

Nurturing the Self: How Yin Yoga Enhances Compassion, Wellbeing, and Mindfulness in Future Instructors

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Abstract: Existing literature suggests that qualities such as self-compassion, wellbeing, and mindfulness in yoga instructors contribute positively to trainee outcomes. Although research is limited, prior studies indicate that Yin Yoga, rooted in Taoist and Hatha Yoga, fosters these qualities. Yin Yoga is a slow, mindful practice that encourages self-compassionate awareness. This study aimed to evaluate the effects of Yin Yoga on self-compassion, wellbeing, and mindfulness among participants in a seven-month Yin Yoga teacher training program in Istanbul, Türkiye.

Using a one-group pre-test-post-test quasi-experimental design, the study revealed significant improvements in participants' self-compassion, wellbeing, and mindfulness levels from pre- to post-assessment. A notable correlation was also found between wellbeing and mindfulness, as well as between self-compassion and mindfulness. Thematic analysis of open-ended responses further supported these quantitative findings, highlighting participants' enhanced self-awareness and emotional regulation. Results suggest that consistent Yin Yoga practice may effectively promote these psychological attributes in trainees. Future mixed-method research is recommended to explore additional psychological factors that may enhance Yin Yoga instructors' teaching abilities.

Keywords: Yin Yoga, Self-compassion, Wellbeing, Mindfulness, Yin Yoga Instructors, Yoga Teachers Training

Yoga Teachers' Training

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INTRODUCTION

Yoga, hailing from the Indian subcontinent, found its way to spread all over the globe. According to the data from 2016-2022 as provided by the Sports Federation in Türkiye under the Ministry of Youth and Sports, there are currently 2610 yoga instructors and 116 official yoga teachers' training programs offered which are registered under the Sports Federation (HİS | Herkes İçin Spor, n.d.). There is no specification about the type or genre of yoga instructors or teachers' training programs. Hence, we do not have the exact count of Yin Yoga instructors or Yin Yoga training programs, which is the type of yoga of our interest.

Yin Yoga is a branch of yoga, that has its roots in the traditional system of Hatha Yoga and Taoist Yoga. Yin indicates stillness and is slow paced rather than dynamic form. Holding postures for at least several minutes and extending the connective tissue surrounding a joint are two aspects that distinguish yin practice from a yang approach in yoga (Grilley, 2012). The practitioner is invited to bring awareness and attention to the present moment while observing any mental and physical sensations, without judgment. Research on Yin Yoga seems scarce. However, the review of existing literature on the benefits of Yin Yoga seems promising. Previous research on Yin Yoga indicated a significant reduction in anxiety, which has implications for the treatment of general anxiety (Winroth et al., 2019). Yin Yoga aids in the development of mindfulness and lowering stress, anxiety, and depression (Daukantaitė et al., 2018). In a study, student pharmacists and teachers who performed Yin Yoga and guided meditation for six weeks reported an improvement in mindfulness and a reduction in stress and anxiety. The results were reported at 6 weeks, 3 months, and 6 months, which demonstrated the long-term benefits of Yin Yoga and guided meditation (Lemay et al., 2021).

Given the connection between Yin Yoga, mindfulness and self-compassion, the researchers assume that, practicing Yin Yoga may lead to significant improvements in the levels of self-compassion, wellbeing, and mindfulness in the study participants. "Self-compassion involves being kind to oneself when confronting personal inadequacies or situational difficulties, framing the imperfection of life in terms of common humanity, and being mindful of negative emotions so that one neither suppresses nor ruminates on them." (Neff & Beretvas, 2013)

Seligman (2011) states, “wellbeing is a construct which has five measurable elements (PERMA) that count toward it: Positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and purpose, accomplishment”. Mindfulness is “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally”, is an essential aspect of yoga practice (Kabat-Zinn, 1994).

Self-compassion, mindfulness, and wellbeing are desirable qualities yoga teachers can possess (Snaith et al., 2018). Self-compassion is positively linked to yoga teachers’ ability to provide emotionally supportive environments for students (Woodyard, 2011). Generally, increased self-compassion in educators can lead to a range of positive outcomes, including improved wellbeing, reduced burnout, greater job satisfaction, and increased motivation in students (Moë & Katz, 2020; Chan et al., 2021; Jennings, 2015). Furthermore, self-compassion has been found to enhance resilience, improve classroom management skills, and promote student engagement and learning (Long & Neff, 2018; Jennings, 2015; Chen, 2022). The authors believe that the above mentioned research on educator/teacher enhanced qualities in students can be replicated in a yin yoga trainer and yoga student scenario as well. Studies have shown a positive correlation between mindfulness and a yoga instructor’s ability to provide safe and effective yoga classes (Harvey et al., 2020). Mindfulness has been linked to improved emotional regulation, which is crucial for educators, as it helps reduce stress and anxiety, increase self-awareness, and enhance emotional intelligence (Hölzel et al., 2011; Tang et al., 2015). The benefits of wellbeing for educators include improved physical health, increased energy, improved concentration, and better sleep (Dreer, 2021; Hascher & Waber, 2021). Given the scarcity of research evaluating specifically the impacts of self-compassion, wellbeing, and mindfulness on Yin Yoga instructors, the researchers investigated these variables’ influence on the educator population.

Present Study

Considering the limited research on the effects of Yin Yoga training on instructors, this study aimed to explore the potential impact of a seven months intensive Yin Yoga teacher training program on the self-compassion, wellbeing, and mindfulness of its participants. We hypothesized that engagement in the training would result in measurable improvements in these areas. Accordingly, our research objectives were to: 1) Quantitatively examine the changes in self-compassion, wellbeing, and mindfulness levels following participation in the training, 2) Assess correlations among self-compassion, wellbeing, and mindfulness scores post-training, and 3) Qualitatively explore the perceived benefits and personal experiences of participants resulting from the training.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This was a self-funded predoctoral research project. The research received ethical approval from the Institutional Ethics Committee in Türkiye.

This study employed a single group pre-test and post-test quasi-experimental design to assess the impact of Yin Yoga teachers’ training program on participants’ levels of self-compassion, wellbeing, and mindfulness. The study aimed to measure changes in these psychological attributes from pre- to post-intervention.

The null hypotheses for the study were as follows:

- Yin Yoga training has no effect on participants’ self-compassion, wellbeing, and mindfulness scores as measured by standardized assessments.
- There is no correlation between the mean scores of self-compassion, wellbeing, and mindfulness among participants following the Yin Yoga training.

Participants

The participants of the present study were prospective trainers at a yoga school in Istanbul, Türkiye. All yoga students who consented to participate provided written informed consent via Survey Monkey. Forty two adult women participants (≥ 18 years) registered to participate in the 200 hour Yin Yoga Specialization Program of Berivan Aslan Sungur. Thirty eight students completed the pre-test administered in the first session and 29 students completed the post-test immediately after the Yin Yoga training. Two participants were excluded due to incomplete answers or missing follow-up questionnaires. Finally, 27 (N) participants were included in the study.

Measurements

The Case Study Schedule obtained information regarding the age, education, and occupation.

The Self-compassion Scale-Short Form (Raes et al., 2011) assess how frequently an individual acts kindly and compassionately toward himself or herself in difficult life situations. The Turkish version (Yildirim & Sarı, 2018) was used for the assessment.

The PERMA-Profil (Butler & Kern, 2016) was used to determine the respondent’s level of wellbeing. The Turkish version (Demirci et al., 2017) was used for the assessment. Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) (Baer et al., 2008) assessed five facets of a general tendency to be mindful in their daily life: observing, describing, acting with awareness, non-reactivity to inner experience, and non-judging of inner experience. Participants completed the Turkish version (Kınay, 2013).

Two open-ended introspective questions were posed - one before the training to know about the participants’ expectations of the training and one after the training as feedback on its effects.

- What changes do you anticipate as a result of the training? Please include specifics about your personal life, health, and work life.
- What changes have you noticed as a result of the training? Please include specifics about your personal life, health, and work life.

Procedure

Teachers’

The Yin Yoga **Teacher** Training course includes āsanās (postures), teaching skills, and psychological concepts to support prospective Yin Yoga teachers to cultivate a broadened mindset and equip them to conduct yoga sessions. The program incorporates psychological theories of congruence, self-acceptance, psychological wellbeing, loving capacity, self-compassion, and authenticity. The program lasted 7 months with 9-weekend sessions and a 5-day yoga retreat in conclusion.

Self-compassion and mindfulness are integrated throughout the sessions along with the elements of congruence and self-acceptance. The instructor imparts knowledge of the various postures and techniques of Yin Yoga to the trainees, highlighting the specific regions of the body that are targeted by each pose and any corresponding contraindications. The trainees are encouraged to progress slowly and mindfully in the yin poses, while the instructor provides guidance on self-acceptance and surrender. The instructor fosters an atmosphere that is conducive to safety and comfort, cultivating an environment in which the students can develop self-acceptance. This dynamic between the instructor and the student facilitates openness and honesty in the student.

The concepts are conveyed in the context of an attitude towards the trainees and practiced with one another in the group. While explaining the Yin Yoga poses, the trainer delivers explanations on which body part the pose is going to work and which pain would be not tolerated. However, the student has the option to go deeper into the pose while taking little but mindful steps. The yin āsanās are accompanied by the instructor's guidance on self-acceptance and surrender.

Yin Yoga is a slow and still practice, where the trainer has the opportunity to incorporate psychospiritual discussions. The purpose of the discussions is to increase awareness of the reactions of the individuals. Since the practice is done alone on a mat, the practitioner is not distracted and can readily observe oneself. While asking questions such as 'Are you comfortable in the pose?' or 'Are you able to stay with discomfort?', the practitioner may be encouraged to develop awareness, tolerance, resilience, and compassion. The instructor makes the session as experiential as possible.

The theoretical part of the teachers' training includes some aspects of the Patañjali's Yogasūtra-yama and niyama- 'the do's and don'ts of yoga' play a vital part in describing how a yogi conducts his life (Bryant, 2015). Yama consists of five qualities, and two among them are the most touched upon during this training-āhimsa (non-violence and kindness) and satya (truthfulness). The teaching of non-violence, compassion, and kindness are incorporated into the training.

Data Analysis

The study's data were processed through the SPSS-21 software suite for analysis. This involved employing descriptive statistical methods, including frequency counts, mean calculations, and standard deviations. To examine the associations among self-compassion, wellbeing, and mindfulness, we utilized the Independent Samples t-test and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analyses.

RESULTS

Descriptive and correlational statistical analyses were completed with SPSS. Pre-post comparisons of means were calculated for all measured values of the variables. Significant differences in scores ($\alpha = 0.05$) were analyzed using paired t-test.

The 27 participants ranged in age from 27 to 56 years, with a mean age of 36 (SD = 7.41). Most participants were college or university graduates (65.5%), with 74% being employed. Nearly half (48.1%) were married, and 48.2% were living with a partner or spouse. Additionally, the majority (70.4%) did not have children.

Paired t-tests were conducted to determine effect sizes for changes from baseline to post-intervention (Table 1). Results indicate that there are significant differences between the pre- and post-assessment. The group demonstrated higher norms in general: the mean baseline self-compassion (3.44) of the group, according to the norms, will fall under the category of 'moderate' self-compassion. After the intervention, the mean self-compassion (3.71) was marked as 'high'. The difference in the mean self-compassion scores before and after the intervention is statistically significant at 0.05 level. Hence, the null hypothesis, "There is no effect of a Yin Yoga training on the self-compassion of the participants", is rejected.

The mean baseline wellbeing (7.06) of the group, according to the norms, will fall under the category of normal functioning. After the intervention, the mean wellbeing (7.51) was marked as high. The difference in the mean wellbeing scores before and after the intervention is statistically significant at 0.05 level. Therefore, the Null Hypothesis, "There is no effect of a Yin Yoga training on the wellbeing of the participants", is rejected.

The mean baseline mindfulness (27.62) of the group, according to the norms, will fall under the category of moderate mindfulness. After the intervention, the mean mindfulness (28.03) was found to be around the 'high' mindfulness threshold. The difference in the mean mindfulness scores before and after the intervention is statistically significant at 0.05 level. Hence, the Null Hypothesis, "There is no effect of a Yin Yoga training on the self-compassion of the participants", is rejected.

Referring to Table 2, it can be noted that the correlation coefficient values were found to be statistically significant. The correlation between wellbeing and mindfulness is found to be 0.7877, indicating a strong correlation at 0.01 level. The correlation between self-compassion and Mindfulness was also high (0.7676) at 0.01 level. Between self-compassion and wellbeing the correlation was 0.5476 and it is statistically significant at a 0.05 level. This implies that with an increase in mindfulness, the wellbeing and self-compassion also increase and vice versa.

The correlations of self-compassion, wellbeing, and Mindfulness are statistically significant. Hence, the Null Hypothesis, "There is no correlation between the mean self-compassion, wellbeing, and mindfulness scores of the participants", is rejected.

Table 1: Pre- and Post-test results of Self-compassion, PERMA, and Mindfulness scores

Self-compassion	3.44±0.66	3.71±0.55	2.76	0.00518*
Self-kindness	3.58±0.81	3.71±0.61	1.99	0.02864*
Self-Judgement	3.50±1.11	3.76±0.55	1.42	0.08
Common Humanity	3.31±0.79	3.61±0.61	3.03	0.0027*
Isolation	3.83±0.90	3.92±0.63	2.33	0.01382*
Mindfulness	3.43±0.68	3.75±0.71	1.73	0.04807*
Over Identification	3.02±0.94	3.58±0.69	1.5	0.07
PERMA-Wellbeing	7.06±1.32	7.51±0.89	2.08	0.02368*
Positive Emotion	7.00±1.51	7.43±0.98	1.76	0.045*
Engagement	7.18±1.72	5.84±0.98	-5.75	<.001*
Relationships	7.05±1.49	7.28±1.21	0.77	0.22
Meaning	6.88±1.50	7.43±1.16	2.41	0.012*
Accomplishment	7.09±1.45	7.55±1.04	1.7	0.05
Mindfulness	27.62±2.51	28.03±2.00	2.88	0.00393*
Observing	30.07±4.38	31.56±3.23	1.95	0.031*
Describing	29.85±6.33	31.04±5.47	-0.86	0.2
Awareness	29.52±6.33	27.44±5.07	-1.81	0.041*
Non Judging	26.15±5.50	25.52±4.42	-0.65	0.26
Non-reactivity	22.52±4.37	24.59±2.99	2.8	0.005*

N:27
The result is significant at p < .05.
SD: Standard Deviation

Table 2: Correlation between Self-compassion, PERMA, and Mindfulness of the participants

Variables		Self-compassion	PERMA	Mindfulness
Self-compassion	Pearson Correlation	1	.5476*	.7676**
	Sig.	.	0	0
	N	27	27	27
PERMA	Pearson Correlation	.5476*	1	.7877**
	Sig.	0	.	0
	N	27	27	27
Mindfulness	Pearson Correlation	.7676**	.7877**	1
	Sig.	0	0	.
	N	27	27	27

*The P-Value is .003111. The result is significant at p < .05.

**The P-Value is < .00001. The result is significant at p < .01.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the impact of Yin Yoga on self-compassion, wellbeing, and mindfulness among participants in a seven-month Yin Yoga teacher training program in Istanbul, Türkiye. This quasi-experimental study assessed quantitative outcomes and qualitative experiences. The training incorporated non-violence, compassion, and kindness, reflecting Winnicott's (2018) mirror role concept, where self-compassion elements self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness were role-modeled (Neff, 2003). Yin Yoga aligns with these principles, encouraging self-kindness, mindfulness, and acceptance, fostering non-judgmental self-awareness and understanding.

Research indicates that yoga instructors with higher wellbeing demonstrate better teaching proficiency and student relationships (Harvey et al., 2020). The Yin Yoga approach emphasizes adaptability, allowing students to modify poses, which cultivates resilience and tolerance. Glasser's Choice Theory (1998) supports this by emphasizing individual control over feelings and actions.

Fig 1: Thematic Analysis of the Participants Qualitative Responses

Theme	Subtheme	Excerpts from the Transcript
Mental Health	Calm, balanced, peaceful	"I am more balanced and accepting. I can manage crises much better." "I've become more patient and calmer." "Inner discipline to be a better yoga teacher." "I feel like I'm coming out of my depressive mood."
Physical Health and Body Awareness	Relaxation, healing, flexibility	"My body is becoming more relaxed." "Improved understanding of my body's reactions." "Maintaining consistent practice, I'm more flexible and lighter." "I'm taking care of my health." "I'll quit worrying about my health and put effort into getting fitter."
Mindfulness and Compassion	Awareness, self-awareness, tolerance, acceptance, self-compassion	"I was able to better express myself, form healthy relationships, and listen to myself." "My self-acceptance and love have grown" "I am balanced and tolerant to myself" "High Awareness" "My awareness and perspective have increased." "Living a more mindful existence" "Living more mindful."

Thematic analysis of pre- and post-training responses revealed increased self-awareness and honesty in participants. Quantitative and qualitative findings aligned, with participants reporting greater openness and introspection. However, increased awareness sometimes led to heightened self-judgment and over-identification. Post-training responses highlighted significant changes in participants' mental and physical health, body awareness, and mindfulness.

References from existing literature further reinforce these findings. For instance, studies on the effects of Yin Yoga have shown significant reductions in anxiety and improvements in mindfulness and wellbeing (Daukantaitė et al., 2018; Winroth et al., 2019). Long-term benefits of Yin Yoga and guided meditation have also been reported, showcasing sustained psychological improvements (Lemay et al., 2021). Additionally, mindfulness has been linked to better emotional regulation and reduced stress, aligning with this study's outcomes (Hölzel et al., 2011).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, yoga teachers who possess these qualities may be better equipped to provide safe and effective yoga classes, as well as create emotionally supportive environ-

ments for their students. Therefore, it is crucial that yoga teacher training programs include components that focus on the development of these qualities.

Further research on Yin Yoga could be conducted involving other psychological variables which are crucial for instructors. Micro training programs could be conducted to avoid the effect of extraneous factors which might otherwise be associated with long-drawn training programs. Due to the fact that the literature review reveals scant scientific research on the subject of the qualities of a yoga instructor and how those qualities influence the student, we also recommend conducting additional research on the same, with a focus on both qualitative and quantitative research methods.

Limitations include the absence of a control group, limited gender diversity, and potential cultural biases. Monthly sessions may have influenced outcomes, and the program's academic rigor could have added pressure on participants. Future studies should include a control group, diverse participants, and more frequent sessions to improve reliability.

This study demonstrates that Yin Yoga training positively impacts self-compassion, wellbeing, and mindfulness. Beyond personal growth, such training equips participants to foster meaningful changes in their students' lives.

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