



Received: 27-11-2025
Accepted: 07-01-2026

International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research and Studies

ISSN: 2583-049X

Role of Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) Music and Yoga Scheme in Promoting International Understanding: A Study Among International Students in India

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Abstract

The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) Music and Yoga Scheme performs as a crucial cultural diplomacy commitment aimed to foster international understanding among students from different countries studying in India. The initiative promotes significant cultural exposure, emotional wellness, and comprehensive personal growth by involving individuals living in India's diverse traditions of music and yoga. Music and yoga serve as universal mediums that overcome national and cultural confines, allowing students to engage deeper with Indian culture while exchanging their own traditions. The researcher

utilized a mixed-methods strategy in this study, implementing a descriptive and explanatory research design to fulfill the research objectives. This study utilized random sampling, including a sample size of 373 international students enrolled in ICCR scholarships in India. This study utilized a questionnaire as the data collection method to analyze the data and evaluate the hypothesis using SPSS. The findings indicate that music and yoga act as powerful non-verbal cultural instruments that transcend language barriers, positively impacting students' social integration and their opinion of India's cultural diplomacy initiatives.

Keywords: ICCR, Travel and Tourism Scheme, International Understanding, Cultural Relations, International Students, Intercultural Communication

1. Introduction

In an increasingly globalized society, the necessity for international comprehension and harmonious coexistence has become a paramount responsibility. A crucial role arises for global understanding in the prevention of war, and the cultivation of a culture of peace should naturally result from such understanding among nations (Carlos Alberto Torres, 2018) ^[1]. Cultural exchange programs play a vital role in bridging gaps and fostering greater understanding and mutual respect among individuals from diverse origins. Cultural interchange constitutes a mechanism of reciprocal attraction and repulsion (O'Regan, T. 1999) ^[2]. International students serve as a vital conduit for cultural exchange, as they have the ability to reside and study inside a foreign culture for an extended duration.

Cultural diplomacy has demonstrated efficacy as a mechanism of soft power, enabling nations to convey their cultural identity and values internationally, encompassing political and economic domains. Cultural exhibition and exchange have consistently influenced intergroup interactions (Clarke, D. 2020) ^[3]. Nations employ the arts, education, and culture to capture the affections of foreign populations. Cultural diplomacy has consistently served as a vital instrument in India's international involvement, leveraging its rich cultural legacy and diverse traditions to connect with the global community through intercultural conversation. Yoga is a significant contribution of India to the world, utilizing the human body as a laboratory and workshop while regulating the mind (Musalgaonkar, V. 1980) ^[4]. Music, yoga, philology, and spirituality are significant elements of India, acknowledged globally for their universality and efficacy in the wellness sector.

Rana, S. (2023) ^[5] asserts that among all cultural diplomacy channels, the performing arts, including music and dance, establish direct engagement with the audience, necessitating live presence, hence amplifying their influence compared to other artistic mediums. The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) is a significant entity that promotes cultural and educational connections between India and other countries. The ICCR plays a crucial role in India's cultural foreign policy by

promoting worldwide understanding through scholarships, cultural exchanges, and people-to-people initiatives. Hindustani music is characterized by its tremendous diversity. Its primary objective is to promote peace and foster social well-being. It fosters both national and international integration. These elements lead to the conclusion that Hindustani Classical music is multidimensional and universally applicable (Kannan, T. 2022). The Music and Yoga programs within ICCR hold a distinctive role in fostering international understanding as an organization.

The USA has commendable individual and institutional engagement in IDY, but numerous smaller countries in Europe, Asia, and Africa have also participated. The impact is significantly favorable, with numerous individuals in each country engaging in Yoga for wellness and health benefits, which increase by 2-7% annually. The proactive involvement of the Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR) and the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, in many nations, bolstered by the Ministry of AYUSH, has had a substantial influence (Manjunath, N.K., 2023) ^[8]. The programs aim to educate international students about India's rich musical heritage and the ancient practice of yoga, transcending linguistic and cultural barriers, as music is regarded as a universal language. Both disciplines offer opportunities for participants to integrate their physical, mental, and spiritual aspects. Hindustani classical music has undergone significant globalization, with an expanding global audience. This musical form possesses the ability to communicate emotions or atmospheres to the audience via its lyrics and meticulous note tuning, with the aesthetic principle referred to as "Rasa" (Das, V., 2025).

Yoga, widely embraced in the West, is one of India's most prominent cultural exports and has been increasingly utilized by India in its diplomatic initiatives to advance its foreign policy objectives. India is regarded as possessing significant soft power due to its diverse culture, lengthy democratic tradition, and leadership among the Global South. Utilizing yoga as a tool of soft power enables India to present itself as a manifestation of profound historical wisdom and the principles of unity, harmony, and peace (Otto, L. (2025) ^[9]. International students involved in the Music and Yoga programs of ICCR frequently serve as cross-cultural ambassadors, conveying their experiences and perspectives of India upon returning to their home countries. This engagement is crucial for dismantling cultural preconceptions and fostering intercultural understanding to promote global harmony. Nevertheless, despite its acknowledged importance, minimal research has been undertaken to investigate its relevance to overseas students in India.

2. Literature Review

Kemper, K. J., & Danhauer, S. C. (2005) ^[10] assert that music is extensively utilized to enhance well-being and to divert patients from pain and other distressing symptoms, thoughts, and emotions. Music, while convenient and accessible, can enhance one's mood. Music is unequivocally the paramount festival activity in Europe. This sector epitomizes the extensive enrichment of culture, with music exhibiting notable diversity that can be analyzed and categorized. Classical music, world music, jazz, and rock represent distinct social domains and interact with public policy in various ways (Négrier, E *et al.*, 2013) ^[11]. Music

Therapy is a recognized health profession that employs musical experiences therapeutically to enhance physical, emotional, psychological, cognitive, behavioral, and social functioning. Due to music's potent and non-threatening nature, distinctive consequences can be achieved. This may encompass, but is not restricted to, employing music to cultivate stress and anxiety alleviation skills, enhancing gait and gross motor skills through rhythmic walking and entrainment activities, offering a secure environment for emotional and self-expression via songwriting, and facilitating communication and language development through singing and active music creation (Orleans, L. A. 2005) ^[12].

Excellence in musical performance encompasses two primary elements: a profound comprehension of the music's content, structure, and significance, and an absolute mastery of technical technique. The performance evaluation encompassed numerous previously evaluated studies. Assessment transpires in the routine endeavors of music critics, educators, and performers. An overall assessment is seen as a weighted function of evaluations in individual aspects. To sustain the speed and attain perceived synchrony, musicians should perform slightly ahead of the audible beat (Gabrielsson, A. 1999) ^[13]. Music is sound organized by humans; its specific characteristics differ among cultures (Herndon & McLeod, 1981) ^[14]. Music has the capacity to enhance self-efficacy, self-esteem, and self-concept, alongside improvements in mood, reduced aggression, increased motivation, and improved behavior (Hallam, 2015) ^[15].

As stated by Garfinkel and Schumacher (2000) ^[16], the Sanskrit term "yoga" derives from the root "yug," meaning "to unite" or "yoke," which signifies "to bind together" or "to concentrate." Fundamentally, the term "yoga" denotes a practice of unification or a discipline: to connect the body with the mind and collectively unite with the self (soul), or the integration of the individual self with the transcendental self. Yoga originates from an oral tradition in which lessons were passed down from instructor to pupil. Yoga signifies the integration of individual awareness with the divine consciousness. The practice encompasses eight stages or limbs of yoga: yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, and samadhi. The rigorous practice of these culminates in self-realization, the principal objective of yoga. An analytical assessment of the principles and objectives of yoga reveals that it encompasses a comprehensive lifestyle, culminating in a state of total bodily, social, mental, and spiritual well-being, alongside harmony with nature (Taneja, D.K., 2014) ^[17].

Pranayama is a crucial component of health and spiritual practices among Indo-Tibetan cultures. Meditation, awareness, and enlightenment are considered essential for fostering physical well-being; they serve as both a distinct form of meditation and a precursor to more profound meditative practices. Pranayama can swiftly anchor the attention in the present and alleviate tension (Brown, R. P., & Gerbarg, P. L., 2009) ^[18]. Students exhibited diminished stress and anxiety levels following the completion of a six-week yoga and meditation program prior to final examinations. Findings suggest that engaging in mindfulness meditation as infrequently as once a week may help alleviate stress and anxiety among college students. Administrators must integrate education on nonpharmacological approaches for stress and anxiety

reduction into curricula to facilitate student self-care (Lemay, V. *et al.*, 2019).

Awareness-based stress reduction (MBSR) is a structured intervention designed to enhance awareness via meditation, which involves methodically directing attention to each body part sequentially, practicing mild Hatha yoga, and participating in group discussions (Saeed, S. A., *et al.*, 2010) [19]. In addition to the illnesses outlined in this brief overview, there are at least thirty-five other prevalent medical conditions for which it may possess therapeutic efficacy. Yoga is accessible, simple to engage in, and free of charge, exhibiting a low dropout rate. While generally safe, individuals with uncontrolled hypertension, glaucoma, or sciatica, as well as pregnant women, should modify or avoid certain yoga positions. Extensive human experience has shown that consistent yoga practice is an effective method for sustaining overall health and preventing disease (Agarwal, S.K., 2013) [20]. Yoga soft power diplomacy exemplifies India's endeavor to leverage ancient Hindu spiritual traditions to promote itself as a positive and advantageous cultural influence in international relations. Nonetheless, despite its considerable success, it also poses some substantial obstacles to India's communication strategy both domestically and internationally (Gautam, A., & Droogan, J., 2018) [21].

Scope

This study examines the role of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations' (ICCR) Music and Yoga programs in promoting international understanding among ICCR-sponsored international students in India. The study examines international students engaged in ICCR-organized music and yoga programs, enrolled in designated universities and higher educational institutions in India. The results aim to elucidate the efficacy of ICCR's Music and Yoga programs as tools for cultural diplomacy and international comprehension.

Theoretical framework:



This study's conceptual framework focuses on analysing the role of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) Music and Yoga Scheme in fostering intercultural understanding among foreign students in India. The ICCR music and yoga scheme is recognized as the primary independent variable because of its vital role as an effective instrument for cultural diplomacy, fostering students' cross-cultural communication, appreciation of diversity, and global perspective.

International understanding serves as the dependent variable, representing the extent to which international students develop mutual respect, cultural awareness, and positive perceptions of India.

The model developed for this study illustrates the relationship between ICCR's music and yoga scheme and international understanding, guiding the development of hypotheses and empirical analysis.

Research Question

How does the ICCR's Music and Yoga Scheme influence international understanding among international students in India?

Objective of the Study

To assess the role of ICCR's Music and Yoga scheme on international understanding.

Hypothesis

H1: ICCR Music and Yoga scheme has a significant role in fostering international understanding.

3. Methodology

This research utilized both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. A descriptive and exploratory research methodology was chosen to examine the role of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) Music and Yoga Scheme in fostering intercultural understanding among international students in India. The researchers chose 373 international students enrolled in the ICCR scheme across various universities in different Indian states. Data were collected using a standardized questionnaire and analyzed with SPSS version 25. The study utilized descriptive, correlation, and regression analyses to examine the gathered data.

4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Demographics

| Variables | N/ Valid Case | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|----------------------------------|---------------|---------|----------------|
| Gender of Respondents | 373 | 1.3700 | .48345 |
| Age of Respondents | 373 | 2.0912 | .97675 |
| Country of Respondents | 373 | 15.8740 | 15.43083 |
| Education of Respondents | 373 | 2.1394 | .75625 |
| Study Year of Respondents | 373 | 2.2708 | .95271 |
| Duration of Study of Respondents | 373 | 1.9598 | .88049 |
| State of Respondents | 373 | 3.4638 | 2.30984 |

Source: Survey Data

The above table shows that out of the 35, 26 (74.3%) of them are male, 34.3% of the respondents are between the ages of 26 – 30 years, 2 (5.7%) of the respondents are from the country Iraq, and 8 (22.9%) respondents' programs of study in India are a Master's degree. 34.3% of the respondents are in the second year of their study, 15 (44.9%) of respondents' duration of study in India is 3 years, 3 (8.6%) of respondents are studying in Gujarat state, 24 (80%) of the respondents' monthly stipend is between 20,000 and 25,000.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

| Items | N | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|-----------------------------|-----|--------|----------------|
| Music and Yoga Scheme | 373 | 3.9775 | .75258 |
| International Understanding | 373 | 4.2059 | .60523 |

Source: Survey Data

The table above presents the descriptive statistics for the two key variables—Music and Yoga Scheme, and International Understanding, based on responses from 373 participants. The mean score for the *Music and Yoga Scheme* is 3.98, with a standard deviation of 0.75, indicating that

respondents generally hold a positive perception of the scheme, with a moderate level of variation in their views. This suggests that most participants agree that the Music and Yoga Scheme is effective and beneficial.

The mean score for *International Understanding* is relatively higher at 4.21, with a lower standard deviation of 0.61, reflecting a strong and more consistent agreement among respondents regarding the promotion of international understanding. The higher mean coupled with lower variability implies that participants largely share similar positive views about international understanding outcomes. Overall, the results indicate that both variables are perceived positively, with *International Understanding* receiving stronger and more consistent endorsement. This pattern suggests that initiatives like the Music and Yoga Scheme may play a meaningful role in fostering international understanding among participants.

Pearson Correlation Test:

The research aimed to determine the correlation between the factors of a music and yoga scheme and international understanding among international students in India. The Pearson correlation test quantified the link between variables through the correlation coefficient. The Pearson correlation coefficient (r) assesses the relationship between variables and indicates their reciprocal influence. The table below displays the findings.

Table 3: Correlation Matrix of the Variables

| Items | Music and Yoga Scheme | International Understanding |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| Music and Yoga Scheme | 1 | .551** |
| International Understanding | .551** | 1 |

Source: Survey Data

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The table above shows the correlation between the *Music and Yoga Scheme* and *International Understanding*. The correlation coefficient ($r = 0.551$) indicates a moderate to strong positive relationship between the two variables. This suggests that greater participation or exposure to the Music and Yoga Scheme is associated with higher levels of international understanding among the respondents. The correlation is statistically significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed), implying that the observed relationship is highly unlikely to have occurred by chance. Therefore, the findings provide strong empirical support for the argument that the Music and Yoga Scheme play an important role in promoting international understanding. Overall, the results validate the study's assumption that cultural and wellness-based initiatives make a meaningful contribution to fostering cross-cultural awareness, mutual respect, and global harmony.

Table 4: Model Summary

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square |
|--|-------|----------|-------------------|
| 1 | .551a | .303 | .302 |
| a. Predictors: (Constant), Music and Yoga Scheme | | | |

Source: Survey Data

The above table describes that the model summary of the regression analysis examining the effect of the *Music and Yoga Scheme* on the dependent variable. The R value of **0.551** indicates a moderate positive relationship between the Music and Yoga Scheme and the outcome variable. This

suggests that changes in the Music and Yoga Scheme are meaningfully associated with changes in the dependent variable.

The R-squared value of 0.303 indicates that approximately 30.3% of the variation in the dependent variable is explained by the Music and Yoga Scheme. This suggests a relatively high explanatory power for a single-predictor model in social science research.

Furthermore, the Adjusted R-squared value of 0.302, which accounts for model complexity and sample size, is very close to the R-squared value, implying that the model is stable and not overfitted. Overall, the findings suggest that the Music and Yoga Scheme plays a significant role in explaining the variability of the dependent variable, while the remaining variation may be attributed to other factors not included in the model.

Table 5: ANOVA^a

| Model | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|--|----------------|-----|-------------|---------|-------|
| 1 Regression | 41.342 | 1 | 41.342 | 161.580 | .000b |
| Residual | 94.925 | 371 | .256 | | |
| Total | 136.267 | 372 | | | |
| a. Dependent Variable: International Understanding | | | | | |
| b. Predictors: (Constant), Music and Yoga Scheme | | | | | |

Source: Survey Data

The above table presents the ANOVA results examining the effect of the Music and Yoga Scheme on International Understanding. The regression sum of squares is 41.342, while the residual sum of squares is 94.925, out of a total sum of squares of 136.267, indicating that a substantial portion of the variance in international understanding is explained by the model.

The model yields an F-value of 161.580 with degrees of freedom ($df = (1, 371)$) and a significance value of 0.000 ($p < 0.001$), which demonstrates that the regression model is statistically significant. This implies that the Music and Yoga Scheme has a significant predictive value for international understanding among the respondents.

Overall, the ANOVA results confirm that the proposed model fits the data well, and participation in the Music and Yoga Scheme has a strong and meaningful influence on promoting international understanding. This supports the study's hypothesis that cultural and wellness-oriented initiatives, such as music and yoga, play a crucial role in fostering cross-cultural harmony and global understanding.

Table 6: Coefficients^a

| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
|--|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|------|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 (Constant) | 2.444 | .141 | | 17.326 | .000 |
| Music and Yoga Scheme | .443 | .035 | .551 | 12.711 | .000 |
| a. Dependent Variable: International Understanding | | | | | |

Source: Survey Data

The above table presents the results of the regression analysis examining the effect of the Music and Yoga Scheme on International Understanding. The unstandardized coefficient (B) for the constant is 2.444 with a t-value of 17.326 and a p-value of .000, indicating that the intercept is statistically significant. This means that when the Music and Yoga Scheme score is zero, the predicted level of

International Understanding is 2.444.

The Music and Yoga Scheme have an unstandardized coefficient (B) of 0.443, a standardized coefficient (Beta) of 0.551, a t-value of 12.711, and a p-value of .000. This indicates that the Music and Yoga Scheme have a significant positive effect on International Understanding. Specifically, for every one-unit increase in the Music and Yoga Scheme, International Understanding is expected to increase by 0.443 units, holding all other factors constant. The standardized Beta value of 0.551 further suggests that the Music and Yoga Scheme is a strong predictor of International Understanding in the model.

Overall, these results confirm that participation in or exposure to the Music and Yoga Scheme is positively associated with higher levels of International Understanding among the participants, and the relationship is statistically significant.

5. Result and Discussion

The findings collectively indicate that the Music and Yoga Scheme has a significant and positive impact on International Understanding among international students in India. The descriptive statistics show strong endorsement of both the scheme and the concept of international understanding, while correlation and regression analyses confirm a robust and statistically significant relationship. The R^2 value suggests that while the Music and Yoga Scheme explain a substantial portion of the variance in International Understanding, other factors (such as cultural exchange programs, social interactions, and academic experiences) may also contribute.

Overall, the study validates the hypothesis that cultural and wellness-oriented initiatives like Music and Yoga can effectively foster cross-cultural awareness, mutual respect, and global harmony. These results highlight the importance of incorporating such programs within higher education institutions to enhance international student experiences and promote intercultural understanding.

6. Conclusion

The study investigated the influence of the Music and Yoga Scheme on International Understanding among international students in India. The results demonstrate that the program is favourably regarded by participants and significantly contributes to enhancing cross-cultural awareness and global comprehension. Descriptive statistics indicated that respondents expressed substantial agreement with the scheme's success and the significance of promoting international understanding, accompanied by minimal heterogeneity in replies.

Correlation and regression analysis further validated a moderate to strong positive association between the Music and Yoga Scheme and International Understanding. The regression analysis indicated that the scheme significantly forecasts foreign knowledge, accounting for almost 30% of the variance. This indicates that although the scheme is a significant element, additional cultural, social, and academic experiences may also affect foreign comprehension.

The study emphasizes the significance of incorporating cultural and wellness-oriented efforts, such as Music and Yoga, within educational programs. These programs not only improve students' personal well-being but also significantly promote intercultural harmony, mutual respect, and global citizenship among international students. The

results underscore the importance of these programs in fostering inclusive and culturally sensitive educational environments.

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