

The Effect of Yoga and Dance on Spiritual Deepening

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Derleme Makale/ Review

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.15038037

Gönderi Tarihi/ *Received:*
05.11.2024

Kabul Tarihi/ *Accepted:*
20.02.2025

Online Yayın Tarihi/ *Published:*
28.02.2025

Abstract

This study aims to examine the contributions of yoga and dance to spiritual depth. By investigating the effects of these two practices on individuals' physical and mental health in daily life, it seeks to explore their roles in achieving inner balance and personal development. Both yoga and dance, while effective individually in enhancing physical flexibility and mental calmness, become even more impactful when combined. Yoga strengthens the connection between mind and body by increasing flexibility, while dance offers emotional expression and freedom. The study highlights how the combination of yoga and dance is highly effective in developing personal awareness, establishing emotional balance, and achieving inner peace. The integration of these practices is significant not only for physical health but also for spiritual depth and well-being. Additionally, when supported by mindfulness, these practices enhance individuals' ability to cope with stress and strengthen their mental health. As a result, it is concluded that yoga and dance are powerful tools that assist individuals in finding inner balance, improving emotional and mental health, and coping with stress more effectively.

Keywords: Yoga, dance, spiritual depth, mindfulness

Yoga ve Dansın Ruhsal Derinleşme Üzerindeki Etkisi

Özet

Bu çalışma, yoga ve dansın ruhsal derinliğe katkılarını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Günlük hayatta bu iki pratiğin bireylerin fiziksel ve zihinsel sağlığı üzerindeki etkilerini araştırarak, iç denge ve kişisel gelişim üzerindeki rollerini keşfetmeyi hedeflemektedir. Hem yoga hem de dans, bireysel olarak fiziksel esneklik ve zihinsel sakinliği artırmada etkili olurken, bir araya geldiklerinde çok daha güçlü bir etki yaratmaktadır. Yoga, esnekliği artırarak zihin ve beden arasındaki bağlantıyı güçlendirirken, dans duygusal ifadeye ve özgürlüğe olanak tanımaktadır. Çalışma, yoga ve dansın birleşiminin kişisel farkındalığın gelişiminde, duygusal dengenin sağlanmasında ve iç huzurun elde edilmesinde son derece etkili olduğunu vurgulamaktadır. Bu uygulamaların entegrasyonu, sadece fiziksel sağlık açısından değil, aynı zamanda ruhsal derinlik ve iyi oluş açısından da büyük önem taşımaktadır. Ayrıca farkındalıkla desteklendiğinde, bireylerin stresle başa çıkma becerilerini artırarak zihinsel sağlıklarını güçlendirdiği görülmektedir. Sonuç olarak, yoga ve dansın bireylerin iç dengesini bulmalarına, duygusal ve zihinsel sağlıklarını iyileştirmelerine ve stresle daha etkili bir şekilde başa çıkmalarına yardımcı olan güçlü araçlar olduğu sonucuna varılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yoga, dans, ruhsal derinlik, farkındalık

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INTRODUCTION

Spiritual deepening is the process by which an individual turns inward to gain a deeper understanding of themselves and the universe. This process enhances one's spiritual awareness, allowing for greater meaning and purpose in life. Yoga and dance have historically been regarded as significant instruments of spiritual deepening across various cultures. Spiritual deepening involves focusing on one's inner experiences to develop spiritual awakening and awareness. This process contributes to a deeper understanding of oneself, life, and surroundings, ultimately leading to inner peace. Spiritual deepening can be supported by various practices such as meditation, prayer, yoga, and dance. Particularly, meditation facilitates spiritual deepening by helping individuals observe their mental processes and develop inner consciousness. The combined practice of yoga and meditation promotes spiritual deepening by enhancing mental tranquility and emotional balance. Yoga has positive effects on cardiorespiratory health (Torğutalp, 2018). Yoga is one of the oldest teachings that encompass self-awareness and higher consciousness, transcending centuries (Betül, 2011). Originating in India, yoga is an ancient discipline with a history spanning thousands of years. First mentioned in the sacred scriptures known as the Vedas, dating back to 2500 BCE, yoga has been recognized in Indian religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism as a means of purification and enlightenment. Yoga includes physical, mental, and spiritual practices aimed at establishing harmony between the body, mind, and spirit. By calming the nervous system, which constitutes the core of the physical and physiological body, yoga relaxes the brain, soothes the mind, and facilitates overall bodily relaxation (Akarsu & Rathfsch, 2018). In the modern era, yoga has evolved within Western fitness culture, becoming a part of the cultural industry. During this process, the field of yoga has been examined as a social domain with its unique habitus, gendered doxa, and dominant forms of capital (Duman & Koca, 2020).

Dance is one of the oldest forms of human expression and has existed in various forms in nearly every culture. As a fusion of art and movement, dance enables individuals to explore their bodies. The spatial awareness inherent in dance movements helps individuals develop essential skills such as strength, flexibility, coordination, and overall physical competence (Turan & Çamlıyer, 2016). Dance serves as a medium for expressing emotions and thoughts effectively while facilitating social interaction. It is a rhythmic human behavior shaped largely by culture, where aesthetic and artistic values come to the forefront in a non-verbal, physical, emotional, and symbolic ritualistic form (Turan, 2016). Used as a communication tool for centuries, dance continues to convey messages and functions as a common language among societies even today

(Sahin, 2024). Dance has been utilized for a broad range of purposes, from religious rituals and social celebrations to healing ceremonies and entertainment. In particular, in Indian culture, dance possesses religious and spiritual significance. In Hinduism, deities symbolize the creation, preservation, and destruction of the universe through dance. For example, the cosmic dance of Lord Shiva, known as "Nataraja," represents the cyclical nature of the universe. This highlights the spiritual and cultural importance of dance, playing a vital role in expressing spiritual experiences and strengthening social bonds. The aim of this study is to examine the effects of yoga and dance on spiritual deepening and to reveal how these two practices contribute to individuals' spiritual development.

Yoga and Spiritual Deepening

Yoga is an ancient discipline that integrates physical postures, breathing techniques, and meditation to achieve bodily, mental, and spiritual wholeness. It is acknowledged that yoga practice strengthens the connection between mind and body and can be used as a therapeutic intervention for various ailments (Ovayolu & Ovayolu, 2019). The therapeutic effects of yoga stem from mechanisms such as the regulation of the autonomic nervous system, particularly the reduction of sympathetic tone, the counteractivation of neuromuscular systems, and the stimulation of the limbic system. These mechanisms allow yoga practice to create a balancing and healing effect on the body (Efe & Keyvan, 2021). Originating in India, this practice is now globally embraced for purposes of health, awareness, and inner peace. Yoga is not merely a physical exercise but also a philosophy that guides individuals on a profound spiritual journey. In this context, the fundamental philosophy of yoga, the effects of breathing techniques and bodily postures, and their influence on the subconscious should be analyzed from a broad perspective. As described in Patanjali's "Yoga Sutras," yoga is regarded as the process of controlling mental fluctuations (Iyengar, 2005). The philosophy of yoga is based on an eightfold path: Yama (ethical discipline), Niyama (personal discipline), Asana (physical postures), Pranayama (breath control), Pratyahara (withdrawal of senses), Dharana (concentration), Dhyana (meditation), and Samadhi (ultimate state of consciousness) (Feuerstein, 2003). Meditation, an inseparable part of yoga practice, aims to calm the mind, enhance awareness, and establish inner peace. Through meditation practices, individuals can consciously observe themselves and their surroundings, develop resilience against stress, and experience spiritual deepening. Pranayama, derived from "prana" (life force) and "ayama" (control), refers to the regulation of breath (Saraswati, 2008). Pranayama techniques strengthen the respiratory system, improve mental concentration, and reduce stress levels. For instance, Nadi Shodhana (alternate

nostril breathing) helps establish mental balance, while Bhastrika (bellows breath) increases energy and revitalizes the mind. These techniques contribute to meditation by slowing brain waves and enhancing mental focus (Desikachar, 1995). Yoga is effective in dealing with common pregnancy issues such as poor circulation, blood pressure fluctuations, excessive weight gain, fatigue, swelling, and urinary problems, while also strengthening the uterus and perineal muscles and supporting the spine (Alkan & Özçoban, 2017). Yoga asanas not only improve physical flexibility but also have positive effects on the nervous system, digestive system, and hormonal balance. For example, Tadasana (mountain pose) corrects posture and supports spinal health, while Savasana (corpse pose) facilitates deep relaxation and stress reduction (Iyengar, 2001). Regular practice of yoga postures strengthens bodily awareness, enhances the individual's connection with their own body, and supports spiritual development. Scientific studies have also demonstrated the impact of yoga practices on brain chemistry, showing decreased cortisol levels and increased serotonin production in yoga practitioners (Field, 2011). This suggests that yoga serves as an effective tool in combating psychological disorders such as stress, anxiety, and depression. Mindfulness-based yoga practice enhances individuals' inner peace, promoting a more conscious way of living. Given its fundamental philosophy, relationship with meditation, pranayama techniques, the effects of asanas, and their influence on the subconscious, it is evident that yoga significantly contributes to spiritual deepening. Modern science also supports the psychological and physiological benefits of yoga practices, proving this ancient discipline to be an effective method for coping with the stress and anxieties of contemporary life. Regular yoga practice assists individuals in self-discovery, elevating their awareness levels, and attaining inner peace.

The Commonalities Between Yoga and Dance

Yoga and dance are disciplines that consider the human body, mind, and spirit as a whole. Both serve the purpose of achieving inner balance through movement, breath, and awareness. Their points of intersection manifest in the mind-body connection, energy flow, the harmony of rhythm and movement, and the balance between individual experience and communal sharing. These shared aspects illustrate that both practices offer a profound awareness and spiritual experience beyond mere physical activity. Yoga and dance are significant practices that strengthen the connection between the body and the mind. In yoga, physical postures (asanas) and breathing techniques (pranayama) regulate mental focus and energy flow (Iyengar, 2001). Similarly, dance enables individuals to connect with their bodies through mindful movement. Especially in free dance and contemporary dance forms, as in yoga, the energetic effects of

movements are emphasized, allowing individuals to release their inner energy. In this context, both practices enhance mental awareness and balance energy by using the body as a medium. A fundamental element in both yoga and dance is the seamless flow of breath and movement. Yoga synchronizes movements with conscious breathing, promoting relaxation and meditation (Desikachar, 1995). Likewise, dance integrates rhythmic breathing with movement. Particularly in disciplines such as ballet and modern dance, breath supports the flow of movement and enhances the body's rhythmic harmony (Hanna, 1987). In both yoga and dance, breath is a key factor that determines the power and fluidity of movement, directly influencing the individual's mode of self-expression. Yoga and dance act as a bridge between individual awareness and collective consciousness. While yoga practice is often regarded as a personal journey, group sessions and community events foster strong bonds among practitioners (Feuerstein, 2003). Similarly, dance allows individuals to express themselves while creating a sense of unity within a community. Traditional dances and spiritual movement practices enhance the sharing of energy within a group, enabling individuals to perceive themselves as part of a larger whole. This balance aids individuals in exploring their inner world while aligning with collective consciousness. Yoga and dance share numerous parallel aspects on physical, mental, and spiritual levels. Strengthening the mind-body connection, ensuring the harmony of breath and movement, and balancing communal consciousness with individual experience demonstrate that both practices promote deep awareness and spiritual growth. Yoga and dance should be regarded as powerful tools for self-discovery and as means of achieving balance against the stresses of modern life.

Scientific and Psychological Explanations

Yoga and dance are not merely physical movements; they also have profound effects on mental and neurological processes. Recent scientific research has demonstrated their positive impact on brain waves, stress management, anxiety, and depression. Studies reviewing yoga's effectiveness as a complementary therapy for depression indicate that yoga can be particularly beneficial in alleviating depressive symptoms (Bridges, 2017; cited in Efe & Keyvan, 2021). With their therapeutic applications, both yoga and dance serve as supportive tools for both physical and psychological health. Yoga and dance enhance the brain's neuroplasticity, contributing to learning, memory, and emotional regulation. During yoga practice, alpha and theta brain waves are observed to increase. Alpha waves promote mental calmness, while theta waves stimulate creativity and subconscious processes (Cahn & Polich, 2006). This evidence suggests that yoga, supported by meditation and breathing techniques, provides mental clarity

and relaxation. Similarly, dance directly engages the brain's motor cortex, sensory integration centers, and reward systems. During dance practice, dopamine and serotonin levels rise, boosting feelings of happiness and alleviating symptoms of depression and anxiety (Karpati et al., 2015). Furthermore, regular dance practice can slow age-related cognitive decline and help prevent conditions such as dementia (Rehfeld et al., 2018). Numerous clinical studies have confirmed the positive effects of yoga and dance on stress management. Yoga reduces cortisol levels, thereby mitigating stress responses (Pascoe & Bauer, 2015). Breathing techniques and meditation activate the parasympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system, facilitating relaxation and alleviating symptoms of anxiety disorders and depression. Dance therapy similarly supports emotional regulation. Free movements and rhythmic dances enhance stress coping mechanisms while strengthening social support systems through group participation. Research has shown that dance therapy leads to positive mood changes and improved self-perception in individuals with depression (Koch et al., 2014). Yoga and dance are widely utilized as alternative approaches in therapeutic processes. Yoga therapy is applied as a supportive method for chronic pain syndromes, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (Kolk, 2014). It has been found particularly effective in mitigating the negative effects of traumatic experiences by increasing bodily awareness. Dance therapy is a powerful method used to overcome emotional blockages and facilitate self-expression. It has shown positive results in treating psychological disorders, autism spectrum disorder, and Parkinson's disease. Especially in dance therapy that incorporates rhythmic movements, individuals improve their motor skills while simultaneously supporting emotional healing (Hackney & Earhart, 2010). Yoga and dance are scientifically grounded practices that offer mental and spiritual healing beyond mere physical activity. Their effects on brain waves, their ability to reduce stress and anxiety, and their therapeutic applications have led to increasing acceptance in modern healthcare approaches. These practices should continue to be evaluated as holistic methods that help individuals discover themselves, maintain mental health, and enhance their quality of life.

CONCLUSION

Yoga and dance are disciplines that consider the human body, mind, and spirit as a whole, serving as essential practices that support both physical and psychological well-being. Their shared aspects revolve around the conscious use of movement, breath control, heightened bodily awareness, and energy exchange within a community. While yoga promotes mental clarity and physical harmony through asanas and breathing techniques, dance enhances self-

expression, rhythmic coordination, and emotional awareness. In this sense, both disciplines contain complementary elements that strengthen an individual's inner balance. The scientific and psychological examination of yoga and dance highlights that these practices are not merely physical exercises but have profound effects on the nervous system, brain waves, and neuroplasticity. Research indicates that yoga and dance effectively reduce stress, anxiety, and depression. Yoga, particularly by increasing alpha and theta waves, promotes mental calmness and strengthens inner awareness. Similarly, dance improves motor skills while raising dopamine and serotonin levels, enhancing happiness and fostering social bonds. Modern scientific studies have also shown that yoga and dance are increasingly used for therapeutic purposes. Yoga therapy plays a vital role in managing PTSD, ADHD, and other psychological disorders, while dance therapy demonstrates healing effects in conditions such as autism spectrum disorder and Parkinson's disease. These therapeutic approaches enhance bodily awareness, allowing individuals to overcome inner blockages and achieve emotional integration. Yoga and dance play a significant role in the journey of self-discovery, making them essential tools for balancing the stress and mental fatigue of modern life. In today's world, physical activities should be evaluated not only from a bodily health perspective but also for their ability to support mental and spiritual growth. Yoga and dance should be considered holistic approaches that establish body-mind unity, reinforce inner balance, increase psychological resilience, and strengthen social connections. In conclusion, yoga and dance are complementary disciplines that contribute to an individual's multidimensional development. Their potential to enhance both individual awareness and collective consciousness ensures their growing recognition in modern health and psychology fields. Future research should further explore their physiological, psychological, and neurological effects to better understand their role in human life. Thus, yoga and dance should not only be viewed as physical exercises but also as significant tools for self-exploration and transformation.

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KATKI ORANI CONTRIBUTION RATE	AÇIKLAMA EXPLANATION	KATKIDA BULUNANLAR CONTRIBUTORS
Fikir ve Kavramsal Örgü <i>Idea or Notion</i>	Araştırma hipotezini veya fikrini oluşturmak <i>Form the research hypothesis or idea</i>	Faik Öz Özcan ERCAN
Tasarım <i>Design</i>	Yöntem ve araştırma desenini tasarlamak <i>To design the method and research design.</i>	Faik ÖZ Faik ÖZ
Literatür Tarama <i>Literature Review</i>	Çalışma için gerekli literatürü taramak <i>Review the literature required for the study</i>	Faik Öz Özcan ERCAN
Veri Toplama ve İşleme <i>Data Collecting and Processing</i>	Verileri toplamak, düzenlemek ve raporlaştırmak <i>Collecting, organizing and reporting data</i>	Faik ÖZ Özcan ERCAN
Tartışma ve Yorum <i>Discussion and Commentary</i>	Elde edilen bulguların değerlendirilmesi <i>Evaluation of the obtained finding</i>	Faik Öz Özcan ERCAN
Destek ve Teşekkür Beyanı/ Statement of Support and Acknowledgment Bu çalışmanın yazım sürecinde katkı ve/veya destek alınmamıştır. <i>No contribution and/or support was received during the writing process of this study.</i>		
Çatışma Beyanı/ Statement of Conflict Araştırmacıların araştırma ile ilgili diğer kişi ve kurumlarla herhangi bir kişisel ve finansal çıkar çatışması yoktur. <i>Researchers do not have any personal or financial conflicts of interest with other people and institutions related to the research.</i>		
Etik Kurul Beyanı/ Statement of Ethics Committee Bu araştırma nitel yöntemle (geleneksel derleme) yapıldığı için Etik Kurul gereksinimi bulunmamaktadır. Since this research was conducted with a qualitative method (traditional review), there is no need for an Ethics Committee.		



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