

## *Mindfulness and self-efficacy for teaching writing in English as a foreign language*

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### Abstract

Mindfulness meditation is still a fairly new practice in educational settings and is gaining acceptance as a suitable strategy to regulate thoughts and emotions. This study explores the effects of mindfulness practice on pre-service teachers' perceived self-efficacy for teaching writing in English as a foreign language (EFL). The mindfulness practice, which took place over a period of 14 weeks was integrated into a course on the theory and practice of teaching writing with an experimental group of students ( $N = 24$ ), but not with a control group ( $N = 22$ ). Both experimental and control groups were evaluated pre- and post-course by means of a self-report questionnaire consisting of closed and open questions. *T*-tests revealed a significant improvement in participants' self-efficacy for teaching writing following the mindfulness practice. Qualitative data reflected participants' varied emotions regarding teaching writing and an overall positive reaction to the mindfulness practice. Findings further suggest that participants were aware of a connection between the mindfulness and enhanced self-efficacy in teaching writing.

*Keywords:* mindfulness; English as a foreign language; emotions; self-efficacy, writing; pre-service teachers

## 1. Introduction

Because of its complexity, teaching writing is known to cause emotional discomfort among teachers and student teachers (Cremin, 2006; Cremin & Myhill, 2013). In non-native pre-service teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL), negative emotions regarding teaching writing are exacerbated and include uneasiness, language anxiety, and feelings of inadequacy (Horowitz, 1996; Lee, 2010; Tum, 2012). Research on pre-service teachers' emotions suggests that they are affected by the way they perceive their teaching performance (Perkrum, 2006), and perceptions of poor performance has adverse effects on their self-efficacy for language teaching (Wyatt, 2018), as well as their overall well-being (Tum, 2012).

Congruent to research on teachers' emotions is inquiry regarding the promotion of positive emotions, increased self-efficacy and well-being through mindfulness meditation practices. These practices are not limited to but are commonly known to focus on training of self-regulation of attention, awareness and emotions. In their review of 19 studies of mindfulness meditation with teachers, Lomas et al. (2017) reported overall positive outcomes for mindfulness which appeared to have a beneficial impact upon most measures of mental health, including emotional regulation and other qualities associated with well-being.

When these effects are considered, it is clear that mindfulness meditation warrants being studied in regard to pre-service teachers. Yet only a handful of studies have been conducted, and none on student teachers of EFL who are non-native speakers of English teaching writing in an EFL context. The current study aims to examine the effect of mindfulness meditation practice on pre-service EFL teachers with particular focus given to self-efficacy in teaching writing.

## 2. Teaching writing in EFL

Writing in the EFL classroom has been a fairly neglected skill, thought by many to be developed by advanced learners as a result of their language knowledge. However, today there is evidence-based research showing that writing in EFL contributes to language learning at all levels (Manchón, 2009; Williams, 2012). Studies by Swain and others (Swain, 1998, 2000, 2006; Swain & Lapkin, 1995; Toth, 2006) show that writing has positive effects on language acquisition partly because written production is a slow activity, giving learners time to think about the language they are producing, and because it leaves a record, which the learners can read, think about and revise. Together, these actions enable learners to access, and re-process their implicit language knowledge and make it available for use.

Another reason for the interest in teaching writing to EFL learners is due to English being the global lingua franca. The necessity of using English to engage in

intercultural communication and negotiation worldwide is growing (Canagarah, 2013), as is the popularity of internationalization in higher education and of student mobility. Today, more non-native than native speakers of English are using written English to communicate in business, economics, the sciences and academia. The success of this communication greatly depends on writing appropriately and effectively. This orientation is also discernible in descriptors of language proficiency developed for the Council of Europe European Language Portfolio. For example, "Can write clear, well-structured texts on complex subjects, underlining the relevant salient issues, expanding and supporting points of view at some length with subsidiary points, reasons and relevant examples, and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion" (overall written production, C1, CEFR, 2018). It is therefore increasingly evident that teaching writing can no longer be marginalized in the EFL classroom as it was in the past.

### 3. Teaching writing in EFL and self-efficacy

The literature on language teachers' self-efficacy (LTSE) describes teachers with a strong sense of self efficacy, believing they have the ability to "support learning in various task-, domain- and context-specific cognitive, metacognitive, affective and social ways" (Wyatt, 2018, p. 93). Such teachers are motivated, enthusiastic and report high levels of job satisfaction (Reeve, 2014), a solid professional identity, effective teaching, and self-actualization (Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson, 2009). Conversely, Wyatt's (2018) meta-analysis of 115 studies on LTSE posited that it is threatened by several personal and external factors including linguistic competence in the language of instruction, linguistic competence in the local vernacular, dyslexic students in classrooms, large classes, frequent curriculum change, imposed teaching methods, as well as low-confidence in pedagogical skills. These threats negatively affect language teachers' beliefs in their ability to teach effectively resulting in increased negative emotions, fear and trepidation related to language teaching.

Research on LTSE in the skill of writing reveals that native speakers and non-native speaker EFL teachers equally suffer from impaired self-efficacy. Reasons include bad prior school experiences (Martin & Dismuke, 2015) negative experiences with writing and lack of good, effective models from teachers' own schooling (Norman & Spencer, 2005). In addition, research on teaching writing often shows that teachers themselves have to engage in writing and be good writers, "a prerequisite for teachers of writing is 'insider' knowledge of the writing process" (Gardner, 2014, p.129). Yet, lack of confidence in their own writing skills, and an "irrational, nagging fear of being found out" (Locke, 2015, p.149) was a recurrent theme in Locke's mixed methods research study. Similarly, other

studies have shown that teachers who lacked confidence as writers avoided modeling writing and were unable to demonstrate the process of writing to pupils (Cremin & Myhill, 2013; Office for Standards in Education, 2009).

Non-native EFL teachers' low self-efficacy in teaching writing was found to be related to physiological and emotional states (Cheng, Horwitz, & Schallert, 1999; Lee, 2010; Shim, 2008). Indeed, studies in EFL teacher education contexts concurred that "future writing instructors in L2 teacher preparation programs tend to view the endeavor with alarm" (Ferris, 2007, p. 165). Additionally, studies of in-service non-native speakers of English EFL teachers' perceptions of teaching writing report feelings of low self-confidence (Shim, 2008), feelings of inadequacy about how to teach writing (Troia, Lin, Cohen, & Monroe, 2011) and the sense of being "powerless" (Lee, 2010). Reported reasons for these feelings often stem from lack of preparation for teaching writing, inexperience in teaching writing and past negative experiences regarding their own writing.

#### 4. Mindfulness

Over the last decade, mindfulness has received much attention in the research literature on emotional well-being. Mindfulness is defined as paying attention to and being aware of internal and external experiences as they occur (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Levels of mindfulness can be increased through meditation or mindfulness-based training (e.g., Falkenstrom, 2010; Kabbat-Zinn, 1990). Originating from Buddhist traditions, mindfulness practice suggests that by bringing awareness to the present moment, and developing inner awareness, emotional suffering can be alleviated. Mindfulness has been shown to have positive effects on mental health and psychological well-being (Baer, Carmody, & Hunsinger, 2012; Brown & Ryan, 2003).

Attending to the present moment, however, is an enormous challenge for many people, especially in today's digital society where one's faculty of attention is constantly being divided and pulled in several directions by numerous stimuli at any given moment. For teachers, paying attention to the present moment can be a particularly difficult task because teaching fundamentally includes attentional challenges. During any lesson, teachers are expected to be experts in their discipline, focus on lesson content, attend to 30-40 pupils, assess their level of engagement as well as their behavior, and understand the dynamics of the classroom. These multiple, attention drawing stimuli are stressful and divide the social, emotional, and cognitive demands of teaching. As a result, teachers, especially novice or pre-service teachers, become upset and frustrated. Thus, in many instructional situations, teachers suffer from anxiety, stress, self-doubt, and negative emotions, which often leads to burn-out and early attrition.

In view of the above, mindfulness training for teachers has gained ground in a number of countries, such as the United States and the UK, where government-funded programs function to counteract teacher burnout, develop teachers' resilience, and provide teachers with tools to cope with their negative emotions. The goals of these training programs include working on teachers' emotional responses with the aim of avoiding being "locked into pre-programmed ways of thinking and behavior because of our emotions" (Siegel, 2015. p. xii). Despite the growing popularity of mindfulness practices among teachers, only few studies have been published on mindfulness interventions for pre-service and novice teachers, and we found none on pre-service EFL teachers. Those we found on pre-service teachers are case studies involving few participants and short-term interventions. These studies report findings of lower stress and a "sense of calmness" (Hartigan, 2017, p. 6), mindfulness as a significant predictor of well-being (Ming-tak Hue & Ngar-sze Lau, 2015), and significant increase in emotional regulation (Kerr et al., 2017).

## 5. Mindfulness and writing

Though not obvious at first, mindfulness meditation practice and writing in EFL share several qualities, notes Garretson (2010). When practiced seriously, mindfulness and writing both bring about greater self-awareness and greater self-regulation. Mindfulness practice develops reflective abilities about one's thoughts and feelings, while writing practice develops reflective abilities about one's ideas and language. Both meditation and writing are usually done in silence. Meditation is done in silence so one can be aware of thoughts and feelings as they arise, and writers often write in silence to connect to thoughts and language processes. Even in collaborative writing, there are moments of silence as participants connect to their thoughts. Moreover, Garretson (2010) suggests that various writer-centered writing tasks parallel various mindfulness exercises. For example, mindfulness meditation practice involves following the breath and accepting whatever arises. Similarly, free writing involves following ideas and language and accepting whatever transpires. Furthermore, in mindfulness meditation one notes thoughts as they arise and lets them go, deciding post-meditation whether to return to them for greater investigation, whereas in pre-writing activities such as brainstorming, learners note thoughts and decide post brainstorming whether ideas are worth expanding. The parallels between mindfulness meditation and writing closely connect cognition and emotion which function simultaneously whenever teachers are teaching (Barcelos & Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2018). With the similarities of mindfulness practice and writing in mind, and the potential that mindfulness practice has proven for the well-being of

teachers (Jennings, 2015), we designed a small scale experimental study for pre-service EFL teachers focusing on their self-efficacy for teaching writing.

## 6. The context

This study took place within the context of the English department in one of the largest teacher education colleges in Israel, during the 2016-2017 academic year. The college offers an undergraduate degree and a teaching certificate in a variety of disciplines as well as teaching certificates to post-graduate students. The curriculum in the English department in both the undergraduate and post-graduate programs includes a semester course on theory and practice in teaching EFL writing for all age levels. It is a practical course focusing on instructional methods of writing in the EFL classroom. Its goal is to foster connections between developing pupils' language and writing skills, managing classroom learning contexts and reaching the desirable achievements. Thus, writing skills and pedagogical practices are intertwined. In the course, the students write extensively, and every lesson involves some writing practice so that they are reminded of the complexities of writing and through practice become more confident in their own writing abilities. In addition to writing, they practice different instructional approaches and teaching practices such as instructor modeling, analyzing and designing writing tasks, providing feedback, as well as evaluating several digital writing and assessment tools.

During the 2016-2017 academic year, the course was taught to two heterogeneous groups (with a total of 55 students) comprising both third-year undergraduate students and post-graduate students. Both groups covered the same syllabus and were taught by the same lecturer. One group, chosen arbitrarily, engaged in mindfulness meditation practices (experiment group) in addition to studying the syllabus of the course. The other group (control group) did not engage in mindfulness practice intervention and followed the course syllabus only.

Mindfulness meditation practice with the experiment group took place at the beginning of each lesson for 14 weeks. Part of the practice included free-writing, whereby students accessed thoughts and feelings that arose during the meditation practice. In this way they reflected on their inner experiences and linked them to language and writing. In the first lesson, the lecturer who had been practicing mindfulness meditation for several years, introduced the students to the rationale of the mindfulness practice and highlighted the similarities between meditation and writing. She told the students to settle back in their chairs, sit upright with their feet on the ground with a sense of relaxation and ease in their bodies, and close their eyes if they wished. She then asked them to bring awareness to the tactile sensations throughout their bodies, from the soles of their feet to the crowns of their heads.

Once the students were settled, she told them to take three slow, gentle, deep breaths, breathing in and out through the nostrils, letting their awareness permeate their entire body and noting the sensations related to breathing. As they continued to breathe, she told them to observe the course of each in-breath and out-breath, noting whether it was long or short or deep or shallow. She also told them that when thoughts arose, they should simply note them as thoughts arising, and let them go rather than follow them. Following the practice, the students were asked to engage in free writing for several minutes. Every lesson for the next 13 weeks began in the same manner of mediation practice followed by free writing. In each meditation practice the students were asked to bring their attention to different objects that awakened their senses: the touch or weight of an object in their hand, the taste of food in their mouth, sounds beyond the classroom walls, images that they could see with their mind's eye, and kindness to themselves.

After free writing and sharing which often led to discussion about emotions, the teacher moved onto the subject of the lesson attending to both methodological and emotional aspects of teaching writing. For example, students were given a writing task, and asked to think about how they would model it for their prospective pupils. Before getting up in front of the class to demonstrate, they were asked how they felt about modeling and what were their thoughts, were they excited, did they feel aversion or anxiety?

During these 14 weeks, the control group studied the identical course content but without the mindfulness practice. At the beginning of each lesson, the students also engaged in free-writing activities using the triggers of taste, touch, sound and vision. Sometimes in modeling or sharing they spoke of their emotions, as they did when studying the rest of the course material. But the instructor did not mention mindfulness at all.

## 7. Research aim and research questions

The main purpose of the current study was to examine whether mindfulness practice has a positive effect on pre-service EFL teachers' self-efficacy in teaching writing. The study focused on the following research question: What is the effect of mindfulness practice on pre-service EFL teachers regarding their self-efficacy in teaching writing, compared to pre-service EFL teachers who did not experience mindfulness?

### 7.1. Data collection

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected using a pre- and post- self-report questionnaire based on and adapted from the *Self-Efficacy Questionnaire*

(2015) developed by the Research Collaboration Organization (<http://Research-Collaboration.org>). Following a pilot, review and changes, the questionnaire was administered to the experimental and control groups twice: first at the beginning of the course (pre-), and again at the end of the course (post-). The questionnaire contained 13 closed statements pertaining to self-efficacy for teaching writing, and two open questions. The statements were ranked on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 – strongly disagree to 5 – strongly agree ( $\alpha = 0.867$  in pre-test and 0.854 in post-test). Of the 13 statements, seven items related to cognitive aspects of self-efficacy for teaching writing, such as “I can design appropriate writing activities for my pupils” ( $\alpha = 0.67$  in pre-test; 0.79 in post-test). The remaining six items pertained to emotional aspects of self-efficacy for teaching writing, such as “I can help most pupils to have a positive feeling about their writing” ( $\alpha = 0.86$  in pre-test; 0.85 in post-test).

The qualitative component of the pre- survey was in the form of two open questions, namely: “How do you feel about teaching writing?” and “What are your expectations of this course in terms of learning to teach writing? In the post- survey, two extra questions were presented to the experiment group only, specifically relating to the mindfulness practice, namely: “Has the mindfulness practice affected you in general, and in the way you feel about teaching writing in particular?” and “Do you think you will use mindfulness practices with your pupils in class?” Numerical codes were used for matching the pre- and post- questionnaires. Out of the 55 students who participated in the two courses, 22 students in the control group and 24 in the experiment group completed both pre- and post- questionnaires (a total of 46).

## 7.2. Data analysis

Descriptive statistics and *t*-tests were conducted on the quantitative data, comparing the two groups in both pre- and post-questionnaires. A paired *t*-test was conducted to compare between the mean score of the pre- and post- tests for each group. An additional *t*-test was conducted to compare between the two groups. Furthermore, *t*-tests were conducted separately on emotional and cognitive items of self-efficacy. The responses to the open questions were independently examined by the two researchers both explicitly and holistically, while paying attention to the themes that emerged (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). Answers were coded and thematically categorized (Holliday, 2010).

To avoid ethical complications, the researchers followed the Ethical Standards of the American Educational Research Association (AERA 2011), particularly regarding confidentiality, integrity and informed consent. All participants were reassured that participation or lack of in the mindfulness practices would not interfere with their assessment or grade for the course, and all gave their consent.



### 7.3. Findings

#### 7.3.1. Quantitative results

Findings are presented according to the research question: What is the effect of a mindfulness intervention on pre-service EFL teachers regarding their self-efficacy in teaching writing? First we present the quantitative results. Table 1 below displays the results of the mean score and standard deviation comparing between the pre- and post- questionnaires for the experimental and control groups.

Table 1 Comparison of within group and between group level of self-efficacy

	Pre-questionnaire		Post-questionnaire	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Experimental group (N24)	3.3	0.53	3.5*	0.55
Control group (N22)	3.4	0.62	3.7	0.51

(2.91,  $p < 0.01$ )\*

Table 1 shows the number of participants in the experimental group (24) and in the control group (22), the mean scores and standard deviation of the pre- and post- questionnaires, within and between the two groups. We can see that both groups had a similar mean score in the pre-questionnaire showing a medium level of self-ascribed efficacy ( $M = 3.3/3.4$  out of 5). In the case of the experimental group, a paired *t*-test yielded an improvement in the post-test ( $M = 3.3$  in pre-test;  $M = 3.5$  in post-test) which was found statistically significant (2.91,  $p < 0.01$ ). In the case of the control group, a paired *t*-test yielded a higher mean score in the post-test but it was not found to be statistically significant ( $M = 3.4$  in pre-test;  $M = 3.7$  in post-test). No significant difference was found between the two groups.

In order to address specific features of self-efficacy in teaching writing, *t*-tests were conducted on statements pertaining to emotional aspects (six items) and cognitive aspects of self-efficacy (seven items) separately. The findings are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Comparing pre- and post- tests for emotional and cognitive aspects of self-efficacy for experimental and control groups.

	Emotional Pre		Emotional Post		Cognitive Pre		Cognitive Post	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Experimental (N24)	3.4	0.63	3.8*	0.57	3.2	0.52	3.4	0.63
Control (N22)	3.7	0.76	4.0**	0.57	3.2	0.62	3.4	0.52

( $t(24) = -.37, p < 0.01$ )\* ( $t(22) = -.33, p < 0.05$ )\*\*

Table 2 shows the mean scores pertaining to the six emotional and seven cognitive aspects of self-efficacy in teaching writing in the pre- and post- questionnaires for the experimental and control groups. With regards to statements on emotional aspects of self-efficacy, *t*-tests yielded an increase in the post- test that was statistically significant among both the experimental ( $M = 3.4$  in pre-test and  $M = 3.8$  in post-test) and the control group ( $M = 3.7$  in pre-test and  $M = 4.0$  in post-test). With regards to the cognitive aspects, results show a slight increase in the mean score for both groups, but it were not found to be statistically significant.

### 7.3.2. Qualitative results

In the qualitative component of the pre-questionnaire, participants were asked to write about their feelings regarding teaching writing and to share their expectations of the writing course. In the post-questionnaire participants were asked if their expectations were met. Additionally, in the post- questionnaire participants in the experimental group were asked to relate explicitly to the mindfulness practices they experienced during the course. The aim was to gain deeper and more personal information in participants' own words and to examine possible changes in their feelings towards teaching writing following the mindfulness experience. Most students in both groups answered the open questions (79% in the pre-survey and 65% in the post survey).

### 7.3.3. Participants' responses at the beginning of the course

At the beginning of the course, responses to the open questions by members of both groups were very similar, therefore we have presented them together. They expressed fear and apprehension about teaching writing:

*I have fears about teaching in general and about writing in particular*

*I am still a student and teaching writing is one of the things that I am afraid of. I hope to overcome this obstacle.*

Many students used the word 'frustration' to describe their emotions and emphasized the need for 'courage' to overcome their fear, as in the following two examples: "I'm afraid I won't be able to teach them properly and won't be able to approach each individual's difficulty and get frustrated or discouraged about it"; "(...) it requires a lot of courage. It's a new adventure for me". Also, some wrote that they lack knowledge, tools or experience to teach writing: "I don't have enough tools to teach writing"; "I don't have any method for teaching writing or any experience in it". Some students expressed a sense of confusion: "Wow (...) where do I start? Which style to teach them?"

In the following examples we can see some students drawing a connection between teaching writing and their language anxiety and low self-esteem: "Because it is not my mother language, I still make spelling mistakes, so I'm worried about making mistakes in class (...) I'm afraid I won't be able to teach them properly". Similarly: "I also fear making spelling mistakes in class, as a teacher (...) I worry that I won't be proficient enough to stand in front of them"; "I worry about not being professional enough. Not being able to evaluate their writing skills correctly".

#### 7.3.4. Participants' responses at the end of the course

In the post-questionnaire both groups were asked about their feelings regarding teaching writing and whether their expectations of the course had been met. In addition, participants in the experimental group were asked to refer specifically to the mindfulness practices. Data from both groups revealed that participants perceived that they had gained skills and knowledge of teaching methods during the course. The following examples are samples of their responses: "In this course we learnt ways of handling teaching writing and how to provide interesting strategies for teaching writing"; "I leave with good ideas and methods to use on my future students"; "I learned writing activities so kids will enjoy and learn (...) I understand how to do it and how to make my students appreciate writing".

#### 7.3.5. Responses to questions about mindfulness

Regarding participants' thoughts about the mindfulness practice they experienced in the course, and the ways in which it may have contributed to helping them face the challenge of teaching writing, three themes emerged from the data: (1) Initial skepticism and suspicion, (2) favorable perception, and (3) eagerness and excitement about implementing mindfulness in their prospective teaching. Prior to presenting a sample of participants' answers, it should be pointed out that overall responses about the mindfulness practice were positive, illustrating that the students recognized a connection between mindfulness practice and their emotions regarding writing. The following response is one that is typical of many: "It has helped me deal with my stress levels and tackle each task at a time without freaking out and in general has made me calmer".

The following excerpts are students' responses illustrating each of the themes that emerged. Initial skepticism and suspicion towards mindfulness: Some students did not hide their doubts about the "new thing" they encountered in this course, as can be seen in the following two examples: "This was the first time doing mindfulness, so I felt a little awkward since I myself had not yet realized the full purpose of mindfulness"; "It felt a bit weird for me at first since

this was the first time I had done such an activity". Other participants felt embarrassed by the activities, for example: "I have to admit that I was a little embarrassed, since doing this meditation is hard for me". Similarly, opening up to mindfulness was a slow process for some, as in this example: "I was having a hard time warming up to the idea of mindfulness. I felt cynical about it and could not see how it could come in handy in class. But having realized that it has to do with relieving the pressure off the writing process, it grew on me". One participant expressed reservations and wrote: "We have to keep in mind that Mindfulness might not suit everybody all the time". These comments revealing student discomfort, at least initially, highlight the importance of making explicit the connection of mindfulness practice to the course content so that students come to accept it not as an 'add on' but as an integral aspect of the course.

Favorable reactions to the mindfulness practice were expressed by a number of students, for example: "I didn't know much about it, but I can see so many benefits in mindfulness while teaching". Others wrote about particular feelings they had while practicing mindfulness, "Having those moments of stillness which we experienced in class and which I also tried implementing in other situations in life (it can be as simple as taking a few breaths to still and quiet the mind) has been very precious".

The responses below illustrate eagerness and excitement about implementing mindfulness in prospective teaching: "I believe that adding those activities, if done regularly, can totally change the dynamics in class, can help both teachers and students deal with their stress levels more efficiently and calmly". "As a future teacher I will definitely use the mindfulness strategies in my classes". Several participants explicitly made the connection between mindfulness, positive emotions towards writing and teaching writing, as in the following example, "In my opinion, those activities are a great way to help the pupils feel less stressed when they encounter writing tasks". Another participant made a connection between mindfulness practices, a clearer mind, engagement and motivation for writing, "I believe that Mindfulness might be very helpful in getting people engaged in writing, or even many other purposes. When the mind is clear, it is easier to focus on the specific missions ahead of us".

## 8. Discussion and conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of mindfulness practice on pre-service EFL teachers regarding their self-efficacy in teaching writing. Thus, the study was designed to compare two groups of students taking the same course, differing in the mindfulness practice experienced only by the experiment group. Without a doubt, mindfulness practice did seem to have a positive

effect on these students' perceptions of self-efficacy for teaching writing. Their responses were encouraging, suggesting that they had gone through a learning process that was meaningful both practically and emotionally. The rise in emotional self-efficacy among participants in the experiment group can be further explained by the explicit connections made between the reflective nature of mindfulness and writing. In each session, the students sat quietly, following their breath, noticing their thoughts and writing reflectively so that mindful relaxation and writing were mutually reinforced. Comfort associated with writing could then be transferred as positive emotions about teaching writing. This personal experience was primarily expressed by comments such as: "moments of stillness", "feel less stress", "deal with stress levels more efficiently and calmly", which attests to development of what Bandura terms as "higher-order self-regulatory skills" (Bandura, 2006, p. 2). This finding supports Bandura's construct of self-efficacy (1994, 2006), whereby teachers need to develop emotional regulation skills intrinsic to teacher motivation and include managing negative emotions or intrusive negative thoughts.

The rise in emotional self-efficacy and the positive comments expressed by the participants also highlight the connection made between relaxation and gaining confidence as writers. Gaining such sense of confidence is likely to further increase their efficacy to engage in writing, model writing to pupils (Cremin & Myhill, 2012) and venture on improving the writing skills of their pupils in class. Additionally, in view of the findings showing positive reactions to mindfulness, one could consider that experience with mindfulness practice may enable teachers to supplement bad prior school experiences (Martin & Dismuke, 2015) they may have had with more positive ones.

However, the reported increase in self-efficacy among the students in the control group, who did not experience mindfulness, creates a complex picture, making it difficult to assign the increase in emotional aspects of self-efficacy solely to mindfulness practice. This finding forces us to be wary in drawing definite conclusions, despite the positive attitude expressed by some of the mindfulness participants. Other factors could have been involved to affect participants' self-efficacy. These could have been the overall impact of the course content, students talking about their emotions in relation to teaching writing and discussing their feelings when they taught writing in their practicum classes. Another possible reason for the overall improvement in both groups is that the more pleasant emotions they felt, even if due to lecturer and peer support, the more the emotional aspects of self-efficacy were reinforced.

Although this study was conducted in one teacher-education institution and was small-scale, its findings add to the growing body of knowledge about emotions in language teaching. It sheds additional light on mindfulness and its

uses in education with beginning or practicing teachers (Bernay, 2014; Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, Bonus, & Davidson, 2013). Based on the outcomes of this study we could posit that if novice EFL teachers use mindfulness practices on a regular basis, they are likely to deal positively with negative emotions and gain self-efficacy in teaching writing, leading to more effective teaching in general. Yet, we must also ask ourselves, to what extent is this likely to happen? Ironically, when novice teachers go out into the field, due the pressure of time and heavy workload, they often neglect their own emotional needs and resort to basic survival skills (Smethem & Hood, 2011).

Since it is becoming common knowledge that cultivating emotional balance among teachers is strongly associated with teacher resilience, effectivity and ability to derive joy from the job (Day & Gu, 2007, 2009), pre-service and in-service professional development programs should incorporate practices such as mindfulness into their programs. Current EFL teacher education programs in Israel, as in many other countries, are governed by a centralized curriculum that combines teaching subject-matter knowledge, language proficiency, and didactic skills. To be good, effective and satisfied, teachers need more than that. Teachers need alternative preparation courses that include content and pedagogical knowledge on the one hand, and practices, such as mindfulness, which can help them to deal effectively with their emotions, on the other.

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