

2022-05-01

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IMPLEMENTING MINDFULNESS-BASED INTERVENTIONS IN THE FIRST-YEAR
COMPOSITION CLASSROOM AS AN EMBODIED MULTIMODALITY

PATRICIA FLORES HUTSON

Doctoral Program in Rhetoric and Composition

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Dean of the Graduate School

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2022

Dedication

To my wonderful husband Mike, and my two beautiful sons, Mikey and Lucian.

IMPLEMENTING MINDFULNESS-BASED INTERVENTIONS IN THE FIRST-YEAR
COMPOSITION CLASSROOM AS AN EMBODIED MULTIMODALITY

by

PATRICIA FLORES HUTSON

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at El Paso

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of English

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

May 2022

Acknowledgments

This dissertation took four years to complete. There were many days when I felt like giving up. Giving birth to my second son during a global pandemic while writing this dissertation was one of the most challenging periods of my life. I am 100% confident that I wouldn't have continued with this project without the endless support and encouragement I received from the chair of my committee, Dr. Lucia Dura. It is difficult to find the right words to express my gratitude to you, Dr. Dura. I have known you since you were my instructor during my freshmen year of college, and you have been my role model ever since. I can only hope you know how much of a positive impact you have had in my life, from navigating academia to figuring out motherhood: "In Lak'ech". I am also very grateful to my committee members, Dr. Beth Brunk-Chavez and Dr. Sarah De Los Santos Upton. Thank you for believing in this project, and for your support. I appreciate your invaluable guidance and contributions which helped me complete this milestone.

Thank you to Dr. Lauren Rosenberg, for always being a positive and safe support system and for the many conversations where you encouraged me to think outside the box. I am very grateful to have met and worked with amazing people during my Ph.D. journey, including, Dr. Kate Mangelsdorf, Dr. Judith Fourzan, Esther Al-Tabaa, Tafari Nugent, Dr. Isabel Baca, Dr. Laura Gonzales, and Dr. Jennifer Clifton. I am also grateful to the team at the EPCC-UTEP Humanities Collaborative Fellowship: Margie Nelson Rodriguez, Brian Kirby, Dr. Brian Yothers, and Vincent Martinez.

I am eternally grateful to my cohort, who became my second familia during this journey, Britta, Liza, Moy, Stephen, Ashok, Suresh, and Billy: I will forever cherish all the memories (good and bad), all the laughter and tears we shared, I love you all so very much! Special thank

you to my two dear colleagues and friends, Corina Lerma and Dr. Juan Moises Garcia Renteria: muchisimas gracias por su amistad, por ser un apoyo incondicional en cada momento de esta aventura. Gracias por ser mis compañeros del doctorado desde el primer día. Y gracias a nuestra “cohorte” adoptada, Angie, por todas las pláticas, las risas, y por tu amistad.

To all the participants in this study (instructors and students): thank you for your time and commitment during this process. This dissertation wouldn't have been possible without your openness, willingness, and contribution, and for that, I am immensely grateful to you all.

To my yoga teachers and mentors, Betsy and Gilberto Arias: I walked inside your yoga studio ten years ago and my life changed forever. I am eternally grateful for your teachings and for all the love you have shown me throughout the years. I would also like to thank my yogi family: Edgar, Eva, Jorge, Daniela for always showing an interest in my work and for your endless encouragement and good vibes (literally!). Thank you to my friends Bety, Paulette, Yolanda, Celina, and Mel for their constant check-ins, conversations, and moral support. I would also like to thank my therapist, Dr. Eliane Herdani, for helping me cope with the many stressors that came from writing this dissertation (let's normalize therapy and mental health!).

This Ph.D. program would simply not have been possible without the support of my family. I am forever grateful to my mom and my mom (in-law), for helping take care of my sons throughout the past five years, thank you so much for your infinite love and selflessness. Thank you to my brother Roberto, for being my best friend and for pushing me every step of the way, I wouldn't be here without you and our weekly phone calls where I would tell you I was quitting the program, and you kept telling me “No, you are not!”. Thank you to my twin brother Samuel, for teaching me how to laugh in any situation and to not take life too seriously. To my sister Melissa, my confidant and partner in crime, for being my number one cheerleader during this

process. Thank you to Memo and Henry for all your support. Thank you to my dad, who from a very young age instilled in me the importance of education. I love you all so very much!

Finally, to the most important people in my life: thank you to my loving husband, Mike, for being a great husband/father/friend and for remaining cool, calm, and collected during my endless writing sessions. Thank you for going through this journey by my side and for making me coffee every single afternoon so I could write. You are the best person I know and the love of my life. An extra special thank you goes to my four-year-old son, Mikey and my one-year-old son, Lucian, for bringing me more joy, love, and smiles than I have ever known. Son la inspiracion y el motor de mi vida.

Abstract

Mindfulness is rapidly increasing its popularity amongst instructors and administrators in higher education (Bush, 2011; Egras, 2015; Egras and Hadars, 2019; Wenger, 2019). The simplicity of mindfulness makes it an inclusive practice that can be performed by every individual. Further, it is time and cost effective as it only requires a couple of minutes of class time. Studies focusing on implementing mindfulness specifically in writing and composition classes are scarce (Wenger, 2019; Consilio & Kennedy, 2019). This dissertation hopes to add to the growing research of mindfulness in higher education, specifically in writing classes, by exploring the ways in which mindfulness can be implemented in the first-year composition (FYC) classroom as an embodied multimodality. Further, this study also explores the perceptions that students have on mindfulness-based interventions in their classroom. The study consisted of two different phases. Phase I consisted of a quantitative study that sought to understand if a minimal-scale mindfulness-based intervention can have an impact on undergraduate students' self-awareness. The Mindfulness Attention Scale (MAAS) (Brown & Ryan, 2003) was used as a quantitative screening tool. Phase II of the study consisted of a qualitative approach that entailed semi-structured face-to-face interviews. Qualitative data was analyzed through theories of multimodality (Arola, Ball, and Sheppard, 2014; Mills & Exley, 2014; Jewitt, 2013; Shipka, 2011; Chandler, O'Brien, & Unsworth, 2010; Lenters, 2008; Zammit, 2007; Anderson et al., 2006; Self ; 2004) and embodiment (Peary, 2016; Johnson et al., 2015; Arola & Wysocki, 2012; Elbow, 2012; Knoblauch, 2012). This theoretical framework serves as the foundation and lens for analyzing the collected qualitative data. These sub-fields of RWS advocate for, and shed light on, the urgency for developing the learning scope within the traditional classroom. Phase I of the study indicated that UTEP's FYC students have the same average levels of mindfulness that are

on par with other college students. Further, quantitative data suggest that there was no change in students' awareness throughout the 10-week mindfulness intervention period. Lastly, there was no significant difference in mindfulness scores between the control and treatment groups.

However, Phase II of the study suggests that mindfulness-based interventions impact students' levels of awareness. Further, FYC students are open to learning mindfulness practices in their classrooms. The qualitative data also helped in understanding how mindfulness can function as an embodied multimodality in the FYC classroom.

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Wherever you go, there you are. – Jon Kabat-Zinn

Chapter 1. Introduction

My first experiences with school-related anxiety began at the start of my academic career in 2004. As a recent high school graduate enrolled at The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), I encountered many challenges that I was not expecting during my entire undergraduate experience. Although born in the United States, I lived across the border from El Paso in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, all my life until I completed my bachelor's degree at UTEP in 2009. As such, during my undergraduate career, I was a border commuter student, crossing from Mexico to the U.S. every day. My time as an undergraduate were some of the most challenging of my life, compounded by the fact that I was a border-commuter, English Speakers of other Languages (ESOL) student. I often dealt with panic attacks and anxiety, which dissuaded me from participating in class, made me afraid to ask questions, and hampered my abilities to learn. The anxiety I felt inside the classroom naturally transferred to my everyday life. This experience made me realize how my identity is closely tied to my use of language. Having to use a language I was less proficient in greatly affected my mental health. Therefore, I decided to pursue a degree in Communication Studies to better understand the way we communicate, and the impact communication has on our everyday lives.

In 2010, after graduating college, I continued to struggle with challenges associated with my mental health, and in an act of desperation attempted yoga and meditation in order to address my anxiety. I fell in love with yoga almost immediately and have been a devoted practitioner and advocate for this practice ever since. More importantly, the practice of yoga, mindfulness, and meditation significantly improved my mental health. As a result, I completed a yoga teacher training and have taught yoga for the past eight years in the Mexico – U.S. border region of El

Paso, Texas, and Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua. This inspired me in my graduate career, as I began my master's degree in Communication Studies in 2014 and completed a thesis project which explored the connection between yoga and interpersonal communication.

I began my Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Composition right after completing my master's degree. I was motivated to continue researching the benefits of mindfulness and yoga and their relation to mental health. As part of my assistantship, I was required to teach two first-year composition (FYC) courses each semester. In 2017, when I walked into an FYC classroom as an assistant instructor for the first time, I was immediately taken by the memories and feelings of my own experiences in the same class as an undergraduate student. Ten years earlier I was struggling with mental health issues while taking ENGL 1301 and 1302, and now I was teaching in the exact same room.

Through conversations with my students, I learned that nearly all of them were suffering from similar stressors that I had experienced years earlier. Most of my students were first-year college students learning to navigate college life and were dealing with the transition from high school to college. Further, many of them had jobs outside UTEP, and some of the students were border commuters.

In speaking with them further, I shared my issues with stress and the relief I acquired through yoga and mindfulness practices. One day mid-semester, one of my students approached me and asked if I could guide them into a yoga session to help them "deal with the stress of midterms." I knew that implementing a full yoga session would be inappropriate during class time, so I decided to implement a brief 3-minute guided mindfulness meditation. After the meditation, we had an open discussion on their thoughts and perceptions. Through this discussion, students shared that they would enjoy having these sessions more often. From that

point forward, my students would ask for the “breathing exercise” before class began. Noticing the positive feedback I received from the mindfulness practices, I implemented them in every class I have taught ever since. These practices consist of a brief 3-minute guided mindfulness meditation at the beginning of the class session. I open the practice to all my students, while all the same respecting the wishes of those who choose not to participate. My intent in implementing these sessions has always been to bring the benefits of the mindfulness practices I have experienced both through private meditation and from yoga teachings. As an experienced meditation instructor, I was able to craft and design a brief meditation session that was relatively easy to follow and understand for most individuals. I also implemented mindfulness practices through YouTube videos, and have received positive feedback from my students. The videos I played for my students aligned with the mindfulness practices I implemented in class, which seemed to be as effective as a tailored mindfulness practice. Further, I was able to explain to the classroom the evidence-based benefits of meditation on practitioners.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, I taught several RWS 1301 online courses. The additional layers of stress that the pandemic had on college students further motivated me to implement mindfulness practices in my classes. I would often have conversations with my students about the stressful state of the world. Students shared with me some of the challenges they were facing, from job insecurity to illness within family members. Therefore, we would take a couple of minutes at the beginning of each class to engage in a mindfulness practice where we would focus on our breath and the present moment. These practices helped in shifting the focus to the present moment and allowed for calmer and more engaged students.

These experiences implementing mindfulness practices in the FYC classroom form the genesis of this dissertation. After a couple of years of implementing these practices, I decided to

dedicate my dissertation project to researching the perceptions that FYC students have of mindfulness practices in their classroom, and exploring how these practices can be implemented in order to positively affect student outcomes. Additionally, the readings throughout my coursework about multimodal literacies, multimodality and theories of embodiment revealed how a mindfulness practice can operate within these frameworks.

In this dissertation, I conducted a sequential mixed-method study exploring the perceptions of undergraduate students enrolled in FYC at UTEP about brief mindfulness interventions in the classroom. I examined whether a brief mindfulness practice in the classroom impacts students' awareness. Further, this dissertation seeks to understand how mindfulness practices can function in an FYC classroom.

1.1 Significance of Study

College years are one of the most stressful times in an individual's life (Kleinpeter, Potts, & Bachmann, 2016). Transitioning from high school to college is one of the most significant life changes, as it represents many new challenges, such as additional personal, socioeconomic, and academic responsibilities (Enriquez, Ramos, & Esparaza, 2017). According to national data from the Healthy Minds Study, student mental health concerns have escalated over the last ten years (Chessman & Taylor, 2019), with approximately 30-45% of college-attending adults meeting the diagnostic for a mental disorder (Zivin, Eisenberg, Gollust, & Golberstein, 2009). Further, researchers have found that 64% of college students with a mental health problem have not sought professional help (Eisenberg, Hunt, Speer, & Zivin, 2011). Researchers have found two major factors as to why students don't seek treatment for mental health issues. The first is the lack of mental health literacy, as students rarely read or get informed about mental health conditions. The second is the existing stigma surrounding mental health (Eisenberg, Hunt, Speer,

& Zivin, 2011). Studies indicate that students with mental health issues have lower self-efficacy related to their academic performance and less motivation (Lipson & Eisenberg, 2018). Further, they are more dissatisfied with their academic performance, are less likely to participate in class, and have lower retention rates (Carton & Goodboy, 2015).

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the mental health of various populations, including college students (Brooks, Webster, Smith, Woodland, Wessely, Greenberg, 2020). The negative effect of epidemics and pandemics is well-known, as studies indicate that these events bring new stressors, including fear and worry about constraints on physical movement and social interaction, and radical lifestyle changes (Brooks, Webster, Smith, Woodland, Wessely, Greenberg, 2020). This was amplified by The National Alliance of Mental Illness (NAMI) (2021) as well as The Chronicle of Higher Education (2021), both of which also concluded that the Covid-19 pandemic presented many challenges to college students and educators across the nation, as well as affecting the mental health of students. A review of Indiana University's Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement, which surveyed 35,000 incoming freshmen across the country, found that more than half said the pandemic had substantially increased their mental and emotional exhaustion (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2021). Additional studies showed that counseling centers reported an increase in certain anxiety and depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder among students who sought mental health treatment on campus during the last academic year (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2021).

It has also been reported that college counseling centers are seeing an uptick in students seeking treatment, resulting in increased concerns that these centers will be overwhelmed with not enough resources to address each student's needs (The Chronicle of Higher Education,

2021). Thus, some experts agree that there is a need to implement new tactics that can help alleviate this mental health crisis in colleges across the nation. For instance, implementing “mental health days” and encouraging educators to be mindful of what students are going through by offering extra academic help or leeway in the classroom.

1.2 Purpose of Study

In this study, I argue that implementing mindfulness practices in the classroom can bring many benefits to college students. As I will note in my literature review, the benefits of mindfulness are evidence-based and have been studied in many disciplines. The simplicity of mindfulness makes it an inclusive practice that every individual can perform. Also, it is cost-effective, and can easily be implemented in the classroom through a variety of modes. I argue that the FYC classroom is ideal for implementing these practices. The FYC program at UTEP is “dedicated to helping students acquire and develop the composing abilities they need to succeed in their academic careers, their future professions, their civic responsibilities, and their lives” (The University of Texas at El Paso, 2020). More importantly, the FYC classroom helps equip students with the skills they will need to succeed in college and beyond. This study was implemented in four Rhetoric and Writing Studies (RWS) 1301 courses at UTEP, which all belong to UTEP’s FYC program. As the RWS 1301 course is a required course for every UTEP student, most students take this course during the first year of college. Additionally, the RWS 1301 course has a diverse population of first-year college students, with students from all departments. By implementing mindfulness practices early in the students’ undergraduate career, they could potentially learn a skill that they could benefit from for the rest of their lives.

Mindfulness practices in FYC have been explored in previous studies, and results indicate that mindfulness has a positive impact on students' writing process and academic

performance. Mindfulness practices have been shown to positively lower stress and anxiety in college students (Chiesa & Serretti, 2011). Further, these practices increase positive interpersonal relationships (Grepmaier et al., 2007), a positive effect regarding attentional functioning (Felver et al., 2014). Previous studies have also shown that students become calmer, less stressed, and more present in the classroom after such interventions (Bush, 2011). Further, mindfulness practices have been proven to cultivate a heightened sense of awareness and attention and cognitive enhancement (Greeson et al., 2014), improved self-regulation (Strait et al. 2020) and enhanced academic performance (Lin & Mai, 2018).

Previous studies also indicate that mindfulness practices result in a more enjoyable and productive writing process for the affected students (Wenger, 2015). Mindfulness practices have a valuable role in enhancing attentional control, reducing apprehension, and facilitating the development of metacognitive skills and agency crucial to good writing (DeMint, 2014). Further, there has been a link between mindfulness practices and a lesser degree of writing anxiety and writing errors (Britt, 2011). Therefore, in this study, I propose that mindfulness practices be implemented in the FYC classroom not only as an alternative route to help diminish the current mental health crisis in colleges and universities across the nation, but also as a tool to enhance students' academic performance and writing skills. By using RWS theories of multimodality and embodiment, I argue that mindfulness can be used as an embodied-multimodality practice that can be implemented in the FYC classroom through different modes.

1.3 Understanding the Concept of Mindfulness

To better understand how mindfulness can be situated in the FYC classroom, it is essential to provide a brief summary of the concept. Mindfulness is an ancient practice, the earliest writings of which date back 25 centuries to Eastern traditions (Bodhi, 2011; Fennell&

Segal, 2011; Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). The concept of mindfulness has been given different definitions throughout time; one of the most popular is by Kabat-Zinn (1994), which involves paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally. However, the cultivation of insight and reduction of suffering remains mindfulness' key components (Bodhi, 2011; Fennell & Segal, 2011; Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). Mindfulness gained popularity in the U.S. in the 1970s when Jon Kabat-Zinn introduced mindfulness to medicine (Bishop, Carlson, & Anderson, 2004) and founded the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center (Bodhi, 2011; Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Maex, 2011; Vago & Silbersweig, 2012), which later evolved into the Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program (Grossman et al., 2004).

Over the past several decades, mindfulness practices have been studied in different fields, from medicine to psychology, business, and communication studies. In higher education, mindfulness practices have gained the attention of several educators who aim to bring the benefits of the practices in their classrooms. Educators across the nation are implementing these practices through a variety of methods. For instance, universities are creating wellness programs that include mindfulness practices, while others are implementing them through group activities. Further, some professors are choosing to implement these practices directly in their classrooms. Through this study, I not only seek to understand the perceptions of FYC students of mindfulness practices inside their class but also how mindfulness practices can be implemented as an embodied multimodality practice in FYC.

In order to situate this study within the field of RWS, chapter 2 will present a review of previous studies of mindfulness practices in FYC. Further, I provide two overlapping streams of research that guide this study, one general and one discipline-specific. In the first stream, I

provide an in-depth review of mindfulness as a concept, its history and how it made its way to the west. Further, I also review previous studies on mindfulness practices in higher education and how mindfulness is currently used across different universities. In the second stream of the literature review, I outline theories of embodiment and multimodality and rhetorics of mental health within the field of RWS.

1.4 Research Questions and Methodology

This dissertation study consists of a sequential mixed-method design that is experimental and exploratory as it seeks to understand the perceptions that first-year composition students have on the implementation of mindfulness-based interventions in their FYC classroom. The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the perceptions about mindfulness of first-year college students who participate in a brief mindfulness intervention in the FYC classroom?

RQ2: Can minimal-scale mindfulness-based interventions impact first-year college students' self-awareness?

RQ3: How does mindfulness practice function in FYC?

I chose to use an experimental design with classrooms randomly assigned to treatment and control conditions for this study. By doing so, I could better assess the data collection and analysis. I recruited four FYC instructors to participate in this study. All four instructors taught RWS 1301 in the fall of 2019. The mindfulness intervention was implemented in the two treatment courses. The intervention consisted of a three-minute guided mindfulness meditation practice that was implemented through a YouTube video at the beginning of class, once a week, for a total of 10 weeks.

There were two phases of this study. In Phase 1, a quantitative screening tool was used, where scores on the Mindfulness Attention Scale (MAAS) were documented. Phase 1 helped in answering RQ2. The MAAS (Brown & Ryan, 2003) is one of the most popular measures of mindfulness, “exhibiting promising psychometric properties and theoretically consistent relationships to brain activity, mindfulness-based intervention (MBI) outcomes, and mediation of MBI effects” (Van Dam, Earleywine, & Borders, 2010, p. 805). The MAAS is a 15-item scale designed to assess a core characteristic of mindfulness; namely, a receptive state of mind in which attention, informed by a sensitive awareness of what is occurring in the present, simply observes what is taking place (Brown & Ryan, 2003). The survey took between 3 and 5 minutes to complete. Phase II of the study consisted of a qualitative approach that consisted of semi-structured face-to-face interviews. All interviews were conducted at the end of the semester. The collected data, which I analyzed using the theoretical framework summarized below, helped in answering RQ1 and RQ3.

1.4.1 Theoretical Framework

To situate mindfulness within the field of RWS, I am using and expanding upon theories of multimodality (Arola, Ball, and Sheppard, 2014; Mills & Exley, 2014; Jewitt, 2013; Shipka, 2011; Chandler, O’Brien, & Unsworth, 2010; Lenters, 2008; Zammit, 2007; Anderson et al., 2006; Self ; 2004) and embodiment (Peary, 2016; Johnson et al., 2015; Arola & Wysocki, 2012; Elbow, 2012; Knoblauch, 2012). These theories serve as a foundation and lens for analyzing the collected qualitative data. I chose to use theories of multimodality and embodiment as these two interdisciplinary fields broadly discuss the various ways in which we can expand on the learning practices in the FYC classroom. Further, these two sub-fields of RWS advocate for, and shed light on, the urgency for developing the learning scope within the traditional classroom. Lastly,

in this study, I argue that mindfulness is an embodied multimodality practice that can be implemented in the FYC class. Therefore, this theoretical framework serves as a foundation for this study, which situates mindfulness within the scholarship of RWS.

1.5 Assumptions and Limitations

In this study, there are some assumptions and limitations that were made at the beginning of the research design. The following sections highlight those two important aspects of this research study.

1.5.1 Assumptions

As an experienced mindfulness practitioner and FYC instructor, several assumptions were made at the beginning of the study. The first assumption was based on my experience implementing mindfulness practices in the FYC classroom. I assumed that a brief 3-minute mindfulness practice implemented once a week would be a relatively easy practice to be performed by every participant. Second, I assumed that most of the participants were going to have a positive experience through the mindfulness intervention. Third, I assumed that most participants would receive positive benefits from the interventions. Lastly, as an FYC instructor, I assumed that all of the participants would be honest in answering the surveys and the interview questions.

1.5.2 Limitations

In this research study, I foresee several limitations that could potentially arise. First, participation in the mindfulness-based interventions entirely depends on how many times the students choose to participate. Participants could possibly be absent or choose not to participate in all ten interventions, which could lead to inaccurate data. Second, there is uncertainty regarding the predisposition some students already have/lack towards mindfulness practices.

Mindfulness practices can have a different impact depending on how much an individual chooses to engage with the practice. Third, my own experiences as a mindfulness practitioner could potentially result in biases when analyzing the data. I mitigated these potential biases by being aware of my positionality and interpreting the data analysis with an open and honest mindframe. Lastly, a potential limitation could be how honest and truthful the study participants are when responding to the quantitative survey and qualitative interviews.

1.6 Chapter Overview

Chapter 2 presents a literature review that situates this study within the scholarship of RWS and the sub-field of Rhetorics of Mental Health. Chapter 2 begins with a review of mindfulness practices and FYC. Then, I provide a brief discussion of the concept of mindfulness, its history, meaning, and how the practice made its way to the West. I follow with a review of mindfulness practices within higher education in the U.S. I then situate this study within the scholarship of RWS by providing a review on multimodality and embodiment, which serve as a foundation for this study. I end this chapter exploring the rhetorics of mental health and addressing the gaps in literature in which this study can be situated.

Chapter 3 puts forth the methodology of this study. I begin this chapter with the research design and the three research questions that guide this study. In this chapter, I also explain in detail the two different phases of this study: Phase 1 includes the quantitative area of the study, while Phase 2 consists of the qualitative area. Further, I provide a review of the theoretical framework of this study, which consists of theories of embodiment and multimodality.

Chapter 4 includes the results and interpretations of the quantitative data for Phase I of the study. Phase I of this study consists of the scores from the MAAS surveys and their

interpretation. Further, it includes the results from Phase II of this study, which consists of the qualitative data from face-to-face interviews.

In chapter 5, I provide the analysis of the qualitative findings of Phase II of this study. Further, I expand on the theoretical framework of this study by aligning theories of multimodality and embodiment within the qualitative data.

In chapter 6, I answer the three research questions that guided this study and offer concluding thoughts. This chapter also describes the major assumptions and limitations of the study and provides recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1 Overview

The practice of mindfulness has been gaining popularity among instructors and administrators in higher education (Bush, 2011; Egras, 2015; Egras and Hadars, 2019; Wenger, 2019); however, few studies focus on implementing mindfulness in writing and composition classes specifically (Wenger, 2019; Consilio & Kennedy, 2019). FYC classes reach a wide range of students in all disciplines, usually in their first year, which offers an opportunity for them to learn self-regulation skills that they can apply in their education and beyond. More importantly, most of these studies lack a qualitative approach to understanding the ways mindfulness works inside a college classroom. Exploratory research is often qualitative in nature, therefore, by implementing a qualitative study I will be able to better understand the perceptions that students have of mindfulness interventions in their classroom.

The simplicity of a mindfulness practice makes it an accessible exercise that can be performed by any individual, anywhere, at any time of the day. These practices are cost-effective as they only require a guided session that can be read from a script or played on a recorded device. Additionally, short-duration and long and rigorous mindfulness practices have been shown to have substantially the same results practices (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). Therefore, these practices provide minimal interruption of class time yet can yield great benefits for students (Shapiro, Brown, & Astin, 2011), programs and institutions.

This chapter begins by reviewing previous studies of mindfulness practices in first-year composition (FYC) to situate the study within the field of rhetoric and writing studies (RWS). This review is followed by two overlapping streams of research that guide this study, one general and one discipline specific. The first stream explores mindfulness as a concept, providing a brief

history of the practice and how it made its way to the west. It also reviews previous studies on mindfulness practices in higher education and how such practices are currently used in different universities across the nation. The second stream outlines theories of embodiment and multimodality and rhetorics of mental health within the field of RWS.

2.2 Mindfulness Practices in the FYC Classroom

Mindfulness is being researched as a subject of legitimate pedagogical study in different departments across the curricula, from science to psychology (Wenger, 2019). Recently, additional research has been done on the implementation of mindfulness practices in writing classrooms. Increasingly, scholars and instructors of RWS are integrating mindfulness practices and pedagogies to gain a better understanding of the nature of writing, in addition to attaining practical improvements in the teaching and learning of writing (Consilio & Kennedy, 2019). Due to its ambiguous nature, mindfulness practices can be implemented in different modes, from guided meditations to mindful writing exercises.

Such implementations can be traced back to James Moffett's (1982) pioneering work, "Writing, Inner Speech, and Meditation," which explored mindfulness practices in writing instruction. His seminal work inspired scholars to conduct additional research about the ways further practices can be implemented in the writing classroom, which include conversations on understanding mind-body connection (Elbow, 1998; Perl, 2004) and integrating contemplative pedagogies for teaching and learning (Wenger, 2015). As a result, mindfulness has been established as a "generative heuristic given that it is inherently metacognitive, noncognitive, and experiential, offering a wider, nonjudgmental lens for investigating and developing pedagogy (Consilio, & Kennedy, 2019, p.31).

These studies demonstrate that the cultivation of mindfulness is linked to a more enjoyable and productive writing process amongst students (Wenger, 2019). Further, mindfulness practices also help in creating space for the act of composing, which allows for the separation for invention and performance (Wenger, 2019). Additionally, several dissertation and thesis studies have researched the effects of mindfulness in FYC. DeMint's (2014) dissertation investigated the correlation between meditation and anxiety, meditation and attention, and meditation and cognition in ENGL 103 Rhetoric and Composition. All students participated in a guided mindfulness practice on eight consecutive Mondays and completed writing assignments and surveys as part of the class. Results from her dissertation indicated that a brief mindfulness meditation plays a "valuable role in enhancing attentional control, reducing apprehension, and facilitating the development of metacognitive skills and agency crucial to good writing (DeMint, 2014, p. 91). Rahman's (2017) thesis researched whether the practice of keeping a mindfulness journal positively influenced writing transfer in composition practices. The results of this study indicate that first-year writing students' awareness increased through mindfulness practices, which resulted in better writing habits. Britt's (2011) dissertation used a quantitative strategy to examine if a 3-minute mindfulness intervention would affect writing anxiety and writing performance measures in a freshman composition course. Results from this study showed a lesser degree of writing anxiety and writing errors. As a result, Britt (2011) concluded that mindfulness approaches offer a potentially powerful set of interventions for writing instructors working with apprehensive writing students.

Both experienced and novice instructors can focus on gaining experience in mindfulness techniques as prewriting strategies. If students learn and practice effective methods for alleviating their writing anxiety, they can better facilitate their own writing skill development.

Zamin's (2018) dissertation consisted of a mixed methods study examining the impact of participation in a four-week, once a week program of mindfulness intervention on the self-efficacy, management of writing anxiety, and dissertation-writing productivity of advanced academic writers across the disciplines engaged in "high stakes" writing projects (this intervention was implemented outside of the classroom). Zamin (2018) argues that "the spread of mindfulness practice as one that supports mental and physical well-being has had somewhat limited, albeit interesting, iterations in the environment of higher education in the last ten years" (p. iv). Her study supports the idea that mindfulness practices can be implemented through different programs to support graduate students' writing processes.

Generally, when mindfulness practices are implemented in the classroom, the instructor either guides the students into a mindfulness meditation or plays a video with a recorded guided meditation. Mindfulness practices outside the classroom can also be held on campus by university wellness programs (Bush, 2011). Wenger (2019) implements mindfulness practices into to her curriculum as a practice and a lens to help students delve into their writing bodies and to provide them with the tools for becoming more reflective and better writers. Wenger (2019) sheds light on the importance of implementing mindfulness practices in a writing classroom, stating that "many students find that mindfulness helps them navigate the difficulties of paying attention while writing (p.60). Further, she describes how "practicing a breathing meditation helps students work through the negative emotions of the writing process- which can derail their attention to the task- and to refocus, short-circuiting more destructive and habitual responses (like stopping or procrastinating) (Wenger, 2019, p.61).

This dissertation study adds to the growing research on the benefits of mindfulness practices in the writing classroom by exploring the perceptions that FYC students have about

such interventions and assessing growth in awareness throughout the intervention period. The sections that follow detail the two overlapping streams of research that ground this study within mindfulness and RWS. The first stream provides a review of mindfulness as a concept, mindfulness in higher education, and mindfulness interventions. The second provides a review of theories of embodiment and multimodality and rhetorics of mental health in RWS.

2.3 Stream 1: Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a concept that has been studied, researched, and applied in many disciplines since the 1970s. In the following section, I will provide a review of literature on the concept of mindfulness, mindfulness in higher education, and mindfulness-based interventions.

2.3.1 Defining Mindfulness

Mindfulness (translated from the Pali word *sati*) is an ancient practice associated with Buddhism and other Eastern spiritual traditions (Shapiro & Carlson, 2006), and it has been traditionally understood as “an understanding of what is occurring before or beyond conceptual and emotional classification about what is or has taken place” (Chiesa, 2013, p. 256). The earliest known writings of mindfulness date back 25 centuries to Eastern traditions (Bodhi, 2011; Fennell & Segal, 2011; Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). The main purpose of mindfulness practices in Buddhist traditions was, and continues to be, the alleviation of suffering and cultivation of compassion (Santorelli, 1998). Further, Buddhists believe that the development of mindfulness is not taken as a goal itself, but as a means of promoting psychological well-being (Chiesa, 2013).

Baer et al. (2006) identified five facets of mindfulness: (a) observing thoughts, feelings, and sensations; (b) acting with awareness; (c) describing inner experiences; (d) remaining non-judging of inner experiences; and (e) maintaining non-reactivity to inner experiences.

Mindfulness can also be defined as an active regulation of one’s attention to focus on cognitive

events (Kabat-Zinn, 1994), and as such the practice can be used as a nonjudgmental, curious, and self-compassionate awareness of one's moment-to-moment experience. In simpler terms, Dreyfus (2011) defined mindfulness as "the ability of the mind to retain its object and not float away from it" (p. 51).

While definitions have evolved over time, the most consistent components of mindfulness relate to the cultivation of insight and reduction of suffering (Bodhi, 2011; Fennell & Segal, 2011; Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). Guided by Buddhist traditions, Kabat-Zinn initially defined mindfulness as paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). This definition of mindfulness became the most frequently used in literature (Khoury et al., 2017). Later scholars supplemented with additional components, such as attention, awareness, intention, attitude, and acceptance (Baer 2003; Bishop et al. 2004; Brown and Ryan 2003; Shapiro et al. 2006). Today, most scholars who study mindfulness associate it with complete awareness of the self and body.

The practice of mindfulness was widely introduced to the West by T. W. Rhys Davids in 1881 (Gethin, 2011), and made its way to modern psychology in the 1970s by Jon Kabat-Zinn, who introduced mindfulness to medicine (Bishop, Carlson, & Anderson, 2004). In the late 1970s, Kabat-Zinn founded the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center, which is based on mindfulness meditations (Bodhi, 2011; Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Maex, 2011; Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). Kabat-Zinn's institution later evolved into the Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program, which became the pioneer in integrating the practices of mindfulness meditations in clinical settings (Grossman et al., 2004). The MBSR program was implemented with the goal to reduce stress among patients suffering from different medical conditions (Kabat-Zinn 1982; Kabat-Zinn et al. 1986; Kabat-Zinn et al. 1985).

While performing further research on the subject, Kabat-Zinn argued that from all the mediative wisdom practices developed in traditional cultures throughout the world and throughout history, mindfulness practice was the most basic, powerful, and universal wisdom to develop, as he argued its concepts were generally easiest to grasp by practitioners (Kabat-Zinn, 2015). Kabat-Zinn wrote many books on mindfulness and continues his research while giving conference presentations around the globe. As a consequence of Kabat-Zinn's work over the last several decades, mindfulness practices have been applied and researched in different fields, including psychology, neuroscience, education, and business (Williams & Kabat-Zinn, 2011).

As discussed earlier, definitions of mindfulness are wide-ranging, as the term is used as an umbrella for a variety of approaches that assign different meaning to the same concept (Khoury et al., 2017). For this study, I am using Stanley's (2013) definition of mindfulness: an embodied and ethically sensitive practice of the present moment recollection. This definition departs from Kabat-Zinn (2003) definition of mindfulness. Stanley's (2013) definition centers on mindfulness as an embodied practice which relates to this dissertation study as I will be aligning mindfulness with theories of embodiment. More importantly, this dissertation seeks to establish mindfulness as an embodied multimodality within RWS.

During the last half-century, mindfulness practices in the West have been practiced in a variety of ways, including meditation. Bowen et al. (2017), define meditation as, "mind-body technique that refers to a broad variety of practices with the general goal of training the mind through regulation of attention and/or emotion to affect body functions, symptoms, and state of being" (p.453). Through repeated meditation practices and cultivation of mindfulness, practitioners achieve an increased awareness and acceptance of the self (Bowen et al., 2017).

Other popular practices associated with the cultivation of mindfulness include yoga and tai chi (Baer et al., 2008). It has even been argued that everyday practices such as cooking, washing dishes, and walking can help cultivate mindfulness, provided that such activity allows a practitioner to center their focus on the breath or anything else specifically (Williams & Penman, 2011). In the west, however, the most common practice for cultivating mindfulness is yoga. Yoga gained popularity in the cultivation of mindfulness over the last decades and has been studied in different settings, including psychology, education, communication studies, business, and neuroscience. (Salmon, Lush, Jablonski, & Sephton, 2009; Shelov, Suchday, & Friedberg, 2009). Due to the increase in studies on mindfulness practices and its benefits, a wide number of researchers across disciplines have created different tools that are used specifically to measure mindfulness, including self-report instruments (Baer, Smith, & Allen, 2004; Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, & Toney, 2006).

In the following section, I present a couple of examples on the benefits of mindfulness practices across different fields. For example, in the field of psychology, several studies have indicated that mindfulness is associated with increased well-being and empathy, as well as decreased rumination and anxiety (Chiesa & Serretti, 2011). These results also revealed that mindfulness is an effective treatment for pain, anxiety, and depression (Chiesa & Serretti, 2011). Additionally, for educational purposes, studies have revealed a positive effect of mindfulness regarding attentional functioning (Felter et al., 2014). As such, more educators are incorporating mindfulness practices in their classrooms. By incorporating mindfulness practices in higher education, students can leverage the benefits of these practices to become better learners and enhance their academic performance.

Positive benefits of mindfulness have also been shown in communication studies, where research has indicated an increase of positive interpersonal relationships through mindfulness (Grepmaier et al., 2007). Kozlowski (2013) indicates that higher levels of mindfulness are linked to increased relationship satisfaction, with more skillful responses to relationship stress, increased empathy, and greater acceptance of others (Barnes, Brown, Krusemark, Campbell, & Rogge, 2007). The development of mindfulness skills has also been associated with increased autonomy, relatedness, and closeness, as well as lower relationship distress among romantic partners (Carson, Carson, Gil, & Baucom, 2004).

Additionally, empathy is a key construct associated with mindfulness. In Buddhist spiritual traditions, mindfulness practices are used to enhance empathy and compassion (Hofmann, Grossman, & Hinton, 2011), and researchers have shown that there is a positive correlation between the two (Lesh, 1970; Shapiro, Brown, Thoresen, & Plante, 2011). These findings indicate the cultivation of mindfulness can contribute to the overall well-being of individuals in their personal and professional lives.

2.3.2 Mindfulness in Higher Education

Bush (2011), the co-founder for the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society and an avid mindfulness practitioner, has identified different motives of educators in higher education for implementing mindfulness practices. The most important reason is due to the potential that mindfulness has to help students become calmer, more focused, less stressed, and more present in the classroom. Additionally, the robust amount research on mindfulness and mental health and well-being has demonstrated that mindfulness practices help alleviate the most common stressors that college students experience including anxiety, stress, and depression (Bush, 2011).

The implementation of mindfulness within higher education has gained the attention of many scholars. Arthur Zajonc from the Mind and Life Institute argues that “during the last fifteen years a quiet pedagogical revolution has taken place in colleges, universities, and community colleges across the United States” (Wegner, 2019, p.83). Zajonc claims that these practices, which include mindfulness, offer a wide range of educational methods that support student attention development, emotional balance, empathetic connection, and compassion (Wenger, 2019). In support of Zajonc’s claim of a “quiet pedagogical revolution,” Egras and Hadars (2019) showed, by mapping out the discourse of mindfulness practices in education, that 447 peer-reviewed papers were published in this particular domain between the years of 2002 and 2017. Institutions such as The Mind and Life Institute, the Garrison Institute, the Association of Contemplative Mind in Higher Education, and networks such as Mindfulness in Education, are some of the pioneers in implementing contemplative-based curriculum interventions, including mindfulness practices, across North America and Europe (Ergas, 2015).

2.3.3 Mindfulness-Based Interventions

Studies have shown that mindfulness interventions can have a positive impact on mood and cognitive process. The Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), designed by Kabat-Zinn is the most popular and researched interventions. This intervention is considered to be one of the oldest documented forms of formal interventions, and as such has influenced a number of derivative practices (Creswell, 2017). For example, researchers at Duke University implemented Koru, which is a short-duration mindfulness program for college students. Koru focuses on mind-body skills, where it is implemented for only four sessions and only to small groups of students. As a result of such implementations, the researchers reported students with significant improvements to stress reduction, sleep quality, and cognitive enhancement (Greeson et al.,

2014). While these types of interventions have gained an increased popularity among some researchers in higher education (Josefsson, Lindwall, M., & Broberg, A. G., 2012), it continues to be a niche program that is not widely utilized (Dvořáková, Kishida, Elavsky, Broderick, Agrusti, 2017).

Whenever such interventions are used and researched, however, they continue to show that such implementation often assists students in coping with the challenging experiences associated with entering college (Dvořáková, Kishida, Elavsky, Broderick, Agrusti, 2017). Other reported positive effects among students have included increased stress-reduction and self-regulation (Strait et al., 2020). Further, studies have shown that by engaging in mindfulness practices, college students are able to learn how to effectively control their emotions, which results in anxiety reduction and more positive interpersonal relationships in the classroom (Dvořáková, Kishida, Elavsky, Broderick, Agrusti & Greenberg, 2017). Additionally, mindfulness interventions have been demonstrated to improve self-awareness and self-acceptance of others, which leads to a stronger foundation of empathy and compassion.

These benefits are not just limited to personal physical and mental health, as many studies have also demonstrated the positive relationship between mindfulness and academic performance (Lin & Mai, 2018). For example, a study of undergraduate students demonstrated how mindfulness-based interventions was associated with increased engagement in the process of learning, which resulted in higher academic success (Elphinstone et al., 2019) as cited in (Vorontsova-Wenger et al., 2021). Additionally, a different randomized controlled study demonstrated that students who participated in a 10-week mindfulness-based intervention program received a higher grade than the control group (Sampl et al., 2017) as cited in (Vorontsova-Wenger et al., 2021).

Essentially, through the implementation of mindfulness-based interventions, college students have shown a multitude of benefits, including making healthier choices, developing stronger relationships, and better preparing for the challenges that arise when transitioning to college (Bush, 2011). More importantly, students' mental health can be significantly impacted since learning to cope with anxiety and depression—two of the most common mental health conditions--can contribute to a better academic performance. In summary, some of the most important aspects that can benefit college students with the incorporation of mindfulness- based interventions are the following:

- Increased well-being, empathy, and compassionate behavior towards others (Chiesa & Serretti, 2011).
- Effective treatment for students who suffer from ADHD (Felver et al., 2014).
- Increase of positive interpersonal relationships amongst classmates (Grenpaire et al., 2007).
- Decrease in anxiety and depression associated with the challenges of entering college (Dvořáková et al., 2017).
- Improvement of awareness of oneself and others, which leads to healthier interpersonal relationships amongst students (Dvořáková et al., 2017).

Additionally, one study showed that incorporating mindfulness-based interventions in the college classroom, can make students better learners while alleviating some of the stressors associated with entering college (Docksai, 2013).

Mindfulness-based classroom interventions can take anywhere from two to ten minutes of class time, which should assuage the concerns of educators and administrators in higher education who are hesitant to allocate a substantial portion of their curriculum. Previous studies

have shown that mindfulness-based interventions based on brief training for participants provide beneficial effects without the resources required for more rigorous interventions (Strait et al., 2020). For instance, a qualitative study from New Zealand found that short-duration in-class mindfulness meditations resulted in calmer, more centered and focused students (Mapel, 2012). A different study demonstrated that a brief 3-minute mindfulness practice implemented at the beginning of each class session resulted in the students' enhanced ability to "clear their minds in advance of the lesson, and places the uncertainties of the future of libraries and librarianship in a more neutral or even optimistic light" (p. 113) and created a positive learning environment in which students felt appreciated as "students with emotions" (Hartel, Nguyen, and Guzik, 2017, p. 114). These studies demonstrate how brief classroom mindfulness interventions can become a valuable asset for any college classroom where instructors can make a significant impact on student's academic performance (Strait et al., 2020).

2.4 Stream Two: Rhetoric and Writing Studies

In the following section, I will provide a review of the literature of theories of embodiment and multimodality within RWS. Further, I will provide a review of rhetorics of mental health in RWS. Further, in this review, I aim to situate mindfulness within theories of multimodality and embodiment.

2.4.1 Understanding Theories of Embodiment

This study hopes to situate mindfulness as an embodied practice that can be used in the FYC classroom through a variety of modes. Theories of multimodality help in understanding the ways mindfulness practices can be implemented in the FYC classroom.

In the last several decades embodiment theory has become an important framework for understanding the mind (Niedenthal et al., 2005). In theories of psychology, scholars have

situated mindfulness practices in bodily experiences using theories of embodiment (Khoury, 2017). Gallagher, 2005, posits that the body shapes the mind as well as the way we communicate. The notion of embodiment was first developed in opposition to the traditional accounts of thinking (Michalak et al., 2012). Lakoff and Johnson (1999) argue that the brain and the body are connected to each other; therefore, the body functions as a component of the mind and not a perceiver, making the body directly involved in the thinking process (Khoury, 2017). Shusterman (2006) argues that our thinking abilities are greatly improved by the awareness and regulation of thought by the cultivation of calm breathing practices. Further, other scholars argue that embodied thinking is dependent on bodily interactions with the world (Barsalou, 2007). They suggest that embodiment is a main factor in understanding how the thinking process happens. Barsalou (2007) explains that the idea of cognition being derived from and dependent on bodily interactions is an example of embodied cognition. In this sense, embodiment becomes an important factor in understanding how cognitive tasks work. Varela (1991, 2001), proposed that a state of consciousness is embodied, involving a direct link between the body and the brain. Therefore, researchers suggest that based on neuroscientific evidence on embodiment, mindfulness and mindfulness-meditation center on the integration of mind and body (Khoury, 2017).

In the field of RWS, the link between language and bodies dates to Plato, Aristotle, and Montaigne (Knoblauch, 2012). Since then, research regarding body-rhetoric connection has continue to grow. Scholars like Jack Selzer and Sharon Crowley (1999) and their important contributions from their *Rhetorical Bodies* collection; Cheryl Glenn (2018), Katie Conboy (1997), Nadia Medina (1997), and Sarah Stanbury (1993) with their work on feminist theory and embodiment; and Gayle Salmon's (2010) work on the body in RWS through transgender

rhetorics, amongst many others (Knoblauch, 2012). In her essay, Knoblauch (2012), elaborates on the three categories of embodiment within the scholarship of rhetoric and composition, stating that these consist of: embodied language, embodied knowledge, and embodied rhetoric. Further, she states that “This is not to say that these three categories are (a) mutually exclusive, or (b) the only ways in which one could categorize embodiment within Composition and Rhetoric. As is true in other disciplines, within English studies, too, these categories overlap, inform each other, even bleed into each other. And scholars interested in embodiment rarely consider or utilize just one category” (Knoblauch, 2012, p.51). Knoblauch (2012) defines embodied language as “the use of terms, metaphors, and analogies that reference, intentionally or not, the body itself. Embodied knowledge is that sense of knowing something through the body and is often sparked by what we might call a “gut reaction.” Finally, embodied rhetoric is a purposeful decision to include embodied knowledge and social positionalities as forms of meaning making within a text itself (p.52). Similarly, Beavers et al., (2021) define languaging as “the understanding of language as an embodied set of linguistic, performative, and material habits and behaviors that often are called “writing,” “speaking,” or “communicating.” The statement uses this term, “language,” because it is broader and linked to a wide array of embodied practices that are also connected to the ways humans enact and know ourselves” (p.2). Further, Johnson et. al. (2015), posit that “The physical body carries meaning through discourse about or by a body. But embodiment theories suggest that meaning can be articulated beyond language. All bodies do rhetoric through texture, shape, color, consistency, movement, and function” (p. 39).

2.4.2 Mindfulness as an Embodied Practice

As previously stated, mindfulness has a wide range of definitions, but for the purpose of this study, I am defining mindfulness as, “an embodied and ethically sensitive practice of the

present moment recollection” (Stanley, 2013). Mindfulness practices center on using the body as a primary medium, as it requires complete awareness of the breath, body, and sensations. Mindfulness practices are therefore an embodied experience. As Michalak & Heidenreich (2012) state, in every formal mindfulness practice the body is the anchor of mindfulness. Further, they discuss that in every mindfulness practice, there is always a reference point of awareness that centers on the body. This direct connection of mindfulness and body makes it an embodied practice. This is important as Merleau-Ponty (1995) argued that, without our bodies, we do not have a world, but rather, we have the world we do due to our own senses and experiences. Katherine Hayles (1999) states that “In contrast to the body, embodiment is contextual, enmeshed within the specifics of place, time, physiology, and culture, which together compose enactment” (as cited in Arola & Wysocki, 2012 p. 3). Lacan (1975) discussed that the way we see our bodily selves is through an image that has been framed by somebody else. While embodiment has different meanings, the understanding of embodiment cultivates through culturally and developed identities that are placed on every individual by others (Arola & Wysocki, 2012). More importantly, the body is understood as a primary medium, which composes, writes, and communicates. By bringing embodied practices, such as mindfulness practices, into the FYC classroom, instructors can positively affect the way composition is done and students’ self-regulation skills.

Scholars in the field of RWS have described mindfulness as a form of embodied learning (Peary, 2016), as mindfulness practices focus on noticing the breath and body. Peary, 2016, argues that

“Through awareness of the sensations of the in- and out-breath (rise and fall of the torso, passage of air through the nose, delicate patterns of temperature

changes across the face and body), actions that are distinct to the moment, the practitioner develops a better connection to the kairotic present and is freed from the lure of the mind's pitter-patter. The rhetorical situation needs ways to latch onto the present vis-à-vis the body. In writing praxis, we seldom draw attention to students' physical experiences as they write, thereby cutting off a valuable flow of information about the inventive present. It's as though students were apparitions in the moment of composing—not fully present, wavering in and out of view, disappearing into a future time in which the writing product is graded or into the past during the evaluation of their previous textual performances. Lacking connection to the present, individuals sever themselves from physical experience: an unfortunate occurrence, given that awareness of one's body can lead to receptiveness to new ideas” (Peary, 2016, p. x).

Further, in the book *Vernacular Eloquence*, Peter Elbow (2012) described the physical modalities of writing, including time and space, which occupies a physical dimension. Peary, 2016, argues that “writing entails a temporal modality with its own series of moments that occur now- not a later date” (p.x). Wenger, 2019, argues that by bringing focus on these embodied contemplative pedagogies and practices in the writing classroom, students can become aware of their mediated bodies, which will help them become better and more responsible writers.

2.4.3 Multimodality and Multimodal Literacy

Anderson et al. (2006) define multimodality as “compositions that take advantage of a range of rhetorical resources- words, still and moving images, sounds, music, animation—to create meaning.” (p.1). Shipka (2011), defines multimodality as a “routine dimension of language in use” (p.13), and that “multimodality has always and everywhere been present as

representations are propagated across multiple media and as any situated event is indexically fed by all modes present whether they are focalized or backgrounded... Through composition, different moments of history, different persons, different voices, different addresses may become embedded in the composed utterance” (p. 27). In a first-year composition class, “students can expect to compose texts requiring multimodality, ranging from print texts with “minimal” multimodality- words, layout, and font size and style- to blogs with a fuller multimodal representation, including images, photos, banners, words, and podcasts (Andreson et al., 2006). Researchers have documented the benefits of using multimodality to positively impact the learning outcome of students across the world.

Multimodality meaning-making demonstrates that writing is not the only mode students need to survive in today’s global society (Chandler, O’Brien, & Unsworth, 2010; Mills & Exley, 2014; Zammit, 2007). Modes are essential to multimodality as they refer to the selection of linguistic, visual, gestural, and audio resources that provide a way for communication and meaning-making (Jewitt, 2013). The practice of multimodal composition is largely advocated as necessary for students in first-year composition courses. Many scholars in the field of RWS are inspiring others to adopt new and innovative learning strategies in response to new literacies practices (Grouling, & McKinney, 2016). Cynthia Selfe argues that “English composition teachers have got to be willing to expand their own understanding of composing beyond conventional bounds of the alphabetic” (Selfe, 2004, p. 54). More importantly, by acknowledging that literacy and learning practices have always been multimodal (Hill & Korhonen, 2004), scholars in the field can break barriers and challenge assumptions about the ways in which teaching composition is done.

Multimodality as a concept is used differently within several epistemological and disciplinary fields. For instance, in the field of computer science, multimodality refers to different channels and mediums of communication. In semiotics studies, Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) situated multimodality as a representation of characterizing texts, fixed images, moving images, and multimedia messages. Interestingly, they also argued that language, gesture, or body posture, are semiotic systems (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001). In RWS, multimodality is characterized in terms of compositions that take advantage of a range of rhetorical resources, including sounds, images, music and animation (Anderson et al., 2006). Further, in gesture studies and social interaction, multimodality refers to the various resources mobilized by an individual, such as gesture, gaze, facial expressions, body postures, and body movements (Mondada, 2016). In the study of conversation analysis, scholars have been approaching multimodality as a term that comprises language, gesture, body posture, and body movements (Goodwin, 2000). A concept parallel to multimodality is multimodal literacy. In this study, I argue that by implementing mindfulness as a multimodality, it will support and enhance the multimodal literacy of students.

Multimodal literacy is a widely established concept that refers to “the ability to successfully engage with texts that integrate different semiotic resources” (Crawford, Camiciottoli, & Campoy-Cubillo, 2018, p.1). Walsh (2010) defined multimodal literacy as “the ability to construct meanings through reading, viewing, understanding, responding to and producing and interacting with multimedia and digital texts” (p.213). Multimodal literacies were inspired by the notion of multiliteracies that was formulated by the New London Group in 1996 which highlighted the importance of changing and adapting new teaching and learning practices to new emerging forms of communication (Crawford, Camiciottoli, & Campoy-Cubillo, 2018,

p.1). Further, the New London Group (1996) “stressed the need to go beyond the traditional interpretation of literacy in terms of the capacity to read and write and urged educators to utilize new technologies to enhance multimodal literacy” (Crawford, Camiciottoli, & Campoy-Cubillo, 2018, p.1). Currently, English educators across the nation are motivated to find new and creative ways to adapt and integrate different multimodal resources as part of their classroom curriculum (Street et al., 2011). However, Beavers et al., (2021), argue that when adapting composing processes for a variety of technologies and modalities it is important to consider “how are the differences in access and use of various technologies and modalities by different students in the course accounted for and not made a barrier to some students’ success in the course? (p.6). Further, they discussed that we must “understand and use a variety of technologies to address a range of audiences already situated in particular political environments and rhetorical situations. Who has access to technologies (and to what degree) and how different students experience technologies for your classroom? (Beavers et al., 2021, p.4). The implementation of multimodal literacies has broadened the ways in which students acquire information and understand concepts. Further, multimodal literacies allow for the integration of different learning practices in the classroom, such as the use of a variety of modes, including visual elements, illustrated books, maps texts, among others (National Council of Teachers of English, 2015). Multimodal literacies go far beyond the traditional methods of teaching-learning practices and create a more inclusive and inviting environment which results in higher student involvement. Arola, Ball, and Sheppard (2014) argue that “the ability to identify particular affordances and rhetorical choices within various media is an important step in supporting the students’ ability to be communication producers” (p.1). By doing so, students can find a common language for understanding.

2.4.4 Mindfulness as a Multimodality

In this study, I argue that mindfulness is in and of itself a multimodality. This notion draws on expanded definitions of multimodality within RWS, sociolinguistic studies and semiotics studies. In this study, I propose defining multimodality as compositions that constitute of a range of rhetorical resources including moving images, sounds, music to create meaning (Anderson et al., 2006) , *as well as* body, body movement and gestures (Mondada, 2016; Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001). In this sense, mindfulness as a multimodality centers on the body as a medium for meaning-making. Further, mindfulness as a multimodality functions as an embodied performance that allows meaning making through the body and body movements, including breathing, movement, and stillness. Through this embodied performance, mindfulness as a multimodality can provide students ways to communicate, learn, and understand beyond traditional methods. Students can also prepare to transition into a headspace for clearer communication, improved learning, and understanding (Vorontsova-Wenger et al., 2021; Strait et al., 2020; Dvořáková et al., 2017; Greeson et al., 2014; Bush, 2011). Thus, students can receive the many benefits of the practice stated earlier in this chapter, which could then potentially have a transformative experience on how they experience and perform communication and composition.

Therefore, in this study, I situate mindfulness as a multimodality due to its embodied nature constituted by different bodily modes. Mindfulness as a multimodality by providing an inclusive, accessible way of learning and meaning making. Through embodied performance as multimodality, I seek to build on theories of multimodal literacy within RWS (Crawford, Camiciottoli, & Campoy-Cubillo, 2018; Arola, Ball, and Sheppard, 2014; Walsh, 2010) that define multimodal literacy as an ability to successfully engage with texts from a variety of digital modes, including visuals, sounds, animations, among others. Implementing mindfulness as a

multimodality as part of the FYC curriculum can broaden the ways in which students learn, acquire information, understand concepts, and compose, which is the primary goal of multimodal literacies (Street et al., 2011). Further, it integrates different learning practices (Walsh, 2010) that go far beyond traditional methods, creating a more inclusive and inviting environment that could potentially result in higher student involvement and better academic performance in FYC, and perhaps beyond.

2.4.5 Rhetorics of Mental Health

Over the past three decades, the field of rhetorics of health and medicine (RHM) has drawn increased attention from scholars. In the 1990s, Judy Segal shed light on the lack of research done in RHM. Segal (1994) argued that RHM “deserves special study because medicine not only partakes of science, but it also occupies an honored position in the society as a whole – as a site of magic and a seat of power” (p.92). Since Segal’s proclamation, researchers and scholars from RHM have worked towards expanding the field. The rhetoric of mental health is an emerging subfield of RHM. In addition to situating this dissertation within rhetorics of multimodality, I also situate mindfulness practices within rhetorics of mental health. While rhetorics of mental health have been studied from different perspectives within RWS, including disability studies (Bonilla, 2017; Greene et al., 2020); discourse and stigma surrounding mental health (Hinshaw, 2006); technical communication (Holladay, 2017); and mental health in academia (Price, 2011); there has yet to be any RHM research done that situates mindfulness in relation to mental health.

Situating mindfulness within rhetorics of mental health is relevant, because, as discussed earlier, mindfulness is an embodied practice that utilizes the body as its primary medium and brings many benefits to the mental health and wellbeing of the practitioners. These benefits are

well-established and researched in the fields of psychology and psychiatry. Some of the proven benefits of mindfulness practices include, increased overall well-being, and decrease in rumination (Chiesa & Serretti, 2011), effective treatment for pain, anxiety, and depression (Chiesa & Serretti, 2011), and a decrease in anxiety and depression associated with the challenges of entering college (Dvořáková et al., 2017). Scholars in RHM have noted the prevalence of mental health issues among academics (Green et al., 2021). It is only natural for mindfulness to be studied in these and other contexts, including studying the discourses that make mindfulness effective, such as language focused on the present.

2.5 Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed the two main areas of scholarship where I am situating mindfulness practices for this study: rhetoric and writing studies and rhetorics of mental health. Further, I provided a thorough review of the concept of mindfulness, including a brief history of the practice, and its gradual adoption in the west. I also presented a review of mindfulness practices in higher education and the ways in which mindfulness practices are currently treated and measured in academia (Bush, 2011; Ergas, 2015; Ergas and Hadars, 2019; Wenger, 2019).

In order to understand mindfulness and why these practices should be situated within the field of RWS, I begin by exploring the concept of mindfulness, how it is currently treated in higher education (Josefsson, Lindwall & Broberg, 2012; Strait et al., 2020), and the benefits that have been analyzed through different studies:

- A positive relationship between mindfulness and academic performance (Lin & Mai, 2018).

- Increased engagement in the process of learning, which resulted in higher academic success (Elphinstone et al., 2019) as cited in (Vorontsova-Wenger et al, 2021).
- Increased well-being, empathy, and compassionate behavior towards other (Chiesa & Serretti, 2011).
- Effective treatment for students who suffer from ADHD (Felver et al., 2014).
- Increase of positive interpersonal relationships amongst classmates (Grenpair et al., 2007).
- Decrease in anxiety and depression associated with the challenges of entering college (Dvořáková et at., 2017).
- Improvement of awareness of oneself and others, which leads to healthier interpersonal relationships amongst students (Dvořáková et at., 2017).
- Mindfulness meditations resulted in calmer, more centered and focused students (Mapel, 2012).

Further, I reviewed previous studies that have implemented mindfulness practices in the writing classroom and their results:

- Mindfulness is linked to a more enjoyable and productive writing process amongst students (Wenger, 2019)
- Mindfulness practices also help in creating space for the act of composing, which allows for the separation for invention and performance (Wenger, 2019).
- A brief mindfulness meditation plays a “valuable role in enhancing attentional control, reducing apprehension, and facilitating the development of metacognitive skills and agency crucial to good writing (DeMint, 2014, p. 91).

- Rahman's (2017) thesis researched whether the practice of keeping a mindfulness journal positively influenced writing transfer in composition practices. The results of this study indicate that first-year writing students increased in awareness through mindfulness practices, which in turn resulted in better writing habits

Then, I sought to understand how mindfulness practices can be situated within the field of RWS. Therefore, in this chapter I explored theories of embodiment (Arola & Wysocki, 2012; Knoblauch, 2012; Johnson et al., 2015; Peary, 2016) and theories of multimodality (Hill, 2004; Selfe, 2004; Shipka, 2011; Jewitt, 2013; Arola, Ball, and Sheppard, 2014) that help in situating mindfulness practices within the scholarship of RWS. I ended with a review of rhetorics of mental health that helped in addressing the gap in the literature of mindfulness practices within that area. Lastly, in this chapter, I sought to highlight the ways in which this study contributes and expands on theories of embodiment, multimodality, and rhetorics of mental health within the field of RWS.

Chapter 3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This sequential mixed methods research study aimed to assess the perceptions of first-year composition undergraduate students on the implementation of mindfulness based-interventions in their FYC class. This study also sought to understand if a minimal-scale mindfulness-based intervention can have an impact on undergraduate students' self-awareness, and the ways mindfulness functions as an embodied multimodality that can be useful in FYC. Ultimately, the results of this study will help shed light on how mindfulness can be applied more systematically in FYC classrooms. The following questions undergird this research:

RQ1: What are the perceptions about mindfulness of first-year college students who participate in a brief mindfulness intervention in the FYC classroom?

RQ2: Can minimal-scale mindfulness-based interventions impact first year college student's self-awareness?

RQ3: How does mindfulness function in FYC?

As cited in Vorontsova-Wenger et al. (2021), answering these questions can contribute to essential aspects of first-year students' transition to college and personal development by improving their ability to cultivate a heightened sense of awareness and attention and cognitive enhancement (Greeson et al., 2014), reduce stress and improve self-regulation (Strait et al., 2020), enhance academic performance (Lin & Mai, 2018), which can lead to a higher academic success (Elphinstone et al., 2019) as cited in (Vorontsova-Wenger et al., 2021). Further, mindfulness-based interventions can result in lower anxiety and improve students' interpersonal relationships in the classroom (Dvořáková et al., 2017).

3.2 Research Design: Sequential Mixed Methods

As stated in Chapter 2, mindfulness practices are rapidly gaining popularity in higher education are well established (Bush ,2011); however, there is not sufficient research investigating the effects of mindfulness practices at the college level, let alone on the FYC student population. This study contributes to ongoing scholarly conversations about integrating, and potentially scaling, mindfulness-based interventions in institutions of higher education, and specifically, into writing programs. Brown and Ryan (2003) established that there is a relationship between mindfulness meditation exercises and the cultivation of mindfulness as a whole. Additionally, research has shown that mindfulness practices help alleviate the most common stressors that college students experience including anxiety, stress, and depression (Bush, 2011). Further, empirical evidence demonstrates that mindfulness meditation can be learned (Brown & Ryan, 2003, 2004; Olendzki, 2009; Shapiro et al., 2006). Based on this evidence, I selected mindfulness meditation as the intervention for this study. To accomplish this, a five-minute mindfulness meditation intervention or treatment was embedded in two existing FYC courses (the “treatment group”), with two additional FYC courses serving as a control group. The study set the control group as the benchmark to measure the results (perceptions, awareness, and any other impact or outcomes) of the treatment group.

A mixed methods approach was pursued for two main reasons. The first was that the study was both experimental and exploratory in nature, and thus a mixed-methods approach was better suited to leverage the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methods. This was accomplished through surveys and interviews to compare data, i.e., patterns or changes in awareness from the survey, and a more open-ended articulation of the participants’ perceptions of the interventions. In this sense, the study was sequential-dependent, where the results of the

qualitative portion were analyzed in relation to those of the qualitative phase (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). The second reason for this approach was that previous studies researching mindfulness interventions in the classroom suggested that a mixed-methods approach would be optimal, as “the qualitative components, such as interviews and intuitive journal writing, could lend depth to the experiences of subjects as they implement mindfulness meditation as a stress-reduction technique. These qualitative strategies would help to identify specific stressors reported by students and would also indicate students’ deficits in stress reduction skills” (Hasha, 2009). Further, I collected quantitative and qualitative data during the same stage, differentiating this from an explanatory or exploratory sequential research approach (Creswell et al., 2003). This study was designed using two phases. Phase I of the study helped in answering RQ2. In Phase I, I used a quantitative screening tool to document scores on the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS). In Phase II of the study, I conducted face-to-face interviews. Data collected from these interviews provided the necessary data to answer RQ1 and RQ3.

Table 3.1: Data Collection Matrix

<i>Data Collection Matrix</i>			
Research Question	Methodology	Data Collection	Data Analysis
RQ1: What are the perceptions about mindfulness of first-year college students who participate in a brief mindfulness intervention in the FYC classroom?	Qualitative	Face-to-face Interviews	Coding and identifying themes

RQ2: Can minimal-scale mindfulness-based interventions impact first year college student's self-awareness?	Quantitative	Online Surveys	Descriptive Statistics
RQ3: How does mindfulness function in FYC?	Qualitative	Face-to-face Interviews	Coding and identifying themes

Table 1

3.2.1 Experimental Research Design

This study used an experimental design with classrooms randomly assigned treatment and control conditions. The random selection was designed to minimize implementation threats in the two treatment groups and the two control groups. With this approach, the study enabled me to assess the effects of mindfulness-based interventions on FYC students' levels of mindfulness.

I recruited four instructors to participate in this study. In the spring of 2018, I had an opportunity to present my dissertation topic at an FYC department meeting. At this presentation, I invited instructors to contact me if they were interested in participating in the study. After the presentation, four instructors approached me and indicated an interest in the study. All four instructors taught the first of two FYC courses at my university, Rhetoric and Writing Studies (RWS) 1301, in the fall of 2019. Two of the instructors taught on Monday/Wednesday/Friday and two taught on Tuesday/Thursday. Two instructors were randomly placed in the treatment

group, in charge of conducting the intervention, and the other two instructors were placed in the control group. Additionally, the control and treatment groups had one instructor teaching on Tuesday/Thursday and the other instructor was teaching Monday/Wednesday/Friday. All four instructors provided the same online surveys to students three times in the semester: once at the beginning, once in the middle, and at the end. I visited all four courses every time the online surveys were implemented, for a total of twelve classroom visits. For the first classroom visit, I informed students about the study using a standard script across all four classes, recruited potential participants, distributed IRB consent forms, and implemented the first electronic survey. During the second visit, the second electronic survey was implemented, and I recruited potential participants for interviews. During the third and the last visit, the final electronic survey was implemented, the list of interview recruits was finalized, and I distributed a sign-up sheet with dates and times to conduct such interviews.

Table 3.2: Distribution of Control and Treatment Groups by Class

	Day	Location
Control Group 1	M/W/F	UTEP's UGLC
Control Group 2	T/TR	UTEP's UGLC
Treatment Group 1	M/W/F	UTEP's UGLC
Treatment Group 2	T/TR	UTEP's UGLC

Over a period of 10 weeks during the semester, in the treatment groups, the instructor of record played a recorded meditation exercise at the start of class. At the end of the semester, face-to-face interviews were performed with participants from the treatment groups. For the

control groups, other than my visits during the implementation of the electronic surveys, there were no changes to the curriculum or class procedures.

3.3 Recruitment

Recruitment was conducted in two different phases. For the quantitative phase of the study, recruitment was conducted at the beginning of the semester. A script was used to recruit potential participants. I visited all four courses (control and treatment) in September 2019 and read a script (see appendix) where I shared information about the study and invited students to participate. The script consisted of a description, duration, and process of the study. All participants signed a printed IRB consent form.

For the qualitative phase of the study, participants were recruited on a volunteer basis during the second and third class visits from the two treatment groups as only the participants from the treatment groups could be interviewed about their thoughts and perceptions on the mindfulness interventions. Interview participants could have opted in or out of the mindfulness intervention and surveys. All interview participants were given an IRB consent form in addition to the survey IRB consent form. A spreadsheet with times and dates was passed around the classroom, and students who agreed to participate in the interviews filled out their names, emails, and phone numbers next to the day and time they agreed to meet. All participants who agreed signed a separate IRB consent form at the beginning of the study. All students who agreed to participate were given a fifteen-dollar visa gift card funded through the Strauss Funding from UTEP's Department of English. The gift card was given at the end of each individual interview.

3.3.1 Participants

All potential participants for the survey and interviews had to meet the following criteria:

- Enrolled as a student at the UTEP RWS 1301 class for fall 2019.

- Be 18 years of age or older.
- Complete an informed IRB consent form and agree to participate in the study.

A total of 55 students out of 75 students participated in Phase I of the study. Twenty-seven students participated from the control group classes and twenty-eight students participated from the treatment group classes. Refer to Table 3.

Table 3.3: Distribution of Participants by Groups

Control Group 1: Participants	Control Group 2: Participants	Treatment Group: 1 Participant	Treatment Group: 2 Participants
Student 1	Student 14	Student 1	Student 15
Student 2	Student 15	Student 2	Student 16
Student 3	Student 16	Student 3	Student 17
Student 4	Student 17	Student 4	Student 18
Student 5	Student 18	Student 5	Student 19
Student 6	Student 19	Student 6	Student 20
Student 7	Student 20	Student 7	Student 21
Student 8	Student 21	Student 8	Student 22
Student 9	Student 22	Student 9	Student 23
Student 10	Student 23	Student 10	Student 24
Student 11	Student 24	Student 11	Student 25
Student 12	Student 25	Student 12	Student 26
Student 13	Student 26	Student 13	Student 27
	Student 27	Student 14	Student 28

Control Group Total Participants: 27

Treatment Group Total Participants: 28

TOTAL PARTICIPANTS: 55

For Phase II of the study, a total of eighteen participants were recruited. All participants were undergraduate students from the border region of El Paso, TX – Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico, and all except one participant were first-year college students.

Table 3.4: Participants Information

(All names are pseudonyms)

	Sex	Undergraduate Student	Freshman	Border Region	Survey Participation
Krys	F	x	x	x	x
Michelle	F	x	x	x	x
Pablo	M	x	x	x	x
David	M	x	x	x	x
Melina	F	x	x	x	x
Jose	M	x	x	x	x
Melissa	F	x	x	x	x
Miguel	M	x	x	x	x
Luciano	M	x		x	x
William	M	x	x	x	x
Esther	F	x	x	x	x
Lori	F	x	x	x	x
Roberto	M	x	x	x	x
Erin	F	x	x	x	x

Estephy	F	x	x	x	x
Clarissa	F	x	x	x	x
Norma	F	x	x	x	x
Alani	F	x	x	x	x

3.4 Intervention

As a RWS instructor, I have been implementing different mindfulness techniques with my own students for the last two years. As an experienced yoga instructor, I have guided FYC students through brief guided meditations that focus on awareness of breath and present moment. There are several techniques that instructors can use in teaching mindfulness to students. From past experience and previous feedback I received from my own students, I have found that a mindfulness practice from a YouTube video is as effective as a tailored mindfulness practice. For this project, I asked participating instructors to play a short video guiding students through the simplest mindfulness technique, which is based on breath awareness (pranayama). The effects of pranayama are long-lasting and can be performed at any setup without the requirement of any equipment. Brief meditation practices (once a week or less) have been associated with positive affect (Polizzi, Baltman, Lynn, 2019). Positive affect refers to one's propensity to experience positive emotions and interact with others and with life's challenges in a positive way. Further, research suggests the beneficial effects of pranayama in a variety of clinical conditions (Sharma, Trakroo, Subramaniam, Rajajeyakumar, Bhavanani, & Sahai, 2013; Turankar et al., 2013).

The video was free and available on YouTube, and the same video was used for each intervention. I chose the pranayama breath awareness technique as it is one of the simplest forms

of guided mindfulness practice. Each intervention took no more than five minutes. The video itself is four minutes, and I estimate that it took no more than a minute to organize.

There were a wide variety of guided mindfulness meditations from which to choose for this study. These guided meditations vary in intent, style, and tone, with some focusing on the breath, others on the body, and still others on a particular image or sound. As an experienced yoga instructor, I was able to choose an appropriate guided mindfulness lesson after reviewing dozens of YouTube meditation videos. I also reviewed previous studies that had done mindfulness-based interventions in a college classroom setting, including a Blackburn (2015) study where she implemented mindfulness interventions with MBA students. Blackburn chose a video by Dr. Ronald Siegel (2013), titled “Breath Awareness Meditation” and offered guidance to make it accessible to every participant. Additionally, this guided meditation session was performed in a very calm tone, with no music background or sounds. I then implemented this intervention with my current FYC students and received positive feedback. Prior to the execution of this research, the recording was shared with other RWS instructors to affirm its fit in the FYC classroom environment. The YouTube link to the video was copied onto instructors’ institutional email so they could access it from the classroom’s computer each week. At the start of each of the 10 class sessions in the treatment classrooms, participants were instructed to listen to the recording.

Duration of Treatment

Since the length of mindfulness-based interventions can vary greatly—from minutes to years—the duration of training is an important decision in the design of mindfulness research (Davidson, 2010). For this study, the intervention was five minutes per class for 10 classes over the course of 10 weeks. The duration of the intervention was chosen based on faculty members’

perception of available time in the class session that could be devoted to the intervention. It is also suggested to be the most optimal amount of time to dedicate for such mindfulness-based interventions inside a college classroom (Greeson et al., 2014). A recorded, guided mindfulness meditation, as opposed to live, guided meditation, was used in this study for consistency in the intervention across the two treatment classrooms.

3.5 Data Collection Procedures

The requisite approval to conduct this study was first obtained by UTEP's Institutional Review Board (IRB) Number [1497611-2]. This study used a sample of convenience. I am an instructor at the FYC Program at UTEP and thus had access to its FYC students - the population of interest in this study. I also had relationships with instructors at the FYC Program at UTEP who could help facilitate the treatment in their classrooms. The two instructors in the treatment group implemented the intervention on ten different days of the semester (alternating between Tuesday and Thursday or Monday, Wednesday and Friday) over the course of ten weeks. The course on Tuesday and Thursday was 90 minutes long, and the course on Monday, Wednesday and Friday was 50 minutes long. The other two instructors taught the control group and did not implement the intervention. All four courses were RWS 1301, the first course in the FYC program and a required course for all UTEP students.

Table 3.5: Sequential Mixed Methods

Step	Description	Timeline
Data Collection: Phase I, Part One	Implemented online survey in all 4 classrooms.	Early October 2019

Quantitative: QuestionPro survey		
Data Collection: Phase I, Part Two Quantitative: QuestionPro survey	Implemented online survey in all 4 classrooms.	Early November 2019
Data Collection: Phase I, Part Three Quantitative: QuestionPro survey	Implemented online survey in all 4 classrooms.	Early December 2019
Data Collection: Phase II Qualitative: Conduct interviews	Conducted interviews.	Early December 2019
Data Analysis	Analyzed survey results and interviewed participants.	
Write-up	Wrote up results and conclusions.	

3.5.1 Phase I: Online Surveys

The instrument used to measure students' pre-test and post-test mindfulness levels was the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) (Brown & Ryan, 2003). The MAAS is frequently used in research on mindfulness, as “[MAAS] is one of the most popular measures of mindfulness, exhibiting promising psychometric properties and theoretically consistent relationships to brain activity, mindfulness-based intervention (MBI) outcomes, and mediation of MBI effects” (Van Dam, Earleywine, & Borders, 2010, p. 805). The MAAS is a 15-item scale

designed to assess a core characteristic of mindfulness; namely, a receptive state of mind in which attention, informed by a sensitive awareness of what is occurring in the present, simply observes what is taking place (Brown & Ryan, 2003). The MAAS purports to measure this variation in people's levels of mindfulness. The MAAS is a self-report questionnaire. Self-reporting is of particular value when attempting to measure mindfulness because mindfulness is not a construct that is easily measured by direct observation or by non-self-reported tests (Baer, 2011). The survey took between 3 and 5 minutes to complete.

3.5.2 Phase II: Semi-Structured Interviews

In-person, semi-structured interviews were implemented at the end of the semester. Participants were recruited from the two treatment classes. The plan for the interviews was disclosed to all students from both treatment classrooms at the beginning of the study. My initial plan was to interview at least 15 students in order to receive a more in-depth explanation on the effects (if any) of mindfulness-based interventions in the classroom. I recruited 23 participants,, thirteen of the participants were students at the RWS 1301 MWF treatment classroom, and the additional ten participants were students at the RWS 1301 TR treatment classroom. However, out of those 23 participants, only 18 participants showed up for interviews. Each interview lasted between 12 and 20 minutes.

Interviews

By conducting one-on-one, semi-structured interviews, my hope was to gain a better understanding and uncover valuable information regarding the participants' perspectives, as well as to notice any cue that might be a helpful addition to the results of the study (Lindolf & Taylor, 2011). All the interviews were performed during the first week of December 2019 at the UTEP Library foyer, next to a coffee shop. In order to preserve the participants' anonymity and safety,

pseudonyms were used. A standard digital recording device was used for each interview. As a precaution, I also recorded the interviews with my cellphone using a free recording app. I chose to do this in order to have a backup plan in case the recording device was lost, stolen, or broken. However, as soon as I completed the interviews I transferred recordings to a hard drive, and I deleted the interviews from my cell phone.

Interview Questions (#1-3 pertain to both intervention participants and non-participants; #4-5 are for participants only):

1. Is this your first year at UTEP? Are you from the region?
 - a. If so, how has your transition from high school to college been?
2. What is your experience with the mindfulness-based interventions implemented inside your classroom?
3. What are your feelings about these interventions?
4. Did you participate in the meditations? Was this a good use of class time? Why or why not? If you didn't participate in the meditations, can you talk about why not?
5. Did these interventions help you in any way? Was there anything you particularly enjoyed? Anything you would change?
6. Would you like to have these interventions in future classes?
7. Is there anything I haven't asked but that you think would be useful for my study?

The transcription and analysis of the interview data occurred once all study interviews were completed. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process; no data can identify any individual, and pseudonyms were employed. I used manual coding to find emerging themes regarding participant perception of awareness. I sought to make connections across responses

with the topics of my theoretical framework. This will help me answer my third research question.

3.6 Data Analysis

In the following section, I provide a description of the data analysis of both the quantitative study and the qualitative study. This section begins the Phase I of the study following by the analysis of Phase II of the study.

3.6.1 Phase I: Quantitative Study

This study was randomly assigned classrooms to control and treatment groups in order to minimize any potential threats (Fraenkel et al., 2012). By using a random assignment approach, participants groups were randomly selected as control and treatment groups, as a result, it ensure that all groups were comparable at the start of a study and that any differences between them were due to random factors.

Further, this study used identical electronic MAAS surveys for all three administrations and did not change from pre-test to post-test. Additionally, data collection was standardized across all four classrooms by using the same protocols, which included asking faculty to read the same script when facilitating the electronic MAAS survey.

This study was also potentially subject to location threat, which is the possibility that the intervention site may influence the study's outcomes (Blackburn, 2015). This threat was minimized by asking the treatment group instructors to turn off the classroom lights when implementing the intervention, which allowed the classroom to be an optimal quiet and comfortable space for a meditation practice. The fluorescent classroom lights can be distracting when trying to engage in meditation practices.

At the end of the semester, all quantitative data scores from the MAAS were downloaded and analyzed through and from the UTEP software QuestionPro. The quantitative data helped in answering RQ2.

3.6.2 Phase II: Qualitative Study

Previous studies researching mindfulness in the classroom suggest that a quantitative approach is insufficient, and that a qualitative approach would be better suited to the topic (Blackburn, 2015; Hasha, 2009). The qualitative phase of the study aimed to answer the more specific research questions in trying to understand the perceptions of mindfulness-based interventions in the college classroom. The qualitative data helped in answering RQ1 and RQ3.

In-person individual interviews were conducted at the end of the study. Times and locations of the interviews were discussed during the recruitment process. Each interview was conducted in a seating area within the foyer of the UTEP. All interviews were conducted between 9 am and 3 pm during the first week of December at a time when participants were not likely tired or fatigued (Lindolf & Taylor, 2011). All interviews were recorded, followed by immediate transcription of data. Emergent themes came from a manual method of analysis. Manual methods of analysis (Gibbs, 2018; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Tesch, 1990) serve to engage all the data in their original form. Manually coding the data turned abstract information into concrete data (Graue & Walsh, 1998). Manual method for analysis consisted of separating data into categories, followed by coding and finding emerging themes that became the major categories for analysis discussed in Chapter 4.

3.7 Theoretical Framework

The concepts of multimodality and embodiment are well-established and widely studied within RWS. This study embraces both terms to analyze how mindfulness practices work in the

first-year composition classroom. Further, through theories of multimodality and embodiment, this study hopes to situate mindfulness as a multimodality that can be used effectively in the first-year composition classroom. As a result, I argue that mindfulness work as an embodied-multimodality that can be used in the college classroom through different modes.

First, I am building and relying on theories of embodiment. While the concept of embodiment has different meanings to different scholars within this discipline, for this theoretical framework, I am using Knoblauch's (2012) understanding of embodiment within the field of RWS as well as Johnson et al. (2015) and their work on situating the body and rhetoric as a form of embodiment. Knoblauch (2012) expands on three categories of embodiment within RWS. These three categories consist of embodied language, embodied knowledge, and embodied rhetoric. In her work, she argues that these three categories are not mutually exclusive or the only ways in which we can situate embodiment within this discipline. Knoblauch's (2012) definition of embodied language as, "the use of terms, metaphors, and analogies that reference, intentionally or not, the body itself" (p.52). Further, she defines embodied knowledge as "that sense of knowing something through the body and is often sparked by what we might call a "gut reaction." (p.52). Finally, she defines embodied rhetoric as "a purposeful decision to include embodied knowledge and social positionalities as forms of meaning making within a text itself" (p.52).

In their article, Johnson et al. (2015) discuss the concept of embodiment in the field of RWS and the ways embodiment is connected to rhetoric. In their essay, the authors posit that, "To think about rhetoric, we must think about bodies. To do this means also to articulate how scholars' own bodies have intimately informed our disciplinary understanding of rhetoric. The links between embodiment and rhetoric consistently appear in both discourses about bodies and

research emphasizing the material body itself.” (p.39). Further, they bring up an important argument stating that by recognizing the fundamental relationship between rhetoric and embodiment, “we can make all bodies and the power dynamics invested in their (in)visibility visible” (Johnson et al., 2015, p.39) By expanding on these categories, this study aims to situate mindfulness as an embodied practice within RWS, as Johnson et al. (2015) argue, “the physical body carries meaning through discourse about or by a body. But embodiment theories suggest that meaning can be articulated beyond language. All bodies do rhetoric through texture, shape, color, consistency, movement, and function.” (p.39).

Further, in this study, I aim to situate mindfulness as an embodied multimodality that can be implemented in the FYC classroom through a variety of modes. I do so by expanding on theories of multimodality within the discipline of RWS by drawing upon definitions of multimodality in sociolinguistics and through the data analysis in chapter 5.

3.7.1 Mindfulness as a Multimodality

As discussed in chapter 2, the concept of multimodality is treated differently within several disciplinary fields. In the discipline of RWS, multimodality is defined as compositions that take advantage of a range of rhetorical resources (Anderson et al., 2006), including images, sounds, document design, and graphics. However, I argue that multimodality within RWS can be defined beyond its traditional definitions and expand from theories of sociolinguistics and semiotic studies that define multimodality as various resources mobilized by an individual, including gesture, gaze, facial expressions, body postures, and body movements (Mondada, 2016, Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001). In addition to this expanded notion of multimodality as physical, the qualitative data of this study guided my theoretical analysis in understanding how mindfulness can be situated as a multimodality.

Mindfulness as a multimodality in the FYC classroom functions as a multimodal literacy for meaning-making and composing. By leveraging the evidence-based benefits of mindfulness, students can potentially improve their learning processes and outcomes by becoming more focused and present in what is happening around them, as well as lowering their stress levels and becoming calmer.

3.7.2 Mindfulness Through Different Modes

The benefits of multimodal practices in FYC are well researched within RWS. Bringing innovative multimodalities in the FYC classroom is encouraged by many RWS scholars. This study proposes mindfulness as an embodied-multimodality that can be used as a multimodal literacy in the FYC classroom. Further, I argue that mindfulness as a multimodality can be implemented in the FYC classroom using a variety of modes, including, video, recordings, animations, sounds, music, and scripts. The simplicity of mindfulness makes it an inclusive practice that can be implemented and performed by anyone who wishes to participate. Further, it is cost and time effective as it only takes a couple of minutes at the beginning of each class.

As stated in Chapter 2, the definitions of mindfulness are wide-ranging. For the purposes of this study, I am using Stanley's (2013) definition of mindfulness, which he defines as an embodied and ethically sensitive practice of the present moment recollection. Expanding from Stanley's (2013) definition of mindfulness and by incorporating theories of embodiment and multimodality, I (re)define mindfulness as an embodied-multimodality that intentionally brings awareness to bodily sensations and external experiences happening in the present moment. In chapter 4 I analyze the data collected using the work of the theories of embodiment and multimodality discussed above.

3.8 Positionality

There are numerous studies arguing for a need to address the current state of mental health in college students. Universities across the nation are seeking opportunities to tackle the mental health crisis that is affecting thousands of college students. Having been a college student who has had issues with mental health, I can attest to the need for a more hands-on approach at the university level.

In 2010 I walked inside a yoga studio and fell in love with the practice almost instantly. I became an avid practitioner, practicing yoga 5-6 times a week. After a short amount of time, I started noticing the benefits of the practice, and became interested in understanding more about its impacts on the overall well-being of the practitioners. The benefits I received from practicing yoga motivated me to complete a yoga teacher training certification in 2014, as I felt motivated to share this practice with others. I have been teaching yoga and meditation ever since at a local studio in El Paso, Texas, as well as offering private yoga classes throughout the region. The Covid-19 pandemic also allowed me to teach yoga classes remotely and expand my teaching to other cities where friends reside.

As an FYC instructor, I have been implementing different aspects of yoga, such as breathing techniques and meditation sessions, with my students since 2017. These are brief sessions that last between 3-4 minutes at the beginning of the class. By doing so, I have had the opportunity to have open discussions where my students share their thoughts and experiences of these practices. Further, I have also seen how students' cultivation of mindfulness is enriched with practice throughout the semester. For instance, students can better participate in mindfulness the more they engage with these practices. My main goal has been to share the evidence-based benefits on mental health and the overall well-being that these practices have

with my students. Further, as a yoga instructor, I am well aware of how cost-prohibitive these types of sessions can be at local studios, and as such not everyone has access to them. While there are a variety of videos available online, most students don't make the time or effort to find and follow a video in their free time.

These experiences motivated me to design this dissertation study. My positionality as a yoga teacher and FYC instructor made me carry certain biases. I mitigated these biases by choosing to have treatment and control groups. Further, throughout the analysis, I kept an open mind and analyzed the data through the lenses of my theoretical framework.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

The participants of this study were well-informed about the purpose and methodology of the study. Participants were guaranteed confidentiality in return for honest and open responses to questions. Aliases were provided to protect the anonymity of all the participants. All information was disclosed through the informed consent letter approved by UTEP's IRB. All aspects of the research protocol were disclosed and approved by UTEP's IRB. All collected data was always kept in the researcher's home office. Data was not shared with any other researcher, participant, or individual.

3.10 Limitations

I encountered several limitations in both phases of the study. In Phase I, when conducting the online surveys, some of the participants were absent or chose to not participate. While most of the surveys had the same number of participants, during the last survey in one of the treatment courses, half the students were absent. Second, since many of the students were not familiar with the concept of mindfulness, it is unclear if they responded to the MAAS truthfully. In Phase II of the study, during the face-to-face interviews, some of the participants were not familiar with the

mindfulness-related terminology, and therefore it was difficult for them to respond to some of the questions.

3.11 Summary

This chapter detailed the methodological design of this study, as well as the methods used to sample, collect, and analyze the data. A key goal of this research was to examine the perceptions that college students have regarding mindfulness-based interventions. By doing so, FYC students could reap the benefits of mindfulness practices, potentially resulting in higher academic performance, increased self-awareness, improved interpersonal relationship skills, and alleviation of some of the stress factors associated with college. Chapter 4 presents the results, findings, and analysis of the quantitative and qualitative phases of this study.

Chapter 4. Results

This sequential nested mixed methods study sought to determine the perceptions of mindfulness-based interventions among undergraduate students enrolled in four FYC courses at UTEP.

4.1 Phase I: Quantitative Findings

This section presents the results of the surveys conducted for this dissertation study. This quantitative data was collected to help answer the second research question of the study: RQ2: Can minimal-scale mindfulness-based interventions impact first year college student's self-awareness? A total of 55 students participated in Phase I of the study. Twenty-seven students participated from the control group classes and twenty-eight students participated from the treatment group classes.

All groups were required to take the same MAAS survey three times during the semester, the first time at the beginning of the semester, the second time during the middle of the semester, and the third time during the end of the semester. The main purpose of the MAAS survey was to determine if a minimal-scale mindfulness-based intervention can impact first-year college student's self-awareness. In the next section, I present a comparison of the two groups' surveys results and average scores. Both groups took the MAAS survey in three different occasions.

Figures 4.1 and 4.2 show results from Survey 1, which was implemented in all four classes between the weeks of October 8, 2019, and October 12, 2019. A total of 29 students responded to the survey from the control group, compared to 31 students from the treatment group. The survey took an average of 3 minutes to complete across groups. The average score for control group in survey 1 was $M = 3.76$, compared to the average score in treatment group in survey 1: $M = 3.97$.

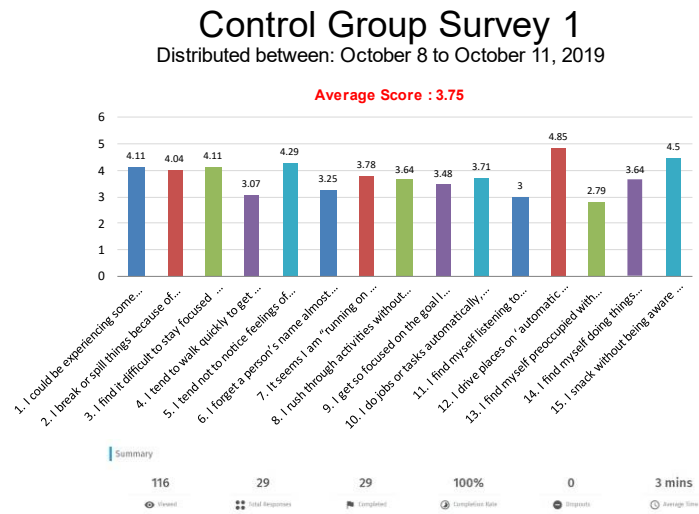


Figure 4.1: Results from Control Group Survey 1

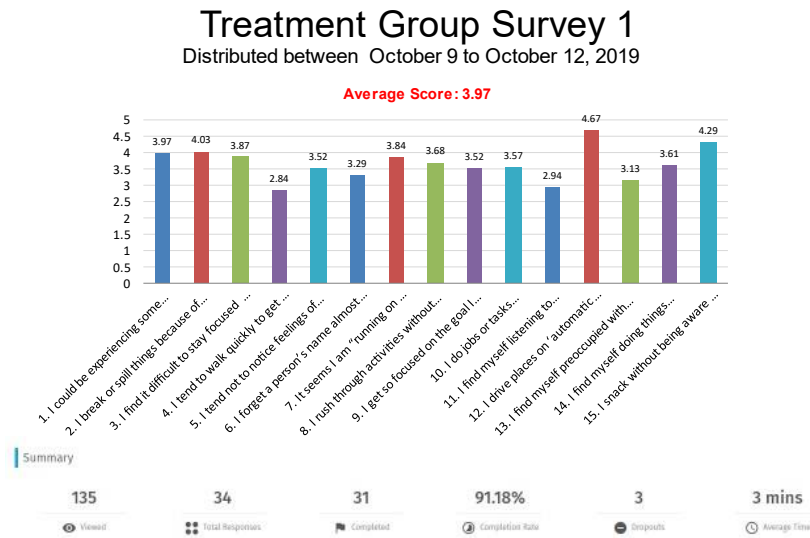


Figure 4.2: Results from Treatment Group Survey 1

Figures 4.3 and 4.4 show results from survey 2. Survey 2 was implemented in all four classes during the week of November 4, 2019, and November 6, 2019. A total of 28 students responded the survey from the control group, and 28 students from the treatment group. The

survey took an average of 3 minutes to complete. The average score for control group in survey 2 was $M=3.86$ compared to the average score in treatment group survey 2: $M=3.84$.

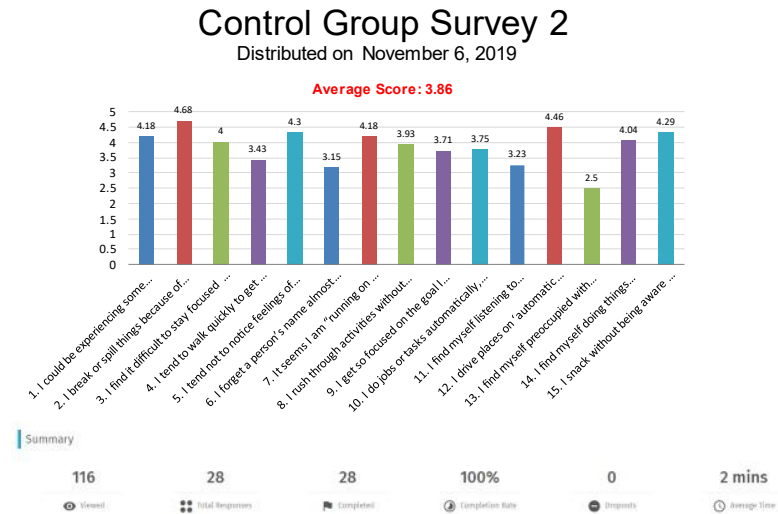


Figure 4.3: Results from Control Group Survey 2

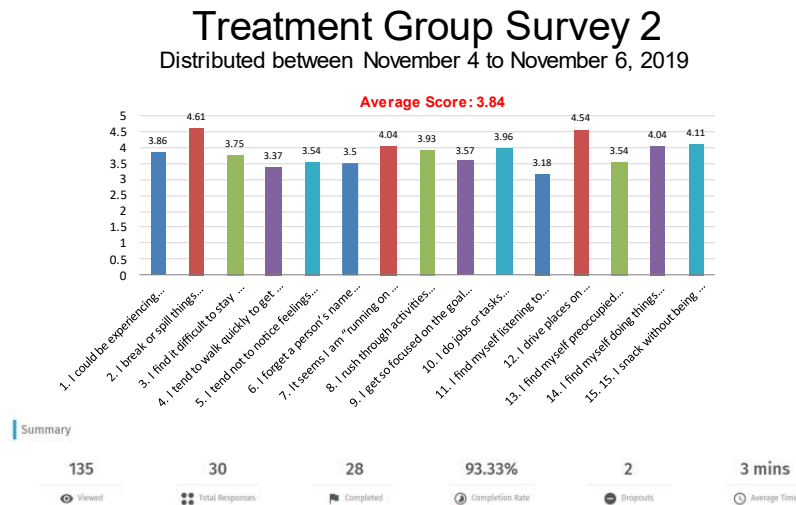


Figure 4.4: Results from Treatment Group Survey 2

Figures 4.5 and 4.6 show results from survey 3. Survey 3 was implemented in all four classes between November 22, 2019, and December 2, 2019. A total of 24 students responded the survey from the control group, and 9 students from the treatment group. One of the limitations encountered during the third survey of the study was that most students from one of the treatment classes was absent on that day. That treatment group belonged to a learning community program, meaning the group of students take different classes together. The instructor from that treatment group was unaware that the class prior to his was canceled, therefore, many students decided to stay home. Since it was the end of the semester, there was no opportunity to visit the class in a different occasion. The survey took an average of 3 minutes to complete. The average score for control group in survey 3 was $M=3.87$ compared to average score in treatment group survey 3: $M=4.32$.

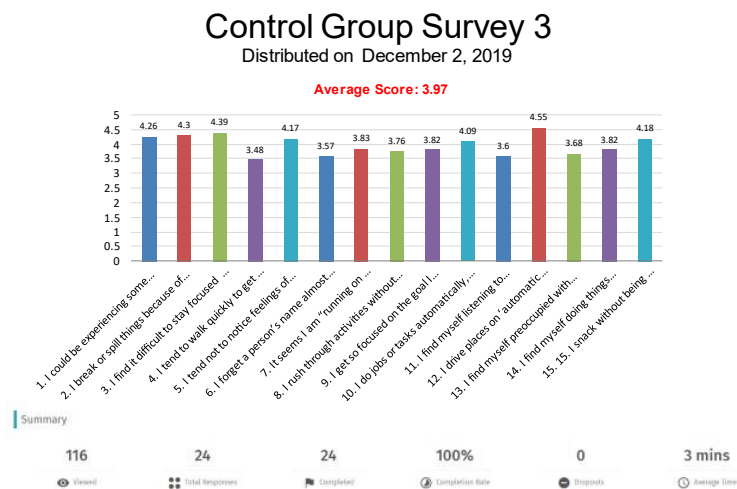


Figure 4.5: Results from Control Group Survey 3

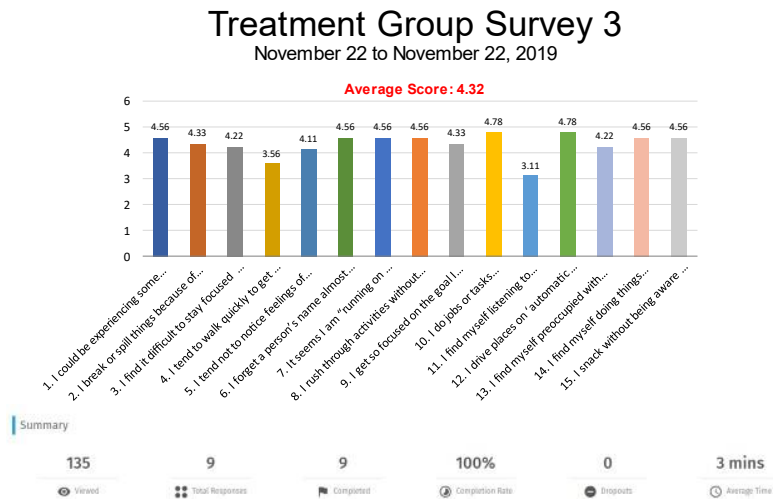


Figure 4.6: Results from Treatment Group Survey 3

4.1.2 Quantitative Analysis

The goal and purpose of using the MAAS in Phase I was to identify whether a minimal-scale mindfulness treatment could improve the students' mindfulness and awareness. Items from MAAS were "drafted to reflect the experience of mindfulness and mindlessness in general terms as well as in specific day-to-day circumstances, including variations in awareness of and attention to actions, interpersonal communication, thoughts, emotions, and physical states" (Brown & Ryan, 2003 p.825). MAAS respondents indicate how frequently they have the experience described in each statement using a 6-point Likert scale from 1 (almost always) to 6 (almost never), where high scores reflect more mindfulness.

To score the MAAS, the sum average of answers is divided by the total number of questions. Higher scores reflect higher levels of dispositional mindfulness (Brown, K. W., & Ryan, R. M. (2003). At the beginning of the semester, the average MAAS score for the control group was (M=3.75) in comparison to the average MAAS score for the treatment group of (M=3.65). In the middle of the semester, the average MAAS score for control group of (M=3.86)

compared to MAAS score for treatment group of ($M=3.84$). The last survey, implemented at the end of the study showed an average MAAS score for the control group of ($M=3.97$), and an average MAAS score for the treatment group of ($M=4.32$). Brown (2003) provided a MAAS average for college students across several independent studies, with a total average score of $M=3.83$. This suggests that UTEP students are in line with previously surveyed university students' mindfulness trait averages overall. In addition, Blackburn (2015) reported baseline MAAS scores for college students enrolled in an MBA program as $M=4.08$ for a control group and $M=3.91$ for a treatment group. A different study performed at the College of Technology with undergraduate management students reported an average MAAS score of ($M=3.90$) (Bukeavich, 2020). All these studies are consistent with Brown & Ryan's (2003) reported 127 average MAAS score of $M=3.83$ across 14 independent college student samples, and an average MAAS score of $M=4.20$ across four adult (community) samples.

In this study, no significant change in the MAAS average score was shown throughout all the surveys implemented in this study. However, survey 3 in the treatment group, performed at the end of the intervention increased to the MAAS average score of ($M=4.32$) compared to that group's MAAS average score ($M=3.65$) for survey 1. In comparison, for the control group MAAS average score in survey 3 ($M=3.75$) there was a slighter increase from the MAAS average score ($M=3.97$) of survey 1. Both control and treatment groups had a similar MAAS average score at the middle of the semester for survey 2, with treatment group MAAS average score of ($M= 3.84$) and control group MAAS average score of ($M=3.86$). All these scores are consistent with previous studies implementing the MAAS with college students (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Blackburn, 2015; Bukeavich, 2020) and show average mindfulness traits scores amongst all participants.

Findings indicate that there was no significant change in the MAAS scores during the 10-week interventions in both treatment groups. Further, results also indicate that both control and treatment groups had similar average scores during the 10-week intervention period. Therefore, quantitative results from this study indicate that a minimal-scale mindfulness based-intervention might not be enough to impact first year college student's self-awareness. For a stronger assessment, a larger sample size would be needed. However, this study aimed to assess perceptions in addition to survey responses through a qualitative component.

4.2 Phase II: Qualitative Results

Qualitative data for this study was collected from face-to-face interviews performed at the end of the semester during the first and second week of December 2019. Qualitative data seeks to answer research question 1 and 3 of the study:

RQ1: What are the perceptions about mindfulness of first-year college students who participate in a brief mindfulness intervention in the FYC classroom?

RQ3: How does mindfulness practices function in FYC?

Participants for face-to-face interviews were recruited from the two treatment group classrooms. A total of eighteen students agreed to participate in the interviews. At the beginning of each interview, participants were (i) informed of the context of the study, (ii) advised they could and should ask questions at any time in the proceedings, and (iii) asked if they would allow to be audio recorded. I declined to take handwritten notes during the interviews, instead opting to record my observations after each interview, and later supplemented by listening to the audio recordings. All interviews took place at the coffee shop inside the UTEP Library. The environment was chosen purposefully, as I wanted to engage each participant in a casual conversation rather than a formal interview. As a result, the tone of each conversation was

natural, friendly, and cooperative. On average, interviews lasted between fifteen to twenty minutes. The duration of each interview was determined by the length of each participant's responses to the open-ended interview questions.

Participants: General Trends and Patterns

All participants were undergraduate students enrolled at UTEP. All participants are from the border region of El Paso, Texas – Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico. All except one participant were first-year college students. Further, all participants participated in Phase I of the study.

4.2.1 Qualitative Findings

I began the qualitative analysis by transcribing all the recorded interviews. After transcribing all the data, I read through the transcripts and notes and coding for themes that emerged within and across them. After reading the transcripts, I printed out all transcribed data manually cut out each code, making piles of similar words and themes, e.g., mindfulness and breath. By using this method, I began “coding the codes” (Salndana, 2021) to condense them into a smaller number. By doing so, I was able to group codes and identify categories and themes. Three different themes emerged from the analysis; all themes were guided by the research questions and theoretical framework of the study.

A. Perceptions of Mindfulness-based Interventions

- An embodied practice.
- Awareness of self and present moment.

B. Outcomes of Mindfulness-based Interventions

- Mood improvement: lower stress, increased relaxation.
- Resetting.

- Self-report benefits.
- Student's Perceived Limitations

C. Implementing Mindfulness-based Interventions

- Mindfulness-based interventions in a variety of modes.
- Mindfulness as a multimodality.

The theoretical framework of the study served as lens for the interpretation of the findings.

Theories of embodiment guided themes A, B, and theories of multimodality guided theme C.

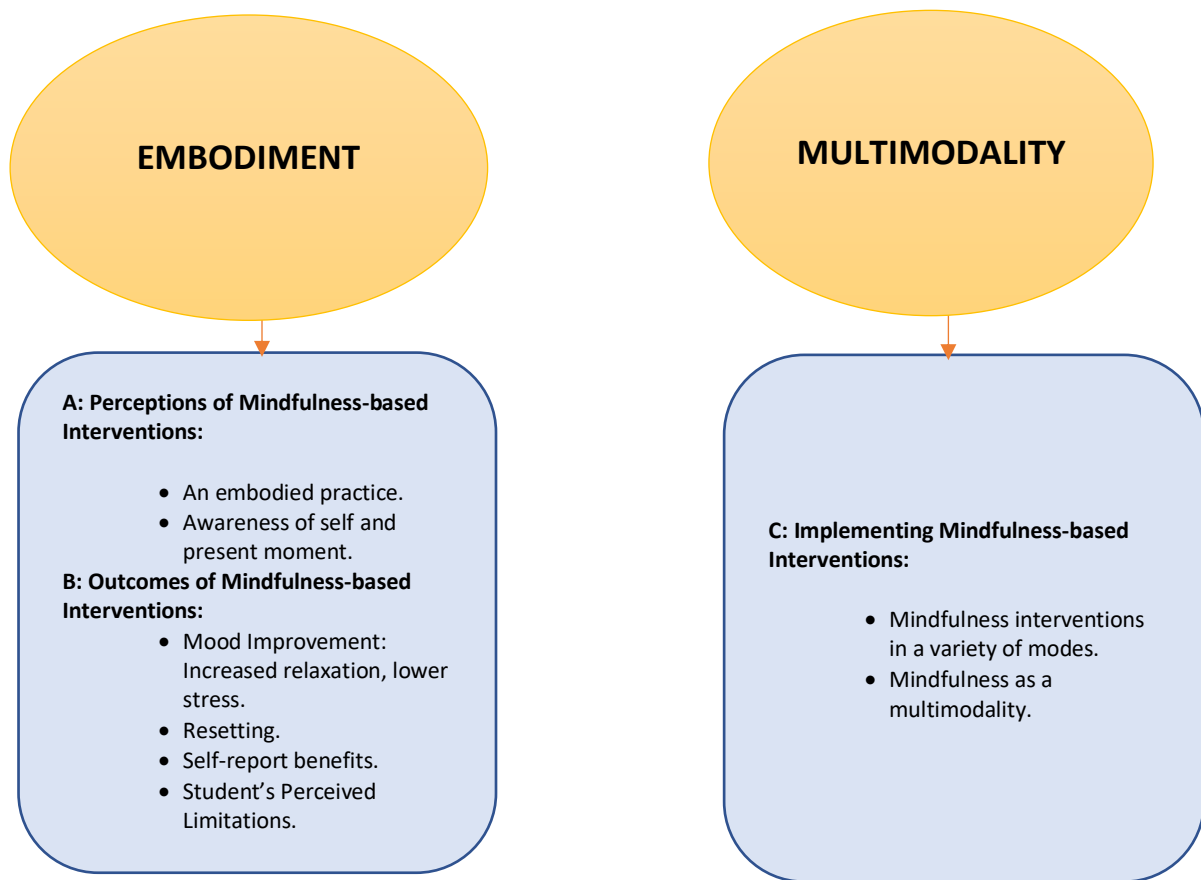


Figure 4.7: Theoretical Framework

4.2.2 Theme A: Perceptions of Mindfulness-Based Interventions

During the face-to-face interviews, all participants shared their perceptions of the mindfulness-based interventions implemented in their class. Through the data analysis, I created two primary categories for theme A: (1) an embodied practice; (2) awareness of self and present moment. These categories explain in detail the perceptions that students had of the mindfulness-based interventions.

An Embodied Practice

While none of the participants used the term embodied during the interviews, all participants defined and understood mindfulness as a practice that utilizes the body as a primary medium. Participants referred to mindfulness as “something” that uses the body, brings awareness to the body, or allows us to connect to the body. For instance, Krys frequently referred to the mindfulness-based interventions as “*feeling your body, your legs, arms, even fingertips, you just become more aware of your body.*” Further, she suggested that these interventions are important in particular because they allow you to become more connected to your own body:

For me it was kind of like a meditation, it allowed me to slow down my pace of thinking or like whatever I was going through throughout the day, it gave a second to catch up, and breathe, control my heart rate and stuff like that. It really brought peace to my day. I also felt like more connected to my body and this made me feel better, it was trippy, but I can't explain it.

Like Krys, Lori also felt more connected to her body, describing the interventions as a relaxing tool that, “*made me feel my body and like be more aware of it and what I was feeling.*” Through this connection to her body, Lori shared how the mindfulness-based interventions “*made me relax and concentrate more, made me have less stress and made me forget everything*

and start again, to make you feel like, oh I have to do this and then continue with my day.” By relaxing and being able to bring her awareness into the present moment, Lori explains that lowering her stress allowed her to continue with her day in a better mindset. Similarly, Luciano shares his experience with the interventions as an embodied experience that *“helped me relax my mind. I remember that they told in the video that you have to close your eyes and to feel all the energy all over your body and it was really, really cool because you feel that energy all over you, you feel your body and you are connected to it.”* Here, Luciano refers to the body as the center of the interventions, by bringing an awareness and connection to it.

Pablo explains his perceptions of mindfulness-based interventions as a challenging one that allowed him to understand how to shift complete awareness to different parts of the body. He explains, *“al principio fue como aprender a hacerlas (las intervenciones), pero ya cuando le vas agarrando practica es más fácil. Pero lo más difícil yo siento que es acostumbrarte. Como a poner toda tu atención a tu cuerpo, y ya después como que se vuelve más fácil y lo empiezas a disfrutar.”* Some of the participants shared that the interventions were challenging to follow at the beginning of the study, but through time, they became easier to follow. Pablo’s understanding of the interventions relies in using the body to bring awareness into the present moment.

Similarly to Pablo’s response, Alani shared her perceptions of the mindfulness-based interventions as a learning practice that becomes easier the more it is practiced. She also perceived these interventions as a body-mind connection:

Pues has de cuenta que me pedía que me enfocara en mi respiración, y me enfocaba en la respiración y en lo que estaba sintiendo y de la nada me distraía otra vez, porque soy muy distraída, entonces por ejemplo me quedaba pensando en el color de la pared, de

qué color era, pero con los ojos cerrados, cosas así. Pero me gustaria tener más practica para poder hacerlas yo en mi casa antes de dormir. Una vez la hice en mi casa, estaba muy estresada, tenía mucha tarea para ese día, y dije, “ay me voy a relajar un poco, y yo busque un video en YouTube y empecé a seguir los pasos, y me quede dormida, entonces si me relaje mucho.

Here, Alani explains her shift in awareness to her body through the interventions, which allowed her to bring her complete the sensations of her body. Further, she shares how she has taken this practice to her daily life.

Other participants reported that the mindfulness practice increased positive feelings towards their own bodies. For instance, Michelle explained her perceptions of the mindfulness-based interventions as something that makes you feel more comfortable with yourself and with your body, as she explained *“it was a good experience to do that like every day because it made you more comfortable with your body and yourself and you get to have time for yourself”*.

Similarly, Melissa shared her perceptions about the interventions as a tool that made her feel better with her body, stating that *“It got me feeling a little more better (sic) with my body, with the breathing because I feel like a little stressed sometimes and somedays and take deep breaths and concentrate on the mind or whatever just cleared it out and make everything better.”*

Similarly, David explained how the interventions *“helped me feel better about myself, more relief I guess.”*

Awareness of self and present moment

Contrary to the quantitative results, through the interviews, many of the participants shared how the mindfulness-based interventions increased awareness of self and the present moment. Clarissa shares, *“just like, when, the breathing I love that, you breathe and become*

feeling more human, I cannot explain, just more aware of who you are and what you are doing in that moment.” She continues by explaining:

I guess just having a little time to clear my mind, I love the part about closing our eyes and take deep breaths because I honestly, I’m tired so that helps me like yeah, to feel better. Yeah, the part where they ask you to breathe and let it go, that was my favorite part.

Through these qualitative findings, we see a possible explanation behind the increase from the first survey to the last survey in the treatment group. Comparably, Pablo explains in detail how the interventions helped him become more aware of himself by shifting his attention to his breath:

Pues cuando te pide que escuches a tu respiración, eso me ayudaba a relajarme mucho. Este pues, la maestra apagaba la luz y así como terapia y todo, entonces pues ya como que dices, no gasto nada en pues como en tratar, entonces fue ya que lo hice, y la verdad si me sentí así como que te relajas. Me gustó mucho sentir mi cuerpo y dejar el estrés, respirar un rato, sentirme más desestresado y tranquilo.

Similar to Pablo and Clarissa, Jose expands on his experience, *“you take a breath of all the stress for the class you’re in. So instead of thinking, oh, the essay is due tomorrow or its due tonight, you get away from that and it helps you concentrate on who you are and what’s happening in the moment you know.”* Comparably, Melina shared her experience with the interventions and how by her increasing self-awareness she felt more connected to herself:

I think they helped me to like, take all the stress that I have, sometimes I just can’t, I need time to like do another (sic) things you know and I think that helped me relax

and take my stress away and be, have time with myself. That you feel like you're by yourself and you just doing what the video is telling you to do and you just concentrate on that, and it feel great.

Participants shared how the interventions were helpful in that moment and how by shifting attention to the breath and different parts of the body, it allowed them to become mindful or aware of themselves, as Roberto explains, *"it is definitely a positive experience, anything that can clear your mind and make you just focus on yourself for a little bit it is always good."*

Increased awareness of self also led to an increased awareness of the present moment. Pablo shares, *"pues como que era un momento así como de pausa como que para relajarte y enfocarte en donde estabas, por ejemplo en el salón y que nada más importaba."* He continues by expressing how the increased awareness of the present moment helped him feel more calm, *"era así como que decía, aquí estoy, todo está bien, y ya no me estresaba por lo que iba a pasar en la siguiente clase o en los problemas que tenía ese día."* Similarly, Lori shared how the interventions helped her shift her attention to the present moment by explaining, *"the videos helped me become more present, like in the day, what I was doing and what I had to do that moment or that day, it made me feel better by remembering that, that the only thing that exists was that moment and like, nothing else"*. Results suggest that through mindfulness practices, participants were able to become more present during the class session. Therefore, they became more focused and better learners on the days the interventions were implemented.

4.2.3 Theme B: Outcome of Mindfulness-Based Interventions

The outcomes of the mindfulness-based interventions are the second theme that emerged from the data analysis. All participants described the benefits they received and felt through the interventions. Additionally, three sub-themes were found from this category: 1) mood

improvement: lower stress, increased relaxation; 2) resetting; 3) self-reported performance benefits. Through the interviews, participants shared how they felt transitioning from high school to college, as all but one participant were first-year college students. Many of the participants reported that the transition had been a challenging and stressful experience, resulting in increased anxiety.

Erin explained how the transition from high school to college had been for her, stating that, *“honestly it has been very hard, my first class was University and I had to drop it because I just couldn’t follow the work and I had two jobs so I had to quit work too, it was just too much.”* She continued by explaining how this experience has been difficult, stating, *“it has been hard, because it’s a totally different thing from high school, like here you have to be responsible, you have to do everything on your own and we also get a lot more work here than in high school”*. William shared how his transition from high school has increased his stress-level, explaining, *“I feel more stressed than ever, it’s a lot of homework and a lot of reading, I am taking chemistry classes, so I am constantly worrying that I am going to fail, it’s just too much.”* The challenges associated with entering college and transitioning from high school are well-documented in the literature (Enriquez, Ramos, & Esparaza, 2017) and the results of this study corroborated previous studies that highlight the different challenges that come from this transition.

Many of the participants were L2 transnational students and border commuters, which came with a unique set of challenges for first year college students. Pablo explained, *“it was very hard, because, for me I came from Juarez to my English is not very good and I struggled a lot with that but when I started here, I am doing my best with my English, trying to improve it because it is more professional here.”* Similarly, Melissa shared her experience with this transition as being a challenging part of her life:

When I graduated from high school it was very challenging, high school was very challenging to me as a Mexican, I was in Loretto. The transition was very difficult. So when I finished high school I decided to go back to university in Juarez. So over there when I was there, I didn't feel comfortable, it was again trying to get used to the education over there. I was three years separated from Mexican education and to come over there and get used to it again. it was very difficult. So, what I decided was, that if I had the opportunity to get my education in the United States and I already had the conversation (skills) in English and the grammar things and all this stuff and I had the opportunity to come back to UTEP and they have over here the career that I want to, so it was better for me to come over here. It is my first semester over here, I have to start again"

The qualitative findings of this study highlighted how transitioning from high school to college is a difficult and challenging experience for most students. Further, this transition brings different layers of stress that manifest that can potentially harm the students' academic performance.

Mood Improvement: Lower Stress, Increased Relaxation

Participants also shared the ways that the mindfulness-based interventions helped them lower their stress and feel more relaxed. Norma explained how the interventions allowed her to lower her stress levels and become more calmed, *"it was a very stressed-relief experience, like how can I say this, like calmed, you get very calmed, and all your stress goes away."* Similarly, Estephy shared how the interventions helped her feel more relaxed, she explained *"I mean I liked them because they do help you relax when you are like trying not to overthink and stuff like that."* While Estephy explained that she hasn't noticed any significant change from the

interventions outside of the classroom, she continues by elaborating how the interventions, *“in the moment they did help me be more relaxed and calmed for class.”*

Comparably, Esther stated how the interventions helped her calm down by sharing:

Um, I guess, kind of calmed me down a little bit. Like after the videos I felt more calmed more relaxed, but yeah, I just felt very calmed. I guess they are very good for you, like if you are feeling very stressed it's a good thing to do that and just calm yourself down and just relax. I think they helped me a lot, because I am the type of person who gets stressed really quick. So when I was like breathing, um I think I felt like a relief from the stress. So yeah, just closing my eyes and enjoying the relaxing experience was very nice.

These findings corroborate the existing research on the benefits of mindfulness practices; namely, stress-reduction, calming effects, and mood regulation (Dvořáková et al., 2017).

Participants also shared how the interventions had a significant impact on their overall stress-levels. Jose explained, *“I think they are a positive experience because I got to release stress...they were helpful especially with how stressful school is and just to take that little break to relax, it was good”*. Similarly, Michelle stated how the interventions had an impact on her stress-levels, *“I remember that I was like thinking about my worries you know. Apart from the college right here. Like this semester, I was passing through a difficult relationship, and I was very stressed, and the videos helped me a lot with that in dealing with that. They relaxed me and made me feel better.”* Lori also shared how the interventions where an opportunity to release stress, explaining *“You get time of relaxation you know; you get a little bit of stress coming out because the semester can be hard or difficult for you. So it's like a breath you take from all of the stuff that's going on.”*

Some participants explained how the interventions helped them regulate their mood by lowering their anxiety. Luciano shared:

Pues fueron algo positivo, porque no se me hacía pesado, como que en la clase tomabas tiempo para como relajarte... Pues me ayudaron a quitarme un poco de la ansiedad porque yo soy muy ansioso y esto me cambio, me calmo más, me hizo más tranquilo... Me gustan mucho en lo personal, porque si me relajaba mucho, creo que si sirven.

Esther explained how the interventions made her feel more relaxed and less anxious, “*Me sentía muy relajada y menos ansiosa, cada vez que se terminaban sentía como un peso menos, no se como explicarlo. Pero si mas alivianada.*” David described his experience with the interventions as an opportunity to feel less anxious as well, stating, “*honestly, it just made me feel very calmed and less anxious, more relaxed. They helped me a lot.*”

Resetting

Through the interviews, participants described how the mindfulness-based interventions served as an opportunity to reset for class. Many of the participants had just taken a difficult class or exam, were coming from work or commuting for hours to get to class. Participants described how the interventions presented an opportunity for them to pause and reset for their class. William shared, “*it is an opportunity to take deep breaths and have a relaxing moment before class.*” Esther explained, “*they make you relax and then you can start work with like a fresh mind.*” Similarly, Alani explained how she would get out of work and get to class, and the interventions gave her a moment to relax, stating, “*I really liked them so sometimes I was very stressed from work coming from work so they helped me relaxed... It was good to do them in the*

beginning of the class so you can start the class with a good mindset rather than continue being stressed from work or previous classes or stuff.”

Miguel shared how the interventions allowed him to reset and refocus for the class, allowing him to become fully present and more confident, saying, *“it was a lot of stress-relief, just breathing in and out, and I feeling (sic) of confidence. Like after the video, I would think, ok I got this let’s do it, I’m ready. I felt more prepared for the class and felt that I could overcome any challenge. It was a good feeling.”* Similar to Miguel’s experience, Clarissa shared how the interventions at the beginning of the class were a good use of time as they set the mood for the class, sharing, *“what I enjoyed about them the most is that we had them in the beginning of the class before class started so it allowed me to like kind of get into a good mindset before the beginning of the class so it created like a good environment for the class.”* Erin explained how the interventions were an opportunity to re-focus and prepare for class, she explained, *“It really helped me concentrate and like re-think my thoughts, think about what I have to do during the day, my priorities, what is important. Just separating everything and thinking on what I had to do in my free time or whatever.”*

Jose also shared how the interventions allowed him to relax for class, as he was enrolled in his most challenging class before this one and the interventions allowed him to gain motivation for class. He explained, *“venia cansado de mi otra clase y decía, hoy no voy a hacer nada en esta clase pero ya después de los videos como que me relajaba y decía, no, ya mero! ya mero! y me volvía a motivar.* He also shared how the interventions were not only useful in helping relax for class, but also relaxing for additional classes later in the day, *“Creo que si es buen uso. Porque si hace una diferencia, porque hay muchos estudiantes que entran como con estrés a la clase, y a lo mejor en la siguiente clase tienen un examen que hacer y pues están*

estresados entonces pues les toma poquito de su tiempo pues como para que se relajen. Y pues aquí es como que el open minded, y como que les entra como que más aire y pueden respirar y concentrar.”

Michelle explained that she looked forward to the interventions, explaining that she would get very excited on the days the interventions were implemented, sharing, *“me gustaron porque vengo de mi clase anterior que es muy estresante, entonces cuando ponían los videos me podía relajar, y me daba mucho gusto, decía “ay, que bueno que hoy si tenemos el video!”* Self-report benefits of interventions:

Like Michelle, other participants shared how the mindfulness-based interventions assisted them in their academic performance. Some participants shared how having a moment to relax before class allowed them to become a better learner, while others stated how the interventions helped them relax and feel better about assignments in class. Luciano explained,

like when the professor gave us the video, it makes us concentrate more on what we were going to do in the class after the video, so it was useful. It was something that made me feel more comfortable in the class, to put more attention in the class...y osea como pues, me sentia con mas confianza, como decia, tomalo facil, no te preocupes, lo puedes hacer y lo vas a hacer.

Similarly, William stated how the interventions better prepared him for class, *“it helps you deal with the class better and it makes you do better with the assignments being able to concentrate more on what you are doing.”* Krys also explained how the interventions helped her do better with the assignments in class, sharing, *“it was something that made me feel more comfortable in the class, the days we had the videos, I was more focused in class and felt better about the assignments.”* Esther explained how the interventions helped her relax and feel less

stressed about the assignments, *“Me gustaron mucho, me ayudaron mucho como por ejemplo en los exámenes, porque a veces me ponía muy nerviosa y todo eso me ayudo a sentirme mejor, más tranquila y siento que me iba a mejor.”*

While the overall academic performance of the participants was not measured in this study, the findings suggests that the interventions helped in improving their day-to-day academic performance.

Students’ Perceived Limitations

An important aspect that emerged from the data analysis was the limitations of the mindfulness-based interventions in the classroom. Some participants shared the challenges they experienced when trying to participate in the interventions. For instance, some of the participants explained how they sometimes felt uncomfortable closing their eyes and following the guided meditation because they felt that other students who were not participating were staring at them. Pablo explained, *“me gustaría hacerlo con personas que estén involucradas también porque si no ves a otras personas que no lo están haciendo y te sientes como incomodo.”* Similarly, Jose explained how he felt uncomfortable because not everyone was participating, stating, *“Pues a lo mejor que no haya tanta gente, o que todos los estudiantes participen.... Porque pues a lo mejor que están los demás estudiantes en la clase y te miran y pues estaba incomodo eso.”*

Clarissa shared that she would’ve preferred every student to participate in the interventions, *“Um, I think it could be really great if you want to do the study again to put all the students who want to do it all in the same room. Um, yeah, but I’m not sure how you would be able to implement it. Like making the class more quiet, making sure that everyone participates which I think it would be hard to do.”*

Luciano shared a similar challenge trying to concentrate inside a room where not every student was participating in the interventions, he shared:

I mean if anything just probably just like, well I know we are kind of limited to the classroom but maybe do them somewhere else beside the classroom. Maybe because not all the students participated on the video, maybe to encourage the teachers to tell the students to pay attention to the videos. Because that was hard, trying to concentrate sometimes with other students not doing them.

A different challenge that some participants encountered was trying to concentrate and learning the practice in a short amount of time. Participants shared how they would want longer interventions to help them better understand the instructions. Estephy shared, *“Have more time, longer videos and more days would be helpful. Honestly maybe make it a little bit more longer because sometimes we need more time to learn to concentrate.”* Melissa also shared how she would like to have longer interventions, she stated, *“quizá más tiempo, ósea más veces en el salón, todos los días, a lo mejor serviría más para aprender a respirar mejor y a relajarte.”* Similar to these responses, Jose shared how he would like to have these interventions more than once a week, stating, *“que fuera más de una vez por semana, estaría chido, porque así las haces más seguido y te acostumbras más, porque pues las haces un día y después pasa una semana y se te olvida.”*

4.2.4 Theme C: Implementing Mindfulness-Based Interventions

The final theme that emerged from the data analysis process is the implementation of mindfulness-based interventions in the classroom. The interview participants described the ways in which implementing these interventions in a classroom did work or could work. They also shared some of the problematic aspects on implementing these interventions in the classroom.

The sub-themes represent the most frequently discussed related topics, which were 1) mindfulness-based interventions in a variety of modes; 2) mindfulness as a multimodality

Mindfulness-based interventions in a variety of modes

During the interviews, participants were asked about their thoughts on implementing mindfulness-based interventions in their classroom. Additionally, they were asked about their perceptions on implementing these interventions in different courses. Students also shared how the interventions served them in teaching them a practice that can be used outside the classroom. Finally, some participants shared that they have been teaching this practice to friends or family members.

Implementing mindfulness-based interventions in the classroom through a guided meditation video is cost-effective and an inclusive practice. These practices can be performed by anyone at any time of the day. Participants shared how the guided mindfulness meditation through a video shown in class helped them follow the interventions better. Clarissa shared, *“I like the videos a lot, like, because it would tell us what to do and that really helped me follow the instructions and not get lost. Also, the voice was soothing, and I just liked it very much.”* Similarly, Erin described how the video was an effective way of implementing a guided meditation, she stated, *“I enjoyed the video, the steps, how they explained it, the guiding steps they tell you to follow made it very easy.”*

Some of the participants expressed how the short amount of time it took to do the interventions was also helpful, as they were able to follow easily and not get lost. Michelle explained, *“they were something different, something new that I’ve been wanting to try for a long time on my own, but I never have time. I feel that because they are very short, they work perfect in the class. They don’t take too much time of the class, so I think the professor also liked that.”*

Lori shared how the videos were so short and easy to follow that it was easy for the entire class to participate, she explained, *“I feel like it’s something different, I think it is very necessary for all students to have these types of experiences. It is a short video very easy to follow.”*

The participants also shared their perceptions on having mindfulness-based interventions that were displayed in the video at the beginning of the class, in order to gauge the effectiveness of using a multimodal practice in different classes. Most of the participants shared how they would benefit from having these interventions in their most challenging classes. For instance, Roberto explained how having these interventions in his biology and chemistry classes would help him relax and feel better, *“I think having them in this class it was good, like I’m not going to say it’s not an important class because it is, but like I have chemistry and biology and I wish I had them in those classes, where I am really stressed.”* David shared a similar opinion, stating how he would like to have these practices in more stressful classes, he explained, *“Yes, (having interventions in different classes), because in my career I know I am going to be very stressed so I would like them in those classes. I would love for them to be in engineering classes, the most stressful classes.”* Melina explained how these videos in different classes would be effective in making students feel better, she shared, *“these videos would be great, it would be cool, like in biology, like take a minute guy it will be ok, calm down!”* Norma explained in detail her opinion on these videos being used in different classes, sharing how she believes they might impact other students:

Yes, I think the most stressful and difficult classes are the ones that really need them, where people are just stressing and are stressed since the minute, they enter the classroom. I think it would be a good idea to have them to make the flow of the class better, you know. I think that would be cool, like to have them in other classes, especially

in stressful classes in the higher-level classes, like from your major. Like at least do them once a week, like at the end of the week or even beginning of the week to relax you and get you ready for the week or for the weekend.

The findings of this study highlighted the openness that students have to implementing mindfulness interventions as a multimodality not only in the FYC classroom but in other classrooms as well. Further, findings of the study showed the positive perceptions that students have of the interventions.

Mindfulness as a multimodality

An important element that emerged from the data analysis was the learned practice that the participants gained from the interventions. Many participants shared how, though the mindfulness-based interventions were primarily used as an in-class activity, they had been able to implement parts of the practice in their daily lives. Mindfulness as a multimodality can be used as a resource by any individual at any time. In other words, it's a transferrable resource that can be used inside and outside the classroom. Some participants shared how they have stressful jobs where they have taken the time to implement these practices to feel more relaxed. For example, Melina shared, *"I really like the learning to breathe, I have been using them at work, especially on Sundays when all families go to the restaurant, and I'm just like, I go to the bathroom and do the breathing exercises there. I feel better when I do them, I take a little time to just hide and try to relax."* Krya also shared how she has been using these practices at work, stating, *"I love them, like I was doing them at work yesterday, like its actually helpful, I'm a server so it's very stressful, and just knowing how to relax, it helps me a lot, I feel happier."* Clarissa shared how she uses this learned practice at home before studying for an exam or reading:

Yeah, I remember the first time we did the videos, I was like, why are we doing this? But then the second time and the third time and so on, they got easier, and I understood them better. And I also want to use these videos outside the class, like when I don't have any patience, maybe before reading. I do them, what I've learned in class. I do them at home sometimes if I am feeling stressed, to take a moment to breathe.

David expressed his experience with the practice and how he implemented what he learned from the interventions in his daily life:

I sometimes do them in the morning after breakfast, like it is a good practice, kind of like yoga. Like in the army, we used to do these types of exercises all the time and so like in basic training we had this woman who came and taught us how to breathe and do breathing exercises. Since the army every time I feel super stressed, I use the breathing exercise I learned at the army, and this is similar.

Pablo, who is a border commuter student, explained how he uses these interventions at the bridge waiting to cross from Mexico to the United States. He shared how these practices help him relax and feel better, *“en el puente a veces estoy muy estresado y no tengo nada que hacer y pues empiezo a respirar y trato de hacer lo del video y si sirve, me siento más despejado.”*

Melina who is also a border commuter student uses these practices in her daily life and is teaching her son to breathe and meditate:

Sabes que una de las cosas que he notado también por ejemplo para mí que cruzo el puente todos los días, llego bien estresada, por el tráfico la gente, y aparte se lo estoy enseñando a mi hijo de 5 años en preescolar y es una herramienta que le estoy dando para toda su vida... se me hace muy bien, creo yo que estaría padre

que no solo en la universidad nos enseñaran este tipo de ejercicios, pero en prepa, secundaria, primaria. Creo que sería muy buen ejercicio para todo tipo de estudiante, para ayudarles desde niños y así ya crezcan con esa herramienta.

The findings of this study showed how mindfulness practices in the FYC classroom work as a multimodality that enhances the learning outcomes of students. In RWS, multimodality is defined as various sources such as images, sounds, document design, and graphics that work in meaning-making. However, in this dissertation, I am borrowing from theories of semiotics studies, gesture studies, social interaction, and conversation analysis where multimodality is defined as gesture, gaze, facial expressions, body postures, and body movements (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001; Mondada, 2016; Goodwin 2000) to define and situate mindfulness practices as a multimodality. I do so by arguing that in the FYC classroom, mindfulness practices can be adapted as a learning resource for students. Mindfulness as a multimodality in the FYC classroom centers on the idea that the body is as a medium for meaning making. Further, it is an embodied performance that students use to communicate, learn, and understand beyond traditional methods. They can also prepare themselves to transition into a headspace for clearer communication and improved learning and understanding

4.3 Summary

In this Chapter, I provided the results for Phase I and Phase II of this study. Phase I consisted of the quantitative results while Phase II consisted of the qualitative findings of this study. Further, in this chapter, I provided an analysis of the quantitative results of Phase I of the study, which indicate that UTEP's FYC students have the same average levels of mindfulness that are on par with other college students. Most importantly, results do not indicate a significant change in the levels of mindfulness through the 10-week period intervention. Lastly, results did

not indicate any significant difference in mindfulness scores between the control and treatment groups. The analysis of the qualitative findings of Phase II will be discussed in chapter 5.

Chapter 5. Discussion

5.1 Overview

I interpreted the qualitative results of this study using the lens of the theoretical framework discussed in chapter 3 (Mindfulness and Embodiment, and Mindfulness and Multimodality).

I found three results through these findings:

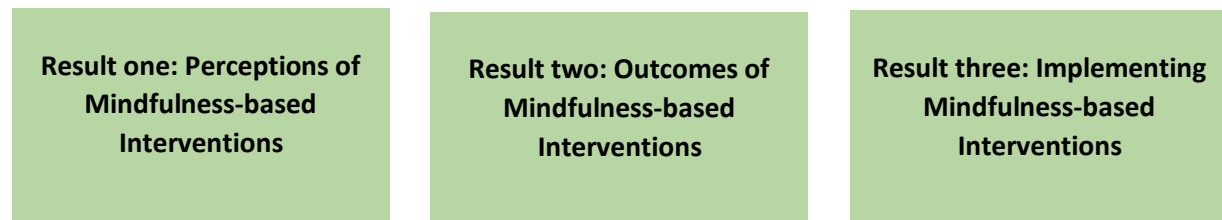


Figure 5.1 Results

In this chapter, I provide the results and interpretations of the qualitative findings of this study. Further, these results and interpretations will help in answering the research questions that guided this study:

Result one: Perceptions of Mindfulness-based Interventions will help in answering the first research question:

RQ1: What are the perceptions about mindfulness of first-year college students who participate in a brief mindfulness intervention in the FYC classroom?

Result two: Outcomes of Mindfulness-based Interventions will help in answering the second research question:

RQ2: Can minimal-scale mindfulness-based interventions impact first-year college students' self-awareness?

Result three: Implementing Mindfulness-based Interventions will help in answering the third research question:

RQ3: How does mindfulness function in FYC?

Summarized answers for all three research questions will be provided in chapter 6.

5.2 Result One: Perceptions of Mindfulness-Based Interventions

The perceptions that students have of the implementation of mindfulness-based interventions fall into two different categories: (1) awareness of self and present moment, (2) mindfulness as an embodied practice. Through these two categories, participants described their perceptions of the mindfulness interventions in their classroom. These two categories were found and analyzed through theories of embodiment within the field of RWS that were previously discussed in chapter 3.

5.2.1 Awareness of Self and Present Moment

Participants perceived mindfulness-based interventions as an embodied practice that brings awareness to the self and the present moment. While the participants of this study did not use this language directly, I interpreted certain paraphrasing as indicating embodiment based on Knoblauch (2012) and Johnson et al. (2015) theories of embodiment. Knoblauch (2012) refers to embodiment as the sense of knowing and creating knowledge through the body; Jonson et. al (2015) argues that embodiment theories suggest that meaning can be articulated beyond language, stating that “all bodies do rhetoric through texture, shape, color, consistency, movement, and function” (p.39).

Participants shared how through the mindfulness-based interventions they were able to shift their attention to what was happening in the classroom in that specific moment. Clarissa shared, “*just like, when, the breathing I love that, you breathe and become feeling more human, I*

cannot explain, just more aware of who you are and what you are doing in that moment. ”

Responses also described how the interventions were an opportunity to clear the mind and focus on the moment, as Jose shared, *“you concentrate on who you are and what's happening in the moment you know. ”* These responses support Kabat-Zinn’s (2003) definition of mindfulness, which he describes as an awareness that arises when one pays attention in the present moment.

Responses also described an increased awareness of self, by shifting attention to different parts of the body and the breath. As Krys described mindfulness as, *“feeling your body, your legs, arms, even fingertips, you just become more aware of your body.”* This perception of mindfulness aligns with Baer et al. (2006) facets of mindfulness: (a) observing thoughts, feelings, and sensations; (b) acting with awareness; (c) describing inner experiences; (d) remaining non-judging of inner experiences; and (e) maintaining non-reactivity to inner experiences. It also aligns with Kabat-Zinn’s (1994) initial definition of mindfulness, paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment. Through the data analysis, the themes that emerged also support Stanley’s (2013) definition of mindfulness, which he defines as an embodied and ethically sensitive practice of the present moment of recollection, as Lori recalls, *“made me feel my body and like be more aware of it and what I was feeling.”* These responses and perceived definitions of mindfulness situate the practice as an embodied experience.

5.2.2 Mindfulness as an Embodied Practice

Responses from the interviews described mindfulness as a practice that uses the body as a primary medium to bring awareness into the present moment, which then allowed them to become more focused on what they were doing during and after the interventions. These responses are similar to Michalak & Heindenreich’s (2012) perceptions on mindfulness practice,

which they claim uses the body as its anchor. Results show how mindfulness practices are through the body and from the body, and every reference point of awareness centers on the body (Michalak & Heidenreich, 2012). Luciano shared, *“you feel that energy all over you, you feel your body and you are connected to it.”* Pablo shared how awareness of the body is a learned practice that becomes easier over time, *“como a poner toda tu atención a tu cuerpo, y ya después como que se vuelve más fácil y lo empiezas a disfrutar.”* He also explained that by learning how to feel his body helped him in becoming less stressed and more calmed, *“me gusto mucho sentir mi cuerpo y dejar el stres, respirar un rato, sentirme mas desestresado y tranquilo.”*

In theories of embodiment in RWS, the body is understood as a primary medium, which composes, writes, and communicates (Arola & Wysocki, 2012). As Merleau-Ponty argued, without our bodies, we do not have a world, but rather, we have the world we do due to our own senses and experiences. Results from this study highlight how mindfulness practice becomes an embodied experience by bringing complete awareness to the body. Further, it is an embodied practice that travels through the body and from the body.

Participant responses also align with Knoblauch (2012) and Johnson et al. (2015). Knoblauch (2012) expands on three categories of embodiment within the discipline of RWS. These three categories consist of embodied language, embodied knowledge, and embodied rhetoric. In her essay, she argues that these three categories are not mutually exclusive or the only ways in which we can situate embodiment within this discipline. Knoblauch (2012) defined embodied language as “the use of terms, metaphors, and analogies that reference, intentionally or not, the body itself” (p.52). This definition connects to some of the participants’ responses, which defined mindfulness practice as “awareness of the body” or “we are a body”. Further, she defines embodied knowledge as “that sense of knowing something through the body and is often

sparked by what we might call a “gut reaction” (p.52), aligning with some participants of the study referring to mindfulness as “something through the body”. Finally, she defines embodied rhetoric as “a purposeful decision to include embodied knowledge and social positionalities as forms of meaning making within a text itself” (p.52).

In their article, Johnson et al. (2015) discuss the concept of embodiment in the field of rhetoric and the ways embodiment is connected to rhetoric. In their essay, the authors posit that, “To think about rhetoric, we must think about bodies. To do this means also to articulate how scholars’ own bodies have intimately informed our disciplinary understanding of rhetoric. The links between embodiment and rhetoric consistently appear in both discourses about bodies and research emphasizing the material body itself.” (p.39). Further, they bring up an important argument stating that by recognizing the fundamental relationship between rhetoric and embodiment, “we can make all bodies and the power dynamics invested in their (in)visibility visible” (Johnson et al., 2015, p.39) By expanding on these categories, this study aims to situate mindfulness as an embodied practice. As Johnson et al. (2015) argue, “the physical body carries meaning through discourse about or by a body. But embodiment theories suggest that meaning can be articulated beyond language. All bodies do rhetoric through texture, shape, color, consistency, movement, and function.” (p.39). Findings of this study indicate that FYC students perceive mindfulness as an embodied practice. Participants shared that, by using the body as a medium, they were able to bring awareness to the self and the present moment. Further, through mindfulness, their body allowed them to redirect their attention to what was happening in that specific moment. As a result, they were able to perform better in class, enhance their academic performance, become better learners and more efficient writers. Therefore, through the findings

of this study, I argue that mindfulness can be defined as an embodied practice that can and should be added to the scholarship of embodiment theories within the field of RWS.

5.3 Result Two: Mindfulness-Based Interventions Outcomes

Although the quantitative phase did not reveal a significant impact, the qualitative phase revealed four important outcomes of the mindfulness-based interventions: 1) mood improvement, 2) resetting, 3) self-reported performance benefits, 4) students' perceived limitations. First, participants felt an immediate mood improvement, meaning that they felt more relaxed and less stressed during and after the interventions. Second, results show how the interventions allowed for an opportunity to pause and reset. Further, the results reflect an increase in self-reported academic performance. Previous scholars have identified that mindfulness practices in the college classroom contribute to an overall mood improvement of the student, specifically, they become calmer, more focused, less stressed, and more present in the classroom (Bush, 2011). In addition to this, mindfulness practices help in lowering anxiety and depression amongst college students (Bush, 2011). Finally, the results of this section highlighted some of the challenges and implications that arise from implementing these types of interventions inside a college classroom.

5.3.1 Mood Improvement

Previous studies have shown some of the benefits of mindfulness-based interventions in the classroom (Strait et al., 2020). These include positive effects on stress and self-regulation amongst college students (Strait et al., 2020), as Norma explained, *“it was a very stressed-relief experience, like how can I say this, like calmed, you get very calmed, and all your stress goes away.”*. Jose also shared how the interventions helped him with his stress levels, stating, *I got to release stress...they were helpful especially with how stressful school is and just to take that little*

break to relax, it was good". Additional studies have shown that through mindfulness practices, college students learn how to effectively control their emotions (Dvořáková et al., 2017). Esther shared, *"I felt more calmed more relaxed, but yeah, I just felt very calmed. I guess they are very good for you, like if you are feeling very stressed it's a good thing to do that and just calm yourself down and just relax. I think they helped me a lot, because I am the type of person who gets stressed really quick."*

Different studies have associated mindfulness practices with positive outcomes in different mental health conditions, including anxiety, depression (Dvořáková et al., 2017), and ADHD (Felver et al., 2014). While the results from this study don't include conversation around ADHD and depression, some participants expressed how the interventions have had a positive outcome with their anxiety. For example, David shared, *"honestly, it just made me feel very calmed and less anxious, more relaxed. They helped me a lot."* Similarly, Esther shared her experience with the interventions as an opportunity to become less anxious, she stated, *"Me sentia muy relajada y menos ansiosa, cada ves que se terminaban sentia como un peso menos, nose como explicarlo. Pero si mas alivianada."*

Results also show that through the mindfulness-based interventions, participants felt more connected to their bodies and as result, felt more comfortable in their bodies. This led to a mood improvement, as participants shared, *"it was a good experience to do that like every day because it made you more comfortable with your body and yourself and you get to have time for yourself"* – Michelle. Similarly, Melissa shared how by feeling better with her body, she was able to feel overall, explaining, *"it got me feeling a little more better (sic) with my body, with the breathing because I feel like a little stressed sometimes and somedays and take deep breaths and concentrate on the mind or whatever just cleared it out and make everything better."*

5.3.2 Resetting

Results from this study demonstrated that mindfulness-based interventions are an effective practice that helps in increasing awareness of self and present moment and improvement of mood. Participants from the study described these interventions as an opportunity to pause and reset. Many of the participants shared how they had just performed an exam in a previous class or had just taken a difficult class. Therefore, coming to class and taking a four-minute mindfulness practice allowed them to pause and reset, as William shared, *“it is an opportunity to take deep breaths and have a relaxing moment before class.”* Esther explained, *“they make you relax and then you can start work with like a fresh mind.”*

Results show that by having the opportunity to reset, participants felt compelled to engage in class and felt better prepared for the assignments, as Jose shared, *“venia cansado de mi otra clase y decia, hoy no voy a hacer nada en esta clase pero ya despues de los videos como que me relajaba y decia, no, ya mero! ya mero! y me volvia a motivar.”* Simiraly, Michelle shared about the challenging class she had before this class, and that the interventions were an opportunity to relax, *“vengo de mi clase anterior que es muy estresante, entonces cuando ponian los videos me podia relajar, y me daba mucho gusto, decia “ay, que bueno que hoy si tenemos el video!”* Clarissa also shared how the interventions being implemented at the beginning of the class were a good use of class time, *“what I enjoyed about them the most is that we had them in the beginning of the class before class started so it allowed me to like kind of get into a good mindset before the beginning of the class so it created like a good environment for the class.”*

Many of the participants work before class, therefore they shared that the mindfulness-based interventions were an effective tool to help them prepare for class after work. For example, Alani shared, *“I was very stressed from work coming from work so they helped me*

relaxed... It was good to do them in the beginning of the class so you can start the class with a good mindset rather than continue being stressed from work or previous classes or stuff.”

5.3.3 Self-Reported Academic Performance Benefits

Results from the study show an increase in self-reported academic performance amongst participants. William shared, *“it helps you deal with the class better and it makes you do better with the assignments by being able to concentrate more on what you are doing.”* Many studies have demonstrated the positive relationship between mindfulness and academic performance (Greeson et al., 2014; Lin & Mai, 2018). For instance, a study demonstrated how mindfulness-based interventions results in increased engagement in the process of learning, which leads to higher academic success (Elphinstone et al., 2019), as Krys shared, *“it was something that made me feel more comfortable in the class, the days we had the videos, I was more focused in class and felt better about the assignments.”* Additionally, a different randomized controlled study demonstrated that students who participated in a 10-week mindfulness-based intervention program received a higher grade than the control group (Vorontsova-Wenger et al., 2021). Other participants described their increased academic performance as a direct result of the mindfulness-based interventions, noting that they were better learners on the days they had the interventions implemented in their classrooms. Luciano explained, *“like when the professor gave us the video, it makes us concentrate more on what we were going to do in the class after the video, so it was useful. It was something that made me feel more comfortable in the class, to put more attention in the class.”* By being more comfortable in the class and creating a sense of awareness, participants were able to perform better after the interventions, resulting in positive academic outcomes.

5.3.4 Students' Perceived Limitations

From the data analysis, some potential limitations emerged in implementing mindfulness-based interventions in the classroom. While many participants had positive feedback on the interventions, others shared some negative feedback that they thought worth mentioned.

Most of the participants had never engaged in a mindfulness-based guided meditation, and therefore some felt it was difficult to concentrate, as Estephy mentioned, *“Have more time, longer videos and more days would be helpful. Honestly maybe make it a little bit more longer (sic) because sometimes we need more time to learn to concentrate.”* While previous studies have shown that short duration mindfulness practices have the same results as long and more rigorous mindfulness practices (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012), some participants said they would like longer interventions implemented more than once a week. As Jose shared, *“que fuera mas de una ves por semana, estaria chido, porque asi las haces mas seguido y te acostumbras mas, porque pues las haces un dia y despues pasa una semana y se te olvida.”*

Further, results of the interviews show a difficulty in focusing and concentrating on the mindfulness-based interventions, as not every student was participating. Some subjects shared they felt uncomfortable at times as they felt the stare of those who weren't participating in the interventions, Pablo shared, *“me gustaria hacerlo con personas que esten involucradas tambien porque si no ves a otras personas que no lo estan haciendo y te sientes como incomodo”,* similarly, Jose shared, *“estan los demas estudiantes en la clase y te miran y pues estaba incomodo eso.”* Similarly, Clarissa explained the challenges presented from the interventions, *“I think it could be really great if you want to do the study again to put all the students who want to do it all in the same room. Um, yeah, but I'm not sure how you would be able to implement it.*

Like making the class more quiet (sic), making sure that everyone participates which I think it would be hard to do.”

5.4 Result Three: Implementing Mindfulness-Based Interventions

Interview results from this study align with the notion that mindfulness in the FYC classroom functions as a multimodality. Implementing mindfulness as a multimodality in the FYC classroom supports students’ learning literacies, meaning-making, and academic performance. Further, results described the ways mindfulness can be implemented in the classroom through a variety of modes.

5.4.1 Mindfulness as a Multimodality

In chapters 2 and 3, I discussed the concept of multimodality and the way it is treated across different disciplinary fields. I proposed that by drawing on definitions of multimodality within RWS, sociolinguistic studies and semiotic studies, mindfulness can be situated as a multimodality. In chapters 2 and 3, I defined multimodality as compositions that constitute of a range of rhetorical resources, including moving images, sounds, music (Anderson et al, 2006), body, body movement and gestures (Mondada, 2016; Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001). The results of this study highlighted the ways in which through mindfulness, the body becomes the primary medium for knowledge and meaning making. As one participant, Krys stated, *“I felt more connected to my body” ... “I felt my body and where I was in that moment. I felt more focused in class and I was able to understand the assignments better”*. Further, other participants shared how through mindfulness they were able to increase self-awareness by shifting attention to their bodies. Michelle shared, *“sentía mi cuerpo y me sentía mejor, como mas despierto”*. In doing so, participants observed an increase in positive learning outcomes, as Erin shared, *“it helps me a lot, I feel happier, I feel like I was able to do better, like be a better*

student on the days of the videos". Mindfulness as a multimodality can be implemented and cultivated in the classroom, as William shared, *"it was hard to do at the beginning, like I didn't understand why we were doing it, but then it became easier, like easier to follow and do, and it did helped, helped me feel better, like gave me more motivation to work or whatever"*. By establishing mindfulness as a multimodality and implementing it in the FYC classroom, I argue that we can potentially change the way composition is done.

The simplicity of mindfulness makes it an accessible practice that can affect the ways we communicate, interact, and live in the world. In her article, Butler (2016) connected multimodality and accessibility arguing that there is a need to embrace different ways of communicating through multiple modes that engage more senses. Similarly, participants shared how mindfulness allowed them use other senses in order to become more effective learners. As Erin stated, *"I just felt that I could take a moment to breathe, feel my body and kind of remember why I was here, I was breathing and it gave me an opportunity to relax and focus on my assignments for the day"*. Often, we focus on the mind and available digital technologies for composing, neglecting the body. But as Mahon (2010) argues, "multimodality is a method through which we communicate, not only with writing, but with visual, aura, spatial methods too" (p.114). Mindfulness as a multimodality reminds us that we are embodied writers.

Mindfulness can be a relatively easy practice to learn in the classroom. As a result, students can take this learned multimodality practice and transfer it to other aspects of their lives. For instance, results from the study described the ways in which they have used mindfulness to cope with stressful situations in their daily lives, Clarissa shared, *"I do them, what I've learned in class. I do them at home sometimes if I am feeling stressed, to take a moment to breathe, and then I feel better, happier, more relaxed, ready to study or write or do homework"*. Additionally,

some of the participants shared how they are teaching friends and family members how to use the mindfulness to feel better about themselves and cope with stressors of their lives, Melina shared, *“se lo estoy enseñando a mi hijo de 5 años en preescolar y es una herramienta que le estoy dando para toda su vida....”* Further, participants described that they were able to take this practice outside the classroom and incorporate it in their daily lives. For instance, more than half of the interview participants discussed their stressful jobs and how they are slowly incorporating this practice to cope with the stress and challenges that come from work. Melina, who works at a restaurant, shared, *“I have been using them at work, especially on Sundays when all families go to the restaurant.”* Krys also shared how she has been using these practices at work, stating, *“I was doing them at work yesterday, like its actually helpful.”* By bringing mindfulness as a multimodality in the classroom, students can receive the benefits of this practice in and out of the classroom setting. Thus, I also argue that mindfulness practices is a transferrable multimodality that students can use in different aspects of their lives.

5.4.2 Mindfulness-Based Interventions in a Variety of Modes

Many scholars in the field of RWS are inspiring others to adopt new and innovative learning strategies in response to new literacies practices (Grouling & Grutsch McKinney, 2016) that go “beyond conventional bounds of the alphabetic” (Selfe, 2004, p. 54). The embodied practice of mindfulness as a multimodality in the classroom can be intensified by using different modes, including guided meditation videos that can be played for students at any point during class time. Through this performance, students can communicate, learn, and understand beyond traditional methods. Results from this study included positive feedback on using videos as a mode to implement these interventions, Clarissa shared, *“I like the videos a lot, like, because it would tell us what to do and that really helped me follow the instructions and not get lost. Also,*

the voice was soothing, and I just liked it very much.” Participants also shared that a short video was helpful, not intrusive, and convenient. As Erin explained, *“I feel like it’s something different, I think it is very necessary for all students to have these types of experiences. It is a short video very easy to follow.”* All interview participants gave positive feedback on the implementation of mindfulness in their classroom. This may be a biased result due to the self-selection of interview participants, but nonetheless, it provides valuable information about student perceptions.

Further, interview results show that participants are open to having these types of interventions in other classes, as David shared, *“Yes, (having interventions in different classes), because in my career I know I am going to be very stressed so I would like them in those classes. I would love for them to be in engineering classes, the most stressful classes.”* By situating mindfulness as a multimodality and implementing it in the traditional college classroom, instructors and students can leverage from the described benefits, resulting in calmer students and better academic outcomes. Additionally, participants shared how the interventions in their class were effective as they didn’t have to leave the classroom or make time to attend a wellness program outside their schedule, Michelle shared, *“they were something different, something new that I’ve been wanting to try for a long time on my own, but I never have time. I feel that because they are very short, they work perfect in the class.”*

5.5 Conclusion

Multimodality is a well-researched concept that is treated differently across disciplines. Through these qualitative findings and results, I argue that mindfulness is not only implemented multimodally, but it is in and of itself a multimodality. I support this argument by expanding the traditional definition of multimodality within the field of RWS and drawing on existing theories

of multimodality within the disciplines of sociolinguistics and semiotics. Re-defining multimodality as compositions that constitute (1) a range of rhetorical resources, including images, music, sounds, in order to create meaning (Aderson et al., 2006) as well as (2) bodily modes, including body, body movements, gesture, facial expressions (Mondada, 2016; Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001). I argue that mindfulness as a multimodality utilizes the combination of these modes for meaning-making as it is an embodied performance that allows students to learn, communicate, and understand beyond traditional methods. By bringing the evidence-based benefits of mindfulness as an embodied multimodality in the classroom setting, we can potentially impact the students' academic performance as well as alleviate some of the challenges associated with college.

5.6 Summary

In this Chapter, I provided the results for chapter 4 and the interpretations, discussion, and theory building for this study. The purpose of this chapter was to describe how the collected quantitative and qualitative data helped in understanding the perceptions, impact, and use of mindfulness-based interventions in the FYC classroom.

While the quantitative data did not show clear positive changes in the results, Phase II of the study provided the qualitative data, which suggests that undergraduate FYC students are open to learning mindfulness practices in their classroom. The data also suggests that undergraduate students perceive mindfulness as an awareness of themselves through their bodies and an awareness of the present moment. They view mindfulness as a tool that can be cultivated through practice that can be performed inside and outside the classroom. Participants of the study shared that mindfulness practice can be used as an asset in their classroom that may lead to a more effective learning experience and higher academic outcomes. By using mindfulness practices to

lower stress levels and to relax and reset before classes, participants shared that their academic performance was more positive on the days that the interventions were implemented. Data also suggest that participants have a positive view on implementing mindfulness-based interventions through a guided meditation video. Participants indicated that this is an effective way as it only requires a couple of minutes at the beginning of the class. The guided meditations are easy to understand and follow.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

During the past several decades, mindfulness practices have gained increased popularity in academia, especially in the field of higher education research. The benefits of mindfulness practices are well-established across different disciplines and are increasingly being studied in higher education due to the encouraging effects and benefits on college students' wellbeing and academic performance. Instructors are progressively interested in how mindfulness practices might impact the student's experience in their classrooms. As a result, a growing number of college instructors are incorporating mindfulness practices and interventions into their classrooms (Bush, 2011). This led to an increasing number of studies measuring mindfulness within college students. However, most of these studies do not explore students' perceptions of these practices or the self-reported benefits of mindfulness. Further, no study has been measuring mindfulness inside a first-year composition classroom. This study sought to address that gap by exploring first-year composition students' perceptions of implementing mindfulness-based interventions in their classrooms.

Students in the first-year composition classroom were of particular interest for the purposes of this study for several reasons. First, I was teaching first-year composition classes, and several FYC instructors from my department had shown interest in participating in my research study, which negated the requirement for additional volunteers. Secondly, students enrolled in a first-year composition class are mostly first-year undergraduate students from all departments across the curriculum. This would allow for richer data collection. Lastly, I was situating this study within the field of RWS by analyzing data through theories of embodiment

and multimodality. More importantly, mindfulness promises stress and anxiety relief and enhancement in writing practices in FYC courses (Greeson et al., 2014; Dvořáková et al., 2017).

The goal of this experimental sequential mixed-methods study was to evaluate the perceptions of first-year composition students' mindfulness-based interventions implemented in their classroom. By understanding such perceptions, college educators, instructors, and administrators can gain enough confidence to begin implementing these practices in the college classroom. Further, through this study, students' self-reported benefits described how these practices made an impact on their lives inside and outside academia. Therefore, this study sheds light on the benefits of mindfulness practices through the students' voices and experiences. As a result, this study aims to inspire instructors from FYC and other disciplines to integrate such practices for their students to receive the benefits of mindfulness.

This study consisted of two different phases. Phase I consisted of the quantitative section of the study. In Phase I, MAAS surveys were implemented and analyzed and were designed to respond to RQ2: Can minimal-scale mindfulness-based interventions impact first-year college students' self-awareness? A total of 44 students participated in Phase I, all of whom were undergraduate students enrolled in four different RWS 1301 classes at UTEP. Participants were randomly selected from two control and two treatment groups. The MAAS scores were evaluated to measure all the participants' overall mindfulness throughout the 10-week intervention period. The MAAS was implemented three times per class, at the beginning, middle, and end of the semester. This helped measure and compare control and treatment groups' scores of mindfulness. All the quantitative data were collected and analyzed through UTEP's QuestionPro.

In Phase II of the study, I presented the qualitative data findings collected from semi-structured interviews with 18 participants. The interviews took place at the end of the study in

December 2019. All the participants were enrolled in two RWS 1301 classes at UTEP. Further, all the interviewees participated in the 10-week mindfulness intervention study. The qualitative findings that emerged from the data formed three main themes:

- (a) Perceptions of mindfulness-based interventions
- (b) Outcomes of mindfulness-based interventions
- (c) Implementing mindfulness-based interventions.

The first theme, perceptions of mindfulness-based interventions, comprised two sub-themes: *an embodied practice* and *perceptions of self and present moment*. The second theme, outcomes of mindfulness-based interventions, included four sub-themes: *mood improvement, lower stress, increased relaxation; resetting; self-report benefits; students' perceived limitations*. The third theme, implementing mindfulness-based interventions, comprised of three sub-themes: *mindfulness-based interventions in a variety of modes; mindfulness as a multimodality; students' perceived limitations*. These themes helped answer all three research questions that guided this dissertation study. The qualitative findings were analyzed through the manual analysis method. They were interpreted through the lens of the theoretical framework comprised of theories of embodiment and multimodality discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 of this study.

The following section will provide conclusions for each specific research question.

6.2 Research Questions: Conclusions

This study focused on answering the following three research questions:

- RQ1: What are the perceptions about mindfulness of first-year college students who participate in a brief mindfulness intervention in the FYC classroom?
- RQ2: Can minimal-scale mindfulness-based interventions impact first-year college students' self-awareness?

RQ3: How does mindfulness practice function in FYC?

The study was purposely designed in two different phases to successfully answer each research question. Phase I provided the quantitative data that helped answer RQ2, while Phase II of the study provided the qualitative findings that answered RQ1 and RQ3.

6.2.1 Answer to Research Question One

RQ1: What are the perceptions about mindfulness of first-year college students who participate in a brief mindfulness intervention in the FYC classroom?

The qualitative data findings from this study aimed to understand the perceptions that FYC students at UTEP have on the implementation of mindfulness interventions in their classroom. Results from this study indicate that undergraduate FYC students at UTEP perceive mindfulness as two key concepts:

- a) An embodied practice
- b) Complete awareness of self and present moment.

Embodied Practice:

While none of the participants specifically used the term embodied, all participants defined and understood mindfulness as a practice that utilizes the body as the primary medium. Therefore, I argue that participants perceived mindfulness as an embodied practice. Further, the findings of the study indicate that FYC students perceived mindfulness interventions as an embodied practice that helps in bringing complete awareness to the self. It does so by allowing them to shift their attention to different body parts and on their breath. Participants understood mindfulness as a practice performed by and through the body. By using their body as a medium, they were able to bring complete awareness into themselves and the present moment.

Awareness of self and present moment:

Results from the study indicate that FYC students perceived mindfulness as an awareness of self and the present moment. By doing so, participants shared how mindfulness also brought complete awareness to the present moment. While participants shared that they encountered these feelings during the mindfulness practices, some reported lasting sensations that continued throughout the class or even the entire day. Participants also shared how they felt better on the days they practiced mindfulness, as well as improved focus and cognitive abilities.

All the participants expressed a positive perception of implementing mindfulness-based interventions in their classroom. Further, the results indicate two significant aspects that were gained from the interventions. First, participants expressed how mindfulness is a learned practice or tool used inside and outside the classroom. As such, participants shared the different ways in which they benefited from the practice both in their class and also in their day-to-day lives. In their classroom, participants shared how through mindfulness, they were able to have an opportunity to reset, which allowed them to better focus and be more present in class, which resulted in them becoming better learners and more efficient writers. Outside the classroom, participants shared the different ways in which they have used mindfulness as a tool to relax and feel better. Some of the participants shared how they use mindfulness during or before their jobs in order to be more efficient workers, or how to relax on stressful occasions. Other participants shared how they use mindfulness at home before or during the completion of a homework assignment. Additionally, some of the participants revealed that they are teaching friends and family members how to use mindfulness in order to receive the benefits they have experienced from the practice.

To summarize RQ1, FYC students perceived mindfulness as an embodied practice that allowed them to bring awareness to the self and the present moment. Further, students found the

interventions an enjoyable and effective use of class time. Lastly, through the mindfulness interventions, students gained a skill that they use inside and outside the classroom for different reasons, including relaxing, improved focus, and enhanced well-being.

6.2.2 Answer to Research Question Two

RQ2: Can minimal-scale mindfulness-based interventions impact first-year college students' self-awareness?

Phase II and Phase I of this study provided the data that was helpful in answering this research question. First, the quantitative data results indicate that undergraduate FYC students at UTEP possess levels of mindfulness that are in line with those of undergraduate students in different colleges (Bukeavich, 2020; Blackburn, 2015; Brown & Ryan, 2003). Quantitative data was measured through the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) (Brown & Ryan, 2003). The MAAS is the most popular tool to measure mindfulness (, Earleywine, & Borders, 2010), and it is a 15-item scale designed to assess a core characteristic of mindfulness.

The MAAS was implemented three times throughout the 10-week intervention period: at the beginning, middle, and end of the semester. Additionally, it was implemented in control and treatment groups that helped in comparing results.

To summarize, the MAAS results showed no significant change in the MAAS average scores throughout the 10-week intervention period. The average MAAS score in treatment groups compared to control groups was similar, and the overall MAAS scores in treatment groups did not significantly change throughout the 10-week intervention period. Therefore, quantitative data indicate no change in students' awareness throughout the 10-week mindfulness intervention period.

However, while quantitative results did not show a significant increase in FYC students' mindfulness during and throughout the intervention period, qualitative findings suggest otherwise. While qualitative findings did not measure levels of mindfulness, the participants shared how the interventions helped increase their self-awareness and awareness of the present moment as discussed in RQ1

Results of the study also highlighted the outcomes of implementing mindfulness practices in the FYC classroom. The qualitative findings revealed three primary outcomes of the mindfulness-based interventions:

- 1) Mood improvement
- 2) Resetting
- 3) Self-reported performance benefits.

The study also highlighted some of the students' perceived limitations of implementing mindfulness-based interventions in the FYC classroom.

Mood improvement:

Results indicate that participants felt an immediate mood improvement, meaning they felt more relaxed and less stressed both during and after the mindfulness interventions. As a result, they could perform better in class on the days the mindfulness interventions were implemented. Further, results indicate that they felt a sense of calmness and happiness through the mindfulness interventions.

Resetting:

Results indicate that the interventions allowed for an opportunity to pause and reset. Participants shared how the interventions were an opportunity to briefly pause before the class began and how they felt a sense of reset after each intervention. As a result, participants

described they could be more focused and felt better prepared for the class on the days the mindfulness interventions were performed.

Self-reported performance benefits:

Results from the study indicate that participants' academic performance improved on the days the mindfulness interventions were implemented. Participants shared how, through the interventions, they were able to become calmer, more focused, less stressed, and more present in the classroom. Further, participants shared they felt a decrease in anxiety which contributed to their positive academic performance. Participants described their increased academic performance as a direct result of the mindfulness-based interventions, noting that they were better learners on the days they had the interventions implemented in their classrooms.

Students' Perceived Limitations:

Some participants expressed some potential limitations that emerged from implementing mindfulness-based interventions in the classroom through the data analysis. First, many participants had never engaged in a mindfulness practice or meditation. Therefore, it wasn't easy to concentrate, and some expressed the notion that the practice was challenging to perform. Further, participants said it was challenging to concentrate and focus entirely on the mindfulness practices as not every student participated. Lastly, participants noted that because not every student was participating, some felt uncomfortable as they felt the stares of those who were not participating.

6.2.3 Answer to Research Question Three

RQ3: How does mindfulness practices function in FYC?

The study's qualitative findings sought to understand how mindfulness practices function in FYC. The findings of this study resulted in two key components that support the statement

that mindfulness can successfully function as an embodied multimodality that can be useful in FYC. The perceptions of mindfulness as described in RQ1 demonstrate that 1) mindfulness is an embodied practice that utilizes the body as the primary medium to bring awareness into the present moment and the self, and as such, 2) mindfulness works as an embodied practice that utilizes the body as multimodality that results in academic enhancement performance by creating better learners and more efficient writers.

The findings of the study also indicate that mindfulness practices can be implemented in the college classroom through a variety of modes, including but not limited to videos, recordings, animations, or scripts. For this specific study, a YouTube video was played at the beginning of the classroom. The video was played from the classroom projector. Participants of the study shared their thoughts on the video, stating that it was easy to follow and understand, as it effectively guided them into the mindful meditation practice. While the classrooms conveniently had a projector, mindfulness practices could easily be implemented through other modes. For instance, instructors could play a recording video from their cellphones or read a script and guide students through the mindful meditation practice.

In summary, mindfulness successfully functions as an embodied multimodality that can be useful in FYC to enhance the academic performance of students and alleviate some of the challenges that are associated with college. Further, mindfulness as an embodied multimodality goes beyond the traditional teaching-learning methods and provides the students a transferable skill they can have for the rest of their lives. The simplicity of mindfulness allows it to be implemented through a variety of modes in the classroom. It is a cost-efficient and inclusive practice that only takes a couple of minutes of class time. Further, the outcomes from the mindfulness practice were highlighted in this study. The outcomes demonstrate the different

benefits of implementing these practices on college students. While there were some reported limitations on the mindfulness interventions, they were clearly outweighed by the benefits described above.

6.3 Limitations

I encountered five main limitations in this study. First, many of the students that I was planning to recruit were not familiar with the concept of mindfulness. Therefore, some of the students refused to participate, as they associated mindfulness with religion or had a misconception of what mindfulness represents. While I tried to clearly explain the concept of mindfulness and what the practice entails, many students still refused to participate. Second, the participation in the study depended on students' being present in class. Some participants shared they missed some parts of the interventions due to being absent. Further, some of the participants missed completing the MAAS survey due to being absent on its implementation days. Third, participants shared how they sometimes felt uncomfortable performing the mindfulness interventions as not every student in the classroom was participating in the study. Trying to concentrate and focus on a guided meditation while others are staring can be a challenging task to perform. Fourth, only two of the participants had experience with mindfulness practices. The vast majority of the participants were unfamiliar with the mindfulness meditations, and they found the practice very challenging at the beginning of the study. However, participants shared how the practice became easier after a couple of times. The last limitation encountered in this study was found through the face-to-face interviews. The qualitative data was challenging to collect. Most of the participants were not familiar with the practice of mindfulness. Therefore, it was difficult for them to express in words what their perceptions of mindfulness were and their

overall experience with the interventions. Some participants felt better expressing their thoughts in Spanish, so I gave them that option.

6.4 Recommendations and Implications for Future Research

Based upon the findings and conclusions of this study, I am providing several recommendations for FYC instructors and writing program administrators that are interesting in implementing mindfulness practices into their curriculums.

1. Mindfulness is a simple practice of bringing attention to the present moment. By understanding the concept of mindfulness and its simplicity, instructors and administrators can easily implement these practices in the classroom without any previous experience. Mindfulness can be implemented through different modes, as a wide variety of mindfulness practices videos are available through YouTube.
2. Have an open discussion with students about mindfulness practices. Discussion surrounding mindfulness consists of a brief history of mindfulness, explaining what the practice entails and the proven benefits the practitioners can receive. Further, inform the students how mindfulness practices can benefit their academic performance and make them more efficient writers. Additionally, allow space to understand the students' perceptions of mindfulness and mindfulness being implemented in their classroom.
3. Explore the implementation of mindfulness practices through a variety of modes. There is a wide selection of videos and recordings that can be effective in the FYC classroom. By implementing mindfulness through a variety of modes, the instructor can have an open discussion with her students to understand which video or mode was more efficient and enjoyable.

4. It is essential to keep an open mind when incorporating mindfulness practices in the classroom. Always invite students to participate in the mindfulness practices and remain respectful of students who choose not to participate. The concept of mindfulness is well-known but not well-understood by many. While we can do our best to explain what mindfulness is, the concept is still misrepresented, and many associate it with religion or “new age” ideas.

6.4.1 Future Research

Several remarks were found through this study that can potentially be explored in future research:

1. More quantitative studies should be implemented in different colleges and universities to examine whether the MAAS scores remain consistent.
2. Additional qualitative studies should be implemented in different institutions to compare the perceptions that FYC students have of implementing mindfulness practices in their classrooms.
3. More qualitative studies should be implemented in FYC courses to document the impacts that mindfulness practices have on students’ academic performance.
4. Further, more studies should be implemented in FYC courses to measure mindfulness practices’ impact on the students’ writing process and performance.
5. Future studies implemented in the classroom setting should take advantage of the ways technology has made mindfulness accessible to research.

6.6 Summary

In this Chapter, I provided the findings, results, and interpretations of this sequential mixed methods study. The purpose of this chapter was to describe how the collected quantitative

and qualitative data helped understand the perceptions, impact, and use of mindfulness-based interventions in the FYC classroom. Further, this chapter provided the answers to all the three research questions that guided this study.

Phase I of the study provided the quantitative results, which indicate that UTEP's FYC students have the same average levels of mindfulness that are on par with other college students. Further, quantitative data suggest that there was no change in students' awareness throughout the 10-week mindfulness intervention period. Lastly, there was no significant difference in mindfulness scores between the control and treatment groups.

Previous studies suggest that a qualitative approach should be taken when measuring and researching mindfulness (Bukeavich, 2020; Blackburn, 2015). In this study, the quantitative data showed no change in students' levels of mindfulness throughout the 10-week intervention. However, phase II of the study, which provided the qualitative data, suggests that mindfulness-based interventions impact students' levels of awareness. Further, FYC students are open to learning mindfulness practices in their classrooms. The qualitative data also helped in understanding how students perceive mindfulness. More importantly, the findings described mindfulness as a learned skill that can be cultivated through time. Further, mindfulness as an embodied multimodality positive benefits to FYC students. Participants of the study shared that mindfulness practice can be used as an asset in their classroom, leading to a more effective learning experience and higher academic outcomes. By using mindfulness practices to lower stress levels and relax and reset before classes, participants shared that their academic performance was more positive on the days the interventions were implemented. Data also suggests that participants positively view implementing mindfulness-based interventions through a guided meditation video. Participants indicated that this is an effective method as it only

requires a couple of minutes at the beginning of the class, and the guided meditations were easy to understand and to follow.

This study highlighted the many benefits of incorporating mindfulness practices in the college classroom. Further, through the findings of this study, we have added to the growing literature regarding the perceptions that FYC students have of mindfulness practices in their classroom. While mindfulness is not a one-size-fits-all solution, it is a useful tool that can greatly benefit college students. Incorporating mindfulness practices in the classroom as an embodied multimodality is an ideal way for college students to learn this skill, as it is time- and cost-efficient. Mindfulness practices benefit the mental health and overall well-being of their practitioners, and they also have a positive effect on the writing process. Further, this learned skill can be used inside and outside the classroom, and the more we incorporate mindfulness practices the easier they become to perform. By bringing mindfulness in the FYC classroom as an embodied multimodality we can potentially change the way composition is done.

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Appendix 1: Consent Form

University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) Institutional Review Board

Informed Consent Form for Research Involving Human Subjects

Protocol Title: Implementing Mindfulness-Based Interventions in the First Year Composition College Classroom

Principal Investigator: Patricia Flores Hutson (915-412-0766)

UTEP: Department of English

Introduction

You are being asked to take part voluntarily in the research study described below. You are encouraged to take your time in making your decision. It is important that you read the information that describes the study. Please ask the study researcher or the study staff to explain any words or information that you do not clearly understand.

Why is this study being done?

You have been asked to take part in a study researching the ways mindfulness-based interventions work inside a college classroom. Approximately, 80 study subjects will be enrolling in this study at UTEP. You are being asked to be in the study because you are enrolled at a Rhetoric and Writing 1301 course at UTEP and you are 18 years of age or older. If you decide to enroll in this study, your involvement will last ten weeks. The study will be implemented once a week at the beginning of your RWS 1301 course. Each study session will last no longer than five minutes.

What is involved in the study?

If you agree to take part in this study, the research team will: Showcase a YouTube video with a guided meditation. The guided meditations will be done inside your RWS 1301 classroom and will last five minutes. You will be doing the guided breathing meditation practice once a week for 10 weeks.

You will: Respond to an online survey three times per semester inside your RWS 1301 classroom. You will also be asked if you would like to participate for an interview at the end of the semester that will take place at the UTEP library. The interviews will last no longer than 20 minutes. All interviews will be recorded using a recording device. After the interviews, the recordings will be transcribed for analysis. The names of the participants will be changed, and pseudonyms will be used.

What are the risks and discomforts of the study?

Factors such as stress or discomfort might occur while performing the guided breathing meditation exercise and during the interview process. Another risk might be the loss of confidentiality as you will be doing the practice inside your classroom.

What will happen if I am injured in this study?

The University of Texas at El Paso and its affiliates do not offer to pay for or cover the cost of medical treatment for research related illness or injury. No funds have been set aside to pay or reimburse you in the event of such injury or illness. You will not give up any of your legal rights by signing this consent form. You should report any such injury to Patricia Flores Hutson at 915-412-0766 and to the UTEP Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (915-747-7693) or irb.orsp@utep.edu.

Are there benefits to taking part in this study?

Through this study, you will be able to follow a guided breathing meditation exercise for a period of ten weeks. This will allow you to learn basic meditation skills that you will be able to implement on your own once the study is finalized.

Will I be paid to participate in this study?

Yes. Names for participation for interviews will be selected from a poll. You will receive a gift card of \$15. The gift card will be given to you during after the interview.

What other options are there?

You have the option not to take part in this study. There will be no penalties involved if you choose not to take part in this study.

What if I want to withdraw, or am asked to withdraw from this study?

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You have the right to choose not to take part in this study.

If you do not take part in the study, there will be no penalty or loss of benefit.

If you choose to take part, you have the right to skip any questions or stop at any time. However, we encourage you to talk to a member of the research group so that they know why you are leaving the study. If there are any new findings during the study that may affect whether you want to continue to take part, you will be told about them.

The researcher may decide to stop your participation without your permission, if he or she thinks that being in the study may cause you harm, and you are no longer comfortable being part of the study.

Who do I call if I have questions or problems?

You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may call insert

Patricia Flores Hutson at 915-412-0766 or email pflores4@utep.edu

If you have questions or concerns about your participation as a research subject, please contact the UTEP Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (915-747-7693) or irb.orsp@utep.edu.

What about confidentiality?

1. Your part in this study is confidential. The following procedures will be followed to keep their personal information confidential: All records will be maintained under the supervision of Patricia Flores Hutson.

The results of this research study may be presented at meetings or in publications; however, your name will not be disclosed in those presentations.

Organizations that may inspect and/or copy your research records for quality assurance and data analysis include, but are not necessarily limited to:

- The sponsor or agent for the sponsor
- Office of Human Research Protections
- UTEP Institutional Review Board

Because of the need to release information to these parties, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

All records will be stored at all times with the researcher only.

Mandatory reporting

N/A

If information is revealed about child abuse or neglect, or potentially dangerous future behavior to others, the law requires that this information be reported to the proper authorities.

Authorization Statement

I have read each page of this paper about the study (or it was read to me). I will be given a copy of the form to keep. I know I can stop being in this study without penalty. I know that being in this study is voluntary and I choose to be in this study.

Participant's Name (printed)

Participant's Signature

Date

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Appendix 2: Recruitment Script

Hello! My name is Paty Flores Hutson, I am a fourth year Ph.D. student of Rhetoric and Composition Studies at the Department of English here at UTEP. I am here today because I would like to invite you all to participate in my research study for dissertation project. My project is about understanding the perceptions of RWS 1301 students regarding mindfulness-based interventions inside their classroom. If you agree to participate you will be participating in a mindfulness-based interventions for a total of 10 times. Each week, once a week, for a total of 10 weeks, at the beginning of each class session, your instructor will play a YouTube video that lasts 5 minutes. By watching this video, you will be asked to follow a guiding breathing practice. The practice doesn't require any movement of the body or anything else other than breathing with awareness. Once the practice is done, you will continue with your class session as normal. For those of you participating in the study, you will be asked to fill out an online survey 3 times per semester. Once at the beginning of the study, the second time at the middle of the study, and the last time at the end of the study. The surveys will take about 3 minutes to complete and will be filled out electronically from your computer available at this classroom. Additionally, interviews will be performed at the end of the study. I will recruit 7 participants from this class and will offer gift cards for participation. If you wish to participate in the interviews, you will be selected from a poll of names at the end of the study.

If you wish to participate, you will be reading the Study Information and filling out an IRB form today.

It is important that if you choose to participate, you understand that you can end your participation at any point of the study.

Further, if you choose not to participate, your grades, academic standing, and relationship with your instructor will NOT be affected by any means. During the intervention, you will be asked to sit quietly on your chair checking your emails or preparing for class.

If you would like to participate in my research study you have to be 18 years of age or older.

The study has correlation with your RWS 1301 class material. The study is a separate topic from anything you will learn in your RWS 1301 class.

Disclaimer: The video consists of a guided breathing exercise, it is not yoga and it does not follow any religion. It is a mindful breathing practice. If you have any questions, you can always contact me at pflores4@utep.edu.

Appendix 3: Online Survey Questions

The Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS)

Instructions: Below is a collection of statements about your everyday experience. Using the 1-6 scale below, please indicate how frequently or infrequently you currently have each experience. Please answer according to what really reflects your experience rather than what you think your experience should be. Please treat each item separately from every other item.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Almost always	Very frequently	Somewhat frequently	Somewhat infrequently	Very infrequently	Almost never

- _____ 1. I could be experiencing some emotion and not be conscious of it until some time later.
- _____ 2. I break or spill things because of carelessness, not paying attention, or thinking of something else.
- _____ 3. I find it difficult to stay focused on what's happening in the present.
- _____ 4. I tend to walk quickly to get where I'm going without paying attention to what I experience along the way.
- _____ 5. I tend not to notice feelings of physical tension or discomfort until they really grab my attention.
- _____ 6. I forget a person's name almost as soon as I've been told it for the first time.
- _____ 7. It seems I am "running on automatic," without much awareness of what I'm doing.
- _____ 8. I rush through activities without being really attentive to them.

- _____ 9. I get so focused on the goal I want to achieve that I lose touch with what I'm doing right now to get there.
- _____ 10. I do jobs or tasks automatically, without being aware of what I'm doing.
- _____ 11. I find myself listening to someone with one ear, doing something else at the same time.
- _____ 12. I drive places on 'automatic pilot' and then wonder why I went there.
- _____ 13. I find myself preoccupied with the future or the past.
- _____ 14. I find myself doing things without paying attention.
- _____ 15. I snack without being aware that I'm eating.

I will add a question to the surveys in the middle and end of the semester regarding the number of mindfulness-based interventions the students have participated in during the semester as follows:

Middle of the semester:

So far, how many times have you participated in the guided mindfulness/meditation video?

0-1	1-2	2-3	3-4	4-5	I don't remember
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End of the semester:

Since the last survey, how many times have you participated in the guided mindfulness/meditation video?

0-1	1-2	2-3	3-4	4-5	I don't remember
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Appendix 4: Interview Questions

(#1-3 pertain to both intervention participants and non-participants; #4-5 are for participants only):

1. Is this your first year at UTEP? Are you from the region?
 - a. If so, how has your transition from high school to college been?
2. What is your experience with the mindfulness-based interventions implemented inside your classroom?
3. What are your feelings about these interventions?
4. Did you participate in the meditations? Was this a good use of class time? Why or why not? If you didn't participate in the meditations, can you talk about why not?
5. Did these interventions help you in any way? Was there anything you particularly enjoyed? Anything you would change?
6. Would you like to have these interventions in future classes?
7. Is there anything I haven't asked but that you think would be useful for my study?

Vitae

Paty Flores Hutson completed her Bachelor of Arts degree in Communication Studies from The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) in 2009. In 2016, she received her Master of Arts degree in Communication Studies from UTEP. She joined UTEP's Rhetoric and Composition doctoral program in the fall of 2016.

Paty was a recipient of UTEP'S Department of English Outstanding Ph.D. Student Award in Teaching in 2020. She also received the 2018 and 2019 Baker Hernandez Grant from the English Department. Paty has presented her research at several academic conferences such as the 2018, 2019, 2021 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), and the 2019 Western States Rhetoric and Literacy Conference at Montana State University.

While pursuing her doctoral degree, Paty worked as an Assistant Instructor for in-class and online composition/professional writing courses and as an Assistant Director for the First-Year Composition Program. She also served as the secretary for UTEP's Frontera Retorica Association. During the last year of her doctoral program, Paty was a fellow at the Mellon Foundation-funded Humanities Collaborative at EPCC-UTEP 2021-2022. As a fellow, Paty worked as an instructor at the Department of English at the El Paso Community College Rio Grande Campus. Paty's dissertation "Implementing Mindfulness-Based Interventions in the First-Year Composition Classroom as an Embodied Multimodality" was supervised by Dr. Lucia Dura.

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