



# Benchmarking From the World's Top Universities: Necessitating Mindfulness Programs at Mongolian Universities

Anar Purvee<sup>1, (✉)</sup> and Dashdemberel Chinges<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Neon Edu LLC, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia  
anar.purvee@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup> Human Mind Perfection Non-Government Organization, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

**Abstract.** The purpose of this paper is to provide realistic and reasonable arguments for why it is fundamental for Mongolian universities to offer mindfulness training programs/courses and what to learn from the world's leading universities in this process. This study employed a qualitative research design, document analysis method, and benchmarking tool for curriculum analysis, and compared mindfulness curricula at the world's top universities. The findings of this study showed that not only short courses but also an official master's degree program offered in the field of mindfulness, indicating its benefits proven to be effective for a range of goals in current formal education. In this way, this study provides practical implications for Mongolian universities by necessitating the importance of initiating mindfulness programs/courses.

**Keywords:** Benchmarking · Curriculum Analysis · Document Analysis · Mindfulness · Mongolia · University Sector

## 1 Introduction

The term Mindfulness has become popular not only among the general public but also in academia. It is associated with the concepts and practices of meditation and stress reduction techniques. With the help of modern-day research findings in neuroscience, it is known for various crucial benefits, such as reduced stress and increased attention and concentration [1]. In this way, mindfulness has grown into an independent field of research and education in the current scholarship and practical applications.

Moreover, it has also become a billion-dollar business industry. For example, in the USA, the meditation and mindfulness market was valued at one billion dollars in 2015 [2]. In 2021, its global application market was estimated at \$97.6 million [3].

In terms of research and education, all levels of formal educational institutions all around the world, from primary schools to top universities in the world, have been offering mindfulness training programs to their students and employees. For example, Maloney et al.'s study discussed the MindUP Program, which has been taught globally to school-aged children, including in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Finland, China, and Hong Kong [4]. They noted that the program had favourable benefits for improving children's social relations and secular ethics.

Similarly, Semple et al.'s study also examined K-12 mindfulness curricula in the United States [5]. They remarked that the curricula facilitated attention and concentration, and have been widely accepted by students, teachers, and administrators.

At the university level, numerous top universities in the world have provided mindfulness programs to their students and employees [6, 7]. It is crucial to note here that some top universities offer master's degree programs in this field, for instance, the University of Oxford [6]. All of these are elaborated in the Results section of this paper.

In this way, the concept of mindfulness and its benefits have become widely recognised and accepted globally in the last 30 years [1, 4, 5]. However, it is ironic to see that this has not been investigated, examined, and even discussed in research and education at Mongolian universities nowadays. In this regard, the purpose of this paper is to provide realistic arguments for why it is fundamental for Mongolian universities to offer mindfulness training programs/courses and what to learn from the world's top universities in this process.

For this purpose, this paper is organised into the following sections: (2) Literature review for analysing the history of mindfulness and the Mongolian university sector, (2) Methods for document and curriculum analysis, (3) Results for comparing mindfulness curricula at the world's top universities for benchmarking, and (4) Conclusion for providing practical implications for initiating mindfulness programs at Mongolian universities.

## 2 Literature Review

To discuss the background of this study, this section is organised into the following subsections: (2.1) A Brief Introduction to Mindfulness and (2.2) A Brief Introduction to the Mongolian University Sector.

### 2.1. A Brief Introduction of Mindfulness

The concept of mindfulness originated from Buddhist teachings dating back to the 6th-5th century BCE. In 1976, Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese monk, author, and teacher, published his book titled *The Miracle of Mindfulness: An Introduction to the Practice of Meditation* [8]. This marked the first introduction of this term in academia.

In 1979, Dr Jon Kabat-Zinn, who was also Master Thich Nhat Hanh's student, founded the Stress Reduction Clinic, currently known as the Centre for Mindfulness, at the University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School. Since then, the centre has been responsible for conceptualising, implementing, and examining an eight-week Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program, which has been utilised, modified, and taught globally [9].

By 2017, the MBSR program had been taught to more than 24,000 people and used for more than one million hours of clinical care [10]. Currently, there are a variety of mindfulness programs being taught at different levels of education institutions. Among these range of varieties, Dr Jon Kabat-Zinn's team recreated the 2017 version of the MBSR Curriculum Guide to sustain "the fidelity and integrity of the MBSR" and ensure its "clinical efficacy, scientific validity, and educational rigour" [10: 4].

Since the 1970s, scholars in the fields of medicine and psychology have shown

heavy interest in the effectiveness of mindfulness and have further developed this research area. In addition to the MBSR, the field of Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) has been developed by researchers Mark Williams, John Teasdale, and Zindel Segal [11]. This program is aimed at “people at risk for depression” and teaches them “a range of skills to prevent depression ... negative thoughts” [7: para. 3].

Moreover, it is crucial to note that the context of mindfulness training programs has remained secular even though its concept and practices originated from Buddhism. Mindfulness now is considered “a universal human capacity proposed to foster clear thinking and openheartedness” which undoubtedly has many medical benefits [12: 1350].

In educational settings, scholars have noted that mindfulness encourages students’ “holistic development and well-being” [4: 313] by reducing stress and improving performance and quality of life [13].

Although the term mindfulness has become popular nowadays, scholars have also emphasised that this field lacks an operational definition and rigorous research needs to be done [1-3]. Maloney et al.’s study remarked, “Research on mindfulness education ... is still in its infancy, and much work has yet to be done” [4: 331].

In this regard, to achieve consensus on the operational definition of mindfulness, Bishop et al.’s study proposed two distinct concepts based on the discussions in the current scholarship [1]. The first one was about self-regulation of attention which aims at “increased recognition of mental events in the present moment”; the second one refers to an orientation “towards one’s experiences in the present moment” by being curious, open, and accepting [1: 232].

## 2.2. A Brief Introduction of the Mongolian University Sector

Before socialism, Mongolia was a Buddhist country with a nomadic lifestyle, and its education system was heavily based on Buddhist teaching methods [14-17]. During that era, Buddhism “controlled most aspects of Mongolian society, including education, the judiciary, and health care” [14: 13].

Nevertheless, the establishment of communism/socialism in 1921 forced Mongolians to adopt Marxist-Leninist ideology, in which any religion or religious matters were strictly forbidden [15]. The cleansing process of the tradition and religion occurred during the period between 1933 and 1953 when the Great Purge executed 36,000 Mongolians, including leaders, intellectuals, and Buddhist monks [16]. After that socialist civilisation and urbanisation took place successfully and built modern Mongolia.

During the socialist era, the Mongolian official education system was established successfully under the Marxist-Leninist ideology. The first university of Mongolia - the National University of Mongolia - was founded in 1942. Thus, the foundation of the Mongolian higher education system was “ideologically Marxist-Leninist, politically communist, administratively centralised, vertical and financially free to all students” [15: 392].

In 1990, Mongolia transitioned into a democracy, adopted market economic principles, and claimed religious freedom for its citizens. However, it seems as if the university sector remains defensive and sensitive to any religious terms. This can be seen from the term meditation, which is widely known, used, and practised by the

general public, but it is a consciously or unconsciously silent topic in the university environment. Similarly, the term mindfulness has been discussed among Buddhist monks and meditation practitioners but not among academics, scholars, and educators formally although this is a secular training program, which has been widely delivered and researched all around the world.

In this regard, based on all these discussions, this study highlights the importance of initiating mindfulness research and educational training programs at Mongolian universities as its benefits in contemporary education have been validated in the current scholarship and practice.

### 3 Methods

This study adopted a qualitative research design as this investigated phenomenon is currently new in the Mongolian university sector [18]. Qualitative research involves various methods for data collection, such as observations, interviews, documents, and audio-visual digital materials [19]. Collecting and analysing relevant documents in the field is a mandatory step for most research, and document analysis also becomes an independent research method. Therefore, this study utilised the document analysis method for the purpose of the study. Documents include materials that are written in text forms, such as photographs, diagrams, and other visual materials.

Documents in this study mean the mindfulness curricula at the world's top universities. Gathering and analysing such documents are linked to the method of benchmarking for curriculum analysis. Different terms were relevant to this study, such as curriculum analysis, curriculum evaluation, curriculum development, and benchmarking [20-24]. For this study, the term curriculum analysis was used. Scholars have discussed different models for curriculum analysis. For example, Nouraey et al.'s team conducted a systematic review of 63 papers in the field and compared the most popular three models: the CIPP model, the Four-level model of learning evaluation, and Philips' model of evaluation [20]. These models had similarities in the process of analysing the context, input, process, and product evaluations of the curricula.

In contrast, Gonzalez et al.'s study was more relevant to this study because they aimed at designing a new curriculum, although in the field of supply chain management [21]. They suggested three phases for this process: (1) Gaining relevant information on customer expectations, (2) Quality function deployment and benchmarking analysis, and (3) Designing the program. Among these steps, benchmarking is a popular term that is used in curriculum analysis and development but with different meanings. Firstly, it is used as a concept of standards that need to be complied [23, 24]. Secondly, it is about learning from others, identifying the "best practices of industry functional leaders", and integrating the findings into the strategic plans [21: 40]. In other words, benchmarking is about learning from industry leaders and competitors to develop a new curriculum.

In this regard, Hall discussed the BEKA model of curriculum analysis [25]. This model serves as "a useful and powerful tool enabling understanding of the actual process of teaching, coverage of curriculum content and assessment, and demonstrating linkages between theory and practice" [25: 1]. BEKA stands for the steps of Benchmarking, Evidencing, Knowing, and Applying. Thus, the curriculum analysis process starts with benchmarking, which is about analysing the contents of "documents from external professional bodies, other institutions" [25: 3]. Therefore, this study utilised the

benchmarking method in the process of learning from the world's top universities and analysing their mindfulness curricula.

## 4 Results

Before analysing the mindfulness curricula, it was important for this study to decide what universities should be considered and chosen as the top in the world. Times Higher Education is undoubtedly a well-known website for ranking universities in the world. The top five universities in its list of *World University Rankings 2023* were Oxford, Harvard, Cambridge, Stanford, and Massachusetts Institute of Technology [26].

**Table 1.** Comparison of mindfulness training programs/courses

Program/course	Audience	Aim	Contents
<b>University of Oxford:</b> Department of Continuing Education			
MSt in Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy  2 year part-time	Experienced professionals	Enhancing specialist skills in Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT)	The theoretical foundations of MBCT  The practical skills for delivering knowledge and understanding into MBCT teaching
Meditation Around the World  One-day school (in person or online)	Everyone	Exploring, examining, and experiencing meditation practices developed by various spiritual traditions	The theory and practice of meditation around the world  The comparison of spiritual versus secular meditation
<b>Harvard University:</b> Centre for Wellness and Health Promotion			
Koru Mindfulness  Four-week course (online and in-person)	Current students	Deepening self-reflection, managing stress, and enriching one's life	Several tools, such as meditation, breathing exercises, guided imagery, and the body scan.
Mindful of Race: Embodiment through Movement, Breath, and Focused Attention  1 hour 15 minute session (in-person)	Current students who identify as BIPOC (Black Indigenous and People of Color)	Exploring how racial/ethnic identities impact people  Learning practical tools for staying present amid challenging times	The lens of mindfulness  Embodied practice and dialogue  Practical tools of mindfulness
Guided meditations (online and telephone)  Online short courses (recorded meditations)	Everyone	Learning to be in the present moment, stay focused, and reduce stressors and negative thoughts	Several meditation and yoga tools, such as Awareness of breath meditation, Body scan meditation, Gatha meditation, Guided imagery, Labeling thoughts and feelings meditation, and Yoga Nidra
Mindfulness  From 30-60 minute online short courses to multi-week courses	Benefits-eligible faculty and staff	Bringing the benefits of mindfulness to people in all corners of the university	Series of meditation and yoga tools, such as Mindful movement: Yoga for the office; Mindful communication: Speaking and listening with awareness; Mindfully resolving conflicts in the workplace; and Mindfulness and emotional intelligence

When surfing their websites, this study confirms that all these leading universities offer mindfulness courses for their staff, students, and publicly for everyone. These five universities are located in the United Kingdom and the United States; therefore, this study chose the University of Oxford and Harvard University for further detailed

analysis of their mindfulness curricula. In this way, these universities were able to represent the respective countries for comparison. Table 1 shows the comparison of their mindfulness programs and courses.

The results of this study showed an interesting fact regarding the introduction and development of mindfulness in current formal education. Short courses are commonly offered. For example, Harvard University delivers short-term online and in-person courses on mindfulness [7]. In contrast, the University of Oxford offers a master's degree program in Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy in addition to its short-term meditation courses [6].

An official master's degree program offered in the field indicates that the benefits of mindfulness have been proven to be effective for a range of goals. For example, in a university environment, by reducing stress and increasing attention skills, mindfulness training is positively associated with students' study performance. It is found to be beneficial for better performance on tests/exams and higher grades [27]. Research at Harvard University also emphasised its "measurable changes in brain regions associated with memory, sense of self, empathy, and stress" [28: para. 1].

In addition, it is crucial to note that mindfulness is also found to be effective in reducing insomnia, fatigue, and depression, which all are essential for study/work performance [29]. Thus, research on its cognitive and psychological benefits is currently being held for an eight-week brain training program at Harvard University [30]. All these discussions indicate that mindfulness has held an essential position in the delivery of formal education in the world.

## 5 Conclusion

Despite the fact of its numerous benefits and applications in the delivery of formal education settings in the world, it is ironic to see that mindfulness has not been investigated, examined, and even discussed in research and education at Mongolian universities nowadays. Thus, this study employed a qualitative research design, document analysis method, and benchmarking tool for curriculum analysis, and compared mindfulness curricula at the University of Oxford and Harvard University.

The findings of this study showed that not only short courses but also an official master's degree program offered in the field of mindfulness, indicating its benefits proven to be effective for a range of goals in current formal education.

By necessitating the importance of initiating mindfulness programs/courses, this study provides practical implications for Mongolian universities for increasing study/work success and performance and other related cognitive and psychological benefits for their employees, students, and everyone else in the country.

The limitation of this study is based on the usage of the only first step (benchmarking) of the BEKA model of curriculum analysis. Thus, this paper does not provide detailed content for potential mindfulness courses that can be taught at Mongolian universities. Therefore, future studies should investigate the next steps of the model in order to provide more rigorous findings for developing mindfulness curricula in Mongolian universities.

## References

1. S.R. Bishop, M. Lau, S. Shapiro, L. Carlson, N. Anderson, "Mindfulness: A Proposed Operational Definition", *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice* 11(3) (2004) 230-241. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/clipsy.bph077>
2. J. Wiczner, "Meditation Has Become a Billion-Dollar Business." <https://fortune.com/2016/03/12/meditation-mindfulness-apps/> (accessed on Mar. 12, 2016).
3. G. Ankit, K. Vineet, "Mindfulness Meditation Application Market Research, 2031." <https://www.alliedmarketresearch.com/mindfulness-meditation-application-market-A31649> (accessed on Nov. 1, 2022).
4. J. E. Maloney, M.S. Lawlor, K.A. Schonert-Reichl, J. Whitehead, "A Mindfulness-Based Social and Emotional Learning Curriculum for School-Aged Children: The MindUP Program. Handbook Of Mindfulness in Education: Integrating Theory and Research into Practice", (2016) 313-334. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4939-3506-2\\_20](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4939-3506-2_20)
5. R. J. Semple, V. Drouman, B.A. Reid, "Mindfulness goes to school: Things learned (so far) from research and real-world experiences", *Psychology in the Schools* 54(1) (2017) 29-52. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.21981>
6. University of Oxford, "Mindfulness Courses at the Department of Continuing Education." <https://www.conted.ox.ac.uk/search#/courses?s=mindfulness&sort=relevance> (accessed on Jan. 14, 2023).
7. Harvard University, "Mindfulness for Students." <https://wellness.huhs.harvard.edu/mindfulness-for-students> (accessed on Jan. 14, 2023).
8. T. N. Hanh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness, Gift Edition: An Introduction to the Practice of Meditation*, Beacon Press, 2016.
9. UMass Memorial Health Center for Mindfulness, "Everyone Experiences Stress. It's a Part of The Human Experience." <https://www.ummhealth.org/center-mindfulness> (accessed on Feb. 25, 2023).
10. S.F. Santorelli, J. Kabat-Zinn, M. Blacker, F. Meleo-Meyer, L. Koerbel, "Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) Authorized Curriculum Guide", Centre for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society (CFM), University of Massachusetts Medical School, 2017.
11. University of Oxford's Department of Psychiatry, "University of Oxford Mindfulness Research Centre." <https://www.psych.ox.ac.uk/research/mindfulness> (accessed on Feb. 25, 2023).
12. D.S. Ludwig, J. Kabat-Zinn, "Mindfulness in medicine", *The Journal of American Medical Association* 300(11) (2008) 1350-1352. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.300.11.1350>
13. E.I. de Bruin, R. Meppelink, S.M. Bögels, "Mindfulness in Higher Education: Awareness and Attention in University Students Increase During and After Participation in a Mindfulness Curriculum Course", *Mindfulness* 6 (2015)1137-1142. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-014-0364-5>
14. R. Gilberg, J.O. Svantesson, *The Mongols, their land and history*, in: O. Bruun & O. Odgaard (Eds.), *Mongolia in Transition*, Curzon Press Ltd, Richmond, Surrey, 1996, pp. 5-22.
15. B. Zagdraghaa, H. Trotter, Cultural–historical factors influencing OER adoption in Mongolia's higher education sector, in: C. A. P. B. Hodgkinson-Williams (Ed.), *Adoption and Impact of OER in the Global South, African Minds, International Development Research Centre & Research on Open Educational Resources*, 2017, pp. 389–424.
16. N.D. Bumaa, *The twentieth century: From domination to democracy*, in: P. L. W. Sabloff (Ed.), *Modern Mongolia: Reclaiming Genghis Khan*, 1st ed., The University of Pennsylvania, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, USA, 2001, pp. 31-60.
17. A. Purvee, "Women and academic leadership at public and private universities in Mongolia,"

- Ph.D. dissertation, Faculty of Education, Monash University, Australia, 2020.
18. D.E. Gray, *Doing Research in the Real World*, SAGE Publications Inc, Los Angeles, California, 2014.
  19. J. Creswell, *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*, Pearson Australia, 2014.
  20. P. Nouraey, A. Al-Badi, M.J. Riasati, R.L. Maata, "Educational Program and Curriculum Evaluation Models: A Mini Systematic Review of the Recent Trends", *Universal Journal of Educational Research* 8(9) (2020) 4048-4055. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2020.080930>
  21. M.E. Gonzalez, G. Quesada, K. Gourdin, M. Hartley, "Designing a Supply Chain Management Academic Curriculum Using QFD and Benchmarking", *Quality Assurance in Education* 16(1) (2008) 36-60. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1108/09684880810848404>
  22. I.Á. Jóhannesson, K. Norðdahl, G. Óskarsdóttir, A. Pálsdóttir, B.Pétursdóttir, "Curriculum Analysis and Education for Sustainable Development in Iceland", *Environmental Education Research* 17(3) (2011) 375-391. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2010.545872>
  23. A. Burns, "ESL Curriculum Development in Australia: Recent Trends And Debates", *Regional Language Centre Journal* 34(3) (2003) 261-283. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/003368820303400302>
  24. L. Stern, A. Ahlgren, "Analysis of Students' Assessments in Middle School Curriculum Materials: Aiming Precisely at Benchmarks and Standards", *Journal of Research in Science Teaching* 39(9) (2002) 889-910. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/tea.10050>
  25. C.E. Hall, "Toward a Model of Curriculum Analysis and Evaluation—BEKA: A Case Study from Australia", *Nurse Education Today* 34(3) (2014) 343-348. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2013.04.007>
  26. Times Higher Education, "World University Rankings 2023." [https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/2023/world-ranking#!/page/0/length/25/locations/AUS/sort\\_by/rank/sort\\_order/asc/cols/stats](https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/2023/world-ranking#!/page/0/length/25/locations/AUS/sort_by/rank/sort_order/asc/cols/stats) (accessed on Jan. 14, 2023).
  27. G. Tatter, "Making Time for Mindfulness." <https://wellness.huhs.harvard.edu/mindfulness-for-students> (accessed on Jan. 23, 2019).
  28. S. McGreevey, "Eight Weeks to a Better Brain." <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2011/01/eight-weeks-to-a-better-brain/> (accessed on Jan. 21, 2011).
  29. J. Corliss, "Mindfulness Meditation Helps Fight Insomnia, Improves Sleep." <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/mindfulness-meditation-helps-fight-insomnia-improves-sleep-201502187726> (accessed on Jun. 15, 2020).
  30. S. Lazar, "Maintain Your Brain." [https://scholar.harvard.edu/sara\\_lazar/participate](https://scholar.harvard.edu/sara_lazar/participate) (accessed on Jan. 21, 2023).



**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

