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MINDFULNESS IN INDIAN CLASSROOMS: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Dinesh Kumar¹✉, Neema S Nair²

Abstract:

The paper examines the components of mindfulness in Indian classrooms, the opportunities it creates in the educational scenario, and the challenges in its implementation. With the assistance of review analysis and experiential learning in the area of mindfulness, the authors try to elaborate the beneficial effects of mindfulness strategies on students, teachers and their reflection in society. It is observed that with the development of cognitive, emotional and behavioural skills students have better attention, concentration, reflection and self-regulation. This in terms will have an impact on student's better academic performance and they will be able to maintain better communication and relation with the society. Teachers are also benefited with a stress free campus with more creative and collaborative classrooms. The awareness about the beneficial effects of mindful strategies, a mindful curriculum which caters to the needs of the individual schools and suitable teachers who can train students and suitable teacher training programmes are certain major concerns penned by the authors.

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1.0 Introduction:

Every classroom has her own story to tell. A child in the Indian context in the school atmosphere is experiencing a wide range of situations where he or she may be happy, maybe sad, stressed or may be motivated. Most of the times it is seen that the need of the child is never been understood or never been heard off. It may vary place to place according to the mind-set of the teachers and the overall atmosphere of the school. However in general we can see that once the school atmosphere is largely concentrated on academic performances of pen and paper tests alone, not heading to the intellectual, emotional and social needs of the children the overall climate of the school will be stressful. Stressful in the sense we can observe children to be lethargic, violent, angry, and restless not only in the campus but even at home or in their families. What are the remedies we can think about to bring a change in the mind-set of the children which we can direct towards their holistic well being and growth. If the school atmosphere is calm and peaceful it will

1 [Author] ✉ [Corresponding Author] Associate Professor, School of Education, Lovely Professional University, INDIA.
E-mail: dinesh.12648@lpu.co.in

2 [Author] Research Scholar, Lovely Professional University, INDIA

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be reflected in the mentality of all stakeholders. If the children are happy or if we can make the children happy that happiness can be reflected among the teachers, the parents and in the society.

Education intends one to be a successful human being. It is assumed, through school education children should learn what to do for themselves as required. It is usually seen in many schools in India, the poor performance of the children in academics. They may be highly proficient in many other outside school activities and very good trouble shooters of daily life. But academically when it comes to the matter of studies they become poor performers. Studies have found academic stress have a negative correlation with academic achievement and mental health (Agarwal, 2011 and Kaur 2014). Now what is the problem behind it? It is not that they can't read, it is not that they can't write but what we can find out that these children are unable to concentrate and sort out the valid information while they are in stress.

Various education commissions of India including National Education Policy of 2020 reiterates the aims of education lies in teaching life a meaning, developing the ability to live the life of soul by developing wisdom and to get trained in self development through a proper instructional medium. National Education Policy 2020 depicts the school education especially for middle stages (children of grade 6 - 8) focuses on students experience on experiential learning, conceptual learning and building their ability of critical thinking and logical decision making. Students will be exposed to learning ethical and spiritual values too. It has to be made possible by creating a holistic integrated enjoyable and engaging learning atmosphere.

2.0 The Classroom at present:

Leaving aside the COVID-19 conditions and the online education platforms, the common education scenario needs to be probe into for the hurdles in learning. Here one must know the circumstances teachers and students face while engaging in the teaching learning process.

To tell a few, a teacher of English language who is expected to promote and popularise the use of English language in the campus will be facing a number of issues in popularizing the language, such as, if the school is in a rural area the social economic background of the children, their behavioural and emotional mind-set, the resources provided and available in the school and classroom setting, the mind-set of the children their acquisition ability to adapt to the language, their own peer group influence and overall the support teachers may get from their own teacher colleagues etc.

Many problems mentioned above are visible in the school setting. But the mind-set of the children and the support or motivation whatever the English teacher should get from the school that is from the stakeholders and teacher colleagues and the behavioural and emotional background of the children as well as the people involved in the school settings are not visible factors. These factors will be visible or recognizable only when the reactions comes up in the work front and when these negative factors comes up it is the turn for negative results. At this moment the teachers will plunge into anxiety and stress. They are answerable to a lot of questions regarding the performance of the children and the score they get in the annual examinations and assessments. Once the teacher stumbles over the answers of these questions eventually they are also falling prey into the hands of professional stress which may lead to personal TRAUMA.

3.0 Mindfulness:

In an academicians' angle certain common obstacles that hinder the child from a better academic performance are: writing difficulties, time management, behavioral/attitude issues, creative obstacles. Now the question, what are the ways through which we can boost this power within

which will help the child's acquisition of skills, the skills which will help a child to develop into a true humane?

The need of a well-defined strategy is in demand at this juncture to help the children to embark the process of learning and to achieve a perfect learning sphere which helps in developing life skills and that skill acquisition solely depends on the development of executive functions of brain. The studies conducted in the field of education in the western world substantiate the mindful interventions at school as a suitable way out. Jon Kabat-Zinn. (www.mindful.org) defines Mindfulness as an awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally. Thich Nhat Hanh, the exponent of Mindfulness delineate it as the practice of focusing attention on the experience of the current moment with an attitude of nonjudgmental acceptance and curiosity. In simple terms it is an awareness of the present moment. Mindfulness involves techniques like breathing, stretching, focusing and relaxation. These Mindfulness practices lead the children to the desired levels of life skills attainment which ultimately leads to happiness.

4.0 Purpose:

The purpose of this paper is to examine the components of mindfulness in Indian classrooms, to explore the opportunities it creates in the educational scenario, and to enlist the challenges in its implementation. For achieving the said objectives, systematic review of available literature has been done with respect to mindfulness in schools, mindfulness and students, mindfulness and teachers, and mindfulness and society

5.0 Mindfulness in Schools:

The recent decades are witnessing a tremendous change in the learning atmosphere through introducing Mindfulness in school education. The Mindful teaching practices are in use in education, art, social work, law and ethics etc., other than medical, therapeutic and counseling fields (Brady, 2008 & Orr, 2002). The studies reveal integrating mindfulness into the curriculum can promote students' attention, emotional balance, empathetic connection, compassion and care for others. It also gives the student an opportunity and an ambience for deeper engagement and self-reflection. Mindfulness is a stage where one is fully aware of the present moment. Scientific studies have proved that mindfulness meditation can lead to learning related cognitive benefits such as improving attention and working memory and decreasing the tendency of mind wandering. The later 1990s witnessed mindfulness-based programmes gradually stepping into the educational settings from their previous areas of scientific and therapeutic research. Its application and research are taking place in diverse educational contexts in different parts of the world.

In Indian context too studies and implementations are taking place, but at a slow pace. The Happiness Curriculum formulated in to the Delhi municipal schools is an example of evolving change. The motive behind the launch of the 'Happiness Curriculum' is to spread the message that education is not just to push students to getting good marks, but also to create an environment where they are happy, content and self-aware. The curriculum includes various interventions like meditation, joyful exercises, indoor games, storytelling, group discussions, skits, individual and group presentations, activities for rapport building and team-work. The government has set aside a 45-minute "happiness period" every day for children between classes I and VIII, while nursery and kindergarten school children will have this twice a week. (Kundu, P. 2018)

6.0 Mindfulness and students:

Keeping in mind the development of Executive Functions of the brain many programmes of School based mindfulness interventions were developed in recent years like Mind-Up, Muse Practices,

MISCHO, Langerian strategies etc. Students who participated in these programmes showed improvements in executive functioning skills and self-control abilities and an abate in aggression, social problems and in anxiety. Among students higher levels of mindfulness were associated with better grades, better test scores in academic subjects. It is further noticed that through Mindfulness practices students have enough opportunities to exercise the 21st century skills of creativity, collaboration, communication and critical thinking. It is evident from the studies that by reducing anxiety and by heightening self-control skills Mindfulness Interventions helped students to overcome fear of the subject or examination and thus nullifying stress (Kilpatrick et al, 2011, Sanger & Dorjee 2015).

A Learner learning with a structured Mindfulness strategy in class may definitely experience interest in the learning context, more attention and awareness, better extrapolation, will maintain a good classroom communication with teachers as well as peers. The learning of language skills like, Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing will be better acquired and expressed which will result in better performance in academic grades. When students are given the opportunity of an experiential classroom with mindful techniques like meditation, mindful listening, and mind mapping etc their listening, attention, perception and extrapolation skills are enhanced. Enhancing learning skills result in better Academic achievement. Growing empathy and compassion towards the self through activities corresponding with real life situations, promotes better understanding of one's own weakness as well as strength resulting towards a stress free, fear free, no bullying school culture. Increased self-control and control over anxiety result in no fear of exams Danilewitz et al., (2018). Reformation towards more compassionate and adaptive nature results in positive peer relations. More active and socialized in class and school activities. Acquisition of life skills like problem solving, critical thinking, creativity etc. Once the self-realization and self-control abilities are developed, collaboration and communicative skills are cherished and the students will become more adaptive and accommodative. Increase in the qualities of compassion and empathy will result in no bullying, no body shaming campus.

7.0 Mindfulness and teachers:

Research studies conducted among teachers practicing Mindfulness and teachers teaching Mindfulness have proved they are benefited with self-awareness and self-regulation, social and emotional benefit among students which lead to better classroom management, effectiveness, positive feelings about teaching and teacher unity and collaboration. Jean-(Jean-Baptiste 2014), (Kwon 2015). Mindful setting will help the teacher to create an accommodative classroom. By developing the attention of the students, they could relieve the problem of noisy, non-attentive classrooms. Mindful strategies in learning will give them a space to create suitable activities for peer connection and communication thus enhancing the learning skills. As teachers themselves are involved with the activities in the Mindfulness strategies a better understanding will develop between teachers and students. They can relieve the scope of misunderstanding entirely. It will result in more interest, higher grades in the subject and a better communication with their parents.

Teachers can easily involve in and create think out of the box contexts in the teaching learning process which result in more creativity both among teachers and students. While providing instances in the classroom for the development of creative and artistic skills among children, their aesthetic needs are being catered through the activities of main subjects. Which in terms will help to achieve the higher stages of Blooms Taxonomy. The diminishing stress factor while applying Mindful strategies will give space for harmonious relations among colleagues with more productive interdisciplinary engagement in classroom teaching and content transaction.

8.0 Mindfulness and society:

Mindfulness can give answers to many social issues that is in our present society. Once the stress, fear and anxiety is controlled with the development of self-regulation skills and with the increase in communication skills and qualities like empathy and compassion one can face life in a better way with their enhanced life skills. The strong bond among the school community will reflect in the immediate society where family of the concerned are belong to. At the family front parents are with the opinion about their mindful practicing children, increased ability of emotion control, more responsible to self and to their duties at home. The enhanced ability of communication diminished the gap of misunderstanding leading to harmonious relations with family members and they became confident enough in recognizing and choosing the opportunities in life.

With the development of Interpersonal communication skills and creativity the students could better express themselves and could communicate effectively with the society avoiding conflicts arising out of misunderstanding and miscommunication. School is a preparatory ground for children to live real life and mindfulness act as a substrate on which their learning skills, life skills and livelihood skills are developed.

9.0 Opportunities & Challenges:

There are challenges and concerns in the proper and effective implementation of Mindfulness practices. The prime one is to find a suitable time and schedule within the daily chorus of school. Mindfulness training is more effective when number of people practicing are less under one instructor. So it is difficult to accommodate more people at the same time. Studies have shown that it is difficult to maintain interest of the children in mindfulness practices at off school hours and after. Training and practice of teachers and their sustenance in Mindfulness practice are another major issue. Before the implementation of Mindfulness practices at school all stakeholders have to be provided awareness as well as a preliminary training, even it is being done, convincing them about the privileges are difficult as there are no fast results. The change in behavior and emotional skills among children can be observed only through how they handle situations. A common strategy will not be always effective. So customized modules are needed catering the individual needs of the schools. The epitome of the result will be possible only when all teachers, parents and students are trained and with the adaptation of full-fledged mindfulness curriculum.

It is the prime time to think and take actions towards the implementation of Mindfulness in schools. As NEP2020 emphasis on development of 21st century skills of learning, literacy and life skills among school children, mindfulness strategies well knitted with school curriculum will bring the required change. Attention to include Mindfulness as part of teacher training curriculum also needs to account for. Teachers with better self-regulation, better social and emotional competencies will maintain a good relationship with students and colleagues creating a harmonious learning atmosphere. The strong bond created in our classrooms will pave a strong foundation for a mighty and vibrant nation.

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