

The Effects of an MBCT Course on College Students During the Pandemic

Yi-Sheng Jiang
Chi Nan University

Abstract

Research showed that one in six of college students in Taiwan suffered from depression. In addition, the World Health Organization also pointed out that global anxiety and depression cases increased by 25% in the first year (2020) of the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of this study was to assess if the Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) course could help students improve concentration, reduce stress, manage emotions, and change cellphone habits. The methodology of this study was using a questionnaire survey, which included qualitative and quantitative questions, a five-point scale questionnaire (from “*Not at all improved*” to “*Extremely improved*”). In addition, the Chinese version of Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (CMAAS) measurements were taken before and after the MBCT course. The results of this study showed that nearly 60% of the students expressed that the MBCT course could effectively improve their concentration, 83% of the students thought that it significantly reduced their stress, and 86% of students’ feedback showed that it improved their emotional management. However, most students expressed that this course did not help them much in the change of cellphone habits. Therefore, this study suggests that universities in Taiwan should offer more mindfulness-based courses, including online mindfulness courses to help students learn more effectively and improve their physical and mental health, especially during the pandemic.

Keywords: concentration, COVID-19 pandemic, emotion management, mindfulness, stress reduction

Corresponding author: Yi-Sheng Jiang. Email: ysjon@ncnu.edu.tw

Introduction

The World Health Organization (2022) has pointed out that global anxiety and depression cases increased by 25% in the first year (2020) of the COVID-19 pandemic. Besides, research showed that one in six of college students in Taiwan suffered from depression (Chen, 2016; John Tung Foundation, 2012). Many studies have shown that excessive stress can cause emotional disorders, among which anxiety and depression are two of the most common ones. On the other hand, many studies have proved that mindfulness healing courses, through the mindful practice of concentration and awareness, can effectively reduce stress, treat emotional disorders, improve concentration, reduce cellphone addiction, and further enhance learning effectiveness.

Mindfulness healing courses include Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). Numerous scientific evidence and clinical research showed that an eight-week mindfulness-based healing course, especially the MBCT is effective in treating depression (Assumpcao et al., 2019; Cladder-Micus et al., 2018; Tajik et al., 2020). In addition, research also shows that mindful-

ness-based healing courses are effective for managing emotions, reducing stress, improving concentration and improve cellphone addiction (Assumpcao et al., 2019; Cheng et al., 2020; Strauss et al., 2021; Yüksel & Bahadır-Yılmaz, 2020).

The MBCT program was originally developed by Professor Mark Williams at Oxford, John Teasdale at Cambridge and Zindel Segal of the University of Toronto in 1993. They combined the training of Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT), and the concept of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn at the UMass Medical Center in America in 1979. The MBCT program was designed to help people who had serious depression, and clinical trials showed that it worked. In fact, it is now one of the preferred treatments recommended by the UK's National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (Segal et al., 2013).

According to Kabat-Zinn's definition, mindfulness is the awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, to the present moment nonjudgmentally (Kabat-Zinn, 2011). Based on this definition, an MBCT program is usually comprised of many practices on mindful concentration and awareness, which include both formal practices, such as sitting meditation and mindful walking,