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## Trial of Integrating Yoga into a Standard School Classroom Setting

### Yogayı Standart Bir Okul Sınıfı Ortamına Entegre Etme Denemesi

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#### Abstract

This article presents a holistic approach to regaining self-awareness and self-consciousness. This method energizes and connects all three aspects: the body, mind, and soul. Although this technique is recognized worldwide, it has not been widely implemented in mainstream children's education in Western countries. This technique is known as yoga. The research aims to introduce and examine two types of yoga trials conducted at a typical senior high school in Japan. The first trial involves a regular 7-minute warm-up stretching session during the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) class. The second consists of a single session led by a qualified yoga instructor in the school gym. This research employs a mixed-methods approach, with findings based on multiple questionnaire responses and feedback from students and a yoga instructor. This experiment seeks to determine whether yoga can be integrated into a non-physical education (P.E.) related program conducted in a regular classroom environment—with limited space and time—during an EFL class, as well as into a program held in the gym with a yoga instructor. This paper acknowledges the benefits and challenges of such experiences for students and discusses their responses to this unconventional EFL class. Additionally, the study explores the potential for incorporating yoga teaching methods into the classroom. It also evaluates whether yoga has a future in schools, not only in India but also in countries with limited connections to yoga, such as Japan.

**Keywords:** Yoga, Mainstream Education, Students' Health, Yoga in Schools

#### Öz

Bu makale, öz farkındalık ve bilinçliliği yeniden kazanmak için bütünsel bir yaklaşım sunmaktadır. Bu yöntem, beden, zihin ve ruh olmak üzere üç yönü de enerjiyle doldurur ve birbirine bağlar. Bu teknik dünya çapında tanınmasına rağmen, Batı ülkelerinde ana akım çocuk eğitimi alanında yaygın bir şekilde uygulanmamaktadır. Bu teknik, yoga olarak bilinmektedir. Araştırma, özellikle Japonya'daki tipik bir lise okulunda gerçekleştirilen iki farklı yoga denemesi türünü tanıtmayı ve incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. İlk deneme, EFL (Yabancı Dil Olarak İngilizce) dersinde düzenli olarak yapılan 7 dakikalık bir ısınma germe seansını içermektedir. İkinci deneme ise okul spor salonunda bir yoga eğitmeni tarafından yapılan tek bir seanstan oluşmaktadır. Bu araştırma, karma yöntemler kullanarak yapılmış olup, bulgular öğrenci ve yoga eğitmeninin anket cevapları ve geri bildirimlerine dayanmaktadır. Bu deney, yoga'nın, sınırlı alan ve zamanla bir EFL dersinde, beden eğitimi (B.E.) ile ilgili olmayan bir program olarak, ya da bir yoga eğitmeni eşliğinde okul spor salonunda yapılacak bir program olarak entegre edilip edilemeyeceğini belirlemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu makale, öğrencilere yönelik bu alışılmadık EFL dersi deneyimlerinin faydalarını ve zorluklarını kabul etmekte ve onların bu derse verdikleri yanıtları tartışmaktadır. Ayrıca, çalışma yoga öğretim yöntemlerinin sınıfta nasıl kullanılabileceğini araştırmaktadır. Ayrıca, yoga'nın sadece Hindistan'da değil, yoga ile sınırlı bağları olan Japonya gibi ülkelerde de okullarda bir geleceği olup olmayacağını değerlendirmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Yoga, Yaygın Eğitim, Öğrenci Sağlığı, Okullarda Yoga

#### Introduction

In today's fast-paced world, we often forget what it means to be self-aware and what it's like to be mentally present. With the rise of easily accessible technologies like TikTok and Instagram, we have become busier, fully immersed in external news, and attempting to keep up with the endless stream of information that bombards us daily. We become so focused on the outside world that we gradually forget who we truly are and where we are headed. As Thomas Moore (1994) stated, part of the issue stems from a lack of soul in our society, without which we

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seem to lack essential vitality and energy. In Western society's materialistic, consumer-driven mindset, we have lost the ability to be enchanted by gazing at the stars and feeling the wind on our faces. Many individuals sense a void in both society and their own lives. We all rush to acquire and consume, leaving little time for simple pleasures. Miller (2007) emphasizes that the human world has prioritized compartmentalization and standardization since the Industrial Revolution, leading to fragmentation. This fragmentation permeates everything (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski & Flowers, 2005, p.190). Initially, economic activities were separated from the surrounding environment, resulting in ecological devastation. Subsequently, social fragmentation emerged. Most individuals in industrialized societies reside in large cities, where they often feel afraid and disconnected from others. Self-destructive behaviors involving tobacco, alcohol, and drugs are engaged in. Others are also harmed, including the elderly, spouses, and children. Miller (2007) stresses that this primarily occurs because individuals feel disconnected from one another and isolated from meaningful forms of community. It is likely that we would all agree that sometimes, days are spent on autopilot, performing similar actions or following someone's instructions without truly understanding what is being done, why it is being done, and, most importantly, whether it is even desired.

If we look at education, it has become part of a similar scenario. Now, education focuses almost solely on the mind with some lip service to the body; the soul is completely ignored (Kessler, 2000; Miller, J., 2000). In 2007, Miller continued: "Knowledge is divided into subjects, units, and lessons. Yet, students can often not see the relationship between these subjects, the relationship between facts within a subject, or the subject's relevance to their own lives" (Miller, J., 2007, p.4). In 2019, Moore added: "Modern education is at a distance, like learning about the people next door, instead of becoming friends with them" (Moore, 2019, p.52). Classrooms are where we sit, far from materials or events relevant to what is being learned. This is done because of anxiety about being correct. Mistakes are not to be made, intuition is not trusted, and sensory observations are avoided, leading to learning less than half of what is available. Our society is overly fact-oriented, making anything else seem fuzzy, sensational, and unreliable. Additionally, it is frequently stated that education aims to prepare children to compete in a global economy. In many instances, schooling has shifted into a series of tests and challenges instead of focusing on learning and recognizing a child as a whole individual. Consequently, education has become a grim experience where children encounter various academic and social pressures. Macroeconomic, political, environmental, and socio-cultural factors can also impose significant pressure and demands on the education system. This frequently results in stress, conformity, and uninspired and mechanical learning (Bone, J., 2019).

These days, aside from school, children's and adolescents' lives, much like those of adults, are filled with TV, the internet, and computer games, depriving them of an environment where their inner life can develop properly. Tony Eade (2019) stresses that while technology can offer significant benefits, such as insights into other cultures, children have come to expect immediate responses and may become uncritical of what they see and hear without explicit guidance. Furthermore, media and advertising exert pressure with powerful messages about success, happiness, and identity—and how these should be achieved. Consequently, children are encouraged to view themselves as consumers and lean towards individualism and narcissism. Ecclestone and Hyers (2009) highlight that when combined with adults' tendency to perceive children as vulnerable and overprotect them, many children find disappointment and challenges overwhelming, leading to brittleness rather than resilience. Even back in 1976, researcher Jerome Singer, who studied the development of inner life and behavior, found that the risks of an underdeveloped imagination include "delinquency, violence, overeating, and the use of dangerous drugs" (p. 32), and this trend appears early. Impulsive and excessively dependent children tend to lack a developed inner life. Conversely, those who can utilize their imagination tend to display

more relaxed and independent behaviors, a trait that carries into adolescence. Goleman (1995) also emphasizes that one of the key factors in the development of healthy emotions and inner life is the ability to monitor one's feeling state, the ability to be aware of the body's sensations and feeling states so that anger and impulse do not get out of control (Goleman, 1995, p.238). Healthy emotional development also includes empathy. Children who experience neglect or abuse may be more prone to criminal behavior; in contrast, those who spend time with adults who are sensitive to the child's feelings are more likely to become healthy and successful citizens. Numerous other studies suggest that individuals with an underdeveloped inner life seem more vulnerable to external influences.

However, a humanistic researcher, John P. Miller (2000), argues that there is a way to change this situation: "The soul can be reclaimed. Instead of denying and oppressing the soul, it can be learned to let the soul manifest itself in the world. Instead of confining the soul, it can be learned to celebrate the soul. By reclaiming the soul, it is found that the classroom, or any educational encounter, takes on a new vitality and purpose. Students and teachers no longer go through the motions, but instead, feel alive and nourished in what they do" (Miller, 2000, p.4). Even Gandhi (1924) maintained, "The rock bottom foundation of the technique for achieving the power of nonviolence is belief in the essential oneness of life" (Gandhi, 1924, p.390). By introducing a soulful curriculum that acknowledges and prioritizes our inner lives, balance and connection between our internal and external experiences can be achieved.

This paper introduces a holistic approach to regaining self-awareness and self-consciousness. This approach energizes and connects all three aspects: the body, the mind, and the soul. This technique, perhaps better described as a philosophy or lifestyle, is well-known worldwide. However, it has not been extensively integrated into mainstream children's education in most Western countries. This technique is known as Yoga.

### **The Philosophy and Principles of Yoga**

What most people, even in India, associate with when they hear the term yoga is the demonstration of Bhūgata Samādhi, siddhis, magic, mantra-tantra, aerobics, mental concentration, self-mortification, or even self-torture. This is where a person appears on a spacious dais, gripping a long rope, using the vertical rope as a ladder and effortlessly climbing to the top, saluting the audience from his mid-air position. Alternatively, it may be a man who remains inside a cave for several days and emerges from the pit after an extended period, fresh and agile, with no signs of fatigue. Usually, people might think these individuals are great yogis, but they are not. Yoga has nothing to do with magic or religion. It is not intended for those with supernatural powers, either.

Karuna Nagarajan (2015) emphasizes that yoga should be seen more as a complete system, a science, or a way of life that can be applied regardless of age, gender, profession, state, conditions, problems, or suffering. Furthermore, yoga can be utilized in any human endeavor—personal, professional, social, family, and spiritual—because it involves mastery over the mind and managing its modifications and operations. It is a process of gaining control over the mind, encompassing two aspects: the power to concentrate on any desired subject or object and the capacity to remain quiet for an extended period. It is a (Upāyah), a skillful, subtle process, not a mechanical, gross effort to stop the mind's thoughts. Thus, yoga aims to achieve emotional steadiness. Through regular yoga practice, we can balance concentration and detachment at the mental level and attain homeostasis at the bodily level, integrating personality by promoting coordinated body-mind harmony in a well-balanced manner.

Even the core meaning of the word yoga conceals concepts of balance. According to the Indian National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE, 2015), yoga has a verbal root, Yuj, in Sanskrit, which means joining (Yujyate anena iti Yogah). In other words, yoga is that which joins. In traditional terminology, it refers to joining the individual self with the universal SELF. It expands

the narrow, constricted egoistic personality into an all-pervasive, eternal, and blissful state of reality. In yoga, the term blissful, or joyful, is repeatedly emphasized because, despite our true nature, which is blissful, people often become overly distracted by their minds, bodies, and material objects.

Yoga aims to help individuals shed ignorance and become aware of their true divine selves. Thus, the goal of Yoga is to liberate a person from imperfections and unite with the supreme universal self. Nagarajan (2015) states that the Yoga way of life is characterized by peace and tranquility, harmony and health, love and happiness, precision and efficiency. The foundation of Yoga is the pursuit of happiness, which, unfortunately, we often seek in the objects of our senses. In Yogic philosophy, true happiness lies within us. It exists in silencing the mind; it represents a state of Bliss, Freedom, Knowledge, and Creativity. To attain this happiness, Sri Aurobindo (time unknown) underscores the importance of holistic personality development across physical, mental, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual levels, which should be a systematic effort toward self-perfection. This is a process through which limitations and imperfections can be eliminated.

### **Yoga as a Part of School Education in India**

As we all know, yoga has earned its reputation and has followers all around the world. However, in Western countries, it is still viewed as a studio fitness activity that can be learned at private gyms or yoga studios, primarily introduced to adults, and tends to be quite costly. In contrast, yoga is becoming essential to India's education system.

The Indian government indicates that research from various countries worldwide shows that integrating yoga into the school curriculum effectively helps students develop self-regulation, mind-body awareness, and physical fitness. This, in turn, may encourage additional social-emotional learning (SEL) competencies and lead to positive student outcomes, such as improved behavior, mental health, and performance (Arora, P., 2021). The Central Board of Secondary Education India (2023) also highlights that combining physical postures, controlled breathing, and mindfulness techniques helps students develop better attention spans, enhancing academic performance and productivity. Here are a few reasons why the Indian government believes that yoga can benefit children (Arora, P., 2021).

- 1) Yoga reduces stress and anxiety: Students are often very stressed, eager to outperform themselves and prove their worth at every opportunity. Yoga helps them cope with stress and restore peace of mind.
- 2) It improves memory and attention span, directly benefiting children's academic performance. In fact, yoga also aids children suffering from ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) by reducing its core symptoms, such as inattentiveness, hyperactivity, and impulsivity.
- 3) Yoga helps manage weight. Children spend long hours in sedentary poses and tend to consume a lot of junk food, so Yoga helps counterbalance this lifestyle.
- 4) Yoga improves flexibility, balance, and posture. Sitting down to study for long hours and spending too much time on screens can lead to incorrect posture. Poor posture in childhood can develop into significant anatomy complications in adulthood. The practice of various asanas corrects posture and restores equilibrium to the whole body.
- 5) Yoga teaches correct breathing techniques. As breathing is fundamental to life, pranayama and other breathing exercises in yoga help students learn to master breathing correctly at a young age and improve their quality of life.
- 6) Yoga promotes mindfulness: Mindfulness helps individuals feel less anxious and more relaxed. Children can enhance their mindfulness through creative and engaging visualization techniques.

- 7) Yoga encourages self-love and self-care: Yoga promotes healing from within rather than solely focusing on appearance. It teaches individuals to respect and love their bodies. Introducing yoga in schools can instill these values at a young age.
- 8) Yoga decreases school absences and violence. With improved health and a balanced temperament, children are less likely to miss school or get into fights over minor issues.
- 9) Yoga enhances coping skills, boosts immunity, and improves physical appearance: Yoga teaches children how to effectively cope with stress, manage it, and remain productive. It promotes blood circulation and helps prevent attacks from various viruses and bacteria by increasing antibody levels.
- 10) Yoga enhances sleep quality. As yoga helps the body and mind relax, practitioners experience improved sleep. With better rest, children can concentrate more effectively in class, be more active while playing, and perform better on exams.
- 11) Yoga boosts self-confidence and self-esteem. Through asanas, children develop strength, endurance, and confidence, as well as a stronger mind-body connection. This confidence, along with strength, compassion, and acceptance, extends into the real world.

Based on these positive outcomes from yoga, starting in the 2000s, the Indian government has actively worked to incorporate yoga into mass education. According to Nagendra (2015), the National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE, 2009) has made significant strides. Since 2014, yoga education has been made compulsory nationwide for all teacher educators and student-teachers in the country. Nagendra (2015) emphasizes that yoga has become a necessary discipline due to its roots in Indian culture and traditions; it influences the total development of human personality and is scientific in method and content like any other academic discipline. On International Yoga Day, June 21, 2021, the Government of India launched the NIOS (National Institute of Open Schooling) Diploma course in Yogic Science, as noted by Pritam Arora (2021). This course is part of a two-year Diploma program that teaches Yoga Teaching Training and Yoga Therapy. Starting on the same date, the Haryana government integrated Yoga into the grades 1 to 10 school curriculum. In doing so, Haryana joined Maharashtra, Karnataka, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Chhattisgarh in offering Yoga in schools. Moreover, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, formulated and currently being implemented according to the global education development agenda, has been officially approved and adopted by the Indian government since 2015. It includes yoga in its educational framework and aims to integrate yoga, naturopathy, and the Ayush system into the curriculum for healthcare education (Dhananjay Mankar, 2024).

The Yoga at School project is gaining a strong and undeniable reputation among schools, too. Top boarding schools in India prioritize the importance of yoga in students' lives and integrate yoga education into the curriculum to ensure the holistic development of students. According to Scindia Kanya Vidyalaya (2024), one of India's leading schools of yoga practice, introducing yoga in schools helps students learn to maintain discipline and enhance their mental and physical health. Students who regularly practice yoga are more likely to avoid academic stress, comprehend concepts with greater focus, and retain information for extended periods. Engaging in yoga education fosters self-awareness of their bodies and encourages students to adopt a healthy lifestyle rooted in values and ethics. Mindful eating, adequate rest, and physical exercise contribute to students' overall well-being. Niru Agarwal (2013) notes that schools incorporating yoga as a fundamental part of their curriculum report higher levels of student harmony and community connectedness.

As we can see from the arguments above, yoga is gradually gaining popularity among various institutions across India. With its long history and significant impact on Indian culture, along with centuries of proven effectiveness, yoga is likely to encounter fewer boundaries among the Indian population in general and within mass education systems specifically. Just as Judo is widely



implemented across Japan, yoga is becoming an essential part of physical education in Indian schools. But what prevents us from learning from our Indian counterparts? If the benefits of yoga are so clear and powerful, why don't we seek to apply it not just in trendy gyms that are affordable only for housewives, but also give our kids the opportunity to maintain balance and flexibility while they are still young and healthy?

### **Research Questions**

In this paper, I would like to introduce and examine one of the actual yoga trials regularly applied at a typical senior high school in Japan during the EFL class. This study comprises two projects: a standard 7-minute standing yoga stretching warm-up conducted before class and a one-time session with an experienced yoga instructor at the school gym.

Research Question 1) This experiment aims to determine whether yoga can be incorporated not into a P.E. program but into a regular classroom environment—with limited space and time—during an EFL class, which typically has no connection to physical education.

Research Question 2) We will also explore how students perceived the overall experience of a complete yoga class led by a professional yoga instructor and the impression these students conveyed to the instructor.

Research Question 3) We will explore potential yoga teaching methods for the classroom and P.E.-like activities in school.

Research Question 4) Finally, we will assess whether yoga has a future in schools, not just in India but also in countries with limited ties to yoga, such as Japan.

### **Method**

This mixed-method research study includes a quantitative analysis of multiple questionnaires collected from students over two years and a qualitative analysis of comments from the students and a yoga instructor. The survey results were calculated using IBM SPSS Statistics and the Wilcoxon rank-sum test. All participants were informed beforehand about the study's purpose and signed a consent form. Since the students involved in the study are minors, consent was also obtained from the school's principal as their legal guardian.

### **Setting and Participants**

This study was conducted at one of Japan's private senior high schools, involving 105 students aged sixteen to seventeen in a two-year project. Most students at this school have a strong interest in medicine, physics, or law and demonstrate high academic potential. The project took place during a regular English Communication skills class, which is 45 minutes long and meets once a week. Like many schools in Japan, except for PE classes, students at this school spend most of their time seated at their desks, with limited opportunities to move or stretch. As a proponent of holistic education, I aimed to incorporate activities that nurture students' minds and bodies. In addition to holistic activities where students discuss their inner feelings, I introduced seven-minute yoga sequences at the beginning of each class to help them stretch and relax.

I came up with the idea of stretching in class a few years ago. First, during our practice of tongue twisters, I noticed that students felt more relaxed when I incorporated some movements, and the pronunciation drills went much smoother. However, simple stretching without specific sequences confused the students and made them shy. As a solution, I decided to apply my favorite yoga poses, so I used a particular yoga sequence for each tongue twister. This way, I conducted this tongue-twister-yoga warm-up practice for over two years. Students seemed to enjoy this brief

activity, and some of them eagerly recited tongue twisters and started to stretch whenever they saw me, even in the hallways. Still, I felt something was lacking. This yoga activity felt too robotic and dull for me and the students. So, when I decided to embark on this new research into holistic curriculum, I enrolled in a yoga instructor training course and officially became a Hatha yoga instructor. This may sound overly ambitious or pointless for an EFL teacher like me, but after rigorous training, I finally realized that yoga is not just a series of poses; it came alive for me. I learned how and when to apply each pose, which offered me endless opportunities to practice different poses based on the time of day, weather conditions, and students' moods.

### **Setting and Method for Project #1: Regular In-Class Yoga Stretching**

In Japan, students remain in their homerooms most of the day and often fall asleep or stay still during breaks. To awaken these sleepy students and allow them to change pace and exercise, I've begun each lesson with a set of 7-minute yoga sequences. In Japanese schools, students greet their teacher by standing, bowing, and saying hello. Not wanting to miss this opportunity, we performed the yoga warm-up right after this greeting. Since we were in a classroom with limited space, I incorporated common standing poses from Hatha and Jivamukti yoga, including standing Sun Salutation poses, Trikona asana poses, Warrior 1 and 2, balancing poses, hands and finger stretching sequences, back and hip twisting poses, head massage, and more.

Students were given different routines in each class during this project. We always began with slow stretching movements for the head and hands, gradually introducing stretching and twisting poses for the entire body. In every class, I aimed to vary the flow of the sequences, balancing the repetition of familiar poses with the introduction of new ones. Depending on the poses, we focused on our breathing. Once the warm-up was complete, students slowly returned to their seats, where we remained still and continued slow breathing for a few more seconds.

Honestly, this warm-up stretching was never a time when all the students actively participated. Although these students were teenagers, some treated this warm-up like little kids, giggling and chatting instead. Some remained standing, simply observing the others. However, this warm-up stretching was never intended to be a compulsory, controlled activity, and I never forced the students to participate, even if they chose not to. Still, all the students were standing during this practice, and by the end of our yoga time, even the sleepy ones were awake, which I considered a success as a teacher.

### **Setting and Method of Project #2: A One-Time Yoga Class at the Gym with Another Instructor**

The second project took place in a school gym. After a year and a half of practicing warm-up yoga in class, I wanted the students to experience authentic yoga, allowing them to fully engage their bodies without space and uniform limitations. Since this actual yoga trial could not be conducted in the classroom, I first arranged a suitable facility for such an exercise. Yoga mats are essential for performing sitting and lying positions. However, as we didn't have any, the regular gym was not an option, leading to the idea of using a judo room with a tatami. My next step was to find a qualified yoga instructor who could teach this unique, crowded yoga class. My Hatha yoga teacher's course mentor and a very good friend of mine, Tina Yogin from Slovenia, kindly assisted me with this yoga project at school. We held this yoga class during our EFL session to minimize distraction for students with already packed schedules. Tina conducted the class in English since she was from overseas, and at the end, we had a small discussion in English. Therefore, although this class was focused on physical education, we could still refer to it as an English Communication class.

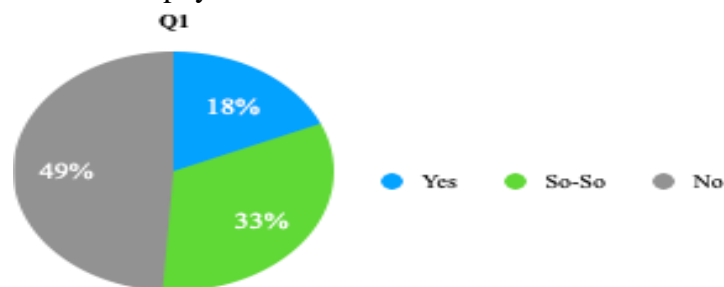
We split 105 students into two groups and held two 40-minute sessions with them. Tina began with some slow head and chest stretching poses, then gradually increased the speed and difficulty

of the sequences. Students performed various poses while standing, sitting, and lying down. Compared to regular yoga classes for adults, Tina made these sessions quite intense, incorporating many repetitive, stamina-focused sequences. She explained this was due to the high energy among the students at the start of the class. Since it was an unusual event, deviating from their typical school routines, students became super hyper, had trouble following our instructions, and were very chatty. Tina's hard work paid off. By the end of each session, students were tired but also very relaxed and calm. At the conclusion, Tina had the students sit in lotus pose for a while, and then they all chanted "Om" together a few times. That was a fantastic experience for me! When more than 70 teenagers began chanting simultaneously, their beautiful voices filled the air, and the gym transformed into a sacred space. I will never forget that wonderful feeling of unity!

## Results

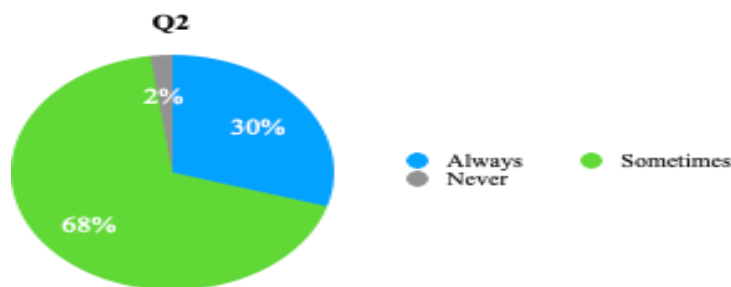
Now, let's review the results of the Yoga at School Project. In this section, we will examine the outcomes of both projects. However, first, I would like to present the findings from the pre-test questionnaire, which addresses the current school situation from a physical health perspective.

To address question Q1, "Apart from the PE class and sports-related club activities, do you think students at your school have any opportunity to move, stretch, and relax their bodies?" 49.9% of the students answered "No," 32.6% answered "So-so," and only 18.5% replied "Yes," indicating a significant lack of physical activities available to students at school.



Q1: Apart from the PE class and sports-related club activities, do you think students at your school have any opportunity to move, stretch, and relax their bodies?

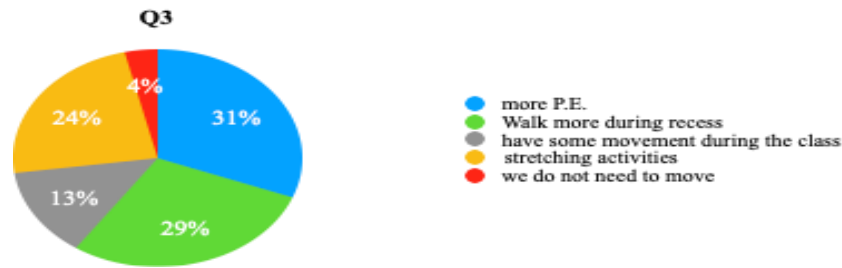
The second question Q2: "Do you ever feel that your body is stiff and that you need to stretch your spine and muscles during class time?" further confirmed the seriousness of this situation. 29.7% of the students answered "Always," 68.1% said "Sometimes," and 2.2% answered "Never."



Q2: Do you ever feel that your body is stiff and that you need to stretch your spine and muscles during class time?



Students were then asked what could be potential solutions to this issue.

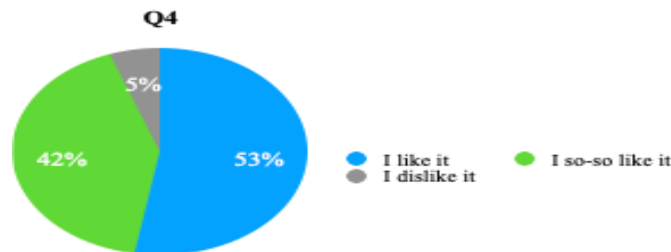


Q3: Potential solutions to this issue

The majority, 31%, responded that they should have more PE classes; 29% suggested that students should walk more during break time; 24% agreed that they should incorporate warm-up activities during class; and 13% believed that there should be opportunities for students to stand up and walk around the classroom during lessons. Only 4% of the students agreed with the notion that school is solely for studying and that physical health should be disregarded. These results reinforced my earlier assumptions that the majority of students at this school do not get enough movement and stretching and that they feel the need for more frequent exercise during school hours.

### Results of 7-Minute In-Class Yoga Stretching

The following questionnaire was conducted after the end of the first year students completed their 7-minute warm-up yoga activity at the beginning of each class. To the question, "What do you think about our warm-up yoga practice before class?" 52.7% of the students responded that they liked this exercise, 41.8% indicated that they were neutral about it, and 5.5% disliked the warm-up.



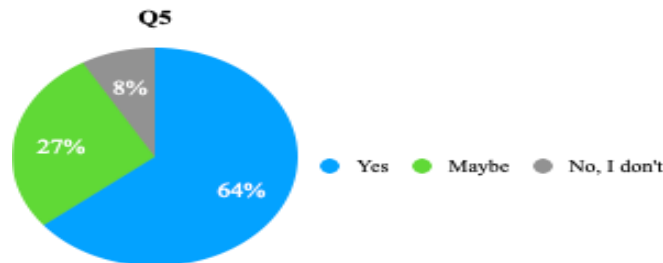
Q4: What do you think about our warm-up yoga practice before class?

To gain more detailed reasons for their answers, students were also asked why they made those comments. For the responses indicating "yes, I do like the warm-up," the majority of answers included: eight students stated, "I like it because it feels good and brings me joy"; another eight students noted, "After morning yoga stretching, I feel refreshed." Seven students mentioned that they can stretch and relax their bodies; four students expressed that yoga helps them relax, and another four emphasized that yoga energizes them. Two students stated that yoga is beneficial for mind control and refreshes the brain. Additionally, two students wrote that yoga changes the atmosphere of the class, enhancing the lesson's flow.

Regarding the neutral responses, six students commented that yoga stretching makes them feel more comfortable and refreshed. Five other students highlighted that yoga can relieve stiffness in their muscles. Four more mentioned that it is enjoyable to move their bodies, and another four pointed out that yoga is beneficial because they rarely get the opportunity to move in a classroom setting. There were also some reasons why they were not completely satisfied with the yoga warm-up. Two students remarked, "It's a little complicated," and two others stressed that the stretching is pleasant but stated, "I don't feel comfortable in my school uniform" and, "It is a great idea, but

I feel a bit shy." Two more mentioned that they don't notice a significant difference because they do it after recess. For the five negative responses, they said, "I don't feel like moving in the early morning," "It's too tedious," "Yoga makes me tired," "I don't like it because my shirt comes untucked," and "I can't wait to get into class."

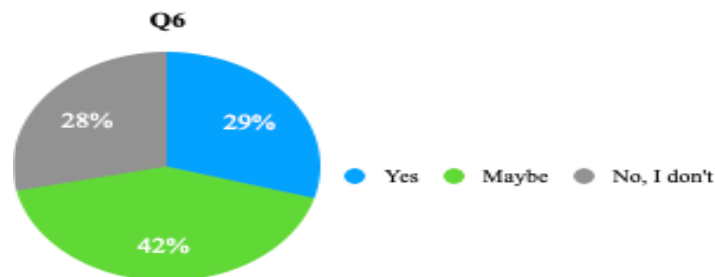
To the question, "Can a 7-minute yoga stretch at the beginning of the class benefit you?" 64.2% of the students responded "yes," 27.4% said "maybe," and 8.4% replied "no."



Q5: Can a 7-minute yoga stretch at the beginning of the class benefit you?

Positive feedback included 20 comments from students who noted that stretching makes them feel good and refreshed. Nine students mentioned it helps wake them up, and three even added that it allows them to relax and concentrate better for the rest of the lesson. Regarding negative feedback, three students stated that 7 minutes is too short for effective stretching. Two students noted that they felt too tired, while another two mentioned they would compensate for the exercise with something else.

Then, I asked the students if they would like other teachers to lead a 7-minute yoga session or any other stretching activities during the lessons. I've always been curious about how students would respond to the idea of regularly stretching at school. Unfortunately, my hopes were not met: 29.5% answered "yes," 42.1% "maybe," and 28.4% "no."



Q6: Would like other teachers to lead a 7-minute yoga session or any other stretching activities during the lessons.

Thirteen students admitted that it seemed fun, could be beneficial for their bodies, might make them less sleepy in class, and could help them feel less tired. Seven students expressed satisfaction with their current activities and mentioned they would get tired of doing yoga in every class. A few students emphasized that it's fun because they do it during English class. Some comments noted that the classroom is too small, and they worry about losing class time.

### Results of the Actual Yoga Workshop at the Gym

At the beginning of the workshop, students were asked to assess how they felt in various parts of their bodies, such as the neck, back, and hips, to evaluate the outcomes of their yoga practice. At the end of the session, a similar questionnaire was given.

According to the pre-and post-questionnaire results, students reported sufficient release in all the body parts included in the test. The area around the neck had a pre-test mean of 2.83 and a post-test mean of 3.92.

**Table 1.** Around the neck area

Group		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
<i>neck</i>	Pre-test	2.8333	96	1.09224	.11148
	Post-test	3.9271	96	.95416	.09738

Shoulders had a pre-test mean of 2.76 and a post-test mean of 4.02.

**Table 2.** Shoulders area

Group		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
<i>Shoulders</i>	Pre-test	2.7629	97	1.16165	.11795
	Post-test	4.0206	97	.91264	.09266

The spine area showed a pre-test mean of 2.89 and a post-test mean of 4.04.

**Table 3.** The spine area

Group		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
<i>Spine</i>	Pre-test	2.8969	97	1.11322	.11303
	Post-test	4.0412	97	.90043	.09143

For the waist area, the pre-test mean was 2.95, and the post-test mean was 3.97.

**Table 4.** The waist area

Group		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
<i>Waist</i>	Pre-test	2.9579	95	1.16615	.11964
	Post-test	3.9789	95	.95627	.09811

Arms had a pre-test mean of 3.23 and a post-test mean of 3.97.

**Table 5.** Arms

Group		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
<i>Arms</i>	Pre-test	3.2316	95	1.06644	.10941
	Post-test	3.9789	95	.95627	.09811

Finally, legs had a pre-test mean of 3.07 and a post-test mean of 4.01.

**Table 6.** Legs

Group		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
<i>Legs</i>	Pre-test	3.0737	95	.98112	.10066
	Post-test	4.0105	95	1.00525	.10314

Students were also asked if they felt their bodies were stretched and relaxed. Once again, the numbers reveal a notable difference: 2.84 for the pre-test and 4.05 for the post-test mean.

**Table 7.** The overall feeling of the body

Group		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
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<i>Whole body</i>	Pre-test	2.8495	93	1.15105	.11936
	Post-test	4.0538	93	.83881	.08698

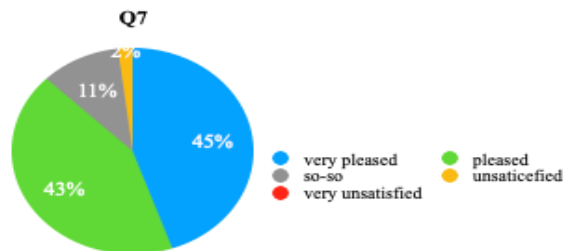
Interestingly, seeing how yoga influenced students' inner condition was insightful. To the question: Do you feel irritated or stressed? In the pre-test, the mean was 3.38; for the post-test, it dropped to 2.71.

**Table 8.** Do you feel irritated or stressed

Group		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
<i>Stressed or irritated</i>	Pre-test	3.3854	96	1.19973	.12245
	Post-test	2.7188	96	1.31151	.13386

I believe these results clearly demonstrate the benefits of yoga practice. After the yoga class, children undoubtedly felt the difference in their physical and mental conditions.

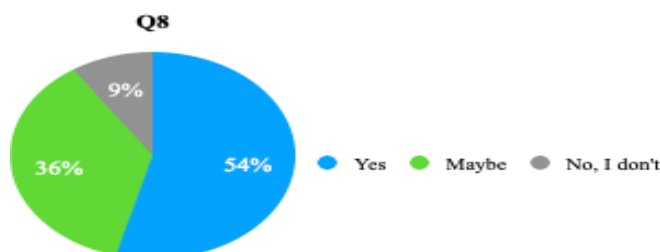
After the session, students were asked about their overall impression of the workshop. Forty-six students were very satisfied, 44 were satisfied, 11 felt good about the practice, two were somewhat unsatisfied, and none reported feeling unsatisfied.



Q7: What is your overall impression of the workshop?

In response to the question, "Why do you think so?" 14 students agreed it was a good workout and enjoyed stretching their bodies. Two noted improvements in their blood circulation, and another two mentioned that the session helped relieve their daily stress. Thirteen students commented that it was a fun experience. Nine students shared that it was their first real yoga class, which they found very interesting. Another 11 students reported feeling good, able to relax and feel lighter, and three students even admitted that their minds were now at peace. Four students also mentioned that working out with friends was enjoyable. Regarding the negative feedback, two students expressed uncertainty about the effects; one wanted to stretch his neck more, and two mentioned that it felt too harsh and tiring for them.

When asked, "Do you think a complete yoga lesson at the gym can benefit you?" 54.2% of the students answered "yes," 36.5% answered "maybe," and 9.4% answered "no."

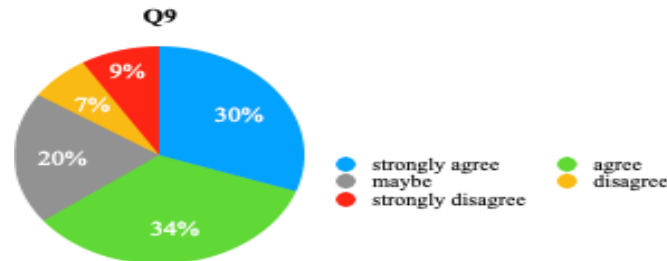


Q8: Do you think a complete yoga lesson at the gym can benefit you?

Seventeen students unanimously stated that yoga can prevent lack of exercise, improve their posture, and promote good health. Nine students noted that it is relaxing and fun, while another five added that since they sit and study at their desks all day, this was a good way to refresh their

bodies. Another four students mentioned that it was just right to keep them awake. Students dissatisfied with the workshop expressed concerns: two students said it takes too much time and effort, one claimed it would decrease their study time, and one stated they prioritize strength training over flexibility. Therefore, the results indicate that students were generally satisfied with the workshop.

Students were also asked if they would like a similar yoga practice during their PE class, like the swimming or judo activities they had already participated in.

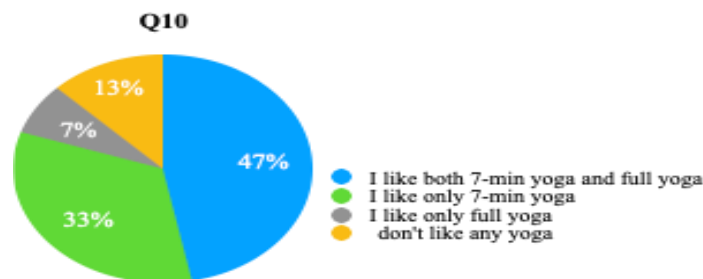


Q9: Would like a similar yoga practice during their PE class, like the swimming or judo activities?

To answer this question, 31 students responded that they strongly agreed, and 35 agreed. Thirteen of these students admitted that they could soften their bodies, ten could relax significantly, another ten said it felt great, and seven remarked that yoga was enjoyable. Three students even mentioned that they could utilize their whole bodies more than in their regular PE classes. At the same time, another three commented that yoga class was a more valuable and fun exercise than their standard PE. However, over thirty other students were less optimistic about this idea. Twenty students indicated they were unsure whether they agreed or disagreed, seven disagreed, and nine completely disagreed. Their comments were not unanimous. Some stated that they had other commitments, that it was just too much trouble to add anything more, and that it was too demanding to do in a school setting. A few also noted feeling too stiff, not sporty, and unfit for a yoga class.

Finally, students were asked to evaluate their overall experience with the in-school yoga project.

46.9% of the students responded that they liked both the 7-minute yoga stretching sessions and the yoga workshop at the gym. 33.3% of students preferred only the 7-minute yoga stretching in the classroom. 7.3% of the students favored the workshop at the gym more. 12.5% of the students didn't want any yoga exercises at school.



Q10: Evaluate their overall experience with the in-school yoga project.

### Feedback from the Professional Yoga Instructor on the Yoga Project at School

Now, let's discuss the results of another qualitative analysis: the interview responses from the professional yoga instructor who participated in this research.

Right after we finished the yoga workshop, Tina generously shared her insights on the project and presented her vision for yoga in schools. Below are a few questions from my interview with Tina.

**Q1: "What do you think the future of yoga as a school subject could be?"** Tina: "I would



include yoga everywhere, especially in schools. Kids need movement since they sit for eight hours each day. During these eight hours, they should have opportunities to move regularly—at least half an hour every day. All they would need to do is stand up, stretch their spine and joints, breathe, and perhaps chant for a bit of focus; this would provide them a reset. After that, when they return to their eight hours of studying, they'll be prepared to work.

**Q2 How should the yoga class for kids be designed?** For children, movement is essential. They are very active; their bodies are made to move, so they naturally desire to do so. It's better to allow them to move much more in class than adults. Adults often face limitations and can feel exhausted, experiencing pain in different areas, which leads to habits that impede their ability to move like young kids. Children's minds function differently, and their breath follows a unique rhythm. Since children are still young, they often struggle to take the process seriously. However, when they move, their blood circulation improves, energy flows, and they begin to breathe more deeply. Ultimately, they can feel relaxed and refreshed because they release energy.

Sitting for eight hours at school also builds up tension. Moving around gives them a chance for fun, but the fundamentals of yoga, sitting, and concentrating can be challenging since they're still all day. After moving and breathing, I think these young ones can finally sit down and maybe even chant "Om," as they find it interesting; they might also practice some pranayama, but not for too long. That should benefit them greatly. The time shouldn't be excessive; compared to the standard 75-minute yoga class, 30 minutes would be sufficient. However, if we practice this exercise with them regularly, they will adapt, and things may change. They'll likely start breathing better and improving their concentration, so they might even begin to enjoy sitting poses and chanting, but they need to reach that point first. I believe the best approach for these kids is to let them move first, stretching their spine and joints while encouraging them to breathe.

**Q3 What do you think about their stiffness?** – "Very stiff. But I don't think it's just in Japan; generally, the situation is similar everywhere. If you look at Europe, you'll see a comparable picture. When you simply ask children to touch the ground, even though they are still very young, most cannot reach the floor. This indicates that their spines have already developed habits; they are stiff and not moving. Thus, they will face problems much earlier than their parents over time. They will suffer from lower back pain, hip pain, and shoulder pain because they are already constricted. So, what will happen in a few years? When they become completely rigid, issues will start to appear. As educators, I believe our purpose is not to develop athletes or focus on weight loss but to maintain their bodies and minds in a healthy state. If your body feels stuck, your mind becomes stuck, too; they are connected. If your breath is stagnant and you feel tense, your mind becomes rigid. When children begin to move, they can start to think more clearly. This will help them relax and enhance their mental and physical abilities.

I admit that children already engage in many sports, but if they are stiff, their potential is limited; they simply force it. When you're young, playing basketball is important, but it shouldn't be done mindlessly; movements should be conscious. You will depend on your habit once a habit forms in your body. Through yoga, you begin to concentrate and deepen your self-awareness, reconnecting with yourself. When you realize, "Oh, I'm stuck; I'm so stiff," you start to focus on the movement, which is what they truly need. By moving their spines, they can achieve a complete reset. For example, they constantly use their chest in basketball, but if it's not open, they can't fully benefit. Practicing poses like cat and cow will help them open their chest and finally experience a release.

**Q4 How can yoga be beneficial for students?** - "Yoga can be beneficial for all students. It embodies a mindset that aligns with Buddhism. Yoga is also a practice of sitting quietly; it provides a moment to reflect on breathing. We often focus too much on the outside world. Through yoga, we can encourage them to connect with themselves. Each day, for half an hour, they would have

the opportunity to sit with their thoughts. Some may initially struggle because they are rarely truly 'in'; they are always "out." However, in the future, if something goes wrong, they might break. Thus, being strong and learning to be flexible is essential. I believe this is crucial now, as everyone feels so disconnected. If I were in school, I would schedule regular yoga sessions, perhaps in the morning and a bit in the afternoon. Nutrition is important as well. We should support them with healthy food. These changes can significantly impact children and potentially transform entire generations.”

## Discussion

First, let's consider whether yoga can be incorporated not only into a PE program but also into a standard classroom environment (Research question#1). The students' feedback indicates that they were generally pleased with this warm-up activity during class. Over 60% of the students agreed that a brief stretching exercise before class could be beneficial. Although some comments indicated that stretching in their tight uniforms within the limited space at their desks can be quite uncomfortable, they still acknowledge the advantages of this short exercise. First and foremost, it is enjoyable to have some movement before the lesson; it helps them feel less drowsy in class and reduces their fatigue. However, some students expressed skepticism about introducing yoga-like stretching activities into every class because they might lose valuable learning time. Their concerns are understandable, given that class time in Japan is only 45-50 minutes, which is relatively short; incorporating stretching into every class could result in lost instructional time. Many also emphasized that it is fun because it occurs during their English class, and they might feel uncomfortable exercising in front of other teachers. This concern is valid, as many teachers conduct their classes very strictly and formally, and students may not feel it is appropriate to move and relax in front of such instructors. However, I believe Yoga warm-up stretches can benefit not just the students but even the teachers. Since we must conduct many lessons in a row, practicing yoga in each class helps the teacher feel rejuvenated. Just like students, teachers can become very tired from standing or sitting in the same position for long periods, so stretching during class promotes regular physical activity, which many teachers often lack in their busy daily routines. Based on my experience, I have noticed that even when my hectic schedule doesn't allow for sufficient yoga practice with the instructor, I feel more energetic and refreshed every day since starting yoga at work.

Next, let's discuss how students perceived the overall experience of a complete yoga class led by a professional yoga instructor and the impression these students conveyed to the instructor. (Research question#2). Students provided very positive feedback, although it was not as strong as that from the 7-minute workout questionnaire. Many students agreed that it was enjoyable and, compared to the warm-up activities, they appreciated the poses that engaged their entire bodies. They felt they could move freely in the gym; some even noted they could use their whole bodies more than in regular PE classes. However, some students mentioned they were unfit for complete yoga stretching. They found it too demanding and felt overwhelmed at the thought of adding anything more to their already busy schedules. These responses are completely understandable. Even I, a yoga enthusiast who has practiced for over 15 years, still experience muscle pain after each lesson. These students are so accustomed to a sedentary lifestyle that stretching like this may feel tiring and even painful. Conversely, this could strongly support the case for stretching activities like yoga. Even when playing sports, students often don't stretch their entire bodies; their stiffness becomes habitual, and the muscle pain that follows such exercise can intensify. Therefore, I believe these negative comments could highlight the necessity of stretching exercises such as yoga. The results from the pre-and post-workshop questionnaire about participants' physical and mental conditions also clearly demonstrate the importance of yoga stretching. Its positive impact is undeniable. Comments from the professional yoga instructor only intensified my concerns about

the students' overall physical condition. As we learned from Tina's interview, she admitted that at ages 16 to 17, these teenagers were extremely stiff. Their difficulty in calming down at the beginning of the lesson also indicates the level of stress these children are experiencing. However, as Tina emphasized, practicing yoga is possible even with hyperactive and unfit students. If we implement these activities regularly, the students' bodies will gradually adapt to balanced stretching, become more flexible, and eventually start to feel the joy of movement. They definitely begin to relax more if slow briefings and short Om chanting are incorporated into the lesson, as yoga is not just simple muscle training—it's a time when students can close their eyes for a few minutes and finally connect with themselves.

Research Question 3: we will explore potential yoga teaching methods for classroom and P.E.-style school activities. The results show that students feel the difference in their bodies after stretching and view this activity as beneficial. However, I must admit that they seem puzzled and shy whenever I ask students to stand up and stretch for the first time. Yet, after I explain that I'm also a yoga instructor and want them to take a short break from their studies to move their bodies, students eagerly begin to follow along and enjoy the stretching. Once they become accustomed to the idea that yoga is part of this class, they treat it just like any homework or assessment. Therefore, I believe it's essential for students to understand why we do the warm-up during class time. Students become more interested in the activity once they grasp the reasons and benefits of stretching during lessons. Regularity is also an essential factor. Yoga shouldn't become a compulsory, overly controlled activity for students. If the lesson schedule is overloaded, teachers should skip these activities. However, if students only have the opportunity to stretch and exercise occasionally, they may be more reluctant to participate. Regarding the warm-up layout, the timing for stretching is also crucial. Since the lesson duration is relatively short for high school students, starting or ending the lesson with yoga would be more effective. I prefer starting the lesson with yoga because finding time in a busy schedule is more manageable. Yoga can also provide a refreshing change of pace, allowing students to recover from previous classes and begin a new lesson with a fresh mindset. In contrast, with my university students, I like to incorporate yoga in the middle of the class, between extended reading or writing activities, or after tiring tests that demand long periods of concentration. After about an hour of class, students naturally begin to yawn or stretch, so a brief break to stand and stretch for a few minutes is always appreciated as a valuable reward.

Finally, let's assess whether yoga has a future in schools, not just in India but also in countries with limited ties to yoga, such as Japan (Research Question #4). So, the answer to whether yoga can be used in the classroom for short relaxation and stretching for students and teachers is quite positive. The only issue is who can lead these stretching activities in class. The notion of incorporating a movement element into secondary education has not yet been adopted in mass education in countries like Japan. As we see from the students' comments, they remain critical and conservative about applying stretching during class time. Another concern is who will provide such instructional warm-up stretches. Since many teachers lack experience in yoga or other stretching exercises, implementing these activities could pose challenges. One solution may be to offer short yoga workshops for school teachers. The number of sequences suitable for the classroom is minimal and straightforward, so with some practice, most teachers can effectively guide their students. Naturally, some teachers may initially feel hesitant, but similar to the introduction of technology in schools, if educators are provided with strong reasons that outline the benefits of these stretching activities for both students and teachers, they may eventually grow accustomed to the idea of regular movement in the classroom.

The second solution is to include yoga in the PE program, led by trained yoga instructors. As yoga has gained popularity as a recreational activity in many countries, there are now enough

skilled instructors available to expand their teaching opportunities and offer multi-hour yoga classes in public and private schools. The main concern is that hiring these specialists can be costly for schools. However, if this program effectively combines physical challenges with mental development for students, these additional costs would be justified. Currently, we are working on implementing this project at the school where we are initially testing it for this study. Given the school's strong ties to Buddhism, the principal has been very supportive of organizing regular yoga workshops as part of the religious studies and meditation curriculum, particularly for senior students who often feel excessively stressed and fatigued due to the pressures of schoolwork and preparing for college entrance exams.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

I wanted to conclude this paper with the words I discovered on one of Joe Dispenza's blogs, a man who was able to recover from being completely paralyzed after a serious accident: "Humans are the only beings capable of intentionally shaping their reality, presenting us with incredible opportunities. When we shift our worldview, we effectively redraw the reality surrounding us. By recognizing that there are no unchangeable rules, we can return to the true, fundamental laws of the universe, ultimately enhancing the world for the better. By dismantling the conventions and stereotypes that restrict us, we can perceive everything from a new, liberated perspective." (Samoilova, S. 2025)

I agree that introducing yoga in schools can be an incredibly ambitious project. It will require time and resources to change the perception that standard classes are solely for studying and that PE is only for preparing students for sports activities. However, as we learned from the pre-study questionnaire, students feel a strong need to stretch and relax their bodies. Over 60% of students indicated a need for regular stretching, as they often feel stiff and tense during class. Although these students have PE classes almost daily, a half-hour of physical activity is not enough for them to feel stretched and energized throughout the day. When most lessons are conducted in the classroom, where students primarily sit at their desks and passively listen to their teachers, they gradually become fatigued and sleepy. It could even be argued that if students are required to sit all day and only occasionally engage in brief physical activities during PE classes, they may feel even more tired and drowsy after returning to their desks than before their PE class. However, if we allow students to move and stretch during or between lessons, they can release stress in shorter timeframes, feel more refreshed during classes, and won't become overly tired after their PE classes.

As Tina mentioned, children today significantly lack opportunities to move, leading to early stiffness and unbalanced health, an issue that begins much earlier than in previous generations. Just think about what students endure daily, especially in junior and senior high schools. Sitting still in the same place for over eight hours can be tiring and depressing for kids, mainly since they are still young and their bodies need movement to expend energy. I don't want to be overly critical, but doesn't school sometimes feel more like a nursing home for the elderly rather than a place for young, strong, and energetic children? It is said that sitting has the same negative effects on adults as smoking does, so why do we let our children suffer from such a detrimental routine at such a young age?

Yoga teaches self-awareness, empowering individuals to make decisions, act, and take responsibility for their actions without shifting blame to circumstances or others. Don't we all agree that there are numerous ways to improve our world, society, and schools? If tools like yoga are accessible and easy to apply, we should embrace them. Let's take the first steps today instead of merely wishing for a bright future. Let's teach our kids how to create these changes for themselves so they can develop self-awareness and potentially lead more independent, mindful lives in the future.

## **Declarations**

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***Competing interests:*** The author declares that she has no competing interests.

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***Ethics approval and consent to participate:*** All study participants were first informed about the purpose of the study and signed a consent letter. Since the students involved in the study are minors, consent was also obtained from the school's principal, their legal guardian.

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