

# Qigong at School

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## Introduction

Qigong is a vital component of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) that refers to the mastery (gong) of controlling the body's energy (qi).<sup>1</sup> According to Chinese tradition, the flow of qi in the body can become stagnant or blocked, and Qigong aims to help relieve these blockages by using various breathing, movement, and meditation exercises. These techniques help facilitate the release of vital energy allowing it to flow through the body again, thereby restoring physical and mental well-being.<sup>2</sup>

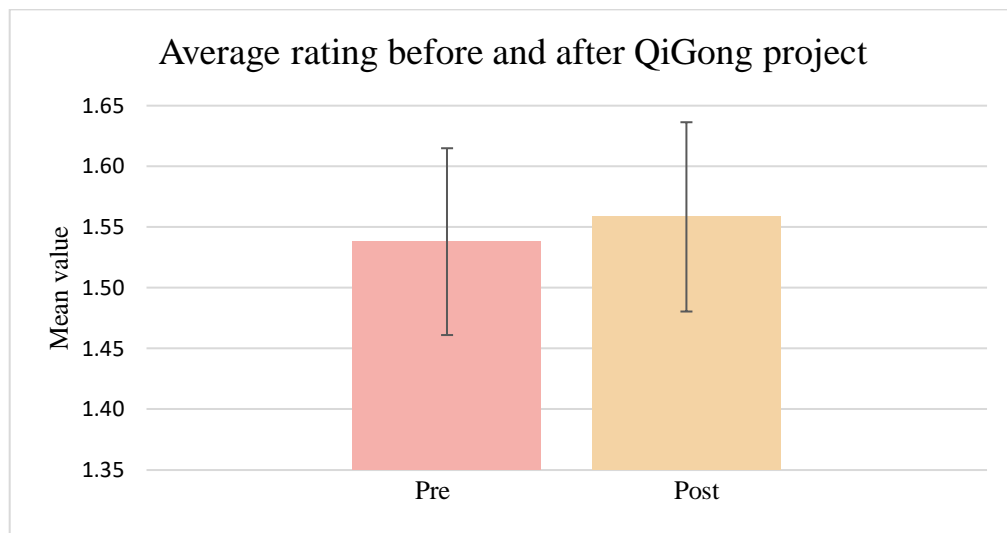
Mind-body practices such as Qigong and yoga are gaining popularity in Western society as effective methods to reduce the impact of everyday stress.<sup>3</sup> While these methods are widely embraced by adults, the transformative potential of Qigong also extends to children. For example, one scientific study introduced Qigong into the school routine of thirteen-year-olds over six-months, leading to enhanced social behaviour and a noticeable decrease in bad behaviour.<sup>4</sup> Another study found a 43% improvement in symptoms of behavioural disorders in children aged six to ten through a combination of Qigong and Tai Chi.<sup>5</sup>

## Methods

As part of the "Qigong at School" initiative, second and third-grade students practised Qigong once a week lead by an instructor from the Institute of Compassion. Although these classes are still ongoing (as of February 2024), we present some data related to this project in this article. Each child was given a questionnaire before the start of the Qigong classes and after two and a half months into the project as a follow up. This questionnaire was created by the teachers, and included questions on topics such as compassion, mindfulness, and coherence. To help children share their views on the Qigong sessions, the questions were answered using a 5-point scale of smiley faces. The happiest smiley meant they "strongly agree" with the question, and the unhappiest smiley face represented that they "strongly disagree". After the questionnaires were collected, the smileys were turned into numbers from one to five (1 = strongly agree - 5 = strongly disagree) to help with analysing the data.

## Results

Out of the 83 children who initially took part in the study, we analysed responses from 49 participants due to missing questionnaires and incomplete answers. These children, aged between seven and ten years old, shared their thoughts before and after participating in the "Qigong at School" project. When we look at the graph below, we can see that the children's responses remained consistent on the questionnaires despite two months of weekly Qigong exercise. Importantly, most children did indicate that they "agree" when asked if "Qigong is good for you", and whether "you feel more connected to your breath".



*Graph:* The average total score before the Qigong project was 1.54, and after the project, it slightly increased to 1.56.

On the second time we provided the questionnaire, the children were also asked additional questions such as: "Do you do anything during the day to relax, to feel better or to replenish your energy?", and "If yes, what do you do?". The children provided a variety of written responses about their self-care strategies, including activities such as "Yoga, handstand", "I breathe in and out deeply", "I put on something to listen to", "I lie down on the couch", and "I think I can do something when I do it/I keep going". The wide range of activities demonstrate that children are already incorporating techniques similar to those taught in the Qigong project into their daily lives to help them relax and improve their well-being.

## Conclusion

While the findings of this project do not provide conclusive evidence that Qigong significantly changes the levels of compassion, mindfulness, or coherence in children, it's worth mentioning there's a general positive perception of Qigong. Children expressed a positive view of Qigong's

impact for the question of whether Qigong is beneficial and for feeling connected to their breath. It's important to acknowledge that these impressions may evolve with an extended Qigong project duration, which we are looking forward to reporting in the coming months as a follow up.

### **Scientific Studies**

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