Mindfulness ‘helps students recall lectures better’, study claims

Researcher also suggests there is ‘a lot of interest’ in further study on mindfulness-NSS scores link

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By Anna McKie (/author/anna-mckie)
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Undergraduate students who engaged in 10 minutes of mindfulness meditation before a lecture were better able to recall its contents, according to a study.

Researchers at Birmingham City University (https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/birmingham-city-university) gave one group of 35 students mindfulness meditation assistance and another group of 35 an audiobook to listen to before a lecture. Afterwards, the students were quizzed about the lecture's contents.

Participants placed in the mindfulness meditation group recalled significantly more information than participants who listened to the audiobook, the study found.

According to the paper, universities are seeing heightened levels of stress reported among students, with evidence to suggest that this affects academic performance through “memory impairment, which interferes with an individual's learning and information recall”.

Michael Mantzios, lecturer in health psychology at Birmingham City and one of the authors of the paper, said the research showed that mindfulness was a helpful tool for students. “We found that students who display higher levels of mindfulness will perform better at university,” he added.

Dr Manztios presented the research at the Advance HE Teaching and Learning Conference on 5 July. The research was published under the title “Mindfulness as an Intervention for Recalling Information from a Lecture as a Measure of Academic Performance in Higher Education: A Randomized Experiment” in Higher Education for the Future earlier this year.
There have been studies that suggest that mindfulness is a useful way to combat stress among students and to help them concentrate better, and some universities in the UK have begun offering classes or training in mindfulness.

However, the technique has its critics, with some sceptical about its long-term benefits and highlighting a lack of training in its use.

Dr Mantzios admitted that until recently he himself had been somewhat sceptical. However, he told *Times Higher Education*, the results of the research convinced him that mindfulness should be part of universities’ duty of care for students.

“We need more tools to improve mental health and well-being to help students cope and become more resilient and to actually build better employees for the market out there,” he said.

His belief in the usefulness of mindfulness was reinforced after he tried the techniques himself, Dr Mantzios added. “Some academics object to the methodology or sample size of mindfulness studies; we can easily overcome that by doing more research and better controlling it,” he said. “However, a lot of critics don’t understand the basics or foundation of mindfulness, and there’s not a lot we can do about that.”

Dr Mantzios and his team have also produced a piece of research, which is currently under review, about how the mindfulness of students could affect National Student Survey scores.

In a cross-sectional study, the researchers gave students a questionnaire on mindfulness and a mock NSS. According to Dr Mantzios, the research showed that students who scored higher on the mindfulness questionnaire rated their institution higher on the NSS.

“We’ve had a lot of interest in that piece of work,” Dr Mantzios said, adding that it “builds the case about why mindfulness is useful in higher education”.

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