

Developing a Mindfulness Program for Filipino Children

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Abstract

Previous studies established that mindfulness is an effective strategy in promoting social and emotional learning and holistic development of children, which is vital to academic and life success. Thus, this study explored the development of a mindfulness program for preschool-aged children. The researcher developed and implemented a six-week mindfulness program called *Alumana* for 28 preschool children aged 4-6 years old. Results were analyzed through document analysis of the facilitator's logs and thematic analysis of parents' responses in open-ended interviews. Findings showed that the participants gradually transitioned from being hesitant during the first weeks of the mindfulness-based activities to being responsive and enthusiastic through various strategies towards the end of the program. The significance of incorporating children's responses to make the program more developmentally appropriate and engaging for the children is highlighted in the study. The use of props and relatable activities is important to produce a more engaging program for young children. Findings also present the perceived benefits in learning and the holistic development of the children according to the participants' parents and age-appropriate mindfulness program in a local context is applicable in preschool. Through this study, implementing a more mindfulness program in a local context could be further examined for young Filipino children.

Keywords: mindfulness, mindfulness program, preschool children

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Introduction

The importance of developing competencies earlier for children to have a more stable life in their later years explains the growing interest in understanding the malleability and adaptability associated with this period of development (Flook et al., 2015). In the Philippines, child development as a stage is accentuated as Filipino children are part of the most vulnerable population groups in society with 31.4 % belonging to families of low socio-economic status (Philippine Statistics Office, n.d.). The geographical location of the country also exacerbates the vulnerability of Filipino children as it is prone to natural disasters. Maclean et al. (2016) noted that children who experience one or more natural disasters by age 5 might have an increased risk of mental health problems, particularly anxiety disorders. Unfortunately, subsequent displacement due to war and conflicts in some parts of the country also increases the vulnerability of Filipino children. As an example, conflict in Marawi City caused as many as 100,000 families to flee their homes and half of them manifested mental health issues during the conflict (World Health Organization, 2021).

In addition, the unprecedented worldwide experience of the COVID-19 pandemic also increased children's susceptibility as negative effects to children and their caregivers' mental health have also been identified (Imran et al., 2020). Negative impacts observed during the pandemic in younger children include more fussing or whining, struggling to focus or engage in play, and even becoming more aggressive (Imran et al., 2020). These adverse effects were also connected to related adults as they experience financial, physical, and mental stress which in turn affect the quality of support given to the children and their behavioral concerns during the pandemic (Calvano et al., 2021).

The ever-changing environment and situation of children in the Philippines has become more aggravated during the COVID-19 pandemic and has reciprocal effects on their development during their foundational years. Because of this fundamental stage of development, more programs and interventions are being suggested for children to have better opportunities later in life (Nieminen & Sajaniemi, 2016). Recently, mindfulness practice has been continuously studied to be integrated into programs specifically for children. The substantial interest in mindfulness is evident in how the community of scholars seeks to investigate methods of integrating mindfulness activities into various interventions and

programs (Bishop et al., 2004). Berti and Cigala (2020) furthermore explained that contemplative practices such as mindfulness can enhance socio-emotional competence as it emphasize self-awareness, emotional regulation, and emotional recognition.

Kabat-Zinn (1990) defines mindfulness as “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experiences moment by moment” (p. 4). As mindfulness requires a non-judgmental, non-striving, and non-competitive perspective with everyday experiences, children’s “beginner’s minds” are fit to have these types of intervention programs (Hooker & Fodor, 2008). The plasticity and the developing brain of children become a sound motive to start mindfulness programs as well (Lyons & DeLange, 2016; Nieminen & Sajaniemi, 2016).

Given the qualifying characteristics of children as eligible participants and the mindfulness intervention program’s cost-effective implementation in schools, adaptation becomes easier as the mode of implementing the practice is also not significantly different from the practice for adults (Hooker & Fodor, 2008). Like its positive effects on adults, tremendous effects have likewise been identified on how mindfulness helps children’s development. In a literature review by Lyons and DeLange in 2016, existing research explains the impacts of mindfulness training in different areas such as self-control, executive function, and emotional regulation. Mindfulness practice in a non-clinical setting such as school has shown positive impacts on a child’s academic performance and school behavior (Lu et al., 2017). Contrary to misconceptions that mindfulness is only for fostering calmness and relaxation, Lyons and DeLange (2016) explained in their study the need to conduct mindfulness for children as it is beneficial in improving conscious control over one’s attention, actions, and emotions. At the same time, it diminishes automatic responses of an individual especially for children in a school setting.

Effects on children after implementing mindfulness programs are not limited to cognitive development. Behavioral regulation has also been identified as another area that was positively influenced in children. In the literature review by Bockmann and Yu (2022), they identified 10 studies that indicated positive changes in the behavioral regulation of young children that note a decrease in hyperactivity, aggression, behavioral problems, and an increase in impulse control. Particular to one study, participation in mindfulness activity even just for 15 minutes (e.g. breathwork, yoga, and sensory awareness) effectively help children

to stop an “automatic impulsive response” and choose more “intentional and deliberate response” (Lim & Qu, 2017, as cited in Bockmann & Yu, 2022, p. 6).

Despite these studies that exhibit positive effect on children’s cognitive, behavioral, and emotional development, Flook et al. (2015), Lyons and DeLange (2016), and Bockmann and Yu (2022) still conclude that there is a lack of research that can highlight mindfulness for children, especially in their early years. Underlying mechanisms and even program characteristics of existing mindfulness programs that promote various beneficial effects still need to be further examined (Zelazo & Lyons, 2011). Additionally, the lack of empirical studies for younger preschool children remains to be a gap in the existing literature (Flook et al., 2015). In the recent literature review by Bockmann and Yu (2022), research regarding non-secular mindfulness practices particularly in schools still focused on older children, adolescents, and adults. Additional studies are still warranted to further explore the impacts of mindfulness programs for children, and highlighted components of development are being explored especially for younger children.

Another gap in the literature recommended by recent studies to be explored is the involvement of parents and families in mindfulness programs implemented. Nieminen and Sajaniemi (2016) recommended an effective mindfulness program for very young children that involves everyday moments, including those that occur at home, which is also important in understanding the implemented program’s possible effects on the children’s behaviors. Due to the lack of children’s self-evaluation, parents may provide information on how the mindfulness program has possibly affected the children’s behaviors through observation. Lyons and Delange (2016) similarly posited in their study the importance of involving parents in implementing mindfulness programs for children as they have a special role in supporting the mindfulness practice of children and youth. Thus, identifying parents’ perceptions of their children’s participation in a mindfulness program is another way to examine the positive outcomes of mindfulness programs to children and its applicability not only in schools but also at home.

Method

Various program adaptations for children may create different impacts on the

implementation of the program as it provides a better understanding of the underlying effects of the mindfulness program (Viglas, 2015). The findings of the study by Alampay et al. (2019) in the Philippines suggested that mindfulness's suitability in the Filipino cultural context needs to be further analyzed by conducting studies to make it "developmentally appropriate to the cognitive capacities of children" (para. 51). Given the importance of integrating mindfulness practice to child development programs and the child's ever-changing environment and situation, particularly in the Philippines, this study aims to address the gap in exploring a local developmentally appropriate program with integrated mindfulness concepts and principles that primarily caters to children's development, supported by children's experiences of the program. In addition, the feasibility of the designed mindfulness program to be implemented in preschool children and its applicability according to parents will be explored to provide additional knowledge in the existing literature. Ultimately, this study's objective is to answer the following questions:

1. What are the children's experiences and responses that can help in developing a mindfulness program for Filipino children?
2. How do parents perceive the implemented mindfulness program for children?

Participants

This study was conducted in a non-sectarian private school in Quezon City, Philippines. The selected school offers 11 classes both in the morning and afternoon with an age range of 4-6 years old as of January 2020. Out of the 11 classes, only two classes were randomly

Table 1. *Profile of the Participating Children of the Mindfulness Program*

Characteristics	N*	%
Sex		
Male	16	57%
Female	12	43%
Class		
Afternoon	18	64%
Morning	13	46%
Age as of January 2020		
4 years to 4 years and 11 months	17	61%
5 years to 5 years and 11 months	11	39%

*N=28

selected where the mindfulness program is implemented—one class in the morning and one in the afternoon. A total sample size of 28 participants were selected for the study. Table 1 illustrates details of the participants' sample size, sex, and age.

For the parents' open-ended interviews, a total of ten parents were randomly selected (five from each class) and they agreed to participate in the interviews after the implementation of the program.

Research Process and Data Analysis

The study employed a qualitative methodology to examine the development of a mindfulness group program for preschool children. The research was implemented through a case study design. J. W. Creswell and J. D. Creswell (2018) explain that qualitative research through a case study is a design of inquiry to develop an in-depth analysis of often a program, event, activity, or process involving one or more individuals. The lack of research on a mindfulness program that aims to understand the important strategies and practices in implementing programs (Domitrovich & Greenberg, 2000) will be addressed through the qualitative research design of the study.

After collecting signed consent forms that indicated the objectives of the study, scope of participation, risks and benefits of participation, and data storage management, the researcher conducted an initial non-participative observation of the two classes.

Observation logs of the sessions were also accomplished by the facilitator to vividly capture the implemented activities, children's responses, and daily reflection. Document analysis was conducted on all of the facilitator's session logs. As defined by Bowen (2009), document analysis is "the systematic procedure of reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic material" (p. 27). Its data analysis allows data to be interpreted "to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, as cited in Bowen, 2009, p. 27). Analysis was formulated by determining themes that highlight the striking experiences of the children in activities that are based on mindfulness concepts such as focus and attention, breathing awareness, and mindful sensing. Various implementation experiences were also analyzed as part of the document analysis process.

Noting the importance of capturing the parents' perceived responses to the implemented

mindfulness program, 10 parents of children who participated in the program were interviewed nine weeks after the implementation of the program. Simple random sampling was applied to determine the parents that will be interviewed for both classes through recorded phone calls since face-to-face interviews could not be achieved due to restrictions of Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ). Parents were asked about stories shared by the children about the implemented mindfulness group program, observed behaviors about the children after participating in the intervention program, applicability and feasibility of such program to be extended to schools, and its effects even to them as parents.

For the open-ended interviews, thematic analysis was used for the data analysis. Alhojailan (2012) describes the process of thematic analysis as a strategy to identify possible patterns and themes with the collected data from the responses of the participants. Following the process of thematic analysis after reading the transcripts of interviews, an initial set of salient themes was identified. These themes were further analyzed as needed and transcripts were re-read until all responses' codes were identified to determine the final themes and categories. These themes determine the parents' observed responses of the children with the program, perceived applicability, and benefits of the implemented mindfulness program.

Characteristics of the Implemented Program

The mindfulness group program that was used for this proposed study is specifically designed by the researcher for preschool children and as a mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) Level 1 Certified Facilitator. The *Alumana: A Mindfulness Program for Preschool-aged Children* is an eight-week program consisting of 12 sessions. *Alumana* is a Filipino word loosely defined as paying attention or noticing (Tagalog Lang, n.d.).

In the sessions of the Alumana program, two general mindfulness principles became the guiding principles for the flow of mindfulness concepts: focused attention and open monitoring. Galla et al. (2016) define focused attention as engaging and sustaining moment-to-moment attention on a mental or physical object such as the rhythmic movement of the belly or chest during breathing. Open monitoring on the other hand is integrating mindfulness training programs following initial experience in cultivating focused attention (Galla et al., 2016). In the 12 sessions of the eight-week program, the Alumana mindfulness program

includes sessions 1-6 for focused attention while sessions 7-12 are for open monitoring. Similarly, Weijer-Bergsma et al. (2012) highlighted these mindfulness principles in the MindfulKids program that inculcate bodily awareness, orienting attention, and awareness of breath as the mindfulness objectives of the first few sessions, while the remaining sessions highlight empathy, awareness of thoughts, and even consolidation of all the mindfulness concepts.

Alumana Mindfulness Program Activities and Units

The program is composed of 12 sessions that were implemented for eight weeks and divided into four units with similar mindfulness concepts, themes, and exercises. Each unit is implemented for two weeks with three sessions each. For repetition and instilling practice in the children, each theme is repeated twice per unit with different activities. Table 2 details

Table 2. *Alumana: Mindfulness Group Program*

Session Number (20-30 Minutes each session)	Unit (2 weeks per unit)	Mindfulness Activity	Mindfulness Concept	Other implemented activities related to the unit
1	Understanding Focus and Attention	Smiling meditation	Bodily awareness	Reading of storybook (<i>Puppy Mind</i> by Andrew Jordan Nance), 10 fingers breathing, smiling breathing, bumblebee breathing, listening with intent, quiet listening for 30 seconds, 30-second sitting still, bubble breathing, 30-second sitting still with eyes closed
2		Listening to the bell	Orienting attention, observing sounds	
3		Stopping with the bell	Orienting and sustaining attention, instilling curiosity	
4	Awareness of Breath	Identifying in-breath and out-breath	Awareness of breath	Sitting still while breathing for 30 seconds, smelling the flower and blowing the candle, video-watching of the process of breathing, singing of Lungs Song, sitting still while breathing for 30 seconds, tummy breathing with a stuffed toy, long and short breathing with pinwheel
5		Awareness of length of in-breath and out-breath	Sustaining curiosity, nonjudgmental awareness	
6		Counting the breath with the bell	Sustaining curiosity, nonjudgmental awareness	
7	Mindful with Senses	What did you taste?	Mindful eating	Reading of storybook (<i>The Sound of Silence</i> by Katrina Goldsaito), bumblebee breathing, shoulder breathing, smelling of different scents, mindful eating, looking at different paintings and pictures
8		What did you smell?	Mindful smelling	
9		What did you see?	Mindful seeing	

Note. Mindfulness concepts are adapted from Weijer-Bergsma et al.'s (2014) and Galla et al.'s (2016) implemented mindfulness programs

the mindfulness activities and concepts tackled per session. The last unit, Unit IV: Mindfulness in Daily Living (sessions 10-12), was not implemented due to the cancellation of classes from the initial surge of COVID-19.

The mindfulness activities are adapted from Thich Nhat Hanh's 2011 book titled *Planting Seeds: Practicing Mindfulness with Children*. This book suggests different mindfulness activities generally for children. The researcher adapted the activities by simplifying the process and modifying its appropriateness for young children without losing the objective of the activity. Each session is implemented with a core practice of "sitting breathing", an adaptation of sitting meditation that is more developmentally appropriate for children. This is followed by activity time that introduces various experiences related to the mindfulness concept for each week, questions or sharing time that allows children to recall their experiences and listen to their classmate's responses, the breathing exercise of the day that allows the children to experience developmentally appropriate breathing techniques, and finally, goodbye time to recapitulate the whole experience for each session and prompts to remind them the purpose and intention of the whole practice.

Results

Children's Experiences in Mindfulness Program Activities

The facilitator identified the children's responses and experiences to the Alumana program by recording observations and the children's reactions for every session in both classes. Overlapping themes were identified from the facilitator's logs to describe the overall responses and experiences of the children from the implemented program.

Understanding Focus and Attention

The first unit of the program centers on focus and attention. Various activities were implemented in the first two weeks for the children to understand the importance of recognizing focus and attention. These activities target specific mindfulness concepts such as bodily awareness, orienting attention, observing sounds, sustaining attention, and instilling

Table 3. *Children's Responses and Experiences in Unit 1: Understanding Focus and Attention*

Facilitator's Notable Observations on Children's Responses and Experiences
Being participative after initial hesitations • "Children did the smiling breathing, though some of them hesitated at first." • "The children also effectively tried 30-second sitting/ breathing. One of the children said, 'That's hard!' but eventually became successful in doing the session." • "One of the children who was unresponsive before sat down and listened the whole time." • "More children tried the 10-second quiet listening, children who do not usually answer participated." Relating positive experience with the activities • "<i>Puppy Mind</i> sticks to them as the children share so many experiences with their puppy mind." • "One of the children said that she can hear her heartbeat when they are asked on the things that they can hear while listening with intent." • "Children were also excited to learn the new breathing technique which is the bubble breathing." • "There are children who are mentioning yoga as it reminds them of why it is needed to breathe and sit still." • "One of the children shared how breathing can help in 'concentration.' This child explained that concentrating is when you stop so you can do what you are supposed to do." Repeating the activities • "Children listened attentively in the re-reading of <i>Puppy Mind</i>." • "I tried to let the children do the 30 seconds first as they are still trying to do the 30-second sitting still. It is effective and the children tried doing it again for a second time. The children also became more familiar with the breathing exercises." Need for modification of activities • "There are children who are not following instructions while doing the 30-second sitting still." • "Visual cues also become helpful with the class as they get to follow what is being shown in the picture." • "Questions are needed to be properly sequenced so that they can help in the discussion with the group."

curiosity. Refer to Table 3 for a list of notable observations from the facilitator during this unit.

For the first unit, the facilitator observed that some of the children in both classes hesitated to do the activities at first, such as the smiling breathing activity, since they were not accustomed to this kind of mindfulness exercise. However, as sessions went by, the children became more engaged and started to participate in the program more. Notably, the unresponsive or non-participative children became more active throughout the weeks.

Positive experiences from the activities were also relayed by the children. As an example, using the storybook *Puppy Mind* by Andrew Jordan Nance to discuss focus and attention while understanding how minds tend to wander was a relatable topic for the children,

encouraging them to share many experiences. Another instance was during the activity of listening quietly for 30 seconds, the children were asked after the activity on the things they listened to. One of the responses from the children includes hearing her heartbeat while doing the activity. Other concepts such as “yoga” and “concentration” were also mentioned by the children as they shared their positive experiences related to the activities.

Furthermore, the children also became more interested in the various activities used in the program as these were also repeated in the succeeding sessions. It can be noted that through repeating the activities, they become more interested in the implementation of the program. This was evident as they grew more familiar with the activities involved in each session.

Modification of activities was also noted based on children’s responses. The strategy in implementing sitting still for 30 seconds had been changed based on the children’s responses while they executed it. After one child asked for permission not to close his eyes when doing the activity, the facilitator determined that a modification had to be made. This led to providing more options such as keeping eyes half-closed, looking at the floor, or looking at the tip of their nose. It is noted that allowing these preferences based on their liking encourages the children to do the activity without hesitation.

The progression of sitting still with eyes closed is implemented extensively for them to practice the core practice of this mindfulness program which is sitting breathing. This prolonged length of practice is supposed to allow the children to do the activity and to further explore the mindfulness concept of focus and attention. As observed, children experienced difficulty in performing the activity for 60 seconds, so it was reverted to 30 seconds.

Awareness of Breath

As Unit 2 focused on Breath Awareness, several activities allowed the children to anchor their moment-to-moment experiences to their breath. By doing so, the children were able to recognize their in-breath and out-breath better. Some of the facilitator’s notable observations are recorded in Table 4.

Continuous participation was observed during the second unit. When the children were asked about their experiences in sitting breathing, one of them noted how her heartbeat “goes up and down.” With the continuation of the second unit, breath awareness, more sets of activities that highlight breathing activities while sustaining curiosity and instilling non-

Table 4. *Children's Responses and Experiences in Unit 2: Awareness of Breath*

Facilitator's Notable Observations on Children's Responses and Experiences
Continuous participation • "One of the children mentioned that her heartbeat goes up and down." • "Everyone enjoyed and tried the tummy breathing with a stuffed toy." • "One of the children said that he used to 'concentrate' and 'focus' to breathe." Interest in implemented songs and storybooks • "Children are still interested in the lungs song." • "The children listen attentively to the story." • "Even though there are adults going around inside and outside the classroom, all of the children are attentively listening to the story of the book." Adjusting the activities based on personal preferences • "Focusing through the sounds help the children with their breathing." • "There are children who did the breathing exercises while closing their eyes at the start of the activity." Need for modification of activities • "During sitting breathing prompts where also provided." • "Management becomes easier as the children are guided with the activities that have prompts." • "It can still be seen how other children are really doing the sitting breathing. However, some children tend not to be focused with the activities because of the other children."

judgmental awareness were implemented. Activities for this week include tummy breathing with a stuffed toy, long and short breathing, and listening to the sound of the bell. Children were observed to have continuous participation as they also tried to relate their experiences with words such as "concentrate" and "focus."

The children also showed interest in using age-appropriate materials and activities related to mindfulness concepts. For example, in the activity of identifying long and short breathing, using props such as a pinwheel also engaged the children in understanding the mindfulness concept with familiar material. The use of a song to further demonstrate the process of breathing that involves body parts such as the lungs is also another helpful strategy. The song explained to them that as they breathe in, the lungs grow bigger, and then they become smaller as they breathe out. Because of this, children are more interested in this process and frequently request this song to be sung. Reading the storybook *The Sound of Silence* by Katrina Goldsaito to the children also became useful in explaining the mindfulness concept of finding silence with the sounds in the environment. Observably, the children were very attentive during read-aloud sessions.

As the children grew accustomed to the various activities implemented for this unit, they also adjusted the activities themselves based on their personal preferences. For instance, the children explained how they become more focused by listening to the sounds while breathing. Other children also expressed how they prefer closing their eyes for them to do the breathing exercise.

Similar to Unit 1, the children's responses also highlight the need to modify activities. These modifications made the participants more engaged through various strategies that were employed. For example, in the sitting breathing exercises, after the children were able to sit still for a set amount of time, the facilitator realized the importance of providing prompts for the children as some of them were still having difficulty doing the breathing activities. These prompts were made to guide the children in what they can do while they are doing the sitting breathing. More pauses and breaks were also given for them to explore the experiences in breathing activities longer. The prompts that were given to the children were age-appropriate cues and guides that allowed them to focus and be attentive to certain body experiences (e.g. "touching your tummy and feeling it while breathing") or stimuli found in the environment (e.g. "feeling the wind from the fan"). These have become useful for the children to understand what to do while doing sitting breathing. This has allowed easier facilitation as it is the core practice of the program.

Mindful with Senses

The third unit is called Mindful with Senses which includes activities that focus on how children can be mindful with their senses of sight, smell, and taste. Since the sense of hearing had already been tapped in the first unit of the program, activities did not revolve around it. However, mindful listening was still included with the core practice of sitting breathing. Much like in the previous units, the facilitator observed and noted the children's responses. Table 5 notes some of these observations.

In the final weeks of implementing the activities, the children were observed to actively participate in trying the activities in every session that center on various senses such as the senses of sight, smell, and taste. Main activities include mindful eating, identifying smells based on a picture, and drawing the object they are holding. The children also expressed enthusiasm for interactive activities that highlight being mindful with their senses. For

Table 5. *Children's Responses and Experiences in Unit 3: Mindful with Senses*

Facilitator's Notable Observations on Children's Responses and Experiences
Active participation in activities related to senses • "Children are quiet when the focusing on the sounds are done." • "Listening to the sounds attentively makes the children listen and be quiet too." • "The children focused on the fragrances of the various smells." • "Though the activity is just fast, children were able to mention various smells they notice that can be smelled in the picture." • "Some children really paid attention and drew unique fine lines of the leaf and even the holes in the leaf." Familiarity in activities • "Children are more focused with sitting breathing and it is automatic for them to share their experiences every sitting breathing." • "It is automatic for children to share their experiences after our sitting breathing. They are very responsive and try to participate by answering the questions that were posed." Satisfaction in doing the activities • "Children clapped after they are done with sitting breathing. The children were focused in doing it." • "The satisfaction that the children felt after doing the sitting breathing is very delightful to be observed. They get to become more open with the experience." Need for modification of activities • "Everybody got so perked up with the activity. Multiple prompts or reminders were done in order for them to listen." • "Everybody wants to try the activity all at the same time. Some got more excited to try the activities, making it harder to implement."

example, in one activity wherein they guessed the scents in enclosed canisters, the children were very focused on smelling various scents and attempting to identify them. Then, in the sense of sight activity, the children were tasked to draw a leaf by looking at an actual leaf, and they excitedly tried and managed to focus on illustrating the leaf with details like its veins and holes. Another activity for mindful seeing is looking at different paintings and then trying to identify various components that can be found in the painting. The children individually described the sample paintings through their colors, lines, and shapes, even though some of these attributes were not explicitly in the paintings. Some of the children also recognized and identified common and familiar objects seen in the paintings. As a simple activity, children's responses exhibit how they can demonstrate mindful seeing with the sense of sight they have always been using.

An activity that is a developmentally appropriate counterpart of a popular mindfulness activity, the Raisin Exercise, which targets mindful eating was implemented by eating

individually-wrapped chocolate candy. Observations include children being focused on listening to unwrapping the chocolate candy, smelling the chocolate before eating, and letting it touch their lips before eating. This activity allowed the children to try to be more focused on eating a single food, unlike the usual way of doing it.

After the implementation of two complete units and nearing the end of the program, the facilitator observed that the children grew accustomed to mindfulness activities such as sitting breathing as it is usually done every session. The inquiry part serves as the question and answer for the children to reflect on how the breathing activity was also notably automatic for the children to do after they had their breathing exercises and became habitual after doing sitting breathing. This created an opportunity for them to recall what they had done during this activity.

Satisfaction in doing the activities has also been observed as the children completed doing the activities for the concluding weeks of the program. For example, in one of the sessions, as they were able to complete sitting breathing, the children clapped their hands showing that they had accomplished it. This can be noted as a manifestation of how the core practice has been instilled in the children as well.

Similar to the previous units, the children became more familiar with the exercises, but there were still challenges in implementation like in circumstances wherein they would become too excited with the activities. In one of the sessions, the children wanted to try the activity all at once, so the facilitator experienced difficulty in implementing it. To alleviate the situation, the facilitator modified the activity for easier implementation, such as providing multiple prompts or stating reminders to the class.

Shared Stories at Home about the Mindfulness Program

To ascertain the responses of the children in the mindfulness program implemented at home, the facilitator inquired the parents about the experiences that the children shared. According to the parents, some of the prominent mindfulness activities that their children have extended to their homes include reading a book and singing songs specifically taught in the session. Based on the parents' anecdotes, the children also usually remembered the breathing exercises which are part of the core practice of the program. Inhaling and exhaling as an activity were repeatedly shared and practiced by the children at home. The process of sitting breathing was also recognized by the children as they shared the use of the singing

bowl and the stillness needed in doing the practice.

Children do not only remember how to execute the breathing exercises, but they also recall the purpose of the exercise. Several parents have explained that there were instances wherein children used breathing techniques such as inhaling and exhaling in various situations. For example, children have shared that breathing exercises help whenever they feel “mad” or “stressed.” Facing an unwanted situation for the child such as eating food that they do not want is another instance given by the child on how the breathing exercise helps.

Parent’s Perceptions about Mindfulness and Children’s Learning

To understand how the program can be extended to regular classrooms and curriculum, parents were also inquired about the perceived benefits of the children’s learning by participating in a mindfulness program. Notable excerpts from the parents’ interviews regarding these perceptions are listed in Table 6.

Table 6. *Parent’s Perceptions about Mindfulness and Children’s Learning*

Perceived Benefits	Quotes*
Developing Awareness and focus	“Yeah, I think so. The breathing exercises. I’m not sure if most schools do that, but with young kids, I think this is really necessary to help them calm down, be more aware of what’s happening...” (Parent 1) “They get to be more aware and more able to you know- meaning to say more focused with their behaviors and actions that they do.” (Parent 3)
Added Knowledge for the Children	“It is an additional knowledge for the children, like, with their behavior, like that. At least they are encouraged.” (Parent 5) “Yes definitely, not all can be taught in books usually. So with the things like that. It will be helpful with the development of the children.” (Parent 8)
Extra Toolkit for Children	“I think mindfulness is important and okay to teach with children at a very young age. It is a skill that can be applied to do so many things... if he is still a child and at least the concept of mindfulness, or the activities about mindfulness, it is something that they can bring in their growing years.” (Parent 4) “Yes, it is helpful aside from the usual knowledge of the children... They know that with these programs has light sessions only... and more stories are shared when it is about your classes.” (Parent 10)

*Note. Translated Filipino responses.

Perceived benefits of the children's learning according to the parents include (a) developing awareness and focus, (b) added knowledge for the children, and (c) extra toolkit for children. In terms of developing awareness and attention span, parents have shared that the program may instill these characteristics and in return, become beneficial for their children's learning. Additional knowledge for the children when it comes to understanding oneself becomes a common theme in the parents' responses. For them, since understanding the self through emotions and actions was not usually included in classroom activities, children must be more aware of these. Lastly, parents also believed that extending this program to the classroom and curriculum would provide an extra toolkit for the children in dealing with stressful situations. One parent explained that children who are participating in a program like Alumana can have a toolkit that can be used as they grow older. Another parent also explained how this program becomes an avenue for the children to have "light classes" that are less academic than what the children are accustomed to.

Benefits for Parents if the Child Participates in a Mindfulness Program

Upon asking the parents for their perceived personal benefits from the mindfulness program, they have shared that the program will not be only beneficial for the children but for them as parents as well. Table 7 lists anecdotes from the parents on these benefits.

Perceived benefits for the parents include how mindfulness programs can become helpful for the parents in understanding their child. Parents shared that through this mindfulness program, they can understand the children's actions or behavior better, which in turn could help their parenting strategies. They also noted how the direct benefits of the program to children became helpful for them as the children themselves were equipped with self-management or self-regulation. With this, they will not have a difficult time identifying productive and unproductive behavior. Additionally, since the children can apply the mindfulness practices they have learned at school, positive behavior was extended to their homes as well.

Table 7. *Parent's Perceived Benefits if the Child Participates in a Mindfulness Program*

Perceived Benefits	Quotes*
Additional Help in Understanding the Children	“Yes, we need a lot of parenting tips nowadays. Being a parent nowadays is really a lot of hard work, maybe because of the technology that they’re exposed to, it’s hard to get their attention. I have three kids.” (Parent 1) “Yes, we will understand the child further, if they wanted to point out something, at least we will understand it.” (Parent 7) “They get to be more aware and more able to you know— meaning to say more focused with their behaviors and actions that they do.” (Parent 3) “It is an additional knowledge for the children, like, with their behavior, like that. At least they are encouraged.” (Parent 5)
Extension of Application at Homes	“Yes, because when we reflect in our house when the child arrives at home, things like these will be helpful.” (Parent 9) “When you explain to them, for example with anger management. When you explained “Why are you mad?”, he remembers it at doing it at home as well. With Teacher E when you are mad, you need to inhale-exhale first. It becomes a booster to what is being taught at home and at the same time it can also be heard outside the house. It should not only be taught at home, but teachers should also teach it in school.” (Parent 10)
Extra Toolkit for Children	“...since the child can identify what is wrong with the behavior, the child can learn what is a better behavior.” (Parent 3) “I think when we saw improvements with the child it becomes helpful for the parents. It is so direct. For example, your child knows how to self-regulate or your child knows how to control emotions, or how to empathize or knows the concept of mindfulness. It can be a big help for the parents.” (Parent 4)

Note. “Teacher E” serves as an alias for the facilitator’s name; translated Filipino responses

Discussion

Children’s Responses and Experiences in the Implemented Mindfulness Group Program

According to previous research on mindfulness for children, the main goal in adapting the practice for children is making it developmentally appropriate for them (Hooker & Fodor, 2008; Lyons & DeLange, 2016; Stanley, 2018). Adapting a mindfulness program through

developmentally appropriate practices is not limited to the content but also to the structure of the program (Viglas, 2015). Different variations may yield various effects of the program. The lack of studies on “process-oriented data” describing the program implementation in terms of its practices and strategies still serves as a barrier to understanding effective program implementation (Domitrovich & Greenberg, 2000). The presented results can help in discussing the children’s responses and experiences with the implemented mindfulness program.

Initial hesitations in doing the activities were observed with the children as these concepts, routines, and activities were unfamiliar to them. These observed hesitations during the implementation of the first unit eventually developed into being participative as more and more of them became involved in doing the activities. As part of the study’s findings on the second unit, continuous participation was observed. Then, throughout the last unit, the children were observed to have grown familiar with the activities and even expressed satisfaction in doing them. Children also relate their positive experiences with the activities. Remembering previously discussed concepts such as *Puppy Mind* and even sharing how their heartbeat can be heard are some examples of these positive experiences related to the practice. This finding is consistent with the literature that indicates children’s receptiveness to mindfulness activities (Rosaen & Benn, 2006). This study’s results contribute to filling the existing gap in the literature on further studying responses to mindfulness concepts of particularly young children (Bockmann & Yu, 2022).

Another gap that the results of the study attempt to address is how mindfulness programs can be age-appropriate for children (Davidson & Kazniak, 2015). Zelazo and Lyons (2012) suggested practical recommendations are needed in adapting a program to make it more developmentally appropriate for children. With the results of the existing study, an apparent interest in the implemented activities is observed when songs and storybooks were used in implementing the said activities. For instance, familiarity was instilled in the children by providing materials for discussing abstract concepts such as reading the book *Puppy Mind* to understand focus and attention. For this study, children enjoyed more interactive activities that were used to highlight the awareness of breath. As an example, the participants particularly enjoyed using pinwheels to identify short and long breaths. Related to the interests of the children, they were also engaged in songs and books that explain unfamiliar

concepts such as the process of breathing in the lungs (“Lungs Song”) and the concept of silence with moment-to-moment experiences (*The Sound of Silence*). Children respond more positively with activities that have visual aids or more engaging resources which contributed to the mindfulness program’s ease of implementation (Kim et al., 2019).

Another striking result of the current study is the children’s responses to mindfulness activities related to the senses. Various activities centered on senses such as mindful seeing, mindful tasting, and mindful smelling. Mindful listening, as it was previously done in other activities, is still being used by the children to be more focused, especially with breathing exercises. The familiarity of the children with senses together with the activities’ interactive and hands-on design contributed to their enthusiasm which is an important factor in implementing mindfulness programs for very young children (Lyons & DeLange, 2016; Galla et al., 2016).

The results of the study also exhibit how children’s individual responses in doing certain activities were apparent. For instance, one child expressed that he does not want his eyes closed as he prefers opening them while doing the sitting still activity. As a result, options were provided such as keeping eyes half-closed, looking at the floor, or looking at the tip of their nose for the participant to choose based on his preference. This adjustment is consistent with the research findings in making the program based on the developmental characteristics of the children (Kim et al., 2010). With the developmental characteristics of children compared to adults, shorter formal practices are recommended to adapt a mindfulness program for younger children (Hooker & Fodor, 2008).

Across the three units, the facilitator observed the need to modify the activities. As an example, since children expressed difficulty doing sitting breathing activities, several prompts were provided to the children that were age-appropriate and were more descriptive. Another example includes an activity to explore their attention and awareness which was planned to have a longer time of implementation, but based on the children’s responses, they cannot sit still and focus for a longer duration. Due to this circumstance, the class did not proceed with the initial plans of making the activity longer.

Throughout the weeks, the children became more familiar with the practice as they performed it and applied the provided prompts. Designing the structure of the program with an emphasis on constructing easily understandable instructions should also be a priority in

program adaptation for very young children (Zelazo & Lyons, 2012). Adapting the activities to make them more developmentally appropriate for the children promotes accessibility of the mindfulness concepts that are apt for the participants (Hooker & Fodor, 2008). By creating a more age-appropriate version of the inquiry process, the children felt more comfortable with processing and sharing their experiences in mindfulness-based activities such as quiet listening for 30 seconds. Repetition of the discussion and implementation of the activities was favorably received by the children as they became more interested in them.

Parent's Perceptions of the Implemented Program

Highlighting the importance of parents' perspectives on children's participation in a mindfulness program, the current study has explored its possible outcomes for children. Emphasizing the importance of parental involvement in the current literature (Lyons & DeLange, 2016; Stanley, 2018), the current study incorporated the results of conducted interviews.

Parents' understanding of the program mainly derives from the stories and anecdotes the children share with them. According to the parents' responses, the common stories their children mentioned were the implemented activities like singing a song, reading a book, or watching a video, breathing exercises such as breathing in and out, and the core practice of the program which is "sitting breathing". It can be noted through the parents' responses that there were components that were retained to the children as they were not only able to share these stories but also apply these practices at home. Children have noted how these can be applied when facing circumstances that involve strong emotions or any unwanted situation.

One of the important aspects of a mindfulness program is the extent of the reported home practice of its participants. In the literature, there is a correlation between participants' reported home practice and the well-being of the participants (Huppert & Johnson, 2010). With children as the participants of the study, parents' reports of children's home practice and application can explain how children have possibly extended the use of the activities of the program at home.

Consistent with this study, unanimous responses from parents showed that a program like *Alumana* is beneficial for children's learning and schooling, too. This is consistent with the

research findings of studies that seek to understand the social validity of implementing mindfulness programs particularly the parents (Bockmann & Yu, 2022). Benefits to the children according to parents' perceptions include developing awareness and attention span, additional knowledge for the children, and an extra toolkit for the children. Parents' responses have shown implementing mindfulness programs for children could be beneficial not just in school but also in other facets of child development.

They also noted that implementing mindfulness programs for children could help them understand their children and at the same time result in better parenting. These results not only highlight positive responses from the participating children but to their parents as well, especially when their children practice mindfulness activities at home. The importance of program buy-in particularly with parents and families is crucial in implementing a mindfulness program (Dariotis et al., 2016).

Implication

This exploratory study was designed to describe the process and experiences in developing a mindfulness program for very young children. The results of the study contribute to the existing literature on how mindfulness programs can be applicable and feasible for young children aged 4-6 years old. Incorporating qualitative data such as children's responses and reactions aids in creating future programs and interventions by identifying important practices and strategies (Domitrovich & Greenberg, 2000).

This study highlights that for a mindfulness program to be feasible and applicable, children's responses to various mindfulness-based activities should be taken into consideration to implement changes and modifications in the program. Mindfulness programs for preschool-aged children need to be contextualized and age-appropriate for them to be more engaged in relatable exercises and activities. All these results contributed to how parents perceive the benefits and applicability of mindfulness in homes and schools. Experiences and learnings from a mindfulness program for very young children must also involve everyday moments including those that occur at home (Zelazo & Lyons, 2012; Nieminen, 2018). This illustrates how parents can be involved in implementing a mindfulness program for children as they share how it can help the children's learning and in handling of

their children's behaviors. The findings of this study emphasize the possibility of implementing a mindfulness program for Filipino children that could illicit positive effects not only on children's holistic development but also on their day-to-day activities at home with their families.

Limitation and Future Direction

Based on the results of the study, a more contextualized and developmentally appropriate mindfulness program is feasible and could be adapted in schools and other related programs. For future research, the program can also be implemented in other participants such as children in childcare institutions to further see its viability in other settings. Since there are perceived benefits for the parents, more involvement of related adults at home can be further explored for continuing the practice at home. The implemented program's efficacy through a quantitative research design is also recommended to be investigated to establish the effectiveness of mindfulness in children's holistic development.

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