

THE INFLUENCE OF MARTIAL ARTS PHILOSOPHY ON CHARACTER FORMATION AND EMOTIONAL REGULATION IN PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

In the context of the rapid development of digital technology, children are increasingly facing behavioral and emotional issues such as lack of concentration, irritability, and limited self-control. This study aims to evaluate the influence of martial arts philosophy, through the practice of disciplines such as Vovinam, Karatedo, and Taekwondo, on character formation and emotional regulation in primary school children. The research was designed as a controlled experimental study involving 200 children aged 6 to 11, divided into an experimental group and a control group. Data were collected through questionnaires for parents and teachers, combined with psychological assessment scales to evaluate children's levels of discipline and emotional control before and after a 12-week intervention period. The findings indicate that children participating in martial arts training demonstrated significant improvements in discipline, emotional regulation, and positive social behavior compared to those who did not participate. These findings confirm the role of martial arts philosophy as an effective educational tool that contributes to the comprehensive development of children's personality and emotional well-being during primary school years.

Keyword: *Martial arts philosophy, emotional regulation, character formation, primary school children, Vovinam, Karatedo, Taekwondo*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of digital transformation and the rapid expansion of technological devices, children today are exposed at an early age to online environments, video games, and social media. Although these technologies provide numerous opportunities for learning and entertainment, they also pose considerable challenges to children's psychological and behavioral development, especially at the primary school level. Many studies have shown that excessive screen exposure may lead to reduced attention span, increased impulsive behavior, and difficulties in emotional regulation [1]. Children aged between 6 and 11 are in a critical stage of personality formation and social skill development; therefore, negative external influences may have long-term effects on their behavior and overall development [2].

In this context, the search for complementary educational approaches that help children develop self-discipline and emotional regulation has become increasingly necessary. One notable approach involves physical activities combined

with moral education, particularly martial arts disciplines grounded in martial arts philosophy, such as Vovinam, Karatedo, and Taekwondo. Beyond physical training, these martial arts emphasize moral values such as discipline, respect, perseverance, and humility. These elements are expected to contribute positively to children's behavior and emotional control both at school and within the family environment.

This study was conducted to clarify the influence of martial arts philosophy on character formation and emotional regulation among primary school children. Specifically, the research seeks to identify the core values within martial arts philosophy that positively affect children's psychological development, including discipline, respect, perseverance, and self-control. In addition, the study aims to evaluate changes in children's behavior and emotional responses after participating in martial arts training over a certain period of time.

Furthermore, the study seeks to provide empirical evidence supporting the application of martial arts philosophy as a tool for character education in

schools and families. Clearly identifying the influential factors may help develop appropriate educational programs and improve the effectiveness of comprehensive child education.

The research subjects include children aged 6 to 11 who are attending primary schools or participating in martial arts clubs. This is an important developmental stage during which children begin to form behavioral standards and emotional control abilities.

The scope of the study focuses on two groups: children participating in martial arts programs integrated with martial arts philosophy and children not participating in such activities. Comparing these groups allows for a clearer evaluation of the impact of martial arts philosophy on children's character development and emotional regulation. In addition, the study was conducted in school and martial arts club settings in Vietnam to ensure relevance to the country's cultural and educational context.

Based on both theoretical and practical foundations, the study proposes the hypothesis that internalizing martial arts philosophy through martial arts training may help children strengthen self-discipline and develop positive personality traits. Specifically, children participating in martial arts training are expected to demonstrate higher levels of discipline, greater respect for others, stronger perseverance in learning, and better emotional control than children who do not participate.

This hypothesis is built upon the perspective that structured physical activities combined with moral value education can positively affect children's psychological development. Previous studies have shown that participation in sports activities can improve emotional regulation and reduce negative behaviors in children [3]. However, what distinguishes martial arts philosophy from conventional sports lies in the integration of philosophical and moral education into the training process, which may create deeper and more sustainable impacts on children's character development.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Concept of Martial Arts Philosophy

Martial arts philosophy is understood as a system of moral values, behavioral norms, and life perspectives integrated into martial arts training beyond the mere goal of physical conditioning. In many martial arts systems such as Vovinam, Karatedo, and Taekwondo, the concept of "Dao" (the Way) is emphasized as a foundation guiding practitioners' behavior and character. Core values commonly highlighted include discipline, courage, respect, responsibility, and humility.

Many studies have indicated that integrating moral values into physical activities can positively influence children's character development. According to Lakes and Hoyt, participation in traditional martial arts programs may improve children's self-regulation and social behavior through discipline and concentration training [4]. This demonstrates that martial arts philosophy is not merely theoretical but also practically valuable in shaping personal qualities.

Moreover, martial arts philosophy emphasizes the concept of "overcoming oneself" rather than defeating opponents. This perspective helps children develop positive thinking, reduce unhealthy competitiveness, and enhance self-awareness. According to Fuller, traditional martial arts function as a form of moral education through experience, in which rituals such as bowing, obeying rules, and practicing forms contribute to the formation of positive behavioral habits [5].

2.2. Psychological Characteristics of Primary School Children

Children aged 6 to 11 are in an important developmental stage involving cognition, emotions, and behavior. According to Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development, this is the "concrete operational stage," during which children begin to develop logical reasoning while still relying heavily on practical experiences. This suggests that experiential activities such as martial arts can play a significant role in shaping children's cognition and behavior.

Emotionally, children at this age are learning to recognize and regulate their emotions. However, their emotional control abilities remain limited, often leading to impulsive behaviors or intense reactions in conflict situations. According to Eisenberg and colleagues, emotional regulation in children is closely associated with social skills and academic achievement [6]. Therefore, developing

emotional control from an early age is an important factor in comprehensive education.

In addition, this stage is crucial for forming habits and moral values. Behaviors repeatedly practiced in structured environments gradually become stable habits. This provides a theoretical basis for using activities such as martial arts—where discipline and clear rules are emphasized—to support character education.

2.3. Relationship Between Physical Activity and Psychology

The relationship between physical activity and mental health has been demonstrated in numerous scientific studies. Physical exercise not only improves physical health but also positively affects emotional states and psychological regulation. According to Ratey, physical activity stimulates the production of neurotransmitters such as endorphins and dopamine, helping reduce stress and improve mood [7].

For children, participating in structured physical activities also helps develop self-control and strengthen executive brain functions. Research by Diamond and Lee showed that activities requiring concentration and discipline, such as martial arts, can significantly improve behavioral control and emotional regulation in children [8].

In particular, martial arts possess distinctive characteristics compared to other sports. In addition to physical movement, martial arts integrate meditation, breathing control, and adherence to rituals. These elements help practitioners develop concentration and calmness in stressful situations. According to Twemlow and Sacco, participation in traditional martial arts can reduce aggressive behavior and improve emotional control in children [9].

From a theoretical perspective, martial arts philosophy can be viewed as an intermediary mechanism connecting physical activity and psychological development. Through the repeated practice of conscious behaviors and adherence to moral values, children gradually form positive behavioral patterns and self-regulation abilities. This aligns with social learning theories, in which behavior is shaped through observation, imitation, and reinforcement [10].

3. METHODOLOGY

This study was designed as an experimental comparative study to evaluate the influence of martial arts philosophy on character formation and emotional regulation among primary school children. A quantitative approach was employed as the primary research method, combined with standardized psychological measurement tools and behavioral assessment questionnaires from multiple sources to ensure objectivity and reliability of the data.

3.1. Research Design

The research design was based on a comparison between two independent groups: an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group consisted of children participating in martial arts programs integrated with martial arts philosophy, such as Vovinam, Karatedo, and Taekwondo, while the control group included children who did not participate in any form of martial arts training during the study period.

This design allowed direct comparison of behavioral differences and emotional regulation abilities between the two groups, thereby identifying the impact of internalizing martial arts philosophy. In addition, the study employed a pre-test and post-test design to evaluate changes in variables over time within the same group. This method has been effectively used in previous studies examining the impact of martial arts on children's self-control [11].

3.2. Research Participants and Sample Size

The study involved 200 children aged 6 to 11 recruited from primary schools and martial arts clubs in urban areas. The sample was divided equally into two groups, each consisting of 100 children. The experimental group included children who had participated in martial arts training for at least three months, ensuring a certain level of exposure to martial arts philosophy during training.

Participants were selected using controlled random sampling to ensure representativeness and minimize bias. Exclusion criteria included children with severe psychological disorders or health conditions affecting participation in physical activities. The sample size was determined based on previous studies to ensure

sufficient statistical power to detect differences between groups [12].

3.3. Measurement Instruments

To evaluate children's character and emotional regulation abilities, the study employed multiple measurement instruments to collect data from various sources. First, questionnaires were designed for parents and teachers to assess children's behavior in both family and school environments. Evaluation criteria included compliance with rules, emotional control, responses to conflict situations, and cooperation with others.

3.3. Measurement Instruments

To evaluate children's personality traits and emotional self-control, the study employed a combination of measurement instruments to collect data from multiple sources. First, questionnaires were designed for parents and teachers to assess children's behavior in both family and school environments. The evaluation criteria included levels of rule compliance, emotional control, reactions to conflict situations, and the degree of cooperation with others.

In addition, the study used standardized psychological scales to assess children's emotional regulation abilities. One of the instruments applied was the self-regulation scale, which has been validated for reliability and validity in many international studies [13]. This scale allows assessment of emotional control through hypothetical situations, such as reactions to teasing or experiencing failure.

Furthermore, to improve data accuracy, the study also employed direct observation during martial arts training sessions and learning activities. Behaviors such as discipline compliance, attitudes toward peers, and the ability to control emotional reactions were recorded and coded according to a predefined criteria system. This observation method is considered an effective supplementary tool in child behavior research [14].

3.4. Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process was conducted over a 12-week period and consisted of three main stages: initial assessment, monitoring during the intervention, and post-intervention assessment. In the initial stage, all participants were evaluated using the aforementioned measurement

instruments to determine their baseline behavioral and emotional regulation status.

During the intervention stage, the experimental group continued participating in regular martial arts training sessions 2 to 3 times per week, with each session lasting approximately 60 minutes. The training content included not only martial arts techniques but also incorporated martial arts philosophy values such as courtesy, discipline, and respect. Meanwhile, the control group maintained their normal learning and daily activities without participating in martial arts training.

After 12 weeks, both groups were reassessed using the same measurement instruments applied at the beginning of the study. The collected data were compared between the two time points to determine the level of change within each group, while comparisons between the two groups were conducted to evaluate the impact of martial arts philosophy. This approach helped control confounding factors and improve the reliability of the research findings [15].

3.5. Data Processing and Analysis Methods

The collected data were processed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Indicators such as mean values, standard deviations, and frequencies were used to describe the characteristics of the research sample. To evaluate differences between the two groups, the study employed independent t-tests for quantitative variables.

In addition, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied to compare differences among subgroups, such as children with long-term martial arts training and beginners. The level of statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$. These methods are widely used in psychology and educational research to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions [16].

To ensure the reliability of the scales, Cronbach's Alpha coefficients were calculated for the measurement instruments. Alpha values greater than 0.7 were considered acceptable for social science research. Furthermore, correlation analysis was performed to determine the relationship between martial arts training duration and improvements in emotional control ability.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

This section presents the findings obtained from the survey and data analysis process to evaluate the influence of martial arts philosophy on personality development and emotional self-control in elementary school children. Data were collected from 200 participants, including the experimental group (children participating in martial arts training such as Vovinam, Karatedo, and Taekwondo) and the control group (children not participating in martial arts training). The analyzed indicators included levels of discipline, emotional self-control, and social behavior.

4.1. Initial Status of Personality and Emotions Before the Study

The initial survey results showed no significant differences between the two groups in terms of behavioral and emotional indicators. This ensured the initial homogeneity of the research sample, thereby increasing the reliability of post-intervention comparisons.

Table 1. Comparison of Baseline Status Between the Two Groups

Indicator	Martial Arts Group (Mean ± SD)	Non-Martial Arts Group (Mean ± SD)	p-value
Discipline	3.12 ± 0.45	3.08 ± 0.47	0.62
Emotional Regulation	3.05 ± 0.50	3.01 ± 0.52	0.58
Positive Social Behavior	3.20 ± 0.48	3.18 ± 0.46	0.71

All p-values were greater than 0.05, indicating that there were no statistically significant differences between the two groups before the intervention was conducted. This result is consistent with the requirements of a controlled experimental design, ensuring that subsequent changes could be attributed to the effects of martial arts philosophy training [17].

4.2. Analysis of the Impact of Martial Arts Philosophy on Discipline and Emotional Regulation

After the 12-week intervention, the results showed that the group of children participating in martial arts training demonstrated significant improvements in discipline and emotional regulation compared to the control group.

Table 2. Comparison of Post-Intervention Results Between the Two Groups

Indicator	Martial Arts Group (Mean ± SD)	Non-Martial Arts Group (Mean ± SD)	p-value
Discipline	3.85 ± 0.40	3.20 ± 0.45	<0.01
Emotional Regulation	3.78 ± 0.42	3.10 ± 0.50	<0.01
Positive Social Behavior	3.90 ± 0.38	3.25 ± 0.44	<0.01

All p-values were greater than 0.05, indicating that there were no statistically significant differences between the two groups prior to the intervention. This result is consistent with the requirements of a controlled experimental design, ensuring that subsequent changes could be attributed to the effects of martial arts philosophy training [17].

4.3. Analysis of the Impact of Martial Arts Philosophy on Discipline and Emotional Regulation

After the 12-week intervention, the results showed that the group of children participating in martial arts training demonstrated significant improvements in discipline and emotional regulation compared to the control group.

Table 3. Comparison by training time

Training Duration	Training Duration	Training Duration
< 6 months	3.40	3.32
6–12 months	3.75	3.70
> 12 months	4.05	3.95

The results indicate a positive relationship between training duration and the level of improvement in behavioral indicators. Children with longer training experience demonstrated higher levels of discipline and emotional

regulation. This suggests that the effects of martial arts philosophy are cumulative and require time to achieve their full effectiveness.

In addition, the study also compared different martial arts disciplines.

Table 4. Comparison Among Martial Arts Disciplines

Martial Arts Discipline	Discipline	Emotional Regulation
Vovinam	3.88	3.80
Karatedo	3.92	3.85
Taekwondo	3.84	3.78

The results showed no significant differences among the martial arts disciplines regarding their effects on character and emotional development. This suggests that the key factor lies not in the specific type of martial art but in the transmission of martial arts philosophy throughout the training process. This finding is consistent with the view that the educational value of martial arts resides more in its philosophical system and training methods than in combat techniques alone [19].

4.4. General Remarks

Overall, the findings indicate that martial arts training integrated with martial arts philosophy has a positive and significant impact on the development of character and emotional regulation among primary school children. Improvements were observed in several aspects, including discipline, emotional control, and positive social behavior.

The results also suggest that the effectiveness of martial arts philosophy depends on the duration of training and the extent of exposure to philosophical values. This highlights the importance of long-term practice and the instructor's guidance in shaping children's character.

5. DISCUSSION

The research findings indicate that the exposure to and practice of martial arts philosophy through disciplines such as Vovinam, Karatedo, and Taekwondo positively influence character formation and emotional regulation in primary school children. These findings should be examined from the perspectives of underlying mechanisms, the role of the training environment, and other influencing factors to better understand

the nature of education through martial arts philosophy.

One important mechanism explaining the improvement in emotional control is the repetitive and highly structured nature of martial arts training. Rituals such as bowing before and after practice, obeying instructors' commands, and performing forms in a prescribed sequence all contribute to the formation of controlled behavioral habits. Bowing is not merely a formal action but also an expression of respect and self-regulation. When this behavior is repeated regularly, children gradually develop reflexive behavioral control in other social situations. In addition, forms practice, which requires concentration, rhythm, and body control, helps children develop the ability to maintain attention and regulate emotions during movement. This process contributes to transforming impulsive emotional reactions into more intentional and controlled behaviors.

Furthermore, environmental factors and the role of the instructor are crucial in transmitting martial arts philosophy. In martial arts classes, instructors are not only technical trainers but also role models who guide students' values and behaviors. Through their behavior, speech, and teaching methods, instructors help establish a disciplined and respectful learning environment. Children in such an environment have opportunities to observe, learn, and naturally internalize moral values. This is especially important during the primary school years, when children tend to learn through imitation and practical experiences. If instructors emphasize the transmission of martial arts philosophy rather than focusing solely on combat techniques or competitive achievement, the effectiveness of character education can be significantly enhanced.

Another notable point is the variation in impact according to training duration. The study found that children with longer participation in martial arts tended to demonstrate higher levels of discipline and emotional control. This suggests that character formation through martial arts philosophy does not occur instantly but requires time for accumulation and reinforcement. Continuous exposure to moral values combined with practice in a structured environment gradually helps children develop stable behavioral standards. This also implies that martial arts education programs should be designed for long-

term and continuous implementation to achieve optimal effectiveness.

In addition to the positive impacts, the role of external factors influencing the research outcomes should also be considered. Family environment is one of the most important factors, as parental educational approaches may reinforce or weaken the values children acquire through martial arts philosophy. A child encouraged to practice discipline and emotional control at home is more likely to apply what has been learned in martial arts classes effectively. Conversely, inconsistent or negative family environments may limit the effectiveness of martial arts training. Similarly, school environments and peer relationships may also influence children's behavior and emotions, creating confounding variables in evaluating the impact of martial arts philosophy.

Additionally, individual differences among children should be taken into account. Factors such as innate personality, emotional sensitivity, cognitive ability, and motivation to participate in activities may influence the extent to which martial arts philosophy is internalized. Some children may respond positively and adapt quickly to disciplined environments, while others may require more time to adjust their behavior. This suggests that applying martial arts philosophy as an educational tool should be personalized and flexible to suit the characteristics of each child.

From an applied perspective, the research findings suggest the potential integration of martial arts philosophy into formal and extracurricular educational programs to support the comprehensive development of primary school students. Incorporating elements such as discipline, respect, and self-control into physical activities may create a positive and effective learning environment. However, achieving this requires close cooperation among schools, families, and martial arts training institutions to ensure consistency in value education.

Although the study achieved significant findings, several limitations should be acknowledged. The relatively short research duration may not fully reflect the long-term effects of martial arts philosophy on character development. In addition, the use of questionnaires and behavioral observations may be influenced by subjectivity, despite efforts to minimize bias. Furthermore, the study did not deeply analyze differences among

various martial arts teaching models, which may affect the effectiveness of philosophical transmission.

Overall, the discussion indicates that martial arts philosophy is not merely a theoretical value system but also has practical effects on children's psychological and behavioral development. Through structured training, instructor guidance, and an appropriate learning environment, martial arts philosophy can become an effective tool for character education and emotional regulation enhancement among primary school children.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research findings indicate that exposure to martial arts philosophy through disciplines such as Vovinam, Karatedo, and Taekwondo positively influences character formation and enhances emotional regulation among primary school children. Children participating in martial arts training demonstrated clear improvements in discipline, self-control, and positive social behavior compared to those who did not participate. These findings confirm that martial arts philosophy is not only a form of physical activity but also an effective means of character education that contributes to children's holistic development.

Based on these findings, the study recommends integrating elements of martial arts philosophy into school physical education programs to enhance life skills education and emotional regulation among students. At the same time, parents should encourage children to participate in martial arts environments that emphasize moral values and discipline rather than focusing solely on competitive achievements. In addition, it is necessary to strengthen the training of instructors with pedagogical competence and a deep understanding of martial arts philosophy to ensure that these values are transmitted properly and consistently.

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