

IMPACTS OF MINDFULNESS ON CONCENTRATION: A SELF-REPORT OF A 20-DAY PRACTICE OF MEDITATIVE WALKING

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ABSTRACT

Mindfulness is originally a concept in Buddhism and has been widely used to improve mental state around the world. Meditative walking, a type of mindfulness practice, is a widespread practice. The main aim of the research is to find how a 20-day practice of mindfulness can improve the practitioners' concentration. A self-report method was employed. The author reflected on his practices and experiences within a total of 20 days of mindfulness practice by meditative walking at night for 20 min (from 8 to 8.20 pm) every day. He made notes on every single happenstance that he was aware of. The primary assessment was through daily monitoring of increased mindfulness and other internal and external factors influencing the practice. Findings show that regular mindfulness practice improved the concentration level. Specifically, in the first 2 days, the practitioner kept concentration for about 2–3 min. On day 5, the concentration level increased up to 7 min. It kept growing to 17 min on day 15. Furthermore, on the final 5 days, the concentration continued to grow and reached the level of 20 min on the last day. Implications of mindfulness practice for concentration are discussed.

Keywords: Concentration, Meditation, Meditative walking, Mindfulness, Observation.

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INTRODUCTION

Mindfulness

Mindfulness has been a growing research interest in many disciplines. In Western cultures, mindfulness has two main branches with distinct definitions (Pirson *et al.*, 2018). In the meditative approach, which is stated in Buddhist texts, mindfulness is generally defined as a mental state of being conscious and aware of things in the present (Bodhi, 2013). Practicing mindfulness is a process of observing emotion, bodily sensation, environment, and the mind (Creswell, 2017; Parsons *et al.*, 2022). Any mental and affective occurrences should not be judged (Baer, 2003). In other words, the practitioners should not label the occurrences, such as anger, good, or bad (Goldberg *et al.*, 2022). Mindfulness practice should not be considered "specific active controls" but acceptance of experienced phenomena as they are (Bishop *et al.*, 2004). Unlike the meditative approach, the socio-cognitive approach, introduced by Langer *et al.* (1978), is deviant from the original concept and excludes the component of meditation. Accordingly, mindfulness is defined "as a way of cognitive functioning that focuses on openness to new information, the engagement with the environment, and the construction of novel distinctions" (Thiedmann *et al.*, 2025, p. 1558).

Whatever the approach is, the meditative and sociocognitive approaches share a common feature: engagement with the present (Pirson *et al.*, 2018). In mindfulness practice, the practitioner is supposed not to trace the past or think of the future. Their concentration on the presence of what is happening in both the surrounding and inside themselves is believed to release them from sufferings experienced in the past and unrealistic desires (Li *et al.*, 2025; Sizoo & Kuiper, 2017). Within the scope of this study, meditative walking is practiced; thus, the meditative approach is used to frame the study.

Regular mindfulness practice is supposed to benefit the practitioners greatly. One well-documented advantage is that it may contribute to the balance of the mind and regulate negative states that can occur when contacts and collisions can cause the living beings to lose balance, probably leading to inappropriate behavior (Pagni *et al.*, 2023). Therefore, mindfulness practice has been proven to reduce psycho-

emotional problems, such as stress (Dark-Freudeman *et al.*, 2022), anxiety, and depression (Querstret *et al.*, 2020).

A connection between the body and the mind is well-documented in the literature. When the body, in each step of practice, focuses on the breath, the practitioner's mind is entirely aware and alert without being influenced by external factors (Pernet *et al.*, 2021). During mindfulness practice, if the practitioner loses control of their mind, they are influenced by external factors, such as seeing someone passing by and immediately looking at that person. This means they no longer focus on the steps and breathing to perceive reality but are drawn by another external factor (Fox *et al.*, 2014; 2016). When the mind is drawn, the body is also immediately attracted to that thing and therefore is distracted from the presence. Therefore, practicing mindfulness of the body may also result in the mindfulness of the mind in a certain sense that the practitioner should experience rather than learn about it (Ong *et al.*, 2014).

Intersection between mindfulness and meditation

The intersection between mindfulness and meditation has been a topic of debate. As stated earlier, there are two main schools of thought about mindfulness. However, within the Buddhist discourse, the scope of this study, meditation, and mindfulness intersect at some points (Berry *et al.*, 2020). Meditation is generally known as a practice of being still. During meditation, the practitioner concentrates on one thing (e.g., breath, bodily sensation, and mind). They are recommended to focus their attention on the physical, affective, and cognitive emergences embodied. The ultimate purpose of meditation is for knowledge cultivation or enlightenment (Fredrickson *et al.*, 2017; Kabat-Zinn, 2003). In contrast, in mindfulness, the practitioner notices not only the internal phenomena but also happenstances in the surroundings (Donald *et al.*, 2019). The ultimate aim of mindfulness is happiness and well-being, sometimes considered a coping strategy for psycho-emotional crisis (Dark-Freudeman *et al.*, 2022; Querstret *et al.*, 2020).

It is important to address here that mindfulness and meditation are intersected. Acknowledging the intersection between these two interrelated practices, many Buddhists and scientists have recommended meditative walking for several reasons (Davis *et al.*,

2022; La Forge, 2016). First, meditative walking is more accessible for busy people or those new to the Buddha's path (Davis *et al.*, 2022). If a person has a disturbed mind, sitting still for 15–30 min is difficult because they have never known how to control their mind. Therefore, encouraging, facilitating, and promoting practitioners to achieve results in their practice and walking meditation quickly are a suitable and easy-to-practice method. Second, practicing walking meditation may make it easier for practitioners to monitor external objects (La Forge, 2005; 2016).

The distinction between meditation and meditative walking is acknowledged. According to several researchers (e.g., Edwards *et al.*, 2018; Gunaratana, 2002; Ludwig & Kabat-Zinn, 2008), when a meditator generally sits still and closes their eyes, the mental factors at this time have arisen; that is, thoughts in the past and future usually arise objectively in daily life. However, when practicing meditative walking, the practitioner does not necessarily have to keep their eyes closed to focus on one thing. In meditative walking, instead, they turn their concentration to their footsteps and breaths (Xiong & Doraismany, 2009). In addition, the mind must be mindful of monitoring the breath by counting, that is, the internal objects. Through monitoring and controlling these objects, practitioners can recognize their practice's progress at each stage. Recognizing progress or regression in practice will help practitioners adjust their practice methods appropriately to achieve improvement in the future.

Although mindfulness is originally a concept in Buddhism, the practice of mindfulness has gone beyond the boundaries of religion. As the Dalai Lama & Abrams (2016) put it, mindfulness can bring about well-being, a fundamental need of human beings. Accordingly, happiness is a fundamental in life that everyone seeks to have. "Whether one believes in religion or not, whether one believes in this religion or that religion, we are seeking something better in life" (p. 15).

Despite the assumed benefits and widespread practice of mindfulness, there is little empirical evidence about the effects of mindfulness. To fill this gap, this study aims to examine the impacts of mindfulness on concentration. Regarding the recommended benefits of mindfulness mentioned in the current literature, mindfulness shows its positive influence on practitioners' concentration. Considering the importance of concentration in work and life, this study is timely. Its findings will provide implications for increasing concentration. Given that mindfulness practice is voluntary and a personal choice, this study employs a self-report method in which the author reflects on his own practices and experiences.

RESEARCH METHODS

Considering the characteristics of mindfulness practice and its effects, the researcher employed a self-report method. He practiced mindfulness for 20 days and reported its effects on well-being and concentration (Appendix 1). During the 20 days, the practice focused mainly on 20-min meditative walking in the evening as the daytime was his study time. During his practice, he made notes on every single emotional and mental occurrence he experienced and his awareness of the happenstances in the environment. The notes were both quantitative and qualitative. For the quantitative part, the number of times the researcher's breath was monitored, manifesting the process of mind control or mindfulness. His concentration time and distraction time were recorded. The researcher's qualitative notes were mainly on what distractors were and how he was distracted. The practice time and location remained unchanged during the study to ensure research reliability and validity.

RESULTS

The collected data about the mindfulness practice shows that the level of concentration gradually and significantly improved during the 20 days (Fig. 1). Specifically, in the first 2 days, the practitioner could maintain concentration for about 2–3 min, accounting for around 10% of the total time of practice days. In the next 4 days, the level of concentration gradually developed and reached nearly 7–8 min on the 6th day, constituting approximately 25% of the total practice days before it fell slightly on the 7th day. From day 8 to day 15, the practitioner's concentration increased relatively steadily and reached 17 min on the 15th day, making up for 85% of the total time of practice per day. In the final 4 days, the level of concentration fluctuated marginally before it reached the level of 20 min on the 20th day. Overall, the concentration degree significantly improved during the practitioner's regular practice of 20 min/day.

An analysis of the qualitative data shows some themes. First, the concentration level was influenced by external factors. Given that external factors are inevitable in meditative walking, the recognized external factors were sounds made by passers-by, natural sounds, and unexpectedly arising phenomena. On the 1st day, some passers-by, although unfamiliar, were unaware of the practitioner's practice, greeting and maintaining a short conversation, generally spanning 1–2 min. Some of them were professors; regarding courtesy, the practitioners stopped for a while and did the greeting. In terms of natural sounds, only loud noises could distract the practitioner during his practice. As the practitioner practiced meditative walking in the evening, he was easily shocked by unexpectedly arising phenomena, such as running animals.

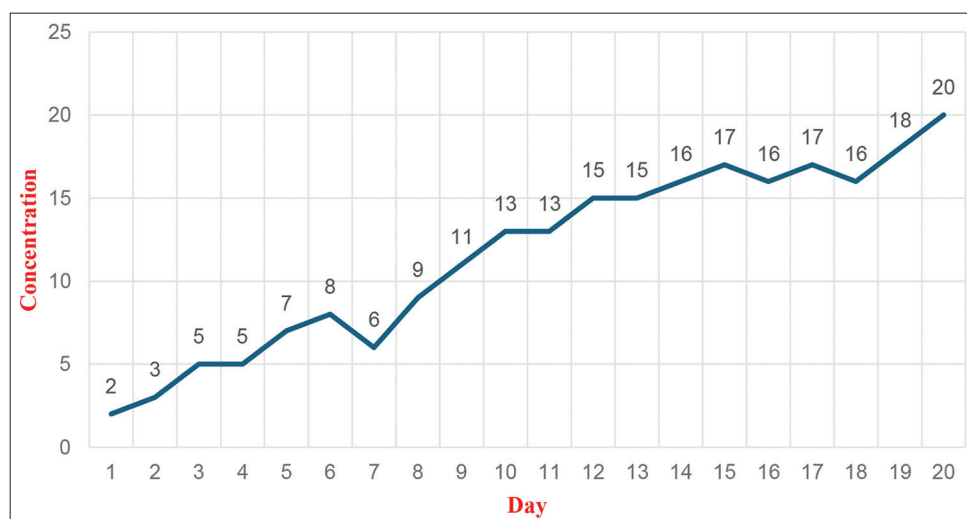


Fig. 1: Growth in concentration during the 20-day mindfulness practice

However, on the following days, from his familiarity with the site, he chose to practice meditative walking in a silent place, where few people showed up. Thus, the distraction decreased.

The second theme was the effects of internal factors on the practitioner's concentration. During the 20-day practice, some issues that the practitioner experienced and was experiencing emerged in his mind. His memory of family members and events was recalled, and most prominently, his worries about his thesis arose when his mind was silent.

Surprisingly, there was an interaction between internal and external factors affecting his concentration. The interaction was internally driven or externally driven. Regarding the externally driven interaction, he responded that the external factors distracted him from focusing on his observation. He was sometimes led by the passers-by and immersed in communicating with them, making him forget that he was practicing mindfulness. The internally-driven force refers to his turn to concentrate on the present after a specific distraction. However, as reported earlier, in the final days, the influence of external factors decreased; thus, the interaction between external and internal factors fell gradually during the practice.

In summary, although the practitioner's concentration on the present increased according to his notes, he was sometimes distracted by arising issues in the environment and was led by his experiences, occasionally resulting in pauses in his awareness and observation during his meditative walking. The interaction between internal and external factors was also recorded with a certain impact on the practitioner's concentration.

DISCUSSION

Research has shown that when there is more influence from external factors, the internal factor, that is, the mindfulness of the practitioner, will decrease. On the contrary, when the practitioner carefully observes and pays attention to each step and breath, the concentration and control of internal factors increase, and the external factor decreases significantly. Obviously, in the process of practicing, choosing the right place and time is extremely important. For example, a practitioner who prefers a quiet spot in the evening to practice will give better results than someone who chooses a noisy place because the influence of external objects will make it impossible for the practitioner to achieve the desired results. In addition, other factors, such as weather and environmental factors, also contribute to the continuous control of mindfulness. When it is windy, the body becomes colder, and the follower finds it more challenging to focus on counting breaths and steps. Instead, the practice will go more smoothly if it is a sunny and dry day. Therefore, the practitioner must carefully select and control all internal and external factors to achieve the ultimate practice.

Continuity and sustainability over a long period also showed positive results in the evident growth of mindfulness maintenance. In the 1st day, mindfulness maintenance was relatively low, only within the range of 3–5 min, accounting for 10% of the total number of practice days. Then, it improved to 5–7 min starting from the 3rd day onward, accounting for 25% of the practice days. The research results showed that mindfulness was enhanced when the practitioner had continuity and stability in his practice, making concentration an opportunity to develop every day. Next, the time of mindfulness maintenance increased to 5–10 min, which accounted for 40% of the practice days and was also the highest percentage. This shows that the average mindfulness practice of a beginner with this method will be most effective at 5–10 min, which is also the average index in practice. Finally, in the time range of 5–15 min, this number accounts for 25%. Maintaining mindfulness continuously and regularly for beginners will take more work. In summary, preserving mindfulness by walking or sitting meditation every day will help improve the practitioner's concentration and awareness in practice.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusion suggests that mindfulness practice is influenced by internal and external factors

both in terms of the mind and the conditions of the surrounding environment. In addition, continuity and sustainability, as well as maintaining practice, will be the decisive factors in helping practitioners achieve the purpose of practice. To succeed in mindfulness practice, practitioners must be careful when choosing external conditions and maintaining stability and continuity.

This study shows potential limitations. First, using the researcher's self-reports as a data collection method, this study shows a lack of generalizability and subject-driven data. Future research can use a larger sample size and data triangulation to increase research reliability and generalizability. Second, although the study was longitudinal, this scope mainly focused on the effects of a 20-day practice on concentration. Research on related issues, such as well-being, may provide more implications for the practice of mindfulness.

BIONOTE

Thang Van Bui is a Buddhist monk. He obtained his master's degree in Comparative Religion from Nalanda University, Rajgir, Bihar, India. He is now a PhD candidate in philosophy. He does research on Buddhist philosophy, no-self, and mindfulness.

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Date	Pattern (Left and Right)	Place (controlled)	External factors	Internal factors	Results
September 10, 2024	2 steps (Left and Right)	Hostel courtyard	- Focused on steps at 1 min only - Watched the steps up and down - Listened to music	- Stated of peace and balance - Focused on listening to recognitive the sound - Focused on listening to know the sound - Stay of peace and balance	- Felt happy - Temporarily forgot negative experiences - Was not distracted from schoolwork by soft noise in the surrounding - Temporarily forgot negative hustles and bustles in life
September 11, 2024	2 steps (Left and Right)	Hostel courtyard	- Focused on steps at 2-4 min. - Listened to music from afar		
September 12, 2024	2 steps (Left and Right)	Hostel courtyard	- Focused on steps at 3-7 min. - Listened to the sound of the wind		
September 13, 2024	2 steps (Left and Right)	Hostel courtyard	- Focused on steps at 5-7 min. - Saw the ant - Felt the cold wind - Heard footsteps from afar	- Avoided trampling - Felt comfortable body - Known someone was coming.	- Felt the presence of myself - Thought positively
September 14, 2024	2 steps (Left and Right)	Hostel courtyard	- Heard the wind blowing through my ears. - Focused on steps at 5-8 min. - Listened to the sound of cars running in the distance.	- Known someone is coming - Felt the comfort through the pores	- Was not distracted from school work by soft noise in the surrounding - Be aware at present
September 15, 2024	2 steps (Left and Right)	Hostel courtyard	- Focused on steps at 5-7 min. - Tracked steps and breathing for 5 min. - Heard the sound of insects around	- Felt peace and serenity - Remembered childhood memories in the past.	- Felt the presence of myself - Thought positively
September 16, 2024	2 steps (Left and Right)	Outside hostel (Rainy day)	- Focused on steps from 5 to 10 min. - Listened echo somewhere. - Heard the sound of the insects	- Associated with the performance event. - Memorial like that when I was a child.	- Felt the presence of myself - Thought positively
September 17, 2024	2 steps	Outside hostel	- Focused on steps from 5 to 12 min. - Saw the ants	- Avoided stepping on them. - Felt cool body and at peace.	- Temporarily forgot negative experiences
September 18, 2024	2 steps	Outside hostel	- Paid attention to steps (counting) - Focused on steps from 7 to 13 min.	- Listened only and focused on my steps	- Was not distracted from schoolwork by soft noise in the surroundings.
September 19, 2024	2 steps	Outside hostel	- Listened insect sound - Focused on steps at 5-15 min. - Listened to music from further side	- Mind arisen some memorials in the past like missing the country. - Tried to avoid pushing them.	- Felt the presence of myself - Thought positively
September 20, 2024	2 steps	Outside hostel	- Saw the ant on the ground - Focused on steps at 5-16 min.	- Felt peace and bliss - Missed hometown	- Thought positively - Felt happy
September 21, 2024	3 steps (leaving, moving, down)	Outside hostel	- Heard windy - Focused on steps and breath at 5-17 min. - Felt a windy blow	- Felt peace and bliss in mind - Body becomes cool - Known some boys coming	- Concentration increased - Thought positively
September 22, 2024	3 steps (leaving, moving, down)	Outside hostel	- Heard the sound of talking of someone - Focused on steps at 5-15 min - Listened to the echo from afar	- To be here and now - Know that a festival happening	- Was not distracted from schoolwork by soft noise in the surroundings.
September 23, 2024	3 steps (leaving, moving, down)	Outside hostel	- Focused on steps at 5-17 min. - Saw an ant underground - Windy felt	- Experienced in peace and balance. - Focused on listening to know the sound	- Felt happy - Temporarily forgot negative experiences
September 24, 2024	3 steps (leaving moving down)	Outside hostel	- Focused on steps from 5 to 15 min. - Saw the ant underground - Windy felt through the body	- Experienced of peace and balance - Focused on listening to the cognitive sound	- Felt comfortable - Temporarily forgot negative hustles and bustles in life. - Felt the presence of myself