

Enhancing Social Intelligence and Academic Performance of International Business Students Through Yoga

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Abstract. This research aims to assess whether the age-old discipline of yoga can enhance social intelligence of business executives. We also look at the role of mindfulness in development of social intelligence. The study variables were: social intelligence, academic performance, mindfulness and yoga practice. Our sample was 258 participants in Executive MBA programmes. A partial mediation model was developed and PROCESS macro was used for statistical analysis. We find that yoga practice improves mindfulness. Yoga practice improves social intelligence and academic performance directly as also through mindfulness. In the case of social intelligence 43 per cent of increase comes from yoga directly and 57 percent through enhanced mindfulness. We find that yoga improves performance in analysing case studies a little more than it affects other academic performance. In the case of academic performance, 46 per cent of increase comes from yoga directly and the remaining 54 percent from enhanced mindfulness.

Keywords: international business education, social intelligence, yoga, mindfulness.

1. Introduction

MBA programmes originated in the United States more than a century ago when the country started industrialising and the companies pursued scientific management. The globalisation of business functional areas, particularly in marketing, accounting, finance, and personnel, helped develop international business (IB) as a discipline in the 1960s, although adoption was sluggish. Around the same time, business schools began to convert into significant academic institutions based on reports from the Ford Foundation and Carnegie Foundation. The lack of internationalisation was not addressed by the change. International attention was essentially nonexistent until the early 1980s. The only exceptions were a few lone foreign commerce courses and a scattering of international finance courses in the 1970s. The idea that leaders need something more than technical skills is not new. More than a century ago, Columbia University's Professor Edward Thorndike had pointed out that "the best mechanic in a factory

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may fail as a foreman for lack of social intelligence” (p. 229). This section of the paper attempts to outline what social intelligence is. The following sections analyse whether and how yoga can enhance the social intelligence of MBA students. The impact of yoga on academic performance in IB courses and other courses is also analysed. Further, the role of mindfulness as a mediating variable is explored.

The term social intelligence was first used by educational psychologists John Dewey (1909) and Herbert Lull (1911) but the modern concept has its origins in Thorndike’s (1920) formulation: “By social intelligence is meant the ability to understand and manage men and women, boys and girls – to act wisely in human relations” (p. 228). Similarly, Fred Moss and Thelma Hunt (1927) defined social intelligence as the “ability to get along with others” (p. 108). Few years later, another educational psychologist Philip Vernon (1933) provided the most wide-ranging definition of social intelligence as the “ability to get along with people in general, social technique or ease in society, knowledge of social matters, susceptibility to stimuli from other members of a group, as well as insight into the temporary moods or underlying personality traits of strangers” (p. 44). Futurist and educator Karl Albrecht (2006) defines it as the “ability to get along well with others and to get them to cooperate with you” (p. 3), whereas American Psychological Association defines social intelligence as the ability to understand people and effectively relate to them (VandenBos 2015).

The century old concept of social intelligence has had a sporadic development but promises to be a late bloomer. It had been casually dismissed as “just general intelligence applied to social situations” (Wechsler 1958, p. 75). Since there was a high correlation between intelligence and social intelligence, there seemed to be no need to pay attention to the latter. The search for social intelligence in pre 1983 literature with its record of disappointing empirical results and substantial theoretical criticism is aptly summarised in the title of Frank Landy’s (2006) paper: “The long, frustrating and fruitless search for social intelligence: A cautionary tale”.

Daniel Goleman (2006) draws on the emerging field of neuroscience research to propose that social intelligence is made up of “social awareness, what we sense about others – and social facility, what then we do with that awareness” (p. 84). It is both sensing what the other person is feeling and based on that having smooth effective interaction. Studies in neuroscience reveal that our social relationships have a direct effect on our physical and mental health (Goleman and Boyatzis 2008).

Operationalisation of social intelligence (SQ) had been problematic for researchers for decades. Even Thorndike (1920) pessimistically noted that social intelligence “eludes the formal standardized conditions of the testing laboratory. It requires human beings to respond to, time to adapt its responses, and face, voice, gesture, and mien as tools” (p. 231). Such logic, however, has never stopped psychometricians into venturing into the unknown and it could not stop

them in this case. True to the goals of their tradition, soon enough psychometricians were translating the abstract definitions of social intelligence into standardised laboratory instruments for measuring individual differences in social intelligence (Taylor 1990). The first attempts were made in 1920's in George Washington University under the leadership of Thelma Hunt. However, the George Washington Social Intelligence Test (GWSIT) was "so heavily loaded with ability to work with words and ideas, that differences in social intelligence tend to be swamped by differences in abstract intelligence" (Thorndike & Stein 1937, p. 282). Recent advances in factor analysis techniques and a growing interest in cognitive neuroscience has given a new life to the notion that SQ is not a mere component of intelligence quotient (IQ) and can be measured in a credible manner.

2. What is Yoga?

Yoga is arguably the longest standing curriculum aimed at embodied learning. Over the past four centuries, the Sanskrit text of the ancient Indian book *Gita* has been translated into a number of languages and is still a favourite with commentators from various philosophical traditions (Lloyd 2015). Recently, western management experts have also been interested in yoga as it is described in the *Gita* (Turci 2021). Sometime between third century BC and third century AD, sage Patanjali compiled the *Yoga Sutras*, the original textbook of classical yoga (Stiles 2021). This is a secular text that has become preeminent in teaching yoga. Other texts and translations that have followed refer to these sutras as being the heart of yogic thought. The eight limbs of yoga in Yoga Sutra are:

1. Yama (Selfless values): Non-harming, truthfulness, non-stealing, self-restraint and greedlessness.
2. Niyama (Self-discipline): Cleanliness, contentment, austerity, self-study and acceptance.
3. Asana (Postures): Body positions that open energy channels and develop physical stability for meditation and other advanced practices.
4. Pranayama (Breathing practices): Cardiovascular control to enhance the flow of vital energy through retraining the respiratory organs.
5. Pratyahara (Withdrawal of senses): Withdrawal of sensory inputs, coming from the five senses into the physical being.
6. Dharna (Concentration): Creation of one-pointedness of the mind.
7. Dhyana (Meditation): Uninterrupted flow of concentration.

8. Samadhi (Merger of individual consciousness with universal consciousness): Highly esoteric practice that cannot be taught. Not practiced in the West.

Modern yoga came into being by bridging the realms of Indian spirituality and European physical culture. It has been moulded in conformity with contemporary aspirations and inclinations that are the common heritage of a cosmopolitan culture. Of the eight limbs of yoga, three – physical postures, breathing practices and meditation – are popular in the West. It is generally accepted that the primary goal of yoga is to maintain physical fitness and to cultivate balance, calm, harmony and awareness.

There is a wide range of research in the field and it is hard to compare and evaluate this research due to the different approaches and styles included as “yoga” and the different methodologies researchers use. The yoga of Patanjali is now considered “classical” (Singleton 2008). Yoga in the West puts more emphasis in the postural practice. It is presented without its religio-philosophical teachings and is therefore compatible with secularisation (De Michelis 2004). Hatha yoga that was used in the programme is the most common form of yoga as practiced in the West and comprises of three of the eight limbs outlined by Patanjali, viz., asanas (physical poses), pranayama (breath control) and dhyana (meditation). Scholars believe that health, peace and joy are not the primary goals of yoga practice; the ultimate objective of yoga is to release the latent powers within the human body and mind, which leads to care for the welfare of others.

3. Impact of Yoga

In recent decades, interest in yoga research has skyrocketed in the West. Numerous empirical studies have demonstrated the therapeutic effects of yoga practices on a wide range of physical and mental health indices (McCall 2007). Yogic science is not just a set of physical exercises or religious rituals but a set of theories about the mind that have bio-psycho-social implications in relation to health and illness (Pradhan 2014). The growing interest in yoga and its possible applications in health, psychology, and other fields is noteworthy. Yet, the research on effect of yoga on intelligence is not even a trickle as compared to the flood of studies on therapeutic effects of yoga. This study aims to partially close this gap.

Several prominent managers and entrepreneurs in the field of IB have attributed their business success to regular yogic practice – Ariana Huffington of Huffington Post, Sergey Brin of Google, Jeff Weiner of LinkedIn, Ratan Tata of Tata Sons, Beyoncé of Parkwood Entertainment, and William Clay Ford Jr. of Ford Motor Company, to name but a few. As a student backpacker, Steve Jobs learnt yoga in India and was influenced by a book *Autobiography of a Yogi* that