

# "A STUDY OF SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN YOGIC PRACTITIONERS"

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**Abstract:** Social-emotional development encompasses self-awareness, emotional regulation, social skills, and empathy—elements vital for psychological resilience and interpersonal effectiveness. In the face of rising stress and mental health issues, there is growing interest in holistic practices such as yoga to promote mental and emotional well-being. Yoga, a discipline rooted in Indian philosophy, integrates physical postures (asanas), breathing techniques (pranayama), and meditation (dhyana), offering a comprehensive mind-body approach to self-regulation and emotional balance.

This study investigates the impact of yogic practices on social-emotional development among adult practitioners. Using a comparative cross-sectional design, the study includes 150 participants—75 regular yoga practitioners (minimum one year of continuous practice) and 75 non-practitioners, selected from wellness centers and community organizations in Delhi NCR, India. The Social Emotional Competence Questionnaire (SECQ) and Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i) were used to assess competencies such as self-regulation, emotional awareness, and social interaction. Qualitative data were also collected through semi-structured interviews.

Findings indicate that yoga practitioners scored significantly higher in emotional intelligence, empathy, and interpersonal communication. Qualitative narratives revealed that regular engagement with yoga improved stress management, increased patience, and fostered deeper self-reflection. These results align with previous studies highlighting yoga's benefits in enhancing mental and emotional health (Riley & Park, 2015; Telles et al., 2019).

This study supports the integration of yogic interventions into mental health and educational programs, suggesting that regular practice contributes positively to social-emotional growth. It also underscores yoga's potential role in fostering community well-being and emotional literacy. Further longitudinal research is recommended to examine causality and broader applicability across populations.

**Keywords:** Social-emotional development, Yoga practitioners, Emotional intelligence, Mindfulness, Self-regulation

## I. INTRODUCTION

Social-emotional development refers to the process through which individuals acquire the ability to recognize and manage emotions, develop care and concern for others, make responsible decisions, and establish positive relationships (Denham et al., 2003). These competencies are crucial for both individual well-being and the health of communities. In recent years, concerns over rising levels of stress, anxiety, and emotional dysregulation, especially in urban populations, have highlighted the need for integrative approaches to mental health.

Yoga, an ancient Indian practice, has gained international recognition as a means to cultivate physical health, emotional balance, and spiritual growth. It combines physical postures (asanas), breathing control (pranayama), and meditation (dhyana), fostering a union of body and mind (Iyengar, 2002). Yoga's meditative components have been shown to influence the autonomic nervous system and reduce stress-related responses, promoting psychological equilibrium (Telles et al., 2019).

Several studies have noted the positive impact of yoga on mental health, including improvements in self-awareness, mood regulation, and interpersonal sensitivity (Riley & Park, 2015). However, limited research has specifically addressed yoga's influence on the broader spectrum of social-emotional competencies, such as empathy, conflict resolution, and emotional resilience. This gap is particularly relevant in today's context, where emotional intelligence is recognized as a key predictor of success and well-being across various domains.

The current study aims to explore the role of yoga in enhancing social-emotional development among adult practitioners. By comparing a group of experienced yoga practitioners with non-practitioners, the study seeks to assess differences in emotional intelligence, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills. The findings will offer insights into how yoga can be incorporated into educational and therapeutic frameworks for promoting emotional well-being and social harmony.

## II. METHODOLOGY

### *Research Design*

This study adopted a **comparative cross-sectional research design** to examine the influence of regular yogic practice on social-emotional development. The design facilitated a direct comparison between two distinct groups: yoga practitioners and non-practitioners. The rationale was to identify significant differences in emotional and social competencies attributable to consistent engagement with yogic practices.

### *Participants*

The sample comprised **150 adult participants** aged between 25 and 50 years, drawn from urban regions of Delhi NCR, India. The participants were divided equally into two groups:

- **Yoga Group (n=75):** Individuals with a minimum of one year of continuous yoga practice (at least 4 days per week, 45 minutes per session), enrolled in certified yoga centers.
- **Control Group (n=75):** Individuals not engaged in any form of yoga, meditation, or similar wellness activities.

Purposive sampling was employed to ensure representation from both genders and to control for confounding variables such as chronic illness, psychiatric conditions, or previous therapy.

### *Instruments*

Two standardized psychometric tools were used:

1. **Social Emotional Competence Questionnaire (SECQ)** – Developed by Zhou and Ee (2012), this tool measures five domains: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. It has demonstrated good internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.82$ ).
2. **Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i)** – Developed by Bar-On (1997), this inventory measures various facets of emotional intelligence including empathy, emotional regulation, and interpersonal functioning.

Additionally, **semi-structured interviews** were conducted with 20 yoga practitioners to collect qualitative insights on perceived emotional and social changes due to yoga.

### *Procedure*

Participants were approached through yoga centers, community networks, and wellness programs. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was maintained. The quantitative questionnaires were administered in a supervised setting to minimize response bias. The yoga group was asked to detail their practice routines, including duration, frequency, and types of yoga techniques used (asana, pranayama, meditation).

Semi-structured interviews lasted 20–30 minutes and were audio-recorded with participant permission. These were transcribed and coded for thematic analysis.

### *Data Analysis*

Quantitative data were analyzed using **SPSS Version 26.0**. Independent sample **t-tests** were conducted to compare the two groups on SECQ and EQ-i scores. Significance was determined at  $p < 0.05$ . Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) were computed to understand the distribution and central tendencies of the variables.

Qualitative data from interviews were subjected to **thematic analysis**, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) method. Emerging themes were categorized under emotional awareness, empathy, interpersonal behavior, and self-regulation.

### *Ethical Considerations*

The study was approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee. All participants were informed about the objectives, confidentiality procedures, and their right to withdraw without consequences.

## III. RESULTS

### *Quantitative Findings*

The primary objective of the study was to assess the difference in social-emotional competencies between regular yogic practitioners and non-practitioners. Data from the Social Emotional Competence Questionnaire (SECQ) and Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i) were analyzed using independent samples t-tests.

**Table 1: Comparison of Mean Scores between Yoga Practitioners and Non-Practitioners**

<b>Social-Emotional Domain</b>	<b>Yoga Practitioners (n = 75)</b>	<b>Non-Practitioners (n = 75)</b>	<b>t-value</b>	<b>p-value</b>
Self-Awareness	24.6 ± 3.1	20.3 ± 3.6	7.82	< 0.001
Self-Management	25.1 ± 2.9	21.0 ± 3.2	7.24	< 0.001
Social Awareness	23.8 ± 3.3	19.5 ± 3.7	6.92	< 0.001
Relationship Skills	24.2 ± 2.7	20.1 ± 3.4	7.05	< 0.001
Emotional Regulation (EQ-i)	26.4 ± 3.0	21.8 ± 3.5	7.68	< 0.001
Empathy (EQ-i)	25.9 ± 2.6	20.9 ± 3.2	8.01	< 0.001

All five social-emotional domains showed significantly higher scores among yoga practitioners compared to the control group ( $p < 0.001$ ), indicating a strong positive association between regular yogic practice and enhanced social-emotional development.

These narratives strongly align with the high scores recorded in empathy, self-regulation, and social awareness in the quantitative data. The results clearly demonstrate that individuals who engage in regular yogic practice exhibit significantly higher levels of social-emotional competence compared to those who do not practice yoga. This includes greater emotional awareness, enhanced interpersonal skills, and improved self-regulation—skills essential for mental well-being and social functioning.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to investigate the influence of regular yogic practice on social-emotional development among adults. The findings from both quantitative and qualitative data indicate that individuals who engage in consistent yogic practices demonstrate significantly higher competencies in emotional regulation, empathy, self-awareness, and interpersonal skills compared to non-practitioners.

The results align with existing literature, which suggests that yoga contributes to emotional well-being by fostering mindfulness, increasing neuroplasticity, and modulating stress responses (Riley & Park, 2015; Telles et al., 2019). The observed improvements in domains such as self-awareness and emotional regulation among yoga practitioners can be attributed to the integrative nature of yoga, which combines physical movement, breath control, and meditative focus. These elements help cultivate an inward focus and self-observation, allowing practitioners to become more aware of emotional triggers and manage reactions constructively (Sengupta, 2012).

The higher empathy and relationship skills scores found in the yoga group suggest that yoga not only nurtures intrapersonal development but also enhances interpersonal dynamics. This finding supports previous research that highlights yoga's role in improving compassion and social connectedness (Gaiswinkler & Unterrainer, 2016). The qualitative themes further reinforced these outcomes by showcasing personal reflections of improved patience, better conflict resolution, and greater emotional balance.

While the results are promising, it is important to acknowledge limitations such as the cross-sectional design, which restricts causal interpretation. Additionally, factors such as personality traits, socio-economic status, and prior exposure to emotional training were not controlled in this study. Nevertheless, the strong association observed between yoga and social-emotional competence warrants further longitudinal research.

These findings have practical implications for educators, therapists, and policymakers. Incorporating yoga-based interventions in schools, workplaces, and community health programs can be a low-cost and effective method to enhance emotional intelligence and promote social harmony.

#### V. CONCLUSION

This study provides empirical evidence supporting the positive role of yoga in fostering social-emotional development among adult practitioners. Participants who regularly engaged in yogic practices exhibited significantly higher levels of emotional awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and interpersonal competence compared to non-practitioners.

Both quantitative assessments and qualitative narratives revealed that the integrative and holistic aspects of yoga contribute to improved emotional stability and enhanced social functioning. The findings underscore yoga's potential as a transformative tool for emotional literacy and psychological well-being in modern life.

In a time when mental health challenges and social isolation are on the rise, integrating yoga into daily routines and wellness programs can serve as an accessible and culturally rooted approach to fostering resilience, empathy, and

community engagement. Future research should focus on longitudinal and experimental designs to further validate these outcomes and explore underlying mechanisms.

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Integration of Yoga in Educational Institutions**  
Schools, colleges, and universities should introduce structured yoga programs to enhance students' emotional regulation, empathy, and interpersonal skills.
2. **Yoga as a Mental Health Intervention**  
Mental health professionals and counselors can incorporate yogic practices into therapy and stress-management programs to improve emotional well-being among clients.
3. **Community-Level Yoga Initiatives**  
Local governments and NGOs should organize community-based yoga sessions, particularly in urban and high-stress areas, to promote emotional resilience and social harmony.
4. **Corporate Wellness Programs**  
Employers should consider integrating yoga into workplace wellness strategies to improve employee mental health, productivity, and teamwork.
5. **Further Research**  
Longitudinal studies and randomized controlled trials should be conducted to establish causal links and explore how specific yogic components (asana, pranayama, meditation) influence various emotional and social outcomes.

## VII. LIMITATIONS

While the study provides valuable insights, it is subject to several limitations:

1. **Cross-Sectional Design**  
The study's design limits the ability to draw causal inferences. Longitudinal designs would better capture the progression of social-emotional growth over time.
2. **Sample Diversity**  
Participants were drawn from a specific geographic and cultural region (Delhi NCR, India), limiting generalizability to broader populations.
3. **Self-Report Bias**  
Data collection relied on self-reported measures, which may be influenced by social desirability or inaccurate self-assessment.
4. **Lack of Randomization**  
The groups were not randomly assigned, so unknown confounding variables (e.g., personality traits or prior mindfulness exposure) could influence results.
5. **Limited Qualitative Scope**  
Only 20 practitioners were interviewed, which may not fully represent the depth and variety of experiences within the yoga community.

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