

Effect of Short-term Yoga Practices on Physical and Mental Well-Being of Youth

AMITHA SEHGAL

Associate Professor

Department of Commerce

R. A. Podar College of Commerce & Economics

Matunga, Mumbai 400 019

Tel.: 98195 46310/98199 68234

amitas10@gmail.com

Abstract

The ancient science of yoga has gained global acceptance as a means for physical, emotional and spiritual health. This study used a before-after experimental design to test the efficacy of a short-term yoga programme on students of commerce and business in the age group 18-21.

The study concludes that yoga has a clear positive effect on body posture, stress levels and overall fitness of the young adults. It makes a strong case of further implementation and penetration of the The Ministry of AYUSH (Ministry of Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy), Common Yoga Protocol training for college and university teachers.

Keywords: *yoga, youth, common yoga protocol, Ministry of AYUSH, International Yoga Day*

Paper Type: *Experimental Focus Group*

Introduction

The International Yoga Day, June 21st brought into focus the importance of integrating the ancient science of yoga into the mainstream education system in India.

On December 11 in 2014, the United Nations General Assembly declared June 21st as the International Day of Yoga. The declaration came after the call for the adoption of June 21st as International Day of Yoga by Hon'ble Indian Prime Minister, Shri. Narendra Modi during his address to UN General Assembly on September 27, 2014 wherein he stated: "Yoga is an invaluable gift of India's ancient tradition. It embodies unity of mind and body; thought and action; restraint and fulfillment; harmony between man and nature; a holistic approach to health and well-being. It is not about exercise but to discover the sense of oneness with yourself, the world and the nature. "In Suggesting June 21, which is the Summer Solstice, as the International Day of Yoga, Shri. Narendra Modi had said that, "the date is the longest day of the year in the Northern Hemisphere and has special significance in many parts of the world."

The goal of modern education has been to equip students for a livelihood. But it has remained largely inadequate to teach students to live in a healthy and holistic manner. All current forms of education give knowledge of the skills required to survive in the outside world. In contrast, yoga is an experiential science that helps in understanding the body and mind, to unfold an understanding of self-knowledge.

The ultimate goal of human life is to live in harmony, be at peace and be happy. The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines health as: "A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely absence of disease or infirmity," (WHO, 1946).

Framework of Study

Objective

The aim of the study was to study the effect of a short-term yoga practice programme on the state of mind and body of young students studying business and commerce.

Subjects: The study is based on data collected on 23 students (12 Female and 11 Male) from R. A. Podar College of Commerce & Economics College, Mumbai, age range 18 to 21, who were interested in attending the yoga programme on a voluntary basis.

More than 40 students were recruited initially and given an introductory session on the theory and goals of yoga along with meditation. But, due to some reason or the other, only 23 students consistently participated in the programme.

Yoga Programme Design: The Common Yoga Protocol designed by The Ministry of Ayush, Government of India was followed precisely. The 10-day programme was conducted in a college class room for a duration of around one hour and 30 minutes, from 11.30 a.m. to 1.00 p.m, from June 10th, 2016 to June 20th, 2016.

Study Design: A random, small sample was used with a structured pre and post questionnaire administered to the sample. The questionnaire had a mix of closed-ended and open-ended questions.

The Common Yoga Programme Schedule

The students were briefed about the programme on June 10th at an orientation cum meditation session where the video on the Common Yoga Protocol was shown and questions answered. Instructions relating to preparation for the course with respect to clothes, food habits and timings were shared with around 60 students.

From the next day June 11th the programme began in right earnest.

The Common Yoga Protocol was taught as per the following sequence:

Day One: The students assembled in a room on the 3rd floor where arrangements appropriate for yoga were made. The session started at 11.30 sharp. The researcher distributed the questionnaires which were to be filled by the students with basic details and basic information: Breath rate, Pulse rate, height, weight, sleeping habits, moods, etc.

The session started with a shloka and an introduction about knowing the self. The students learnt to be with their own selves. Then they were taught to count the number of breaths and their pulse rate for one minute, sitting in Sukhasana.

The students were explained the importance of breath, Prana. Our body thrives on breath hence it becomes very important for us to understand our breath – the life giver.

This was followed by Stretching exercises like: Neck Rotation exercises, knee bending exercises, torso rotation exercise.

The first day of the session ended with a shloka.

Day Two: The second day witnessed a few more students as compared to the previous day. The session started with the shloka followed by the stretching exercises. A few new asanas were practiced:

Tadasana – The Mountain Pose,

Vrikshasana – The Palm Tree Pose,

Uttanasana – The Forward Bending Pose.

Day Three: The session started with the shloka followed by the stretching exercises. The asanas learnt on the previous day were practiced. A few more asanas were learnt: ArdhaChakrasana – The Backward Bending Pose, Trikonasana – The Triangle Pose, Dandasana – The Alert Pose, Badhakonasana – The Butterfly Pose.

Day Four: The session started with the shloka followed by the stretching exercises. The asanas learnt on the previous day were practiced.. A few more asanas were learnt: Vajrasana – The Thunderbolt Pose, Shashankasana – The Hare Pose, Ustrasana – The Camel Pose, Sukhasana – The Pleasant Pose.

Day Five: The session started with the shloka followed by the stretching exercises. The asanas learnt on the previous day were practiced. A few more asanas were learnt: Vakrasana – The Twisted Pose, Bhujangasana – The Cobra Pose, Shalabhasana – The Locust Pose.

Day Six: The session started with the shloka followed by the stretching exercises. The asanas learnt on the previous day were practiced. A few more asanas were learnt: Setu Bandhasana – The Bridge Pose, Pavanmuktasana – The Abdominal Toxins Relieving Pose, Shavasana – The Corpse Pose, Sukhasana – The Pleasant Pose.

Day Seven: The session started with the shloka followed by the stretching exercises. The asanas learnt on the previous day were practiced. Then Pranayamas were learnt: Kapalbhatai Pranayama – The Intuition garnering practice, Anulomvilom pranayama – The Alternate Breathing practice, Bhramahri Pranayama – The Bumble Bee Humming Breathing practice, Along with Nasika Mudra and Gyan Mudra.

Day Eight: The session started with the shloka followed by the stretching exercises. The asanas and Pranayamas learnt on the previous days were practiced.

Day Nine: The students mastered their Yoga practice and poses and also the pranayamas. They started gearing up for the International Yoga Day.

Day Ten: The 10th Day was a run through for the International Yoga day. The students assembled in the college auditorium and performed the Yoga asanas, the way they would do the following day. Again the forms were asked to be filled just like day one and the students noticed an immense difference in their breathing habits, behavior and state of mind. The session and also the 10 Day workshop ended with a healthy, delicious sattvic bhel, bananas and sweets treat. By now the students and the professor were all like a mini yoga family, Happy in Yoga.

Limitations of Study

Sample size was small. The time duration was short. For a better research design it is necessary to have two separate groups of subjects: an experimental group and a control group and an increase in the duration of the study.











Results and Observations

Table 1

No.	Attendance	Student No.	Day 1	Day 10	Feedback on the Various Personality Aspects of the Students									
			Breathing Rate (breaths per minute)	Stress Levels	Anger/Temper Outbursts	Anxiety/Fear	Self Confidence	Overall Fitness Level	Positivity	Inter-personal Relationships	Sleep Quality	Appetite/Eating Habits	Body Posture	
1	10	5	16	14	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊
2	9	3	31	24	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊
3	9	4	16	12	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊
4	9	7	22	11	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊
5	9	8	28	15	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊
6	9	9	18	12	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊
7	9	13	24	15	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊
8	9	14	28	15	😊	😞	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊
9	9	22	Abs	16	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊
10	8	16	24	12	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊
11	8	20	24	23	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊
12	7	11	24	18	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊
13	7	12	18	12	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊
14	5	1	16	11	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊
15	5	2	20	12	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊
16	5	10	Abs	12	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊
17	3	6	Blank	Blank	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊
18	3	15	Blank	18	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊
19	3	17	24	15	😊	😊	😊	Blank	Blank	😊	Blank	Blank	Blank	😊
20	3	18	20	10	😊	😞	😞	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊
21	3	19	16	14	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊
22	3	21	Blank	15	😊	😊	😊	😊	Blank	😊	😊	😊	😊	Blank
23	3	23	Blank	16	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊

Table 2

Results

Nos.	Students with Attendance	Stress Levels	Anger / Temper Outbursts	Anxiety / Fear	Self Confidence	Overall Fitness Level	Positivity	Inter-personal Relationships	Sleep Quality	Appetite / Eating Habits	Body Posture
											
	% age	Lesser than before	Lesser than before	Lesser than before	More than before	More than before	More than before	Better than before	Better than before	More fulfilling	Better than before
1 to 16	50 - 100%	88%	94%	38%	44%	75%	100%	50%	63%	56%	100%
17 to 23	30 - 50%	72%	43%	29%	14%	29%	86%	14%	86%	43%	57%

An analysis of the above tables reveals the following effects of the short-term yoga session on the 23 students:

- All students who filled out the form on the first and last day experienced a reduction in their breathing rate. They experienced slower breathing/per minute.
- 19 out of 23 students students felt less stressed.
- 18 out of 23 students felt less angry or had fewer temper outbursts.
- 8 out of 23 students had less anxiety
- 8 out of 23 students felt more confident
- 15 out of 23 students felt more fit overall.
- 22 out of 23 students felt more positive.
- 9 out of 23 students felt their inter-personal relationships had improved.
- 16 out of 23 students experienced better quality of sleep.
- 12 out of 23 students had more satisfying eating/appetite behavior.
- 22 out of 23 students experienced a better body posture.

Further, if the results are co-related with attendance patterns (Table 2), the following observations are made:

Students with 50 to 100 per cent attendance

- 88 per cent felt less stress
- 94 per cent felt less anger
- 38 per cent felt less anxious
- 44 per cent felt more confident
- 75 per cent felt better overall fitness

- 100 per cent felt more positive
- 50 per cent felt better inter-personal relationships
- 63 per cent had better sleep quality
- 56 per cent had more fulfilling eating patterns
- 100 per cent had better body posture.

Students with 30 to 50 per cent attendance

- 72 per cent felt less stress
- 43 per cent felt less anger
- 29 per cent felt less anxious
- 14 per cent felt more confident
- 29 per cent felt better overall fitness
- 86 per cent felt more positive
- 14 per cent felt better inter-personal relationships
- 86 per cent had better sleep quality
- 43 per cent had more fulfilling eating patterns
- 57 per cent had better body posture.

The above analysis reveals that yoga has a desired effect on improving positivity in attitude and outlook towards life. Even a short-term programme helps students to gain better body awareness and posture. It also helps them reduce stress.

Several studies validate this observation that yoga improves positivity in the personality and reduces stress, (Bhushan, L.I., 1994; Hafner-Holter, Gunther, 2009; 23(4):244-8; Kamakhya, 2006); Ramadoss R., Bose, B., (2010).

Some of the responses to the open-ended question: "What did you like best about the yoga sessions?" are summarized as under:

- My mental tension was greatly reduced;
- My head feels less jumbled and stress-free;
- It made me feel positive, fit and reduced unwanted stress;
- Asanas made me feel better than before;
- With the calmness yoga gives, I was able to devote time for myself;
- I feel a positive energy within myself;
- I feel a change of mind and body - feel good;
- It is more mental than physical, so after yoga I feel more energized than exhausted;
- Usually I would get tired after classes but after doing yoga and then going to class I did not get tired, I still felt energetic;
- Felt more focused;
- It brings out the new in me, it calms me down and makes me meet a new me;
- For the first time I felt my breathing rate and pulse rate;

- The best part about these yoga sessions is that I learnt the art of letting go. I realized there were a lot of unnecessary things I was holding back, which did not make way for the new. But now I feel lighter;
- Demonstrating and practicing yoga with our Principal, Dr. Shobana Vasudevan and teachers and more than 100 students on June 21st, the International Day of Yoga, was an encouraging experience and gave us greater confidence.

100 per cent of students said “yes” to the question: “Would you like to continue practicing yoga?”

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study supports the vision of Hon'ble Indian Prime Minister, Shri. Narendra Modi that the ancient science of yoga must become a part of peoples' lifestyle for health, vitality and peace.

It also validates The University of Mumbai's initiative to train teachers of the University and colleges affiliated to the University.

To integrate yoga with our lifestyle, it must be taught to students by mainstream teachers, not just professional yoga teachers. Learning from their core subject teachers gives students a perspective on how yoga is not another “activity” but a way of life.

It also creates a special bond between students and teachers and helps teachers become mentors and counsellors.

The study recommends that a greater number of teachers must be trained in the Common Yoga Protocol.

While lack of space and time makes it difficult for most colleges to conduct yoga sessions on a regular basis, a few yoga practices like stretches, pranayama and breath awareness can be integrated during the regular lecture hours, especially in the first lecture of the day.

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