



From Anxiety to Authenticity: Empowering Senior High School EFL Writers Through Mindful Learning

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Abstract

This study investigated the implementation of mindful learning in teaching writing and examined its empirical effects on secondary EFL students' writing skills and affective factors. Utilizing a concurrent triangulation mixed-methods design, data were gathered from classroom observations, reflective journals, interviews, and descriptive questionnaires alongside a quasi-experimental post-test component involving 68 senior high school students. Qualitative findings revealed that operationalizing mindful learning through a four-stage instructional sequence (mindful breathing, concept awareness, mindful writing, and reflection) significantly enhanced students' metacognitive awareness, classroom engagement, emotional regulation, and self-acceptance. Quantitatively, the independent samples *t*-test demonstrated that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group ($M = 82.4$ vs $M = 77.1$, $p = 0.003$) with a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.89$). The integration of these findings confirms that mindful learning simultaneously optimizes cognitive text production and mitigates academic anxiety. Consequently, this pedagogical framework offers a robust, holistic approach to language acquisition by reframing writing as an interconnected cognitive and emotional process.

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1. Introduction

In today's educational environments, students frequently encounter academic stress, shortened attention spans, and emotional exhaustion. These challenges are particularly evident in senior high schools, where learners are expected to cope with increasing academic demands while simultaneously developing emotional and cognitive maturity. Consequently, educators are encouraged to adopt instructional approaches that not only enhance academic achievement but also support students' psychological well-being. One promising pedagogical approach is mindful learning, which integrates mindfulness principles into teaching and learning practices to foster awareness, concentration, reflection, and meaningful engagement (Kang & Kim, 2023).



Globally, educational systems are increasingly shifting from content transmission toward learning approaches that promote deeper understanding, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and learner well-being. This transition reflects the growing recognition that students need not only disciplinary knowledge but also the cognitive, emotional, and metacognitive competencies required to address complex real-world challenges. Consequently, educational reforms in many countries have emphasized meaningful learning experiences that encourage active engagement, self-regulation, reflection, and lifelong learning. Within this international movement, mindful learning has received increasing attention as a pedagogical approach that cultivates present-moment awareness, intentional learning, and meaningful knowledge construction while simultaneously supporting students' cognitive and emotional development.

The relevance of mindful learning is also increasingly evident within the context of Indonesia's educational reform. The national curriculum, *Kurikulum Merdeka*, promotes the concept of Deep Learning, which emphasizes meaningful, contextual, and reflective learning experiences. This curriculum aims to strengthen students' higher-order thinking skills, character development, and self-directed learning capacities. Rather than focusing primarily on memorization, students are encouraged to construct knowledge through inquiry, creativity, collaboration, and reflection. These principles closely align with the philosophical foundations of mindful learning, which emphasize active awareness, reflective thinking, and meaningful knowledge construction. Therefore, mindful learning can be viewed as a practical pedagogical manifestation of Deep Learning within the Indonesian educational context, integrating both cognitive engagement and emotional awareness in classroom instruction (Benu et al., 2025).

The concept of mindful learning was first introduced by Langer (1989) and extends beyond the traditional understanding of mindfulness as a meditative practice. Instead, it represents a cognitive framework that encourages learners to actively construct understanding through awareness, openness, and flexibility. Langer argues that mindful learning occurs when learners continuously create new distinctions, reconsider existing knowledge, and adapt their perspectives to changing contexts. Unlike mindless learning, which is characterized by automaticity and repetitive routines, mindful learning encourages active meaning-making through sustained attention, curiosity, and reflection.

According to Langer and Moldoveanu (2000), mindful learning consists of four interconnected dimensions. The first dimension, sensitivity to novelty, refers to learners' tendency to perceive each learning experience as unique and worthy of exploration. The second dimension, flexibility in perspective, highlights learners' openness to multiple viewpoints and their ability to reinterpret information dynamically. The third dimension, contextual awareness, emphasizes understanding how situational and cultural contexts influence meaning and knowledge construction. The fourth dimension, novelty production, refers to learners' capacity to generate new ideas, interpretations, and categories through reflection and engagement. Together, these dimensions transform learning from a passive process of information reception into an active, reflective, and creative experience. Research has demonstrated that mindfulness-based educational programs can reduce stress, enhance self-regulation, and improve students' overall well-being (Fosco et al., 2025).



Within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, mindful learning offers considerable potential because language learning inherently involves awareness, reflection, and meaning-making. Among the four language skills, writing is particularly compatible with mindfulness principles because it requires learners to organize thoughts, reflect on experiences, and express personal perspectives. When students engage in writing mindfully, they do more than produce grammatically correct sentences; they develop deeper awareness of meaning, emotions, and communication. Previous studies have shown that mindful learning can positively influence students' writing performance, creativity, and emotional regulation (Gao, 2023; Piscayanti, 2021; Saputra et al., 2020). Through activities such as reflective journaling, mindful observation, breathing exercises, and contextual reflection, learners are encouraged to connect personal experiences with written expression, thereby promoting authentic communication and self-understanding. At the same time, many EFL learners continue to face challenges in writing. Students often struggle with limited vocabulary, difficulties in processing information in English, and challenges in organizing ideas coherently (Rismadewi, 2023). These difficulties frequently hinder their ability to generate ideas, structure arguments, and develop meaningful written texts. Consequently, instructional approaches that support both cognitive and affective aspects of learning are needed to improve students' writing competence.

Despite the growing body of international research on mindful learning, studies within the Indonesian context remain limited, particularly at the senior high school level. Existing research has primarily focused on university students (Piscayanti, 2021; Wang et al., 2023) or examined specific cognitive outcomes without exploring classroom implementation in secondary education. As a result, empirical evidence regarding how mindful learning can be integrated into Indonesian high school classrooms and its influence on students' writing skills remains scarce. Furthermore, local studies tend to conceptualize mindfulness as a general life skill rather than as an instructional framework embedded within teaching and learning activities.

Although previous studies have demonstrated that mindful learning can improve students' attention, emotional regulation, academic engagement, and overall learning outcomes, the existing evidence remains fragmented. Most research has primarily examined its effects on general academic achievement, psychological well-being, or classroom engagement, while relatively limited attention has been given to its role in developing English writing skills. Furthermore, previous studies have often investigated mindful learning or writing performance separately, providing limited understanding of the mechanisms through which mindful learning may enhance students' writing achievement. Existing research has also predominantly been conducted in Western educational settings or higher education contexts, leaving insufficient evidence regarding its effectiveness in secondary school English classrooms in developing countries. Consequently, further investigation is needed to examine how mindful learning contributes to English writing achievement within different educational and cultural contexts.

The present study offers several contributions to the existing literature. First, it extends mindful learning research from higher education to the senior high school context, which remains underexplored in Indonesia. Second, it examines mindful learning as an instructional framework rather than merely a personal well-being strategy. Third, by combining classroom observations with quasi-experimental investigation, the study provides a comprehensive



understanding of both the implementation process and the learning outcomes associated with mindful learning. Specifically, this study seeks to explore how mindful learning is implemented in English classrooms.

2. Method

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods convergent design that integrated qualitative and quantitative approaches to investigate the implementation and effectiveness of mindful learning in English writing instruction. The qualitative component explored how mindful learning was implemented in classroom practices, while the quantitative component examined its effect on students' writing achievement.

The quantitative strand adopted a quasi-experimental posttest-only control group design. This design was selected because random assignment of students was not feasible within the school setting, and existing classes were maintained as intact groups (Maciejewski, 2020; Miller et al., 2020). One class was assigned as the experimental group and received instruction through mindful learning strategies, while another class served as the control group and received regular English instruction.

The mindful learning intervention was developed based on Langer's (1989) theory of mindful learning and the classroom practices proposed by Piscayanti (2021). The intervention incorporated activities that encouraged novelty seeking, perspective flexibility, contextual awareness, reflective journaling, and creative production. These activities were integrated into regular English writing lessons throughout the intervention period.

Research Setting and Participants

This study was conducted at SMA Negeri 4 Singaraja, Bali, Indonesia. The school was selected because of its commitment to educational innovation and its implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* framework. Two intact classes were purposively selected based on their comparable academic characteristics and schedule availability. One class served as the experimental group and the other as the control group.

Purposive sampling was employed because reorganizing students into randomly assigned groups was not feasible within the existing school structure. The use of intact classes allowed the study to be conducted within the natural classroom environment while maintaining the regular instructional schedule.

Data Collection & Instrument

Data were collected using both qualitative and quantitative instruments. Qualitative data were obtained through classroom observations, teacher interviews, and students' reflective journals. Classroom observations were conducted throughout the intervention to document teaching practices, student engagement, and classroom interactions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the English teacher to explore perceptions of mindful learning implementation. In addition, students completed reflective journals to record their learning experiences and reflections during the intervention. Quantitative data were collected through a



writing posttest administered to both the experimental and control groups at the end of the intervention. Students were required to complete a writing task, and their compositions were assessed using an analytic writing rubric covering five dimensions: content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics.

The study employed four instruments: an observation sheet, an interview guide, reflective journals, and a writing test rubric. The observation sheet and interview guide were developed based on the four dimensions of mindful learning proposed by Langer and Moldoveanu (2000), namely sensitivity to novelty, flexibility, contextual awareness, and novelty production. Reflective journals were used to capture students' personal experiences and responses to mindful learning activities. Students' writing performance was assessed using an analytic scoring rubric adapted from established writing assessment criteria. The rubric evaluated content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. To enhance scoring reliability, students' writing products were independently assessed by two raters.

Data Analysis & Trustworthiness

Qualitative data obtained from observations, interviews, and reflective journals were analyzed using thematic analysis following the procedures proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis involved data familiarization, initial coding, theme generation, theme review, and theme definition. The resulting themes were used to describe how mindful learning was implemented in the classroom and how students responded to the intervention. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize students' writing scores, while an independent samples *t*-test was conducted to determine whether there was a significant difference in writing achievement between the experimental and control groups. Statistical significance was established at the .05 level.

The findings from both qualitative and quantitative strands were integrated during the interpretation stage using triangulation. Qualitative findings were used to explain and contextualize the quantitative results, providing a comprehensive understanding of the implementation and effectiveness of mindful learning in English writing instruction.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative findings, triangulation was conducted through multiple data sources, including observations, interviews, and reflective journals. Member checking and reflective documentation were also employed to enhance credibility. The research instruments were reviewed by experts in English language education to establish content validity. For the writing assessment, inter-rater scoring was employed to improve reliability and consistency in evaluating students' written work.

3. Findings

3.1 Pre-Writing Stage: Mindful Breathing and Awareness

At the onset of the lesson, the teacher systematically guided students through a brief breathing exercise designed to cultivate mindful awareness, calm minds, and establish presence. Classroom observations revealed a prominent, positive shift in the classroom



atmosphere; a high baseline of academic anxiety and scattered focus transitioned into a visibly relaxed, physically grounded, and cognitively prepared learning environment.

This observational data was strongly corroborated by the students' reflective journals, where they explicitly noted that this initial calming phase helped them dismantle emotional exhaustion and academic stress accumulated from previous classes. Furthermore, descriptive data from the questionnaire's *Novelty Seeking Descriptor* supported this finding. Students consistently reported a higher propensity to stay present in the moment (e.g., "*I try to be present to the moment*" and "*I always see everyday as a new day*"), which effectively mitigated immediate intellectual and emotional blockages before writing.

3.2 Planning Stage: Concept Awareness and Cognitive Flexibility

During the planning stage, students were intentionally guided to develop a deep awareness of their insights and perspectives before text production, challenging rigid assumptions and mapping out arguments. Observation logs indicated that instead of relying on the mechanical mimicry of rigid text templates, students actively participated in open-ended brainstorming. They dynamically questioned vocabulary choices, mapped out ideas, and showcased continuous curiosity.

This cognitive flexibility was further highlighted in interviews with both the English teacher and the students. The teacher observed that students demonstrated an enhanced capacity to structure thoughts independently. Concurrently, a student noted during the interview: "*Usually, we just memorize text templates from the blackboard. Now, we are guided to think about our own point of view and how to relate the topic to our real, everyday experiences.*" This shift directly reflects the *Flexibility and Engaging* dimensions of the questionnaire blueprint, where students acknowledged being significantly more adaptive to new perspectives, showing strong agreement with items such as "*I am open to new perspectives.*"

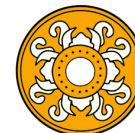
3.3 Core Activity: Mindful Writing and Free Expression

During the productive writing phase, the instructional focus shifted toward the principle of non-judgmental awareness. Students were encouraged to express their thoughts freely without the paralyzing fear of technical mistakes or immediate grading penalties. Classroom observations documented a substantial increase in student engagement, persistence, and task attention, alongside a noticeable reduction in writer's block. Instead of sitting idle out of anxiety, students actively consulted dictionaries to expand their vocabulary.

Entries in students' reflective journals illustrated that removing the constant threat of punitive evaluation liberated their creative voices. Interview transcripts further highlighted that this non-judgmental environment triggered novelty-producing behaviors, fostering a genuine sense of ownership over their language work. Consequently, students treated writing as a medium for authentic personal expression rather than merely a high-stakes exam requirement.

3.4 Post-Activity Stage: Reflection and Self-Acceptance

In the final stage, students systematically engaged in reflection to evaluate their performance, build metacognitive control, and ground their identity. Observations showed



students calmly reviewing their completed pieces and autonomously detecting grammatical or structural flaws—viewing errors as constructive milestones rather than failures.

Qualitative accounts from both reflective journals and interviews collectively confirmed that this stage nurtured metacognitive growth and self-comparison over peer-comparison. This qualitative manifestation of self-compassion was heavily backed by the *Self-Acceptance* dimension indicators in the questionnaire, where students widely agreed with statements promoting self-evaluation and psychological resilience in language acquisition.

3.5 Descriptive Statistical Analysis

The second research question examined whether there was a significant effect of mindful learning on students' writing skills. The data gathered from the post-test scores of both the experimental and control groups were analyzed quantitatively using SPSS. Descriptive statistics were computed to provide an immediate overview of the post-test writing performance after the instructional treatment (Table 1).

Table 1. Summary of Descriptive Statistics

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum
Experimental	34	82.4	5.6	78
Control	34	77.1	6.2	70

Table 1 highlights that the experimental group achieved a higher mean score ($M = 82.4$, $SD = 5.6$) compared to the control group ($M = 77.1$, $SD = 6.2$). The mean difference of 5.3 points initially suggests that students instructed through mindful learning gained better writing outcomes than those under conventional instruction. Furthermore, the experimental group's lower standard deviation (5.6 vs 6.2) indicates greater homogeneity and less score dispersion. This implies that the benefits of mindful learning were uniformly distributed among lower, moderate, and higher-achieving students, thereby narrowing internal performance gaps. Notably, even the lowest-performing student in the experimental group ($Min = 78$) outperformed the control group's minimum ($Min = 70$), while the highest experimental score reached 90. To justify the use of parametric statistical analysis for hypothesis testing, normality and homogeneity checks were conducted on the post-test data. The normality of the scores was evaluated using the Shapiro-Wilk test (Table 2).

Table 2. Results of the Normality Test

Group	Statistic	df	Sig.
Experimental	0.964	34	0.608
Control	0.958	34	0.425

As presented in Table 2, the significance values (p -values) for both the experimental group ($p = 0.608$) and the control group ($p = 0.425$) were greater than 0.05. This confirms that the post-test data in both groups were normally distributed. Subsequently, Levene's test was employed to assess the variance homogeneity between the groups (Table 3).



Table 3. Results of the Homogeneity of Variances Test

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
1.872	1	66	0.174

The analysis yielded a significance value of 0.174 ($p > 0.05$), demonstrating that the variances across the experimental and control groups were homogeneous. Met with these two statistical assumptions, the data were deemed fully eligible for parametric analysis via an Independent Samples T-Test.

3.6 Hypothesis Testing

To verify whether the descriptive variance observed in Table 1 reflected a genuinely significant difference, an Independent Samples T-Test was carried out (Table 4).

Table 4. Independent Samples T-Test Results

Variable	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Post-test Writing	3.12	66	0.003	5.3

The independent samples t-test revealed a statistically significant difference between the two groups, $t(66) = 3.12$, $p = 0.003$. Since the significance value is well below the threshold ($p < 0.05$), the null hypothesis is rejected, reinforcing that mindful learning exerts a statistically significant effect on students' writing skills. To measures the magnitude of this instructional treatment, Cohen's d calculation was applied (Table 5).

Table 5. Effect Size Summary

Mean Exp	Mean Ctrl	SD Pooled	Cohen's d	Category
82.4	77.1	5.9	0.89	Large

The calculation produced a Cohen's d value of 0.89. According to Cohen's (1988) operational conventions, a value exceeding 0.80 denotes a large effect size. This indicates that the integration of mindful learning was not only statistically significant but also holds substantial practical relevance for improving pedagogical outcomes in EFL writing environments.

The findings indicate that mindful learning had a significant positive effect on students' writing skills. The experimental group achieved a higher mean post-test score ($M = 82.4$, $SD = 5.6$) than the control group ($M = 77.1$, $SD = 6.2$), with a mean difference of 5.3 points. The data met the assumptions of normality and homogeneity, supporting the use of parametric analysis. An independent samples t -test confirmed a statistically significant difference between the two groups, $t(66) = 3.12$, $p = 0.003$, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. Furthermore, the effect size analysis yielded a Cohen's d of 0.89, indicating a large practical



effect. These results demonstrate that mindful learning significantly enhances EFL students' writing achievement and has substantial educational value for writing instruction.

4. Discussions

The findings demonstrate that mindful learning significantly improves both students' writing performance and their learning experiences in EFL classrooms. Students who participated in mindful learning achieved significantly higher writing scores than those receiving conventional instruction, with a large effect size, indicating that the intervention produced not only statistical significance but also meaningful educational benefits. These findings support Langer's (1989, 1997) theory, which argues that mindfulness promotes active engagement, openness to multiple perspectives, and sensitivity to contextual information. By encouraging students to become consciously aware of their thoughts before and during writing, mindful learning appears to facilitate deeper cognitive processing, enabling learners to generate ideas more effectively, organize their thoughts coherently, and express their experiences more meaningfully.

The present findings are consistent with previous studies reporting the positive effects of mindfulness-based learning on language learning outcomes (Lin, 2020; Piscayanti, 2021; Wang et al., 2023). Similar to these studies, the current intervention encouraged learners to become more attentive to their learning process rather than merely focusing on the final product. Such awareness may explain why students demonstrated better writing performance, as mindful learners tend to engage in greater planning, monitoring, and reflection throughout the writing process. However, unlike most previous studies that focused primarily on university students, the present study demonstrates that mindful learning is equally effective for senior high school students. This suggests that the benefits of mindful learning are not restricted to mature learners but can also be realized among adolescents when appropriate instructional guidance and structured classroom activities are provided. The findings also differ from studies reporting relatively modest effects of mindfulness interventions (e.g., Saputra et al., 2024). A possible explanation is the nature of the intervention itself. Whereas previous research often implemented mindfulness as a single activity, such as breathing exercises, the present study incorporated mindfulness throughout the entire writing process, including mindful breathing, idea generation, reflective writing, and post-writing reflection. This integrated approach likely produced stronger cognitive and emotional engagement, resulting in greater improvements in writing achievement. The findings therefore suggest that the effectiveness of mindful learning depends not only on the inclusion of mindfulness activities but also on how systematically these activities are embedded within the instructional process.

Beyond improving writing achievement, the findings indicate that mindful learning contributes to students' affective development. Participants reported feeling more relaxed, confident, and willing to express their ideas during writing activities. These results are consistent with previous studies showing that mindfulness enhances emotional regulation, self-



efficacy, and learning engagement (Piscayanti, 2024; Putri et al., 2024). Writing in a foreign language is widely recognized as both a cognitive and emotional process, and reducing anxiety may enable students to allocate more cognitive resources to planning, organizing, and revising their ideas. Consequently, the improvement in writing performance observed in this study may be explained not only by enhanced cognitive engagement but also by the creation of a more supportive emotional learning environment.

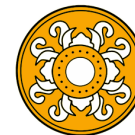
The findings have several important implications for theory and practice. Theoretically, this study extends Langer's mindful learning framework by providing empirical evidence that its principles can be successfully applied to EFL writing instruction in secondary education, a context that has received relatively limited attention in previous research. Pedagogically, the findings suggest that English teachers should integrate mindfulness throughout the writing process rather than treating it as a brief relaxation activity. Incorporating reflective questioning, mindful observation, breathing exercises, and reflective journaling may help students become more engaged, reduce writing anxiety, and produce higher-quality written texts. From a curriculum perspective, the results also support current educational reforms that emphasize deep learning, learner agency, and reflective practice, indicating that mindful learning offers a practical strategy for achieving these educational objectives.

5. Conclusion and Suggestion

This study investigated the implementation of mindful learning in teaching writing and examined its empirical effect on students' writing skills within an EFL context. The integrated mixed-methods analysis reveals that operationalizing mindful learning through a structured four-stage instructional sequence—comprising mindful breathing, concept awareness, mindful writing, and reflection—significantly enhances both the process and product of writing. Qualitatively, this pedagogical framework nurtures heightened metacognitive awareness, active classroom engagement, robust emotional regulation, and deep self-acceptance among learners. Students shifted from passive text-reporters to resilient, autonomous meaning-makers who view technical errors as developmental milestones rather than definitive failures.

Quantitatively, the study confirms that mindful learning exerts a statistically significant positive effect on students' writing performance. The robust experimental outperformance, coupled with a large effect size, underscores that the pedagogical benefits of mindfulness transcend minor incremental gains, offering substantial practical value for classroom instruction. The synthesis of these findings reinforces a critical pedagogical paradigm: writing is not merely a mechanical cognitive activity but an intricate, deeply affective, and reflective process. By mitigating baseline academic anxiety and fostering cognitive flexibility, mindful learning effectively addresses the holistic needs of language learners, leading to higher quality and more consistent writing outcomes.

Based on these conclusions, several practical and theoretical recommendations are proposed. For EFL practitioners, particularly at the secondary school level, integrating brief mindfulness practices into writing instruction is highly encouraged. Given that writing is



universally perceived as a high-anxiety task, incorporating brief breathing exercises or grounding techniques at the onset of lessons can effectively stabilize student focus. Furthermore, educators should systematically embed reflective journaling into their curriculum to provide a safe, non-judgmental space that promotes authentic self-expression and dismantles writer's block. Students are likewise encouraged to adopt these mindfulness practices autonomously, reframing the act of writing as a journey of personal self-discovery and a tool for academic stress management rather than a low-agency requirement for a grade.

For future research, given the institutional and contextual boundaries of this study, several avenues should be explored. Since this investigation was restricted to a specific senior high school cohort focusing on writing, future researchers are suggested to examine the applicability of mindful learning across other receptive and productive language strands, such as speaking and listening. Additionally, executing longitudinal research designs would yield deeper, more definitive insights into the long-term sustainability of mindfulness interventions on students' linguistic competence and psychological resilience. Finally, utilizing larger, multi-centered, and more diverse participant samples is highly recommended to enhance the external validity and generalizability of the findings across broader educational landscapes.

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