

# Lived Experiences of Karatedo Athletes: A Phenomenological Study

Alonzo L. Mortejo

Department of Graduate school, Faculty of Mater in Physical education and sports, Bataan Peninsula State University, Balanga city, Philippines, 2112

\*Corresponding Author: [alonzomortejo@gmail.com](mailto:alonzomortejo@gmail.com)

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## Abstract

**Studi Purpose** With an emphasis on their motivations, difficulties, and personal development, this study examines the lived experiences of karate dojo athletes at a few Philippine institutions. **Method** The study examines how Karatedo practice affects athletes' self-discipline, fortitude, and identity using a qualitative phenomenological technique. Important themes, such as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, physical and psychological challenges, and the transforming impact of Karatedo in creating life skills, surfaced through in-depth interviews with collegiate and national-level athletes from state colleges and universities (SUCs). **Results** show that Karatedo helps athletes develop their mental toughness, emotional intelligence, and sense of belonging, which in turn affects their career and personal paths.

**Keywords:** Martial Arts; Sports Psychology; Athlete Resilience; Karate; Collegiate Athletes;

## 1. Introduction

Karatedo, a Japanese martial art deeply rooted in discipline and self-mastery, has gained global recognition both as a traditional practice and a competitive sport (Funakoshi, 2018). For athletes, Karatedo is more than a form of self-defense; it serves as a vehicle for personal transformation, instilling values such as perseverance, respect, and mental toughness (Bhattacharya et al., 2022; Mor-stabilini, 2013) (Nakayama, 2020). (Física et al., n.d.)

Despite its growing popularity in the Philippines, research focusing on the experiences of Karatedo practitioners remains scarce. While studies on sports psychology emphasize the importance of mental resilience in athletics (Deci & Ryan, 2017), there is a gap in understanding the unique challenges and triumphs faced by Karatedo athletes. This study aims to bridge that gap by exploring the lived experiences of Karatedo practitioners, particularly how they navigate their training, competition pressures, and personal growth.

Through a phenomenological approach, this study presents narratives that highlight the struggles and victories of Karatedo athletes, offering insights into how the sport impacts their lives beyond the dojo.

## 2. Materials and Methods

A qualitative phenomenological research design was employed to capture the authentic lived experiences of Karatedo athletes in select colleges in the Philippines. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with 10 Karatedo athletes from different competitive

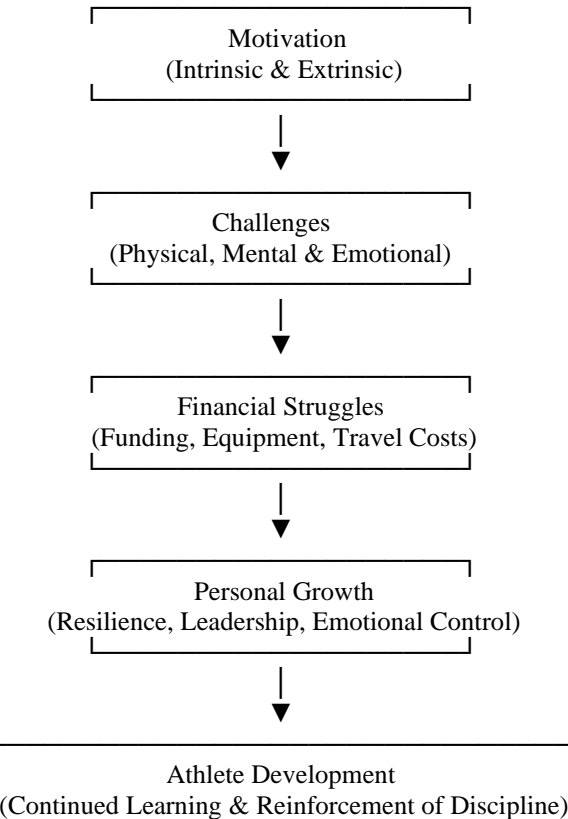
levels, including university teams and national representatives. Participants were consistent athletes selected using purposive sampling to ensure diverse perspectives on the sport. The data were analyzed thematically, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework. Recurring themes were identified, and a thematic map was developed to illustrate the core experiences of Karatedo athletes.

## 3. Discussion

The lived experiences of Karatedo athletes revealed several key themes, including their motivations, challenges, and personal growth throughout their journey in the sport.

Here is an improved cyclical version of the thematic map, which better illustrates the continuous journey of Karatedo athletes' lived experiences:

Cyclical Thematic Map of Karatedo Athletes' Lived Experiences



Explanation of the Cyclical Structure

- **Motivation:** Athletes begin their Karatedo journey due to intrinsic factors (self-growth, passion, discipline) or extrinsic factors (scholarships, family influence, recognition).
- **Challenges:** As they progress, they face physical, mental, and emotional difficulties due to competition pressure, injuries, and burnout.
- **Financial Struggles:** Limited funding, expensive travel, and lack of institutional support add to their challenges.
- **Personal Growth:** Despite hardships, Karatedo fosters resilience, leadership, and mental strength, helping athletes overcome adversity.
- **Athlete Development:** As they grow, athletes continue learning and reinforcing discipline, eventually mentoring younger athletes, passing on their experiences, and inspiring the next generation.

The study revealed that collegiate Karatedo athletes in the Philippines experience a dynamic interplay of motivation, challenges, and personal development throughout their athletic journey. Motivation emerged as a significant factor in their engagement with the sport, with intrinsic and extrinsic elements shaping their commitment. Intrinsic motivation was driven by a deep passion for martial arts, personal growth, and the discipline instilled by Karatedo, which many athletes found beneficial beyond sports. Participants highlighted how their training enhanced their self-discipline, perseverance, and resilience, which translated into their academic and personal lives. Additionally, extrinsic motivations, such as scholarship opportunities, family influence, and the prestige associated with being a Karatedo athlete, played a crucial role in sustaining their involvement. Several athletes expressed gratitude for the educational access their sport provided, reinforcing the significant role of Karatedo in higher education. This in support to the studies (Meyer & Bittmann, 2018; Parnabas et al., 2015) made by the motivation is crucial among athletes in karatedo for joining.

Despite these motivations, the study identified substantial challenges faced by collegiate Karatedo athletes as also good to examine as mentioned in the study also of (Degli & Di, 2018). Physical challenges were a common theme, as athletes endured rigorous training schedules that often resulted in injuries and fatigue. Rehabilitation from injuries proved to be a mental and emotional struggle, yet many athletes viewed these experiences as opportunities to build resilience. Psychological challenges were also prevalent, with athletes experiencing performance anxiety, self-doubt, and the immense pressure of representing their schools in competitions. Mental fortitude became a key factor in managing these stressors, with some athletes adopting strategies such as mental conditioning and self-regulation techniques. Financial constraints further exacerbated these difficulties, as limited institutional support for Karatedo often required athletes to fund their own training, travel, and equipment expenses. Unlike mainstream sports such as basketball, Karatedo received minimal financial backing, making it difficult for athletes to fully focus on their development without external burdens.

Despite these adversities, the study found that participation in Karatedo significantly contributed to athletes' personal and psychological growth. Many reported increased self-discipline, leadership skills, and emotional intelligence. Through their experiences, athletes developed a heightened sense of responsibility, as many transitioned into leadership roles within their teams, mentoring younger athletes and fostering a supportive team culture. The discipline cultivated in Karatedo extended beyond the sport, positively influencing their academic performance and personal decision-making. These findings illustrate the transformative power of Karatedo, not only as a sport but as a medium for holistic development, equipping athletes with essential life skills that extend into their future careers and personal endeavors.

## 4. Conclusion

This study underscores the multifaceted experiences of collegiate Karatedo athletes in the Philippines, highlighting both the challenges and the profound growth associated with their participation in the sport. While athletes navigate physical strain, mental pressure, and financial constraints, their journey is marked by resilience, discipline, and personal transformation. Karatedo serves as a platform for holistic development, fostering mental fortitude, leadership, and a strong sense of purpose among athletes.

Given these insights, it is imperative that universities and sports institutions enhance their support for Karatedo programs. Increased financial backing would alleviate the economic burden on athletes, allowing them to focus on their training and academic pursuits. Additionally, integrating sports psychology programs into athletic training would provide athletes with the mental resilience needed to manage competition stress and performance anxiety. Community-based initiatives should also be encouraged to promote Karatedo at the grassroots level, ensuring that aspiring athletes have access to training and opportunities from an early stage. By addressing these concerns, institutions can contribute to a more supportive and sustainable environment for collegiate Karatedo athletes, empowering them to thrive in both their sporting and academic pursuits.

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