Enhancing Classroom Climate and Mental Well-being: A Yoga and Meditation-Based Approach

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Abstract

Classroom incivility, characterized by disruption and disrespect, poses a significant challenge to modern education, undermining mental well-being and effective learning. This conceptual paper examines how yoga and meditation, grounded in ancient Indian wisdom and contemporary neuroscience can serve as interventions for overcoming incivility in classroom and enhance mental health. This study argues that incivility in classroom is often spread through lack of knowledge regarding consequences and through observational learning drawing from Social Learning Theory. Yoga and meditation foster crucial skills like self-awareness, emotional regulation, and focused attention. Specifically, yogic principles such as Ahimsa (non-violence) and Pratyahara (sense control) are highlighted as vital tools for cultivating empathy, self-control, and respect in relationships. Meditation, acting as a cognitive resource, improves attention, reduces impulsive behaviour, and promotes a calm, harmonious classroom climate. This paper synthesizes existing literature by emphasizes the how these practices reduce stress, increase attentiveness, respect and promote cooperative learning environment. Recommendations include brief mindfulness sessions, yoga-based stress management, real-life examples, and educator training, all aimed at fostering internal transformation in students. This conceptual paper contributes to holistic framework which is culturally rooted by addressing incivility and techniques to foster civil behaviour academic environment.

Keywords: Classroom Incivility, Mental Wellbeing, Yoga, Meditation, Education

India's education sector, the largest network globally, plays a vital role in shaping knowledge, values, and ethics. Post-COVID-19, it has embraced digital transformation, earning the title of the edtech capital. The pandemic accelerated online learning, and as we move to an endemic phase, the focus is on continuity and quality outcomes.

For over a century, higher education has remained mostly traditional, with teacher-led classroom instruction still dominant. Despite ongoing calls for change, shifts have been slow. Research supports active learning and effective teaching strategies (Mayhew et al., 2016; Freeman et al., 2014), prompting initiatives like teacher development programs to enhance equity and outcomes (Beach et al., 2016).

Progress in higher education remains limited, with a research gap on using culturally rooted practices like yoga and meditation to address classroom incivility. Though their benefits are known, their academic application is underexplored. This study proposes a conceptual model integrating Indian philosophy and Social Learning Theory to enhance classroom civility.

Within the existing challenges, the present study aims to examine the barrier in holistic education and identify the neurological and psychological mechanisms through which these practices can enhance mental well-being, helping individuals to develop better self-management skills and adopt effective adaptive coping strategies like Yoga and Meditation for a respectful and conducive environment.

Classroom Incivility – A Barrier to Holistic Education

Teaching is a profession demanding a great deal of emotional effort, requiring teachers to dedicate themselves to facilitating the development of students (Chang M.L., 2009; Keller M.M., Chang M.L., Becker E.S., Goetz T., Frenzel A.C., 2014). Students have diverse needs which have to be patiently and effectively managed. Teachers are responsible for providing a positive learning environment by creating a warm and secure classroom for students. The classroom climate and work environment significantly contribute to interactions, relationships, and the overall learning and teaching experiences of students and teachers.

Classroom climate refers to the emotional and social atmosphere shaped by interactions among students and teachers. Teachers influence this through instruction and behaviour management. It includes civility—respectful, inclusive behaviour—and incivility, such as disobedience, gadget use, and disruptions, which affect harmony and the overall learning environment.

Classroom incivility can be due to individual, interpersonal, social environmental, and technological factors. Lack of subject interest, misaligned expectations about classroom norms and behavior, chatting during lectures, stress, anxiety, lack of self-regulation, and

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immaturity. Certain students are very resistant to authorities and end up in frequent conflicts among peer groups. Classroom incivility creates an emotional-based atmosphere like negative relationships, loss of respect, stress, fear, lack of confidence, and mistrust. Communication becomes disrupted and ineffective (Cheetham and Turner, 2020). Uncivil behavior can lead to negative consequences, such as increased burnout (Bani-Melhem, 2020), intentions to retaliate (Wang et al., 2022), and decreased levels of performance (Yue et al., 2021). A consolidative review by Rose et al. (2020), studied student uncivil behaviour. They reported that nursing student's workload, high expectations contributed to incivility.

In colleges, class fellows and other batch mates initiate incivility based on the peer team they belong to. Uncivil action recipients are likely to feel susceptible based on personality type, and social support. Incivility also led to higher academic stress and are associated positively with psychological distress (Huang, Qui, Alizadeh and W, 2020).

If class is not interactive, unclear policies, heavy workload, tight deadlines, and differences in communication styles and culture can affect classroom climate. A study by Segrist, Bartels, & Nordstrom (2018), found that Social norms were predictors of classroom incivility. Predictors of student incivility emerged as Class size and instructor nonverbal immediacy (Weger, 2017). Therefore, incivility needs to be addressed as these behaviours affects the mental health of both students and teachers.

Relevance of Mental Well-being in classroom dynamics

Mental well-being in classrooms shapes emotional, social, and cognitive health, fostering engagement, academic success, and strong teacher-student bonds. A supportive environment enhances psychological safety, while neglect can lead to stress, anxiety, and disengagement, reducing educational quality and student experience (Greenberg et al., 2003).

Wellbeing increases intrinsic motivation, academic achievement, improve classroom satisfaction and decreases disciplinary problems.Positive mental health includes happiness, and life satisfaction (Ryan and Deci, 2001). Study among Chinese nursing students indicates that uncivil behaviour was associated among those who ruminate high and have low mental health (Qiu et al, 2022). Uncivil behaviour includes taking credits for others behaviour which is regarded as highly serious, this significantly impacts students' mental health (Alanazi, et al.,2024).

Mental health always stays as a foundation to learning. Mental wellbeing influences the ability to learn, engage and succeed.

Conceptual framework

Social Learning Theory, particularly Bandura's framework, helps explain classroom incivility and its impact on mental health. According to Bandura (1977), behaviours are learned through observation, imitation, and modelling. In classrooms, students may adopt incivility by observing peers or institutional inaction. Bandura (1986) further emphasized that behaviours are shaped through social processes and reinforcement. This conceptual paper explores how such patterns contribute to toxic environments and aims to bridge Social Learning Theory with ancient Indian psychology to enhance contemporary educational practices.

Yoga: A Path to Harmony and Respect

Yoga provides a holistic framework for fostering harmony and respect. Beyond physical postures, it enhances body awareness, breath control, and mindfulness. By promoting self-regulation and balance, yoga supports personal growth and strengthens relationships. It nurtures empathy, active listening, and a non-judgmental mindset, building community and encouraging cooperation.

Key Principles of Yogic Philosophy

At the heart of yogic philosophy are principles that guide us towards a more harmonious existence:

Ahimsa (Non-violence). This foundational principle promotes empathy and respect in all interactions. As outlined by Patanjali in his Yoga Sutras (Sutra II, 35), Ahimsa, the first of the Yamas (restraints), states that when we cultivate non-violence in our speech, thoughts, and actions, our aggressive nature diminishes, and others respond with less hostility in our presence. Ahimsa is a powerful force capable of transforming both our inner and outer worlds.

Pratyahara (Control of Senses). Often translated as "withdrawal of the senses," Pratyahara is a vital practice for developing inner calm, mastering your thoughts, and enhancing attention and concentration. In yoga, Pratyahara is considered crucial for helping practitioners focus inward, prepare for meditation, and ultimately achieve samadhi, or union with the Divine. By redirecting attention away from external distractions and sensory input, the mind can turn its focus inward.

Here are a few ways to rephrase the provided text about meditation, focusing on clarity, impact, and flow:

Meditation: A Cognitive Tool for Combating Incivility.

Meditation enhances emotional regulation, stress resilience, and attention by positively affecting brain regions like the prefrontal cortex, amygdala, and hippocampus. Beyond relaxation, it fosters a respectful classroom climate and supports academic harmony by improving students' focus, emotional control, and well-being, making it a vital cognitive and educational tool

How Meditation Transforms the Brain.

Prefrontal Cortex: This area of the brain is crucial for executive functions such as awareness, decision making, concentration, problem-solving, self-discipline, and planning (Correll, 2024). Regular meditation strengthens the neural pathways in the prefrontal cortex, enhancing attentional control and our ability to maintain sustained focus.

Amygdala: This small, almond-shaped structure in the limbic system is responsible for processing emotions, especially those related to stress, fear, or threat. Meditation helps to downregulate the "fight-or-flight" response of the amygdala, making individuals calmer and better able to regulate their emotions (Correll, 2024). This calmer emotional state directly reduces the likelihood of uncivil behaviors like inattentiveness, arguments, and disrespect.

Hippocampus: Another limbic system structure, the hippocampus is responsible for memory formation, emotional regulation, and learning. Meditation increases grey matter density in the hippocampus, which in turn boosts memory retention, enhances learning capacity, self-awareness, compassion and builds resilience (McGreevey, 2011).

Cultivating Respectful Interactions.

Ultimately, meditation acts as a cognitive tool by improving neural plasticity that enhances emotional regulation, stability and reduces impulsivity. It empowers individuals to control emotional impulses, avoid impulsive behaviours, and foster genuinely respectful interactions with others (Tang, Hölzel, & Posner, 2015., Correll, 2024).

The Transformative Power of Yoga and Meditation

Yoga and meditation offer powerful tools for navigating stressful events. They help us reconceptualize challenges, enabling us to cope more effectively. Techniques like pranayama (breathing exercises) and meditation can actually reduce our body's physiological response to stress, making it easier to regulate emotions and build resilience. (Chiesa & Serretti, 2009). By cultivating mindfulness, these practices boost self-awareness and empathy—qualities essential for positive classroom dynamics.

Long-Term Impact on Classroom Dynamics

Integrating yoga and meditation into education supports value-based learning and addresses student stress, anxiety, and emotional challenges (Hagen, Skjelstad, & Nayar, 2023). Daily practices like asanas, pranayama, and meditation enhance emotional regulation, focus, and self-awareness, while reducing fatigue and impulsivity (Khalsa et al., 2012). These tools foster resilience, improve classroom behavior, and promote respectful peer interactions. Yogic values like Ahimsa and Pratyahara cultivate empathy and self-discipline. When teachers initiate brief mindfulness practices before sessions, students become more attentive and grounded. This holistic approach not only improves mental health but also nurtures well-rounded individuals prepared for academic and life challenges.

Conclusion

Classroom incivility is a pervasive issue in modern education, detrimental to both mental well-being and the quality of learning. Fortunately, yoga and meditation offer a holistic and sustainable solution. By promoting self-awareness, emotional regulation, and respect, these practices can transform educational settings. Their integration empowers both teachers and students to cultivate a harmonious learning environment, opening doors to improved mental health, respectful interactions, and citizenship.

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