

Integrating Sensory Mindfulness Techniques in Elementary Education for Fostering Healthy Minds: Aligning with the Vision of NEP 2020

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Abstract

This study explores how simple sensory mindfulness practices can nurture healthy minds among elementary school children, in alignment with the vision of the National Education Policy 2020. To understand how these practices influence children's psychological well-being, a descriptive survey research design was adopted. The study was conducted with 100 Class 5 students from GPS School, Vadodara, Gujarat, including 50 girls and 50 boys to maintain gender balance and ensure fairness in representation. The children were gently introduced to structured sensory mindfulness activities integrated into their routine, and their responses were gathered through a self-administered questionnaire aimed at understanding changes in their emotional awareness, behaviour, and overall well-being. The study is thoughtfully rooted in the psychological well-being model proposed by Carol D. Ryff, who describes a healthy mind through six meaningful dimensions- Self-Acceptance, Positive Relations with Others, Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Purpose in Life, and Personal Growth. The study is thoughtfully rooted in the psychological well-being model proposed by Carol D. Ryff, who describes a healthy mind through six meaningful dimensions—Self-Acceptance, Positive Relations with Others, Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Purpose in Life, and Personal Growth. Building on this foundation, the research gently incorporates six practical and child-friendly sensory mindfulness techniques by Jon Kabat Zinn. They were used to explore how simple sensory awareness activities in classrooms can support the holistic and child-centered vision of the National Education Policy 2020.

Key Words: *Sensory mindfulness techniques, Elementary education, Healthy minds, National education policy 2020, School students.*

Introduction

In today's classrooms, educators are increasingly noticing that academic success alone does not guarantee a child's overall well-being. Concerns about children's emotional health, reduced attention span, anxiety, and classroom stress have shifted the focus of education from purely academic achievement to holistic development.

In India, this transformation is strongly reflected in the National Education Policy 2020, which emphasizes social-emotional learning, experiential pedagogy, value-based education, and the nurturing of well-rounded individuals. The policy envisions schools as spaces where children develop not only intellectually, but also emotionally, socially, and ethically (NEP, 2020). Within this broader vision, fostering a “healthy mind” during the foundational years of schooling becomes essential.

The concept of a healthy mind has been scientifically articulated by Carol D. Ryff through her model of psychological well-being. Ryff (1989; 2014) identified six important dimensions - Self-Acceptance, Positive Relations with Others, Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Purpose in Life, and Personal Growth that together describe what it means for an individual to truly flourish. Rather than limiting well-being to feelings of happiness, her framework emphasizes meaning, resilience, growth, and healthy relationships. These dimensions naturally align with NEP 2020’s learner-centered and value-driven approach, particularly its focus on self-awareness, ethical grounding, collaboration, and lifelong learning.

At the same time, mindfulness has gained global recognition as a practical and research-supported approach to enhancing children’s emotional regulation and concentration. The pioneering work of Jon Kabat-Zinn introduced mindfulness practices such as mindful breathing and body scan into educational and clinical settings (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Over the years, school-based research has shown that mindfulness interventions can improve attention control, reduce stress, and strengthen socio-emotional competence among students (Zenner, Herrnleben-Kurz, & Walach, 2014; Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010). Sensory mindfulness techniques—like focusing on the breath, observing sounds and sights, engaging in mindful walking, or paying attention to body sensations—are especially suitable for elementary learners because they are simple, experiential, and engaging.

Integrating sensory mindfulness into elementary classrooms fits naturally with NEP 2020’s emphasis on experiential learning and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL). For example, mindful breathing and body awareness help children develop self-regulation and environmental mastery; sensory grounding enhances emotional balance and positive peer relationships; and reflective practices nurture autonomy and personal growth. By guiding children to observe their thoughts and feelings without judgment, these practices gently cultivate self-acceptance and a sense of purpose—core elements of Ryff’s model of well-being.

In the Indian educational landscape, mindfulness-based practices are gradually finding structured space within school systems. Programs such as the Happiness Curriculum implemented in Delhi government schools, along with empirical studies on mindfulness interventions among Indian students, have reported improvements in attention, stress management, and emotional well-being (Shinde, Pereira, & Khandeparkar, 2022; Kriplani & Rathore, 2025). These developments indicate that integrating sensory mindfulness practices in elementary education is both culturally relevant and practically feasible.

Against this background, the present study explores how structured sensory mindfulness techniques can support the development of healthy minds among Class 5 students. Guided by Ryff's psychological well-being model and aligned with the vision of NEP 2020, the study aims to contribute to the evolving conversation on creating emotionally balanced, self-aware, and resilient learners within Indian elementary education.

Literature Review

In recent years, educators worldwide, including in India, have increasingly recognized the importance of integrating mindfulness into school education. Research indicates that simple mindfulness practices help children regulate emotions, improve concentration, reduce stress, and strengthen overall psychological well-being. Rather than an extra activity, mindfulness is now viewed as a meaningful approach to nurturing emotionally balanced and resilient learners.

One of the most influential international reviews on school-based mindfulness was conducted by Zenner, Herrnleben-Kurz, and Walach (2014). By analyzing several mindfulness programs implemented in schools, they found that regular mindfulness practice helped students improve their concentration, manage stress better, and regulate their emotions more effectively. Their findings suggest that mindfulness is not only beneficial for emotional health but also supports academic engagement and classroom performance.

In a similar direction, Schonert-Reichl and Lawlor (2010) examined the MindUP® program introduced in elementary schools. Their study reported noticeable improvements in students' optimism, emotional understanding, social behavior, and executive functioning skills. Importantly, the research showed that mindfulness practices contributed to healthier peer relationships and a more positive classroom environment. These outcomes strongly reflect the dimensions of psychological well-being described by Carol D. Ryff, particularly Positive Relations, Self-Acceptance, and Environmental Mastery, highlighting how mindfulness supports children in flourishing both emotionally and socially.

Even in India, mindfulness-based practices are slowly but steadily gaining recognition both in research and at the policy level. A recent empirical study by Kriplani and Rathore (2025) explored the impact of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) on school students. Their findings showed that students who participated in mindfulness sessions demonstrated better attention span and experienced lower levels of perceived stress. This suggests that mindfulness practices are not only practical in Indian classrooms but also beneficial for students' emotional and academic functioning. Similarly, Shinde, Pereira, and Khandeparkar (2022) studied the implementation of the Heartfulness Way social-emotional learning program across 12 schools in India. The results indicated improvements in students' self-acceptance, emotional regulation, prosocial behavior, and peer relationships. Importantly, the study highlighted that mindfulness-based approaches can be meaningfully adapted within the cultural and educational context of Indian schools.

At the broader policy level, the Happiness Curriculum introduced in Delhi government schools represents a significant step toward integrating mindfulness and reflective practices into formal education.

In harmony with the vision of the National Education Policy 2020, the curriculum includes meditation, reflective thinking, and emotional awareness activities aimed at promoting holistic development. Reports and academic discussions suggest that such initiatives have contributed to improved classroom climate, greater empathy among students, and enhanced engagement in learning.

Research Gap

Although interest in mindfulness is increasing, only a limited number of studies in India have focused on simple, structured sensory mindfulness practices designed especially for young elementary children or meaningfully linked them with the vision of the National Education Policy 2020. Moreover, the holistic well-being model proposed by Carol D. Ryff has seldom been used in primary classrooms to explore deeper dimensions such as self-acceptance and sense of purpose-beyond merely managing stress. This study seeks to gently bridge these gaps by presenting a localized, theory-guided, and policy-aligned effort to nurture emotionally balanced and psychologically healthy young learners.

Aim

The main aim of this study is to understand how simple and structured sensory mindfulness practices can help nurture healthy minds among elementary school children, in harmony with the vision of the National Education Policy 2020.

Objectives

- To gently introduce six age-appropriate sensory mindfulness techniques in a Class 5 classroom.
- To observe and assess how these practices influence students' emotional awareness, behaviour, and overall sense of well-being.
- To examine the outcomes through the lens of Carol D. Ryff's six dimensions of psychological well-being.
- To explore how classroom mindfulness practices connect with NEP 2020's holistic and child-centered educational approach.

Scope of the study

This study is confined to 100 students of class 5 students (50 girls and 50 boys) from one school in Vadodara, Gujarat to implement the techniques by Jon Kabat Zinn. The scope lies in the selection of subjects, schools, techniques and models for mindfulness techniques.

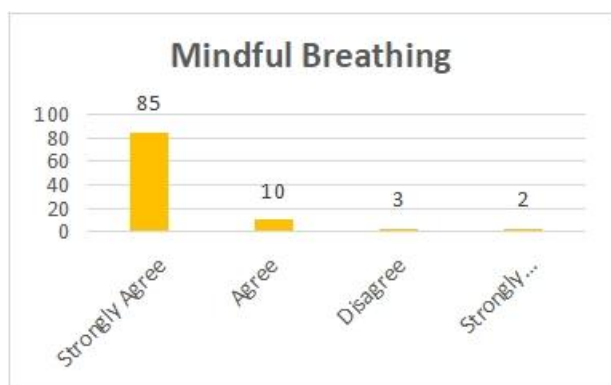
Sensory Mindfulness techniques for healthy minds with requirements of NEP 2020

Here is the integrated Model of Sensory Mindfulness, Ryff's Well-Being & NEP 2020 and Healthy Mind Outcome

Sensory Mindfulness Technique	Carol Ryff Dimension	NEP 2020 Principle	Healthy Mind Outcome
Mindful Breathing	Self-Acceptance	Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)	Emotional regulation, calmness, reduced anxiety
Sensory Grounding (5-4-3-2-1 technique)	Environmental Mastery	Foundational Literacy & Numeracy	Improved focus, confidence in handling academic tasks
Body Scan	Personal Growth	Holistic Development (arts, sports, life skills)	Self-awareness, mind-body connection, resilience
Mindful Walking	Autonomy	Experiential Learning	Independent awareness, thoughtful decision-making
Sensory Objects (texture, sound, smell tools)	Positive Relations	Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)	Empathy, emotional balance, improved peer interaction
Five-Senses Awareness Practice	Purpose in Life	Value-Based Education & Multilingualism/Cultural Identity	Meaningful engagement, cultural rootedness, gratitude

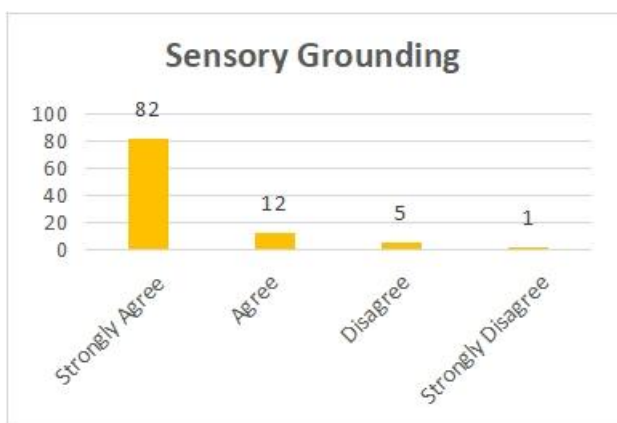
Research findings and discussion

Here is the result of the research conducted through questionnaire among 100 school students from GPS School, Vadodara-Gujarat. Six dimensions by Ryff to have healthy minds were analyzed separately.



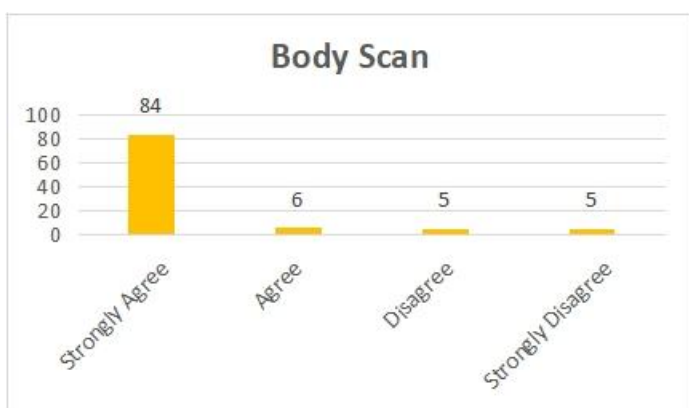
1. Mindful breathing for emotional well being

Out of 100 students, 85 were strongly agree, 10 were agree, 3 were disagree and 2 were strongly disagree for the importance of Mindful Breathing to cultivate emotional regulation, calmness, reduced anxiety. Highest score for strong agreement for this technique proves its ample importance.



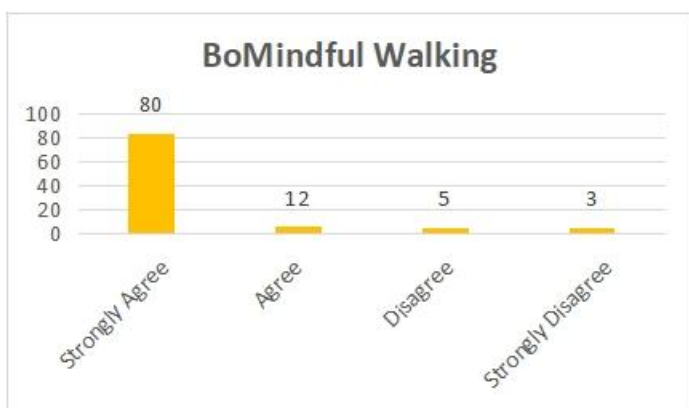
2. Sensory Grounding (5-4-3-2-1 technique) for improved focus and confidence:

Out of 100 students, 82 were strongly agree, 12 were agree, 5 were disagree and 1 was strongly disagree for the importance of Sensory Grounding (5-4-3-2-1 technique) to enhance focus and confidence. Highest score for strong agreement for this technique proves its ample importance.



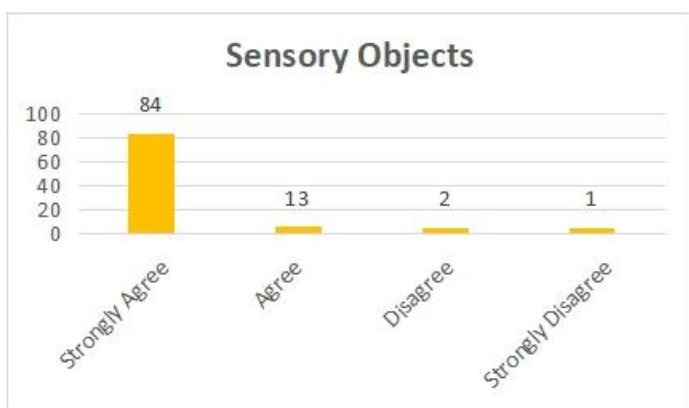
3. Body Scan for foster Self-awareness:

Out of 100 students, 84 were strongly agree, 6 were agree, 5 were disagree and 5 were strongly disagree for the importance of Body scan to enhance Self-awareness. Highest score for strong agreement for this technique proves its ample importance.



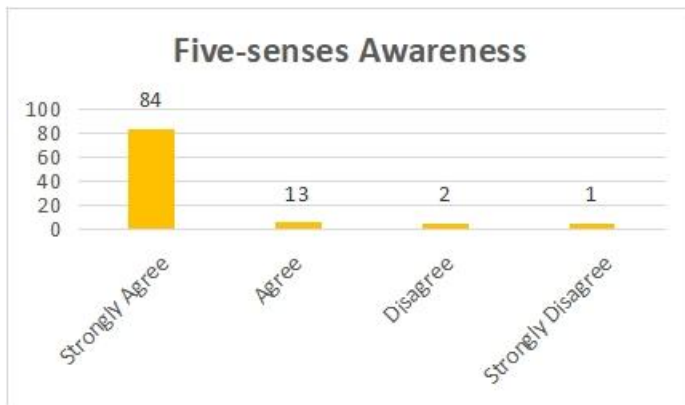
4. Mindfully Walking to foster Independent awareness:

Out of 100 students, 80 were strongly agree, 12 were agree, 5 were disagree and 3 were strongly disagree for the importance of Mindful Walking to enhance Independent awareness. Highest score for strong agreement for this technique proves its ample importance.



5. Sensory Objects for developing Empathy:

Out of 100 students, 84 were strongly agree, 13 were agree, 2 were disagree and 1 was strongly disagree for the importance of Sensory objects king develop empathy. Highest score for strong agreement for this technique proves its ample importance.



6. Five-Senses Awareness Practice for meaningful engagement and gratitude:

Out of 100 students, 84 were strongly agree, 13 were agree, 2 were disagree and 1 was strongly disagree for the importance of Sensory objects king develop meaningful engagement and gratitude. Highest score for strong agreement for this technique proves its ample importance

The above survey shows the vital role of sensory mindfulness techniques for elementary students to develop their healthy minds. A significant transformation was observed in Emotional regulation, Focus, Confidence, Self-awareness, Independent awareness, Empathy and Gratitude.

Conclusion

The study highlights that even simple and structured sensory mindfulness practices can make a meaningful difference in the lives of young learners. When gently woven into daily classroom routines, these activities help children become more aware of their emotions, respond thoughtfully rather than react impulsively, and develop a healthier sense of balance and well-being. Viewed through the framework of Carol D. Ryff, the findings show that sensory mindfulness nurtures essential qualities such as self - awareness, self-acceptance, positive relationships, autonomy, enhanced focus and confidence, Gratitude and empathy - qualities that support children not only academically but also personally. Importantly, the study also reflects how such practices resonate with the holistic and child-centered vision of the National Education Policy 2020. By encouraging emotional awareness, empathy, and reflective thinking, sensory mindfulness emerges as a practical and meaningful approach to shaping confident, resilient, and emotionally balanced learners in elementary education.

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Appendix

Sensory mindfulness techniques questionnaire for healthy minds

Below is a table with statements related to healthy minds in terms of the model suggested by Carol D. Ryff aligning with the requirements of NEP 2020. For each statement, mark your response in the appropriate column: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree.

No	Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Mindful Breathing					
1	When I feel upset or nervous, slow breathing helps me calm down.				
2	I use mindful breathing before exams or difficult tasks				
3	After breathing practice, I feel more relaxed and peaceful				
Sensory Grounding (5-4-3-2-1 Technique)					
4	Noticing things I can see, hear, and feel that helps me focus better in class.				
5	Grounding exercises help me feel confident when I feel distracted.				
6	When my mind wanders, I use my senses to bring my attention back.				
Body Scan					
7	I can notice when my body feels tense or tired.				

8	Body scan practice helps me understand my feelings better.				
Mindful Walking					
9	Walking slowly and paying attention helps me think clearly.				
10	I feel more independent when I practice mindful movement.				
Sensory Objects (Texture, Sound, Smell Tools)					
11	Using calming objects helps me manage my emotions.				
12	When I feel angry or sad, sensory tools help me stay balanced.				
Five-Senses Awareness Practice					
13	Paying attention to my five senses helps me enjoy learning more.				
14	I feel thankful for small things around me when I practice awareness.				
15	Being aware of my surroundings helps me respect my culture and environment.				

With the help of the respected teachers, this table helped students to understand their strengths and weaknesses and assisted to develop their healthy minds.