



# Using The Mindful Inner Smile Technique to Foster Self-Love for Maintaining Mental Health of Junior High School Students

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**Abstract.** Mental health has a significant role in helping students adjust to the various challenges of learning at school. One crucial factor in maintaining students' mental health is self-love. One effective strategy for optimizing self-love is providing mindfulness-based intervention in classical guidance services for students at school. This research aimed to determine the benefits of mindfulness in the learning context before the subsequent research in a controlled trial experiment. The 'Mindful Inner Smile Technique' is a mindfulness technique that guides students to cultivate self-love through a smiling meditation. The researchers explored the effects of using the "Mindful Inner Smile Technique" in classical guidance to increase the self-love of 30 junior high school students in a private school in Palu, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia. The results showed that the student's self-love increased significantly after implementing the "Mindful Inner Smile Technique" in classical guidance. Furthermore, each student showed higher self-love at the posttest than at the pretest. This result proved that mindfulness-based intervention, especially with the "Mindful Inner Smile Technique," is a promising treatment for increasing the self-love of junior high school students. This research implies that guidance and counselling.

**Keyword:** Online Learning, Mental Health, Inner Smile Technique

## 1 Introduction

WHO has raised the theme for World Mental Health Day 2023: 'Mental health is a universal human right' [1]. This theme was raised to increase knowledge and awareness and encourage actions that support and protect everyone's mental health as a universal human right. Mental health has become an important issue for people worldwide, including Indonesia. The experience of the whole world facing the COVID-19 pandemic has become an essential momentum regarding the growing public awareness of the importance of mental health.

An individual can be mentally healthy if he can feel psychological, emotional, and social well-being. Mental health influences how you think, speak, feel, act, make decisions, and interact with the environment [2]. On the other hand, individuals can be in an unhealthy mental condition, for example, when they experience anxiety, stress,

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depression, and other psychological disorders, which can put them in a more serious mental disorder.

Student mental health is one of the essential things that must be maintained so students can participate in learning at school more optimally and productively. If mental health is disturbed, it can cause psychological problems, which can lead to mental disorders. Mental disorders can change the way a person handles stress, interacts with others, makes choices, and triggers desires to harm themselves. Mental health often also has an impact on physical health. An unhealthy mentality can cause various emotional disorders or interfere with other physical functions of the body [2].

Junior high school students who are in the early adolescence development stage are vulnerable to mental health problems. Students are expected to be able to establish new, more mature relationships with peers of both sexes, assume masculine and feminine social roles, accept their physical condition and use their bodies effectively, engage in responsible social behavior, and achieve emotional independence [3], [4].

Students can maintain mental health and reduce the risk of psychological disorders by optimizing self-love. *Self-love* is not defined as fulfilling everything somebody wants, especially if it is useless. On the contrary, this concept encourages people to recognize and accept themselves and treat themselves well and as they are. Self-love is a state of appreciation for oneself that grows from actions that support physical, psychological, and spiritual growth. The purpose of self-love is so that individuals can respect themselves and achieve optimal self-development [5], [6]. Optimizing self-love helps maintain mental health because it makes it easier for a person to think positively so that everyday life will feel more manageable and enjoyable. Individuals can focus more on their life goals and feel safe, comfortable, and at ease when socializing [6].

One intervention that can be given to students to increase self-love and maintain mental health is mindfulness intervention. Every individual can be mindful, especially when consciously carrying out behavior. On the other hand, a person's capacity to remain mindful is an ability that can also be learned. In this regard, mindfulness can be viewed from two points of view: as a trait (general tendency) or as a temporary state [7].

Mindfulness is a stable dispositional characteristic or trait that includes characteristics or tendencies related to innate individual differences. In this case, mindfulness is a natural human capacity that every individual can possess to varying degrees, even individuals who have not been trained [8], [9], [10].

Mindfulness can also be viewed as a state or skill, including a series of situationally specific skills that are not permanent and can be developed through intervention, training, and practice in daily life [11]. This state of mindfulness occurs when a person focuses on a particular experience with acceptance and curiosity. State mindfulness can be measured through engagement in mindfulness practices and state self-report [12]. Mindfulness practice includes focusing attention (readiness of perception by regulating

breathing) and openness to various sensory stimuli, which can be done with mindful movement [13]. This practice is usually included in intervention programs, such as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) [14].

The mindfulness interventions for optimizing self-love contain various mindfulness techniques that can be applied in intervention and everyday life. Mindfulness techniques to optimize self-love to maintain mental health include mindfulness meditation, mindful breathing, mindful inner smile, physical movement (mindful movement), body scanning, mindful eating, mindful walking, and mindful reading [15] [2].

Previous research conducted by the authors has proven the effectiveness of mindfulness interventions in maintaining participants' mental health. Nurses' stress levels can decrease after attending mindfulness training [16]. After mindfulness training, employees' mental health has proven effective in increasing service commitment to customers and the community [15], [17]. The authors also developed the mindfulness intervention guide to optimize self-love for maintaining students' mental health [18].

Based on the explanation regarding the effectiveness of mindfulness interventions above in maintaining mental health, the author is interested in conducting research related to the implementation of mindfulness interventions, precisely the mindful inner smile technique, to optimize self-love and preserve the mental health of junior high school students in a private school in Palu, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia.

## 2 Method

The research design was an exploratory pre-post design to determine whether the mindful inner smiles technique was promising enough for a randomized controlled trial.

We used convenience sampling and included 30 junior high school students in a private school in Palu, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia, as well as 10 male and 20 female students from seventh grade.

We assessed the self-love of students through a self-report scale. Self-love is measured using the Self-Love Scale developed by the authors based on the self-love components [6]. This instrument consists of 20 items covering five components of self-love, among others, self-cherishing (e.g., "I appreciate my efforts on the study"), self-acceptance (e.g., "I feel satisfied with myself"), self-persistence (e.g., "I will study again if I fail on the exam"), self-responsibility (e.g., "I can do my homework without someone help"), and self-restraint (e.g., "I can do light workout in to maintain my body fit"). All items are rated on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always). This scale's Cronbach alpha ( $\alpha$ ) was 0,870, indicating good internal consistency.

The mindful inner smile technique is developed based on the practical methods of Mindfulness in Everyday Life [2], which was developed by the author referring to Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) [9]. Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) is a mindfulness-based cognitive therapy with mind-oriented activities that focus on oneself, one of which is meditation. Individuals will be invited to free themselves from negative thought patterns that have been bothering them with Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy MBCT [19]. The mindful inner smile technique could be done in the intervention sessions and independently by participants at home.

The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics to describe the mean levels of service commitment. In addition, differences between pretest and post-test service commitment levels were analyzed with T-Test. We used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21. Furthermore, the subjects' daily journals were analyzed with thematic analysis to evaluate the participants' progress [20].

### 3 Result and Discussion

The results of the mindfulness-based intervention with the inner smile technique showed that the students who participated improved their self-love. The self-love level of each participant increased on the post-test compared to the pretest. On average, there was an improvement from 56,67 (pretest) to 75,77 (post-test), as presented in Table 1. Self-love increased from “Low” to “Moderate” in the self-love category.

**Table 1.** Paired Sample Statistics

Variable	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1 SelfLovePretest	56.6667	30	11.16130	2.03777
SelfLovePosttest	75.7667	30	11.04749	2.01699

Further, the T-Test also showed that the students' self-love levels were significantly higher in the post-test compared with the pretest ( $z = -7,761$ ,  $p = 0,001$ ). Table 2 presents the students' self-love levels.

**Table 2.** Paired Sample Test

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev	Paired Differences		t	df	Significance		
			Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference			One-Sided p	Two-Sided p	
				Lower					Upper
Pair 1 SelfLove Pretest – SelfLove Posttest	19.100	13.47885	2.4608	-14.06692	7.76	29	<.001	<.001	

The students showed several changes, including increased self-love components such as self-cherishing, self-acceptance, self-persistence, self-responsibility, and self-

restraint. In general, self-love was not only about loving oneself but also about loving others.

Self-cherishing restrained the students from doing bad things. When the students mentioned cherishing their bodies, they said they would not harm them. Protecting oneself means not doing things that hurt one's dignity. Taking care of oneself meant controlling stress, not feeling forced into decisions, and adapting to prevent emotions from getting out of control. Self-love could help people accept their own lust and/or control it. One participant reported that he did not fool around with his classmates. He thought he resisted lust and, therefore, loved himself. Self-persistence would restrain them from doing things beyond their bottom line and boundaries, violating principles in the school environment.

Specifically, mindful breathing is the basis of practice in the mindfulness technique. This technique invites students to get acquainted and reconcile with their breath. Guidance and counseling teachers can explain and provide examples of correct and effective breathing techniques. This mindful breathing technique can be done with relaxation music to help students become more focused and concentrated [2]

Thich Nhat Hanh, the father of mindfulness, said that breathing can calm our bodies and make us smile happily [14]. The following are the steps of the mindful inner smile technique [2] :

- a. The Guidance and Counselling teacher asks students to sit relaxed. They sit in an upright chair, close their eyes, and take a long, slow breath.
- b. Students are directed to focus and feel the air flow entering their nasal cavity, instilling awareness in their minds that they are breathing. They exhale slowly and feel the flow of air coming out of their noses.
- c. Students are invited to repeat slowly and consciously. If thoughts and feelings suddenly arise and are distracting, the teacher can ask students to accept them as they are without judging, after which students can return to focusing on their breathing.
- d. When exhaling, the Guidance and Counselling teacher can invite students to smile gently.
- e. Students are invited to smile, breathe again, and do it slowly.

The following result of this research is an analysis of the participants' daily journal of mindful inner smile technique. Seventeen participants reported practicing the mindful inner smile technique in their daily lives since the start of the intervention, according to their daily journals. They practiced the mindful inner smile technique 2-3 times daily if they felt stressed, worried, and insecure. As an illustration, one of the participants (subject 11) reported on her experience with the mindful inner smile technique: "At that time, I was feeling insecure and worried when I do the exam. And then I take deep breaths and smile, then I feel better and calm. It could be a good thing to practice every day".

Taking deep breaths can help someone to focus, calm down, and be more mindful [2]. This is in line with [21] who stated that the success of using mindfulness techniques is related to daily practice. Every individual can be mindful, especially when consciously carrying out behavior. On the other hand, a person's capacity to remain mindful is an ability that can also be learned. Mindfulness can also be viewed as a state or skill, including a series of situationally specific skills that are not permanent and can be developed through intervention, training, and practice in daily life [11]. This state of mindfulness occurs when a person focuses on a particular experience with acceptance and curiosity.

Specifically, mindfulness interventions, precisely the mindful inner smile technique in this study, can increase the students' mindfulness state. The application of this technique, followed by the practice of this mindfulness technique in everyday life, can optimize self-love in students as the participants in this study. Self-love is not interpreted as fulfilling everything somebody wants, especially if they are useless. Conversely, this concept encourages someone to recognize and accept themselves and then treat themselves well and as they are. Self-love is a state of self-appreciation that grows from actions that support physical, psychological, and spiritual growth. The purpose of self-love is for individuals to respect themselves so that optimal self-development is achieved [5], [6]

The results of this study are in line with the results of previous studies conducted by [22], which show that the provision of structured and systematic psychoeducation has proven to be effective in improving the mental health of clients who experience psychological disorders and mental health of family members who accompanied him during treatment. The results of this study are also in line with the results of previous studies conducted by [23], who found that mindfulness-based e-mental health interventions were effective in reducing the level of psychological distress and anxiety symptoms, as well as increasing self-efficacy in adult individuals in Germany during the Covid-19 pandemic period. Furthermore, the results of this study were also strengthened by previous studies conducted by [24], which show that psychological intervention based on mindfulness has proven effective in reducing work stress and improving employee mental health.

Previous studies that the author has conducted have also proven the effectiveness of providing mindfulness interventions in maintaining participants' mental health. Nurses' stress levels can decrease after attending mindfulness training [16]. After mindfulness training, mental health maintenance in telecommunications service providers' employees has proven effective in increasing service commitment to customers and the community [17]

Specifically, optimizing self-love helps maintain mental health because it makes it easier for someone to think positively, making daily life more manageable and fun. Individuals can focus more on their life goals and feel safe, comfortable, and calm when socializing with others around them [6]. The students are more able to love

themselves, marked by solid self-awareness of their thoughts, feelings, and behavior, a strong appreciation for themselves, strong self-confidence, and concern for caring for themselves, both physically and mentally.

Optimal self-love improves students' mental health by helping them think positively, accept feelings, and manage their behavior more effectively. It can also impact more awake physical health. Finally, students can follow the learning process and academic and organizational activities in their daily lives well and smoothly.

One limitation of our explorative study is the small sample size and the need for a control group. Therefore, it is still being determined if the self-love level is due to our interventions or other factors such as teacher and parent support, the school climate, and the environment. Another area for improvement in our study is the limited duration of the intervention. Our intervention was only given at two meetings as it had to enable the students to perform their activities at school. On the one hand, such a condition may limit the effects of mindfulness intervention.

For future research, we recommend using a control group and increasing the sample size to reach more firm conclusions about the effectiveness of the mindfulness intervention. Also, a follow-up measurement is needed to understand the longer-term benefit of practicing mindfulness. Applying the intervention to the other school levels in Indonesia might give information about the generalizability of the findings. Finally, it would be interesting to know which aspects of self-love are improved, mainly because of the intervention.

The findings of this research provide implications for related parties. Mindfulness interventions, especially mindful inner peace techniques, are expected to be used, limited by guidance and counseling teachers and students, to maintain daily mental health.

## **4 Conclusion**

Based on the research that has been previously explained, it can be concluded that mental health in students can be developed through efforts to optimize self-love using the mindful inner peace technique.

Students need to do informal mindfulness exercises regularly and regularly in daily life. Internalizing mindfulness in school also needs to be done by making slogans/taglines, artifacts, and yells with mindfulness themes to facilitate students' remembering and understanding of mindfulness. Simple mindfulness, such as the mindful inner smile technique, can also be practiced by students and teachers together, for example, before learning, both luring and online.

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