

Consciousness-Based Education for Holistic Development and Special Education

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HOW TO CITE:

Kamna Gaur, Monali Bhattacharya
(2026). Consciousness-Based
Education for Holistic Development
and Special Education.
International Journal of Special
Education, 41(1s), 493-503.

ABSTRACT:

Stress amongst students is one of the most crucial existential problems in today's time. Recent studies suggest that incorporating meditation practices in educational settings can lead to better cognitive function, reduced stress, and improved learning capabilities. This paper discusses the value and need for integration of emotional and spiritual quotient in current education system. It highlights the existing gaps in the modern education frameworks with reference to the emotional and spiritual development of students. It further discusses a model of education known as Consciousness Based Education which focusses on development of consciousness of students by integrating Transcendental Meditation(TM) into classroom teaching. This paper is a narrative review and includes peer-reviewed studies and longitudinal research on TM conducted in schools and universities in different parts of the world. The main purpose of this review is to synthesize the relevant empirical and theoretical literature assessing the impact of TM and Consciousness Based Education on education and special education with main emphasis on reduction of stress, cognitive performance, academic outcomes and emotional regulation. Relevant studies have been retrieved from academic databases and analysed thematically to identify underlying conceptual patterns. This literature review synthesizes current literature on the implementation and outcomes of TM programs in educational institutions and highlights the challenges, implications and future directions. The outcome of the analysis emphasises on the psychological and physiological benefits associated with Transcendental Meditation. Additionally, it discusses the implementational requirements to integrate such consciousness based education models in current educational systems.

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Keywords: Education, Transcendental Meditation, Emotional Quotient, Spiritual Quotient, Consciousness.

Contribution/Originality- This paper contributes to the existing literature by highlighting the importance of development of emotional and spiritual quotient in students. Its originality lies in addressing this gap by proposing a model of education with its roots in Vedic tradition known as Consciousness-Based education for development of consciousness of student which may lead to a more holistic academic, social and personal life.

“UNESCO’s “Education 2030” states that a renewed vision for education should be:

Comprehensive, holistic, ambitious, aspirational and universal, and inspired by an idea of education that transforms the lives of individuals, communities and societies, leaving no one behind” (Miseliunaite et al., 2022)

1. The Missing Dimension in Modern education: Moving Away from Our Roots

Modern education has put major emphasis on standardization of education and measurable performance outcomes, (Au, 2011) it has significantly reduced the scope of exploring the internal landscape of a student, which consists of more than just cognitive and technical proficiency. This has led to the marginalization of broader development goals for students. Although these systems are crucial in cultivating skills associated with intelligence, it often leads to neglect of the emotional and psychological aspect of students’ growth. Self-regulation, empathy, and interpersonal awareness are core components of Emotional Quotient (EQ) that are essential to adaptive functioning and life outcomes, according to research on emotional intelligence (Brackett et al., 2011a; Mayer et al., 2008).

Modern educational systems have often been criticized, including special education, for placing too much emphasis on academic and cognitive results while ignoring the internal aspects of learning, such as self-regulation, emotional balance, and awareness. Such a lack is especially critical in special education, where students with conditions like ADHD, autism spectrum disorder, and learning disabilities frequently struggle not only

with academic skills but also with stress, concentration, and emotional regulation.

There are scholars who have studied the concept of positive education which is education for both traditional skills and for happiness. The synergy between learning and positive emotion, suggest that happiness should be taught in school. There is strong evidence from research that schoolchildren can learn skills that boost resilience, positive feeling, engagement, and meaning. Furthermore, Positive Psychology paradigm emphasizes the significance of engagement, purpose, and wellbeing as the pillars of effective learning and human flourishing. (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Seligman et al., 2009).

There is a lack of holistic education in classroom teaching, a number of studies have suggested that psychological distress has increased in students. Academic pressure and performance-oriented culture leads to increasing levels of anxiety, stress, and depressive symptoms (Pascoe et al., 2020; Suldo et al., 2008). Worldwide, university students experience high levels of psychological stress; prevalence estimates can 99.2%. Additionally, a number of issues, such as academic overload, low income, uncertainty and worry about the future, and low self-esteem and motivation, are linked to psychological stress in students (Pacheco et al., 2023). Stress affects up to 90% of medical students. According to a 2017 study at the Medical University of Vienna with 589 second- and sixth-year students, performance pressure overload has been the most common stressor reason (92.1%), and 52.4% of students have been reported to reach critical scores in depression screening (Steiner-Hofbauer & Holzinger, 2020).

The current education system is facing a crisis because two essential components that education should culture which are Emotional Quotient (EQ) and Spiritual Quotient (SQ) are missing. Spiritual quotient can be defined as the “hereditary capacity of the human brain, based on structures in the brain that gives us basic ability to form meanings, values, and beliefs” (Haji et al., 2013). Sense of meaning in life is defined as people’s ability to make sense of life, discover the value of their lives, and recognize the purpose and mission

of life and it has been seen that “the lack of a sense of meaning in life can lead to a series of psychological and behavioral problems” (Zhou et al., 2025).

The modern education systems often ignore these aspects due to their secular, materialist focus which has created a gap between acquiring knowledge and leading a life based on values. As a result, students frequently struggle from a lack of purpose, decreased intrinsic motivation, and ethical ambiguity while making decisions. Academics claim that education is unable to cater to the entire range of human development in the absence of reflective, contemplative, and consciousness-oriented practices (Waterman & Walton, 2024a). Consequently, closing these gaps needs a paradigm shift that integrates SQ and EQ as essential elements of education (Brackett et al., 2011b; Durlak et al., 2011).

This gap in current educational framework neglects the profound need of inner development of students. It overlooks the role and value of consciousness in learning and human growth. There is a need for a more comprehensive synthesis because the dominant models influenced by philosophers like Piaget and Vygotsky place an emphasis on cognitive and social processes related to consciousness but do not adequately incorporate experiential aspects of consciousness (Stoltz et al., 2024). Moreover, current systems often leave out inquiry into consciousness due to deep rooted materialist assumptions that reduce it to mere brain activity, limiting students' exposure to other ways of knowing (Sheldrake, 2013) This absence contributes heavily to partial development of students, where knowledge, attitude, and behaviour stay inadequately integrated, as evidenced in studies of educational consciousness and sustainability awareness (Madhu & Hanchinalkar, 2025).

This gap can be filled by exploring models like Consciousness Based Education (CBE), a model of education which puts emphasis on the development of student's consciousness, their inner awareness which helps in fostering creativity, emotional intelligence, and responsible decision-making in complex global contexts (Heaton et al., 2017; Paredes et al., 2025).

An increasing amount of interdisciplinary research has backed CBE approach, especially through studies on Transcendental Meditation (TM) as its core pedagogical tool. Grant's (1998) early theoretical articulation has conceptualized, CBE as a transformative paradigm that places consciousness at the center of learning (Grant, 1998). This concept is increasingly supported by empirical research. For example, researchers have discovered that college students who took part in CBE interventions showed notable improvements in their mental health, such as lower levels of depression and anxiety and higher levels of self-esteem (Loiselle & Travis, 2023). Similarly, research has shown that a key element of CBE, TM, greatly enhanced students' emotional intelligence and sleep quality while lowering their levels of fatigue and stress (Paredes et al., 2025). These conclusions are also supported by evidence from educational settings. A multi-case study in Bali has found improvements in students' behavior, social interactions, and learning (L. Fergusson et al., 2022). In support of these empirical results, a systematic review conducted has found that contemplative educational practices, which are closely related to CBE, have a major positive impact on social competence, academic achievement, and well-being (Waters et al., 2015). In order to address students' holistic development, scholars have highlighted the increasing significance of incorporating consciousness-based techniques into contemporary educational systems (Waterman & Walton, 2024b). Together, these studies suggest that CBE is a promising approach for fostering comprehensive human development.

Furthermore, research studies suggest that integrating contemplative practices in curricula can enhance brain functioning and academic performance (Lin & Mai, 2018; Liu et al., 2022; Ostermann et al., 2022). These studies support the idea of paradigm shift towards a more holistic education system. As a result, integrating consciousness-based education modalities is not only beneficial but also a required step to create meaningful educational systems that purposefully align with the needs of human growth in the twenty-first century.

Despite this expanding evidence base, Maharishi's model remains underrepresented in mainstream educational research, with limited critical engagement and insufficient exploration of its large-scale curricular integration. This gap underscores the need for systematic inquiry into the relevance and applicability of consciousness-based education in contemporary educational systems.

The objective of this paper is to explore consciousness based education as an educational model which can address the issues of current education systems.

2. Consciousness-Based Education

Consciousness-Based Education (CBE), is an approach to education which integrates the best of modern western approaches to knowledge, with a subjective science of consciousness (Jones & Akura, 2017). "It integrates the best practices of education and places beneath them a proper foundation—direct development of the student from inside out" (Llewellyn & Pearson, 2011). Consciousness-Based education was founded by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi with its roots in the ancient Vedic tradition of India. Consciousness-Based Education acknowledges that students' levels of consciousness or alertness are a crucial component of their learning. Learning is more effective and fulfilling when students are more aware and awake. Traditionally, consciousness has been defined as the constant flow of thoughts and perception that occupy the mind. Conversely, it is generally accepted that thoughts and perceptions are only byproducts of the brain's electrochemical processes. Maharishi has proposed a fundamentally new understanding of human consciousness. "Consciousness-Based education, understands pure consciousness as the foundation and source of all mental activity, the most silent, creative, and blissful level of the mind—the field of one's total inner intelligence, one's innermost Self" (Llewellyn & Pearson, 2011).

3. Components of Consciousness Based Education: Knower, Process of Knowing and Known

Maharishi defines three components of education, the knower, who is essentially the

learner(student), the known(academic disciplines), that which is to be learned, and the process of knowing, which includes intuition, thought, sense of perception and intellectual analysis (S. L. Dillbeck & Dillbeck, 1987).

3.1 Knower

The basic structure of education advocates concentrating only on specific subjects of studies and there is low or no focus on the development of consciousness of the students which is primary. This means that the focus is largely on a specific branch of study like physics or history rather than expanding or refining the consciousness of the student. As Maharishi explains, "What the present system of education provides is the knowledge of the object; what it misses is knowledge of the subject, knowledge of the knower" (S. L. Dillbeck & Dillbeck, 1987). The knowledge of the knower to its deepest essence can only be gained through the direct experience of the full range of consciousness, from "the most active surface level of thought to the deepest inner silence of Transcendental Consciousness, the field of the total potential of mind" (S. L. Dillbeck & Dillbeck, 1987). In present day scenario, students are left feeling confused and unsatisfied since they are not provided with the means to experience and develop the entire spectrum of consciousness. Maharishi explains that if the knower is in doubt, then the whole field of knowledge has no basis, and "such baseless knowledge can only be non-fulfilling" (S. L. Dillbeck & Dillbeck, 1987). Knower/ student stays in doubt because they do not have access to their own true and infinite reality, which lies as the fundamental basis within themselves as Pure Consciousness. This is why CBE has Transcendental Meditation as its foundation through which students gain a direct experience of Pure Consciousness.

3.2 Known

From the perspective of the known, that which is to be learnt, it is clear that the degree of consciousness of the knower or student greatly influences the depth and quality of comprehension of any topic. A learner may not be able to fully understand the academic discipline or investigate its

deeper dimensions if they have a limited or underdeveloped level of awareness.

As Maharishi explains, “A stable level of consciousness is required, one that will not change, so that the knowledge of an object could be reliable” (S. L. Dillbeck & Dillbeck, 1987). The only level of consciousness that is stable is the level of Pure Consciousness. When this level of Consciousness is enlivened and stabilized in students' awareness only then they can experience the “known” in its true and full value.

3.3 Process of Knowing

Even the “process of knowing is never satisfied unless everything is known” (S. L. Dillbeck & Dillbeck, 1987). This means that the “process of knowing” is not fully enriched until and unless the full value of Pure Consciousness is lived, as Pure Consciousness is the basis of “everything” and ultimately “is” everything. The process of knowing can be brought to its complete value by enlivening its full depth along with its source, Pure Consciousness. That's when different aspects of the process of knowing like perception, thoughts, and intuition are fully functioning and enjoy the process of learning and growth.

The next section addresses the question of how can students grow the full value of Pure Consciousness in their awareness.

4. Transcendental Meditation

Transcendental Meditation(TM) is a simple, natural, and effortless technique that allows our mind to settle down and transcend the finest relative state to experience Pure Consciousness. As Maharishi explains, through “Transcendental Meditation it is possible for every mind to come out of the relative state of experience and attain the state of Being” (Mahesh, 1995).

Transcendental meditation is a simple and scientific technique to direct one's awareness inwards with the help of a Mantra. It helps in accessing finer states of the mind to a point where one experiences their own Self, transcendental consciousness (turiya). Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, founder of TM describes transcending as “turning one's attention inwards toward subtler levels of

thought, until the mind transcends the experience of the subtlest state and becomes completely still, at rest, yet fully awake and called this transcended state pure consciousness or transcendence” (Wahbeh et al., 2018)

When the mind settles down, the body gains a state of deep rest (M. Dillbeck & Orme-Johnson, 1987), which in turn releases deep-rooted stresses. These stresses are responsible for many lifestyle disorders like anxiety, depression, insomnia, PTSD, etc., and ultimately prevent the full blossoming of the inner potential of every student. TM is a scientifically proven technique to help develop mental potential, health, and behaviour. With the regular practice of Transcendental Meditation, Pure Consciousness naturally grows in awareness, which allows students to live with greater clarity, increased intelligence, and efficiency.

5. Research on Brain Development, Health and Behaviour

There are more than 600 scientific studies done on Transcendental Meditation (Orme-Johnson & Barnes, 2014) which have been conducted in more than 250 independent research institutions including Harvard Medical School, Princeton University, Stanford Medical School, etc. The benefits of Transcendental Meditation and its advanced programmes have been documented in a variety of domains, such as brain development, health, and behaviour.

The practice of Transcendental Meditation leads to a state where the mind settles down, and the brain coherence increases. Physiologically, transcendental experiences during

Transcendental Meditation practice are marked by slow inhalation, along with autonomic orientation at the onset of breath changes and heightened $\alpha 1$ (8–10 Hz) frontal coherence”(Travis, 2014)

Increased coherence (Travis & Arenander, 2006) in the brain suggests that different parts of the brain are working together, if different parts are working together then one can be more efficient in any given task. Compared to a control group of students, a study on college students in the Washington, D.C. area showed a notable improvement over a 10-week period on a Brain

Integration Scale (Travis et al., 2009). This scale assesses the quality of students' brains function when they are working on a task, including the level of brain coherence and the efficiency of the brain's responses. Another study on 362 high school students in Taiwan has highlighted how TM has helped in the development of practical intelligence, creativity, field independence, mental efficiency, and fluid intelligence (So & Orme-Johnson, 2001).

Creativity is the ability to come up with new ideas or to apply what we already know in a unique way, and it is an essential quality to progress in life (Sands, 2025). Practical intelligence has been defined as the ability to know how to do or say the right thing at the right time, this intelligence is a better predictor of success in career and relationships than IQ (Sands, 2025). Field Independence allows one to see the big picture but also the details at the same time. Someone with less field independence gets easily distracted by irrelevant things. A person with higher field independence is receptive to others' perspectives and doesn't get easily influenced (Sands, 2025). Increase in fluid intelligence leads to an increment in the capacity to think logically and solve problems in new situations, independently of previously held knowledge and mental efficiency is a person's increased capacity to remember pertinent information, distinguish between important and unimportant stimuli, and process vast amounts of data to provide useful solutions. It is essentially an improvement in the ability to interact with the environment which needs a holistic brain functioning (Sands, 2025). All of these qualities can help students live a more productive and efficient academic and personal life.

TM helps in increasing learning ability and memory (Alexander et al., 1989). Studies show greater usage of total brain functioning which suggests increased blood flow to the brain during TM indicating greater enlivenment of the brain (Jevning et al., 1996) and greater usage of unused reserves of the brain (Lyubimov, 1999).

Stress has a major role in developing disorders like anxiety, depression, insomnia, etc. It has been proven through research that TM gives the body a profound level of rest which helps in

releasing deep-rooted stresses. Students who practice Transcendental Meditation exhibited a significant reduction in PTSD, according to a recent study conducted at a South African university (Bandy et al., 2020). A research study done in Cambodia showed that the university that introduced TM displayed improvements in self-esteem, reduced anxiety, and lowered depression as well as showed improvements in overall health of mental, physical, and social aspect (L. C. Fergusson et al., 1995). In a recent four-month-long randomized trial study conducted at a West Coast public high school in the USA, students experienced a significant reduction in their overall emotional stress symptoms, anger, and fatigue. Improvement has been also seen in sleep quality, and academic achievement in English Language Arts (ELA) with the help of TM (VALOSEK et al., 2021). TM has proven to be useful in reducing healthcare costs (Herron et al., 1996). Studies have also shown that TM leads to decreased blood pressure among adolescents (Barnes et al., 2001).

Behaviour plays an important role in students' life. Studies indicate that students practicing TM show social maturity (Aron et al., 1981). Significant improvement in social-emotional competencies of TM group compared to controls have also been recorded (Valosek et al., 2019). Growth in emotional intelligence has also been seen in students practicing TM. A research study on Indian medical students has suggested that regular practice of Transcendental Meditation leads to meaningful improvements in emotional intelligence, reductions in perceived stress and fatigue, and shown to enhance sleep quality among Ayurvedic medical students (Paredes et al., 2025). A randomised control study done in Australia on paramedicine students has shown that students who have practiced TM have had "reduced levels of stress, depression, fatigue, and increased mental clarity and trait resilience post TM intervention compared to the control group" (Boyle & Little, 2025).

An exploratory study has also highlighted the viability of employing the Transcendental Meditation technique to lower stress and anxiety as a way to lessen ADHD symptoms. The

Transcendental Meditation technique has been utilized and taught to the students from age 11 to 14, and have been practiced twice a day at school. At baseline and three months later, executive function performance tests and common ADHD inventories have been provided. The findings have demonstrated statistically significant improvements in executive function and ADHD symptoms as well as decrease in stress and anxiety (Grosswald et al., 2008). Another random assignment study of brain and psychological measures has supported the efficacy of TM practice as treatment for ADHD (Travis et al., n.d.).

When combined, these findings imply that TM may treat ADHD at both the behavioral and underlying neurocognitive levels, probably by lowering stress and encouraging more effective brain activity. In special education settings, where students with ADHD frequently experience both executive dysfunction and increased stress reactivity, this dual impact is especially pertinent. The results provide credence to the use of TM as a complementary, relatively simple-to-implement school-based intervention that may improve both cognitive function and emotional control. However, more extensive, controlled study is required to confirm its effectiveness in various educational situations due to the exploratory character and small sample sizes of current studies.

The current education system has put major emphasis on standardized evaluation and information acquisition which has led to a profound lack of holistic development of students all across. These conventional systems do not nurture the emotional and spiritual aspects of students' life by not providing them tools to access and develop Pure Consciousness. By promoting the holistic growth of the knower with the help of direct experience of Pure Consciousness along with the enrichment of known and the process of knowing, the framework of consciousness-based education provides a more all-encompassing approach in this situation. Within this framework, TM has been suggested as a valuable technique to systematically grow students' consciousness. The research indicates improvement in behavioural outcomes and greater emotional intelligence through the

practice of TM. It has shown that TM also promotes better psychological and physiological health by reducing stress and provides the system a profound level of rest. These results provide credibility to the idea that improving students' internal landscape by introducing this model of education can have a positive impact on their social and academic functioning.

This paper proposes the idea of systematic integration of CBE in current education systems. This model can be easily integrated in any existing educational system. As TM can be practiced easily in the classrooms without any additional equipment. The implementation of TM in classrooms does not require any change in lifestyle or belief system. It is an internationally standardized program, that can be uniformly implemented. For students, spiritual and emotional training is as important as physical training because holistic education must address the development of the whole person rather than focusing solely on intellectual or physical development. Meditation should become a part of the curricula. There can be collaborations with international organisations like UNESCO and national governments which can help with policy integration and facilitate best practices. Additionally, equitable access must be promoted so that students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds can benefit from these programs. In order to implement such programs at broad levels in schools and universities, resources must be allocated. There should be dedicated time allotment for meditation considering the fact that the current education systems don't allow much space for additional activities. To implement such programs successfully it becomes crucial for teachers to receive training so they are ready to respond to any queries students may have about the practice. In order to evaluate students and monitor their long-term growth and development across institutions, it is imperative that studies should be carried out in educational settings in order to maintain both qualitative and quantitative evaluation of such models.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the modern education is in a need of a paradigm shift towards more holistic and

integrative approaches considering all the challenges it is facing. Consciousness-Based Education, with Pure Consciousness as its foundation, provides a promising framework for addressing these challenges by fostering the development of the learner's cognitive, emotional, and behavioural capacities. Evidence suggesting improvements in brain functioning, health outcomes, and social behaviour highlights the potential of such approaches to enhance not only individual well-

being but also broader societal outcomes. By promoting balanced development through the integration of inner and outer dimensions of learning, this model aligns education with the fundamental goal of nurturing fully developed human beings. Therefore, despite the need for further empirical validation, the implementation of such approaches on a global scale may represent a meaningful step toward creating more effective, inclusive, and sustainable educational systems.

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