

Art Integrated Learning and Its Impact on Students' Stress and Coping Mechanism

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Abstract

Recognising the increasing prevalence of stress among students and the growing need for effective coping strategies, the present study investigates the potential of Art Integrated Learning (AIL) as an educational intervention to strengthen coping mechanisms and promote emotional well-being. AIL integrates artistic modalities such as visual arts, music, drama, and movement into core academic instruction, thereby fostering creativity, emotional expression, and problem-solving skills. Grounded in the principles of multiple intelligences and experiential learning, this approach offers a holistic framework for student development.

The study employed a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. A sample of 120 students, engaged in both traditional and art-integrated curricula, constituted the basis of the study. The quantitative component involved pre- and post-intervention measurements of stress levels, while the qualitative component comprised thematic analysis of interviews to capture students' personal experiences and perceptions of AIL. The findings revealed that students exposed to AIL reported significantly lower stress levels, improved emotional regulation, and enhanced coping strategies compared to those in the traditional instructional settings.

These findings support the educational vision articulated in National Education Policy (NEP 2020) and the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE 2023), both of which advocate arts-based, inclusive, and emotionally responsive pedagogies. The study positions AIL as a viable psycho-educational tool that fosters a supportive and engaging learning environment, enabling students to express themselves creatively and manage academic pressures more effectively.

Keywords: Art Integrated Learning (AIL), Student Stress, Coping Mechanisms, Emotional Resilience, Mental Well-being, Holistic Education

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INTRODUCTION

“Art-integrated education will be embedded in classroom transactions not only for creating joyful classrooms, but also for imbibing the Indian ethos through integration of Indian art and culture in the teaching and learning process at every level.”

—National Education Policy (NEP), 2020, p. 37

In an era where academic achievement often overshadows emotional well-being, student mental health has emerged as a critical concern within educational discourse. Increasing academic expectations, social pressures, and personal development challenges frequently expose students to heightened stress levels, adversely affecting their psychological health and academic performance. Academic demands such as maintaining high grades, preparing for standardised examinations, and managing extensive workloads, constitute major sources of stress. Simultaneously, social pressures related to peer relationships and identity formation further intensify the students' stress experiences.

Elevated stress levels are associated with adverse outcomes including anxiety, depression, burnout, and reduced academic performance (Lee, et al. 2019). Effective coping mechanisms—defined as cognitive and behavioural strategies employed to manage stress—are therefore essential, for sustaining mental health and academic success (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984).

Emotional resilience—the ability to adapt positively to adversity, plays a crucial role in enabling students to navigate these challenges successfully.

Within this context, Art Integrated Learning (AIL) emerges as a transformative pedagogical approach that simultaneously supports cognitive development and socio-emotional growth. AIL integrates the artistic disciplines such as music, drama, visual arts, and dance into academic instruction, thereby enhancing engagement and deepening conceptual understanding. Rooted in experiential and constructivist learning theories, AIL engages multiple senses, fosters creativity, and nurtures emotional intelligence, making learning both meaningful and emotionally responsive.

Theoretical Foundations of Art Integrated Learning (AIL)

The conceptual foundation of AIL is grounded in interdisciplinary educational and psychological theories that emphasise holistic learner development. It aligns closely with Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligences, which broadens the understanding of intelligence to include linguistic, musical, spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal domains. By accommodating diverse learner profiles, AIL facilitates inclusive and differentiated instruction.

Further theoretical support is provided by Csikszentmihalyi's (1990)

theory of flow, which describes a state of deep engagement and intrinsic motivation frequently experienced during creative activities. Participation in AIL activities can induce this flow state, thereby enhancing emotional regulation, engagement, and stress reduction.

AIL also contributes significantly to Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) by fostering empathy, collaboration, communication, and emotional awareness—competencies essential for resilience (Masten, 2014). Group-based artistic activities encourage cooperation and respect for diverse perspectives, strengthening the peer relationships and classroom cohesion. Research highlights the therapeutic value of creative expression, noting its role in emotional catharsis, self-reflection, and psychological well-being (Pennebaker and Seagal, 1999). Additionally, the creative process enhances problem-solving skills and cognitive flexibility, which are critical for managing academic and life challenges (Runco, 2004).

Policy Integration and State-level Interventions

Art Integrated Learning is firmly embedded in India's educational policy frameworks. The National Education Policy 2020 advocates the integration of arts across subjects to promote creativity, critical thinking, and socio-emotional learning. This vision is operationalised through the National Curriculum Framework for

School Education (NCF-SE 2023), which situates AIL within the diacritics mark Vikas framework, addressing learners' physical, emotional, cognitive, aesthetic, and spiritual development (NCERT 2023).

At the state level, initiatives such as the Delhi Government's Happiness Curriculum and Karnataka's drama-based educational collaborations provide empirical evidence of AIL's positive impact on student well-being, engagement, and emotional regulation (NCAER, 2021; Azim Premji University, 2020). Internationally, UNESCO (2016) and OECD (Winner *et al.*, 2013) also underscore the role of arts-based education in fostering resilience, intrinsic motivation, and emotional well-being.

Pedagogical Applications and Curricular Integration

AIL can be effectively implemented through subject-specific and interdisciplinary strategies. Narrative techniques such as storytelling and role-play enhance language learning; visual arts and rhythm facilitate mathematical understanding; simulations and multimedia support science education; and dramatisation and creative mapping enrich social science instructions. AIL also aligns with pedagogical frameworks such as STEAM, project-based learning, and experiential education, fostering higher-order thinking and learner agency.

Successful implementation of AIL requires systemic support, including

teacher training, curriculum redesign, partnerships with artists and cultural organisations, and the integration of digital tools to enhance multimodal learning experiences. Through its emphasis on creative engagement and emotional expression, AIL reimagines classrooms as inclusive, participatory spaces, that support both academic learning and mental well-being.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In contemporary educational contexts, student stress has emerged as a pervasive issue affecting both mental health and academic achievement. Conventional pedagogical approaches often fail to adequately address these concerns, prompting increased scholarly interest in innovative interventions such as AIL. This literature review critically examines national and international studies on AIL and its influence on student stress and coping mechanisms. It traces theoretical developments, synthesises empirical findings, identifies research gaps, and establishes a conceptual foundation for the present study.

Studies Conducted in India

Within the Indian educational landscape, AIL has emerged as a policy-endorsed pedagogical approach aimed at fostering holistic development and emotional well-being. The National Education Policy (NEP 2020) and the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE 2023) explicitly advocate arts integration across

curricular areas, with the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) mandating its implementation across grade levels (CBSE, 2020; NCERT, 2023).

Conceptual analyses situate AIL as a transformative educational framework rather than a supplementary instructional strategy. Arunadevi and Ajantha (2023) conceptualised AIL as a means of nurturing creativity, multiple intelligences, and emotional growth, aligning it closely with experiential and constructivist learning theories. Although theoretical in nature, their work provides a strong policy and pedagogical justification for integrating arts into mainstream schooling.

Empirical studies reinforce these conceptual claims. Surana and Datta (2023) demonstrated that structured art-based interventions significantly reduced academic stress and improved emotional balance among university students, suggesting AIL's relevance beyond school education. Pathak (2023) further reported that art-integrated classrooms foster emotional resilience and constructive coping mechanisms, enabling students to manage academic pressure more effectively.

Inclusive education perspectives are highlighted by Deepthi *et al.* (2022), who found that proactive coping strategies—including art-based and expressive activities, enhanced socio-emotional adjustment among students with learning disabilities.

These findings underscore the value of AIL in addressing diverse learner needs. Research conducted during crisis contexts, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, also indicates that engagement in creative and reflective activities mitigates academic stress and discourages avoidance-oriented coping (Rahiman *et al.*, 2020).

Large-scale programmatic initiatives provide further validation. Singh (2021) reported that the Delhi Government's Happiness Curriculum significantly enhanced emotional regulation, classroom engagement, and well-being, through mindfulness and art-based practices. Similarly, drama-based pedagogies implemented in Karnataka demonstrated improvements in confidence, collaboration, and reduced performance anxiety (Azim Premji University, 2020; Jayaram, 2019). Independent evaluations of the Happiness Curriculum further confirmed gains in empathy, peer interaction, and self-confidence (NCAER, 2021).

Studies Conducted Abroad

International scholarship consistently demonstrates the effectiveness of art-based interventions in stress reduction and resilience-building. Weiland (2012) reported that the focusing-oriented art therapy significantly reduced stress and enhanced emotional awareness among graduate students. Systematic reviews by Abbing *et al.* (2018) and Koch and Arnaud (2022) provide robust evidence that creative arts

interventions reduce anxiety and strengthen coping mechanisms across populations.

Drama and theatre-based pedagogies have been shown to enhance the socio-emotional competencies, including empathy, collaboration, and adaptive coping (Crossley *et al.*, 2019). Mindfulness-based art therapy has received increasing empirical support, with studies demonstrating reductions in psychological distress and physiological stress indicators among university students (Beerse *et al.*, 2020; Van Lith *et al.*, 2021).

Recent cross-cultural research further underscores the adaptability of art-based interventions. Studies conducted in Indonesia, China, and South Korea reported significant reductions in academic and acculturative stress through art therapy and group-based creative practices (Fitria *et al.*, 2022; Li and Kim, 2023; Zhang *et al.*, 2023). These findings affirm the universal applicability of arts-based approaches in educational mental health interventions.

Summary

The reviewed literature establishes a consistent relationship between arts-integrated pedagogies, reduced stress, and enhanced coping mechanisms. Indian research highlights strong policy alignment and classroom-level relevance, while international studies provide rigorous

empirical validation across diverse contexts. However, there remains a notable lack of curriculum-based, mixed-methods empirical studies examining AIL as a structured intervention within Indian secondary schools. This gap underscores the need for systematic investigation.

JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

In recent years, the escalating levels of stress among students have emerged as a critical concern within educational discourse, intensified by academic competition, social pressures, and post-pandemic uncertainties. While conventional interventions often emphasise counselling services or academic accommodations, there is an increasing need for holistic and preventive approaches that foster resilience and promote students' overall well-being.

Art Integrated Learning (AIL), grounded in experiential and constructivist learning theories, offers a promising pedagogical approach by embedding creative expression within core academic instruction. Empirical evidence indicates that engagement with the arts provides meaningful expressive outlets, enhances classroom engagement, and fosters a stronger sense of identity and achievement among the learners (Eisner, 2002; Winner *et al.*, 2013). Recent international reviews further demonstrate that art-based interventions consistently reduce stress and strengthen coping strategies, underscoring their

relevance in contemporary educational settings (Koch and Arnaud, 2022).

Despite growing empirical and policy support, there remains a significant gap in studies that systematically examine AIL as a structured, curriculum-based intervention for stress reduction, particularly within Indian school contexts. This study is justified by the need to explore AIL as a proactive psycho-educational intervention that extends beyond instructional pedagogy. By integrating AIL into everyday classroom practices, schools may enable students to develop adaptive coping mechanisms, enhance emotional intelligence, and achieve balanced academic and personal growth.

This rationale aligns with national policy directives such as the National Education Policy (NEP 2020) and the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE 2023), which explicitly advocate the integration of arts to promote emotional resilience and holistic development. State-level initiatives, including Delhi's Happiness Curriculum and Karnataka's drama-based pedagogical programmes, further demonstrate that AIL is both theoretically robust and practically feasible. Building on these policy-supported frameworks, the present study seeks to generate empirical evidence to strengthen the case for arts-based, inclusive, and stress-responsive education.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The present study adopts a mixed-methods research design focusing on Grade 9 students. It examines two key variables—student stress levels and coping mechanisms. In light of increasing concerns regarding student mental health and the growing emphasis on holistic education, the study seeks to evaluate the impact of Art Integrated Learning (AIL) on these dimensions. Specifically, it investigates the extent to which AIL fosters emotional resilience and contributes to students' academic well-being.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS (CONCEPTS)

Art Integrated Learning (AIL)

In this study, AIL is defined as an educational approach in which the art forms, such as music, drama, drawing, dance, and storytelling are systematically integrated into the teaching of academic subjects. Students in the AIL group receive regular curriculum content through creative and expressive modalities. Participation is operationalised as engagement in structured art-integrated activities at least three times per week during the study period.

Student Stress

Student stress refers to the psychological strain or tension experienced by learners as a result of academic workload, performance expectations, or social pressures.

Coping Mechanisms

Coping mechanisms are defined as the cognitive and behavioural strategies employed by students to manage stress and address emotional or academic challenges.

Emotional Resilience

Emotional resilience is operationalised as a student's capacity to regulate emotional responses, maintain psychological stability, and adapt constructively to stressful or adverse situations.

Traditional Learning Environment

A traditional learning environment refers to conventional classroom instruction in which content is delivered primarily through lectures, textbooks, and written assignments, without the intentional integration of art-based pedagogical methods.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the present study are to:

- assess the impact of Art Integrated Learning (AIL) on students' perceived stress levels;
- evaluate the effectiveness of AIL in strengthening task-oriented coping strategies;
- examine the influence of AIL on reducing emotion-oriented coping mechanisms;
- determine the effect of AIL on avoidance-oriented coping behaviours;
- compare the effectiveness of AIL and traditional pedagogical

approaches in enhancing students' stress management and coping strategies;

- explore students' subjective experiences of AIL in fostering emotional expression, creativity, and supportive classroom interactions; and
- integrate quantitative and qualitative findings to develop a comprehensive understanding of the impact of AIL on student well-being.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present study seeks to address the following research questions:

- How does participation in Art Integrated Learning (AIL) influence students' perceived stress levels?
- In what ways does AIL enhance students' task-oriented coping strategies?
- Does AIL contribute to a reduction in emotion-oriented coping mechanisms among students?
- How does AIL affect avoidance-oriented coping behaviours among students?
- How does AIL compare with traditional pedagogical methods in improving students' stress management and coping mechanisms?
- What are students' perceptions and experiences of AIL in fostering emotional expression, creativity, and supportive classroom interactions?

- How do quantitative and qualitative findings collectively provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of AIL on student well-being?

METHODOLOGY

The present study employs a mixed-methods research design to examine the impact of AIL on students' stress levels and coping mechanisms. The integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches enable a comprehensive analysis by combining statistical evidence with students' subjective experiences, thereby capturing the multidimensional effects of AIL on students.

Population, Sample, and Sampling Technique

The study was conducted at Maharaja Agrasain Public School, Ashok Vihar, an urban, private, co-educational senior secondary school located in Delhi. The school is recognised by the Directorate of Education (DoE) and affiliated with the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). The total population of Grade 9 students enrolled during the academic session, comprised 249 students, including 138 boys and 111 girls.

From this population, a sample of 120 students was selected using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure representativeness and balance. Stratification was carried out based on the following criteria:

- **Gender:** Equal representation was ensured with 60 boys and 60 girls.
- **Economic Background:** Students were categorised based on parents' occupation and annual income into three groups:
 - **Lower-income group (20%):** Annual income below INR 3 lakhs.
 - **Middle-income group (65%):** Annual income between INR 3 and 10 lakhs.
 - **Higher-income group (15%):** Annual income above INR 10 lakhs.
- **Type of Curriculum Exposure:** Students were further divided into two equal groups based on their exposure to—
 - Traditional teaching methods
 - Art Integrated Learning (AIL) programmes

Anonymised school records were used to classify students according to gender and economic background. Within each gender-income stratum, students were selected using a computer-generated random sampling procedure to minimise selection bias.

Accordingly, the final sample consisted of:

- 60 students who were exposed to Art Integrated Learning, and
- 60 students who received traditional classroom instruction.

Proportional representation across economic strata was maintained as follows:

- 24 students (20%) from the lower-income group,
- 78 students (65%) from the middle-income group, and
- 18 students (15%) from the higher-income group.

This stratified sampling approach facilitated a meaningful comparative analysis of the effects of AIL on students' stress levels and coping mechanisms across gender and socio-economic backgrounds.

The selected age group of 13–14 years (Grade 9) is particularly significant, as this developmental stage is characterised by increased academic demands, identity formation, and heightened exposure to competitive pressures, all of which substantially influence stress experiences and coping capacities.

Research Tools

For the collection of quantitative data, the investigator employed two instruments—a self-developed Stress Perception Scale (Annexure 1) to assess students' perceived stress levels, and the Inventory for Coping Stressful Situations (Annexure 2), to evaluate the coping strategies adopted by students in response to stress.

Although standardised tools such as the Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen *et al.*, 1983) and the Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (Endler and Parker, 1990) were reviewed modifications were required to ensure cultural sensitivity, age appropriateness, and contextual

relevance for Indian secondary school students. Consequently, self-developed instruments were designed to more accurately capture stress perceptions and coping behaviours within the specific academic and socio-cultural context of the study.

Procedures for Establishing Reliability and Validity

To ensure the psychometric robustness of the self-developed Stress Perception Scale and Inventory for Coping Stressful Situations, a systematic multi-stage validation process was undertaken. This process involved theoretical grounding, expert validation, pilot testing, and reliability analysis to establish the tools' validity and reliability.

Item development and theoretical framework

The initial pool of items for both the instruments was developed following an extensive review of literature related to adolescence stress, academic pressures, and coping mechanisms. The tools were theoretically grounded in the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping proposed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), which conceptualises stress as a dynamic interaction between an individual's appraisal of environmental demands and their available coping resources.

Items were framed to reflect key dimensions of stress—namely academic, emotional, social, and physical stressors—as well as three major coping orientations

which are problem-focused (task oriented), emotion-focused, and avoidance-oriented coping strategies. Care was taken to ensure clarity, age-appropriate language, and contextual relevance of secondary school learners.

Content Validation

Content validity was established through expert review. The preliminary versions of both tools were evaluated by a panel of seven experts comprising a School Counsellor, a Special Educator, a Wing Coordinator, and Post Graduate Teachers (PGTs) of economics, mathematics, English, and political science. The experts examined each item for clarity, relevance, linguistic appropriateness, cultural sensitivity, and alignment with the intended constructs.

Based on the feedback received, necessary modifications were made. Ambiguous and repetitive items were revised or eliminated, and additional items were incorporated to address identified conceptual gaps, thereby strengthening the content validity of the instruments.

Face Validity and Pilot Testing

Face validity and practical usability of the tools were assessed through pilot testing. The pilot study was conducted on a sample of 30, Grade 9 students from the same school, who were not included in the final sample but shared similar demographic characteristics.

Following the completion of the instruments, students participated in

an informal feedback session to share their understanding of the items, ease of response, and perceived relevance. This process ensured that the tools appeared to measure the intended constructs and were comprehensible and appropriate for the target population.

Reliability Testing

The internal consistency reliability of both the instruments was determined using Cronbach's Alpha, based on pilot data. The reliability coefficients obtained were as follows:

- Stress Perception Scale: $\alpha = 0.72$
- Inventory for Coping Stressful Situations: $\alpha = 0.75$

Both values exceed the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70, indicating acceptable internal consistency and suggesting that the items within each scale reliably measured their respective constructs.

Construct Validity

Due to the limited pilot sample size ($n = 30$), Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) could not be performed for the empirically establish construct validity. Instead, construct validity was addressed through a theoretical approach by ensuring alignment of each item with established stress and coping frameworks, particularly the model proposed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984).

Expert judgement and domain-specific relevance to the adolescent academic context, further supported the construct validity of the tools.

Conclusion

Although advanced the statistical validation techniques such as factor analysis could not be employed due to sample size constraints, a rigorous validation procedure involving expert review, pilot testing, and reliability analysis was followed. These measures ensured that the instruments were reliable, contextually appropriate, and theoretically sound for assessing stress perception and coping mechanisms among secondary school students.

Future studies employing larger samples are recommended to further validate these tools, through factor analysis and additional psychometric testing.

PROCEDURE

Quantitative Data

Pre-intervention measurements were administered at the beginning of the academic term to establish baseline levels of stress perception and coping mechanisms among students. Subsequently, the AIL programme was implemented for a duration of two months (Annexure 4). Upon completion of the intervention, post-intervention measurements were collected using the same instruments.

The procedure followed three distinct phases:

- **Pre-intervention Phase:** The baseline data on students' stress perception and coping mechanisms were obtained using the Stress Perception Scale and

the Inventory for Coping Stressful Situations.

- **Intervention Phase:** Students in the experimental group participated in AIL-based instructional activities, including visual arts integration, music-based learning, and drama-oriented pedagogy, over a period of two months. Students in the control group continued with traditional classroom instructions.
- **Post-intervention Assessment:** Stress perception and coping strategies were reassessed using the same tools to measure changes following the intervention.

Statistical analyses were conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention. Paired-sample t-tests were used to compare pre- and post-intervention scores within each group, while Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was employed to examine differences between the AIL and traditional teaching groups. These analyses facilitated the assessment of both within-group changes and between-group differences, thereby determining the comparative efficacy of AIL.

Qualitative Component

Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 30 students who participated in the AIL programme. The interviews aimed to explore students' subjective experiences of AIL, with particular emphasis on stress management, coping strategies, emotional engagement, and classroom interaction.

A semi-structured interview guide (Annexure 3) was developed to ensure consistency across interviews while allowing flexibility for in-depth exploration of individual perspectives. Each interview was conducted individually in a quiet and private room within the school premises to ensure confidentiality and comfort. The duration of each interview ranged from 15 to 20 minutes.

The interviews focused on the following key themes:

- Students' overall experiences with AIL activities.
- Perceived benefits of AIL in managing academic and personal stress.
- Changes in coping strategies before and after participation in AIL.
- Emotional engagement, motivation, and enjoyment in the learning process.
- Suggestions for improving the implementation of AIL.

The collected qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis. Recurring themes and patterns were identified to gain deeper insights into the ways in which AIL influenced the students' emotional resilience, creativity, and problem-solving abilities.

INTEGRATION OF QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE DATA

The integration of quantitative and qualitative methods enabled data triangulation, thereby enhancing the

validity and reliability of the findings. Quantitative data provided objective and measurable evidence regarding changes in stress levels and coping mechanisms, while qualitative findings offered contextual depth and interpretive understanding of the students’ lived experiences. Together, these approaches facilitated a comprehensive and holistic understanding of the impact of Art Integrated Learning on students’ overall well-being.

DATA AND RESULT ANALYSIS

Quantitative Component

Participants

The quantitative analysis was conducted on data collected from 120 Grade 9 students drawn from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, with equal representation of male and female students. The sample was divided into two groups: 60 students exposed to traditional pedagogical practices (control group) and 60 students participating in the AIL programme (experimental group). Pre-intervention data were collected at the beginning of the academic term, and post-intervention data were obtained after the completion of the two-month long AIL programme.

Data Collection

- **Stress Perception:** Students’ stress perception was assessed using the Stress Perception Scale. Analysis of pre- and post-intervention scores revealed a substantially greater reduction in stress levels among students in the AIL group (–24.31%) compared to those in the traditional teaching group (–4.26%). This finding indicates that participation in Art Integrated Learning was associated with a significant decrease in perceived stress levels.

Fig. 1 illustrates the changes in stress perception across the two groups. The Art Integrated

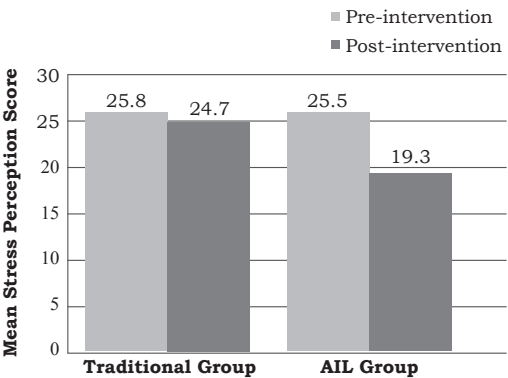


Fig. 1: Pre- and Post-Intervention Scores on the Stress Perception Scale

Table 1
Pre- and Post-Intervention Stress Perception Scores for AIL and Traditional Groups

Group	N	Pre-Intervention Mean (SD)	Post-Intervention Mean (SD)	Change (%)
Traditional Group	60	25.8 (4.2)	24.7 (4.0)	–4.26%
AIL Group	60	25.5 (4.1)	19.3 (3.5)	–24.31%

Learning (AIL) group exhibited a substantial reduction in perceived stress levels, whereas the traditional teaching group showed only minimal change.

- **Coping Mechanisms:** Coping mechanisms were assessed using the Inventory for Coping Stressful Situations. The results indicated that students in the AIL group

demonstrated a notable increase in task-oriented coping strategies (+15.15%), accompanied by significant reductions in emotion-oriented (-18.48%) and avoidance-oriented coping (-13.85%). In contrast, changes observed in the traditional teaching group were minimal, indicating limited improvement in coping strategies.

Table 2
Pre- and Post-intervention Coping Mechanism Scores (Task-oriented, Emotion-oriented, and Avoidance-oriented) for AIL and Traditional Groups

Coping Mechanism	Group	N	Pre-Intervention Mean (SD)	Post-Intervention Mean (SD)	Change (%)
Task-oriented	Traditional Group	60	45.2 (5.3)	46.1 (5.0)	+1.99%
	AIL Group	60	44.9 (5.5)	51.7 (4.8)	+15.15%
Emotion-oriented	Traditional Group	60	36.4 (6.0)	35.9 (5.8)	-1.37%
	AIL Group	60	36.2 (5.8)	29.5 (5.1)	-18.48%
Avoidance-oriented	Traditional Group	60	38.7 (5.2)	38.1 (5.0)	-1.55%
	AIL Group	60	39.0 (5.1)	33.6 (4.9)	-13.85%

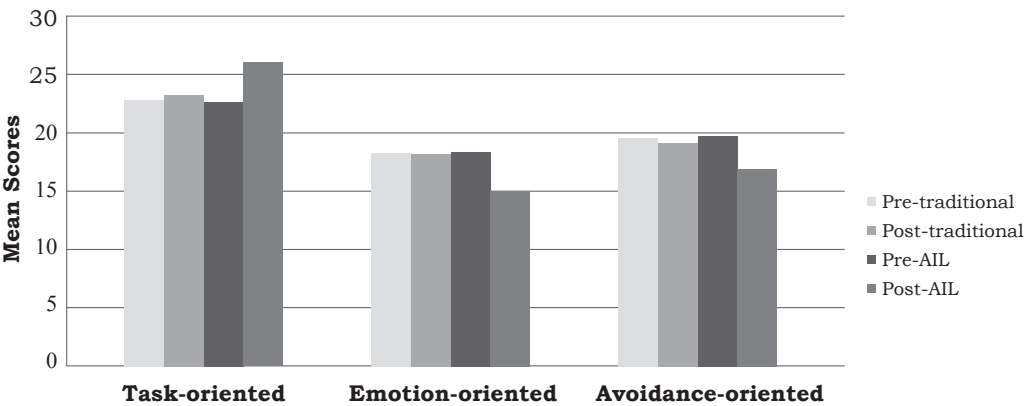


Fig. 2: Pre- and Post-Intervention Scores on the Inventory for Coping Stressful Situations

Fig. 2 illustrates changes in the coping mechanisms across the two groups. The AIL group demonstrated a marked increase in task-oriented coping, alongside reductions in emotion-oriented and avoidance-oriented coping. In contrast, the traditional teaching group exhibited negligible changes in these strategies.

Statistical Analysis

To examine the statistical significance of the observed differences, paired sample t-tests and ANOVA were conducted. The results confirmed that participation in AIL programmes led to significant reductions in stress levels and improvements in coping mechanisms compared to traditional learning environments.

- **Paired Sample t-Tests:** Paired t-tests revealed statistically significant improvements in stress perception and coping strategies for the AIL group (all $p < .001$). In comparison, the traditional group showed no significant changes across these measures.
- **ANOVA Analysis:** One-way ANOVA results revealed significant between-group differences in stress perception and coping mechanisms (all $p < .001$), confirming the superior effectiveness of AIL over traditional instructional methods.

Interpretation of Results

The findings clearly indicate that students exposed to Art Integrated Learning (AIL) experienced

Table 3
Paired Sample t-Tests for Stress Perception and Coping Mechanisms

Measure	Group	t-value	p-value
Stress perception	AIL Group	9.23	< 0.001
	Traditional Group	1.34	0.185
Task-oriented coping	AIL Group	7.56	< 0.001
	Traditional Group	1.14	0.259
Emotion-oriented coping	AIL Group	8.97	< 0.001
	Traditional Group	1.29	0.202
Avoidance-oriented coping	AIL Group	7.43	< 0.001
	Traditional Group	1.27	0.209

Table 4
ANOVA Results for Stress Perception and Coping Mechanisms

Measure	F-Value	p-Value
Stress perception	35.89	< 0.001
Task-oriented coping	24.32	< 0.001
Emotion-oriented coping	45.67	< 0.001
Avoidance-oriented coping	30.41	< 0.001

significantly greater reductions in stress levels and more substantial improvements in coping mechanisms, compared to those in the traditional learning group. Specifically, the AIL group demonstrated a marked decrease in stress perception (-24.31%), whereas the traditional group showed only a marginal reduction (-4.26%).

Furthermore, the task-oriented coping strategies increased substantially among students in the AIL group (+15.15%), in contrast to the negligible improvement observed in the traditional group (+1.99%). This suggests that AIL effectively strengthened students' problem-focused approaches to manage academic and emotional challenges.

Notably, the significant declines in emotion-oriented (-18.48%) and avoidance-oriented coping (-13.85%) within the AIL group indicate a shift towards more adaptive coping patterns. Students appeared better equipped to regulate

emotions constructively rather than relying on maladaptive or avoidant behaviours. These quantitative findings are strongly supported by qualitative insights, wherein the students reported that engagement in artistic activities provided a safe, structured, and expressive outlet for emotional regulation and stress management.

All observed changes in the AIL group were statistically significant ($p < .001$), reflecting robust and meaningful effects. In contrast, the traditional learning group did not exhibit any statistically significant improvements across stress or coping dimensions.

Qualitative Component

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 students from the AIL group to explore their lived experiences and perceptions of Art Integrated Learning, particularly in relation to stress management and coping abilities.

Table 5
Thematic Analysis of Student Interviews on Art Integrated Learning (AIL)

Theme	Description	Frequency
Enhanced emotional expression	Students reported that AIL provided an outlet for their emotions.	25
Increased creativity and problem-solving	Students noted that artistic activities stimulated their creative thinking.	20
Supportive learning environment	AIL fostered a supportive atmosphere, reducing feelings of isolation.	18
Improved coping mechanism	Students felt better equipped to handle stress after participating in AIL.	22

Thematic Analysis

The thematic analysis of interview data ($n = 30$) revealed consistent and recurring patterns across student responses. Enhanced emotional expression and improved coping strategies emerged as the most prominent themes, underscoring the role of AIL in fostering emotional resilience, engagement, and overall psychological well-being. Students frequently described AIL activities as enjoyable, calming, and empowering, contributing to a more supportive and emotionally responsive classroom environment.

The thematic analysis revealed four primary themes: enhanced emotional expression, increased creativity and problem-solving, supportive learning environment, and improved coping mechanisms. Among these, enhanced emotional expression and improved coping mechanisms emerged as the most prevalent themes.

The frequent recurrence of enhanced emotional expression (reported by 25 out of 30 students) and improved coping mechanisms (reported by 22 out of 30 students) indicates a high degree of consistency in students' perceived benefits from AIL. This consistency strengthens the qualitative evidence, supporting the role of AIL in fostering emotional resilience and adaptive stress management among students.

The frequencies represent the number of students endorsing

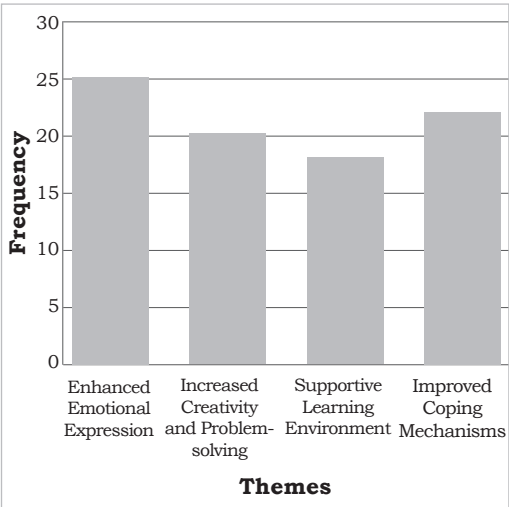


Fig. 3: Frequencies of Themes Identified in the Thematic Analysis of Student Interviews

each theme. Enhanced emotional expression and improved coping mechanisms, were the most frequently reported themes, underscoring the role of AIL in promoting students' emotional resilience and overall well-being.

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Data

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings provided comprehensive understanding of the impact of AIL on students' stress levels and coping strategies. The quantitative results clearly demonstrated that AIL led to significant reductions in perceived stress and notable improvements in adaptive coping mechanisms. Complementing these findings, qualitative narratives offered explanatory depth by illustrating

how arts-based practices facilitated emotional expressions, creativity, and social connectedness. Taken together, the triangulated evidence confirms that AIL is both statistically effective and experientially meaningful in promoting student well-being.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study adhered strictly to established ethical guidelines to safeguard the rights and well-being of all participants. Informed written consent was obtained from both students and their parents, prior to data collection. Participation was entirely voluntary, and students were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any negative consequences. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the research process, and all data were used solely for academic purposes.

DELIMITATIONS

The present study is delimited by the following factors:

- **Sample Scope:** The sample comprised 120 Grade 9 students from a single CBSE-affiliated school, with equal representation of gender and varied socio-economic backgrounds. This may limit the generalisability of the findings to other educational contexts.
- **Duration:** The study was conducted over a period of two months, capturing only the short-term effects of AIL. Long-term impacts of AIL were not examined.
- **Research Instruments:** The use of self-developed tools for measuring stress perception and coping mechanisms may influence the internal validity and reliability of the findings, despite systematic procedures undertaken to establish their psychometric adequacy.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Reduced Stress Levels:** The findings revealed a significant reduction in stress levels among students exposed to AIL compared to those following traditional instruction. The mean stress score for the AIL group decreased from 25.5 to 19.3, whereas the traditional group showed only a marginal reduction from 25.8 to 24.7 (see Table 1; Fig. 1). This indicates that AIL is a highly effective intervention for reducing perceived stress among adolescents.
- **Improved Coping Mechanisms:** Students in the AIL group demonstrated substantial improvements in coping strategies across multiple dimensions. Task-oriented coping increased significantly from 44.9 to 51.7, while the traditional group showed negligible change (45.2 to 46.1). The emotion-oriented coping decreased markedly in the AIL group (36.2 to 29.5), compared to a minimal reduction in the traditional group (36.4 to 35.9).

Similarly, Avoidance-oriented coping declined in the AIL group from 39.0 to 33.6, whereas the traditional group exhibited only a slight decrease (38.7 to 38.1) (see Table 2; Fig. 2). These results suggest that AIL facilitated a shift towards more adaptive coping patterns.

- Statistical Validation:** Paired sample t-test results confirmed that all observed improvements in the AIL group were statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), while no significant changes were detected in the traditional group (see Table 3). One-way ANOVA further established significant between-group differences across stress perception and all coping mechanisms, with F values ranging from 24.32 to 45.67 (all $p < 0.001$), thereby confirming the superior effectiveness of AIL over traditional instructional methods (see Table 4).
- Qualitative Insights:** The thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews provided deeper insight into students' lived experiences of AIL. Students consistently reported enhanced emotional expression, increased creativity, a supportive learning environment, and improved coping mechanisms (see Table 5; Fig. 3). Enhanced emotional expression (reported by 25 out of 30 students) and improved coping mechanisms (reported by 22 students) emerged as

the most frequently endorsed themes, highlighting AIL's role in fostering emotional resilience and psychological well-being.

- Conducive Learning Atmosphere:** The convergence of quantitative and qualitative findings indicates that AIL contributes to the creation of a supportive and engaging learning environment. Students reported feeling more connected, less isolated, and more actively engaged in the learning process. These outcomes underscore the potential of AIL to cultivate inclusive, resilient, and emotionally responsive classrooms.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the present study underscore the need for the broader adoption of Art Integrated Learning (AIL) within school education. By systematically incorporating artistic activities into the curriculum, schools can equip students with effective tools to manage stress and develop adaptive coping mechanisms. The demonstrated positive impact of AIL on emotional resilience, creativity, and problem-solving skills highlights its potential to simultaneously enhance academic achievement and socio-emotional well-being, in alignment with the holistic vision of education articulated in the National Education Policy (NEP, 2020).

Implementation Strategies for AIL in Schools

- **Curriculum Integration:** Embedding arts-based learning across subjects such as science, mathematics, and languages. For instance, storytelling and dramatisation in history, visual-arts in geometry, and music-based patterns in mathematics.
- **Project-based Learning:** Incorporating theatre-based role-play, collaborative art projects, and music integration to promote experiential and interdisciplinary learning.
- **Collaboration with Artists:** Engaging local artists, theatre practitioners, and cultural organisations to conduct interactive workshops and support authentic arts-based pedagogy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **Professional Development for Educators:** Teacher training programmes should focus on subject-specific arts integration strategies (for example drama in social sciences, visual arts in mathematics) to ensure effective classroom implementation.
- **Resource Allocation:** Schools should allocate adequate resources for art materials, teacher training, and partnerships with cultural institutions to sustain AIL initiatives.

- **Expanding the Scope of Research:** Future studies should adopt longitudinal designs with larger and more diverse samples to examine the long-term impact of AIL across varied socio-economic and cultural contexts.
- **Policy Integration:** Given its demonstrated benefits, AIL should be embedded within curriculum frameworks as a structured pedagogical approach rather than treated as an optional enrichment activity.

CONCLUSION

The present study provides compelling empirical evidence that Art Integrated Learning (AIL) significantly reduces students' stress levels and enhances their coping abilities. The findings indicate that integrating the arts into academic instruction fosters emotionally supportive, cognitively engaging, and socially inclusive learning environments.

AIL emerges as a powerful pedagogical approach that enriches academic learning while simultaneously promoting students' mental well-being. Students exposed to AIL reported lower stress levels and demonstrated more adaptive coping strategies compared to those in traditional learning settings. Qualitative findings further revealed that AIL facilitated emotional expression, creativity, and a sense of community, contributing to both psychological well-being and academic engagement.

Importantly, these outcomes align closely with the vision articulated in India's National Education Policy (NEP 2020) and the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE, 2023), which emphasise experiential, inclusive, and arts-integrated pedagogies as central to holistic development. By empirically validating these

policy directives, the present study highlights the potential for AIL to be institutionalised as a mainstream educational strategy. Collectively, the findings strongly advocate for the systematic integration of Art Integrated Learning to promote holistic, inclusive, and meaningful learning experiences in schools.

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ANNEXURE 1

STRESS PERCEPTION SCALE

Instructions:

Below are statements about how you may feel about school and other daily experiences. Please read each statement carefully and choose how often you feel that way. Circle the number that best represents your response.

Scale:

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

S. No.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	I often feel under pressure to perform well in exams.					
2	I find it hard to balance studies and other activities.					
3	I feel anxious when teachers talk about tests or assignments.					
4	I feel tired or restless due to academic pressure.					
5	I compare myself to my classmates and feel less capable.					
6	I get headaches or feel unwell when stressed about school.					
7	I worry about disappointing my parents with my marks.					
8	I find it difficult to talk to others about my stress.					
9	I feel like I have no control over my studies.					
10	I lose sleep due to school-related stress.					
11	I feel emotionally drained at the end of the school day.					
12	I can't enjoy my hobbies because I worry about school.					
13	I feel scared to ask questions in class.					
14	I feel stressed when I have multiple assignments or homework.					
15	I feel more pressure than I can handle at school.					
16	I often think about failing or making mistakes.					
17	I have mood swings or cry while feeling too stressed.					
18	I feel I don't get enough time to relax.					
19	I worry that I'm not as good as others.					
20	I feel that my stress affects my performance.					

Scoring:

Add the scores of all 20 items. Higher scores indicate higher levels of perceived stress.

ANNEXURE 2

INVENTORY FOR COPING WITH STRESSFUL SITUATIONS

Instructions:

Everyone deals with stress differently. Below are some common ways people respond to stress. Read each statement and circle how often you use each method when you're feeling stressed.

Scale:

1 = Never 2 = Sometimes 3 = Often 4 = Always

Task-oriented Coping (Problem-solving and active management)

S. No.	Statement	1	2	3	4
1	I try to figure out what caused the problem and fix it.				
2	I make a plan and try to follow it.				
3	I focus on what I can do instead of worrying.				
4	I ask teachers or parents for advice.				
5	I organise my time to reduce pressure.				
6	I take steps to avoid making the same mistake again.				

Emotion-oriented Coping (Emotional reaction and internal processing)

S. No.	Statement	1	2	3	4
7	I feel like crying or getting upset when I'm stressed.				
8	I blame myself for the problem.				
9	I get easily angry or frustrated.				
10	I talk to myself or pray for strength.				
11	I feel sad and do nothing about it.				
12	I think about how unfair everything is.				

Avoidance-oriented Coping (Escape or distraction)

S. No.	Statement	1	2	3	4
13	I distract myself by watching TV or using social media.				
14	I try not to think about the problem.				
15	I avoid doing homework or skip studying.				

16	I pretend like everything is fine.				
17	I play games or go out to forget about the stress.				
18	I talk to my friends, but I don't share my problems.				

Scoring:

Sum the scores within each coping style (task-oriented, emotion-oriented, and avoidance-oriented). Higher scores in task-oriented coping category and lower scores in emotion-oriented, and avoidance-oriented coping, indicates greater reliance on that coping style.

ANNEXURE 3

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

Section 1: Parental Consent Form

Dear Parent/Guardian

Your child is invited to participate in a research study titled “Impact of Art Integrated Learning on Stress and Coping Mechanisms among Students.” The study involves a short semi-structured interview, conducted privately in the school premises, lasting approximately 20–25 minutes. The purpose of the interview is to explore students’ experiences and perceptions of Art Integrated Learning and its effects on their stress levels and coping strategies. Participation is entirely voluntary. Students may withdraw at any time or choose not to answer any question. All responses will be kept confidential and used only for academic purposes. Identities will not be disclosed in any publication or report.

Kindly fill the below mentioned consent slip and submit to the respective class teacher.

Consent:

I have read and understood the purpose of this interview. I give permission for my child, to participate in the above-mentioned interview.

Child’s Name: _____

Parent/Guardian Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Section 2: Interview Guide for Students

Introduction by Interviewer:

“Thank you for agreeing to talk to me. I’m here to learn about your experiences with Art Integrated Learning. This is not a test—I’m just interested in your honest thoughts. Feel free to skip any question or stop anytime.”

Part A: Warm-up Questions

1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself—your interests, favourite subjects, or hobbies?
2. How do you usually feel about school and academic work?

Part B: Experience with AIL

1. What kind of Art Integrated Learning activities have you taken part in?
2. Can you describe one AIL activity that stood out to you?
3. How was it different from your regular classes?

Part C: Stress Awareness

1. What do you usually feel when you are stressed about studies?
2. Have AIL activities helped in reducing your stress? In what ways?
3. Can you think of a time when an AIL activity helped you feel better?

Part D: Coping Strategies

1. What do you usually do to feel better when you are stressed?
2. Have you learned new ways to handle stress through AIL? Please explain.
3. Do you feel more capable of handling challenges now?

Part E: Emotional and Cognitive Engagement

1. How do AIL activities make you feel—more focused, calm, expressive?
2. Have you noticed any changes in how you learn or participate?

Part F: Suggestions

1. What did you like best about the AIL activities?
2. Is there anything you would change or improve?

Closing Questions

1. Anything else you'd like to share about AIL?
2. Do you have any questions for me?

Section 3: Interviewer Notes

1. Student Code: _____
2. Date: _____
3. Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

General Observations:

- Student comfort level:
- Body language:

- Level of engagement:
- Notable emotional responses:

Key Points Noted During Interview:

-
-
-

Signature of Interviewer: _____

Date: _____

ANNEXURE 4

BRIEF ABOUT AIL PROGRAMME

Design of Art Integrated Learning (AIL) for Grade 9 – CBSE

Art Integrated Learning for Grade 9 was thoughtfully designed, as a pedagogical approach to make the learning process more experiential, inclusive, and emotionally enriching. Rooted in the principles of constructivist and experiential learning, AIL was aligned with the CBSE’s directives under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and implemented both within specific subjects and across disciplines through cross-curricular integration. The AIL model in Grade 9 was both subject-specific and cross-curricular. It was designed to make learning more joyful and inclusive while building resilience and improving students’ ability to manage academic stress. Through active involvement in art-based tasks, students not only demonstrated academic competence but also developed a stronger sense of identity, emotional balance, and interpersonal connection. The programme aimed not only to improve students’ academic outcomes, but also to foster twenty-first-century skills such as creativity, emotional intelligence, collaboration, and critical thinking. The design process involved collaborative planning by subject teachers, mapping learning outcomes with relevant art forms, and developing integrated lesson plans that aligned with curriculum objectives.

Subject-specific Implementation: AIL was introduced within core academic subjects, with activities tailored to their conceptual content. For instance:

- **English:** In the poem “The Road Not Taken”, students created symbolic paintings and composed their own poems, reflecting on the personal choices and dilemmas. They also dramatised scenarios inspired by the poem, fostering emotional expression, and deeper comprehension of literary themes.
- **Social Science:** While studying “Nazism and the Rise of Hitler”, students engaged in political cartooning, poster-making, and dramatic monologues — portraying victims and propagandists. These activities humanised historical content and encouraged empathy, ethical reasoning, and media literacy.
- **Mathematics:** In the topics like Euclid’s Geometry and Mensuration, students created 3D models using origami and recycled materials. They visually demonstrated properties of shapes, and calculated surface areas and volumes, enhancing spatial understanding, and engagement through hands-on learning.
- **Science:** For the chapter, “Life Processes,” students created animated flipbooks or collage storyboards illustrating different stages of digestion

and respiration in humans, which led to improved memory retention through visual sequencing of biological processes.

- **Hindi:** While reading “Raidas ke Pad”, students performed bhajans, illustrated couplets, and reflected on social themes like caste discrimination. These activities promoted moral awareness, artistic expression, and a connection to cultural and literary heritage.

Cross-curricular Integration

Beyond individual subjects, AIL was implemented through the interdisciplinary projects also. For instance, Project on the theme of “Water Conservation”

- Science: Investigation of water sources and purification methods.
- Mathematics: Recording and analysing daily water usage through data visualisation (e.g., bar graphs).
- Social Science: Analysis of water policies and local conservation initiatives.
- English: Drafting persuasive letters and composing poetry for water awareness campaigns.
- Hindi: Creating slogans and jingles in local languages.
- Art: Poster-making, mural painting, and clay modeling of rainwater harvesting systems.

This project provided a platform for students to connect classroom learning with real-world environmental issues, encouraging activism, creativity, and interdisciplinary thinking.