



Impact of Yoga and Meditation on Academic Stress and Life Skills of Secondary School Students

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Abstract

Secondary school students experience substantial academic and developmental pressures arising from examinations, heavy workloads, parental expectations, peer comparison, career uncertainty and rapid physical and emotional changes. When these demands exceed students' perceived coping resources, academic stress may impair concentration, motivation, sleep, emotional stability and school participation. Life skills such as self-awareness, emotional regulation, problem-solving, decision-making, communication, empathy and coping with stress can protect adolescents from some of these adverse effects.

The present article examines the impact of yoga and meditation on the academic stress and life skills of secondary school students. It is a qualitative, descriptive and literature-based study drawing on official documents of the World Health Organization, the National Council of Educational Research and Training and the Central Board of Secondary Education, together with selected school-based trials and systematic reviews. Research findings indicate that appropriately designed yoga and meditation programmes may help students recognise stress reactions, regulate emotions, improve attention, develop adaptive coping and respond more calmly to academic difficulties. Some studies also report improvements in working memory, self-esteem, resilience and prosocial behaviour. However, the evidence is not uniformly positive. A large cluster-randomised trial found that universal school-based mindfulness training was not more effective than usual school provision for improving adolescent mental health and well-being.

The article concludes that yoga and meditation should not be presented as guaranteed methods for securing high academic marks or as substitutes for counselling, physical exercise or mental-health treatment. Their educational value depends on regular practice, student engagement, trained instructors, cultural sensitivity, safe implementation and integration with a wider life-skills and school-well-being programme.



Keywords: Yoga, meditation, academic stress, life skills, secondary school students, mindfulness, coping skills, emotional regulation.

1. Introduction

Secondary education is a decisive stage in the personal and academic life of a student. At this level, students are expected to understand increasingly complex subjects, prepare for examinations, make decisions about future study and adjust to changing relationships with parents, teachers and peers. These educational expectations coincide with adolescence, which the World Health Organization identifies as the period between 10 and 19 years of age. Adolescents undergo rapid physical, cognitive and psychosocial development that affects how they think, make decisions, manage emotions and interact with others.

Academic demands are not harmful in themselves. Appropriate challenges can motivate students, strengthen perseverance and develop a sense of achievement. Stress becomes problematic when students believe that educational demands are greater than their available time, abilities, emotional resources or social support. Examination anxiety, fear of failure, continuous comparison, excessive homework and uncertainty about future careers may then produce irritability, avoidance, disturbed sleep, physical tension and reduced concentration.

Mental-health difficulties can directly affect school attendance and academic work. According to the World Health Organization, anxiety disorders are estimated to affect 4.1% of adolescents aged 10–14 and 5.3% of those aged 15–19. Anxiety and depressive disorders may interfere substantially with school participation and learning. These figures refer to diagnosable conditions rather than ordinary academic stress, but they demonstrate why schools must take adolescent emotional well-being seriously.

Yoga and meditation have increasingly been introduced into schools as possible approaches to stress management and holistic development. Yoga may combine physical postures, regulated movement, breathing awareness, relaxation and concentration. Meditation generally involves the deliberate regulation of attention, often by observing breathing, bodily sensations, sounds or thoughts without immediate reaction. Their shared educational purpose is to strengthen awareness and self-regulation.

The value of these practices should not be exaggerated. Yoga and meditation cannot remove an unreasonable examination system, family conflict, bullying, discrimination or shortage of educational support. They cannot replace trained counsellors or medical treatment. Nevertheless, when they are implemented carefully, they may provide students with practical methods for recognising stress and responding to it more constructively.

2. Academic Stress and Life Skills

Academic stress refers to the psychological and physical pressure associated with educational demands. It may arise from examinations, low achievement, fear of punishment, competition, time pressure, difficult subjects, parental expectations or uncertainty regarding educational and occupational choices. Stress also depends on how the student interprets a situation. The same



examination may be viewed by one student as a manageable challenge and by another as a threat to personal worth.

Academic stress commonly contains cognitive, emotional, behavioural and physical elements. Cognitive signs include excessive worry, negative self-talk, forgetfulness and difficulty concentrating. Emotional signs may include fear, anger, helplessness and irritability. Behavioural responses can involve procrastination, absence, withdrawal or excessive studying without adequate rest. Physical signs may include muscular tension, fatigue, headaches and sleep disturbance.

Life skills are the abilities that enable individuals to respond effectively to the demands and challenges of everyday life. The World Health Organization's framework emphasises decision-making, problem-solving, creative thinking, critical thinking, communication, interpersonal relationships, self-awareness, empathy, coping with emotions and coping with stress.

Life skills do not develop merely by learning definitions. They require practice in real situations. A student develops decision-making by comparing alternatives and accepting consequences; emotional regulation develops by recognising and managing feelings; communication develops through listening and expressing disagreement respectfully. Yoga and meditation may support these skills by strengthening the internal abilities upon which thoughtful action depends.

CBSE has emphasised the integration of life-skills education in Classes VI–X and identifies self-confidence, social-emotional well-being and the ability to face difficult situations as important educational outcomes. Its school guidance also includes yoga, meditation and mindfulness among possible practices within a wider life-skills, health and well-being programme.

3. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the present article are:

1. To examine the major sources and consequences of academic stress among secondary school students.
2. To analyse how yoga and meditation may influence students' academic stress.
3. To study their possible contribution to self-awareness, emotional regulation, coping, decision-making, communication and resilience.
4. To review selected evidence from school-based yoga and mindfulness interventions.
5. To identify the limitations and risks associated with their implementation.
6. To suggest an educationally appropriate framework for integrating yoga, meditation and life-skills education in secondary schools.

4. Research Method

The study follows a qualitative, descriptive and analytical method. It is based on a review of official health and educational documents and selected peer-reviewed studies relating to adolescents, school-based yoga, meditation, mindfulness, academic stress and life skills.

The reviewed literature was organised under the themes of stress reduction, attention, emotional regulation, coping, self-esteem, social behaviour, working memory and school implementation. Greater weight was given to controlled trials, systematic reviews and official guidance. No primary



data were collected, and no invented sample, questionnaire score or statistical result has been presented. The conclusions therefore represent evidence-based tendencies rather than universal causal claims.

5. Yoga and Meditation as Educational Practices

In a school context, yoga should not be reduced to advanced postures or public demonstrations. A suitable programme may contain gentle movement, simple asanas, breathing awareness, short periods of relaxation and age-appropriate concentration exercises. Meditation may begin with two or three minutes of observing natural breathing and gradually progress to longer practices based on students' comfort and willingness.

NCERT's secondary-stage yoga material places yoga within compulsory Health and Physical Education. It focuses on physical fitness, emotional stability, concentration, mental development, personality development and stress management among adolescents. The material includes asanas, pranayama, relaxation and meditation, together with precautions and limitations.

Yoga and meditation overlap but are not identical. Yoga uses the body as an important point of entry into self-regulation. Students learn to coordinate movement, posture and breathing. Meditation works more directly with attention and awareness. It trains students to notice a thought, sensation or emotion without responding automatically.

These practices can be especially useful in adolescence because emotional reactions are often experienced physically. Fear may appear as rapid breathing; anger as muscular tension; and examination anxiety as restlessness or discomfort. When students learn to observe these signals, they may recognise stress before it develops into panic, aggression or complete avoidance.

Yoga and meditation should remain complementary to physical education. Many yoga sessions do not provide the vigorous movement required for cardiorespiratory fitness. Students continue to need outdoor games, sports, active recreation and adequate sleep. Yoga contributes controlled movement and internal awareness, while sports provide endurance, teamwork, speed and vigorous physical activity.

6. Impact on Academic Stress

6.1 Awareness of Stress Reactions

The first contribution of yoga and meditation is improved awareness of bodily and mental reactions. Students frequently experience stress without identifying it clearly. They may interpret restlessness as inability, temporary confusion as academic failure or physical tension as evidence that they cannot manage an examination.

Breathing awareness and guided relaxation teach students to recognise tension without immediately becoming overwhelmed by it. During meditation, students notice how frequently the mind moves toward future worries or past mistakes. This awareness may help them distinguish between an actual academic problem and anxious thoughts about that problem.

Self-awareness does not remove the examination, but it creates an opportunity for a more deliberate response. A student who notices rising tension may pause, regulate breathing, organise the task and seek help instead of abandoning the work.



6.2 Emotional Regulation

Academic stress often becomes harmful because students react impulsively to discomfort. They may become angry with family members, compare themselves constantly with peers or avoid studying because beginning the task activates anxiety. Yoga and meditation may help establish a brief pause between emotion and action.

A preliminary randomised trial of yoga in secondary-school students reported favourable changes in measures including anger control and fatigue after an 11-week programme. However, not all psychosocial outcomes showed equally clear improvement, and the study was preliminary.

The educational importance of emotional regulation lies in the ability to remain engaged with a difficult task. Students do not need to eliminate all anxiety before studying. They need to tolerate manageable discomfort, return attention to the task and respond without excessive self-criticism.

6.3 Relaxation and Recovery

Academic life requires effort, but continuous effort without recovery reduces efficiency. Students may spend long hours at a desk while retaining little because they are physically tired and mentally preoccupied. Short relaxation practices can teach the difference between purposeful rest and avoidance.

A study of school-going adolescents reported reductions in psychosocial stress following a Yoga Nidra intervention. The measured stressors included school performance, peer pressure, body image and uncertainty about the future. The study supports the possible value of guided relaxation, although its findings require replication through larger and more diverse trials.

Relaxation is most useful when connected with responsible study behaviour. A ten-minute practice followed by focused revision may be constructive; using relaxation repeatedly to postpone necessary work is not. Students therefore require instruction in time management and study planning alongside yoga.

6.4 Coping with Examination Pressure

Meditation may reduce the tendency to treat every anxious thought as a fact. Before an examination, a student may think, "I will forget everything" or "My future will be destroyed if I perform badly." Mindful observation encourages recognition of such thoughts as mental events rather than certain predictions.

School-based mindfulness research with urban male adolescents found reduced anxiety, improved coping and possible attenuation of physiological stress responses when compared with a health-education control condition. The sample was small, so the findings should be interpreted as encouraging rather than definitive.

Yoga and meditation can therefore become parts of an examination-preparation programme that also includes realistic scheduling, sleep, physical activity, academic support and access to counselling. Presenting them as independent solutions would ignore the complex causes of student stress.



7. Evidence from School-Based Studies: Research on yoga and meditation in schools has produced promising but mixed findings. Variation in age, programme content, instructor qualifications, duration, attendance and outcome measures makes direct comparison difficult.

A preliminary trial of a high-school yoga programme found possible protective effects on psychosocial well-being when yoga was incorporated into physical-education classes. The intervention combined physical postures, breathing, relaxation and meditation. The researchers nevertheless recognised the small sample and the need for stronger studies.

A randomised controlled trial involving adolescents compared mindfulness meditation, hatha yoga and a wait-list condition. The mindfulness group showed greater improvement in working-memory capacity than the comparison groups. Working memory is relevant to following instructions, solving multi-step problems and keeping information active during learning. However, improvement in a cognitive test should not automatically be interpreted as a guaranteed increase in examination marks.

A pragmatic cluster-randomised study examined a universal yoga and mindfulness programme among students aged 11–14 in a racially diverse urban setting. The study evaluated anxiety and depression symptoms and demonstrated that outcomes may depend on students' initial symptoms and the context of delivery. Such findings support targeted and carefully evaluated programmes rather than assuming identical effects for every student.

A systematic review of 77 school-based mindfulness studies, including 12,358 students across five continents, found the strongest evidence for improvements in prosocial behaviour, resilience, executive function, attention and mindfulness and for reductions in anxiety, conduct difficulties and attention problems. Evidence for well-being was mixed, and the highest-quality evidence did not demonstrate a reduction in depressive symptoms. The authors stressed the need for better controlled studies, multiple methods of assessment and follow-up evaluation.

The large MYRIAD cluster-randomised trial provides an important caution. It included thousands of young adolescents across more than 80 schools and compared universal school-based mindfulness training with teaching as usual. The programme was not more effective or cost-effective than usual school provision in reducing mental-health risk or promoting well-being.

The MYRIAD result does not prove that meditation is useless. It shows that introducing the same compulsory programme for all students does not guarantee benefit. Student interest, teacher competence, regular personal practice, school climate and the suitability of the intervention may determine outcomes.

Recent Indian evidence also illustrates both promise and limitations. A quasi-experimental study published in 2026 involved 119 students in Grades IX–XI from a government school in northern India. A 12-week Sahaja Yoga Meditation programme was associated with improved self-esteem and adaptive coping and reduced problematic internet use and maladaptive coping. Because the study used purposive sampling and a wait-list design rather than full randomisation, further research is needed before firm causal conclusions are drawn.



Overall, the evidence supports cautious use. Yoga and meditation appear capable of helping some students and some outcomes, particularly attention, anxiety, coping and self-regulation. They do not produce uniform benefits, and their effectiveness depends substantially on programme quality and student engagement.

8. Contribution to the Development of Life Skills

8.1 Self-Awareness

Self-awareness involves recognising one's emotions, thoughts, physical reactions, strengths and limitations. Yoga develops bodily awareness by asking students to notice posture, balance, breathing and tension. Meditation extends this awareness to thoughts and emotions.

A self-aware student may recognise that poor preparation, rather than lack of intelligence, is producing examination anxiety. This distinction can change behaviour. Instead of concluding, "I am incapable," the student can identify a specific need such as revising a topic, seeking clarification or changing a study schedule.

Self-awareness also protects students from harmful comparison. Yoga should be non-competitive: each participant works within personal limits. When this principle is respected, students learn that individual differences in flexibility, speed of learning and emotional expression do not determine human worth.

8.2 Coping with Stress and Emotions

Coping refers to the thoughts and actions used to manage difficult situations. Adaptive coping includes planning, problem-solving, seeking support, constructive emotional expression and temporary relaxation. Maladaptive coping includes avoidance, aggression, denial and harmful digital or substance use.

Yoga and meditation provide practical coping tools. A student may use slow breathing before an oral presentation, brief relaxation after prolonged study or mindful observation when receiving disappointing marks. These practices cannot solve the external problem, but they may reduce emotional reactivity sufficiently for the student to choose an appropriate next action.

The recent Indian Sahaja Yoga study is relevant because it found improvement in adaptive coping alongside reduced maladaptive coping and problematic internet use. It suggests that meditation may support students in responding more deliberately to discomfort rather than immediately seeking escape through digital activity.

8.3 Decision-Making and Problem-Solving

Academic stress often narrows thinking. A distressed student may see only two possibilities: complete success or total failure. Calm attention can create mental space for considering alternatives. The student may break a large task into smaller parts, prioritise subjects, request assistance or modify an unrealistic goal.

Meditation does not directly teach the steps of decision-making. It supports the attentional and emotional conditions needed to use those steps. Therefore, schools should connect contemplative practices with explicit problem-solving activities. After relaxation, students may discuss a



realistic academic dilemma, identify alternatives, consider consequences and choose an action plan.

8.4 Critical and Creative Thinking

Stress can lead students to repeat familiar reactions even when those reactions are ineffective. A more regulated mind is better able to examine assumptions and consider alternatives. Meditation trains students to observe thoughts, whereas life-skills education teaches them to evaluate those thoughts.

Creative thinking may be supported when students become less afraid of mistakes. In yoga, progress usually occurs gradually, and imperfect performance is expected. This experience can help build tolerance for trial and error. However, claims that meditation automatically creates intelligence or creativity would exceed the available evidence.

8.5 Effective Communication

When students are emotionally overwhelmed, communication becomes reactive. They may shout, withdraw or assume hostile intentions. Awareness of emotion can help a student pause before speaking. A short breathing practice during a conflict may reduce impulsive responses.

Communication skills still require direct teaching. Students need opportunities to listen, express disagreement respectfully, seek clarification and give constructive feedback. Yoga and meditation support communication by improving self-regulation; they do not replace dialogue, role play and cooperative activities.

8.6 Empathy and Interpersonal Relationships

Meditation practices that involve non-judgemental awareness may help students recognise that other people also experience fear, embarrassment and insecurity. Group yoga can teach respect for different bodies and abilities when comparison and ridicule are actively discouraged.

The systematic review of school-based mindfulness interventions found high-quality evidence for improved prosocial behaviour and lower-quality but supportive evidence relating to empathy and social competence. These outcomes are relevant to classroom cooperation, peer support and prevention of bullying.

8.7 Resilience and Self-Discipline

Resilience is the capacity to adapt and continue functioning during difficulty. It does not mean remaining unaffected by failure. A resilient student experiences disappointment but can reflect, seek help and resume effort.

Yoga develops discipline through regular and gradual practice. Students learn that forcing a posture is unsafe and that progress requires patience. Meditation similarly teaches returning attention after distraction. The repeated act of returning may become a useful model for academic persistence: distraction is not failure; attention can be restored.

9. Influence on Academic Functioning

The most credible academic contribution of yoga and meditation is indirect. They may improve the conditions under which learning occurs rather than directly producing high marks. Attention,



working memory, emotional stability, sleep, attendance and willingness to seek help all influence academic functioning.

A student who can regulate anxiety may interpret examination questions more carefully. Improved working memory may support mathematical reasoning and reading comprehension. Better coping may reduce procrastination and avoidance. Increased self-awareness may help students select realistic study strategies.

Academic achievement is nevertheless influenced by teaching quality, prior learning, socioeconomic conditions, language, nutrition, family support and access to educational resources. Yoga cannot compensate for poor teaching or unequal opportunity. Schools should therefore avoid using students' participation in meditation to transfer responsibility for structural academic problems onto the students themselves.

10. Framework for Effective School Implementation

Yoga and meditation should be integrated into a comprehensive programme of Health and Physical Education, life skills and school mental well-being. NCERT places yoga within the physical, social, emotional and mental development of the child and recommends practice-oriented learning at the secondary stage.

A practical school programme may include two or three structured sessions each week, supplemented by optional short practices before demanding academic activities. A session may contain gentle preparation, selected postures, natural breathing awareness and guided relaxation or meditation. Difficult postures, prolonged breath retention and forceful breathing should not be included in ordinary unsupervised school practice.

Teachers need recognised preparation in yoga or meditation, adolescent development, inclusive education and basic safety. NCERT guidance states that students with chronic health conditions should inform the teacher and that children with special needs may require consultation and adaptation according to capacity.

Participation should be culturally sensitive and psychologically safe. No student should be forced to recite a religious formula or accept a philosophical belief. Students who are uncomfortable closing their eyes should be allowed to maintain a soft gaze. Students with trauma, panic symptoms or severe distress may require alternatives and professional support.

The practices should be connected with explicit life-skills activities. After a breathing exercise, students might identify their common stress signals. Following meditation, they may analyse an examination-related problem and prepare a coping plan. This connection prevents yoga from becoming a disconnected ritual.

Assessment should be formative and non-competitive. Students should not be graded according to flexibility or ability to perform difficult postures. Teachers may assess regular participation, understanding of safety, recognition of stress, use of coping strategies and reflective learning through journals, discussions and observation.



Schools should also involve families. NCERT's school mental-health guidance emphasises cooperation between schools, parents and communities and identifies yoga, ethics and life skills among activities that may contribute to a supportive well-being environment.

11. Challenges and Limitations

The first challenge is inadequate instructor preparation. Personal experience of yoga or meditation does not automatically qualify a person to teach adolescents. Poor instruction can produce physical strain, discomfort or psychological resistance.

The second challenge is compulsory participation without meaningful engagement. The MYRIAD trial indicates that a universal programme cannot be assumed to benefit all students. Choice, relevance and willingness to practise may influence outcomes.

The third challenge is exaggerated promotion. Yoga and meditation are sometimes advertised as guaranteed solutions for examination anxiety, depression, poor memory or low marks. The research does not support such universal claims.

The fourth challenge is inadequate attention to school conditions. Students cannot meditate away excessive homework, humiliation, discrimination, bullying or constant fear of punishment. Organisational causes of stress must be addressed directly.

The fifth challenge concerns research quality. Many studies use small samples, short interventions, passive control groups and self-report measures. Positive changes immediately after a programme may not continue months later.

Finally, meditation can occasionally be uncomfortable. Quiet attention may bring difficult thoughts or emotions to awareness. Teachers must not pressure distressed students to continue and should know when referral to a counsellor or mental-health professional is necessary.

12. Recommendations

Schools should adopt yoga and meditation as optional or flexibly delivered components of a broader life-skills and well-being programme rather than as isolated ceremonial activities.

Programmes should be age-appropriate, non-competitive, inclusive and connected with practical concerns such as examination preparation, emotional regulation, digital habits, communication and problem-solving.

Teachers should receive sustained training rather than one-day orientation. Training must include safe practice, student consent, disability adaptation, mental-health warning signs and referral procedures.

Schools should evaluate programmes through attendance, student feedback, observed coping behaviour and validated measures rather than relying only on publicity or immediate self-reports. Future studies should use larger and diverse samples, active control conditions, long-term follow-up and independent assessment. Indian research should include government and private schools, rural and urban contexts, different socioeconomic groups and students with disabilities. Most importantly, yoga and meditation should accompany improvements in teaching, counselling, workload, school climate, physical activity and family communication.



13. Conclusion

Yoga and meditation have meaningful potential to reduce academic stress and strengthen the life skills of secondary school students. Their most plausible contributions are increased self-awareness, better recognition of stress, improved emotional regulation, greater attentional control, adaptive coping and calmer decision-making.

Research findings are promising but not uniform. Several studies report benefits for anxiety, working memory, self-esteem, resilience and coping, while large-scale evidence shows that compulsory universal mindfulness programmes may produce no advantage over existing school provision. The effectiveness of an intervention therefore depends on how, why and for whom it is implemented.

Yoga and meditation should not be treated as magical solutions or substitutes for professional care. When taught safely, voluntarily and regularly by trained educators—and linked with life-skills education, physical activity and supportive school practices—they can help students face academic challenges with greater awareness, balance and resilience.

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