in Spanish class. The data from the pre and post-questionnaire showed a positive increase in students feeling a level of comfort in Spanish class.
Increasing Student Motivation in a Foreign Language Classroom Through Mindfulness

When asked during the pre-questionnaire how is your participation level in Spanish class, 33.3% of the students responded bad, 38.9% responded ok, and 27.8% responded great. During the post-questionnaire, the number of students who responded bad decreased to 0%. The number of students who responded ok increased 22.2%, and the number of students who responded great increased by 11.1%. The data from the pre and post-questionnaire showed a positive increase in students participating in Spanish class.

When asked during the pre-questionnaire how much do you think mindfulness practices help you focus in Spanish class, 33.3% of the students responded not at all, 55.6% responded a little, and
11.1% responded a lot. During the post-questionnaire, the number of students who responded not at all decreased to 0%. The number students who responded a little decreased by 38.9% and the number of students who responded a lot increased 72.2%. The data from the pre and post-questionnaire showed a positive increase in students thinking that mindfulness practices helped them to focus in Spanish class.

When asked during the pre-questionnaire how much do you think mindfulness practices help you feel motivated in Spanish Class, 38.9% of the students responded not at all, 50% responded a little, and 11.1% responded a lot. During the post-questionnaire, the number of students who responded not at all decreased to 0%. The number students who responded a little decreased by 27.8%, and the number of students who responded a lot increased by 66.7%. The data from the pre and post-questionnaire showed a positive increase in students thinking that mindfulness helped them to feel motivated in Spanish class.
Increasing Student Motivation in a Foreign Language Classroom Through Mindfulness

When asked during the pre-questionnaire how often do you check your phone during Spanish class, 27.8% of the students responded a lot, 55.6% responded a little, and 16.7% responded not at all. During the post-questionnaire the number of students who responded a lot decreased to 0%. The number students who responded a little increased by 11.1%, and the number of students who responded not at all increased by 16.6%. The data from the pre and post-questionnaire showed a positive increase in students paying more attention in class by not being distracted by their cell phones.
When asked during the pre-questionnaire how often do you pay close attention to your teacher when they are teaching, 11.1% responded not at all, 55.6% responded sometimes, and 33.3% responded all the time. During the post-questionnaire, the number of students who responded not at all decreased to 0%. The number students who responded sometimes decreased by 16.7%, and the number of students who responded all the time increased by 27.8%. The data from the pre and post-questionnaire showed a positive increase in students paying close attention to the teacher when they are teaching.

When asked during the pre-questionnaire how often do you put your head down on your desk during Spanish class, 77.8% responded sometimes, 11.1% responded not at all, and 11.1% responded all the time. During the post-questionnaire, the number of students who responded sometimes decreased by 38.9%. The number students who responded not at all increased by 44.5% and the number of students who responded all the time decreased by 5.6%. The data from the pre and post-questionnaire showed a positive increase in students not putting their head down on the desk during class.
Increasing Student Motivation in a Foreign Language Classroom Through Mindfulness

When asked during the pre-questionnaire how often do you ask questions in class, 33.3% responded not at all, 61.1% responded sometimes, and 5.6% responded all the time. During the post-questionnaire, the number of students who responded not at all decreased by 22.2%. The number students who responded sometimes increased by 11.1% and the number of students who responded all the time increased by 11.1%. The data from the pre and post-questionnaire showed a positive increase in students asking questions in class.

Weekly self – assessment data (Appendix D). Each week students had to complete a self-assessment after the mindfulness practices. This self-assessment was made up of open-ended
questions about mindfulness practices. The students answered it however they wanted, in words, sentences or paragraphs. Figures 20, 21 and 22 show the data per week and the themes that emerged each week. Students were asked to participate in a self-assessment once a week for the four weeks that mindfulness practices were being administered. One question on the self-assessment asked students, “Do you think mindfulness practices are helping you focus in Spanish class? During week one, 10.5% (2 students) responded with I’m not sure, 52.6% (10 students) responded with no, and 36.8% (7 students) responded with yes. During week two, 10.5% (2 students) responded with I’m not sure, 42.1% (8 students) responded with no, and 47.3% (9 students) responded with yes. During week three, 5.2% (1 students) responded with I’m not sure, 47.3% (9 students) responded with no, and 47.3% (9 students) responded with yes. During week four, 5.2% (1 students) responded with I’m not sure, 21% (4 students) responded with no, and 73.6% (14 students) responded with yes. After mindfulness practices I found that my students were more engaged than usual and were not afraid to ask questions in class. The intervention had a positive impact on them.
Increasing Student Motivation in a Foreign Language Classroom Through Mindfulness

Figure 20 Self-Assessment: Do you think mindfulness practices are helping you focus in Spanish class?

Another question on the self-assessment asked students, “Do you want to incorporate mindfulness practices in your daily routine? During week one, 5.2% (1 student) responded with I don’t like it, 5.2% (1 student) responded with I don’t know, 52.6% (10 students) responded with no, and 36.8% (7 students) responded with yes. During week two, 5.2% (1 student) responded with I don’t like it, 10.5% (2 students) responded with I don’t know, 42.1% (8 students) responded with no, and 42.1% (8 students) responded with yes. During week three, 5.2% (1 student) responded with I don’t like it, 5.2% (1 student) responded with I don’t know, 42.1% (8 students) responded with no, and 47.3% (9 students) responded with yes. During week four, 5.2% (1 student) responded with I don’t like it, 10.5% (2 student) responded with I don’t know, 15.7% (3 students) responded with no, and 68.4% (13 students) responded with yes. Even when some of the students answered that mindfulness practices were not helping them that much, I saw
in class that the intervention had a positive impact on them. Students positive engagement and motivation increased slowly.

Another question on the self-assessment asked students, “How do you feel after mindfulness practice? During week one, 15.7% (3 students) responded with great, 21% (4 students) responded with reset, 26.3% (5 students) responded with same, and 42.1% (8 students) responded with good. During week two, 21% (4 students) responded with great, 26.3% (5 students) responded with reset, 21% (4 students) responded with same, and 31.5% (6 students) responded with good. During week three, 21% (4 students) responded with great, 31.5% (6 students) responded with reset, 21% (4 students) responded with same, and 26.3% (5 students) responded with good. During week four, 42.1% (8 students) responded with great, 31.5% (6 students) responded with reset, 10.5% (2 students) responded with same, and 15.7% (3 students) responded with good. Figure 21 shows that the longer students experienced Mindfulness practices the more they want or think to start using them in their daily routines.
Overall, the data collected during weekly self-assessments had a positive effect on the motivation of high school level foreign language classroom. Students did practice mindfulness practices in their daily routine and their participation and motivation in class increased in a positive way.

**Action Plan (sometimes called Discussion)**

The purpose of this Research Project was to investigate meditation practices in a high school level Spanish classroom to help increase student motivation. As part of this project, students practiced mindfulness in their daily lives. During a four-week period, students practiced mindfulness through the Mind Up curriculum twice a week in a high school level Spanish classroom. Mind Up activities used in this project included lessons on how the brain works, how to achieve focused awareness, and attitude exercises focusing on optimism. The data results from this study were positive. The data showed that the implementation of mindfulness practices helped increase student motivation in the high school Spanish class. There are several conclusions that were drawn from the results, gathered through student surveys pre- and post-
intervention. 71% of the Students stated that they would love to incorporate mindfulness practices into their daily routine. 55% also shared that they sometimes felt refreshed or less stressed after the mindfulness intervention. Due to these results, the researcher recommended that the school implement mindfulness as part of the school's curriculum, and also recommended the Mind Up curriculum specifically.

This study found additional positive behavior changes:

- Students participated more
- Students asked the teacher more questions about homework
- The students developed the skills to debate and present their points of view when they had doubts about something
- Students were not distracted by constantly looking at the cell phone in class
- The students did not lower their heads while the teacher taught

The researcher plans to continue applying mindfulness practices in the classroom, incorporating what was learned in this initial project. The researcher observed that some students did not participate in the intervention fully, appearing self-conscious during activities. For example, when the researcher asked students to raise their heads and close their eyes, many participants looked around to see if other students were participating. Therefore, the researcher would like to include an individual space for listening to calming audio, and yoga practices, which were not included in this study. The space would be a private corner in the classroom with a yoga mat and meditation music. This space could be an alternative for students who would prefer to practice mindfulness on their own, rather than in a full classroom group.

This study investigated how mindfulness practices can affect student motivation in a Spanish classroom over time. Future studies may increase the frequency of mindfulness activities
and incorporate additional practices that align with the Mind Up curriculum, such as yoga. In addition, it could be beneficial to implement the intervention in other class subjects in the school, and the researcher recommends adding more teachers to the intervention to increase data collection and compare results. Furthermore, it would be useful to implement this research with students of a wide age range to better understand how mindfulness practice interventions affect different age groups. Future studies may collect data using more open-ended self-reflections, to allow students to express in their own words their experiences with the mindfulness practices.
References


Appendix A
Increasing motivation in Spanish Class
Assent Form

Jan 6, 2020.

Dear Parents,

In addition to being your child’s Spanish 1 teacher, I am a St. Catherine University student pursuing a Masters of Education. As a capstone to my program, I need to complete an Action Research project. I am going to study how mindfulness activities help to increase student’s motivation in Spanish class.

In the coming weeks, I will be implementing different meditation activities before we start with class as a regular part of my Spanish 1 curriculum. All students will participate as members of the class. In order to understand the outcomes, I plan to analyze the results of this mindfulness practices to determine how meditation activities help the students.

The purpose of this letter is to notify you of this research and to allow you the opportunity to exclude your child’s data from my study.

If you decide you want your child’s data to be in my study, you don’t need to do anything at this point. If you decide you do NOT want your child’s data included in my study, please note that on this form below and return it by Friday January 7, 2020. Note that your child will still participate in the mediation activities, but his/her data will not be included in my analysis.

In order to help you make an informed decision, please note the following:

- I am working with a faculty member at St. Kate’s and an advisor to complete this particular project.
- The student benefits may be increased motivation in Spanish class.
- I will be writing about the results that I get from this research. However, none of the writing that I do will include the name of this school, the names of any students, or any references that would make it possible to identify outcomes connected to a particular student. Other people will not know if your child is in my study.
- The final report of my study will be electronically available online at the St. Catherine University library. The goal of sharing my research study is to help other teachers who are also trying to improve their teaching.
- There is no penalty for not having your child’s data involved in the study, I will simply delete his or her responses from my data set.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, 787-240-3045. You may ask questions now, or if you have any questions later, you can ask me, or my instructor, Dr. Olivia Christensen, otchristensen@stkate.edu, who will be happy to answer them. If you have questions or concerns regarding the study, and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you may also contact Dr. John Schmitt, Chair of the St. Catherine University Institutional Review Board, at (651) 690-7739.
You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

______________________________    ____________________
Olga Torres Colon                   Date

OPT OUT: Parents, in order to exclude your child’s data from the study, please sign and return by 01-06-20.

I do NOT want my child’s data to be included in this study.

______________________________    ____________________
Signature of Parent                Date
Appendix B
Pre and Post Questionnaire

1. How much do you enjoy Spanish class?
   - A lot
   - A little
   - Not at all

2. How comfortable do you feel in Spanish class?
   - Very comfortable
   - Somewhat comfortable
   - Not comfortable

3. How is your participation level in Spanish Class?
   - Great
   - OK
   - Bad

4. How motivated do you feel to come to Spanish class?
   - A lot
   - A little
   - Not at all

5. How much do you think mindfulness practices help you focusing in Spanish class?
   - A lot
   - A little
   - Not at all

6. How much do you think mindfulness practices help you feel motivated in Spanish class?
   - A lot
   - A little
   - Not at all

7. How often do you check your phone during Spanish class?
   - A lot
   - A little
   - Not at all

8. How often do you pay close attention to your teacher when she is teaching?
   - All the time
   - Sometimes
   - No at all
9. How often do you put your head down/on your desk during Spanish class?
   o All the time
   o Sometimes
   o Not at all

10. How often do you ask questions in class?
    o All the time
    o Sometimes
    o Not at all
Appendix C
Weekly Self – Assessment

1. Do you think mindfulness practices are helping you focus in Spanish class?
2. Do you want to incorporate mindfulness practices in your daily routine?
3. How do you feel after mindfulness practices?
### Appendix D
Tally Sheet and Observational Notes

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Student Group One</th>
<th>Tally Marks</th>
<th>Notes/Observations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motivated</td>
<td>Not Motivated</td>
<td>I will know that students are motivated when they are actively engaged and participating, tracking the speaker, and asking questions to gain a better understanding.</td>
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<td>Participation</td>
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<td>I will know that students are not motivated if I have to redirect constantly redirect for head down, talking out of turn, or inappropriate technology use with cell phones.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tracking</td>
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<td>Asking Question</td>
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<td>Head Down</td>
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Increasing Student Motivation in a Foreign Language Classroom Through Mindfulness

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