



Research Snapshot

Improving young children's adaptive skills and behaviour through MindUP™



What is this research about?

In this comparison study, we evaluated the impact of MindUP™ on kindergarten students' social, emotional, and adaptive behavioural skills.

To experience success in school and beyond, students must develop social and emotional skills as well as academic skills. Over the past two decades, many schools have implemented social emotional learning (SEL) and mindfulness-based programs to help students develop the social and emotional skills they need.

MindUP™ is a mindfulness-based SEL program that has proven effective in developing students' social and emotional skills, especially with students in grades 3 and up. However, few researchers have examined the impact of MindUP™ with kindergarten students. This study adds to the evidence base by studying the impact of MindUP™ on young children.

What did the researchers do?

The study took place during the 2017-2018 school year and involved a total of 584 kindergarten students across 17 schools in Southwestern Ontario. Ten schools implemented the MindUP™ program with 261 students. The remaining seven schools included 320 students in a comparison group.

Educators in the intervention group received MindUP™ training and implemented MindUP™ programming in their classrooms. Educators in the comparison group followed their usual classroom practices to meet the expectations of the regular curriculum.

Highlights

- MindUP™ is a mindfulness-based social-emotional learning program for children in pre-kindergarten to grade 8.
- Earlier studies on mindfulness-informed programs have shown positive outcomes for students, but few have evaluated outcomes with young children.
- In this study, researchers examined the impacts of MindUP™ for kindergarten students across five psychosocial and behavioural outcome measures.
- Students who received MindUP™ improved in all five areas, demonstrating increases in adaptive skills and fewer behavioural problems.
- Findings suggest that MindUP™ programming can help young children develop positive social, emotional, and cognitive skills.

Educators in both groups (intervention and comparison groups) assessed the behaviour of their students at the beginning and the end of the school year using two measures: (1) the Behavior Assessment System for Children Teacher Rating Scales (BASC-3 TRS) and (2) the Behavior Rating Inventory of Executive Function-Preschool and Child Version (BRIEF-P; BRIEF-2).

The researchers analysed the data to measure and compare student functioning in the following five areas: (1) Behavioural Symptoms (2) Internalizing Problems, (3) Externalizing Problems, (4) Adaptive Skills, and (5) Executive Functioning.

Main Findings

Overall, students who received MindUP™ programming demonstrated noticeable improvement in all five outcome areas.

Specifically, researchers found

- a reduction in behavioural problems (measured using ratings of hyperactivity, aggression, depression, attention, atypicality and withdrawal)
- a reduction in externalizing problems (measured using ratings of hyperactivity, aggression, and conduct problems)
- a reduction in internalizing problems (measured using ratings of anxiety, depression and somatization)
- an increase in adaptive skills (including measures of adaptability, functional communication, social skills, and study skills), and
- a reduction in executive functioning deficits (including measures of ability to initiate, plan/organize, monitor, shift attention, and control emotions).

While both intervention and comparison groups improved in adaptive skills and executive functioning, the intervention group improved much more rapidly. Across the five outcomes, MindUP™ had the biggest impact on reducing executive functioning deficits. This finding is consistent with earlier research that found similar impacts among older students who received MindUP™ programming.

There were no differences in outcomes between boys and girls in the study, which indicates that boys and girls may benefit equally from MindUP™ programming.

How can you use this research?

The results from this study suggest that mindfulness-based SEL interventions, like MindUP™, can improve social, emotional, and behavioural outcomes for young children in their first years of school.

Our findings add to existing evidence showing positive outcomes for older students who receive MindUP™ programming and extend the evidence to demonstrate positive outcomes to younger students.

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Original Research Article

For a complete description of the research and findings, please see the full research article:

Crooks, C.V., Bax, K., Delaney, A., Kim, H., Shokoohi, M. Impact of MindUP Among Young Children: Improvements in Behavioral Problems, Adaptive Skills, and Executive Functioning. *Mindfulness* 11, 2433–2444 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-020-01460-0>

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Learn more about MindUP™

To learn more about the MindUP™ program, visit <https://www.csmh.uwo.ca/research/mindup.html>

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