

Reducing Psychological Stress through Rajyoga Meditation: Evidence from a Quasi-Experimental Study in Imphal, Manipur

Asem Memita Devi ^{*1} Dr. Nagesh.N.V. ^{*2}

Research Scholar^{*1} Research Supervisor ^{*2}

^{*1} ^{*2} Manipur International University (MIU), Manipur and Centre for Academic Research (CARE),
Education Wing, RERF, Mount Abu, Rajasthan

Corresponding Author^{*1}

Address: Brahma Kumaris, Sukh Shanthi Bhawan, Kwakeithel Moirang Pural Leikai,

Imphal West Manipur-795001

Email: memitaasem83@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Stress has been palpably on the rise among college students. Its impact is reflected not only in academic performance but also in cognitive and emotional mechanisms. This study examines Rajyoga meditation as a possible intervention, though the way it works may not be entirely straightforward. A quasi-experimental pre-post control group design was used (N = 100), with an 8-week programme for the experimental group, while the control group received no intervention. Stress was measured using a standardized scale and analyzed through t-tests, gain scores, and effect size.

The results indicate a significant reduction in stress in the experimental group ($p < .001$), with a large mean decrease (-21.24) and a very high effect size ($d \approx -3.55$). The control group showed some statistical change, but the magnitude remained minimal. This suggests that while change can occur generally, the intervention seems to have contributed more meaningfully, though not all aspects are fully clear. The experimental group demonstrated significant reductions across all stress dimensions ($p < .001$), Mean difference = -21.24 ; $d \approx -3.55$ }, indicating a strong intervention effect.

It seems that Rajyoga may operate through internal processes such as attention and thought awareness, leading to shifts in emotional response. These mechanisms are not directly measured but appear implied. Overall, the findings suggest that Rajyoga meditation may be a useful and accessible approach for stress regulation, though its broader application and underlying processes remain only partially understood.

KEYWORDS: Rajyoga Meditation; Psychological Stress; Student Stress; Psychological Regulation; Quasi-Experimental Design

1. INTRODUCTION

Current higher education systems face challenges with college students who experience stress because of their academic responsibilities, competitive learning environments and changing cultural standards. The effects of this condition extend beyond academic results to impact emotional health and mental abilities and social behaviour. Although short-term stress can enhance performance, prolonged and unmanaged stress impairs cognitive functioning, decision-making, and emotional regulation.

In India, rising educational competition creates higher student stress, but most research studies focus on urban areas, with few studies investigating the unique educational pressures that students face in Manipur. The academic demands of Imphal City combine with its unique cultural elements to create a need for researchers to study the area through specific research methods instead of using general research results.

Study has examined various stress management methods, which include counselling and mindfulness-based treatments, but researchers have yet to study indigenous cognitive-spiritual meditation practices. The Brahma Kumaris teach Rajyoga meditation through a method that trains people to recognise their thoughts through self-control practices which lead to positive mind development instead of using breath control or body awareness as their main focus.

Research on the effectiveness of Rajyoga meditation has grown, yet studies on its use in different regional areas stay scarce. This study examines how effective Rajyoga meditation proves in decreasing psychological stress among college students in Imphal City, Manipur, through its experimental design, which benefits both academic research and higher education implementation.

2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Theoretical Perspectives on Stress

The concept of stress has been examined through multiple theoretical perspectives. Selye's physiological model defines stress as a biological response which external demands bring about through his General Adaptation Syndrome model that includes three stages: alarm, resistance, and exhaustion. The cognitive appraisal model developed by Lazarus and Folkman shows stress as a process which develops when people face demands that exceed their available resources. People regulate their stress levels through their perception abilities and cognitive skills and their ability to cope with stress. The two frameworks show that people who want to manage their stress need to treat both their physical needs and their emotional and mental needs. Most existing studies focus on mindfulness-based interventions, while fewer examine cognitive-spiritual approaches such as Rajyoga meditation.

2.2 Meditation and Stress Reduction

Researchers have investigated meditation as a non-drug method for treating stress because studies show that it decreases stress and anxiety and emotional reactivity while boosting attention and psychological resilience. The impacts of this treatment emerge through its ability to control body systems that include the autonomic nervous system and the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, which serve as major components of stress response mechanisms.

Mindfulness-based meditation methods received strong scientific backing from research studies which showed their capacity to improve mental health through present-moment awareness and non-judgemental observation. Research on alternative meditation systems which originate from cognitive-spiritual traditions remains limited despite the existence of extensive literature on the topic.

2.3 Rajyoga Meditation and Psychological Regulation

The Brahma Kumaris teach Rajyoga meditation, which provides practitioners with a unique method to manage their thoughts while they practise self-reflection and develop their ability to perceive soul consciousness. The technique uses open-eye meditation, which allows practitioners to maintain awareness during their normal daily activities, unlike methods that depend on breathing or body movement.

Research shows that Rajyoga improves emotional stability through its ability to decrease anxiety and enhance self-control, which results from its cognitive restructuring method and positive thinking training, while the practice additionally helps control autonomic functions and stress-related biological indicators. The empirical research on Rajyoga shows limited development because most studies focus on controlled experimental environments, even though the practice demonstrates potential to produce greater cognitive control results than mindfulness-based programmes.

2.4 Research Gap

The literature review conducted at this time has identified several main research deficiencies. The research about student stress has not yet studied two specific places, which include Imphal City and Manipur, because socio-cultural elements of these locations determine both stress levels and treatment results.

Research studies about meditation exist in great numbers, but their main focus remains on mindfulness, whereas research about Rajyoga and other cognitive-spiritual methods remains limited. The field requires more quasi-experimental research that uses standardised measures and advanced statistical methods to evaluate Rajyoga because existing studies do not provide a sufficient basis for establishing causal relationships. There is limited quasi-experimental research examining Rajyoga meditation in region-specific student populations using standardised measures.

The present study explores three research gaps which demonstrate how Rajyoga meditation helps college students in Imphal City to decrease their psychological stress. The study results benefit both local research efforts and the global knowledge base about meditation-based stress reduction methods.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the present study are framed to systematically examine the role of Rajyoga meditation in regulating psychological stress among college students. The study shows three research objectives which describe the development of Rajyoga meditation as an effective tool to manage psychological stress among college students.

3.1 General Objective

To examine the effectiveness of Rajyoga meditation in reducing psychological stress among college students in Imphal City, Manipur.

3.2 Specific Objectives

1. To assess baseline stress levels among students in the experimental and control groups.
2. To design and implement a structured Rajyoga meditation intervention programme.
3. To examine pre–post changes in stress levels within the experimental group.
4. To compare post-test stress levels between the experimental and control groups.
5. To evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention using gain scores and effect size measures.

4. HYPOTHESES

The researchers designed their present study hypotheses to test how Rajyoga meditation impacts psychological stress management among college students. The research includes both null and alternative hypotheses which researchers will use to conduct their statistical analysis.

4.1 Null Hypotheses (H_0)

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in baseline stress levels between the experimental and control groups.

H₀₂: There is no statistically significant difference in stress levels between pre-test and post-test within the experimental group.

H₀₃: There is no statistically significant difference in post-test stress levels between the experimental and control groups.

H₀₄: Rajyoga meditation does not have a significant effect on reducing stress levels among college students.

4.2 Alternative Hypotheses (H_1 – H_4)

H₁: Rajyoga meditation significantly reduces stress levels among college students.

H₂: There is a statistically significant reduction in stress levels from pre-test to post-test within the experimental group following the Rajyoga meditation intervention.

H₃: There is a statistically significant difference in post-test stress levels between the experimental and control groups, with the experimental group showing lower stress levels.

H₄: Rajyoga meditation has a significant effect on improving stress regulation as reflected in gain scores and effect size measures.

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research Design

A quasi-experimental pre-test–post-test control group design was employed to examine the effect of Rajyoga meditation training on stress regulation. The researchers established two groups, an experimental group and a control group, because educational environments prevented them from using random assignment methods. The researchers conducted assessments at baseline (pre-test) and after the intervention period (post-test) to conduct both within-group and between-group comparisons. Educational research settings face a common limitation because institutional and administrative constraints make randomisation impossible for their studies.

5.2 Participants and Sample

The research sample included 100 college students from Imphal City who were between 18 and 25 years old and studied at local universities for their undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. The study participants were split into two groups, which included an experimental group with 50 members and a control group with 50 members.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their stress levels and willingness to participate. Individuals with prior meditation experience were excluded to maintain baseline uniformity. The sampling approach was guided by study requirements and institutional accessibility, which may have influenced the composition of the sample.

Table 1: Distribution of Participants

Group	Number of Participants (n)	Percentage (%)
Experimental Group	50	50%
Control Group	50	50%
Total	100	100%

5.3 Instrumentation

Psychological stress assessment used the Stress Scale (2023), which Pandiamani Sivam, Srinivasan, and Suresh Kumar Murugesan developed as their measurement tool. The scale assesses multiple dimensions of stress, including physical, emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and social aspects.

The instrument consists of structured items which participants rate on a Likert scale to measure their stress levels. The scale shows dependable results because it meets the expected standards of both reliability and validity, which internal consistency measurements show through a Cronbach's alpha score above 0.70. The instrument showed acceptable internal consistency through its Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.82 which demonstrates reliable results.

5.4 Intervention: Rajyoga Meditation Programme

- The experimental group participated in a structured Raj Yoga meditation programme conducted over a period of 8 weeks.
- The program conducted three weekly sessions which lasted about 45 minutes each.

- The program specified three main objectives which required participants to develop awareness of their thoughts and build positive thinking patterns while they learnt to control their emotions and develop self-awareness through soul consciousness.
- The sessions started with basic concepts and advanced to higher practice levels which combined cognitive and reflective methods that did not include physical or breath-based techniques.

5.5 Procedure

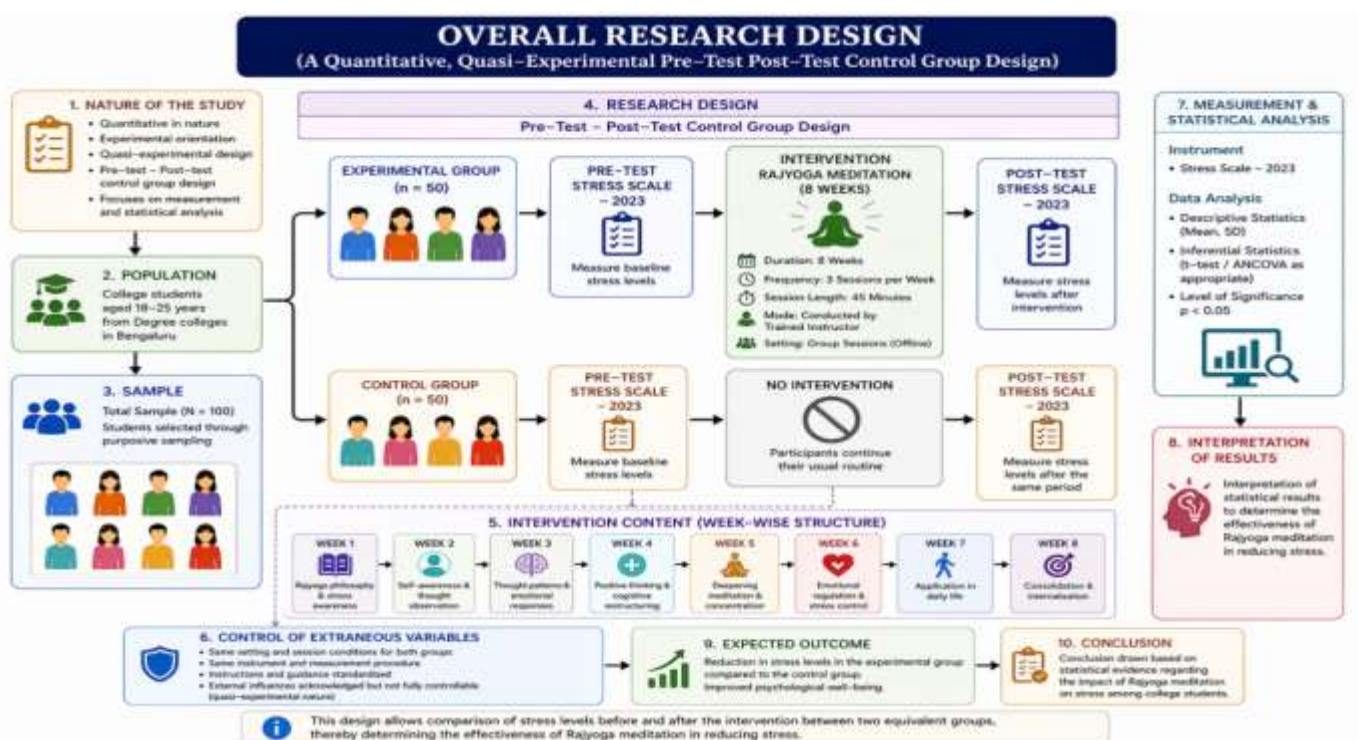
The study followed a defined procedure which consisted of these steps.

- 1. Pre-test Phase:** The experimental and control groups received The Stress Scale (2023) assessment, which measured initial stress levels.
- 2. Interventions:** The experimental group participated in The Rajyoga meditation programme for eight weeks while the control group maintained their normal schoolwork.
- 3. Post-test Phase:** The two groups received The Stress Scale assessment after the treatment period to test for stress level changes.
- 4. Data Analysis:** The researchers employed statistical methods to examine the obtained data through these techniques:
 - o Paired-samples t-test (within-group comparison)
 - o Independent-samples t-test (between-group comparison)
 - o Gain score analysis
 - o Effect size estimation (Cohen's d)

5.6 Ethical Considerations

The study followed established ethical guidelines for its research activities. The Institutional Ethics Committee of Manipur International University approved the research which required data collection. The study required all participants to give their voluntary consent after they had been informed about the study. The study allowed participants to withdraw from the research at any time while it protected their complete anonymity and maintained their confidentiality.

Figure 1: Overview of Research Design



6. RESULTS

The study results are shown through their initial descriptive statistics which researchers used to conduct their inferential analyses that tested the success of Rajyoga meditation research study.

6.1 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive analysis was conducted to understand the distribution of stress scores across the experimental and control groups at pre-test and post-test levels. The mean and standard deviation values show that both groups had similar stress levels at their initial measurement point.

Table 2: Pre-test Stress Scores (Baseline Comparison)

Group	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Experimental Group	113.66	8.12
Control Group	113.60	8.05

Following the intervention, a notable reduction in stress scores was observed in the experimental group:

Table 3: Post-test Stress Scores

Group	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Change from Pre-test
Experimental Group	92.42	7.18	-21.24
Control Group	108.78	8.36	-4.82

The analysis revealed that participants who took part in the Rajyoga meditation program experienced major stress reductions while the control group members experienced only slight stress decreases.

6.2 Paired Samples t-test (Within-Group Analysis)

To examine changes within groups, paired-samples t-tests were conducted.

Table 4: Paired Samples t-test (Within-Group Analysis)

Group	t-value	df	p-value	Interpretation
Experimental Group	25.109	49	< .001	Significant
Control Group	6.832	49	< .001	Statistically Significant

The experimental group demonstrated a significant decrease in stress levels from the initial evaluation to the final assessment, which produced strong results through the statistical test that showed a t value of 25.109 with 49 degrees of freedom and a p value below .001. The control group showed a statistically significant difference between its pre-test and post-test results, but the actual score difference was so small that it had no meaningful effect on real-world applications, according to the results, which showed a t value of 6.832 with 49 degrees of freedom and a p value below .001.

The experimental group achieved significant progress through the intervention, while the control group experienced only slight improvements which reached statistical significance. Although statistically significant, the change in the control group was minimal, indicating limited practical significance.

6.3 Independent Samples t-test (Between-Group Analysis)

Independent t-tests were used to compare post-test stress scores between the experimental and control groups.

Table 5: Independent Samples t-test (Post-test Comparison)

Variable	t-value	df	p-value	Interpretation
Post-test Stress Scores	-5.318	98	< .001	Significant

The results show a statistically significant difference between the two groups because the experimental group reported lower stress levels than the control group. This supports the effectiveness of the Rajyoga intervention.

6.4 Gain Score Analysis

Gain scores were calculated by subtracting pre-test scores from post-test scores for each participant.

Table 6: Gain Score Analysis

Group	Mean Gain Score	Interpretation
Experimental Group	-21.24	High Reduction
Control Group	-4.82	Low Reduction

The independent t-test conducted on gain scores revealed a significant difference:

- $t(98) = -14.907, p < .001$

An increased negative difference gain score was indicative of a greater decrease in the stress levels of those in the experimental group compared to the control group.

6.5 Effect Size Analysis

Effect size was calculated using Cohen's *d* to determine the magnitude of the intervention effect.

Table 7: Effect Size (Cohen's d)

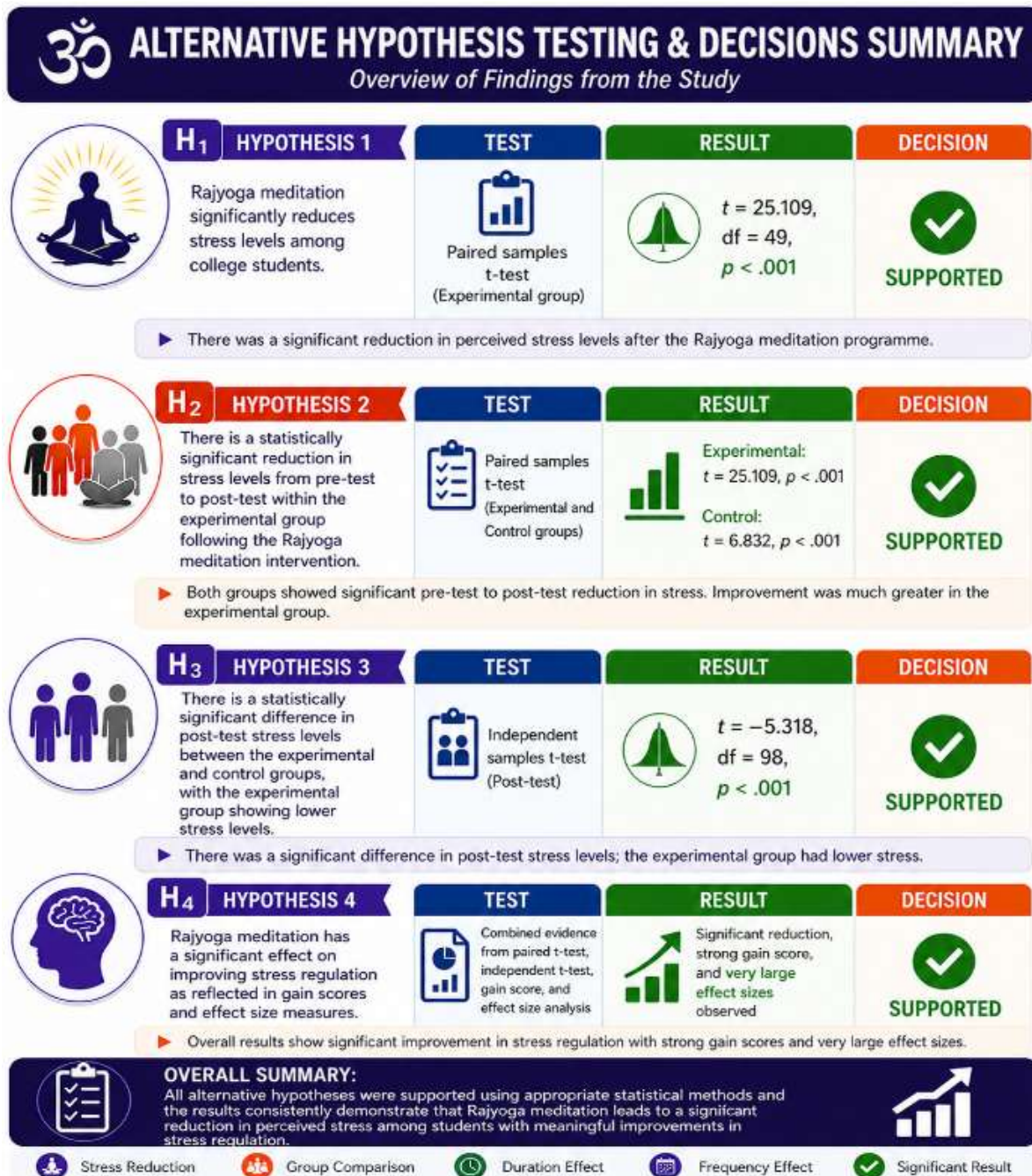
Group	Cohen's d	Effect Size Interpretation
Experimental Group	-3.55	Very Large Effect
Control Group	-0.96	Moderate Effect
Between Groups (Gain)	-2.98	Very Large Effect

The effect size measurements show that Rajyoga meditation programmatic implementation successfully decreased participant psychological stress. The distinction between statistical and practical significance shows that control group results did not produce any actual meaningful changes.

7. HYPOTHESIS TESTING

The researchers used an independent samples t-test to assess whether the experimental group's and control group's initial test results showed any differences. The analysis showed that the two groups had equal initial test results because their stress levels before the test showed no differences ($t(98) = 0.021, p = 0.983$). The study used H_{01} to confirm that both groups had equal groups matching their testing results before treatment started.

Figure 2: Hypothesis Testing and decision summary



The experimental group underwent a paired-samples t-test to measure their changes within the group. The analysis showed that participants experienced a considerable drop in their stress levels, which occurred from their initial assessment to their final assessment ($t(49) = 25.109, p < .001$). The researchers rejected H_{02} because they found that the Rajyoga meditation programme produced a major impact on the experimental group.

The control group demonstrated a substantial statistical distinction between their two assessment points ($t(49) = 6.832, p < .001$). The test results showed that both groups had different stress levels which reached statistical significance ($t(98) = -5.318, p < 0.001$). The researchers rejected H_{03} because the experimental group displayed lower stress levels than the control group after they finished their treatment.

The researchers used gain score analysis and effect size estimation to prove their intervention produced effective results. The study produced substantial evidence because research showed a major drop in stress levels, which the study confirmed through a very large effect size. H_{04} was rejected because Rajyoga meditation proved to be effective in helping college students decrease their psychological stress levels.

8. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- The results indicate that:
- Stress levels decreased significantly in the experimental group following the intervention.
 - The control group showed no meaningful change over time.
 - Post-test comparisons revealed statistically significant differences between the groups.
 - Gain scores and effect size analysis confirmed a strong intervention effect.

Figure 3: Summary of Objectives

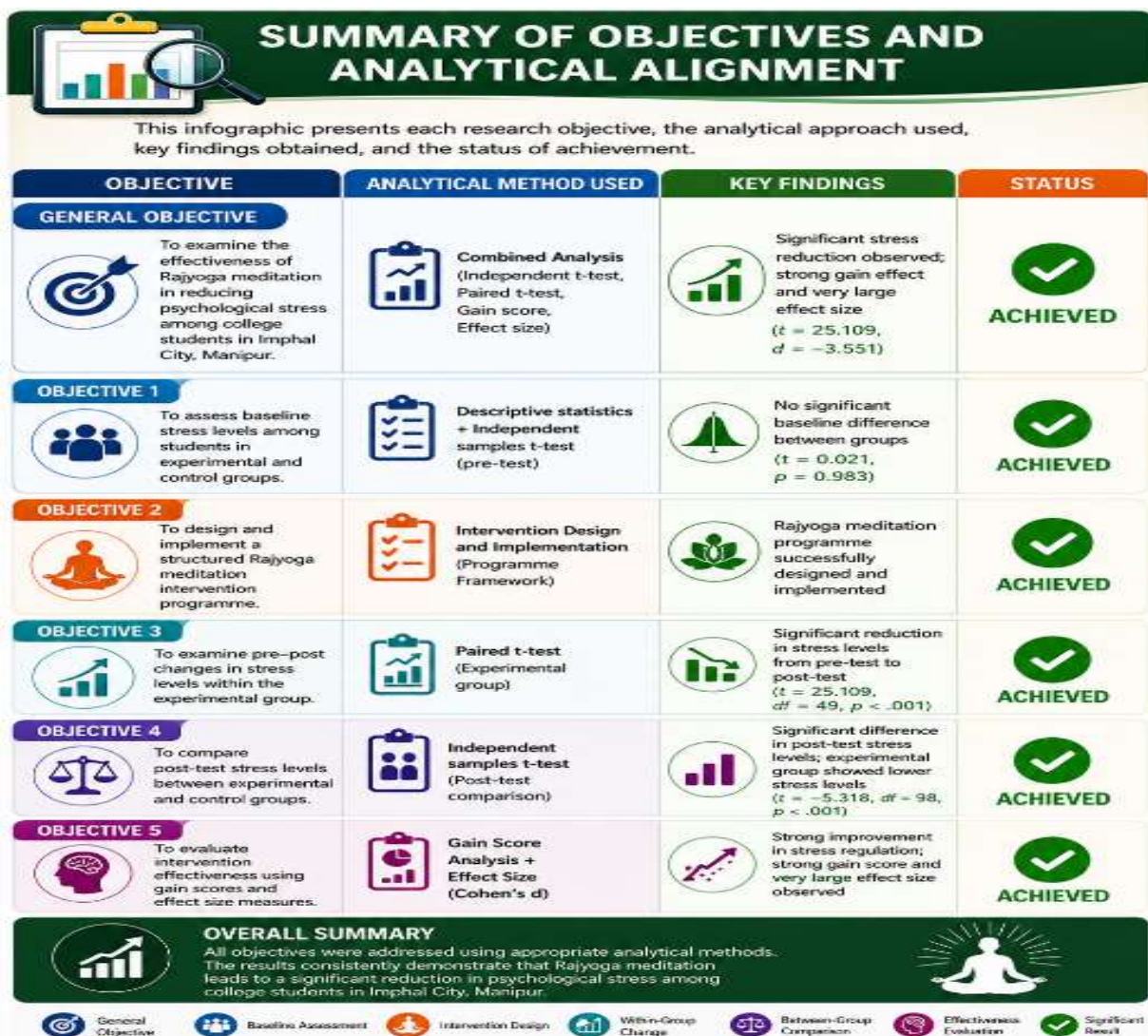


Table 8: Summary of Objectives and Analytical Alignment

Objective	Analytical Method	Key Findings	Status
General Objective	Combined Analysis	Significant stress reduction	Achieved
Objective 1	Descriptive + t-test	No baseline difference	Achieved
Objective 2	Intervention Design	Successfully implemented	Achieved
Objective 3	Paired t-test	Significant reduction	Achieved
Objective 4	Independent t-test	Significant group difference	Achieved
Objective 5	Gain + Effect Size	Strong intervention effect	Achieved

These findings provide empirical support for the effectiveness of Rajyoga meditation as a stress regulation strategy among college students.

9. DISCUSSION

The current research study focused on testing how Rajyoga meditation impacts psychological stress reduction among college students. The experimental group demonstrated a significant decrease in stress levels, which established that meditation-based treatments were effective. The results of the study found both physiological and cognitive stress models to be accurate while validating previous findings about mindfulness and yoga-based methods.

General Adaptation Syndrome, together with Cognitive Appraisal Theory, provides a framework for understanding the research results which show that stress reduction occurs through two processes. The process requires four components, which include attentional control together with self-awareness and emotional regulation and cognitive restructuring.

Rajyoga requires people to think actively during their practice, which results in stronger results than mindfulness techniques because of this difference between both practices; however, researchers must handle the large effect size with caution because they used a quasi-experimental framework. The study presents evidence from a specific geographic area, but its effectiveness is reduced because researchers did not use random selection and participants provided their own data. The researchers recommend future studies use randomized research designs together with physiological measurements and longitudinal tracking methods.

The research shows that Rajyoga meditation functions as an effective cognitive spiritual practice which educational institutions can use to enhance student mental health. These findings are consistent with mindfulness-based and yoga interventions, which also report reductions in stress through internal regulation mechanisms. The reduction in stress may be explained through attentional regulation, cognitive restructuring, and improved emotional control. The large effect size should be interpreted with caution given the quasi-experimental design.

10. CONCLUSION

The present study examined the effectiveness of a structured Rajyoga meditation programme to reduce psychological stress among college students who studied in Imphal City schools. The experimental group showed a significant reduction in stress levels compared to the control group, which displayed the effects of the program that was tested.

The results show that Rajyoga enables people to control their inner state by managing their attention and their thoughts and their emotional responses, which leads to better self-control abilities than simple symptom relief.

The results should be understood through the study's quasi-experimental framework and its small participant group because these elements limit the ability to apply results to other populations. Future research should use randomised studies that follow participants over time while increasing their sample sizes for better results.

The research confirms that Rajyoga meditation serves as an effective cognitive-spiritual method for stress management, which educational institutions can use to help students maintain their mental health. Rajyoga meditation offers a feasible and scalable approach for integrating mental health support within educational systems.

11. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study has several limitations that should be acknowledged:

- The quasi-experimental design limits the strength of causal inference.
- The sample size was relatively small and drawn from a single regional context, which may restrict generalisability.
- Reliance on self-reported measures introduces the possibility of response bias.
- The short intervention period limits assessment of long-term effects.

12. IMPLICATIONS

The research demonstrated that Rajyoga meditation effectively decreased stress levels, which created benefits for educational systems and psychological practices and organisational policies.

- ✓ **Educational implications:** The implementation of Rajyoga through value-based or co-curricular programmes will improve students' ability to concentrate and manage their emotions while participating in school activities. Schools can incorporate brief, organised meditation practices through their academic timetable system. The organisation should create stress management training programmes together with fundamental instructor development programmes.
- ✓ **Psychological implications:** Rajyoga serves as a cognitive regulatory method which enhances individuals' ability to handle their thoughts and emotional states and their coping abilities. The organization serves three purposes, which include counselling services and preventive mental health programmes and non-clinical stress management assistance within educational environments.
- ✓ **Policy implications:** The framework for higher education establishes mind-body programmes as valid educational practices which academic institutions should adopt. The framework for educational programmes requires schools to include meditation practices and life-skills development in their teaching materials. The institution supports wellness programmes which are based on research together with partnerships that extend to organisations which provide meditation training.

Educational institutions can implement Rajyoga meditation because it functions as an affordable method to enhance student health throughout their campuses.

13. FUTURE SCOPE

The practice of Rajyoga meditation leads to decreased stress levels but also points out various research avenues for future study.

- **Methodological expansion:** The researchers should establish causal links through the implementation of randomised controlled trials which require multiple research sites and longitudinal study methods to assess their findings.
- **Physiological measures:** The assessment requires the use of heart rate variability and cortisol levels and autonomic responses as measurement standards.
- **Dimension-wise and comparative analysis:** The research will study stress symptoms which occur in physical and cognitive and emotional and behavioural and social areas. The research will evaluate Rajyoga against meditation practices and yoga and counselling treatments.
- **Diverse populations:** The study will investigate research activities between school students and working professionals and high-stress or clinical populations to examine their scientific applications.
- **Educational integration:** The study will evaluate how Rajyoga practice affects students' academic results and focus abilities and emotional toughness to assist decision-making regarding institutional implementation.
- **Mechanism-focused research:** The researchers will study the fundamental mental processes which include attentional control and cognitive restructuring and emotional processing.

- **Integrated and scalable models:** The research team will create research frameworks which include multiple research dimensions. The team will use digital platforms to achieve two goals: first, make their tools accessible to more users, and second, make their implementation process more effective.

14. CONFLICT OF INTEREST: No conflict of interest.

15. SOURCES OF SUPPORT: NIL

16. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors express their sincere appreciation to Manipur International University (MIU), Manipur, and the Centre for Academic Research (CARE), Education Wing, RERF, Mount Abu, for providing a supportive academic environment for this study.

The authors express their gratitude to Prof. Dr Hari Kumar, Chancellor of MIU Manipur, for his support and institutional assistance. The authors express their appreciation to Prof. Dr B. K. Pandiamani for his support through his mentorship and educational guidance in value-based teaching. The first author extends her heartfelt thanks to her research supervisor, Dr Nagesh N. V., for his continuous academic support and mentorship.

The authors acknowledge the Brahma Kumaris divine family for creating a space that supported their research development through its value-based and reflective atmosphere. No external funding was received for this study.

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