

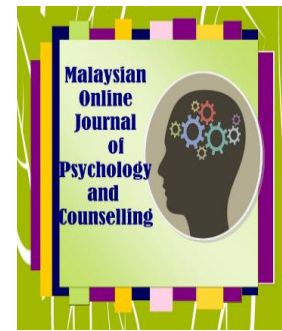
EXPLORING MINDFULNESS EXERCISE EXPERIENCES DURING INTERNSHIP AMONG TRAINEE COUNSELORS

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ABSTRACT

The integration aimed to enhance the trainees' competency and confidence to employ mindfulness practices in client interactions. This investigation delves into the firsthand encounters of trainee counselors who incorporated mindfulness exercises during their internships. Six trainee counselors from UNIMAS engaged in internship attended a mindfulness briefing program and embarked on a month-long journey of practicing mindfulness exercises such as journal reflection, mindfulness breathing, mindful eating, and mindfulness communication as assigned homework. Through individual semi-structured interviews, the trainee counselors' experiences with mindfulness during their internship were explored. Thematic analysis of the recorded data revealed three overarching themes: "Process," "Experience," and "Outcome" which encompass subthemes including the initial process, time constraints, environmental considerations, anxiety, evolving experiences, heightened awareness, habituation, enhanced counseling competency, and the role of mindfulness as a client-oriented tool. The resulting themes provide a comprehensive view of this experience, paving the way for a better understanding of the role of mindfulness in counselor development and client support. Further research and ongoing exploration of mindfulness in counseling contexts could provide valuable insights for refining training programs and optimizing the use of mindfulness as a tool for counselor development.

Keywords: *Trainee counsellor, self-efficacy, mindfulness, anxiety*



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INTRODUCTION

The personal and professional requirements of being a counsellor are challenging and unique. Various research was conducted to study the factor of inhibitors and contributors to the process of trainee's counsellor development. Corey (2016) suggested that trainee counselors experience a variety of emotions ranging from anticipation and excitement to anxiety and confusion, whereby the increased level of anxiety will influence the trainee in performing counseling competency as they have the perception that they are capable in handling potential challenging events. Hence, this investigation is driven by previous research that suggests counselling self-efficacy was identified as main influence in the success of trainee counsellor, while trainee counsellor's anxiety was proven as one of the factors that disrupt development and impairment resulting in poor client outcome (Koth, 2019). Additionally, mindfulness was also identified as a state of being that would facilitate trainee counsellor's development, improving performance, as well as produce positive client outcomes (Voon et al., 2021; Koth, 2019). However, in Malaysia, most studies conducted on such topic mainly focused on the implication of the trainee's counsellor self-efficacy, rather than the factor and intervention in shaping the counselling self-efficacy (Ooi, Jaafar, & Crosling, 2021). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the experience of trainee counsellors in utilizing mindfulness in their internship.

Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to explore the experiences of trainee counsellors in utilizing mindfulness exercises in their internship.

Research Questions

1. How do trainee counsellors perceive and describe their experiences when integrating mindfulness exercises into their internship?
2. What are the specific mindfulness exercises utilized by trainee counsellors during their internship, and how do these exercises influence their overall experiences?
3. What challenges or obstacles do trainee counsellors encounter when attempting to incorporate mindfulness exercises into their internship, and how do they navigate these challenges?
4. In what ways do trainee counsellors believe that the integration of mindfulness exercises enhances their competency and confidence during their internship?
5. How do trainee counsellors perceive the impact of mindfulness exercises on their interactions with clients and the quality of support they provide during their internship?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Trainee Counsellor's Self-Efficacy and Anxiety

Study conducted by Koth (2019) indicated that there is a modest relationship between anxiety of trainee counsellor and self-efficacy. The study shows that trainee counselors with higher levels of anxiety also correspond to lower level of counselor self-efficacy. The results are inclined with past studies from Bandura (1977) and Larson et al. (1992) which suggested that anxiety are cognitive experiences that emphasizing on self-defeating thoughts that stems from negative perception of performance. The beliefs of trainee counsellors with not being equipped with the skills to counsel client are known as negative internal dialogues which would increase the experience of anxiety, due to the fear of being perceived negatively from the client, that would result in poor therapy outcomes (Bischoff, 1997; Bischoff & Barton, 2002). It was also discussed that trainee counsellors that experience anxiety may also be caused by the state regulations, which concerns towards the expected

requirements of counselling training program, such as concerns towards rapport building, the need of control, fear of negative evaluation, and perfectionism (Koth, 2019).

Trainee Counsellor's Anxiety and Mindfulness

Research by Koth (2019) shows that the anxiety level of trainee counsellors correlate negatively with mindfulness, such that higher levels of mindfulness significantly weaken the anxiety level of trainee counselor. Another study done by Campbell and Christopher (2012) by implementing mindfulness training on trainee counselor on an accredited program shows that the trainees are more capable of being less reactive, increased awareness towards body sensations, and able to form connection towards their client. These results could also be supported by studies conducted involving counseling practitioner, whereby mental health professionals in counselling found that the practice of mindful behavior could lower anxiety levels and stress, consequently improving overall well-being through the form of self-care, which focuses on helping the trainee counselor to learn to focus on the present moment with awareness (Bishop, et al., 2004). Other than that, in a qualitative study by Holt (2022), it shows that one of the trainee counselors had acknowledged that mindfulness practices aided them when facing challenging client's situation by accepting the experience with non-judgmental perspective which also encourages the trainee to be more aware of the emotions that they are feeling, which decreases the negative internal dialogue and anxiety of the trainee. In other words, the capability to be here and now allows the trainee counselor to focus on the counselling session, and not on the anxiety as well as physiological response that was faced.

Mindfulness and Trainee Counsellor's Counseling Self-Efficacy

Counsellor's self-efficacy was shown to correlate positively to mindfulness according to the study by Koth (2019). The result showed that trainee counsellors that scored higher on the measure of mindfulness also scored a high measure of counsellor's self-efficacy. Similar to the qualitative research by Holt (2022), majority of the participants stated that their sense of self-awareness had been increased by incorporating mindfulness practice during counselling training, which also facilitated in the understanding of self as well as the identification of inner experiences. Particularly, one of the trainees stated that mindful self-awareness had supported them into becoming a better counsellor, as this aspect had increased their overall well-being, which indicates that the self-efficacy of the trainee counselor had also increases. As suggested by previous studies, for trainee counsellors to increase their confidence in counselling competency, it is mandatory for them to engage in both professional and personal development of self-knowledge, awareness of and openness to others and personal growth, and self-acceptance, as the primary component of self-efficacy is confidence (Johns, 2012; Larson et al., 1992).

Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy and Mindfulness

The cognitive behavioral approach of psychotherapy known as Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) was established by American psychologist Albert Ellis (Ellis, 1957). REBT focuses on replacement of irrational beliefs with rational beliefs through disputation which is the primary mechanism for positive emotional change that explained how emotional disturbance is the result of dysfunctional thinking in reaction to adversity. It also aims to help an individual in reframing negative emotion and thinking by replacing it with positive affirmations (Sharma, 2022). Albert Ellis has noted similarities between the principles of mindfulness and REBT, even suggesting that REBT and mindfulness may have the potential to improve psychological performance in high-performance settings (Young et al., 2022). The notion of REBT value the rationalization of beliefs over irrational beliefs while mindfulness focuses on the development of mindset that is non-judgmental with the presence of awareness in the current moment (Young et al., 2022). As suggested by Ellis (1957),

REBT and mindfulness could be used closely to improve psychological performance and well-being in high-performance settings as both share similar philosophical positions on the causes of disturbance, themes of acceptance, and a similar emphasis on cultivating awareness to respond to events in a rational, adaptive manner.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In this research, a case study qualitative approach was used as this study focused on a specific subject which are trainee counsellor (McCombes, 2019) and aim to understand their perspective of mindfulness towards their development as a trainee counsellor. As the research is exploratory in nature, a semi-structured interview is designed as the researcher would use the participants' answer as a guidance in generating research questions according to the study topic (Tegan, 2022). This study would also incorporate mindfulness exercises as a part of the trainee counsellor's practicum training course to (1) cultivate the trainee counselor's competency and confidence which was supported by research literature and (2) to teach the trainee counselor on mindfulness practices which could be utilized during their work with clients. The source of data would also include interview, voice recording and field notes to enhance and clarify the obtained result (Creswell, et al., 2018).

Formulating Intervention

The designated intervention was adapted from the previous study titled "Mindfulness Practices in Supervision: Training Counselors' Experiences" (Banker & Goldenson, 2021). Due to limited time given and unfunded dissertation, the experiential mindfulness activity presented by Caldwell (2011) from "Mindfulness Matters: Practices for Counselors and Counselor Education" and adaptation will be made to suit the cultural elements and academical understanding of the participants in this research.

Prior to the intervention, the researcher would brief the participants in a classroom setting as an introductory to the research conducted. The session would begin with a 10-minute disclosure from voluntary participants regarding the previous experiences of practicing mindfulness as well as their current counseling performance with the experienced anxiety. Then, the participants will be exposed with the benefits and philosophical aspects of meditational practice through the discussion and reading of empirical studies in the field, meditation common challenges and general information about human psychology which would last approximately 60 minutes (Altinyelken, 2018). Furthermore, in the last 20 minute of the lesson, mindfulness of breathing, mindfulness of eating and mindfulness of communication will be guided by the researcher and practiced by the participants to teach the techniques to the participants through engaging exercises before starting their counselling session (Caldwell, 2011). Following that, a reflection of the voluntary participants regarding the felt experiences and general impression (Altinyelken, 2018).

Participants will be asked to engage in the brief mindfulness activity (3-6 minutes) that rotated between mindfulness of breathing, mindfulness of eating and mindfulness of communication prior to the starting of each of their counselling session (Banker & Goldenson, 2021; Caldwell, 2011). The participants are also required to do a weekly journal reflection towards their personal experiences of their competency of the session as well as their success and difficulty in practicing mindfulness and to upload in Google Drive every week as a part of their curriculum assignment.

After conducting a total of 5 counselling sessions, the selected participants will be invited to provide feedback to the course instructor regarding their overall experience with the mindfulness practice in the course.

Sampling and Recruitment

Purposive sampling was used as this study relies on the researcher's judgement in selecting and identifying respondent's characteristics that are best to achieve the proposed research question (Nikolopoulou, 2022). The purposive sampling was done by contacting the internship supervisor in recruiting participants that is a trainee counselor in UNIMAS. The participants are given informed consent of this study through Google Forms that consisted of the objective and purposes, terms and conditions that includes confidentiality and the right for the volunteers to withdraw, as well as the researcher's contact for inquiries.

RESULTS

Based on the data extracted from the semi-structured interview, trainee counsellors described a unique variety of experiences arising from their mindfulness exercise. These experiences were formulated into three core themes – process, experience, and outcome, along with its own component parts that comprise the study's findings. Pseudonyms were used in the analyzation of themes and their experiences to retain anonymity.

Core Theme 1: Process

The first core theme is depicted from the trainee counsellors' experience during the initial process of practicing a month of mindfulness exercise. This core compromises three subcomponents: initial experience, time restrictions, and environmental conditions.

Initial Experience

All the trainee counsellors shared that their initial experience of mindfulness is difficult to practice. Some of them agreed that it is hard for them to focus on mindfulness exercise. P1 said that: *"I can say to get engaged in mental breathing is actually quite difficult at the beginning because you need to focus, like totally focus on your breath only."* P2 said that: *"For the first minute, I keep counting how many seconds I have to breathe in, hold breathe and breathe out. It disrupts me to focus on my breathing."*

Most trainees reported that the difficulty to focus is due to the negative thoughts that present during mindfulness exercise. P3 shared that: *"I can't focus that long while trying to be aware of myself and my thoughts."* P4 shared that: *"I don't feel comfortable since we need to inhale, exhale, and relax. Some thoughts like negative thoughts emerge and made me question whether it is normal or not."*

Two trainees shared that the first mindfulness experience feels odd as it is different from their usual habit. P5 shared that: *"When I do mindful eating it's like this is kind of a weird experience, it's like what am I waiting for, it's like I'm not that in patience because I usually just eat."* P6 shared that: *"Difficult... when I first started to apply mindfulness exercise. The way for mindful breathing is different from how I usually breathe, usually we inhale we shrink our chest right? But when I practice and think about it, eh... yeah, the correct breathing when inhale the stomach should be expanding."*

Environmental Considerations

Most trainee counsellor shared that minimal distraction with cooling environmental condition at the organization during their internship helped them in practicing mindfulness. P6 shared that: *"The*

office provided at my internship is quiet and cooling with air conditioning that helped me to focus during my mindful breathing.” P2 shared that: “Elements that helped me to practice mindfulness is the quiet, relaxing, and comfortable environment.” P1 shared that: “I am provided an empty room to do my counselling sessions. Therefore, it is quiet and serene enough for me to focus on my breath.” P3 shared that: “I noticed that I must be in a cool environment where I do not sweat, there must not be a lot of people so that I am not distracted, my phone is kept away, and the food must be to my liking, these conditions help me to focus.”

Core Themes 2: Experience

The second subthemes are derived from the journal and semi-structured interview that depicted the trainee counsellors’ subjective experience of before, during, and following counselling performance of assigned tasks. This theme comprised of 2 subthemes which are anxiety and changes in experience.

Anxiety

When practicing mindfulness exercises, all trainee counsellor shared that their worries towards their own counselling competency from the past session emerged while trying to concentrate. P1 shared that: “I was overthinking about the things that I should and should not say which at some point.” P2 shared that: “I am always worried about what question to be asked that led me into feeling anxious and nervous.” P3 reported that: “There’s time I will feel confident and competent, however there’s time I will doubt if I’m a competent counsellor.” P4 shared that: “I am concern if the session conducted will not reached what the client wanted so I will always think if the conducted session is good enough or not.” P5 shared that: “I feel scared and anxious if I perform badly in front of a client.” P6 reported that: “I will feel really nervous whenever I meet client, afraid with their expectation.”

Some trainee counsellors reported that when practicing mindfulness, the concern of not completing counselling internship requirement also emerged. P2 shared that: “Thinking about credit hours automatically makes me feel nervous, whereby I am worried that I cannot finish um.. (pause) internship with a lot of session reports. P3 reported that: “Thinking that..... whether if I can finish my internship that requires 192 hours. Small number is a very big number, even though there’s a lot of client, but...(pause) yeah.. my capability as a counselor.” P6 shared that: “I am afraid that I cannot finish my internship. Hmm.. I always cry... because I don’t know how.”

Evolving Experience

Before practicing the mindfulness exercise, most trainee counsellors has the pre-judgement that mindfulness exercises would not help them as a trainee counsellor. P2 shared that: “Before this, I find that mindfulness does not help someone during counselling session.” P3 reported that: “Before this I had never thought of doing mindfulness, because there are more other things that I can do, why must it be mindfulness.” P4 shared that: “Before this I had never thought of using mindfulness on myself because I don’t think mindfulness helps me to be mindful. And then I always thought to myself ah.. it’s just breathing, everyone can breathe.” P6 reported that: “Seriously I never thought of doing mindfulness, ah.. before this I never thought that I will do it. Before this I do arrangement such as filing, play phone while waiting for client.”

After practicing the mindfulness exercise, most trainee counsellor changed their perspective towards mindfulness and agreed that it is beneficial for them. P2 reported that: “However, after experiencing mindfulness breathing for myself, I find that this exercise is very helpful in making me calm.” P3 shared that: “After I tried mindful eating and breathing, I can experience the changes within me.” P4 reported

that: *"After doing the mindful breathing... ah... since we have the briefing and explanation, then I explore the mindfulness technique to see what suits me."* P6 shared that: *"But after joining the mindfulness briefing the other day, eh... kinda sounds right, why have I not thought of mindful breathing? So now I don't play my phone while waiting, just keep breathing."*

After practicing mindfulness exercise, most trainee counsellor also recommend mindfulness practice into the development of trainee counsellors. This proves that not only the change in perception but also their values as they even recommend it to another trainee counsellor. P2 shared that: *"I feel that mindfulness exercise is very interesting and important to trainee counsellor."* P3 shared that: *"For trainee counsellor, yes.. you should at least master 1 of the mindfulness technique, whether breathing, eating, because maybe breathing is not for everyone, and it is vice versa for mindful eating."* P4 reported that: *"Before I got exposed to mindfulness, usually when counselling session I would do planning and look at the cases. But after practicing mindfulness exercise, we can be more knowledgeable because before we start the session we already relax, and less fearful. And also, yes to trainee counsellor in practicing mindfulness because in terms of the benefit for the client, we're more flexible in helping the client as the session is not fake as though we're just conversing even though the issue is heavy but the session feels genuine."* P6 shared that: *"I will recommend mindfulness exercise to those who needs it especially those who are fearful of practicum and internship. Instead of being anxious, it's better to do mindful breathing, while thinking in a calmly manner than being in a mental fog."*

One trainee counsellor also recommend that mindfulness should be part of the syllabus for counselling course. P5 shared that: *"I would like to suggest to lecturer to add this as a like... additional syllabus, maybe during the first year of counselling studies. Because back when I was a first-year counselling student, I would worry, I'd be confused, I was like I don't know what to do. So, if they were being trained about mindfulness since the start, then they able to complete their hours properly, they able to learn about their true potential."*

Core Theme 3: Outcome

The second subtheme are derived from the journal and semi-structured interview that depicted the trainee counsellors' subjective experience of the outcome of their mindfulness practice and teaching. The data analysis collected 4 areas of benefits: Heightened Awareness, Habituation, Increasing Counselling Competency, and Mindfulness as a tool to help client.

Heightened Awareness

Some of the trainee counsellor reported that doing mindfulness helped them in gaining awareness by being present at the moment. P1 shared that: *"It is helpful for us to focus on the present and how do we actually realize what we want to do in a moment, and not the other things that haven't been done yet."* P5 reported that: *"Mindful eating exercise also taught me that I need to take a step back and indulge in whatever that I am doing right now. Enjoying the current moment helps me to get back into reality. We would always encounter life challenges and it never hurts to take a step back from our routine."*

Some trainee counsellors had also gained awareness towards their own judgement, which mindfulness helped them to accept the problem that they are facing. P3 shared that: *"I realized I worry more than I think, there were times when doing mindfulness made me more anxious because I have realized the amount of pressure, I'm in, maybe because I'm used to distracting myself from my problems and just tackle the issue when it arises."* P4 reported that: *"Learn to accept despite the pre-judgement*

that I had when practicing mindfulness breathing. So, when I feel that I accepted myself then the mindfulness activity helps. This lesson has taught me to change my perspective towards myself."

One trainee counsellor had also gained awareness towards their own habit and started changing them into a more conducive lifestyle as a trainee counsellor. P6 shared that: *"I had started to work into schedule and arrange my files according to the client's turn every morning. Before this I'm quick to feel anxious, tired, and lack self-control to remain focus while giving session due to the inefficiency with the files being in a mess and always think about client's issue."*

Some trainee counsellors also reported that practicing mindfulness helps them to be aware of their bodily sensations. P5 shared that: *"So I do notice that mindfulness breathing helped in my shaking, I do shake a bit. So after the breathing exercise I uh.. my legs stopped shaking, my hands stopped shaking, and I can feel my heartbeat becomes more relaxed."* P6 reported that: *"Doing the mindfulness breathing exercise in extended period of time helps me to feel fresh, loosen up the muscle, and controls my burnout."*

Habit

Most trainee counsellor reported that practicing mindfulness for a month had become a natural part of their life. P2 reported that: *"After finishing my journal reflection, I also practice mindful breathing 30 minutes before session based on the issue that I would handle, especially if I feel that it is heavy."* P4 shared that: *"Every morning I wake up, practice mindfulness breathing."* P5 shared that: *"This mindfulness training really helps train my body to do mindful breathing before the session. So, it becomes like automatic part of me."* P6 reported that: *"Mindful eating is already becoming a part of my habit. Now, if I forgot to bring sweets, I will search for it because I need it to feel calm to face client."*

However, one trainee counsellor shared that practicing mindfulness as a habit requires some time. P3 shared that: *"Overall, my experience with using the mindfulness activity does help to clear myself and ease my nerves but it takes time to make it a part of my daily routine."*

Increases Counselling Competency

All trainee counsellor reported that practicing mindfulness exercise before their session helped them to stay focus throughout the session. P1 shared that: *"The differences that I felt for this session and the other sessions before without mindfulness practice is that I do not feel like my mind wandered off too much and I can always pull myself back into focus."* P2 shared that: *"When doing the mindfulness breathing, it helped me to stay focus during the session by being in the present moment without worrying about past issue or things that are going to happen in the future."* P3 shared that: *"For me when practicing mindfulness eating, I would focus on the food that I am eating. So when I finished eating, I am still in that zone, still in the focus mode. So when my counselling session starts, I am still in the focus mode."* P4 reported that: *"I feel more focus and less judgmental in the session, which means when I meet client before this I sometimes would be bias between woman or men, depending on the issue."* P5 shared that: *"When doing mindful breathing, it's like I only focus on breathing, all the energy I focused not to the thoughts, not to the shaking. The negative thoughts are still there but I am able to soothe it down by channelling the energy into focusing the session instead."* P6 shared that: *"I feel very tired because my counselling session would always be performed continuously with plenty clients, but I still manage to conduct the session and focus with every client because whenever the clients did some activity, I will do mindful breathing by counting to 5 seconds to keep me focused."*

One trainee counsellor shared that practicing mindfulness exercise helped them in active listening as they are more focused when conducting the session. P1 shared that: *"Mindfulness aids in active*

listening as active listening is also one of the things that can improve communication. So, when we are in the total engaged communication. We do realize that we have eye contact. We have like active listening. We know how to paraphrase. We know how to do reflections of content and feelings. And those are the skills of counselling."

Some trainee counsellor reported that their questioning skills are better during the session after practicing mindfulness due to the ability of being mindful of their thoughts and the use of words. P4 shared that: *"After mindful breathing, I feel more relaxed, and I can ask questions that are not bias by focusing on the perspective of the client and not others. When our mind is clear, we are mindful, then the question asked can be understood by the client easily."* P6 shared that: *"Usually when conducting session, I would think of what else should I say? But after trying mindfulness exercise I can automatically know what I needed to say, and I became less disoriented. This is because I can control my mind from thinking about things that are not related, which helped me to focus fully on the client."*

One trainee counsellor shared that after practicing mindfulness exercises, it increases their energy and interactions with the clients. P3 shared that: *"For counselling sessions I became more energized, and I become more interactive with my clients especially for group counselling, I can catch on better about what they are communicating, if the meal is too heavy I can become sluggish at times, but there is some sort of benefit of doing these exercises before a session."*

Mindfulness as a tool to help clients

One respondent shared that he believes trainee counsellors should practice mindfulness first before introducing the technique to the client. P3 shared that: *"I would advise yes to trainee counsellor to practice mindfulness, because you will use the skill for client as well. You cannot teach something that you did not practice."*

Most trainee counsellor shared that after practicing mindfulness exercise themselves, they are more confident in introducing mindfulness skills to their client. P2 shared that: *"I applied mindfulness exercise a lot in my counselling session, by giving tips to my clients that are stressed out, because usually stress is caused by overthinking. So what I would suggest to my client in counselling session is to practice mindfulness breathing as I find that this technique works really well."* P4 shared that: *"I would use mindfulness exercise to focus on the client and teach them about mindfulness, because mindfulness is one of the way that everyone can practice, doesn't matter if the person has mental illness, normal people, or those that has issue, but everyone can benefited from being mindful to distract their issue in a good way, and not to eliminate it fully."* P5 shared that: *"In the session also I do incorporate it and guide the client, especially those clients that feel ashamed and embarrassed to cry longer. So I do uh... guide them how to relax using the mindfulness breathing."* P6 shared that: *"When communicating with client, I will teach them how to inhale when they are anxious, I taught them this technique because I know that it works for me so I shared it with them."*

DISCUSSION

The core theme – process emphasised on initial experience of trainee counsellor when practicing mindfulness exercise. The trainee counsellors participated in this study are inexperienced in mindfulness practice, which explain their challenges during the initial mindfulness experience. This finding is consistent to the study conducted by Tarrasch (2014) which the student's initial mindfulness practice are brought up with distressing feelings and sensation, as well as unfamiliar awareness of their emotional states and physical sensation. Thus explains the need of the trainee

counsellor in this study to seek for suitable conditions and preference when practicing mindfulness to help them in the process of being mindful. Meanwhile from the perspective of REBT, as the aim of mindfulness is to cultivate state of awareness and acceptance (Young et al., 2022), the unfamiliar awareness or distressing sensation from mindfulness practice explain that the trainee counsellor are not accepting towards their own judgement and the odd feelings is due to the lack of awareness when performing daily activity without being mindful such as eating and breathing, as mindfulness eating and breathing requires the trainee counsellor to be aware of each sensation by focusing on only the present moment.

The trainee counsellors' experience when practicing mindfulness in this study shows that anxiety is part of the thought process that influenced their counselling competence. As the trainee counsellor was undergoing their internship in a different setting as compared to their previous practice in university, this led to the trainee counsellor to be concerned of possibility in facing client with issue that they never handled before. This finding proves the lack of mastery in SCMCT theory, which Larson et al. (1992) theorized that the learning process of trainee counselor usually focuses on the challenges posed during their internship and lack of mastery will contribute to lower levels of counselling self-efficacy as they have the perception of not capable of handling potential challenging events. The negative belief system that they might not be capable in handling a counselling session has led them into experiencing anxiety that led to fear and nervousness when conducting counselling session consequently affecting their counselling self-efficacy.

The capacity of self-compassion is considered as one of the trainee counsellor personal agency factors that is reciprocal to the trainee counsellor learning process (Larson et al., 1992). Therefore, mindfulness practice in this study helps to expose the trainee counsellor into causes of disturbance towards their experience during internship, which would encourage the self-acceptance process and instill self-compassion that leads to the changes of experiences of trainee counsellor by looking at their irrational belief without judgement. Hence, the trainee counsellor in this study strongly recommended mindfulness practice as part of their development to soothe their anxiety and pressure that stems from the demanded requirement from the accreditation as well as lack of experience. Mindfulness practice has greatly helped the trainee counsellor in regulating their anxiety that led to the changes of perspective and initial experience. These findings are also consistent with the study conducted by Tarrasch (2014) whereby during the early week of the mindfulness course the students are filled with anxiety but gradually the changes and improvement in behaviors and attitude towards several life domains was recorded over time.

The outcome of trainee counsellor from practicing mindfulness exercise emphasised on the experience in gaining awareness, increases counselling competency, and mindfulness as a tool to help client. Implementing mindfulness on trainee counsellor on accredited program in present study helped the trainee counsellor to be more capable in managing their anxiety and stress level, as they are more capable in being less reactive towards the anxiety that they are experiencing (Campbell & Christopher, 2012). Which looking from REBT perspective, mindfulness practice helped the trainee counsellor to cultivate awareness in responding to events with a rational and adaptive manner (Young et al., 2022). This is because the trainee counsellor acquired a mindful approach towards their life and experiencing feelings, sensations, and thoughts less judgementally and more consciously that lead to the changed in behaviour and attitude as well as acceptance towards their emotional self that are consistent to the finding from Tarrasch (2014). Consequently, practicing mindfulness exercises also helped the trainee counsellor to use mindfulness as a daily habit and a form of self-care (Bishop et al., 2014). Through the mindfulness practice, the trainee counsellor in this study also learn to focus

on the present moment with awareness (Bishop et al., 2004) rather than focusing on their concern towards their client, which helped them form better connection with their client (Campbell & Christopher, 2012). As a result, this helped the trainee counsellor to increase their counselling competency by letting go of unhealthy attachment and desires (Young et al., 2022) as they focus on the therapeutic client-counsellor relationship (Holt, 2022) that also increases their counselling performance and validated their mastery of experience according to SCMCT. This helped the trainee counsellor forming higher levels of self-efficacy (Koth, 2019) as their personal agency from having a greater self-compassion also reduced their anxiousness that led the trainee counsellor in becoming more open to challenges and gaining better persistence and motivation in learning (Larson et al. 1992). As the counselling self-efficacy increases, their ability in applying questioning and active listening skills will be reflected during the counselling session (Larson & Daniels, 1998). Additionally, practicing mindfulness exercises helped the trainee counsellors to share their experiences with the clients which also facilitated the trainee into using mindfulness as a resource or technique to enhance their therapeutic work with client (Holt, 2022).

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While this study provides valuable insights into the integration of mindfulness practices in counselor training, it is important to acknowledge the limitations. The sample size, consisting of trainee counselors from a specific institution, may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the duration of the mindfulness intervention was limited to a month, and the specific exercises may not encompass the full spectrum of mindfulness practices. Future studies should consider diverse samples and extend the duration of interventions to better capture the long-term effects of mindfulness in different counseling contexts. The current study revealed that not every type of mindfulness intervention worked universally for all participants. Hence, a more comprehensive investigation involving a broader range of mindfulness activities would contribute to a nuanced understanding of individual preferences and efficacy. This approach may enhance the applicability of mindfulness interventions in diverse counselling settings.

CONCLUSION

This study increases the research niche which indicates that mindfulness exercises are found to be beneficial to the trainee counsellor during their years of training, as majority of the respondents attributed their positive experience with mindfulness exercise towards their counselling skill development. The finding of present study suggested that it would be beneficial for counselling educator in incorporating mindfulness exercise as part of the curriculum in shaping the development of trainee counsellor throughout the years of study in helping them to cope with the learning as well as personal challenges. Consequently, adapting mindfulness as part of counselling competency and efficacy enhancement could be done as part of training program as well.

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