

Beyond the Mat: Experiences of Physical Education Students in Managing Aggression Through Combat Sports Training

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Abstract: This qualitative study explored the lived experiences of Bachelor of Physical Education (BPEd) students in managing aggression through combat sports training. Using an interpretive phenomenological design, the study examined students' experiences, personal and social meanings, and insights for teaching combat sports in higher education. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with 12 undergraduate BPEd students with experience in structured combat sports training and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis. Findings revealed that students developed emotional regulation through breathing, focus, and delayed reactions; discipline and self-control in managing physical strength; and calmer, nonviolent responses to conflict. Combat sports also contributed to character formation, future-teacher identity, trust, cooperation, confidence, perseverance, and personal growth. Students emphasized holistic instruction, demonstrations, guided practice, feedback, and safety-centered pedagogy. Overall, combat sports were experienced as educational practices that supported aggression management, personal development, social connectedness, and professional preparation.

Keywords: combat sports, aggression management, emotional regulation, BPEd students

1. Introduction

Physical Education (PE) promotes not only physical fitness but also students' emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Combat sports such as judo, karate, taekwondo, and mixed martial arts are often associated with aggression because of their physical and competitive nature. However, research suggests that structured combat sports can promote self-discipline, emotional regulation, self-control, and aggression management. These experiences may influence how PE students perceive, express, and regulate aggressive behaviors inside and outside training environments.

Recent studies support the psychosocial benefits of combat sports. Santos (2026) found that structured combat sports activities enhanced discipline, emotional control, and self-awareness among college PE students. Similarly, Wang et al. (2026) reported that martial arts interventions were associated with reduced aggressive behavior among youth, particularly when training emphasized self-control and holistic development. Lafuente, Zubiaur, and Gutiérrez-García (2021) likewise emphasized the roles of ethical values, respect, and self-control in reducing anger and aggression. Other studies have linked structured physical activity with improved emotional regulation, resilience, and psychological well-being (Zhu et al., 2022; Martin-Rodriguez, 2024).

This study is anchored in Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) and Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory (2000). Social Learning Theory explains how students develop behaviors through observation, imitation,

and reinforcement, while Self-Determination Theory emphasizes autonomy, competence, and relatedness as foundations of motivation and well-being. Together, these theories provide a framework for understanding how combat sports may influence aggression management, self-discipline, motivation, and emotional development.

Although previous research has demonstrated the benefits of combat sports in reducing aggression, much of the evidence relies on quantitative measures. Limited qualitative research has explored how PE students personally experience and interpret aggression management through combat sports. This study addresses this gap by examining students' lived experiences and the personal and social meanings they attribute to combat sports participation.

Specifically, this study explores the lived experiences of Bachelor of Physical Education (BPEd) students in managing aggression through combat sports. It examines how students experience aggression management, the personal and social meanings they associate with participation, and insights that may inform the teaching and implementation of combat sports in higher education.

Statement of the Problem

This study aims to explore the lived experiences of Bachelor of Physical Education (BPEd) students in managing aggression through combat sports.

Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do BPEd students describe their experiences in managing aggression through combat sports?
2. What personal and social meanings do students attribute to combat sports participation?
3. What insights can inform the teaching of combat sports in higher education?

2. Methodology

Research Design

This study will use an interpretive phenomenological design to explore how Physical Education students experience and understand aggression management through combat sports training. Phenomenology is appropriate for the study focuses on students' lived experiences, including how they perceive anger, emotional control, discipline, frustration, and behavioral change during training. The inquiry should avoid assuming that combat sports automatically reduce aggression, according to existing evidence is mixed: the study of Lafuente et al. (2021), found unclear overall effects of martial arts and combat sports on anger and aggression, while Santos (2026) reported improvements in emotional control and aggression management but also identified increased frustration and competitiveness among some students. Data will be interpreted through an interpretivist perspective: recognizing that students may attach different meanings to the same training experiences. The study may be framed as a bounded of purposive sampling technique which is a non-probability where researchers deliberately choose participants based on criterion.

Participants

Participants will be exactly 12 undergraduate Physical Education students who have completed or are currently completing a structured combat sports course or training program: such as taekwondo, karate, arnis, or mixed martial arts. Purposive criterion sampling will be used because participants must have direct experience with the phenomenon under investigation:

- inclusion criteria may include being officially enrolled in the Physical Education program,
- participating in combat sports training for at least one academic term,
- and being willing to discuss experiences of anger, emotional regulation, conflict, and aggression management.

Maximum-variation sampling should be used to include students with different genders, year levels, combat-sport disciplines, training durations, and perceived levels of change. Students who are below the legal age of consent, medically restricted from training, or currently experiencing a serious psychological crisis may be excluded in data collection.

Data Collection

Data will be collected through individual semi-structured interviews, supplemented by non-participant observations of training sessions. Each student may participate in one 5–10-minutes interview, with follow-up interviews conducted when clarification is needed. Interview questions should ask students to describe situations in which they felt angry or aggressive, how instructors taught self-control and respect, how sparring or competition affected their emotions, what strategies they use to manage impulses, and whether training influenced their behavior outside the gym. With permission, interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim; the researcher will also maintain field notes and audio recording. These procedures are supported by prior qualitative combat-sports research that used recorded semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis (Santos, 2026).

Data Analysis

Interview transcripts will be analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis following the six-phase process described by Braun and Clarke (2006):

1. Familiarizing yourself with the data
2. Generating initial codes
3. Searching for themes
4. Review of themes
5. Defining and naming of themes, and
6. Writing up

The researcher will first read and reread the transcripts, identify meaningful statements, and code experiences related to emotional triggers, self-regulation, discipline, empathy, respect, competitiveness, frustration, and perceived behavioral change. Codes will then be compared across participants and data sources to develop broader themes, while negative cases and accounts that contradict the dominant pattern will be retained rather than removed. Credibility will be strengthened through peer debriefing, an audit trail and comparison of interviews with observations. However, participant feedback will be used to enrich interpretation rather than treated as a requirement for proving validity. Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasize that thematic analysis is flexible but must remain theoretically coherent and systematic, and recent methodological guidance warns researchers not to treat themes as automatically “emerging” without active interpretive work (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Morriss, 2024).

Ethical Considerations

Participation should be voluntary and unrelated to grades, team selection, athletic evaluation, or instructor approval; the Belmont Report explains that valid consent requires information, comprehension, and voluntariness (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). Students should be informed about the study’s purpose, procedures, possible emotional discomfort, recording practices, confidentiality limits, benefits, and their right to refuse or withdraw without penalty. Based on the fact that, discussions may involve anger, interpersonal conflict, bullying, injury, or distress, interviews should be conducted privately by a trained researcher, with a stopping procedure and referral pathway to a counselor or health professional. In addition to, Thematic Analysis required coding, identifying details should be removed from transcripts, digital files should be stored securely, and quotations should be edited only when necessary to protect identity and remain the confidentiality without changing meaning. Researchers must also avoid conducting interviews immediately after intense sparring, prevent coercion caused by teacher–student power relationships, report any legally mandated safeguarding concerns transparently, and maintain reflexivity about their own beliefs regarding combat sports and aggression.

Thematic Analysis

Participation and Confidence in Managing Aggression

Theme 1: *Emotional Regulation Through Pause, Breathing, and Focus*

Both male and female BPEd students perceived that combat sports training taught them to pause, breathe, and focus before reacting to anger or frustration. These techniques helped them manage strong emotions during training, competition, and everyday conflicts.

"I learned to control my emotions and remain calm instead of reacting right away." (Respondent 2)

"In the sport of Arnis, I learned to stay calm and control my emotions." (Respondent 3)

"Combat sports have taught me breathing techniques, patience, and self-control to manage strong emotions. Staying focused during training helps me calm down and think clearly before reacting." (Respondent 9)

"That time when I was being cheated on inside the court—I landed a head kick on my opponent, but they were the one awarded the point. My coach lost her protest card because she protested that I did land a head kick and it was supposed to be my point. It was blatant cheating, but instead of getting angry, it sank in—at first I was frustrated, but I really took a deep breath because no one else was going to help me except myself since we had no more protests or cards left. So I really needed clear points. Through the Lord's guidance and genuine self-trust, I was able to bring home the gold." (Respondent 1)

The findings suggest that confidence in managing aggression is strongly influenced by students' ability to regulate their emotions through breathing, focus, and delayed reaction. This observation aligns with research on martial arts and combat sports, which indicates that traditional training may reduce anger and aggression by promoting self-control and emotional regulation (Lafuente et al., 2021). Students who perceive themselves as capable of controlling their emotions are more likely to respond calmly in stressful situations and avoid impulsive or aggressive behavior.

Similarly, recent reviews of aggression control in combat training suggest that structured practice, breathing techniques, and mental focus contribute to improved stress management and self-discipline among martial arts practitioners (Zenodo, 2026). Therefore, the present findings support the existing literature by demonstrating that pause, breathing, and focus can positively affect students' confidence in managing anger and aggression.

Theme 2: Discipline and Self-Control as Responsible Strength

The students emphasized that combat sports taught them to view strength as the ability to restrain oneself rather than to overpower others. Discipline and self-control were central to their understanding of responsible use of physical ability.

"Yes, it changed. Before, I used to get angry very quickly—like having anger issues. Now, I choose to think everything through first, realizing I don't need to show my anger to anyone because it only shows my weakness. I learned that true strength is being able to restrain yourself even when you have the power to inflict pain." (Respondent 1)

"I learned that controlling myself is more important than trying to overpower someone else." (Respondent 6)

"The 5 Tenets of Taekwondo: Courteousness, Integrity, Perseverance, Self-control, and Indomitable Spirit. Also breathing, focus, and discipline during training and inside the court—you should be focused on your goal and not get distracted by anyone. I learned that not all problems are solved with a hot head because that is usually what makes you lose." (Respondent 1)

"Discipline, self-control, patience, proper breathing, and the things I learned help me control my emotions." (Respondent 4)

Based on their responses, discipline and self-control are the main factors influencing how students manage aggression and interpret physical strength. Some students explicitly connected these values to their identity as future physical education teachers, indicating that self-restraint is not only a personal skill but also a professional responsibility.

These findings are consistent with previous research on martial arts and combat sports, which reports that participation may be associated with lower aggression when training emphasizes respect, rules, and controlled practice (Lafuente et al., 2021; Santos et al., 2022). The systematic review found that traditional martial arts, in particular, may reduce anger and hostility by fostering self-discipline and ethical behavior. Therefore, the present findings support the existing literature by demonstrating that discipline and self-control can transform physical ability into responsible strength and reduce aggressive tendencies among BPEd students.

Theme 3: Conflict Transformation Through Calm and Nonviolent Responses

In this part, some students stated that combat sports training changed the way they respond to conflict. Instead of reacting with anger or confrontation, they learned to stay calm, think first, and resolve problems peacefully.

"The way I respond to conflict has changed, and I choose to stay calm and resolve the problem rather than get angry." (Respondent 4)

"Training taught me that physical strength should not be used to solve every problem. Instead, I should use self-control, communication, and proper judgement." (Respondent 6)

"There was one time when my teammate and I were sparring, then we unexpectedly got hurt. Instead of fighting, we chose to take deep breaths, focus, and remember that it was just training—just to avoid trouble." (Respondent 8)

"I have learned that patience, communication, and self-control are important in resolving conflicts peacefully." (Respondent 9)

The role of calm and nonviolent responses identified in this study echoes the findings of recent research on aggression control in combat training, which suggests that structured practice can reduce aggression and improve emotional control, stress management, and self-discipline (Zenodo, 2026). Positive social environments and clear rules in combat sports may therefore serve as protective factors against impulsive or aggressive behavior in everyday life.

These findings are also consistent with broader research on martial arts and combat sports, which indicates that training may support emotional regulation and conflict resolution when instruction emphasizes respect, communication, and controlled practice (Lafuente et al., 2021). Therefore, the present findings support the existing literature by demonstrating that combat sports can help students transform conflict through calm, thoughtful, and nonviolent responses.

Personal and Social Meanings of Combat-Sport Participation

Theme 1: Character Formation and Future-Teacher Identity

Both male and female BPEd students perceived that combat sports contributed to their character formation and professional identity as future physical education teachers. They described discipline, responsibility, patience, respect, and self-control as qualities that should be practiced personally before being taught to students.

"Through these real experiences, those are the best things I can share with my students—my experience on how I reached this point. I can be a good example to them that they won't just learn skills from me, but also discipline, respect, and perseverance, because sometimes we still need to remind each student." (Respondent 1)

"It taught me to be disciplined, patient, and responsible as a future P.E. teacher." (Respondent 2)

"As a future P.E. teacher, these qualities are important because I need to serve as a good example to my students and teach them discipline and respect." (Respondent 6)

"As a future PE teacher, discipline and self-control are very important. Combat sports taught me to set an example first before teaching PE." (Respondent 8)

The findings suggest that confidence in future teaching is strongly influenced by students' perception of their own character development. This observation aligns with research on physical education teacher education, which indicates that personal values and professional identity are closely connected to how future teachers understand their role (Pestaño et al., 2025). Students who perceive themselves as disciplined, respectful, and responsible are more likely to model these qualities in their future classrooms.

Similarly, recent studies on martial arts education suggest that intentional instruction in values, reflection, and respectful relationships can support character development among students (Campbell et al., 2021). Therefore, the present findings support the existing literature by demonstrating that combat sports can contribute to character formation and future-teacher identity among BPEd students.

Theme 2: Trust, Cooperation, and Social Connectedness

The students emphasized that partner drills, teamwork, and shared responsibility in combat sports helped them build trust, cooperation, and social connectedness with their classmates.

"It has a big influence on me because even in our drills, we are paired by partners, so it's the same when it comes to your relationship with your partner, family, or friends where you need to trust one another. We also have a team, like in school group activities where you need to work as one team and pull each other up, not down, because at these times you need to trust one another." (Respondent 1)

"It helps us build trust, respect, and better teamwork." (Respondent 2)

"Combat sports training has helped us build stronger relationships because we have to trust, respect, and cooperate with one another. We practice together and sometimes help each other improve our techniques. It also taught me that training partners are not enemies." (Respondent 6)

"Training in combat sports helps me build stronger relationships with my fellow BPEd classmates by teaching me cooperation, respect, and trust. Through partner drills and group activities, we learn to communicate, support one another, and work as a team." (Respondent 9)

Based on their responses, trust and cooperation are the main factors influencing students' social experiences in combat sports. Some students explicitly connected these experiences to friendship, belonging, and collective learning, indicating that combat sports can create positive social environments despite their confrontational nature.

These findings are consistent with previous research on social connectedness in sport and physical education, which reports that supportive peer relationships and cooperative activities can enhance students' sense of belonging and motivation (Manalad et al., 2026). Therefore, the present findings support the existing literature by demonstrating that trust, cooperation, and social connectedness can positively affect students' experiences in combat sports.

Theme 3: Confidence, Perseverance, and Personal Growth

In this part, some students stated that combat sports training contributed to their confidence, perseverance, and personal growth. They connected improvement with consistency, patience, and the willingness to continue despite difficulty or failure.

"Discipline, and I learned to be a responsible person. I learned to respect anyone regardless of who they are or what aspects they have. I learned to use everything I learned in the right way. I learned to persevere and not give up. I learned to trust myself, and because of this, my confidence was boosted because I am happy that I was acknowledged by my own barangay, my city, and my school, that I am also their pride." (Respondent 1)

"I learned discipline, respect, confidence, patience, and perseverance." (Respondent 2)

"The main values I gained are discipline, respect, perseverance, patience, confidence, humility, and self-control. Combat sports taught me that improvement takes time and that failure is part of learning." (Respondent 6)

"Perseverance, because I would be willing to do anything even when things are hard." (Respondent 10)

The role of confidence and perseverance identified in this study echoes the findings of recent research on martial arts and combat sports, which suggests that participation may support psychological development, self-efficacy, and resilience among students (Zenodo, 2026). Positive feedback, recognition of progress, and framing mistakes as part of learning may therefore serve as protective factors against discouragement and low self-confidence.

These findings are also consistent with broader research on physical activity and motivation Martin et al. (2017), which indicates that perceived competence and persistence are closely associated with continued participation and personal growth. Therefore, the present findings support the existing literature by demonstrating that confidence, perseverance, and personal growth can be enhanced through combat-sport participation among BPEd students.

Insights for Teaching Combat Sports in Higher Education

Theme 1: Combat Sports as Holistic Physical and Life-Skill Education

Both male and female BPEd students perceived that combat sports should be taught as holistic physical and life-skill education rather than as instruction in fighting techniques alone. They described self-defense, fitness, discipline, confidence, self-control, and professional preparation as important reasons for choosing combat sports classes.

"To learn self-defense, improve fitness, and gain skills that can be used as a future P.E. teacher." (Respondent 2)

"BPEd students choose combat sports because they want to learn self-defense, discipline, fitness, and skills that they can use as future P.E. teachers." (Respondent 4)

"It's more of an advantage when you are a BPEd student and you take combat sports. It's almost like it's required—not that I'm saying it literally is required—but for me, I prefer that if you are in P.E., your focus is combat sports because you learn more about self-defense, and not just self-defense, but all aspects of life like being disciplined, consistent, and managing emotions." (Respondent 5)

"Because it doesn't just help you learn how to fight it also gives you knowledge on when to fight or if you should fight. This also help with BPEd students because teaching is also about adjusting to the students' preference." (Respondent 10)

The findings suggest that students' motivation to participate in combat sports is strongly influenced by their perception of holistic benefits. This observation aligns with research on physical education curriculum, which indicates that students are more likely to engage when they perceive activities as relevant to their personal development and future careers (Pestaño et al., 2025; Martin et al., 2016). Therefore, the present findings support the existing literature by demonstrating that combat sports can be taught as holistic physical and life-skill education among BPEd students.

Theme 2: Demonstration, Practice, and Responsive Instruction

The students emphasized that existing teaching methods were effective when instructors used demonstrations, step-by-step explanations, practical activities, guided practice, and feedback.

"They are effective because of demonstrations, practice, and proper guidance from the instructor." (Respondent 2)

"They are effective because we learn through demonstrations, practice, and proper guidance from the trainer or coaches." (Respondent 3)

"The teaching methods are generally effective when instructors provide demonstrations, step-by-step instruction, guided practice, and proper feedback. Practical activities allow students to understand and apply the techniques instead of only learning them theoretically." (Respondent 6)

"Current teaching methods in combat sports classes are effective because they combine demonstrations, hands-on practice, and instructor feedback. These methods help students develop their proper techniques, physical fitness, discipline, and confidence." (Respondent 9)

Based on their responses, demonstration, practice, and responsive instruction are the main factors influencing students' learning effectiveness in combat sports. Some students explicitly connected these methods to their ability to understand and apply techniques safely and correctly.

These findings are consistent with previous research on physical education pedagogy, which reports that demonstration, guided practice, and individual feedback can enhance students' skill acquisition and confidence (Manalad et al., 2026). Therefore, the present findings support the existing literature by demonstrating that demonstration, practice, and responsive instruction can positively affect students' learning in combat sports.

Theme 3: Safety-Centered and Progressive Pedagogy

In this part, some students stated that safety should be integrated into every phase of combat sports instruction. They repeatedly mentioned warm-up, stretching, protective equipment, proper attire, correct techniques, sufficient space, controlled movements, following instructor rules, appropriate rest, and immediate reporting of pain or injury.

"Proper warm-up, using protective equipment, following instructions, and proper techniques are important." (Respondent 2)

"Safety measures include proper warm-up and stretching, wearing appropriate protective equipment, learning techniques gradually, following the instructor's rules, maintaining proper distance, and practicing controlled movements. Students should also be taught how to fall or move safely when applicable. Supervision by the instructor is important, and students should immediately report pain or injuries to prevent them from becoming more serious." (Respondent 6)

"Before training starts, we warm up first, then we train, and then we do combative fighting where you need to wear full gear—shin guards, headgear, groin guard, gloves, basically full gear." (Respondent 8)

"Safety measures used during combat sports classes include proper warm-up and stretching, wearing protective equipment such as gloves, headgear, and following the instructor's rules. Students are also taught proper techniques, controlled movements, and respect for their training partners. These measures help prevent injuries and ensure a safe learning environment." (Respondent 9)

The role of safety-centered and progressive pedagogy identified in this study echoes the findings of recent research on injury prevention in combat sports, which suggests that warm-up, protective equipment, progressive skill development, and instructor supervision can reduce the risk of injury (Zenodo, 2026). Positive safety cultures may therefore serve as protective factors against accidents and promote long-term participation.

These findings are also consistent with broader research on physical education safety, which indicates that clear rules, appropriate equipment, and gradual progression are essential for safe and effective instruction (Lafuente et al., 2021). Therefore, the present findings support the existing literature by demonstrating that safety-centered and progressive pedagogy can positively affect students' experiences in combat sports.

Psychological and Physiological Mechanisms of Aggression Regulation

Theme 1: Breathing Techniques as Physiological Regulation Tools

Both male and female BPED students perceived that breathing techniques learned in combat sports helped them regulate their physiological arousal during stressful situations.

"During a stressful situation, I think about the lessons from training and focus on my breathing and controlling my emotions." (Respondent 2)

"The lesson I learned that helped me was to be disciplined and in control of myself, to have proper breathing, and focus." (Respondent 3)

"There are times when I feel anger because of a problem, but what I learned in training helps me to breathe, remain calm, and avoid arguing." (Respondent 4)

"Breathing techniques, focus, discipline, and self-control are the lessons that help me the most." (Respondent 6)

The findings suggest that breathing techniques serve as physiological regulation tools that help students reduce arousal, regain composure, and think more clearly under pressure. This observation aligns with research on stress management and sport psychology, which indicates that controlled breathing can activate the parasympathetic nervous system and reduce the physiological symptoms of anger and anxiety (Gray, 2014). Students who perceive breathing as an effective self-regulation strategy are more likely to use it in stressful situations and avoid impulsive reactions.

Similarly, recent reviews of aggression control in combat training suggest that breathing techniques contribute to improved emotional regulation and stress management among martial arts practitioners (Zenodo, 2026). Therefore, the present findings support the existing literature by demonstrating that breathing techniques can positively affect students' physiological and emotional regulation in combat sports.

Theme 2: Focus and Attentional Control Under Pressure

The students emphasized that focus and attentional control helped them manage distractions, provocation, and frustration during training and competition.

"Also breathing, focus, and discipline during training and inside the court—you should be focused on your goal and not get distracted by anyone." (Respondent 1)

"When I am in a stressful situation, I remember our training where we need to be focused and composed, so I am better able to control myself." (Respondent 3)

"Staying focused during training helps me calm down and think clearly before reacting." (Respondent 9)

"Combat sports training has taught me to manage my anger and aggression by staying calm and thinking before I act. It helps me understand that strength should be used responsibly and that respect and self-control are important." (Respondent 9)

Based on their responses, focus and attentional control are the main factors influencing students' ability to manage distractions and maintain emotional regulation under pressure. Some students explicitly connected these skills to their performance in competition and their ability to avoid unnecessary conflict.

These findings are consistent with previous research on attentional control and sport performance, which reports that focus and concentration can enhance emotional regulation and decision-making among athletes (Gray, 2014). Therefore, the present findings support the existing literature by demonstrating that focus and attentional control can positively affect students' aggression management and performance in combat sports.

Theme 3: *Mental Toughness and Resilience in Difficult Situations*

In this part, some students stated that combat sports training helped them develop mental toughness and resilience, which enabled them to endure pain, frustration, and difficulty without losing control.

"Perhaps one situation is during a game. Naturally, in combat sports, you need to know how to adapt to the strikes and endure the pain. That's where your emotions will heighten, or where you need to control your emotions so you don't get hot-headed." (Respondent 5)

"Our training in combat sports is really different; you really need to build your mental toughness and how you handle various situations." (Respondent 5)

"Combat sports taught me that improvement takes time and that failure is part of learning. These values have helped me become more responsible and determined, especially when facing challenges in school and in everyday life." (Respondent 6)

The role of mental toughness and resilience identified in this study echoes the findings of recent research on martial arts and combat sports, which suggests that participation may support psychological resilience, coping skills, and stress tolerance among students (Zenodo, 2026). Positive feedback, recognition of progress, and framing challenges as opportunities for growth may therefore serve as protective factors against discouragement and emotional dysregulation.

These findings are also consistent with broader research on sport psychology and resilience, which indicates that mental toughness and coping skills are closely associated with improved emotional regulation and performance under pressure (Gray, 2014). Therefore, the present findings support the existing literature by demonstrating that mental toughness and resilience can positively affect students' aggression management and psychological well-being in combat sports.

Spiritual and Ethical Foundations of Aggression Management

Theme 1: *Faith and Spiritual Guidance as Emotional Anchors*

Several students, particularly the taekwondo participant, described faith and spiritual guidance as central to how they managed anger and aggression during training and competition.

"Once I step inside the court, I surrender everything to the Lord—I mean, all the guidance and my strength come from Him." (Respondent 1)

"Through the Lord's guidance and genuine self-trust, I was able to bring home the gold." (Respondent 1)

"It's inevitable that there is cheating inside the court; there are sadists who kick super hard just to beat you up, and there are those who provoke you inside the court. But instead of letting their attitude get to me, I'd be the one losing. It's hard to focus once you get hot-headed during a match because, for me, I don't just need to win because I want to, but because I love what I do." (Respondent 1)

The findings suggest that for some students, faith serves as an emotional anchor that helps them remain calm under pressure, cope with perceived injustice, and maintain focus on their goals rather than on provocation. This observation aligns with research on spirituality and sport, which indicates that religious beliefs and practices can support emotional regulation, resilience, and meaning-making among athletes (Comb & Cox, 1848). Students who perceive their performance as connected to a higher purpose may be less likely to react impulsively to frustration or unfairness.

Similarly, studies on moral development in martial arts suggest that spiritual or philosophical frameworks can reinforce ethical behavior and self-control (Zenodo, 2026). Therefore, the present findings support the existing literature by demonstrating that faith and spiritual guidance can positively influence students' emotional regulation and aggression management in combat sports.

Theme 2: *Moral Tenets and Ethical Frameworks Guide Behavior*

Students emphasized that moral tenets, particularly the five tenets of Taekwondo, provided an ethical framework for managing aggression and interpreting their experiences in combat sports.

“The 5 Tenets of Taekwondo: Courteousness, Integrity, Perseverance, Self-control, and Indomitable Spirit. Also breathing, focus, and discipline during training and inside the court—you should be focused on your goal and not get distracted by anyone. I learned that not all problems are solved with a hot head because that is usually what makes you lose.” (Respondent 1)

“Stay humble, be disciplined, and don’t act recklessly with your emotions.” (Respondent 8)

“I learned to respect anyone regardless of who they are or what aspects they have. I learned to use everything I learned in the right way.” (Respondent 1)

Based on their responses, moral tenets and ethical frameworks are the main factors influencing how students interpret strength, conflict, and responsibility in combat sports. Some students explicitly connected these values to their identity as future physical education teachers, indicating that ethical behavior is not only a personal commitment but also a professional obligation.

These findings are consistent with previous research on moral development in martial arts, which reports that explicit instruction in values such as courtesy, integrity, and self-control can foster ethical decision-making and reduce aggressive behavior (Lafuente et al., 2021). Therefore, the present findings support the existing literature by demonstrating that moral tenets and ethical frameworks can positively affect students’ aggression management and professional identity in combat sports.

Theme 3: Humility and Respect as Protective Factors Against Aggression

In this part, some students stated that humility and respect helped them avoid unnecessary conflict and manage aggression in training and everyday life.

“Stay humble, be disciplined, and don’t act recklessly with your emotions.” (Respondent 8)

“I learned to respect anyone regardless of who they are or what aspects they have.” (Respondent 1)

“Combat sports taught me that improvement takes time and that failure is part of learning. These values have helped me become more responsible and determined, especially when facing challenges in school and in everyday life.” (Respondent 6)

The role of humility and respect identified in this study echoes the findings of recent research on martial arts and combat sports, which suggests that participation may support moral development, empathy, and prosocial behavior among students (Zenodo, 2026). Positive social environments and explicit instruction in respect may therefore serve as protective factors against arrogance, hostility, and aggressive behavior.

These findings are also consistent with broader research on character education in sport, which indicates that humility, respect, and empathy are closely associated with reduced aggression and improved interpersonal relationships (Manalad et al., 2026; Martin & Santos, 2019). Therefore, the present findings support the existing literature by demonstrating that humility and respect can positively affect students’ aggression management and social interactions in combat sports.

3. Conclusion

Based on the qualitative findings and thematic synthesis, the following conclusions are drawn:

- Combat sports training serves as a highly effective educational and psychological intervention for managing aggression among BPEd students. Rather than provoking violence, structured training fosters cognitive restraint, emotional composure, and somatic self-regulation (such as controlled breathing) during high-stress situations.
- BPEd students attribute rich personal and social significance to combat sports. Participation instills vital professional values such as self-discipline, respect, consistency, and perseverance which shape their identity as future PE teachers and role models. Socially, it transforms training partners into trusted allies, promoting teamwork and relational trust.
- Combat sports hold high practical utility in higher education PE curricula. To maximize pedagogical efficacy, instruction must prioritize clear visual demonstrations, hands-on guided practice, explicit teaching of ethical values, and comprehensive safety protocols (including structured warm-ups and complete protective gear).

4. Recommendations

In light of the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are offered:

1. For PE Department Heads and Curriculum Designers:

Integrate combat sports (such as Taekwondo, Arnis, Judo, or Karate) as mandatory or core specialized courses within the Bachelor of Physical Education (BPEd) curriculum. Course design should explicitly incorporate modules on emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and the philosophy/ethics of combat sports alongside physical technique.

2. For Physical Education Instructors and Coaches:

Adopt demonstration-centered, step-by-step instructional methods paired with immediate feedback. Instructors should integrate routine somatic regulation techniques (e.g., deep breathing exercises, mindfulness pauses) into training sessions and emphasize non-violent martial values (respect, self-control, courteousness).

3. For Institutional Safety and Resource Management:

Ensure that PE departments are fully equipped with standard protective gear (headgear, body protectors, shin guards, groin guards, mats) and adequate training space. Strictly enforce mandatory warm-up routines, gear checks, and controlled contact guidelines during all practical and sparring sessions.

4. For Future Researchers:

Conduct longitudinal or mixed-methods studies to track the long-term impact of combat sports training on BPEd graduates once they enter the teaching profession. Expanding the research scope to include other institutional settings and specific combat modalities will further enrich understanding in this domain.

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