

The Implementation of Yoga Teaching in Improving Elementary School Students' Learning Concentration

Kadek Aria Prima Dewi PF and Ni Putu Erlina Partini

Faculty of Dharma Acarya, State Institute of Hindu Dharma (IHDN) of Denpasar, Denpasar, Indonesia
primadewipf@gmail.com, primadewipf@ihdn.ac.id

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Abstract: This study aims to describe the implementation of Yoga teaching in elementary school children to improve the learning concentration. This study outlines yoga movements that specifically can help elementary school children in the learning process. The qualitative research method with the form of descriptive research is used. The study shows the result that there are yoga movements that can be implemented in the learning process, particularly the yoga movement which is done at the opening of the learning process in the classroom or special treatment through yoga extracurricular at SDN 1 Sumerta. Yoga in general consists of 9 streams, namely (1) *jnana* yoga (the union through knowledge); (2) *karma* yoga (the union through social service to others); (3) *bhakti* yoga (union through devotion to God); (4) *yantra* yoga (union through visual creation / *mandala*); (5) *tantra* yoga (unification through the generation of chakra energy); (6) *mantra* yoga (union through sounds); (7) *kundalini* yoga (union through the awakening of *kundalini* energy); (8) *hatha* yoga (the union through the union of body and breathing); and (9) *raja* yoga (the union through mental mastery). In this study, the implemented stream of yoga is the *hatha* yoga which includes activities of *pranayama*, *mudra*, *bandha* and *asanas*.

1 INTRODUCTION

The success of the learning process is affected by many factors, whether it is intrinsic factor from the students themselves or extrinsic factor outside the students, such as the absence of self-motivation, unconducive atmosphere of the learning environment, health condition of students which is not good, and the boredom of students. The learning concentration is related to motivation, anxiety, the feeling of distress, distraction, panic, readiness to study, and concentration. The concentration is a learning condition which requires serenity, comfort, the attention of someone in understanding content of the learned lesson. If a student is unable to focus his/her mind on the learned lesson, he/she cannot concentrate. Therefore, the students will forget the learned subjects. One of the trainings considered able to train concentration is yoga.

In the teaching of Hinduism, Yoga, in teaching of Patanjali and *Sad Darsana*, completely explains eight stages of self-control which are called *Astanggayoga*. The *Astanggayoga* consists of *yama*, *nyama*, *asanas*, *pranayama*, *pratyahara*, *darana*, *dyana*, and *Samadhi* in Sarasvatī (2002). Yoga is made training

medium since yoga has stages to perform the concentration, among individuals or to The One Almighty God. Kayli Routhier-Martin (2015) elaborated that yoga, through the meditation program conducted in elementary school in the United States of America, is able to solve the negative effect of stress, restlessness, and poverty in their students. Therefore, in the effort to help students achieve their best potency, Mayor of Denpasar City suggested that this yoga activity is done by all people, starting from children, teenagers, adult people, to elderly people, as well as non-Hindu people (metroball.com, 2014). One of the schools implementing the teaching of yoga in Denpasar City is State Elementary School 1 Sumerta. This research elaborates the implementation process of yoga teaching as a medium to improve the learning concentration of students in the school.

2 METHODS

This research used the qualitative descriptive approach. The used data are qualitative data with the primary data source, namely teacher, headmaster, and

students, while the sources of secondary data are from literatures, books, previous researches, documentation. The information was also obtained from the second informant, namely practitioners and instructors of yoga. The subjects of research are students in State Elementary School 1 Sumerta. The technique to determine informant in this research is the purposive sampling technique. The used data collection techniques are observation, interview, literature, and document study. The collected data were analyzed according to the model of Milles and Huberman (2009) with data triangulation, namely data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification.

3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 The Implementation of Yoga Teaching as Medium to Improve the Learning Concentration of Students in Class

3.1.1 Before Teaching and Learning Processes

The purpose of learning in class refers to the framework of a National curriculum called 2013 curriculum. The learning purpose refers to four binding core competence, namely religious/spiritual attitude, social attitude, knowledge, and skill. Therefore, before the learning process is performed by students, they are asked to say *panganjali* of Hindu people and *dainika upasana* (daily prayer), namely *guru puja*. To say greeting and *guru puja* mantra, the students started it with the standing posture (on *āsana*) in which they have been taught *āsana* in yoga. The good standing posture includes the straight position of both legs, straight back of the neck, and eyes looking forward. With these simple things, the students have been taught to focus their mind on one spot, which can train their mental concentration.

After standing up straight, the students are taught to hold hand in prayer position in front of the chest before saying greeting and *Guru Puja* mantra. Holding hand in prayer position in front of the chest while the tops of all fingers are close, pointing upward is one of the positions in yoga as the symbol of respect among the creatures. In saying *Om swastyastu*, the priority is expression of soul from gesture, language, pure heart, and smile. Swastikarana (2013) stated that gesture, language of pure heart and smile are reflection of yoga teaching.

3.1.2 During Teaching and Learning Process

In the teaching and learning processes in State Elementary School 1 Sumerta, students are taught to sit in a comfortable position with the perpendicular position of back, neck, and head. Both hands can be on table and the eyes look straight ahead. With that position, the students will be more focused and concentrate when learning the lessons from teachers. The sitting position of students is one of postures suggested in yoga *āsana*, *Sthira Sukham Āsanam*; *āsana* means stable and comfortable sitting position. When back, neck, and head are straight, the spine as an axis of body is also straight. The spinal cord has the nerves moving out and in between two vertebrae controlling the sensory and motor functions throughout the body (Acarya, 2001). However, when someone bends his/her spine forward, he/she moves the centre of gravity of his/her body forward and the centre of gravity is not in toe anymore, so the concentration will be disturbed (Acarya, 2013).

3.1.3 After Teaching and Learning Processes

After implementation of the teaching and learning processes is finished, the students perform *puja tri sandhya* in their own class. The implementation of *puja tri sandhya* to end this lesson is done at 12.00 Indonesian Central Time simultaneously in every class. The implementation of *puja tri sandhya* involves the activities of *mudra*, *pranayama*, and *asana*.

3.2 The Implementation of Yoga Teaching as Medium to Improve the Learning Concentration of Students outside Class

3.2.1 Puja Tri Sandhya

In the activity of *tri sandhya*, students have applied the teaching of *yoga* starting from the standing posture (*āsana*), hand posture (*mudra*), and *pranayama*. Therefore, after performing *puja tri sandhya*, students are ready to learn lesson in class. The type of *mudra* in this worship is *amustikarana*; the clenching right hand is covered by left hand, while two thumbs meet, point upward, and are placed to epigastrium. Thumb represents the element of soil, stomach, and worry; when one finger representing an element touches

thumb, the element is balanced. Therefore, the disease caused by the imbalance can be cured.

Low motivation and worry can be cured with this posture whenever *puja tri sandhya* is performed. This therapy is recommended to be performed in around 45 minutes; in this *puja tri sandhya*, the *amusti karana* posture is performed for around 15 minutes considering that the elementary school-age children cannot yet perform this for a long time, particularly in the standing position. This posture should be performed in the sitting position with *silā sana*, *a* and *bajrasana* postures. Before performing this mudra, the inhaling activity which is performed three times functions to relax the mind. The activity of *puja tri sandhya* in the school is performed twice, at morning and afternoon.

3.2.2 When Performing Extracurricular of Yoga Āsana

The implementation of extracurricular activities of *yoga āsana* in State Elementary School 1 Sumerta is every Friday from 06.00 a.m. to 07.15 a.m. Indonesian Central Time. The training of *yoga āsana* extracurricular activities is performed for classes IV, V, and VI with 7 stage, namely the opening prayer (*Japa*), *Pranayama* (breath control), Stretching, *Surya Namaskara*, *āsana*, Relaxation (*Savāsana*), and the closing prayer (*Japa*).

3.2.2.1 Opening Prayer (*Japa*)

The opening prayer is filled with *gayatri* mantra and closed with *paramasanthi*. The prayer uses Sanskrit language. Therefore, to make students understand its meaning, the prayer is translated by teacher after it is said together. The elementary school-age children use Indonesian language and Balinese language every day, while the presentation of meaning in prayer uses Indonesian language, so the children understand purpose of the implemented activity.

The praying posture is started with sitting as comfortable as possible; students can choose the desired sitting posture, such as *siddhāsana* (sitting cross-legged posture with left or right leg placed above), *padmāsana* (sitting cross-legged posture with two legs overlapping each other), and *sukhāsana* (posture considered comfortable for oneself). The students are slowly directed to control breath while closing eyes. In silence for a while, students are directed together to say prayer. Stage of Praying Together can see in figure 1.



Figure 1: Stage of Praying Together
(Source: Documentation of Researcher, 2016).

3.2.2.2 *Pranayama* (Breath control)

Pranayama is performed by holding hand in prayer position in front of the chest (in the middle of epigastrium), taking deep breath through nose and chanting mantra "*Ang Namah*", continued by taking breath in stomach by saying "*Ung Namah*", and slowly exhaling through nose while saying "*Mang Namah*"; all mantras are pronounced in heart. It is repeated three times (Interview on 3 June 2016).

Pranayama consists of *prana* and *yama* in which *prana* means wind, the vital weather. *Prana* also means power, purpose, and ambition to live. Meanwhile, *yama* means range or extension. Extension or expansion of energy or the living energy and the development of desire power is *pranayama* (Suamba, 2016: 10). *Pranayama* is a science to balance and regulate vital energy or *prana* through the skilful manipulation of breath. Patanjali in *Yoga-Sutra* (II: 49) defined *pranayama* as a flow regulation of the incoming breath (*Svaha*) and exhalation (*prasvasayoh*) followed by holding breath (*vicchedah*).

3.2.2.3 Stretching

The stretching is started in area of leg joint, neck joint, and abdominal muscle. The whole stretching is useful for relaxing all muscles which start to get damaged, particularly from leg to thigh. Besides relaxing the stretching muscles on leg, it is also useful for flexing the leg muscles which are not flexible in the beginning. Therefore, students performing stretching before the next *āsana* will avoid injury and pain, particularly in leg. One of stretching movements on leg and hand can see in figure 2.



Figure 2: One of Stretching Movements on Leg and Hand.
(Source: Documentation of Researcher, 2016)

3.2.2.4 Surya Namaskara

Surya namaskara consists of twelve postures; each of them relates to one of twelve symbols in zodiac. One complete rotation from *Surya namaskara* of twelve postures is performed twice consecutively. The movement of *surya namaskara* gives a number of general benefits and has a very strong effect on all tissues in the body, like endocrine gland, blood flow, breath, digestion, and the concentration improvement. Twelve movements are explained below.

- *Praṇamāsana* (Praying Posture). It is the position of standing up straight as wide as shoulder. Both palms are placed simultaneously in front of the chest. The whole body is relaxed. Eyes look forward. Exhalation is done slowly; this movement is useful for forming a concentration condition and serenity in preparing for training and obtaining energy from universe (Sarasvatī, 2002);
- *Hasta Uttanāsana* (Posture of Both Arms Lifted). Both arms are lifted above the head. Both arms are stretched as wide as shoulder, while both palms meet or face upward. Head and upper body are bent backward, while eyes look as far as possible backward. Hip is lifted a little. Breathing and lifting arms are done at the same time. This movement is useful for stretching what is inside the abdominal cavity, getting rid of the excess of fat, and improving digestion. It trains muscles in arm and shoulder, harmonizes nerves, spine, and opens all lung chambers (Sarasvatī, 2002);
- *Pādahastāsana* (Posture from hand to leg). The body bends over forward to fingers or both hands touch soil in every side or in front of both legs. Knee is kissed in this position. Both knees are still straight without being bent and eyes are focused to knee. Exhalation is always done as long as the body is bent over forward. This

movement aims to get rid of or to prevent the bellyache and other diseases in stomach. It reduces the excess of fat in stomach, improves digestion, and facilitates blood flow. It relaxes the spine (Sarasvatī, 2002: 18);

- *Aśva Sancalanāsana* (Posture of riding horse). It is a movement of placing both hands on both sides of legs, bending the right knees while throwing left legs backward as far as possible. Left thumb and knee touch floor, while left toes are bent. Pelvis leans forward; the spine is curved while looking up. Body is in a balanced position. Inhalation is done while stretching leg backward and looking up. This movement massages abdominal organs and improves their functions. Muscles in legs will be strengthened. The balance of nerve will be achieved (Sarasvatī, 2002);
- *Parvatāsana* (Posture of mountain). This movement is performed by placing the right leg backward side by side with left leg. It is done by slowly lifting bottom little by little and lowering the position of head and placing it between both arms, so the body forms the triangle with floor. Knee is placed on floor, while the eyes look knees and neck is bent inward. The exhalation is done while straightening leg and bending over body; this movement aims to strengthen nerves and muscles in both arms and legs. To help relaxing, spine is flexed in the opposite direction toward previous gesture and further. The next steps are harmonizing nerve of spine, accelerating flow, and improving concentration (Sarasvatī, 2002);
- *Astāṅga Namaskāra* (Salute with 8 limbs). It is a movement of bending knee to floor, placing chest and chin to floor, while maintaining bottom in the upper position. Both hands, chin, chest, knee, and toe touch the floor, while the spine is curved. Exhalation is still like *parvatāsana*; only in this stage, inhalation and exhalation change alternately. The benefit of this movement is to strengthen muscle of leg and arm, chest, and stomach (Sarasvatī, 2002);
- *Bhujāṅgāsana* (Posture of Cobra). It is a movement of lowering hip while pushing chest forward and above while resting on arm; until the spine is curved, both legs backward are not allowed to be bent or straightened forward, and head looks up. Leg and lower stomach are still on floor and arms support body. Inhalation is done when head looks up and chest cavity is

opened while bending spine. The benefit of this movement is to suppress the stopping blood from the abdominal organs and to push the fresh blood flow. This posture is very beneficial for all stomach diseases, including the inability to digest and constipation. Bending the back trains spine, relaxes the muscles, and improves concentration (Sarasvatī, 2002);

- *Parvatāsana* (Posture of mountain). This position repeats the position 5. Arms and knees should be kept straight. While using shoulder as the rotation point, bottom is lifted, head is lowered, neck is bent, and eyes look knees (Sarasvatī, 2002);
- *Aśva Sancalanāsana* (Posture of riding horse). This position repeats the position 4. Right leg is pulled forward while right leg is placed right in the middle of both hands. The left knee is slowly placed to floor and pelvis is pushed forward. Spine is curved and eyes look backward as far as possible (Sarasvatī, 2002);
- *Pādahastāsana* (Posture from hand to leg). This position repeats the position 3. Left leg is placed parallel to right leg, straightened, and bent forward, while the bottom is lifted and head is placed on knee. Both hands are still placed beside the leg (Sarasvatī, 2002).
- *Hasta Uttanāsana* (Posture of Both Arms Lifted). This position repeats the position 2. Hand is lifted above head. Both hands can meet or the palms are faced above. The back is curved and the pelvis is lifted a little (Sarasvatī, 2002);
- *Praṇāmāsana* (Praying Posture). This position repeats the position 1. Both hands are lowered and held in praying position in front of the chest (Sarasvatī, 2002).

Movement of *Aśva Sancalanāsana* can see in figure 3.



Figure 3: Movement of *Aśva Sancalanāsana*.
(Source: Documentation of Researcher, 2016)

3.2.2.5 *Āsana*

There are several types of *āsana* in the teaching of yoga with their own benefits and functions. To date, there are several types of *āsana* taught in State Elementary School 1 Sumerta during the extracurricular activities, namely the standing *āsana*, sitting *āsana*, and lying *āsana*. The standing *āsana* has several movements as follows:

- *Tadāsana* (Posture of Palm Tree), which is useful for training or improving concentration, strengthening the abdominal muscles and stretching intestine, cleaning the blockage in spinal nerves in joint appearing from the spine;
- *Trikonāsana* (Posture of Triangle) which is useful for loosening up pelvis and backbone (this *āsana* is also useful for focusing the mind of students on an object, since in this movement, there is a view on one focal point);
- *Natarāja āsana* (Posture of God Shiva) which is useful for flexing muscles of spine, balancing leg and hand, and improving concentration;
- *Natavara āsana* (Posture of God Krishna) which is useful for controlling nerves, helping the improvement of concentration and it is a predecessor posture which is good for meditation.

The sitting *āsana* consists of movements as follows:

- *Gomukhāsana* (Posture of Cow Face), useful for balancing tissue of nerve, helping the physical control and training mental concentration, and relaxing both legs;
- *Angusthāsana* (Posture of Tiptoe) which serves to control the sexual system and to help strengthening toes and ankle;
- *Ardha Matsyendrāsana* (Posture of Half Spinal Twist) which is useful for harmonizing the nerves of spine, relaxing back muscles and spine (By massaging the abdominal organs, several diseases in digestion can be cured. It helps controlling the release of adrenaline from the gland and improving the concentration.);
- *Merudandāsana* (Posture of Spine) which is useful for activating abdominal organs, heart in particular, and strengthening the abdominal muscles. It helps removing intestinal worm, stimulating the peristalsis (appendix) of intestine and balancing all areas of stomach. It balances the balance of body and concentration;
- *Dvi Pāda Kandharāsana* (Gesture of two legs supporting shoulder) which is useful for balancing all abdominal organs, liver, small

spleen, heart, intestine, and other organs (This *Āsana* is also useful for improving strength and getting rid of laziness and fatigue.);

- *Sarvāṅgāsana* (Posture of Candle) which is useful for preparing the existing nervous system in the stomach, accelerating blood flow to head, balancing the body, strengthening the hand muscle, and training concentration. Besides, this candle posture is useful for improving the digestion system in the stomach.

3.2.2.6 Relaxation (*Savāsana*)

Savāsana is a relaxation posture performed after *surya namaskara* or *āsana*. This relaxation activity aims to eliminate fatigue after the training of yoga before the students perform the teaching and learning processes. *Savāsana* which is known as the posture of dead body requires the conscious will from the whole body to relax until it feels weak, like the dead body without soul.

Savāsana is performed starting from the lying position while looking up; the whole body is relaxed, two legs are opened with as wide as shoulder, the right leg is laid down to right and the left leg is laid down to the left, both hands are placed beside the body, while the palm faces upward. Both eyes are closed slowly. The whole body is controlled to be as comfortable as possible, without any movement.

The consciousness is slowly focused to the leg. The concentration is focused without movement or stress. The whole leg is felt in the relaxing condition. When the leg is fully relaxed, the consciousness is slowly moved to ankle and lower leg. The area is made relax; it is then moved to thigh and bottom. While stopping for a while, the whole lower part of body is felt in the relaxed condition. It is then moved upward to lower stomach, navel, upper stomach, chest, back, hand, forearm, in a relaxed state.

The consciousness is then moved upward to the area of oesophagus, chin, lip, nose, cheek, eye, forehead, top of head, back of head, and the whole area of head. The whole body is then felt in a relaxed state.

When the whole body is in a relaxed state, without the contraction in a muscle, both hands are held in the praying position in front of the chest. Both hands are scrubbed in front of the chest until it feels warm; it is repeated three times while stimulating two eyes to open again. After two eyes are opened, the students wake up slowly and return to the sitting posture at the beginning before the training starts.

3.2.2.7 The Closing Prayer (*Japa*)

The students return to the comfortable sitting position, while the back of neck and head is straightened. Both hands are placed again on knee to form *jnana mudra*, the hand attitude which is performed by meeting thumb and index finger. The breath is slowly controlled and two eyes are closed. After silence for a while, the closing prayer is chanted to express gratitude to the ruler of place where the training is held and the ruler of universe. The prayer "*Om Lokah Samastah Sukhino Bhavantu*" is repeated three times and it means "May the whole universe be in peaceful and happy state." It is ended by chanting *parama santih*.

3.3 Discussion

There are many researches conducted as the effort to improve the participation of students in the school. Yoga is one of programs provided by several schools, as well as in the elementary school. In Denpasar, the similar activity has been done, but the yoga, in particular, is not yet seriously performed to improve the learning concentration of students. Butzer et al. elaborated that yoga has a positive contribution on the students' behaviour. In his research, class-based yoga activity was performed as an effort to manage the stress behaviour of their students. (tt:2). Yoga activity can help students in improving their self-awareness; improving self-awareness can help students get involved longer in the learning process (Rix and Bernay, 2014). Students have different social background, culture, and economy, so it affects their behaviour in the class. Therefore, by following the awareness-improving program in elementary school students in New Zealand, it can help students to learn more effectively. Yoga is one of programs to help students in focusing their attention, so their awareness level gets better.

Thus, the implementation of yoga in State Elementary School 1 Sumerta is ideally planned and developed more effectively. The right duration needs to be considered in yoga implementation in the school. Considering that the students spend more time in their houses, the parent involvement program should be developed in improving the awareness of students in improving the learning concentration. The program which can be developed should improve the involvement of parents in education in school by giving a task, which must be done by students together with their parents (Dewi, 2016). Thus, the limitation of yoga implementation in school can be solved by performing it together with parent. It will

also improve communication between parent and children. Therefore, the motivation to achieve the best potency will increase when the psychological need in form of the sense of safety, being loved, and being appreciated is met according to the perspective of Maslow. Further research in the framework of experimental research to involve parent in the yoga activity is required, so it can give a more comprehensive knowledge on the implementation of yoga program to improve the learning participation of students in the school.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The implementation of yoga teaching as a medium to improve the learning concentration of students in State Elementary School 1 Sumerta is inside and outside the class. The activity in the class includes the implementation of teaching of *asthanga yoga*, namely *yama*, *niyama*, *āsana*, *pranayama*, and *dharana* before, during, and after the teaching and learning processes. The activity outside the class includes *puja tri sandya* in the yard and the implementation of yoga extracurricular activities. The implementation of yoga activity in the effort to improve the learning concentration of students will be more effective when involving parents in the family education considering that many activities of elementary school students are done in their family. If it can be done, the development of students' potency will be more effective.

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