



Evaluation of Academic Dissertations via Mindfulness in Children Using Content Analysis Method

Çocuklarda Bilinçli Farkındalığa Yönelik Gerçekleştirilen Akademik Tezlerin İçerik Analizi Yöntemiyle Değerlendirilmesi

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ABSTRACT

Mindfulness, which means being aware of the moment and what is happening around and accepting it unconditionally, is especially valuable for children who are in the age of discovery and development. Research question: In the recent years Council of Higher Education (CoHE) Thesis Center publications, how has the mindfulness been studied in Turkish children? Searches were conducted of CoHE Thesis Center until October 2023 to identify dissertations (master of science, doctorate, specialization in medicine). Using the keywords “mindfulness” and “child”, “mindfulness” and “children” were scanned. Studies which did not have full text access and did not include assessment and intervention on mindfulness with children were excluded. Eighty-nine dissertations met the study’s inclusion criteria. Once duplicates were removed and were screened for eligibility, totally 27 studies between 2018 and September 2023 were reviewed. Types of these studies were as follows: 22 were master of science, 3 were doctorate and 2 were specialization in medicine. The most common field outcomes were psychology and education and training. Within the scope of this determination, there were two main themes: evaluation methods (n=20) and intervention methods (n=7). While there were 10 studies between 2017 and 2019, 17 studies were found in the last four years. It has been observed that postgraduate dissertations on mindfulness have increased in recent years. Although the researchers on the subject appear to be from different scientific fields and disciplines and that interest in the subject has increased, future studies are needed to create a general consensus.

Keywords: Academic dissertations, theses, mindfulness, child

ÖZ

Yaşanılan anın ve etrafıta olan bitenin farkında olma ve koşulsuz kabul etme olarak anlam kazanan bilinçli farkındalık özellikle keşif ve gelişim çağında olan çocuklar için oldukça değerlidir. Araştırma sorusu: Yükseköğretim Kurulu (YÖK) Tez Merkezi yayınlarında son yıllarda Türk çocuklarında farkındalık nasıl araştırılıyor? Ekim 2023 tarihine kadar tezlerin (yüksek lisans, doktora, tıpta uzmanlık) tespiti amacıyla “bilinçli farkındalık” ve “çocuk” ile “bilinçli farkındalık” ve “çocuklar” anahtar kelimeleri kullanılarak YÖK Tez Merkezi’nde taramalar yapıldı. Tam metin erişimi olmayan ve çocuklarla bilinçli farkındalık üzerine değerlendirme ve müdahale içermeyen çalışmalar hariç tutuldu. Kriterleri karşılayan 89 tez ele alındı. Tekrarlayan çalışmalar çıkarıldıktan ve uygunluk açısından tarandıktan sonra 2018 ile Eylül 2023 arasında bulunan toplam 27 çalışma incelendi. Bu çalışmaların 22’si yüksek lisans, 3’ü doktora ve 2’si tıpta uzmanlık tezidir. En yaygın alan sonuçları psikoloji ile eğitim ve öğretim idi. Bu belirleme kapsamında değerlendirme yöntemleri (n=20) ve müdahale yöntemleri (n=7) olmak üzere iki ana tema yer almaktaydı. 2017-2019 yılları arasında 10 çalışma bulunurken son dört yılda 17 çalışmaya ulaşıldı. Son yıllarda bilinçli farkındalık üzerine yapılan lisansüstü tezlerin arttığı görülmektedir. Konuyla ilgili araştırmacıların farklı bilim alanlarından ve disiplinlerden olduğu, ayrıca konuya ilginin artmış olduğu görülse de genel bir fikir birliğinin oluşması için yeni yapılacak çalışmalara ihtiyaç vardır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Akademik tezler, tezler, bilinçli farkındalık, çocuk

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Introduction

Aware is associated with aspects of individuals such as being open, non-judgmental, friendly, curious, accepting, compassionate and kind. Mindfulness is explained as moment-by-moment awareness of thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations and the environment (1). Mindfulness has recently begun to draw interest in scientific and popular discourses in daily life (2). It is also studied in various disciplines, especially psychology, physiology, health services, neuroscience and art. In this context, mindfulness research shows that mindfulness-based approaches are aimed at improving stress management, cognitive, emotional and interpersonal functions (3).

Mindfulness studies include various age and focus groups. Studies on its effects on children that one of the focus groups within this scope have started to improve. "Child" which includes the 0-18 age group, is the period before adulthood (4). For this reason, mindfulness studies implemented on individuals who have not yet stepped into adulthood provide that individuals in this age group are supported in terms of academic, social and cognitive functions. Additionally, mindfulness practices are emphasized in this critical period to support the development of different skills (5).

Considering that about half of mental disorders occur before the age of 14, it is clear that the period between the ages of 0-18 is especially transit for adulthood (6). It is important to screen child development, evaluations at an early stage, determine possible situations and apply appropriate protocols regularly. Besides all this, it has been shown that practices aimed at evaluating and improving individuals' mindfulness are also successful in the treatment of medical conditions such as depression, anxiety, chronic pain, heart diseases and cancer (7). For this reason, mindfulness-based interventions are accepted as a hopeful approach and are followed with increasing interest in the field of mental health. Mindfulness practices include movement-based practices such as mindfulness meditations, breathing exercises, yoga, and approaches that protect attention and enhance focus by choosing a focus point (7,8). Mindfulness-based intervention results in enhanced mindfulness through the mindfulness regulation process and a more integrated sense of personal accomplishment among key and common goals (7). Mindfulness-based rehabilitation approaches can be an effective keynote for developing self-regulation by facilitating the individual to learn how to be calmer or more relaxed in general and how to calm himself/herself in times of anxiety or potential threat (9).

As long as mindfulness-based assessment, practices and methods become gradually widespread, the concept of mindfulness is becoming a term that is increasingly heard and included in daily life, along with many academic researches, books, projects and trainings, especially in health services (7,10). However, the scientific basis on which this issue is researched has not been clearly revealed to what extent it is addressed both academically and practically. For this reason, postgraduate theses that include the child population on mindfulness are an important data source.

In this study, the postgraduate theses were examined according to their years, type, institute, subjects, theses types, methods and findings for children in Türkiye until October 2023. This research aimed to determine what the current situation was so far in theses whereby the focus group was children and to reveal the needs for future studies.

Methods

This research was fulfilled through the document analysis, which is one of the qualitative research techniques of postgraduate theses conducted for children in Türkiye. Qualitative research is a type of research in which methods such as observation, interview and documentation are used to collect data. In other words, it is an approach that is based on theory creation and prioritizes research and understanding of social phenomena within the framework to which they depend (11). In this research, postgraduate theses were collected by document analysis. Document analysis consists of a series of processes that occur within the examining and evaluating printed and/or electronic (computer-based and internet-accessible) materials (12). The data obtained were examined by the content analysis method, and similar data were brought together within the framework of categories and interpreted through content analysis (11).

In recent years, it has been observed that the number of mindfulness-based studies has increased with intense interest. For this reason, postgraduate theses published on mindfulness in children in Türkiye were accessed. In accessing theses documents; the keywords "mindfulness", "child" and "children" were used in selecting theses on the subject from the Council of Higher Education (CoHE)-Thesis Center (2023) website (<https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/>). Master of science, doctorate and specialization of medicine postgraduate theses accessed with these keywords were transferred to the computer in pdf format. Published theses fulfilling the following criteria were included: (a) open to full text access, (b) in Turkish or English language, and (c) focus group should be children. Theses on different focus groups were excluded. Twenty-seven postgraduate theses that met the inclusion criteria were reached. The flow chart of the study is given in Figure 1. The aforementioned theses were subsequently collated within the context of main categories through the application of content analysis, and the primary findings were subsequently summarised and interpreted.

Results

Firstly only the word "mindfulness" was scanned in the CoHE National Thesis Center and 494 postgraduate theses were found between May 2011 and October 2023. Then, when the words "mindfulness" and "child" were searched, 60 theses were found between August 2013 and October 2023; when the words "mindfulness" and "children" were searched 29 postgraduate theses were found between June 2018 and October 2023. Duplicate studies (n=20) were excluded, the titles and abstracts of the remaining 69 studies were examined. Forty-two of these studies were excluded because the focus group was not children, and as a result, 27 studies were examined (13-39). Those studies

were published between 2017 and October 2023. Looking at the distribution by years, there was 1 study in 2017, 3 studies in 2018, 6 studies in 2019, 5 studies in 2020, 4 studies in 2021, 3 studies in 2022 and 5 studies in 2023. Twenty-four of the studies were authored in Turkish, while three were written in English.

The most postgraduate theses on mindfulness in children were master of science theses (n=22) with 81.48%, doctorate theses with 11.11% (n=3) and specialization in medicine theses with 7.4% (n=2), respectively. Distribution of these theses according to the institutes and departments they were affiliated with were as follows: education [(n=16); institute of education (n=6), institute of educational sciences (n=9), institute of educational technology (n=1)], social [(n=8); institute of social sciences (n=7), institute of economics and social sciences (n=1)], health [(n=1); institute of health sciences (n=1)], psychiatry [(n=2); department of child and adolescent mental health and diseases].

Of the studies 74.07% that met the inclusion criteria consisted of evaluation studies (n=20). The names of the studies, theses type, methods, main findings and results of these studies are given in Table 1. It was observed that 22 had a quantitative, 1 had a qualitative, and 4 had a mixed (quantitative and qualitative) study design.

Of the studies 25.92% that met the inclusion criteria consisted of intervention (n=7) studies. The names of the studies, theses

types, methods, interventions, main findings and results of these studies are given in Table 2.

Discussion

In this study, postgraduate theses were researched through mindfulness in children in Türkiye and it was revealed that it was a multidisciplinary field that attracted attention in recent years. Researchers who study mindfulness emphasize that although the field has gained popularity recently, it is still a developing field (40). It is thought cherish the hope to plan mindfulness-based studies with qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods, as well as to disseminate studies with a high level of evidence and examining with follow-up.

Every human is considered a child until the age of 18, and with the special status provided, the rights of children to life and development are protected (4). For this reason, studies involving children cover the ages of 0-18. In the studies examined, it was seen that the sample groups were determined according to age. However, there is no mention of a standardized categorization. Given as examples: the study by Kidil (13) titled “Investigation of the Awareness of 5-6 Years Old Children and Their Families on Correct Nutritional Behaviors” and conducted with 5-6 age group; the study by Dursun (14) titled “Investigation of the Effect of Parent Attitudes on the Self-Comfort Levels and Conscious Awareness Based Self-Efficiency of Special Talent

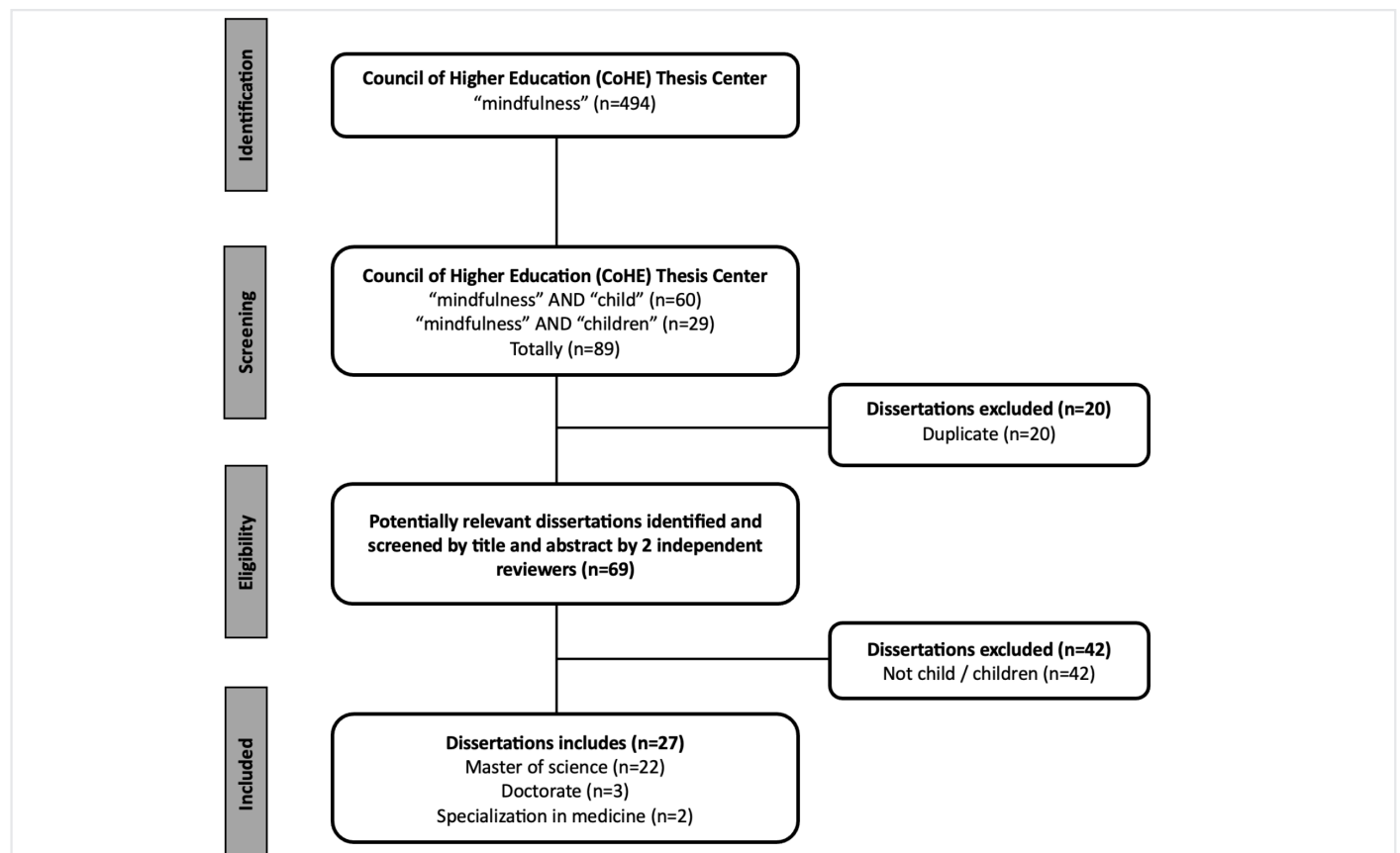


Figure 1. Flow diagram of the study

Table 1. Evaluation studies involving mindfulness in children

Name of the study (researcher and year)	Theses types	Method	Main finding
Investigation of the Awareness of 5-6 Years Old Children and Their Families on Correct Nutritional Behaviors (Kidil, 2021) (13)	Master of science	Qualitative	It has been revealed that children perceive nutrition by creating different categories and that families have an impact on the formation of children's nutritional knowledge.
Investigation of the Effect of Parent Attitudes on the Self-comfort Levels and Conscious Awareness Based Self-Efficiency of Special Talent Children Aged 9-13 (Dursun, 2023) (14)	Master of science	Quantitative	It has been observed that there is a positive and highly significant relationship between the self-compassion levels of gifted secondary school students and their mindfulness-based self-efficacy levels.
The Examination of Exam Anxiety with Individual and Stability Therapy (ACT) Model in Individuals from 12-15 Years (Önal, 2020) (15)	Master of science	Quantitative	Findings obtained as a result of the research, exam anxiety was found to have an impact on conscious awareness, attention, acceptance, determination, decision making, and values.
The Relationship Among Mindfulness, Digital Game Addiction and Demographic Variables (Karzi, 2020) (16)	Master of science	Quantitative	As a result, an inverse relationship was found between digital game play addiction and mindfulness in the participants.
Investigation of the Relationship Mindfulness-based Self-efficacy, Self-compassion and Happiness Levels in Children (Devrim Kahraman, 2020) (17)	Master of science	Quantitative	There is a positive significant relationship between mindfulness-based self-efficacy, self-compassion and happiness levels in children.
Well-being Children: Parental Attitudes and the Role of Mindfulness (Tohumcu, 2022) (18)	Master of science	Quantitative	The findings showed that responsibility and acceptance from parental attitudes and mindful awareness significantly predicted well-being.
Social Mindfulness in Intergroup Context: The Role of Socio-Cognitive Skills (Koçyiğit, 2023) (19)	Master of science	Quantitative	These findings showed that theory of mind has a critical role in displaying social mindfulness toward both ingroup and outgroup.
Emotional Abuse Awareness of Parents of 4 th Grade Primary School Students (Kaya, 2020) (20)	Master of science	Quantitative	No significant correlation was found between the emotional abuse awareness of the parents and the mindfulness-based self-efficacy scores and discouraging family relationships of the children.
Investigation of the Relationship Between Perfectionism, Self-compassion, Mindfulness, Self-esteem, and Perceived Severity of Stuttering in Children who Stutter (Küçükgülzel, 2021) (21)	Master of science	Quantitative	While a negative correlation was expected between the mindfulness subtest scores and the child's level of perception of her own stuttering severity or the stuttering severity of others, no statistically significant relationship was found according to the findings.
Evaluation of Identity Development and Mindfulness in Adolescents with and without Non-suicidal Self-Injurious Behavior (Yazgılı Kahveci, 2020) (22)	Specialization in medicine	Quantitative	Adolescents with non-suicidal self-injurious behavior had more identity confusion, their family relations were more complicated and their mindfulness levels were lower compared to the other two groups.
Evaluation of Emotion Regulation and Mindfulness in Adolescents with and without Identity Confusion (Aydın, 2017) (23)	Specialization in medicine	Quantitative	It has been found that adolescents with identity confusion have more difficulty in regulating emotions and lower levels of mindfulness than those without identity confusion.
Investigation of the Relationship Between COVID-19 Phobia, Metacognitive Problems and Mindfulness Level in High School Students (Yılmaz, 2022) (24)	Master of science	Quantitative	No significant relationship was found between the level of mindfulness and COVID-19 phobia.

Table 1. Continued

Name of the study (researcher and year)	Theses types	Method	Main finding
Investigation the Mediator Role of Mindfulness and Metacognition in the Relationship Between Nomophobia and Alexithymia (Altan, 2019) (25)	Master of science	Quantitative	The metacognition problems and mindfulness had significant mediator effects on the relationship between the alexithymia and mindfulness. The results of the multivariable linear regression analysis revealed that alexithymia personality traits, mindfulness levels, metacognition problems and age significantly predict the nomophobia.
Development of Awareness in Self-Administrative Skills in Preschool Children: Ataşehir Case (Taşkın, 2019) (26)	Master of science	Quantitative	It has been found that children often exhibit and gain self-directed behavior when they are with a parent or a non-parent person, but cannot achieve the same success if they move away from them.
Investigation of the Development of Mindfulness in Middle Childhood in the Context of Mindful Parenting and the Child's Socio-emotional and Socio-cognitive Skills (Karadoğan, 2022) (27)	Master of science	Quantitative	Results of the correlation analyses children's mindfulness was positively to emotion understanding and emotional inhibition and hierarchical regression analysis emotion understanding and emotional inhibition skills predicted children's mindfulness skills.
Investigation of the Relationship Between Digital Game Addiction, Resilience and Mindfulness Levels of Secondary School Students (Keskin, 2019) (28)	Master of science	Quantitative	As a result of the research, digital game addiction and resilience were found to be significantly correlated in the negative direction, digital game addiction and mindfulness were significantly correlated in the negative direction, resilience and mindfulness were significantly correlated in the positive direction.
The Mediator Effect of Mindfulness in the Relationship Between Perceived Stress Level and Quality of Life in Pediatric Asthma (Ayhan, 2020) (29)	Master of science	Quantitative	It was found that perceived stress in asthma had a significant relationship with quality of life, emotional function and symptom sub-dimensions of quality of life; In this context, it has been observed that mindfulness has a partial mediator effect.
Mediating Effects of Emotion Regulation and Creative Problem Solving in the Relationship Between Mindfulness and Foreign Language Learning Anxiety (Gözütok, 2023) (30)	Doctorate	Quantitative	The results of the correlation analysis showed that mindfulness, creative problem-solving attributes and cognitive reappraisal strategy were found to be negatively related with foreign language learning anxiety. Mindfulness was positively associated with creative problem-solving features and cognitive reappraisal strategy.
Assessing Mindfulness in School-Aged Children: Development and Validation of BAU Mindfulness Scale (BAU-MSC) (Taşkın, 2018) (31)	Master of science	Quantitative	The validity evidence has shown that BAU-MSC has promising psychometric properties and it has been recommended for use on Turkish children.
Mindfulness Levels of Gifted and Non-gifted 3 and 4 th Grades Students (Barış, 2018) (32)	Master of science	Quantitative	The mindfulness levels of non-gifted and talented girl students concluded a higher degree than boy students. It is also exhibited that the mindfulness levels of non-gifted and talented students indicate no difference depending on class level. The mindfulness levels of 4 th grade gifted and talented students result higher than 3 rd grade students.

Children Aged 9-13” and conducted with 9-13 age group, and the study by Alpay (36) titled “The Effect of Mindfulness Based Physical Education Lessons on the Mindfulness, Emotional and Psychological Well-Being Levels of Primary School 3rd and 4th Grade Students” and conducted with 3-4 grade students (Tables 1, 2). Studies in the literature on mindfulness include different age groups and life span (41). Mindfulness needs to be evaluated and examined for specific age groups in intervention programs.

Although the concept of mindfulness has its origins in the teachings of Buddha (42), the first scientific publication was

found in 1857. The subject of mindfulness in children has been in the literature since 1872. Despite the fact that there has been an increasing interest in the studies examined in our study for years, the most studies were found in 2019. However, the difference in the number of studies compared to other years is negligible. When looking at the literature, it can be seen that the interest in studies on the subject continues to increase. The creation of environments where researchers can present and share their information on the subject will be a source of motivation.

Table 2. Intervention studies involving mindfulness in children

Name of the study (researcher and year)	Theses types	Method	Intervention	Main ginding
The Effects of Mindfulness Based Yoga Intervention on Preschoolers' Self-Regulation Ability (Önoğlu Yıldırım, 2019) (33)	Master of science	Mix (quantitative and qualitative)	The intervention group of children took yoga 2 times a week for 12 weeks for a total of 15 hours of yoga per child.	Results of the child battery showed that children who were in the yoga group performed better on working memory but none of the other aspects of executive function that were measured revealed a difference. Teachers reported no difference between the two groups. Lastly, mothers evaluated that the two groups were different in terms of positive affect such that children in the yoga group were evaluated as higher.
Investigation of the Effect of Mindfulness Education Program on the Emotional Intelligence, Self-Perception and Executive Functioning Level of Pre-School Children (Aydın, 2023) (34)	Doctorate	Mix (quantitative and qualitative)	Mindfulness Education Program was applied 3 days a week for 8 weeks.	It was determined that the mindfulness education program created a statistically significant difference in the experimental group children's emotional intelligence, self-perception and executive functioning levels compared to those of the control group. According to the qualitative analysis results, the teacher of the experimental group stated that the education program applied positively contributed to the children's emotional intelligence, self-perception and executive functioning levels.
Effectiveness of Mindfulness Based Program on Pre-Adolescents (Özen Koç, 2023) (35)	Doctorate	Mix (quantitative and qualitative)	A mindfulness program was implemented for eight weeks.	It was found that there was a positive relationship between mindfulness and psychological well-being, mindfulness predicted psychological well-being, men's mindfulness and psychological well-being scores were higher than women's, and there was no significant difference in terms of class variable.
The Effect of Mindfulness Based Physical Education Lessons on the Mindfulness, Emotional and Psychological Well-Being Levels of Primary School 3 rd and 4 th Grade Students (Alpay, 2021) (36)	Master of science	Quantitative	Mindfulness practices were carried out in physical education classes, one session per week, for a total of 8 sessions.	As a result, it was determined that 8-week mindfulness based physical education lessons did not have a significant effect on mindfulness, emotional and psychological well-being of primary school 3 rd and 4 th grade students.
Mindful School Program for Elementary School Children and the Effects of the Program on Children (Yazğan, 2019) (37)	Master of science	Quantitative	The program was named "Mindful Okul" that was implemented for 14 weeks.	Results of the research revealed that "Mindful Okul" program had a positively significant effect on both fully awareness and subscales of mindfulness in 3 rd and 4 th grade students.
Effect of Mindfulness Based Anger Management Program on Mindfulness and Anger Management Skills on Children (Yıldızhan, 2019) (38)	Master of science	Quantitative	Mindfulness-based anger management program was applied to for 8-weeks.	Results revealed that the 8-week mindfulness psychoeducation program had a significant influence on the anger management skills on children.
The 8 Week Mindfulness Program for Preschool Children and the Effects of the Program on Children (Çollak, 2018) (39)	Master of science	Mix (quantitative and qualitative)	A mindfulness program was implemented twice a week for eight weeks in total.	Results of the data obtained from 1 st and 8 th month showed that mindfulness program had positive effect on children, especially on children's attention, being calm, self-control, self-acceptance and compassion, being concerned about others and helpfulness.

For all that mindfulness is a field that develops with its roots in psychology, it is seen to be involved in many different scientific fields such as neuroscience, medicine, psychiatry (43). Additionally, mindfulness has been studied on various topics such as addiction, chronic pain, immunity, health behaviors, depression relapse, depression and anxiety symptoms, attention control and focus (41). From this perspective, mindfulness has a rich scope. Similarly, many different areas were included in the studies examined. However, it has been observed that it is not discussed as in the studies examined in scientific fields such as occupational therapy, cardiac rehabilitation, vocational rehabilitation and cognitive rehabilitation, which have an important place in the literature (41,44-46). In this respect, it seems that there is a need for postgraduate theses on the subject of mindfulness in these scientific fields in Türkiye. In addition, studies in the national literature such as “Effect of Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy Program on Psychological Symptom Levels of Schizophrenia Patients” (47) and “Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy: A Review” (48) were achieved.

Qualitative research is a subjective, holistic and process-oriented type of study that investigates the nature of real-life phenomena (11). However, in quantitative studies, this is the opposite. Quantitative research comprehends objective, targeted and result-oriented research types that objectify situations, facts and events and reveal them in a way that can be observed, measured and expressed numerically (49). The majority of the studies examined were created with a quantitative design. When the studies on mindfulness in the literature are examined, it is stated that very few studies have qualitative design, but the results are similar to quantitative studies (9). Therefore, findings of this study are similar to the literature. Some of the studies examined included information about their design in the method section, some studies did not. This situation caused the researchers to have difficulty in determining the methods. Besides, study designs need to be clearly stated. The lack of sharp separation of qualitative and quantitative research methods leads to confusion in the evaluation of research results. All qualitative studies emphasize the issues and events that develop in the natural environment, and when examining these facts, the questions of how and why are answered instead of how many or how much. In consequence, instead of collecting numerical data, administering interventions or treatments as in quantitative research, qualitative research helps further explore and understand quantitative data as well as generate hypotheses. A study can be conducted entirely with qualitative or quantitative methods, as well as a mixed-method research combining qualitative and quantitative approaches can also be planned (49).

Study Limitations

This study, which is based on the examination of postgraduate studies on mindfulness for children, draws attention that most of the postgraduate theses are evaluation-oriented. Due to increasing evidence of the positive impact of mindfulness on psychological health, emotional well-being, learning and physical health, assessing mindfulness has become important (31). However, the limitations of this study are that assessment and intervention methods related to mindfulness are not compared with each

other, only postgraduate theses are examined, and mindfulness studies related to only children are included.

Conclusion

Researches are needed with professional groups such as occupational therapy, physiotherapy rehabilitation, psychology, and neuroscience in order to develop a further comprehensive understanding of the studies on mindfulness more collaborative/multidisciplinary. Although it seems likely that interest in mindfulness will continue, considering the progress made so far, it is recommended that the impact and development of mindfulness-based studies on human life be examined in populations with different characteristics and with various methods.

Footnotes

Authorship Contributions

Concept: K.Y., Design: K.Y., M.T., Data Collection or Processing: K.Y., M.T., Analysis or Interpretation: K.Y., M.T., Literature Search: K.Y., Writing: K.Y., M.T.

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