

Yoga as a Supportive Intervention for Emotional Regulation among Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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Abstract

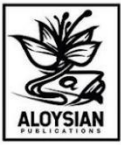
Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) frequently struggle with emotional regulation that impacts their involvement in classroom, academic, and social activities in inclusive education environments. Students with ASD can sometimes react to the classroom environment with anxiety, frustration, impulsive responses and struggles to adapt to the routine. These challenges often create difficulties in learning and in attending classes in the mainstream. In recent years, yoga has gained attention as a holistic mind-body practice that may support emotional stability, self-regulation, and psychological well-being among children with developmental disabilities. The present study aimed to explore the role of yoga as a supportive intervention for improving emotional regulation among students with autism spectrum disorder in Inclusive schools of Delhi.

This study used convergent mixed methods research design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) to combine quantitative and qualitative approaches. The students with autism spectrum disorder attending Inclusive schools of Delhi, their teachers and parents were included in the population. The study used purposive sampling, which entailed 30 students with ASD, 10 special educators, and 20 parents. The quantitative data collecting tools were the Emotional Regulation Rating Scale and the structured questionnaires, while the qualitative data collecting tools were the semi-structured interviews and classroom observations.

An 8-week yoga intervention program was carried out and included a combination of simple yoga postures, breathing exercises and relaxation techniques, 3 times a week. Both quantitative data and qualitative responses were analysed by descriptive statistics and thematic analysis respectively.

The results revealed that after the yoga intervention, students' emotional regulation was improved. These changes included a decrease in emotional outbursts and anxiety, and an improvement in calmness, attention and classroom participation. This study highlights the potential of yoga as a culturally and financially accessible intervention in school settings for emotional regulation of students with ASD.

Keywords: *Autism Spectrum Disorder, Emotional Regulation, Yoga Intervention, Inclusive Schools.*



Introduction

Inclusive education has become a fundamental principle of contemporary educational systems, emphasizing equal learning opportunities for all students regardless of their abilities or disabilities. Legislation promoting inclusive education in India includes the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016, which includes a provision for reasonable accommodation for learners with disabilities and equal access to education (Government of India, 2016). Similarly, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 gives emphasis on inclusive and equitable education by making it obligatory for schools to have children with varying learning needs in the mainstream classrooms (Ministry of Education, 2020).

With students having special educational needs, children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) can be a significant minority that may need extra academic, social and emotional needs support. The criteria for ASD described in the American Psychiatric Association (2013) are persistent deficits in social communication and interaction and restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviour. Emotional regulation is one of the biggest impairments of individuals with ASD, defined as the capacity to monitor, assess, and adjust emotional reactions across various contexts (Mazefsky et al., 2013).

Students with ASD might experience emotional dysregulation through anxiety, frustration, impulsive behaviour and emotional outbursts, especially in a classroom setting with demands for attention, flexibility and social interaction. These challenges can have a major impact on students' academic engagement, their relationships with peers, and their involvement in inclusive classroom activities (Samson et al., 2014). One of the main difficulties teachers face in inclusive classrooms is dealing with students' emotional and behavioural issues with ASD, especially when the classroom has students with other learning disabilities.

In recent years, there has been increasing interest in holistic and complementary interventions that can help support emotional and behavioural development in children with developmental disabilities. Yoga is a traditional mind-body practice that combines physical postures (asanas), breathing exercises (pranayama), and relaxation techniques, and is recognized for its benefits on mental health, stress reduction, and emotional regulation (Field, 2011).

Studies have shown that yoga interventions can affect attention, anxiety and emotional regulation in children and adolescents (Khalsa & Butzer, 2016). Yoga can offer a structured sensory experience and a calming routine for children with autism spectrum disorder, which can help to calm them down and manage their behaviours (Koenig et al., 2012). There have also been studies looking at school-based yoga programmes, which found that students' self-regulation, concentration and emotional wellbeing improved (Hagen & Nayar, 2014).

Though yoga has got immense popularity as a supportive intervention, there is scarcity of research on the role of yoga in the improvement of emotional regulation among students with autism spectrum disorder in Inclusive schools of Delhi. Therefore, the present study aims to explore the role of yoga as a supportive intervention for enhancing emotional regulation among students with autism spectrum disorder in Inclusive schools.



Review of Literature

Emotional regulation problems have been repeatedly cited as a significant issue for people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The inability to regulate their emotions can contribute to anxiety, impulsive responses, and behaviour outbursts that can impact student engagement in class and socializing with peers (Mazefsky et al., 2013). Likewise, Samson et al. (2014) found that those with ASD have difficulty identifying and regulating their emotional reactions, potentially impairing adaptive behaviours in learning settings. Emotional regulation is thus seen as playing an important role in students with developmental disabilities' academic engagement and classroom participation (Ashburner et al., 2010).

The researchers in recent years have gone in the direction of holistic approaches to emotional well-being and self-regulation of children. Yoga has been acknowledged as a mind–body exercise, which involves the combination of physical postures, breathing and relaxation techniques to balance the psychological and emotional systems (Field, 2011). Research on school-based yoga has shown that it can positively impact children and youth's stress management abilities, emotional regulation and concentration (Khalsa & Butzer, 2016). Koenig et al. (2012) noted that yoga-based interventions were effective in enhancing attention and classroom readiness among children with autism spectrum disorder. Additionally, Hagen and Nayar (2014) noted that yoga practices can improve emotional awareness and mental health of school-age children.

Although a number of studies show the efficacy of yoga interventions, the majority of research have been carried out in clinical or therapeutic settings and not in a more inclusive classroom setting. The amount of empirical evidence on the effects of yoga on emotional regulation in mainstream schools and among students with autism spectrum disorder remains limited. Studies on emotional regulation interventions that are yet to be implemented in a practical and classroom setting with students with ASD are still limited in the context of Inclusive schools, especially from Delhi. Hence, the aim of the present study is to study and explore the role of yoga as an enabling intervention for improving emotional regulation in school going students with ASD in inclusive schools of Delhi.

While difficulties in emotional regulation have been found in persons with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), most research has been conducted in clinical or therapeutic settings and not in inclusive classroom settings (Mazefsky et al., 2013; Samson et al., 2014). Literature shows that yoga has been used in children and adolescents to benefit emotional well-being, reduce stress and enhance attention (Field, 2011; Khalsa & Butzer, 2016). But few studies have specifically studied the effect of the yoga on emotional regulation for students with ASD in mainstream schools. The research related to inclusive education in India has been cantered more on policy implementation and academic accommodations, rather than on emotional regulation interventions. There is little empirical research that focuses on classroom strategies that address the emotional needs of children with ASD, especially in Inclusive Schools of Delhi. Furthermore, easy-to-implement, low-cost, and structured interventions, that are integrated into the regular school day, are under-researched. Hence, research is required to explore the impact of yoga as an adjunctive tool to improve emotional regulation of students with autism spectrum disorder in an inclusive school setting.



Need of the Study

Inclusive education seeks to give equal access to learning for students of differing capabilities in regular classrooms. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016) and the National Education Policy (2020) are policies that highlight the importance of inclusive education, which is not only focused on academic learning, but also includes emotional and behavioural development of children with disabilities. Students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) may experience greater difficulty in emotional regulation that impacts their participation in learning, classroom behavior, and social interaction with peers.

In many inclusive classrooms, especially the Inclusive schools of Delhi, teachers tend to concentrate on academic accommodations and individualised instruction and may not have much structured strategies for supporting emotional regulation as well. Students with ASD may experience emotional dysregulation, which can lead to anxiety, frustration, and challenging behaviours that may affect their ability to participate in the classroom.

Yoga has been known to enhance emotional regulation, attention, and self-regulation among children and is considered a holistic, mind–body approach. Yoga is an easy-to-implement, low-cost and culturally relevant intervention, potentially offering a structured activity to help regulate emotions in students with ASD.

Hence, the present study is important because it aims at studying the role of yoga as an intervention for emotional regulation among students with autism spectrum disorder in Inclusive schools of Delhi. The results of this study could help formulate practical recommendations for improving inclusive classroom practices and helping the emotional health of children with ASD.

1. To study the emotional regulation challenges faced by children with autism spectrum disorder in Inclusive schools of Delhi.
2. To explore the role of yoga practices as an assistive intervention for enhancing emotional regulation among children with autism spectrum disorder.
3. To examine teachers' perceptions regarding the incorporation of yoga-based practices in inclusive classrooms.
4. To examine parents' observations related emotional and behavioural changes among children with autism spectrum disorder following yoga intervention.

Research Methodology

The convergent mixed method research design was used to investigate the role of yoga as supportive intervention for emotional regulation in the students of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in inclusive schools of Delhi. Mixed-methods research combines quantitative and qualitative methods in one study, to gain a complete picture of the research problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This design was suitable for the present investigation since the research was not only about the measurement of the changes in students' emotional regulation but also with regard to the perception of effectiveness of yoga practices as regards teachers and parents.

Convergent design involved the collection of quantitative data and qualitative data at the same time in the research process and analyzing them separately. The results of both the data forms were then combined to give a comprehensive analysis of the contribution of Yoga practices to the regulation of emotions among students with ASD. The quantitative part aimed at identifying observable behavioural changes of students after the yoga intervention and the qualitative part aimed at gaining insights into the participants' experiences and perceptions of the intervention.

Population of the Study

The subjects of the study were students diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) attending Inclusive schools in Delhi. These schools have policies that encourage the mainstreaming of children with disabilities in their schools with the assistance of special educators and resource teachers. Students were not the only ones identified in the population, but also special educators and parents who are directly involved in the emotional and educational development of students with ASD.

Sample of the Study

Participants were selected through a purposive sampling method where those who had a direct involvement with inclusive education were selected. In educational research, when participants are chosen based on their significance to the research goals, Purposive sampling is widely used (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Students diagnosed as having autism spectrum disorders, special educators and their parents studied in Inclusive schools of Delhi was included in the sample. A total of 30 students with ASD, 10 special educators and 20 parents participated in the sample. The students chosen were those that have been formally diagnosed as having ASD from school records and who were receiving support from a special educator.

Tools for Data Collection

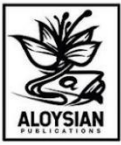
Four research tools were employed to gather good data pertinent to the study which is consistent with the four objectives of the study. Several tools were used so that triangulation and credibility of the results would be obtained.

1. Emotional Regulation Rating Scale

Emotional regulation problems were measured in the students with autism spectrum disorder using a structured Emotional Regulation Rating Scale. This tool was designed to measure emotional regulation problems and changes after yoga intervention. The scale contained the following indicators: emotional control, response to frustration, anxiety during classroom tasks, and participation in classroom activities. The rating scale was completed by the special educators according to their observation of students' behaviour.

2. Yoga Intervention Observation Schedule

Students' engagement and behaviour in Yoga sessions were documented using observation schedule. This tool was used to evaluate the effectiveness of yoga practices to regulate



students with ASD emotions. Students' attention, participation, emotional responses and following instructions during yoga activities were observed.

3. Teacher Questionnaire

Structured questionnaire was given to the special educators to gather their perceptions about the implementation and effectiveness of yoga practices in inclusive classrooms. This tool was suited that of gaining insight into the teachers' perspectives on using yoga-based practices as a supportive strategy to enhance emotional regulation in students who have ASD.

4. Parent Questionnaire

Parents' observations on emotional and behavioural changes of their children after the yoga sessions were collected using a parent questionnaire and assisted in capturing emotional changes that could also be observed in the home environment.

Yoga Intervention Procedure

Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders were included in a structured yoga intervention program. The program involved some basic and authentic kid-friendly yoga asanas like Anulom-Vilom Pranayama, Bhramari Pranayama, Tadasana (Mountain Pose), Vrikshasana (Tree Pose) and Balasana (Child Pose). There were also brief relaxation and mindfulness exercises throughout each Yoga session, to encourage a sense of calm and emotional balance.

The intervention was administered for 8 weeks, three sessions a week, for about 20 minutes per session. Students were given yoga sessions supervised by special educators so that activities were safe for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

Data Analysis

Data from the Emotional Regulation Rating Scale and questionnaires were analysed descriptively with frequency and percentage. These techniques enabled the identification of patterns and changes in emotional regulation pre and post yoga intervention for the students. Qualitative data gathered from observation and open-ended responses were analysed using thematic analysis technique where themes emerged that were associated with emotional regulation, student engagement, and behavioural responses were identified. Combining quantitative and qualitative results allowed for a holistic view of the success of yoga practices in the field of emotional control in students with ASD in inclusive schools of Delhi.



Objective 1

To study the emotional regulation challenges faced by children with autism spectrum disorder.

Table 1

Emotional Regulation challenges faced by children with autism spectrum disorder

Emotional Indicator	Number of Students (n=30)	Percentage (%)
Frequent emotional outbursts	18	60%
Difficulty managing frustration	20	67%
Anxiety during classroom tasks	16	53%
Difficulty transitioning between activities	19	63%
Withdrawal from group participation	14	47%

Interpretation

The results suggest that emotional regulation difficulties are prevalent in the inclusive classroom setting for students with autism spectrum disorder. The majority of students (67%) had problems regulating frustration in the classroom. Likewise, 63% of students had difficulty moving between class activities. 60% of students were seen to be emotionally outburst and 53% were seen to experience anxiety during academic tasks.

These findings suggest that emotional regulation is a major classroom problem for students with ASD relating to participation and engagement in learning.

Objective 2

To explore the role of yoga practices as an assistive intervention for enhancing emotional regulation among children with autism spectrum disorder.

Table 2

Changes in Emotional Regulation after Yoga Intervention

Emotional Indicator	Before Yoga (%)	After Yoga (%)
Emotional outbursts	60%	33%
Anxiety during classroom tasks	53%	27%
Difficulty focusing on activities	57%	30%



Emotional Indicator	Before Yoga (%)	After Yoga (%)
Calm classroom participation	40%	70%

Interpretation

Pre-intervention data and post-intervention data comparisons showed that yoga practices helped students with ASD improve their emotional regulation. Emotional outburst decreased from 60% to 33% and the anxiety shown during class tasks decreased from 53% to 27%.

Moreover, the amount of student involvement in classroom activities has risen from 40% to 70%, which indicated that the application of yoga practices had an impact on students' emotional control and on the engagement of the students in the classroom.

Objective 3

To examine teachers' perceptions regarding the incorporation of yoga-based practices in inclusive classrooms.

Table 3

Special Education Teachers' Perceptions on Yoga Intervention

Teacher Responses	Number of Teachers (n=10)	Percentage (%)
Yoga improved emotional calmness	8	80%
Yoga improved attention and focus	7	70%
Yoga reduced behavioural disruptions	6	60%
Yoga is feasible in school routines	6	60%

Interpretation

The majority of Special Education Teachers (80%) reported that yoga practices helped students become calmer and emotionally stable during classroom activities. About 70% of teachers observed that there were improvements in the attention and focus of students after participating in yoga sessions. Yoga practices also were reported to decrease behavioral interruptions in classrooms, as well.

The results indicate that teachers see yoga as a viable and facilitating method for addressing emotional regulation issues in students with ASD.

Objective 4

To examine parents' observations related emotional and behavioural changes among children with autism spectrum disorder following yoga intervention.

Table 4

Parents' Observations of Emotional Changes

Observation	Number of Parents (n=20)	Percentage (%)
Child appeared calmer	14	70%
Reduced frustration and irritability	12	60%
Improved focus on activities	11	55%
Increased participation in daily tasks	10	50%

Interpretation

Parents also found that their children's emotional behaviour improved after the yoga intervention. Most parents (70%) noted their children were calmer following yoga sessions. Further, 60 percent indicated less frustration and irritability and 55 percent noted better concentration on tasks during normal activities.

The results of this study are in line with the teachers' observation and suggest that yoga can be beneficial in students with ASD for the improvement of emotional stability.

9. Discussion

This present study focused on the effect of yoga as a complementary therapy for enhancing Emotional Regulation in students having ASD in inclusive schools of Delhi. The results of the study suggest that emotional regulation difficulties are a frequent occurrence in inclusive classrooms with students with ASD. A significant number of students experienced challenges in maintaining a controlled reaction to frustration, emotional outbursts and anxiety in classroom activities. These findings align with previous research indicating that emotional dysregulation is a consistent feature of the autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and can impact a student's academic engagement in school and their social functioning within the school environment (Mazefsky et al., 2013; Samson et al., 2014).

The findings of this study also indicated that yoga intervention led to significant emotional regulation changes in students with ASD. After 8 weeks of yoga, there were decreases in emotional outbursts, anxiety and impulsive behavior, and increases in calmness, attention and classroom participation. The results are consistent with previous research that have shown beneficial effects of yoga on emotional stability, stress management and behaviour regulation in children (Field, 2011; Khalsa & Butzer, 2016). Students can learn to be more aware of their own



bodies, regulate their breathing with yoga like Anulom-Vilom Pranayama, Vrikshasana, Balasana and Tadasana, and meditate to achieve emotional balance, thus contributing to emotional regulation.

The teachers' responses to the present study also highlighted the positive impact of Yoga practices in inclusive classrooms. The majority of teachers noted that children were calmer, more focused and involved in classroom activities after their yoga sessions. These observations are similar to those of Koenig et al. (2012) who found that children with autism showed greater improvements in attention and classroom readiness after participation in a structured yoga program. The teachers also suggested that yoga sessions offered a routine, predictable activity that helped students to control emotional reactions better.

Parent observations also revealed improvements in the impact of yoga intervention. Parents have reported that their children seemed more relaxed and were less frustrated following yoga sessions. Parents also reported some positive changes in attention and willingness to engage in daily activities. These results indicate that the therapeutic effects of yoga practices can be applied outside the classroom and also help in emotional stability in the home environment.

While the study showed some promising results, it also highlighted some challenges in the implementation of yoga-based practices in school environments. Teachers indicated that a lack of training in teaching yoga and limited time in the school schedule could be obstacles to the consistent use of these programs. Other studies of school-based interventions have documented that teachers need further training and institutional support to successfully integrate the holistic practices in the classroom.

Major Findings of the Study

These findings are consistent with the goals and research questions of the study.

1. Emotional Regulation Challenges with Students with ASD:

The study revealed that many students with an autism spectrum disorder have significant issues with emotional regulation in inclusive classroom settings. Several students had trouble managing their frustration during learning, controlling their emotional outbursts during learning, and coping with anxiety during academic activities. These emotional challenges often affected their participation in classroom learning and interaction with peers.

2. Effectiveness of Yoga in Improving Emotional Regulation:

The results showed that students with ASD who participated in the yoga practices experienced some positive changes in their emotional regulation. Following the yoga intervention program, emotional outbursts, anxiety when performing class work and impulsive behaviours were reduced. Meanwhile, there was also an improvement in calmness, focus, and engagement in class activity.

3. Positive Perceptions of Teachers regarding Yoga Intervention:

Yoga practices reported to be beneficial for students to be calmer and focused during class activities. They noted that breathing exercises and gentle yoga movements helped them to



feel more balanced emotionally and to minimise behavioural disturbances. Teachers also reported that yoga sessions were a well-formulated activity, allowing pupils to better control their emotions.

4. Parents' Observations of Emotional and Behavioural Changes:

Parents indicated that their children showed significant emotional and behavioral changes after participating in the yoga sessions. Parents noticed their children were less agitated, less frustrated and more focused when they were working on their daily tasks. The positive impacts seen with yoga practices could be carried into students' lives and affect their behaviour outside of the classroom.

5. Implementation Challenges in School Settings:

The intervention was seen to be effective in yoga; however, some obstacles were found in the implementation of yoga practices in schools. Limited time in school schedules and lack of formal training in the yoga instruction were noted by teachers. All these factors can contribute to the consistent incorporation of yoga related activities in an inclusive classroom setting.

Overall, the findings of the study suggest that yoga can be a supportive strategy for improving emotional regulation among students with autism spectrum disorder in inclusive educational settings.

Educational Implications

The academic and emotional needs of students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) need to be addressed in inclusive classrooms.

Simple asanas and breathing exercises can be incorporated into the normal classroom experience in a yoga manner, helping regulate emotions.

Teachers and special educators need to be trained in holistic strategies for their classrooms which may incorporate yoga practices to address emotional and behavioral issues.

Schools should support the implementation of structured well-being programs to help students with special educational need to become calm, focused and self-regulated.

Parent-school partnership is crucial, as it allows for reinforcing supportive practices, such as yoga, at home as well.

Incorporating culturally relevant, low-cost practices such as yoga can have beneficial effects on emotional regulation, engagement, and learning for children with ASD in mainstream schools.

Suggestions for Future Research

The findings from this study might be generalizable to a larger sample size from other geographic areas in the future.



A longitudinal study can be carried out to see how Yoga practices affect the emotional control of autistic students in the long run.

Future studies could investigate the efficacy of various yoga based therapeutic programs for children with developmental disabilities.

Studies can also focus on the importance of teacher training in interventions to support emotional and behavioural management for inclusive classrooms using yoga.

Conclusion

The present study aimed to examine how yoga could be used as a supportive technique for emotional control in the students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in inclusive schools in Delhi. The results indicated that students with ASD face significant difficulties in regulating their emotions (anxiety, frustration, impulsive responses) in inclusive classroom settings. These emotional regulation challenges frequently affect their involvement in the classroom, attention and social relationships.

The findings of this investigation suggest that students' emotional regulation was improved to some degree after implementing structured yoga practices such as breathing exercises and basic yoga postures. A decrease in emotional outbursts and anxious feelings was noted and increased calmness, concentration and engagement in classrooms was noticed. Teachers and parents also commented on the positive shift in the emotional behaviour of students, indicating a capacity for emotional stability in school and at home through yoga practices.

The study also shows that yoga as a practical and culturally relevant approach can be implemented as an affordable strategy that can be incorporated into a classroom environment as a culturally responsive strategy to promote the emotional well-being of students with ASD. However, the implementation of such practices effectively, however, needs adequate awareness of teachers and institutional support. In general, the results highlight the need to include holistic interventions such as yoga in inclusive education to improve emotional regulation and classroom engagement and learning experiences of students with ASD.

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