

The Role of Structured Yoga Programs in Enhancing Children's Physical Fitness and Emotional Regulation

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Abstract: *The present study examines the role of yoga in supporting the physical, psychological, and social development of children. With increasing academic demands and lifestyle-related health concerns, there is a growing need for holistic practices that promote overall well-being in early life. Using an experimental/survey-based research design, the study assessed the impact of regular yoga practice on key developmental indicators among school-aged children. The findings reveal significant improvements in flexibility, muscular strength, posture, and motor coordination. Additionally, children demonstrated enhanced concentration, emotional regulation, and reduced levels of stress and hyperactivity. Positive changes were also observed in social behavior, including increased confidence, better peer interaction, and improved classroom participation. Feedback from parents and teachers indicated strong acceptance of yoga as a safe, cost-effective, and accessible health practice suitable for school integration. Although limited by a modest sample size and short intervention duration, the study provides compelling evidence that yoga contributes meaningfully to children's holistic growth. The results underscore the need to incorporate structured yoga programs into educational settings to support physical, cognitive, and emotional development. Future research should explore long-term effects and age-specific yoga interventions.*

Keywords: Yoga; child development; holistic growth; physical fitness; emotional regulation; cognitive development; academic performance; mindfulness; school-based intervention; well-being

1. Introduction

Childhood is a critical period of rapid physical, psychological, and social development. During this stage, children begin to form essential motor skills, cognitive abilities, emotional patterns, and social behaviors that influence their overall growth and future well-being. However, in recent years, increasing academic pressure, sedentary lifestyles, reduced outdoor activities, and higher exposure to digital screens have contributed to a rise in developmental challenges among children. These challenges include poor posture, obesity, anxiety, attention deficits, and behavioral issues, which collectively highlight the need for holistic, sustainable health interventions.

Yoga, an ancient Indian discipline, has gained global recognition as an effective mind-body practice that supports integrated development. Unlike conventional physical activities, yoga encompasses asanas (postures), pranayama (breathing techniques), relaxation practices, and mindfulness components that together promote balance, flexibility, emotional stability, and mental clarity. Studies have shown that yoga interventions in children can enhance physical fitness, concentration, emotional regulation, and academic performance, while also reducing stress and hyperactivity. As a non-competitive and adaptable practice, yoga is particularly

suitable for children of diverse age groups and developmental needs.

Schools across many countries have begun to integrate yoga into their curricula as part of health and wellness programs. In India, where yoga originated, the National Education Policy (NEP 2020) emphasizes holistic education and encourages the inclusion of yoga and mindfulness-based practices in school routines. Despite this growing attention, there is still a need for empirical research that systematically examines the impact of yoga on children's developmental outcomes, especially within the Indian context.

The present study aims to bridge this gap by investigating the influence of yoga on children's physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development. By evaluating measurable developmental indicators and collecting feedback from teachers and parents, the study seeks to highlight the relevance of yoga as an essential component of child health and educational frameworks. Ultimately, this research reinforces the importance of introducing structured yoga programs to support the holistic growth and well-being of children in contemporary society.

2. Background

Children represent one of the most valuable resources of any society; however, in recent decades, their mental and physical well-being has increasingly been challenged by rapid lifestyle changes, academic pressures, digital exposure, and broader environmental stressors.

Global epidemiological findings indicate that 10–20% of children and adolescents experience a diagnosable mental health disorder during their development (Polanczyk et al., 2015). A large meta-analysis conducted across 27 countries estimated the overall prevalence of childhood mental disorders to be 13.4% (95% CI: 11.3–15.9) (Polanczyk et al., 2015). Similarly, data from high-income nations suggest that approximately 12.7% (95% CI: 10.1–15.9) of children have a diagnosable mental disorder at any given time, yet less than half of these children receive appropriate mental-health services (Erskine et al., 2017; Merikangas et al., 2010).

Beyond mental health concerns, several lifestyle-related risks are increasingly prevalent among children. Surveys conducted across multiple countries identify excessive screen time, obesity, unhealthy diet patterns, insufficient physical activity, bullying, internet-safety risks, domestic violence, child abuse, substance misuse, and youth suicide as top childhood health problems (Hinduja & Patchin, 2018; Sahoo et al., 2015).

Research further demonstrates that many of these factors are interconnected. For instance, excessive screen exposure—particularly more than four hours per day—is associated with increased risk of anxiety, depression, behavioral problems, and ADHD symptoms among children and adolescents (Twenge, 2020; Stiglic & Viner, 2019). Behaviors such as poor diet and physical inactivity accelerate both physical and emotional health concerns, worsening stress, irritability, fatigue, and reduced attention.

When children do not develop adequate coping mechanisms and stress-management skills at an early age, their ability to adjust to adversity becomes more difficult as they grow older. Therefore, the early promotion of emotional regulation, resilience, physical activity, and healthy lifestyle habits is crucial for long-term well-being.

Given this context of rising mental health challenges, lifestyle imbalances, and behavioral risks, holistic and preventive approaches such as yoga have gained substantial attention. Yoga supports physical health through strength, flexibility, and motor development, while also fostering emotional regulation, mindfulness, self-awareness, and stress reduction (Khalsa et al., 2012; Ferreira-Vorkapic et al., 2015). These qualities make yoga a valuable tool for supporting children's overall development and enhancing resilience from an early age.

Present and Future Health Concerns

Beyond current mental and lifestyle-related challenges, recent national and international reports reveal growing health risks among children and adolescents. In India, for example, 33.4% of children are underweight, 7.1% are wasted, 32.9% are stunted, and nearly 14% are obese, with evidence suggesting that 7 out of 10 obese children remain obese into adulthood (World Health Organization, 2021).

Additionally, children commonly experience health complaints such as headaches, anxiety, mood swings, and symptoms of depression—often linked to academic pressures, competition, excessive screen time, reduced physical activity, and social-media-driven comparison. Modern lifestyle patterns emphasizing academic achievement, continuous digital engagement, and limited unstructured downtime further intensify emotional and psychological stress among children (Stiglic & Viner, 2019; Twenge, 2020).

The World Health Organization (2020) also highlights alarming trends in adolescent mortality. The leading causes of death among individuals aged 10–19 years include road traffic injuries, suicide, pneumonia, diarrheal diseases, and drowning, many of which can be prevented through early health education, emotional regulation training, and behavioral interventions.

Furthermore, long-term effects of childhood health patterns are reflected in the rising prevalence of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs). Globally, NCDs account for approximately 70% of all deaths, with cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, and chronic respiratory illnesses being the major contributors (WHO, 2021). These conditions are strongly associated with early-life factors such as obesity, inactivity, chronic stress, unhealthy diet, and emotional dysregulation.

Growing evidence suggests that preventive lifestyle strategies are crucial for reducing future disease burden. Research shows that yoga is a highly effective holistic practice that helps mitigate NCD risk factors by improving metabolic function, regulating blood glucose, enhancing cardiovascular and pulmonary efficiency, and reducing anxiety, depression, and emotional instability in both children and adults (Ferreira-Vorkapic et al., 2015; Khalsa et al., 2012).

Yoga as a Vital Tool for Reducing Modifiable Risk Factors

Unhealthy lifestyle patterns are recognized as major contributors to the development of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) in children and adults. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021), four modifiable lifestyle risk factors—tobacco use, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, and harmful alcohol use—significantly influence the onset of cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes, and chronic respiratory diseases. In the context of children, these risk factors often begin early in life, driven by sedentary routines, irregular physical activity, high-calorie diets, and

chronic psychosocial stress resulting from academic pressure, social comparison, and digital overexposure.

Yoga has been identified as an effective preventive approach to reducing these risk factors through holistic lifestyle modification. Research demonstrates that yoga practices, including āsana, prāṇāyāma, mindfulness, and relaxation techniques, help improve metabolic functioning, reduce sedentary behavior, and enhance psychological well-being (Ross & Thomas, 2010; Khalsa et al., 2012). Studies further show that consistent yoga practice lowers stress biomarkers, improves emotional regulation, and enhances self-control among children and adolescents (Ferreira-Vorkapic et al., 2015; Hagen & Nayar, 2014). By promoting mindful eating, disciplined routines, improved respiratory capacity, and reduced impulsive behavior, yoga directly influences the shared modifiable risk factors of NCDs. When integrated into school curricula or daily routines, yoga serves as an early protective intervention that strengthens physical, emotional, and cognitive resilience, helping prevent long-term lifestyle-related diseases.

Kids' Yoga: Transforming Complete Health and Well-Being for a Safe and Healthy Future

Kids' yoga plays a significant role in promoting holistic growth and ensuring a healthy future for children. It functions as both a preventive and therapeutic intervention, addressing physical, emotional, and behavioral imbalances. Evidence shows that yoga enhances academic and daily performance by improving focus, balance, coordination, flexibility, strength, and bladder control (Sharma & Mehta, 2025). It further supports emotional well-being by increasing motivation, creativity, and resilience while reducing stress, anger, aggression, shyness, and trauma-related symptoms (Gupta et al., 2025). Yoga also fosters self-awareness, patience, mindfulness, confidence, and social harmony (Rao, 2024). Cognitive benefits include improved attention span, memory, logical reasoning, communication, and overall mental stability, contributing to comprehensive personality development (BMC Public Health, 2025).

Additionally, yoga therapy is widely used to support children with cardiac and respiratory issues, ADHD, anxiety, depression, behavioral disorders, Autism Spectrum Disorder, cerebral palsy, and other neurodevelopmental concerns (Cureus, 2024; WJARR, 2024).

Yoga for Today's Children: A Popular Path to Better Health and Behavior

Yoga has gained significant popularity among children in recent years, supported by growing research showing its benefits for attention, emotional regulation, and behavioral development. Studies demonstrate that yoga improves children's attentional performance, executive functioning, and cognitive control (Zhang et al., 2025; Chou & Huang, 2017). Research also highlights that yoga reduces anxiety, stress, and emotional difficulties while improving overall well-being (Stein et al., 2024; Shrikant et al., 2025).

Furthermore, yoga and mindfulness practices are increasingly used among children with behavioral or mental health challenges, making them one of the most widely adopted complementary interventions in pediatric populations (Bazzano et al., 2022; Jensen & Kenny, 2004). Together, these findings strongly suggest that yoga serves as a valuable, holistic tool for supporting children's cognitive, emotional, and psychological growth.

Impact of Yogic Mantra on Memory and Learning

Yogic mantra chanting, particularly in Sanskrit, has been traditionally associated with enhancing cognitive functions such as memory, attention, and learning capacity. Early exposure to structured chanting exercises leverages the brain's plasticity during childhood, supporting neural network development and improving verbal and auditory memory (Shrikant et al., 2025).

Studies examining mind-body interventions that include mantra chanting indicate improvements in attention, focus, and emotional regulation, which indirectly contribute to enhanced learning outcomes in children and adolescents (Stein et al., 2024; Bazzano et al., 2022). Although most contemporary research has focused on yoga postures and mindfulness, emerging evidence suggests that integrating chanting practices may amplify the cognitive and emotional benefits of yoga, providing a holistic approach to mental development. These findings highlight the potential of yogic mantra as a complementary tool for fostering both memory retention and overall learning efficiency in pediatric populations.

Parental Awareness and Children's Growth through Yoga

Parental awareness and involvement play a crucial role in promoting children's growth and holistic development through yoga. Parents who understand the benefits of yoga are more likely to encourage regular practice, create supportive environments, and participate alongside their children, which enhances adherence and effectiveness (Shrikant et al., 2025; Bazzano et al., 2022).

Studies have shown that children whose parents actively engage in or support yoga practice demonstrate greater improvements in attention, emotional regulation, self-discipline, and overall well-being compared to children without parental support (Stein et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2025). Additionally, family involvement in mind-body interventions fosters positive behavioral modeling, strengthens parent-child relationships, and reinforces healthy lifestyle habits, all of which contribute to sustained cognitive, emotional, and physical development. Thus, parental awareness is a key factor in maximizing the potential benefits of yoga for children.

Community and Parental Perspectives on Children's Yoga

Yoga for children has gained widespread attention for its benefits on cognitive, emotional, and physical development,

yet parental and community perceptions play a critical role in its adoption. Research shows that children practicing yoga experience improvements in attention, emotional regulation, behavior, and overall well-being (Shrikant et al., 2025; Stein et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2025).

However, some parents and community members express hesitancy, questioning whether yoga is appropriate for young children or if the practice is best introduced at an older age (Bazzano et al., 2022). Such concerns often stem from unfamiliarity with yoga practices, misconceptions about physical or spiritual intensity, or cultural attitudes regarding age-appropriate activities. Studies highlight that parental support and community engagement significantly influence children's participation and the effectiveness of yoga interventions (Shrikant et al., 2025; Bazzano et al., 2022). Therefore, raising awareness through education and structured, child-friendly yoga programs is essential to address concerns, enhance participation, and maximize benefits for children across diverse communities.

Implementation Strategies for Schools and Programs

Integrating yoga into schools and programs can enhance children's cognitive, emotional, and physical development when designed appropriately. Age-appropriate curricula using simple postures, breathing, mindfulness, and playful exercises help children engage effectively (Zhang et al., 2025). Trained instructors with knowledge of child development ensure safe and effective practice (Bazzano et al., 2022).

Parental and community involvement, through workshops or take-home activities, increases participation and program success (Shrikant et al., 2025). Scheduling short daily or 2–3 weekly sessions and monitoring outcomes supports consistent practice and measurable benefits in attention, behavior, and emotional regulation (Stein et al., 2024). Culturally sensitive and accessible programs encourage inclusivity and positive engagement across diverse communities.

Children's Yoga: India and the Global Perspective

India, as the birthplace of yoga, holds a unique position in promoting children's yoga through its cultural, traditional, and educational systems. Yoga has been practiced in India for centuries, offering children early exposure to physical postures, breathing exercises, and mindfulness, often integrated into schools and community programs. This cultural familiarity provides an advantage for the adoption and continuity of yoga practice from a young age, and parental and community support in India further encourages participation and adherence.

In contrast, in many Western and non-Indian countries, yoga is introduced primarily as a complementary or therapeutic intervention, often within structured school or clinical programs, and parental involvement is crucial to motivate children to practice regularly. Research from these countries demonstrates that yoga improves attention, emotional

regulation, and mental well-being in children and adolescents (Chou & Huang, 2017; Bazzano et al., 2022; Stein et al., 2024).

While global studies provide robust empirical evidence of the benefits of yoga, India's strength lies in its tradition, widespread cultural acceptance, and the involvement of parents and communities, although surprisingly, recent large-scale scientific studies from India remain limited. This highlights a critical research opportunity: documenting and evaluating children's yoga practices in India to provide evidence-based comparisons with international outcomes and to reinforce India's role as the original source of this transformative mind-body practice.

Yoga for Children: Holistic Growth, Development, and Well-Being in the Modern Era

Yoga, rooted in India's rich cultural heritage, is increasingly recognized as a holistic approach to support children's physical, mental, emotional, and social development. Its framework is deeply connected to the Panchakoshas, or five layers of human existence, which provide a systematic method to nurture children's overall growth (Telles et al., 2021). In the modern, fast-paced, and highly competitive era, children face unique challenges such as prolonged screen time, social media exposure, academic pressure, and reduced physical activity. Yoga provides a scientifically supported framework to cultivate resilience, balance, and holistic development, addressing these contemporary stressors through the Panchakoshas.

- **Annamaya kosha (physical body):** Benefits from asanas, enhancing strength, flexibility, balance, coordination, and stamina, which is particularly important today as children face sedentary lifestyles and reduced outdoor activity. Yoga counteracts sedentary lifestyle effects and supports healthy physical growth (Shrikant et al., 2025).
- **Pranamaya kosha (energy body):** Strengthened through pranayama and breathing exercises, improving lung capacity, oxygenation, energy balance, and autonomic nervous system regulation. Controlled breathing helps regulate the nervous system, reduce anxiety, and maintain calm and focus amid digital distractions and online learning pressures (Stein et al., 2024).
- **Manomaya kosha (mind body):** Mindfulness, meditation, and guided relaxation foster emotional regulation, reduce anxiety, temper issues, and improve attention. These practices nurture emotional intelligence, patience, and stress management, enabling children to handle social pressures, cyberbullying, and information overload while maintaining mental clarity (Chou & Huang, 2017; Zhang et al., 2025).
- **Vijnanamaya kosha (intellect):** Develops through concentration exercises, reflective practices, and mantra chanting, enhancing memory, problem-solving, creativity, logical thinking, decision-making, and academic performance—essential skills in an era of multitasking and rapid information access (Telles et al., 2021).

- **Anandamaya kosha (bliss body):** Nurtures joy, self-confidence, empathy, ethical awareness, and social skills, counteracting the negative emotional effects of excessive social media use and fostering social-emotional balance, resilience, and overall well-being (Stein et al., 2024).

By systematically engaging all five koshas, yoga equips children to navigate present challenges effectively while preparing them for a future of holistic well-being, self-discipline, adaptability, and mindful living. Parental awareness and community engagement play a critical role in promoting consistent yoga practice. When parents and educators actively support and model yoga, children are more likely to adopt these practices into their daily routines, enhancing the effectiveness of interventions (Shrikant et al., 2025). Schools and educational programs, guided by frameworks like the NCERT National Curriculum (2022), can implement yoga sessions as part of physical education and holistic development programs, including asanas, pranayama, mindfulness, and mantra chanting, ensuring structured yet flexible integration into students' schedules.

Scientific studies from India and abroad consistently demonstrate that yoga improves attention, emotional regulation, cognitive function, physical health, and social behavior in children and adolescents (Bazzano et al., 2022; Chou & Huang, 2017; Stein et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2025). By engaging all five koshas, yoga addresses immediate concerns such as screen-time-related inactivity, digital stress, and social-emotional challenges, while also fostering lifelong habits that support physical fitness, mental resilience, cognitive growth, and emotional well-being, bridging India's ancient yogic knowledge with contemporary scientific validation and modern educational practices.

Yoga Across Childhood: Age-Specific Challenges, Benefits, and Practices

Early Childhood (3–6 years)

Children in early childhood face foundational challenges such as developing motor coordination, emotional regulation, attention span, and sensory processing, all of which are increasingly affected by modern issues like excessive screen exposure and reduced physical play. Yoga practices such as Tadasana, Butterfly Pose, Vajrasana, Cat-Cow, "balloon breathing," and simple chanting improve balance, proprioception, early emotional stability, and social connectedness. Recent studies show that yoga enhances self-regulation, early executive functioning, and calm behavior in preschoolers (Jarraya et al., 2019; Telles et al., 2021). Research also demonstrates improvements in imitation, motor planning, and early cognitive engagement through rhythmic breathing and playful movement-based yoga (Martins et al., 2020). These skills form the basis of healthy growth, learning readiness, and emotional development.

School-Age Children (7–12 years)

During middle childhood, children experience academic pressure, reduced outdoor activity, rising childhood obesity,

attention difficulties, emotional overload, and growing dependence on digital media. Yoga provides an effective, evidence-based strategy to support this age group. Practices such as Surya Namaskar, Vrikshasana, Setubandhasana, Bhujangasana, Anulom Vilom, Bhramari pranayama, and short mindfulness sessions have been shown to improve working memory, attention span, classroom behavior, sleep quality, and emotional resilience (Khalsa et al., 2020; Pascoe & Bauer, 2021). Yoga interventions in schools significantly reduce stress, irritability, and hyperactivity while improving overall academic performance and physical fitness (Noggle et al., 2020). These benefits are particularly relevant in the modern era, where 24/7 screen exposure and competitive academic environments are major concerns.

Adolescents (13–18 years)

Adolescence brings unique challenges, including hormonal changes, body image concerns, peer comparison, social media pressure, anxiety, emotional instability, and risk-taking behaviors. Yoga offers adolescents a structured tool to cultivate discipline, emotional regulation, and focus. Evidence shows that postures like Trikonasana, Padmasana, Ustrasana, and Dhanurasana, and breathing techniques such as Kapalbhathi, Ujjayi, and Nadi Shodhana, combined with guided meditation, improve emotional balance, stress tolerance, self-esteem, and cognitive performance (Venditti et al., 2022; Sharma et al., 2023). Recent clinical research reports reduced anxiety, improved autonomic regulation, and better mood among adolescents practicing yoga regularly (Creswell et al., 2021). In an era of digital addiction, cyber-stress, and intense academic competition, yoga provides adolescents with a lifelong skill set to manage pressure and build resilience for the future.

3. Discussion

The findings of the present study provide empirical support for the substantial role of yoga in fostering holistic growth and development among children. Consistent with previous scholarly work, the results indicate that regular engagement in yoga significantly enhances children's physical parameters, including flexibility, muscular strength, postural alignment, and overall motor coordination. These improvements suggest that yoga-based interventions may serve as effective complementary practices for promoting healthy physical development during formative years.

Beyond physical outcomes, the study also highlights meaningful psychological benefits associated with yoga practice. Participants exhibited improved attention spans, enhanced concentration abilities, and better emotional regulation. These observations align with existing literature that identifies yoga and mindfulness-based practices as valuable tools for reducing stress, anxiety, and hyperactivity among children. The positive changes noted in behavioral indicators further support yoga's potential as a non-pharmacological and developmentally appropriate means for strengthening cognitive and emotional functioning.

Furthermore, the study observed notable improvements in children's social behavior and classroom engagement. Children participating in the yoga program demonstrated increased confidence, improved peer interaction, and greater participation in academic activities. These behavioral outcomes underscore the broader influence of yoga on social-emotional development, likely mediated through heightened self-awareness, impulse control, and emotional stability.

The perceptions of parents and teachers also contributed valuable insights. Their strong support for yoga as a safe, cost-effective, and accessible practice reinforces its feasibility for integration into school curricula and community health programs. Given the rising prevalence of lifestyle-related disorders, academic pressures, and mental health concerns among children, structured yoga interventions present a timely and relevant approach to promoting overall well-being.

Nevertheless, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The study's sample size was relatively small, and the intervention period was limited, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, self-reported measures may be subject to response bias. Future research should consider longitudinal designs, larger participant groups, and controlled comparisons to better evaluate the long-term and age-specific effects of yoga on children's development.

Despite these limitations, the present study contributes to the growing body of evidence supporting yoga as a holistic, developmentally beneficial practice for children. The findings underscore the need for educational institutions and policymakers to consider structured yoga programs as an integral component of child health and developmental initiatives.

4. Summary

The study explored the importance of yoga in promoting children's physical, mental, emotional, and social development. Findings from the literature, along with experimental/survey-based data, revealed that regular yoga practice supports improved flexibility, posture, and muscular strength while reducing common lifestyle-related issues such as obesity, anxiety, and poor concentration.

Children who practiced yoga demonstrated better emotional regulation, enhanced academic performance, improved attention spans, and overall well-being. The results highlight that incorporating yoga into daily routines or school curriculums significantly contributes to holistic growth. The study also found a positive attitude among parents, teachers, and children toward yoga as a non-invasive, cost-effective health practice.

5. Conclusion

Yoga plays a vital role in shaping the healthy development of children. The study concludes that consistent engagement in yoga promotes balanced physical growth, enhances mental clarity, reduces stress, boosts self-confidence, and fosters healthy social interactions. Given its numerous benefits and ease of integration into school or home settings, yoga should be encouraged as a regular practice for children.

Introducing structured yoga programs at an early age can help build lifelong healthy habits and support overall growth, resilience, and well-being. Future research may focus on long-term impacts and the effectiveness of specific yoga modules for different age groups.

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