

DOI: 10.26565/2786-5312-2022-95-15

УДК 81-13:81'243:378.147

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Teaching mindfulness to ell students as a social-emotional learning wartime coping strategy: a multimodality perspective

This article focuses on exploring the pressing issue of teaching armed conflict affected English language learning (ELL) Ukrainian students to be mindful to better cope with wartime stressors for the sake of their psychological, physical health, intellectual and emotional well-being, enhanced resilience and ethical sustainability. Within the methodological framework of social emotional learning and linguocognitive paradigms, the authors have substantiated the status of the time-tested practice of mindfulness as a coping tool kit to be integrated in teaching English to students in conflict settings. As a result of the study conducted, it has been concluded that consistent practices of teaching mindfulness to students who suffer from war (post)-traumatic stress disorders, depression, anxiety, lack of hope, fear, have promising linguodidactic and psychological implications that result in students' language performance improvements. On the basis of analytically summarizing methods to implement (non-)verbally represented mindfulness as a coping mechanism in the corresponding EFL environment, the authors have come up with a four-dimensional mindfulness developing model of multimodal coping strategies for war affected ELL students. The matrix model suggested includes problem-focused, emotion-focused, avoidance and faith-based linguodidactic activities with an emphasis on the multimodal nature of mindfulness. The most efficient exercises are presented in the paper. It has been pointed out that mindfulness can be taught through listening, speaking, writing, reading practices, as well as through stimulating verbally and non-verbally actualized visual, auditory, olfactory, haptic, and gustatory types of perception. The pilot research project carried out, whose outcomes are to be perspectively refined, interculturally enriched and amalgamated into a coursebook, has proved that helping ELL students with wartime experience to be more mindful through adaptive coping strategies can mediate and moderate the negative impact of armed conflict trauma on their mental health and well-being.

Key words: *coping, ELL students, mindfulness, multimodality, social-emotional learning, wartime.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Young people affected by war conflicts endure a number of traumatic wartime stressors that harmfully impact their physical, psychological, social health and well-being [3; 8; 21]. Youth in war settings often happen to witness bombing, shelling, violence to their community and are subject to chaotic painful destruction of their environments. The latter result in material deprivation, forced displacement, and scarcity or even lack of basic needs for security, food, education, shelter. For that matter, Mental Health Europe (MHE) is very troubled by the situation in Ukraine and how the conflict is impacting children, adolescents, young people, and their families, emphasizing that “war trauma leads to long-term consequences on the psyche of the younger generation, and the longer the conflict, the worse the consequences on mental and emotional wellbeing” [16].

As our teaching practice shows, for Ukrainian youth, including many English language learning (ELL) students we teach, the war experience has caused increased prevalence of stress disorders, fear, grief, depression, phobias, anxiety, trouble sleeping, eating properly, concentrating, dramatic changes in academic and personal performance, hopelessness, uncontrollable aggression, frustration. Given the current tragic armed conflict events in our country, the topicality of our work, carried out within the methodological framework of cognitive and social-emotional learning paradigms, aimed at revealing the linguodidactic potential of mindfulness as a wartime coping strategy that ELL students should be taught to better deal with pervasive war traumatic stresses they have been exposed to since 24 February, 2022, is explicit, as well as its theoretical and practical significance.

To get the above aim realized, we have developed a special research algorithm, according to which the following three key tasks are to be completed. First, the status of mindfulness as a wartime coping strategy to be taught to ELL students is to be substantiated in terms of social-emotional learning and the cognitive approach in teaching foreign languages. Second, with a view to enhancing English language learning for war affected students a matrix model to implement verbally and non-verbally represented mindfulness as a coping mechanism in the corresponding need-oriented EFL environment is to be created. Finally, to make teaching mindfulness to ELL students more successful and ELL students feel better, more secure and more confident on the path of regaining and sustaining outer and inner security after exposure to the trauma of war, the multimodality essence of mindfulness is to be highlighted through specially designed listening, writing, reading, speaking, and multilevel perception enrichment activities.

Various patterns and frameworks have been advanced and considered as for coping adopted by youth in response to war stressful and traumatic events (S. Berjot, S. Folkman, M. Gizman, R. Lazarus, V. Rice, B. Stewart). Using multiple coping strategies that are

typically defined as “behaviors and cognitions that individuals utilize to manage a stressful situation and the attendant negative emotions” [7, p. 129], people try to mediate or modify adverse aspects of their ecology as well as to minimize stress-generated internal threats [19], in a close relationship between emotions and coping [11; 12]. In general terms, coping mechanisms have been characterized as problem focused (environment- or individual-oriented) or emotion focused (attempting to change event meanings), frequently categorized as primary (perception of an occurrence as causing stress) or secondary appraisal (evaluation of hypothetical predicted consequences of applying coping tools) [5; 18].

Despite the fact that for the last decades there have been lots of research works dedicated to coping with war-caused disorders, most of them either concern combatants, not civilians, let alone students, experiencing wartime distress, especially in countries of armed conflicts (D. Blake, M. V. Groer, L. Thomas), or focus on gender differences in coping techniques without concentrating specifically on mindfulness as a coping kit for ELL students from the perspectives of social-emotional learning or linguodidactic cognitivism (T. Cox T., E. Ferguson), which makes the objective timeliness of our work still clearer.

2. FINDINGS

The results of our analysis of the growing number of research on adolescents’ wartime coping tools and our own wartime teaching experience demonstrate the obvious effectiveness of teaching mindfulness through teaching English on the basis of social-emotional learning and cognitive principles to meet both directly and indirectly affected by war EEL students’ increased mental and emotional health needs.

Mindfulness, whose roots go back to Buddha’s early teachings, is typically interpreted as human ability to pay attention to the present moment with focus, kindness and curiosity [1; 22], to be fully present, aware of where you are and of what is going on, not judgmentally and completely. The main advantage of mindfulness is that it is something that everybody has, it is innate [17] and just has to be learnt, and taught, and lived with.

Standing on the integrative methodology grounds of theory of multimodality, social emotional learning, oriented at multimodally activating the prefrontal cortex which is responsible for Maths and Science, to make it reactive with an emphasis on the inner capacity to self-regulate during stressful moments, following the principles of cognitive approach to learning and teaching foreign languages (Y. Chen, N. Weiner, O. V. Kravchenko, Ch. Fillmore,), and our own language teaching experience during the wartime, we have come up with a four-dimensional linguodidactic multimodal matrix to apply verbally and non-verbally expressed mindfulness as yet another coping mechanism to enhance both war traumatized ELL students’ resilience and their English learning progress. The model suggested incorporates

such aspects as problem-focused, emotion-focused, avoidance and faith-based linguodidactic activities with an emphasis on the multimodal nature of mindfulness across listening, speaking, writing, and reading skills, enabling teachers to develop any facet of mindfulness or a cluster of such facets through practicing one or more skills, depending on ELL students' emotional state, their technical facilities while learning inline and specific wartime circumstances that vary from class to class.

Let us conceptually share the most successful mindfulness developing techniques as coping strategies that have proved to be helpful in terms of bringing our ELL students and us, their teachers, literally back to life, at least for a while.

Working at your ELL students' any of the above four skills, it has turned out to be a good idea to encourage them to practice mindfulness for only one minute [15; 20]. Within our empirical framework, the most favorite one-minute mindfulness activities have been sitting still with a one-minute hourglass timer with a multimodal focus on our breath along with what we see, smell, hear, touch.

Next come walking meditations, taken from the book "Happiness: Essential Mindfulness Practices" by the Buddhist mindfulness teacher Thich Nhat Hanh [8]. Taking into account the online format of wartime education in Ukraine, one-minute walks can be taken together in front of computer screens or with telephones during classes. The main thing is to pay attention to each step and match your steps to your breath. Students even tend to create phrases to approximate their walking rhythms (for instance: "With each step, a gentle wind blows").

There are also breathing activities that can be turned to so that ELL learners move forward more positively and in a less anxious way [2; 4; 13]. Depending on what skill is taught, mindfulness activity feelings and experience can be described in writing or in a spoken format to exchange with others for them to read or to listen, cognitively developing communicative and interpretation competence.

Color breathing is also good for reducing stress. It consists in asking your students to think of a relaxing color or shade and one more color that symbolizes anger, sadness, or fear. After that they close their eyes and imagine as if they were breathing in the relaxing color, letting it fill their bodies. When they exhale, let them visualize the "destructive" color leaving their bodies and disappearing.

To improve students' focus, concentration, and attention span, to calm their minds there is another mindfulness developing through language learning activity called "Body Scan". The psychophysiological message is to encourage students to pay attention to their feet for 5 to 10 seconds from time to time while retelling a text, or speak on the given subject, or present their dialogues or role plays. They are supposed to focus on each part of the body until they mindfully reach their head. On completing this, let them share their feelings and emotions as for how each part of the body feels to draw

their verbal and non-verbal awareness to themselves and to the present moment [14]. In case they happen to feel any stress or discomfort, recommend them to breathe that stress or unpleasant sensations out with each exhale, using one of breathing techniques they like.

The following multimodal mindfulness activity is a wonderful little exercise to do when while ELL lesson unexpectedly experiencing a moment of stress, anxiety, frustration, disassociation or grief during a class, or as a way to reconnect. Suggest that your students should relax a bit and ask themselves such questions as "What are five things I can see?", "Four things I can touch?", "Three things I can hear?", "Two things I can smell?", "One thing I can taste?" As they go through these awareness stimulating questions, they react by relaxing that part of their body, or by feeling less anxious.

One more beneficial mindfulness cultivating activity is sharing moments of gratitude. It is proved that people are excellent at remembering negative things that happen. The main point of this mindfulness social-emotional exercise is finding things to be grateful for to this specific day. Indeed, being grateful helps us keep our sustainability balance in check [6]. There's no right or wrong way to practice gratitude, however, you may set aside the last or the initial five minutes of class for ELL students to write down what they are thankful for, briefly share what they have written with partners, or think them to themselves and show symbols on the screen for us and their groupmates to guess.

The benefits of the above mindfulness exercises can be amplified in terms of functionally teaching both grammar (for instance, degrees of comparisons of adjectives/adverbs, used to do smth structures, phrasal verbs, infinitives and gerunds, contextualized tense-aspect forms, conditionals, etc) and vocabulary (topics "Feelings and Emotions". "Parts of the Body and their Functions" "Nature", metaphors (<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/548f3321e4b0273e6928d014/t/5d6ff75c147bd500014deb68/1567618909132/Metaphor.pdf>), etc.).

Since the beginning of the war, our ELT practice has demonstrated that for ELL students, absence of visual stimuli and diversity prove to be stifling and depressing [9; 13]. For this reason, the multimodal linguodidactic activity called "Mindful Seeing" which requires only a window with some kind of a view, may be soothing and pacifying. ELL students are supposed to find a space at a window where there is something to be seen outside (in a shelter environment, it can be any picture of a landscape that students have, or they can close their eyes and imagine a certain scenery), look very carefully at everything they can see, focusing on visual, audial, haptic, olfactory, hypothetical gustatory qualities of everything, and tell about everything in English, "paying attention to the movement of the grass or leaves in the breeze" [10]. Students should be motivated to notice and describe as much as they can in that segment of the world they can see, perceiving the world as though they were unfamiliar with our planet, being observant and aware.

The following mindfulness enhancing multimodal activity that has proved to be an efficient wartime coping mechanism for ELL students is taken from Positive Psychology Toolkit grants ELL students precious opportunities to be listened out to and heard. First, suggest that your students should together think about one thing they are stressed or anxious about, or afraid of, and one thing they all look forward to (if nobody can come up with anything suitable, due to objective wartime reasons, you can switch to especially designed listening and reading activities, for example: [https://www.liveworksheets.com/worksheets/en/English_as_a_Second_Language_\(ESL\)/Health/Listening*_Guided_Meditation_od210728gy](https://www.liveworksheets.com/worksheets/en/English_as_a_Second_Language_(ESL)/Health/Listening*_Guided_Meditation_od210728gy)). As soon as everybody is done, let each participant take his/her turn and share their story with the group. At the same time, each ELL student should be encouraged to concentrate on feelings and emotions he/she experiences while talking about negative and positive things. As soon as this stage is over, together discuss the following questions, suggested by wartime mindfulness experts [7; 10; 18]: “How did you feel when speaking during the exercise? How did you feel when listening during the exercise? Did you notice any mind-wandering? If so, what was the distraction? What helped you to bring your attention back to the present? Did your mind judge while listening to others? If so, how did “judging” feel in the body? Were there times where you felt empathy? If so, how did this feel in the body? How did your body feel right before speaking? How did your body feel right after speaking? What are you feeling right now? What would happen if you practiced mindful listening with each person that you spoke with? Do you think mindful listening would change the way you interact and relate with others? How would it feel if you set the intention to pay attention with kindness and acceptance to everything you said and everything you listened to?” In this way, all ELL students’ skills get perfected and actualized mindfully and meaningfully.

The essential thing about teaching mindfulness as a coping wartime strategy is that whatever mindfulness development activity you do with you ELL or any foreign language learning students, they can be made problem-focused (to cope with a specific issue or a number of issues, implying active/adaptive coping [4]), emotion-focused (to deal with emotions, connected with lack of warmth, cohesiveness, closeness, order and organization, to overcome negativity and aggression [9]), avoidance (avoiding or stuffing emotions,

treating dissociation as a condition in which you feel disconnected from your thoughts, feelings, body, surroundings [16]) and faith-based (not only working at general beliefs such as optimism, work ethic, and trust but also reviving faith [20]), or blended, depending on ELL students’ individual characteristics, needs, mood, specific wartime environment and surroundings. Besides, within the scope of ELL, such multimodal mindfulness advancement exercises as even eating mindfully together, describing tastes, fragrances and other perception details in any format, having a class outside if it is safe enough, listen to music, create something together, are helpful in terms of coping with fears and concerns of wartime, at the same time improving ELL students’ language usage and awareness.

3. CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

To sum it up, as a result of our research, it has been explanatorily proved that systematic SEL and cognitive linguodidactic practices of teaching mindfulness to ELL students who go through war (post)-traumatic stress disorders, depression, anxiety, frustration, lack of hope, fear, have significant linguodidactic and psychological implications that lead to an increase in students’ language progress rates. Our analysis of methods and materials to apply (non-)verbally expressed mindfulness as a coping mechanism in various ELL environments has resulted in the authors’ four-dimensional mindfulness enhancement matrix model of multimodal coping strategies for ELL students who have been affected by this war. The comprehensive model amalgamates problem-focused, emotion-focused, dissociation, and faith-based language learning activities with a highlight on the multimodality of mindfulness as coping. The most efficient activities and conceptual ideas have been shared in the paper. It has been explicated that mindfulness can be taught through listening, speaking, writing, reading, along with refining verbally and non-verbally represented visual, auditory, olfactory, haptic, and gustatory modes of perception. The perspective of our work is to specify and enrich the outcomes obtained intersemiotically and interculturally, turning to bigger international audiences and developing a series of webinars for wartime ELL students and their teachers to share mindfulness social-emotional learning and cognitive approach developing experience through teaching and learning foreign languages to multimodally cope with wartime stresses and challenges.

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НАВЧАННЯ СТУДЕНТІВ, ЯКІ ВИВЧАЮТЬ АНГЛІЙСЬКУ МОВУ, УСВІДОМЛЕНOSTІ ЯК КОПІНГ-СТРАТЕГІЇ ВОЄННОГО ЧАСУ У СКОПУСІ СОЦІАЛЬНО-ЕМОЦІЙНОЇ ДИДАКТИКИ: ВИМІР МУЛЬТИМОДАЛЬНОСТІ

Стаття присвячена дослідженню гостро актуального питання навчання під час війни українських здобувачів освіти, які вивчають англійську мову, усвідомленості (майндфулнесс) з метою більш ефективного подолання ними стресів воєнного часу заради збереження їхнього психологічного та фізичного здоров'я, інтелектуального та емоційного комфорту, підвищення рівня стійкості та стабільності ціннісних настанов. У методологічному скопусі парадигм когнітивного та соціально-

емоційного навчання автори обґрунтовують статус перевіреної часом філософії та практики усвідомленості як ефективного інструменту копінг, який вбачається доцільним інтегрувати до процесів навчання студентів воєнного часу іноземним мовою, зокрема англійській. В результаті проведеної розвідки робиться висновок, що систематичне та послідовне навчання студентів, які страждають від психічних розладів, спричинених війною, депресії, тривожності, безнадії, страху, має велику лінгводидактичну та психологічну значущість, що є очевидною у поліпшенні академічних результатів. Опрацювання та аналіз великої кількості методів імплементації вербально та невербально репрезентованої усвідомленості як механізму копінг у відповідному контексті навчання англійській мові стали базою для розроблення авторами чотиривимірної моделі функціонального використання мультимодальних копінг-стратегій для розвинення майндфулнесс студентів, що вивчають англійську мову у воєнний час. Запропонована матрична модель включає проблемно-орієнтовані, емоційно-орієнтовані, дисоціативно орієнтовані та духовно-орієнтовані види діяльності з акцентом на мультимодальній природі усвідомленості. Найефективніші розроблені авторами вправи наведено у роботі. Доведено, що усвідомленість можна розвивати через аудіювання, мовлення, письмо, читання, а також через стимуляцію вербально та невербально актуалізованих візуальних, аудіальних, ольфакторних, гаптичних та густаторних типів перцепції. Уточнення, крос-культурне збагачення та інкорпорування результатів цього лінгводидактичного проекту у спеціальний курс є перспективою роботи.

Ключові слова: воєнний час, копінг, мультимодальність, соціально-емоційне навчання, студенти, які вивчають англійську мову, усвідомленість.

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