

# A Study on the Effect of Yoga on General Mental Ability of Children

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## Abstract:

Excessive stress is harmful to academic performance in children and may lead to dropping out of school. To meet the demands of a modern life-style which is full of speed, stress and tension, an all-round child health program is crucial. The use of Yoga for children has diverse applications in maintaining and developing their physical, mental, intellectual, emotional and spiritual levels. Yoga, through its physical postures (asana), breathing practices (pranayama), cleansing techniques (kriya), meditation therapies (dhyana) and relaxation training (yoga nidra) yields a positive effect in the management of stress in children. Yoga practice benefited children by improving their eye-hand coordination, attention span, levels of concentration, competitive performance and relaxation.

The goal of this study was to evaluate the effect of Yoga on general mental ability level of children in primary school. 40 Students were randomly assigned to Yoga Ed program over a single semester. Students completed baseline and end-program self-report measures of general mental ability test. Independent evaluation of individual outcome measures revealed that yoga participants showed statistically significant differences between pre and post data.

These preliminary results suggest that implementation of yoga is acceptable and feasible in a school setting and has the potential of playing an important role in increasing general mental ability of children.

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## Introduction

Yoga is an ancient mind-body practice originated in India more than 5000 years ago and is described systematically early on. The research on the psycho-physiological benefits of yoga in children has been found to improve concentration, and mental ability of the practitioners.

There is an increasing interest in the use of yoga for children to calm the mind and increase health and well being. Practice of Yoga to Improve Moral Values in Children.<sup>1</sup> Despite scant but increasing evidence supporting the efficacy of yoga in children, special yoga programs within schools are being developed for children and adolescents. This increasing popularity of the potential benefits of yoga may encourage parents to consider yoga for their children and request referrals or

clarification of the purported effects. A description of the philosophical basis of yoga, the basic components of a yoga practice, safety concerns, and how to locate and evaluate a yoga program for children will be addressed.<sup>2</sup>

Recently, as the educationists become more and more aware about the lacune and short-comings or ills of modern education. Some of them have started looking hopefully towards yoga education as a useful complementary to overcome such problems. Modern yogis too appear to be favorably inclined to ring about a sort of integration between yoga and modern education. The only hitch is on “How to bring about such an integration of yoga into modern education with maximum advantage: Firstly, modern educationists are convinced that yoga somehow can

promote the aim of education. Secondly, scientific studies have shown that yoga can be helpful in promoting health and fitness. So yoga education can be usefully integrated with modern health education. Another point is, Educationists are increasingly becoming aware of the affective Educational Objectives in education; Yoga can also play a significant role in effective education of students. Apart from that Yoga is found to provide strategies for successfully coping with various kinds of life stresses. This aspect can contribute much to the life-long education of students of all age-groups to confront stressful situation in life.<sup>3</sup>

In today's world, we hear so much about being the best and achieving the most. Yoga teaches kids that their bodies are different; different bodies do different things and all of them are okay. There is no one better or worse at yoga than anyone else; we are all just exploring our bodies and learning from them in our own way. Yoga is truly for everybody.

In the same way that it provides children an opportunity to learn something that is non-competitive, it also teaches kids to accept and cherish themselves as they are. Again, with society sending so many messages of inadequacy, yoga teaches kids to love themselves. Learned young, this incredibly valuable lesson arms kids with the tools to fight off the increasing feelings of self-doubt that come during the teen years and beyond. Practice of Yoga can help improving the personality of the children.<sup>4</sup>

All of the above benefits tie together. When children learn to accept and love themselves for who they are, to see the good in others, to focus and calm their minds, and to be aware of their innate capabilities, they learn tools for resilience. They are more likely to be positive and optimistic about life and their abilities, and will hopefully be less likely to succumb to

anxiety, depression and other mental health issues that are so prevalent today.

Maybe most importantly, yoga teaches children that relaxation is not only allowed; it is encouraged. Relaxing is not easy and learning to relax takes practice. Yoga provides space for the mind to slow down and settle. Yoga and physical exercise are useful additions to the school routine, with physical exercise improving social self-esteem.<sup>5</sup>

Children are always told that they need to be engaged and productive. Their little minds are leaping from one activity to another all day long, often right up until they crash at bedtime. Yoga teaches kids that it doesn't have to always be like that. If children can learn how to relax and be still, they will be able to handle better the stressors and pressures that will begin to hit them as they get older. The most obvious benefits of physical exercise in children are improvements in physical fitness, which was shown in a study on 57 children.<sup>6</sup>

Children are actually natural yogis. Their innate trust in others, combined with their lack of inhibitions, allows them to receive the teachings of yoga and grow from them in inspiring ways. Adults have a lot to learn from the way children receive yoga! If we can lead them there, they will not only benefit, but they will enjoy it immensely. A separate report showed that mindfulness based approaches may improve adjustment among stressed and disadvantaged youth by improving self-regulatory capacities.<sup>7</sup>

#### **Methodology:**

40 Students were randomly assigned for Yoga program over a single semester. In this pre-post research design study subjects were introduced to a set of Asana, Pranayama, Meditation, Yoga Nidra and Shatkarma (kriya) practices for a whole semester. The practice session was for half an hour daily (except Sundays and

Holidays) just before the class. Students completed baseline and end-program self-report measures of general mental ability test. Independent evaluation of individual

outcome measures revealed that yoga participants showed statistically significant differences between pre and post data.

**Results:**

Table (1) - General Mental Ability

	Mean	sd	“t” value	significant level
Pre	48.17	11.3	3.80	at 0.01
Post	64.62	28.08		

Above result table shows the mean and standard deviation of the pre and post values of General Mental Ability level of the children practiced the Yoga has been shown in the table. Where N = 40, M1 = 48.17, M2 = 64.62, SED = 4.47, df= 39 and r= 0.27, as well as the t value is 3.80, which is significant at 0.01 level of confidence.

**Discussion & Conclusion:**

Yoga needs to be integrated in education rather as a boon to the students than an additional burden. It is not necessary to add more and more yoga practices from lower to higher standards in schools, or colleges’ etc. selected yoga practices can be appropriated for the use of different types of learners to meet their specific requirements and problems. Coverage of syllabus need not be insisted. Instead, maximum contribution towards the welfare of the learners could be aimed at while selecting various items and contents from a sort of flexible syllabus.

without recourse to any dogma, and they require the same rigour as science insists, namely, observation, experimentation, and verification by repeatable experience. Yoga can be looked upon as the experiential basis for philosophical speculations and conclusions, and if rightly used, Yoga can be a bridge between philosophy and science.<sup>9</sup> Through the sound practice of Yoga, one can attain a disease free body as well as keen intellect.<sup>10</sup>

Practice of Yoga improves mental health.<sup>8</sup> the methods of Yoga can be pursued

The results suggest that implementation of yoga is acceptable and feasible in a school setting and has the potential of playing an important role in increasing general mental ability of children.

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