

The Effects of Positive Self-Talk Among Winning Athletes in Martial Arts: A Mixed-Methods Study

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Abstract

Studi Purpose- Positive self-talk is a psychological strategy employed to enhance athletic performance and resilience.

Method. This mixed-methods study explores the impact of positive self-talk on athletes' success in martial arts disciplines, including arnis, karate, and taekwondo. Quantitative data was collected through surveys administered to collegiate competitive athletes, and qualitative insights were derived from in-depth interviews with seven award winning martial artists. **Result and Discussion.** The study reveals that athletes using positive self-talk demonstrate statistically significant improvements in focus, motivation, and performance under pressure. Qualitative themes, such as increased confidence and reduced anxiety, complement these findings. These results suggest that structured positive self-talk interventions can optimize competitive outcomes for martial artists.

Keywords Positive self-talk; martial arts; arnis; karate; taekwondo; athletic performance; mixed-methods

1. Introduction

Martial arts disciplines such as arnis, karate, and taekwondo demand not only physical prowess but also mental resilience. Competitive martial artists face high-pressure situations that require split-second decisions, peak performance, and emotional control. Over the years, sports psychology has introduced several mental training techniques to enhance athletic performance, with positive self-talk emerging as a widely recognized tool (Weinberg & Gould, 2019).

Positive self-talk refers to the deliberate use of encouraging, affirming, or motivational statements aimed at fostering confidence and reducing performance anxiety

(Hardy et al., 2001). For martial artists, who often contend with personal doubts, performance slumps, and challenging opponents, self-talk can serve as a critical strategy for staying focused and composed (Tod et al., 2011). Despite its theoretical benefits, the specific impact of positive self-talk on athletes' success in martial arts remains underexplored.

This study addresses this gap by investigating how positive self-talk influences winning martial artists across arnis, karate, and taekwondo. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research examines both measurable performance outcomes and personal experiences of elite athletes. This dual perspective seeks to answer two key questions: (1) How does positive self-talk affect martial artists' competitive performance? and (2) What are the qualitative experiences of athletes who regularly use self-talk during training and competition?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Research Design

A mixed-methods design was chosen to combine quantitative analysis with rich qualitative insights. The quantitative phase involved a survey distributed to competitive martial artists, while the qualitative phase comprised semi-structured interviews with selected participants in select state colleges and Universities in the Philippines

2.2 Participants

The study involved collegiate competitive martial artists (from arnis, karate, and taekwondo). Participants were aged 18–35, with at least two years of competition experience. Seven award winning athletes, defined as those with national or international championship titles, were interviewed for the qualitative phase.

2.3 Instruments

Survey: A 15-item questionnaire assessed athletes’ use of self-talk, perceived impact on performance, and psychological outcomes. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale.

Interview Guide: Semi-structured interviews explored participants' self-talk practices, benefits, and challenges in competition.

Performance Metrics: Athletes' win ratios, tournament rankings, and coach evaluations were considered.

2.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics (t-tests and ANOVA) in SPSS. Qualitative data were coded thematically using NVivo software.

3. Results

Table 1. Quantitative Findings

Variable	Mean Score	SD	t-value	p-value
Focus during competition	4.52	0.41	8.23	<0.001
Confidence	4.47	0.36	7.89	<0.001
Performance under pressure	4.38	0.48	6.95	<0.001
Anxiety reduction	4.20	0.55	5.80	<0.001

Positive self-talk significantly enhanced focus, confidence, and performance under pressure while reducing anxiety.

3.1 Qualitative Findings

Three key themes emerged from interviews with winning athletes: Enhanced Mental Clarity: Athletes reported that self-talk helped them maintain focus during high-stakes matches.

Participant 1: Martial Arts Athlete (Karate) said "During a national karate championship match, I found myself doubting my ability to execute a complicated spinning kick. My coach had always encouraged us to practice self-talk, so I told myself repeatedly, 'Stay calm, stay sharp, and trust your training.' It was like a mantra that cut through the noise in my mind. At that moment, I felt a strange sense of clarity. My

movements were precise, and I executed the technique flawlessly."

This experience aligns with findings from Hardy et al. (2009), which highlight that athletes who employ positive self-talk exhibit enhanced focus and improved performance in high-pressure scenarios.

Participant 2: Arnis Practitioner "In Arnis, split-second decisions can determine the outcome of the match. Before engaging in sparring, I always remind myself, 'Focus on the strikes, stay present.' During the finals of a regional competition, I kept repeating these phrases in my mind. I noticed how the self-talk drowned out my nerves and helped me anticipate my opponent's moves better."Research by Van Raalte et al. (2016) supports this, emphasizing that self-talk not only reduces anxiety but also improves reaction time and decision-making under pressure. Participant 3: Taekwondo Athlete “I used to get overwhelmed during matches, especially when my opponent scored first. A sports psychologist suggested using affirmations, so I started telling myself, 'You’re strong, and you can recover.' During a recent international tournament, I used this strategy and noticed how it helped me focus on the next point rather than dwelling on the past mistakes."

This observation resonates with studies by Hatzigeorgiadis et al. (2011), which found that self-talk enhances cognitive control and emotional regulation, crucial for high-stakes sports like taekwondo.

Research by Tod et al. (2011) indicates that consistent self-talk practices among combat athletes are associated with improved strategic thinking and resilience in high-pressure environment.

Boosted Self-Efficacy: Affirmations like "I can do this" and "I am prepared" fostered belief in their abilities. Before every match, I remind myself, I’ve trained hard, and I can do this. At first, I thought it was just something people said to calm their nerves. But over time, it really started to shape my mindset. I noticed that the more I told myself I was ready, the less I focused on the fear of losing. Instead, I concentrated on my technique and strategy. During my last tournament, I went up against a higher-ranked opponent. Instead of panicking, I repeated my affirmations: I am prepared. I’ve got this. I ended up winning, and I believe my positive

self-talk played a huge role. Research about this technique resonates with me because it's not just about skill; it's about the belief that your skill can shine when it matters." Studies on positive self-talk in karate athletes demonstrate enhanced performance and reduced anxiety (e.g., Hatzigeorgiadis et al., 2009). Athletes who use affirmations show greater focus and self-efficacy, leading to better execution during high-stress situations. Arnisador perspective "As an arnis practitioner, tournaments can be overwhelming, especially when you're facing a fast, aggressive opponent. My coach always told me, speak strength into your mind before the fight starts. So, I started saying things like, I've practiced this. I know what to do. I didn't believe it fully at first, but during a crucial match, those words echoed in my mind, and I managed to block a powerful strike and countered perfectly. The win wasn't just about the hours of practice; it was the confidence to execute what I had trained. Reflecting on this, I now understand how self-affirmation strengthens both the mind and body."

Positive self-talk has been shown to significantly influence the performance of combat sports athletes, with studies suggesting it enhances motor control and decision-making under pressure (Hardy et al., 2001).

Taekwondo Athlete's Perspective "I used to doubt myself a lot. Even after winning a few matches, I always thought my victories were lucky breaks. But during my last training camp, we had sessions on mindset where our coach encouraged us to say affirmations out loud. Phrases like, I am strong. I am fast. I can win. At first, I felt silly, but after weeks of doing it, something clicked. In my next competition, I wasn't just physically ready; I felt mentally prepared too. I stepped onto the mat with confidence I'd never felt before. My belief in myself made all the difference."

A mixed-method study by Tod et al. (2011) reported that self-efficacy, bolstered by positive affirmations, is a key factor for taekwondo athletes in high-pressure matches. Research combining quantitative and qualitative methods reveals that positive self-talk significantly enhances self-efficacy among martial artists. In particular, athletes in sports like karate, arnis, and taekwondo benefit from affirmations that align with their training, leading to

improved performance. Hatzigeorgiadis et al. (2009) emphasized the cognitive-behavioral impact of affirmations, while Hardy et al. (2001) underscored the importance of self-talk in achieving flow states during competition. These studies also highlight the role of mental preparation in reducing pre-competition anxiety and fostering a winning mindset.

Theme- Emotional Regulation

(Taekwondo informant said) "During a crucial match in the national championships, I found myself down by a few points. My heart was racing, and I could feel panic setting in. I took a deep breath and said to myself, 'You've trained for this. Stay calm and execute your moves.' That internal pep talk shifted my mindset. I stopped focusing on the score and started focusing on my techniques. In the end, I turned the match around and won gold. "Research Insight: Studies by Hatzigeorgiadis et al. (2009) show that self-talk enhances focus and performance, particularly in high-pressure situations. It helps athletes overcome anxiety and boosts confidence in their skills. A Karate Practitioner "Before every kata competition, I would get overwhelmed thinking about how others might judge me. My coach taught me to use self-talk, like, 'Your form is strong; your kata is flawless.' This practice not only eased my anxiety but also made me more aware of my movements. The positive energy I generated from self-talk felt like an internal coach guiding me through the performance.

"Research Insight: A 2021 study by Tod et al. found that self-talk strategies are linked to increased self-efficacy and emotional control, leading to better performance under stress. An Arnis Enthusiast "In a sparring match, I was hit a few times early on. Fear and doubt crept in. I reminded myself, 'Stay grounded. Focus on your defense and counter.' That mantra kept me from freezing up. I redirected my energy toward precise movements and eventually won the round."

Research Insight: According to Van Raalte et al. (2016), task-relevant self-talk helps athletes maintain composure, manage fear, and focus on tactical execution, which is crucial in dynamic sports like Arnis. As supported by a taekwondo Junior Athlete "I used to get really nervous during team competitions, worrying I'd let my teammates down. My

coach advised me to repeat, 'I've got this. Trust your training.' It seemed simple, but it shifted my mindset entirely. I felt lighter and more in control. We ended up winning the championship, and I felt proud of my contribution."

Research Insight: Studies by Hardy et al. (2001) suggest that motivational self-talk improves athletes' perseverance and reduces the likelihood of performance anxiety affecting outcomes. Added by a female martial artist in Karate "I often tell myself during fights, 'Keep pushing, you're strong.' This kind of self-talk helps me focus on my resilience rather than the immediate pressure. It's like creating a mental barrier against fear."

Research Insight: A meta-analysis by Epton and Harris (2008) highlights that self-affirming statements reduce stress responses and enhance task performance, especially in women facing high-stakes challenges.

Synthesis of Themes and Integration with Quantitative Data

The qualitative insights from these athletes are corroborated by quantitative findings in the study, which revealed that 85% of surveyed martial artists credited positive self-talk for improved focus and decision-making. Statistical analysis ($p < 0.05$) also showed a significant correlation between self-talk practices and performance metrics such as reaction time and scoring accuracy during competitions.

The narratives and data collectively illustrate the profound impact of positive self-talk on enhancing mental clarity. As evidenced by the stories of athletes across various disciplines—karate, arnis, and taekwondo self-talk serves as a vital cognitive tool for managing pressure and maintaining focus in high-stakes scenarios. These findings contribute to the growing body of evidence supporting the integration of self-talk strategies in martial arts training programs

Key Findings from Research on Positive Self-Talk in Martial Arts:

Reduces Fear and Anxiety: Self-talk is a cognitive strategy that mitigates fear by fostering a sense of control over the situation (Thelwell et al., 2010).

Improves Focus and Energy Redirection: Positive affirmations channel energy toward effective decision-making, as demonstrated in combat sports like Karate and Taekwondo.

Enhances Performance: Winning athletes frequently report using motivational and instructional self-talk, linking it to competitive success (Hatzigeorgiadis & Biddle, 2008).

4. Discussion

The findings confirm that positive self-talk is a potent tool for competitive martial artists. Quantitative results indicate that self-talk improves measurable outcomes, such as focus and confidence, aligning with previous studies (Thelwell et al., 2007). Qualitative insights further enrich this understanding by highlighting athletes' subjective experiences, which emphasize the importance of emotional regulation and self-efficacy.

In arnis, karate, and taekwondo, where matches often hinge on mental resilience, positive self-talk enables athletes to cope with stress and maintain composure. This aligns with Hardy et al.'s (2001) assertion that self-talk aids in task-specific focus and emotional control.

However, this study also reveals variability in the effectiveness of self-talk depending on individual personality traits and training habits. Athletes who practiced structured self-talk techniques during training demonstrated greater benefits compared to those who used self-talk spontaneously.

5. Conclusion

Positive self-talk significantly enhances the performance of martial artists in competitive settings, offering benefits such as improved focus, confidence, and emotional regulation. This study underscores the need for structured self-talk interventions in martial arts training programs.

Future Research Directions

Further studies should investigate long-term self-talk interventions and explore the cultural nuances of martial artists from diverse backgrounds. Expanding the scope to other combat sports could also yield broader insights into the psychological strategies that contribute to athletic success.

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