

RESEARCH SUMMARY

Effectiveness of a SEL Mindfulness Program on Northern Ugandan Children (2020)

MindUP™ is an evidence-based program grounded in neuroscience, mindful awareness, social and emotional learning, and positive psychology, providing children with the knowledge and tools they need to manage stress, regulate emotions and face the challenges of the 21st century with optimism, resilience and compassion.

Study One: MindUP™ Feasibility Study

What did researchers examine?

This article presents two studies that took place over the course of two years. In study one, researchers examined (1) the feasibility and effectiveness of a culturally adapted MindUP™ program for students in post-conflict Northern Uganda; and (2) changes in student reports of depression, prosocial behaviors, and empathy using measures that they culturally adapted for this study.

How did the researchers conduct the study?

Researchers worked with a local Ugandan academic as well as local teachers to culturally adapt MindUP™. Next, teachers were trained to implement the program. During the training, researchers went into the classroom for selected lessons. They recorded observation notes to better document how teachers were delivering the lessons and how engaged students were during these lessons. Teachers also kept notes on how they were implementing MindUP™ and completed an implementation questionnaire at the end of the study.

What did researchers find?

Teachers reported successes in their implementation of MindUP™. Among the 7 teachers, they implemented 98% of the lessons. Core breathing was not consistently documented. (Note that during the second year, teachers were asked for more detailed implementation notes). Successes included:

- adapting some of the lessons to better fit the culture
- seeing high engagement of students in the core practice of breathing
- observing increases in prosocial behaviors (for example, acting kindly, sharing, showing respect) among students

Teachers also experienced personal successes. These included:

- gaining new knowledge and skills for their own teaching
- having better interactions and relationships with children and others
- gaining skills to help them overcome their own personal stress and trauma

Challenges included:

- working in large classrooms (50 to 80 students) in small spaces, which made implementation difficult for some of the exercises (for example, helping them find their pulse for one of the lessons), and providing adequate support to students
- teaching within a system that has a tradition of students sitting quietly and writing down the lessons that the teachers deliver. In general, there are few discussions and opportunities to engage in critical thinking and questioning
- understanding some language and concepts that do not translate across all cultures, for example, “anxiety” and “pessimism”
- having limited exposure to education about children development

Research Location

Northern Uganda

Study Design

Study One: Feasibility study (mixed methods)

Research Participants

Study One

- 7 teachers of 5th to 7th grade students who implemented a culturally adapted version of MindUP™
- 168 students in 5th to 7th grade (ages 11 - 14), all received MindUP™
- 46% of students were female

MindUP™ Teacher Training for this study

Study One: Four-day intensive social and emotional learning (SEL) and MindUP™ workshop. An extended training was provided as SEL and mindfulness were new content areas for teachers in this region. Note that an additional 4-day refresher workshop was also held during the second year. Part of the training involved supporting teachers in the classroom as they implemented the program.



Researchers found that among students who had one year of MindUP™, there were reported decreases in depressive symptoms and an increase in empathic concern. They also found that these decreases in depressive symptoms were sustained, and that empathic concern increased over the following year.



Study Two: Student Outcomes

What did researchers examine?

In this second study, researchers wanted to determine if the adapted MindUP™ program had a positive impact on student well-being and academic achievement. They compared two groups of 5th and 6th grade students from two different schools. In one school, students received MindUP™ and in the other school, students did not receive MindUP™.

How did the researchers conduct the study?

At the beginning of the study and then at the end of study, students completed surveys that asked them questions about:

- feelings in the last seven days
- emotional support
- friendship
- perceived hostility
- perceived rejection
- empathic concern

Teacher reports: Teachers were asked to complete measures for each student. These measures asked teachers to report on their observations of the student behaviors with respect to emotions (for example, anger, sadness, positive affect, and empathy). Teachers also provided the students' grades in English, Math, Social Studies, and Science.

MindUP™ implementation was documented by teachers recording when and how they implemented the lessons.

What did researchers find?

MindUP™ Implementation

Based on teacher records, all lessons, with the exception of one lesson in the grade 5 class, were implemented. On average, students in the 5th grade engaged in the core breathing practice three days a week while the 6th grade students did the breathing practices five days a week.

Student Outcomes:

Compared to students who did not receive MindUP™, students in the MindUP™ group reported decreases in:

- feelings of anger
- feelings of loneliness
- perceived hostility
- perceived rejection

MindUP™ teachers reported significant increases in positive affect and empathic behavior among MindUP™ students. Students in the MindUP™ group also had higher grades.

Research Location

Northern Uganda

Study Design

Study Two: Quasi-experimental design

Research Participants

Study Two

- 5th and 6th grade students who received MindUP™ (46 students)
- 5th and 6th grade students who did not receive MindUP™ (36 students)
- All students were aged 11 - 14
- 60% of students were female

MindUP™ Teacher Training for this study

Study Two: Four-day intensive social and emotional learning (SEL) and MindUP™ workshop and a three-day refresher workshop.



There were no differences between the MindUP™ and non- MindUP™ students on:

- feelings of fear
- feelings of sadness
- emotional support
- friendship

Final Summary

These two studies are the first to document the process of culturally adapting the MindUP™ program. This cultural adaptation was shown to be effective in helping Northern Ugandan teachers and children with their social and emotional development and well-being. Further to this, the training provided to teachers filled a need by supporting Ugandan educators to learn more about child development and healthy learning environments. Finally, MindUP™ includes many activities that are easy and inexpensive to implement (for example, core breathing practice, mindful listening) which is important for teachers who have little background in the area of SEL and also face economical constraints. These findings demonstrate that MindUP™ has the potential to positively impact schools in countries that have limited budgets for SEL efforts.

Original Research Article

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[Access the original research article here.](#)

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