

The Effects of Imagery Among Karatedo Players in Selected Colleges and Universities in the Philippines: A Narrative Inquiry

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Abstract

Studi Purpose This study explores the lived experiences of collegiate Karatedo athletes in the Philippines who engaged in mental imagery as part of their athletic preparation. Using a narrative inquiry approach, the research investigates how athletes internalize and make sense of visualization techniques, particularly in enhancing performance readiness, confidence, and stress regulation. Data were gathered from in-depth narrative interviews with ten Karatedo athletes from five universities who completed an eight-week structured imagery program. Emerging stories reflect how athletes used imagery as a rehearsal space, a confidence builder, and a mechanism for emotional regulation. The study highlights imagery's transformative influence on mental preparation, resilience, and identity formation in competitive martial arts. Findings emphasize the need for sport programs to adopt mental training techniques that are personal, reflective, and emotionally empowering.

Keywords: Imagery, Narrative Inquiry; Karatedo; Mental Rehearsal; Athletic Performance; Emotional Regulation; Confidence Building

1. Introduction

Considerable amount of studies were conducted examine the impact of imagery in sports performance in martial arts. (Parnabas, 2015)(Qasim et al., 2014) with the results indicating a positive correlation between internal imagery and sports performance, Mental preparation is a critical component of elite athletic performance, often equaling physical conditioning in importance. Among various mental techniques, imagery—or the cognitive simulation of specific movements and scenarios—has emerged as a powerful tool for enhancing psychological readiness and focus(Mizuguchi et al., 2012). While imagery's effectiveness is well-documented in sport psychology (Cumming & Williams, 2012; Weinberg & Gould, 2015), few studies focus on how athletes subjectively experience this process, especially in the context of Filipino martial arts practitioners.

Karatedo, with its emphasis on discipline, inner calm, and visualization, is uniquely positioned to benefit from mental rehearsal techniques. Yet, the voices of collegiate Karatedo athletes remain largely unheard in academic literature. This study seeks to bridge that gap by capturing and interpreting their personal narratives on the use of imagery in training and competition. Through storytelling and reflective dialogue, this research aims to understand

not only *what* these athletes experienced but *how* they experienced and interpreted the mental imagery process in their athletic lives.

2. Materials and Methods

Research Design

This study employed narrative inquiry as outlined by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), placing participants' stories at the center of the research. This method is grounded in the philosophical foundation of Dewey (1938), who emphasized experience as a vital element in education and human development. The focus was on temporal progression, social interaction, and place to understand each athlete's imagery journey.

Participants and Locale

Ten collegiate Karatedo players (five male, five female), aged 18 to 23, from five higher education institutions in the Philippines member of state colleges and Universities athletic association region (SCUAA) , participated. All had prior regional or national-level competition experience and had completed an eight-week guided imagery program as part of their training regimen.

Data Collection

Participants were interviewed individually in semi-structured, narrative-style sessions lasting 45 to 60 minutes. Questions encouraged storytelling:

- "Describe a moment when imagery changed the way you performed."
- "How did you feel before and after using imagery in training or competition?"

Data Analysis

Stories were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using holistic-content analysis. Key themes emerged through repeated readings, with attention to recurring emotional tones, pivotal moments, and shifts in perspective.

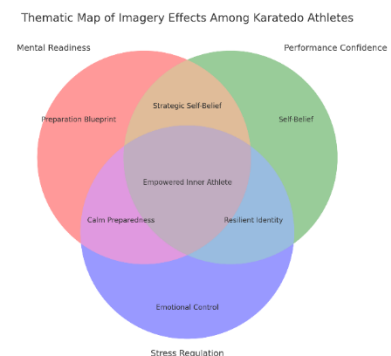


Figure 1. Findings and Thematic Narratives

Mental Readiness: “I already fought the match in my head.”

Participants shared that imagery helped them prepare mentally before competitions. The practice became a “mental warm-up” allowing them to feel more in control. One athlete narrated:

“Before, I used to get overwhelmed just thinking about the crowd and my opponents. But once I began rehearsing the match in my head—each move, each bow—it felt like I already knew the outcome. It was like muscle memory but for the mind.”

Performance Confidence: “I started to believe what I saw.”

Repeated visualizations helped athletes reconstruct their internal belief systems. Imagining themselves succeeding made success feel real.

“I never used to think I could win. But once I started seeing it in my head, it was like I became a different version of myself—someone I believed in.”

Stress Regulation: “It made my mind quiet.”

Visualization provided a calming space amidst competitive tension. Athletes used it to breathe deeply, visualize worst-case scenarios, and emotionally regulate under pressure.

“There were times I imagined losing—falling down, missing the kata. Surprisingly, that made me less afraid when those things actually happened. I was ready.”

3. Result

Thematic Analysis and Interpretation

Theme 1: Mental Readiness – “I already fought the match in my head.”

Discussion:

Mental readiness refers to the athlete’s ability to visualize specific match scenarios before they occur. Imagery served as a cognitive rehearsal space where athletes could map out their performance strategies in advance. This simulation gave them a mental edge, reducing uncertainty and fear of the unknown.

Interpretation:

Participants found that rehearsing movements in their mind helped them anticipate challenges and outcomes. This proactive mental approach was linked to reduced anxiety and enhanced task focus during actual matches. They described this experience as akin to “pre-living” the competition.

Theme 2: Performance Confidence – “I started to believe what I saw.”

Discussion:

This theme captures the internal shift in self-perception. By repeatedly imagining successful actions—winning matches, landing strikes, performing katas—athletes developed a more empowered and capable version of themselves.

Interpretation:

The act of “seeing is believing” became a transformative tool. Imagery helped athletes construct a new identity grounded in competence and control. Their confidence

became intrinsic, no longer reliant on coaches’ or peers’ affirmations.

Theme 3: Stress Regulation – “It made my mind quiet.”

Discussion:

Imagery was a coping mechanism for managing pre-competition jitters and in-game pressure. Participants noted that imagining setbacks (e.g., losing, making mistakes) and rehearsing how they would respond made them feel more emotionally prepared.

Interpretation:

Visualization served not just for success, but for failure as well. This created emotional stability, allowing athletes to remain calm under pressure. It reinforced resilience and readiness to bounce back from unexpected scenarios.

Intersections of Themes (Based on Figure)

Mental Readiness + Performance Confidence = Strategic Self-Belief

Athletes believed they were prepared because they had seen themselves succeed in rehearsal. Their confidence was not blind—it was informed by mental simulations.

Performance Confidence + Stress Regulation = Resilient Identity

When athletes developed inner strength through visualization and managed emotions, they crafted an athletic identity that thrived under pressure.

Mental Readiness + Stress Regulation = Calm Preparedness

Athletes reported approaching matches with a composed mindset, ready for both expected and unexpected outcomes.

All Three Themes = Empowered Inner Athlete

The synergy of readiness, belief, and calm culminated in an internal transformation. Participants became more than competitors—they became resilient, mentally agile, and emotionally intelligent athletes.

4. Discussion

The findings suggest that mental imagery is not merely a visualization exercise but a transformative psychological tool. Through narratives, athletes demonstrated how imagery enhanced self-perception and coping strategies. These results align with Cumming and Williams (2012), who emphasized imagery’s role in motivation and skill learning. Furthermore, the participants’ reflection on failure scenarios also echoes Munroe-Chandler et al. (2007), highlighting developmental maturity in cognitive regulation.

The themes also suggest a profound relationship between mental rehearsal and personal identity construction. Athletes used imagery not only to improve sport performance but to shape the athlete they aspired to become. Imagery became a space for cognitive and emotional transformation also aligned with the studies of (Cumming & Ramsey, 2006; *Imagery in Sport* Dave Smith, Manchester Metropolitan University Caroline Wakefield, Liverpool Hope University, 2008)(Hugh et al., n.d.)

5. Conclusion

This narrative inquiry sheds light on the power of mental imagery among collegiate Karatedo athletes in the Philippines. Through stories of preparation, belief, and self-regulation, it became evident that imagery offers more than competitive advantage—it offers emotional grounding and identity support. Coaches and athletic institutions are encouraged to embed guided imagery into their training programs as a holistic development strategy for young athletes.

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