International Research Journal of Engineering and Technology (IRJET) e-ISSN: 2395-0056
Volume: 13 Issue: 03 | Mar 2026 www.irjet.net p-ISSN: 2395-0072
National Conference on "PRANAYAMA BHARAT-2026"
Organized by: Scientific Pranayama Foundation Trust® Mysuru, in collaboration with ATME College of Engineering, Mysuru.

Role of Scientific Pranayama in Modulating Thyroid Function: A Complementary Therapeutic Study

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Abstract – *Thyroid dysfunctions are widespread endocrine conditions requiring long-term management and behavioral modification. Complementary non-pharmacological approaches aimed at improving autonomic and metabolic regulation are receiving increasing research attention. The role of Scientific Pranayama in modulating thyroid function was investigated in this study, specifically focusing on changes in serum thyroid-stimulating hormone (TSH) via a pre–post experimental framework. Individuals with a confirmed diagnosis of hypothyroidism completed a 21-day systematic breathing protocol as an adjunct to their conventional pharmaceutical treatment, with pre- and post-intervention evaluations of Serum TSH levels. Mean TSH significantly decreased from 9.696 ± 5.908 mIU/L to 3.328 ± 1.731 mIU/L (paired t-test, p = 0.0044), representing a roughly 66% reduction. These findings indicate that structured pranayama may contribute to thyroid function modulation by promoting autonomic and neuroendocrine stability. These findings do not prove clinical causality, but they indicate that Scientific Pranayama may be used as a safe, non-invasive complementary therapy for managing thyroid-related conditions.*

***Key Words*: Scientific Pranayama, Thyroid dysfunctions, TSH, Complementary Therapy, Endocrine Regulation.**

1. INTRODUCTION

Pranayama is an integral component of Ashtanga yoga that involves voluntary regulation of breathing patterns to enhance physiological function and overall health. In modern terms, it is defined as the systematic control of respiration to optimize body functions and mental clarity. Traditional texts describe Pranayama as a practice to control and balance vital life energy (Prana). Pranayama has been recognized by modern research as an effective method for improving oxygen uptake, pulmonary efficiency, and heart rate variability. By balancing the autonomic nervous system, reduction in the body's stress response is facilitated by these techniques. Studies suggest that regulated breathing can serve as a supportive therapy for metabolic conditions like obesity and diabetes, while also reducing the impact of stress-related illnesses. Specific methods—such as Bhastrika, Kapalabhati, and Ujjayi Anuloma-Viloma and Bhramar have proven consistent benefits in improving both physiological stability and psychological well-being across various experimental groups.

The Science of Pranayama originates from ancient Vedic and Upanishadic traditions, providing the foundation for modern respiratory techniques. It is often described as the science of breath regulation. In a modern context, Scientific Pranayama refers to a structured, focused, systematic method of controlled breathing designed to influence physiological functions. Unlike general yoga breathing practices, this approach emphasizes deliberate regulation of airflow at the throat region, particularly around the glottis, through conscious muscular control. This controlled breathing technique aims to produce measurable biophysical and autonomic effects in the body. Scientific pranayama refers to the structured application of physiological and physical principles to the voluntary regulation of breathing.

Thyroid disorders constitute a significant global public health concern, affecting metabolic regulation, growth, and overall physiological homeostasis. Conditions such as hypothyroidism and hyperthyroidism are commonly managed through long-term pharmacological therapy; however, these approaches may not always address associated functional disturbances related to stress, autonomic imbalance, chronic fatigue, cardiovascular complications, metabolic deceleration and reduced quality of life. In recent years, increasing attention has been directed toward complementary non-pharmacological interventions that support conventional treatment strategies. Consequently, there is an increasing demand for non-invasive, cost-effective complementary therapies that can optimize glandular function. The Scientific Pranayama utilizes specific pressure gradients, glottal constriction, and rhythmic oscillations to induce mechanical stimulation of the thyroid gland and modulate the autonomic nervous system. Therefore, this study investigates the therapeutic role of Pranayama (structured breathing) protocols as a complementary intervention, in the management of thyroid disorders.

1.1 The Psychophysiological Foundations of Scientific Pranayama

Scientific pranayama and traditional pranayama differ mainly in their method of explanation, although the breathing techniques may appear similar. Traditional pranayama is based on classical yogic literature and emphasizes the regulation of prana, purification of energy channels (nadis), and improvement of mental and spiritual well-being under the guidance of a teacher. In contrast, scientific pranayama interprets breathing practices using principles of respiratory physiology and physical laws such as Boyle's law, Henry's law, and Pascal's law, explaining pressure–volume changes and oxygen diffusion. It follows fixed breathing ratios, specific time durations, and evaluates measurable outcomes including oxygen saturation and heart rate variability.

Psychological state influences the effectiveness of pranayama, as breathing patterns are closely associated with emotional balance. A calm mind supports slow, controlled breathing, whereas stress can disrupt respiratory rhythm. Incorporating mindfulness enhances breath regulation and may support both mental and physiological outcomes.

Thus, traditional pranayama is mainly based on philosophical and spiritual concepts, while scientific pranayama explains breathing practices using measurable physiological principles, making it more suitable for therapeutic use.

1.2 Importance of Pranayama for Thyroid Glands

The thyroid gland plays a vital role in regulating metabolism, growth, and brain function under the control of thyroid-stimulating hormones (TSH). Impaired thyroid function, particularly hypothyroidism, reduces metabolism and causes physical and psychological disturbances. Although pharmacological therapy is the standard treatment, persistent symptoms have increased interest in complementary approaches. Pranayama, a core yogic practice involving controlled breathing, influences autonomic balance, stress responses, and hypothalamic–pituitary axis activity, suggesting a potential role in thyroid regulation. Alterations in thyroid hormone parameters, particularly among individuals with hypothyroidism, have been reported in several studies evaluating pranayama-based interventions.

Pranayama involves slow and controlled breathing that influences internal body functions. Certain techniques create gentle sound and vibration in the throat region through rhythmic airflow. In physical terms, vibration represents mechanical energy produced by oscillatory movement. These subtle mechanical oscillations may enhance regional circulation and improve oxygen delivery to the throat region. Neural responses and metabolic and endocrine regulation may be facilitated by these effects, including support for thyroid function.

2. LITERATURE SURVEY

Current research indicates that yogic practices support health by balancing the nervous and endocrine systems, serving as a helpful addition to standard medical care. While general yoga is known to benefit thyroid health, most studies do not separate the effects of breathing techniques from physical exercises. Experimental data shows that regulated breathing can stabilize hormone levels and reduce symptoms in hypothyroid patients. Hence, more focused research is needed to understand the role of Scientific Pranayama in thyroid function.

3. THE ROLE OF PRANAYAMA FOR MANAGING THYROID HORMONE HEALTH

Pranayama may contribute to improved thyroid regulation by enhancing respiratory efficiency and supporting hormonal balance. The thyroid, a butterfly-shaped gland in the cervical region, plays a key role in controlling metabolic activity and energy homeostasis. Controlled breathing techniques are proposed to influence physiological functions through improved oxygenation and autonomic regulation. Deep abdominal (diaphragmatic) breathing, a commonly practiced pranayama method, involves slow nasal inhalation with diaphragmatic expansion followed by complete exhalation. This process increases lung ventilation and optimizes oxygen delivery to successfully synthesize thyroid hormones from iodine. Adequate oxygen availability is provided through Scientific Pranayama practice, supports normal metabolic processes and may assist in maintaining thyroid-related physiological stability.

3.1 Impact of Stress on Thyroid Activity

Chronic stress may adversely affect thyroid regulation. These stress responses increase cortisol secretion, which can disturb endocrine regulation and potentially affect thyroid-related physiological processes. Such imbalance may further contribute to metabolic irregularities. Pranayama practice is associated with the activation of relaxation responses and enhanced autonomic

stability. By promoting parasympathetic activation and reducing stress levels, structured breathing techniques may help minimize stress-induced hormonal disturbances and support overall thyroid function.

3.2 Effect of Pranayama on Thyroid Health

Thyroid health may be enhanced through pranayama via mechanical and autonomic mechanisms. It serves as a supportive, complementary therapy for thyroid management by stimulating the gland, improving blood circulation, and regulating the body's stress response. Support for thyroid endocrine regulation has been reported in scientific reviews. It may also improve quality of life, but it does not cure the condition.

Focused awareness on breathing techniques and meditation can significantly reduce stress-related autonomic activity levels. It promotes parasympathetic activation, and relaxation by reducing stress-related arousal, which may support balanced cortisol regulation, glucose levels and supporting thyroid function. Consistent, guided training supports thyroid health by enhancing metabolic function, improving blood circulation. It may improve emotional well-being and support energy levels, thereby helping to reduce fatigue commonly observed in thyroid disorders.

3.3 Benefit of Ujjayi Pranayama on Thyroid Health

Ujjayi Pranayama or the Victorius breath soothes the mind and induces a meditative state. Ujjayi symbolizes mastery over breath and prana. It consists of slow, deep inhalation through both nostrils while maintaining a partially constricted glottis, producing a soft, whispering sound during inspiration. This is followed by a brief breath retention and then a controlled exhalation. Individuals with cardiovascular disorders or hypertension are generally advised to avoid the breath-holding phase (kumbhaka). The partial glottal constriction increases airway resistance, prolongs respiratory cycles, and promotes diaphragmatic engagement. This practice should be learnt from a qualified Pranayama Practioner.

The mild thermal effect generated through controlled glottic narrowing and regulated airflow may contribute to help reduce inflammatory responses and improved tissue comfort and stability in the throat region, potentially supporting thyroid-related function. Regulated breathing patterns are known to influence emotional balance by affecting autonomic nervous system activity, promoting parasympathetic predominance and reducing stress-related hormonal responses. Through controlled intrathoracic pressure changes and rhythmic respiration, Ujjayi breathing may indirectly interact with neuroendocrine pathways, including the hypothalamic–pituitary–thyroid axis. Additionally, paced respiration can enhance ventilatory efficiency and metabolic regulation, which may help reduce symptoms such as fatigue.

3.3.1 Classical Mention of Ujjayi Pranayama in Hatha Yoga Pradipika (2:51)

"Contracting the throat, draw the breath in slowly through both nostrils, so that the breath, making a soft sound, moves from the throat to the heart."

While classical texts do not explicitly reference the thyroid gland—as endocrine science evolved later —contemporary physiological models link the practice of *Ujjayi* to glandular health. This technique is characterized by slow, rhythmic respiration paired with a deliberate, partial constriction of the glottis. This creates slight airway resistance and encourages diaphragmatic engagement. Practicing at a rate of about 5–6 breaths per minute may enhance parasympathetic activation, reduce stress-related responses, and promote autonomic stability. Since stress affects the hypothalamic–pituitary–thyroid (HPT) axis, Ujjayi may indirectly support thyroid regulation by lowering cortisol and stabilizing neuroendocrine function.

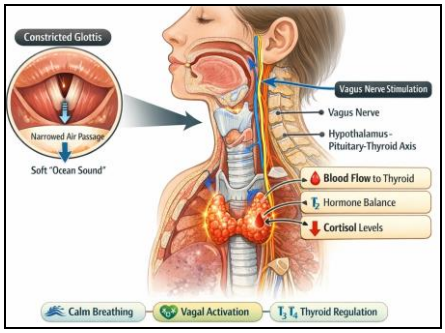

Fig -1: Ujjayi Pranayama & Thyroid Stimulation

4. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study was conducted on 20 volunteers between 30-65yrs of age. Inclusion criteria consisting of 30-65yrs years of aged women, diagnosed hypothyroidism. Pregnant or breast-feeding, addicted to alcohol or drugs, those who are already practicing pranayama was the criteria to exclude the patients. All eligible subjects were selected after the study procedure was thoroughly explained and informed consent was obtained.

Pranayama group (PG) (n=10) patients diagnosed with hypothyroidism were provided with 21 days of scientific pranayama training in addition to standard medical treatment. The Control group (CG) (n=10) participants were also hypothyroid patients on standard medical treatment only. A small observational control subgroup (n = 3) was assessed at baseline; however, follow-up data were not available.

4.1 Protocol of Scientific Pranayama in the Present Study

Instructions were provided to the Pranayama group, and the prescribed practices were taught along with ongoing medication and suggested the best time for doing Pranayama is early in the morning or evening time.

The training involved two sets of practices:

1. **Morning/Evening Session (Empty Stomach):** Included *Bhastrika*, *Ujjayi*, *Anuloma-Viloma*, *Bhramari*, *Udgeetha*, and *Pranava-Dhyana*.
2. **Afternoon Session:** A shorter session focused on *Ujjayi*, *Anuloma-Viloma*, and *Pranava-Dhyana*.

The prescribed protocol was followed by the participant three days a week of direct guidance and practicing independently on the remaining days. At the end of 21 days, outcome measures were reassessed, and the collected data were subjected to statistical analysis.

5. RESULTS, DISCUSSION

Serum TSH levels demonstrated a statistically significant reduction following the intervention.

Parameter	Pre Pranayama practice (Mean ± SD)	Post Pranayama practice (Mean ± SD)	p-value
TSH (mIU/L)	9.696 ± 5.908	3.328 ± 1.731	0.0044*

The percentage reduction in TSH was calculated as 65.68%. Additionally, post-intervention variability was reduced, indicating improved stabilization of thyroid function.

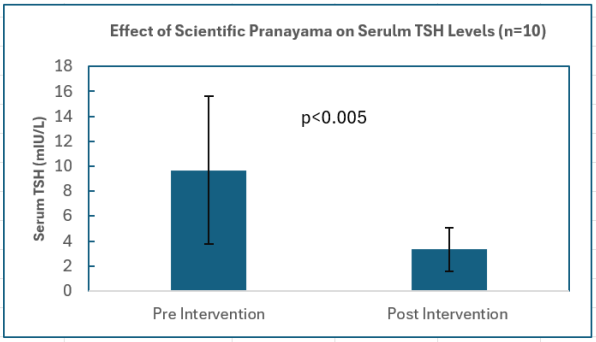

Fig 2: Comparison of mean serum TSH levels before and after 21 days of Scientific Pranayama intervention (n = 10). Values are expressed as Mean ± SD. A statistically significant reduction was observed in post-intervention ($p < 0.05$).

Furthermore, the localized mechanical stimulation produced by techniques such as Ujjayi is hypothesized to enhance glandular vascularity, thereby optimizing hormone secretion. Based on the available evidence, Scientific Pranayama may be used as a supportive therapy to improve low metabolic activity and balance the autonomic nervous system. However, most studies have combined breathing practices with physical postures, making it difficult to understand the separate endocrine effects of breathing alone. Therefore, more focused research is needed to study the independent effects of Scientific Pranayama. The well-designed randomized controlled trials are required to specifically evaluate the hormonal influence of regulated breathing alone. Overall, Pranayama has been identified in current literature as a non-invasive therapeutic tool with potential benefits for both biochemical parameters and the broader clinical manifestations of thyroid dysfunction.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The current investigation establishes that Scientific Pranayama was associated with significant modulation of thyroid function. This was evidenced by a statistically significant decline in serum TSH concentrations among individuals with hypothyroidism. These results suggest that structured and focused breathing may be used as a supportive adjunct to conventional therapy. Given the established relationship between respiratory patterns and emotional regulation, controlled breathing may assist in stress reduction and autonomic stabilization. Techniques incorporating mild glottal constriction may generate localized thermal and vibratory sensations in the Cervical region, which could potentially influence thyroid regulation. Improved thyroid balance may also be associated with secondary benefits such as reduced hair loss and decreased risk of osteoporosis; however, these outcomes require further targeted investigation. Larger randomized controlled trials are necessary to validate and generalize these early observations.

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