iJRASET
International Journal For Research in Applied Science and Engineering Technology

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR RESEARCH

IN APPLIED SCIENCE & ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY

Volume: 14 **Issue:** IV **Month of publication:** April 2026

DOI: https://doi.org/10.22214/ijraset.2026.80954

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International Journal for Research in Applied Science & Engineering Technology (IJRASET)
ISSN: 2321-9653; IC Value: 45.98; SJ Impact Factor: 7.538
Volume 14 Issue IV Apr 2026- Available at www.ijraset.com

Yoga as a Means of Holistic Development: Aligning School Education with NEP 2020

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Abstract: ***In the context of increasing stress and lifestyle-related challenges, there is a growing need for a holistic approach to education that addresses the overall development of learners. Yoga, rooted in Indian philosophical traditions, offers an effective means of promoting physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasises holistic development and recognises yoga as an important component of school education. This study adopts a qualitative, conceptual, and literature-based approach to examine the role of yoga in fostering holistic development among students and its alignment with the objectives of NEP 2020. The findings indicate that yoga enhances self-discipline, concentration, emotional balance, and overall well-being, while also contributing to improved academic performance and social behaviour. However, despite its recognised benefits, the implementation of yoga in schools remains limited and often restricted to physical practices. The study highlights the need for structured integration, trained educators, and effective policy implementation to realise the full potential of yoga in education.***
Keywords: Yoga, Holistic Development, NEP 2020, Well-being

I. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary era, rapid urbanisation, technological advancement, and increasingly demanding lifestyles have significantly contributed to rising levels of stress, anxiety, and lifestyle-related disorders among individuals, particularly students. This situation has necessitated a shift from a narrow biomedical model of health towards a more holistic understanding of well-being. Holistic health refers to an integrative approach that emphasises the interconnectedness of the mind, body, and spirit, recognising that optimal health is achieved through balance across these dimensions. The World Health Organisation (WHO, 1948) defined health as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, a definition that continues to remain relevant in addressing present-day health challenges. Contemporary research further supports this perspective, indicating that imbalances in one domain can adversely affect overall well-being and functioning (Pascoe et al., 2021).

Within this holistic framework, yoga has emerged as a significant and evidence-based practice for promoting comprehensive well-being. Rooted in ancient Indian philosophical traditions, yoga integrates physical postures (asanas), breathing techniques (pranayama), meditation, and ethical principles to foster harmony between the body and mind. Recent studies have increasingly validated the effectiveness of yoga in educational and health contexts. For instance, a systematic review by Cramer et al. (2020) found that yoga interventions significantly improve physical health indicators such as flexibility, strength, and cardiovascular functioning. Similarly, research by Telles et al. (2022) highlighted that regular yoga practice enhances physiological regulation and overall physical fitness among individuals, making it particularly relevant in addressing sedentary lifestyles prevalent among students today.

Beyond physical health, yoga has demonstrated substantial benefits for mental and emotional well-being. Khalsa and Butzer (2016) and more recent findings by Felver et al. (2023) indicate that yoga-based interventions in school settings effectively reduce stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms while enhancing emotional regulation and psychological resilience. These findings are further supported by studies such as Hagen and Nayar (2014), which emphasise the role of yoga in promoting mental calmness and emotional balance through mindfulness and meditative practices. In addition, yoga fosters self-awareness and attentional control, which are essential for students' academic engagement and personal development (Dunning et al., 2019).

The interconnectedness of yoga and holistic health can be understood through its multidimensional impact on human development. At the physical level, yoga enhances flexibility, muscular strength, posture, and balance, while also improving cardiovascular health, regulating blood pressure, and supporting metabolic functioning (Cramer et al., 2020; Telles et al., 2022). These benefits are particularly significant in the context of sedentary lifestyles and increasing health concerns among students.

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At the mental and emotional levels, yoga promotes mindfulness, reduces stress, and enhances emotional resilience through practices such as pranayama and meditation. These techniques regulate the body's stress response system, thereby reducing anxiety and depression and fostering a sense of calm and stability (Felver et al., 2023; Pascoe et al., 2021).

At the spiritual level, yoga facilitates self-exploration, introspection, and personal growth. It encourages individuals to develop a deeper understanding of themselves and their place in the larger context of life, fostering a sense of purpose and inner harmony. This dimension of yoga is particularly important in education, as it contributes to the development of values, ethical awareness, and emotional maturity among students.Taken together, these dimensions highlight yoga as a comprehensive and integrative approach to health and education. By promoting balance across physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual domains, yoga supports the development of well-rounded individuals capable of leading healthy, meaningful, and responsible lives. In this context, the present study seeks to explore how yoga can be effectively integrated into the education system to realise the holistic vision articulated in NEP 2020.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Early scholarly work on yoga emphasised its philosophical and ethical foundations as a means of holistic development. Desikachar (1995) highlighted that yoga is deeply rooted in principles such as self-awareness, non-violence, and respect, which contribute significantly to moral and personal growth. Similarly, Saraswati (2002) viewed yoga as a comprehensive practice addressing physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions simultaneously, thereby supporting balanced human development. Iyengar (2005) further reinforced this perspective by explaining that yoga integrates physical practices with inner discipline, promoting values such as honesty, compassion, and self-control. Brown and Gerbarg (2005) extended the understanding of yoga into the domain of mental health, demonstrating that yogic breathing techniques are effective in reducing stress and anxiety through the regulation of the nervous system.

Subsequent studies began to explore the role of yoga in educational and developmental contexts. Field (2011) reported that yoga contributes to improved physical fitness and encourages healthy lifestyle habits, including proper sleep and regular physical activity. At the same time, Noggle et al. (2012) found that yoga enhances emotional resilience and psychosocial well-being among students, enabling them to cope better with stress and challenges. Khalsa et al. (2012) provided further evidence by highlighting the positive effects of yoga on cognitive functions such as attention, memory, and information processing. Telles et al. (2013) emphasised the physical benefits of yoga, noting improvements in flexibility, strength, and respiratory efficiency. Hagen and Nayar (2014) examined yoga's impact on mental health and concluded that it promotes psychological stability and emotional balance through practices such as meditation and breathing exercises. Zenner et al. (2014) added to this body of knowledge by demonstrating that mindfulness-based practices, including yoga, significantly improve attention, self-awareness, and emotional regulation.

More recent research has increasingly focused on the application of yoga in educational settings and its broader developmental outcomes. Khalsa (2015) found that yoga-based interventions significantly reduce stress and improve emotional well-being among students. Jain et al. (2015) supported these findings, showing that yoga enhances psychological well-being and reduces emotional distress. Sharma (2015) emphasised the role of yoga in developing self-discipline, consistency, and time management skills among learners. Butzer et al. (2016) investigated classroom-based yoga programs and reported improvements in attention, self-control, and behaviour, along with reductions in aggression among students. Similarly, Gordon et al. (2017) observed that yoga enhances empathy and prosocial behaviour, contributing to improved peer relationships and a more supportive learning environment.

Studies focusing on academic and emotional outcomes have also demonstrated significant benefits of yoga. Kauts and Sharma (2009) found that yoga reduces examination stress and enhances concentration, while Rani and Rao (2019) reported improvements in memory, attention span, and overall academic performance among students practising yoga. Singh and Devi (2018) highlighted that yoga enhances emotional intelligence by improving self-awareness, empathy, and emotional regulation, leading to better interpersonal relationships and communication skills. Gulati and Sharma (2017) further noted that the inclusion of yoga in school curricula leads to improvements in self-discipline, concentration, and classroom behaviour, although its implementation often remains limited.

In addition to these empirical findings, broader perspectives have emphasised the cultural and policy relevance of yoga. UNESCO (2015) recognised yoga as an intangible cultural heritage that promotes holistic well-being and connects individuals with their cultural roots. The Government of India (2020), through the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, strongly advocates the integration of yoga into school education to support holistic development, mental well-being, and value-based learning. However, despite strong policy support and extensive evidence of its benefits, the practical implementation of yoga in educational institutions remains inconsistent, often due to a lack of structured curricula, trained instructors, and institutional support.

Overall, the reviewed literature consistently demonstrates that yoga plays a significant role in promoting physical health, mental well-being, emotional stability, cognitive development, and social behaviour among students. It emerges as a comprehensive educational tool that aligns closely with the objectives of holistic development. However, the gap between policy recommendations and practical implementation highlights the need for more structured and systematic integration of yoga within the education system.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1) To examine the role of yoga in promoting holistic development among students.
2) To analyse the impact of yoga on students' well-being, including discipline, mindfulness, academic performance, and social behaviour.
3) To explore the alignment of yoga with NEP 2020 and its effective integration into school education.

IV. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The present study adopts a qualitative, conceptual, and literature review-based research design to examine the role of yoga in promoting holistic development within the framework of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The research is based entirely on secondary data collected from a wide range of credible academic sources. These include peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, edited volumes, government reports, and official policy documents, particularly the National Education Policy (Government of India, 2020). In addition, relevant literature was accessed through established academic databases such as Google Scholar, ERIC, and ResearchGate to ensure the inclusion of authentic and up-to-date studies. Relevant findings from different studies were compared, synthesised, and critically interpreted to identify patterns, similarities, and gaps in the existing body of knowledge.Through this integrative and analytical approach, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of yoga as a significant educational tool for fostering holistic development among students.

V. RESEARCH GAP

Despite a substantial body of literature highlighting the multidimensional benefits of yoga in enhancing physical health, mental well-being, emotional regulation, and academic performance, there remains a significant gap between theoretical understanding and practical implementation within the educational system. Existing studies predominantly focus on the outcomes of yoga interventions, yet comparatively limited attention has been given to the systematic integration of yoga into school curricula in alignment with the framework of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.Another notable gap lies in the limited exploration of contextual challenges, including inadequate teacher training, lack of structured curriculum design, time constraints, and institutional barriers that hinder the effective implementation of yoga in schools. Furthermore, although NEP 2020 strongly advocates the inclusion of yoga as a tool for holistic education, empirical and conceptual studies examining its alignment with policy goals and its real-world applicability remain scarce. There is also a need for more recent and context-specific studies that address the evolving educational landscape and the diverse needs of learners. In light of these gaps, the present study seeks to contribute by providing a comprehensive conceptual analysis of yoga as an educational tool and by exploring practical strategies for its effective integration into school education within the framework of NEP 2020.

VI. DISCUSSION ON THE STUDY

The present study aimed to examine the role of yoga in promoting holistic development within the framework of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The findings derived from the review of literature indicate that yoga serves as a comprehensive approach to education by addressing the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of learners.

A consistent pattern emerging from the reviewed studies is the significant contribution of yoga to physical health. Research by Telles et al. (2013) and Field (2011) demonstrates that yoga enhances flexibility, strength, and overall physical fitness, while also improving physiological functioning. These findings are particularly relevant in the context of sedentary lifestyles and increasing health concerns among students. Improved physical well-being not only supports students' health but also contributes to better engagement in academic activities.

In addition to physical benefits, the literature strongly supports the role of yoga in enhancing mental health and emotional well-being. Studies by Khalsa (2015) and Hagen and Nayar (2014) highlight that yoga-based practices effectively reduce stress, anxiety, and psychological distress. The incorporation of breathing techniques and meditation fosters mindfulness and emotional balance, enabling students to manage their emotions more effectively.

These findings are further reinforced by Noggle et al. (2012) and Singh and Devi (2018), who reported improvements in emotional resilience and emotional intelligence among students practising yoga. Such outcomes are essential for developing adaptive coping strategies and maintaining psychological stability.

Another important dimension highlighted in the literature is the development of self-discipline and behavioural regulation through yoga. Saraswati (2002) and Sharma (2015) emphasised that yoga instils qualities such as patience, consistency, and self-control. Similarly, Butzer et al. (2016) observed improvements in classroom behaviour, including increased attention, reduced aggression, and enhanced self-regulation. These behavioural changes contribute to a more conducive learning environment and positively influence students' academic and social interactions.

The relationship between yoga and academic performance is also evident in the reviewed studies. Kauts and Sharma (2009) and Rani and Rao (2019) found that yoga enhances concentration, memory, and attention span, leading to improved academic outcomes. Mindfulness-based practices, as highlighted by Zenner et al. (2014), further support students' ability to remain focused and engaged in learning tasks. These cognitive and attentional benefits align closely with the educational goals of enhancing learning efficiency and academic achievement.

The literature also underscores the role of yoga in promoting value-based education and social development. Iyengar (2005) and Desikachar (1995) emphasised that yoga is rooted in ethical principles that foster values such as honesty, compassion, and self-awareness. Gordon et al. (2017) further demonstrated that yoga enhances empathy and prosocial behaviour, contributing to improved peer relationships and a cooperative classroom environment. These findings highlight yoga's potential in nurturing socially responsible and emotionally balanced individuals.

Despite the wide-ranging benefits identified in the literature, the discussion also reveals a significant gap between policy recommendations and actual practice. Although NEP 2020 advocates the integration of yoga into school education as a means of achieving holistic development, its implementation remains inconsistent and often limited to physical exercises. Studies such as Gulati and Sharma (2017) indicate that yoga is frequently treated as an optional activity rather than an integral component of the curriculum. Challenges such as lack of trained instructors, insufficient curriculum design, and time constraints continue to hinder its effective adoption.

Furthermore, the reviewed literature suggests that most studies focus on specific outcomes of yoga rather than adopting a fully integrated approach that reflects its holistic nature. There is a need for more comprehensive frameworks that connect yoga practices with educational objectives such as value-based learning, emotional intelligence, and overall well-being.

Overall, the discussion highlights that yoga is not merely a physical activity but a multidimensional educational tool that supports holistic development. Its integration into the education system has the potential to enhance students' physical health, mental well-being, emotional stability, academic performance, and social behaviour. However, to fully realise the vision of NEP 2020, a more structured, systematic, and practical approach to implementing yoga in schools is essential.

VII. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Theme	Findings
Physical Development	Yoga improves flexibility, strength, posture, and overall physical fitness. It also supports cardiovascular health and reduces lifestyle-related health issues.
Mental Health and Well-being	Yoga reduces stress, anxiety, and psychological distress while promoting mental calmness and clarity.
Emotional Regulation	Yoga enhances emotional intelligence, mood stability, and resilience.
Self-Discipline and Behaviour	Yoga fosters discipline, patience, self-control, and structured routines. It reduces aggression and improves behaviour.
Academic Performance	Yoga enhances concentration, memory, attention span, and learning ability. It reduces examination stress.
Mindfulness and Attention	Yoga promotes mindfulness, self-awareness, and attentional control.
Value-Based Education	Yoga develops ethical values such as honesty, compassion, and self-awareness.
Social Behaviour	Yoga enhances empathy, cooperation, and prosocial behaviour

	among students.
Stress Reduction	Yoga effectively regulates the nervous system and reduces stress and emotional distress.
Cognitive Development	Yoga improves attention, memory, and decision-making abilities.
Resilience Development	Yoga strengthens emotional resilience and coping skills.
School Environment	Yoga fosters a calm, supportive, and positive classroom atmosphere.
Lifestyle Development	Yoga encourages healthy habits such as proper sleep, balanced diet, and regular physical activity.
Curriculum Integration	Yoga inclusion in schools improves discipline, focus, and behaviour but remains inconsistently implemented.
Policy Alignment (NEP 2020)	Yoga aligns with NEP 2020 goals of holistic development and value-based education.
Cultural Relevance	Yoga strengthens connection with cultural heritage and identity.

VIII. EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

1) Yoga should be integrated into daily classroom practices through simple techniques such as breathing exercises, mindfulness activities, and short relaxation sessions to improve students' concentration, emotional stability, and engagement.
2) Teachers need proper training and capacity building to effectively implement yoga, including understanding its physical, mental, and philosophical dimensions.
3) Yoga should be included as a regular and structured component of the school timetable rather than being treated as an optional or extracurricular activity.
4) Regular yoga practice can help create a calm, positive, and supportive classroom environment, improving behaviour and teacher-student relationships.
5) Curriculum planners should design age-appropriate yoga modules that include physical postures, breathing techniques, meditation, and value-based components.
6) Educational practices should focus on the holistic development of students by addressing physical health, mental well-being, emotional balance, and moral values through yoga.
7) Policymakers should ensure effective implementation by providing clear guidelines, adequate resources, and monitoring systems aligned with NEP 2020.
8) Teacher education programs should incorporate yoga training in both pre-service and in-service courses to prepare educators for its practical application.
9) Schools should promote yoga as a means of developing healthy lifestyle habits, including stress management, emotional resilience, and overall well-being.
10) A coordinated effort among teachers, schools, curriculum developers, and policymakers is essential to bridge the gap between policy recommendations and actual practice.

IX. CONCLUSION

The present study establishes that yoga is a powerful and comprehensive approach to achieving holistic development in education. By addressing the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of learners, yoga extends beyond the limitations of conventional academic practices and contributes to the formation of well-balanced and resilient individuals. The reviewed literature consistently highlights that yoga enhances physical health, improves concentration and academic performance, strengthens emotional regulation, and fosters values such as self-discipline, empathy, and mindfulness.The findings of the study strongly align with the vision of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which advocates an education system focused on holistic development and well-being. Yoga, in this context, emerges not merely as a physical activity but as an essential pedagogical tool that supports value-based education, life skills, and overall human development. Its integration into school education has the potential to create a more inclusive, balanced, and learner-centred educational environment.

In conclusion, the integration of yoga into school education holds significant potential to transform the learning experience by promoting holistic development, enhancing well-being, and nurturing socially responsible individuals.

Aligning educational practices with the principles of yoga can play a crucial role in realising the broader goals of NEP 2020 and in shaping a healthier, more mindful, and balanced society.

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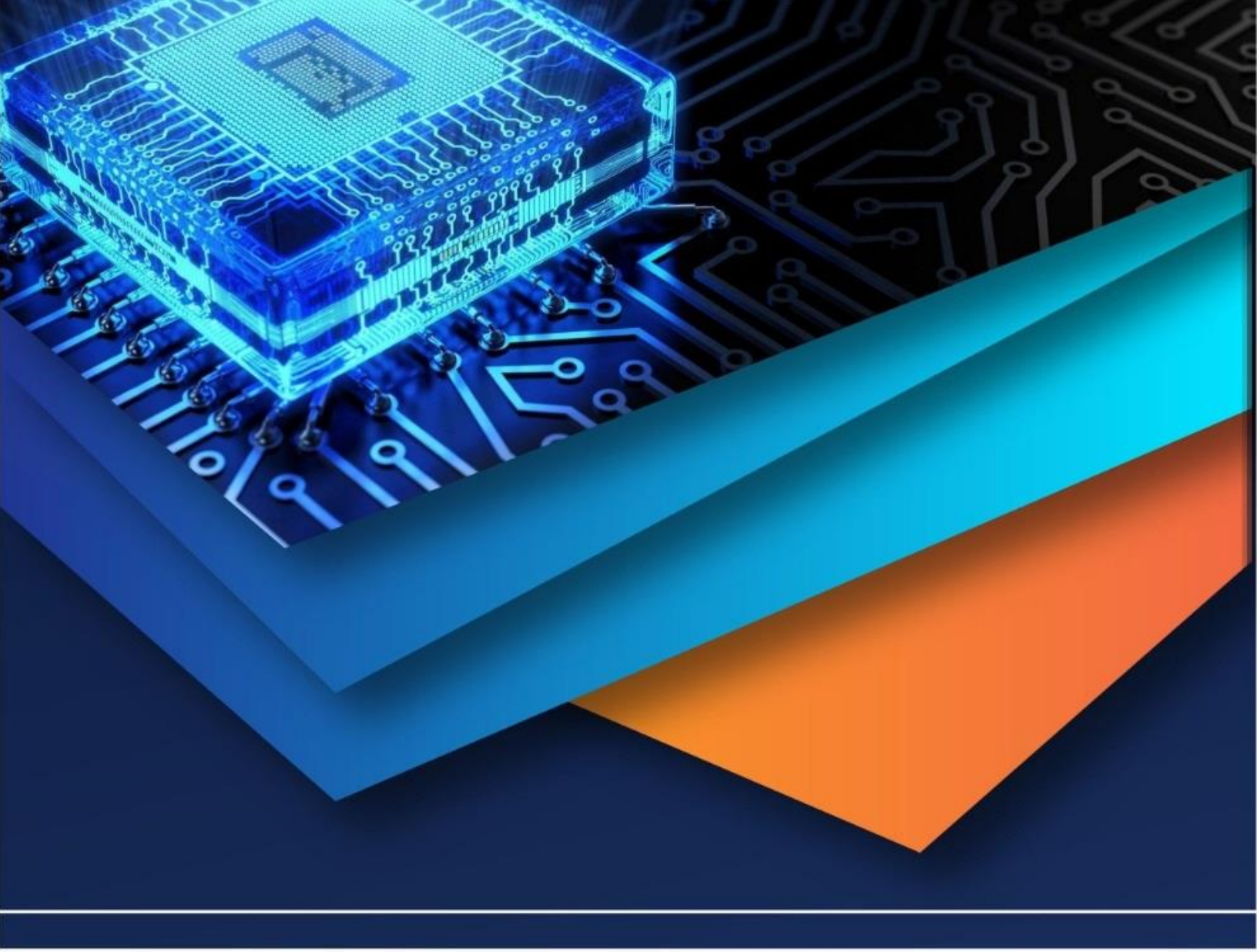

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