



FID Series

"Key impact results"

Devoting class time to improving students' well-being and academic performance in India

Can incorporating social-emotional development and well-being into the school curriculum reduce students' anxiety and improve learning outcomes? This is the central question behind a [project](#) led by Indian NGO Labhya, in collaboration with the Government of Tripura.

The Saharsh program, launched in state schools across Tripura, in north-east India, devotes a 30-minute class each day to improving students' social and emotional well-being. An impact evaluation was conducted to assess the program's impact on students' well-being, mental health and learning outcomes, particularly among those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and to determine its viability for wider scale-up.

Research team

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Key impact results

Conducted from 2023 to 2025, this evaluation has shown that the Saharsh curriculum, which incorporates mindfulness activities and the development of social and emotional skills into the school day, led to significant gains in math scores and cognitive abilities, which increased over the two-year evaluation period. The results suggest that mindfulness activities are primarily responsible for these gains, which may be linked to improved reasoning and problem-solving skills. However, no significant average impact was observed on anxiety or subjective well-being among the student sample as a whole, or on their reading skills.

+ 0,27 standard
deviations

in maths scores, compared with the control group.

+ 0,10 standard
deviations

in fluid intelligence after two years in classes where both components of the Saharsh program were taught.

+ 0,13 écart-type

in fluid intelligence after two years in classes where only the mindfulness component was taught.

The effects on anxiety are more limited and largely short-term: mindfulness classes reduced anxiety by **0.10 standard** deviations after six months, but this figure diminished and was not statistically significant by the end of the two-year period.

Impact study results

During the 2023–2024 and 2024–2025 school years, an experimental impact evaluation was conducted among 800 classes in 100 state primary schools in Tripura. The classes were randomly assigned to three groups:

- a group of 200 classes who were taught the full Saharsh curriculum, combining mindfulness activities with social and emotional skills development;
- a group of 200 classes who were taught mindfulness activities only;
- a group of 400 classes who were taught from the standard curriculum for 30 minutes.

This comparison served not only to assess the program's overall impact, but also to evaluate the respective contribution of each component. The impact evaluation tracked around 4,000 pupils, at the start of the program, after six months and after two years. The data collected covers math and reading, mental health, cognitive abilities and various non-cognitive and social skills.

The impact evaluation addressed three research questions

01

What impact did the "Saharsh" program have on students' well-being and anxiety?

02

Quel est l'impact du programme « Saharsh » sur les apprentissages scolaires des élèves ?

03

How cost-effective is the program, in terms of viability for wider scale-up by the Indian government?

1. What impact did the "Saharsh" program have on students' well-being and anxiety?

The effects on anxiety were largely short-term and may partly explain the program's initial impact on learning outcomes. After six months, daily mindfulness activities reduced anxiety by an average of 0.10 standard deviations, with a potentially greater impact among girls and students from low-income backgrounds (**-0.20 to -0.21 standard deviations**). However, the findings for these subgroups require further validation. After

two years, the average reduction in anxiety is no longer statistically significant. The full curriculum did not have a significant impact on students' anxiety. The effects on depression were also negligible.

The evaluation did not show any significant impact on subjective well-being or impulsive behaviors. No robust evidence was found with regard to student perseverance, with a broad lack of statistically significant results across the various analyses.

These results suggest that reduced anxiety may play a role in the program's initial impact, but this factor alone cannot explain the long-term improvement in math scores. The researchers instead point to improvements in reasoning and problem-solving skills — particularly as a result of greater fluid intelligence — as a potential factor in improved learning outcomes.

2. What impact did the "Saharsh" program have on student **learning outcomes**?

Devoting class time to well-being improves students' math skills and fluid intelligence.

The Saharsh curriculum increased math scores by **+0.27 standard deviations** compared with the control group. Furthermore, this improvement increased over time: gains were observed after six months but were significantly greater after two years. Both versions of the program achieved gains of comparable magnitude: **+0.27 standard deviations** with the full curriculum and **+0.29 standard deviations** with mindfulness activities only. Since no statistically significant difference was observed between the two curricula, these findings suggest that the inclusion of social and emotional activities did not produce any measurable improvement in math scores. Mindfulness activities may therefore be the primary driver behind these gains.

The gains in math are also consistent with the improvements in reasoning and problem-solving skills: Students who practiced mindfulness improved by **+0.13 standard deviations** according to Raven's matrices*, used to measure fluid intelligence – meaning the general ability to reason and solve new problems – and by **+0.10 standard deviations** when taught the full curriculum.

These results suggest that the program's impact goes beyond math skills and may reflect a broader improvement in students' reasoning abilities. However, no significant impact on reading skills was observed. The evaluation thus suggests that incorporating well-being and socio-emotional development activities into the school curriculum may improve certain learning outcomes, particularly in fluid intelligence and math, without necessarily producing gains across all subjects.

**Raven's Matrices are non-verbal intelligence tests that use geometric figures to assess logical reasoning and fluid intelligence.*

3. How **cost-effective** is the program, in terms of viability for wider **scale-up** by the Indian government?

As the program relies on existing school infrastructure and teachers, significant academic gains can be made at a minimal additional cost.

The curriculum is integrated into the school's daily timetable and delivered by its own teachers. Assuming that the government implements the program directly, the researchers estimate that a **0.1 standard-deviation** improvement would cost around **\$0.81** per student for the full curriculum and **\$0.73** for the mindfulness component alone. According to the researchers, a standalone mindfulness program could ultimately achieve an even higher cost-benefit ratio, particularly as it would likely be less expensive to implement and could potentially be delivered over a shorter timeframe. This reasoning is based, in particular, on the gains observed with mindfulness activities alone, which are comparable to those for the full curriculum, with no statistically significant difference between the two curricula.

Perspectives and scale-up

This evaluation has provided various insights into the Saharsh curriculum and the components likely to maximize its impact. In particular, it suggests that mindfulness activities play a central role in improving learning outcomes, which could be attributed to better reasoning and problem-solving skills. However, some questions require further examination: for example, it will be important to determine whether the gains in mathematics continue to increase beyond the two years studied and whether these effects are sustained over the longer term. The researchers also call for further studies to examine whether combining this program with other educational initiatives could increase its impact. Labhya and its partners are proceeding with the program's roll-out in another Indian State, aiming to reach 30 million children by 2030.

Find out more

Research

Carney, Kevin ; Moorthy, Avinash.

"State of Mind and Human Capital Formation: Evidence from Indian Schools". Research Paper (publication à venir)

Media

Video of Labhya's founder presenting the detailed evaluation results. FID, 2026.