

ABSTRACT

In contemporary education, there is a growing emphasis on holistic learning approaches. The holistic education goals of integrating intellectual, emotional, physical, social, aesthetic, and spiritual dimensions of learning are the universal needs of education today. The vision is consistent with the current educational policies, including the National Education Policy (NEP-2020) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4.7. Informed thus by the national and international policy-making aimed towards holistic education, a need to identify the dimensions of holistic education and examine their interrelationships within the Indian context was recognized. Holistic education dimensions, viz. empathy, mindfulness, compassion, and critical inquiry, were identified and substantiated based on a systematic literature review. The thesis aimed to study the mutual relationships amongst identified holistic education dimensions, utilizing a healthy novice meditator adult students sample.

Nine studies subsequently examined the interrelationships among trait/state mindfulness, trait empathy, trait/state arithmetic proficiency (proxying critical inquiry), and compassionate values traits. All the social-behavioral self-report questionnaires administered were subjected to sample- and literature-based reliability-validity evaluation, ensuring the robustness of the findings. Millisecond-precise chronometric cognitive measures and a neurobehavioral examination utilizing a breath-focus meditation intervention were employed to study the state aspects of arithmetic proficiency and novice mindfulness, respectively. Principal findings included the explication of Batson's 'Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis', implicating the role of both affective- and cognitive-empathy traits in fostering altruistic compassionate trait values. Further, the thesis rejected amongst Indian novice meditators the 'Mindful-Altruism Hypothesis' in favor of a 'Mindful-Autonomy Paradox'. Besides, an 'Empathic Affectfulness' effect was observed, indicating the positive and negative association of perspective-taking and personal-distress, respectively, with novice mindfulness traits. Also, novice state mindfulness demonstrated antagonistic neurobehavioral associations with empathetic traits. The thesis concluded with a mindfulness-empathy-compassion integrated trait framework, highlighting the association of mindfulness traits with compassionate altruistic values mediated-moderated via empathic traits. Therefore, emphasizing mindfulness-boosting pedagogical interventions to foster empathy, compassion, and mindfulness. Overall, the findings offer to serve as an empirical aid for Indian educators towards the integration of examined holistic education dimensions onto the ubiquitous classroom practices.