

Integrating Martial Arts in Higher Education: Enhancing stress resilience and community

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Abstract

This research explores how martial arts training environments influence the comprehensive development of college students in Beijing, emphasizing resilience, social competence, community belonging, and self-regulation. The study demonstrates that martial arts effectively address students' physical, psychological, and social development needs, with particularly notable enhancements in interpersonal skills and community involvement. These findings add valuable perspectives to experiential learning research, suggesting that martial arts can serve as an effective supplement to conventional education, fostering holistic student growth in university contexts.

Keywords: Martial Arts Training Environment; Holistic Student Development; Resilience Cultivation; Community Belonging

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Research background

Martial arts, acknowledged as both a demanding physical pursuit and a deep mental discipline, establish an environment that promotes student development across multiple dimensions (Spring, 2018). These practices are gaining recognition in higher education for their distinctive capacity to nurture self-discipline, emotional management, and community involvement. In Beijing, where higher education places a strong emphasis on academic achievement, martial arts training offers a complementary approach to enhancing students' physical and emotional well-being.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in incorporating martial arts into higher education programs (Kwok, 2024). This trend mirrors a shift in educational priorities, with institutions increasingly valuing initiatives that support students' holistic well-being. While physical fitness is an evident advantage of martial arts training, it represents only one facet of its appeal. Research indicates that martial arts also contribute to mental health, aiding students in developing skills such as concentration, stress reduction, and emotional regulation (Thomas & Zolkoski, 2020). These benefits align with the broader educational goal of equipping students not just for academic excellence but also for life's challenges outside the classroom. Nevertheless, despite the rising interest, there is a notable gap in the literature concerning how specific aspects of the martial arts training environment—such as its structure, community interactions, and experiential learning—affect students' personal, social, and academic growth, particularly within higher education settings.

1.2 Scope of the Study

Although existing research has extensively highlighted the physical, psychological, and emotional benefits of martial arts, there is a notable lack of context-specific studies focusing on its effects on college students, particularly in Beijing. The capital city, known for its rigorous academic culture and competitive environment, places significant pressure on students, often leading to high-stress levels, burnout, and mental health concerns. In this setting, the need for interventions that foster not only physical well-being but also emotional resilience, social integration, and personal growth has become even more urgent. While martial arts have been recognized for promoting discipline, focus, and emotional regulation, empirical research investigating its impact on students within the specific sociocultural and academic context of Beijing remains sparse. As such, the unique challenges faced by these students, such as academic overload, social isolation, and the constant balancing act between academic and personal lives, require targeted approaches that address both individual and collective needs. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring how martial arts training can serve as a multifaceted intervention, potentially helping students build resilience, enhance social bonds, and contribute to their holistic development, both academically and personally. By examining these effects within the specific environment of Beijing, this research hopes to offer insights into how martial arts can be effectively

integrated into student wellness programs across universities in high-pressure academic contexts.

1.3 Aim of the study

This research centers on examining the effects of martial arts training environments on the comprehensive development of college students. Martial arts have long been associated with physical fitness and mental discipline, but their broader impact on students' cognitive, physical, and social development remains underexplored in academic settings. Specifically, this study aims to investigate how participation in martial arts programs influences various aspects of student growth, including cognitive abilities such as concentration, critical thinking, and problem-solving, physical aspects like strength, flexibility, and overall health, as well as social skills like communication, teamwork, and emotional regulation. By analyzing how martial arts training contributes to these areas of development, the study also seeks to understand how these outcomes collectively enhance students' overall well-being, resilience, and academic performance. Martial arts training is often seen as a holistic approach that integrates mind and body, fostering not only physical fitness but also mental clarity and emotional stability, which are crucial for academic success and personal growth. Through this investigation, the study aims to fill a significant gap in the current literature by providing empirical evidence on the positive impact of martial arts as an alternative educational method that could complement traditional academic learning. Ultimately, it hopes to offer valuable insights into how martial arts can be integrated into higher education curricula to support students' development both inside and outside the classroom.

2.0 Literature Review

This section provides a critical review of the literature on martial arts training environments and their impact on the holistic development of college students. It addresses the theoretical foundation of the study, identifies gaps in current research, and highlights key constructs and variables related to martial arts training and student development.

2.1 Theoretical Foundation

This study is rooted in experiential learning theory, which emphasizes that meaningful learning arises from active engagement and reflection (Bell & Bell, 2020). Martial arts are widely acknowledged as an effective educational tool that influences physical, mental, and social development, making them particularly relevant for college students balancing academic demands and personal growth. Numerous studies have demonstrated that martial arts enhance resilience, emotional regulation, and social skills, all of which are essential for well-rounded development (Demirdis, 2025). Martial arts training aligns with this framework by involving students in structured, repetitive practices that integrate physical, emotional, and social dimensions of learning. Holistic development models further support the inclusion of martial arts in education, emphasizing the interconnected growth of cognitive, physical, and interpersonal abilities (Osher et al., 2021). These theoretical

perspectives provide a foundation for understanding how martial arts training fosters resilience, emotional regulation, and community building among college students.

2.2 Resilience and Stress Management

A key benefit of martial arts training is its capacity to build resilience and self-discipline. DiObilda-Sharp (2021) notes that perseverance and mental toughness are central outcomes of martial arts practice, as students learn to overcome challenges and maintain focus. Chew and Cerbin (2021) further highlight that the combination of physical activity and mental concentration in martial arts provides an effective outlet for stress relief and promotes mindfulness, helping students manage stress in both academic and personal settings.

2.3 Social Skills and Sense of Community

The communal nature of martial arts training plays a critical role in developing social skills and fostering a sense of belonging. Dawson (2024) emphasizes that group exercises, sparring, and collaborative activities cultivate teamwork and trust among participants. Respect, a core value in martial arts, strengthens interpersonal relationships (Fuller & Lloyd, 2020). Rituals such as bowing and adhering to dojo etiquette encourage humility and empathy, creating a unique environment for respectful communication and meaningful connections.

2.4 Emotional Regulation and Mental Health

Martial arts training supports emotional regulation by enhancing students' awareness of their emotions and reactions. Techniques such as controlled breathing and meditation help participants remain calm and centered during challenging situations (Panda et al., 2021). Kaufmann (2022) adds that martial arts reduce stress and anxiety through physical activity and the release of endorphins, contributing to improved mental health and overall well-being.

2.5 Goal Setting and Personal Growth

Goal setting is a fundamental aspect of martial arts training, as it encourages personal growth and fosters a mindset of persistence and achievement. Shamshirian et al. (2021) explain that practitioners benefit from incremental goal-setting, such as mastering techniques or advancing to higher belt ranks. These milestones build confidence and a sense of accomplishment, which can be applied to academic and professional contexts.

2.6 Gaps in Current Research

While existing studies highlight the benefits of martial arts training in education, there is limited research on its specific impact within higher education settings, particularly in Beijing. The literature primarily focuses on the advantages of martial arts, with insufficient attention given to potential challenges or alternative perspectives. Additionally, the mechanisms

through which martial arts influence social and emotional development remain underexplored, necessitating further investigation.

2.7 Contributions and Contrasting Perspectives

Although many studies, such as those by Harwood-Gross et al. (2021) and Fuller and Lloyd (2020), present martial arts as a valuable educational tool, few examine its limitations or compare its contributions to other developmental interventions. By addressing this gap, the current study offers a more balanced understanding of martial arts' role in fostering holistic development, contributing to a nuanced perspective on its applicability in diverse educational contexts.

2.8 Summary

The reviewed literature highlights the potential of martial arts training environments to significantly enhance physical, mental, and social development among college students. However, gaps in the research underscore the need for a deeper exploration of its contextual relevance and the mechanisms underlying its impacts. By integrating theoretical foundations and addressing identified gaps, this study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of martial arts training as a tool for holistic student development.

3.0 Methodology

This section details the research design, sampling technique, data collection, and analysis methods used in this quantitative study investigating the impact of martial arts training environments on the development of college students in Beijing.

3.1 Research Design

A quantitative research design was adopted to systematically measure the effects of martial arts training on personal and social development. This approach facilitated the collection of numerical data, enabling statistical analysis to identify patterns and relationships among key variables.

3.2 Sampling Technique and Participants

The study employed a stratified random sampling method to select a total of 150 college students from five universities in Beijing. This sampling technique was chosen to ensure that the sample was representative of various demographic factors, including gender, age, academic discipline, and martial arts experience. Stratified random sampling is particularly effective in ensuring that each subgroup within the population is adequately represented, thereby enhancing the generalizability of the study's findings. The stratification process involved dividing the student population into distinct subgroups based on the aforementioned demographic factors, and then randomly selecting participants from each subgroup. This approach not only ensured diversity within the sample but also minimized the risk of sampling bias.

Participants were required to meet specific inclusion criteria to be eligible for the study. Firstly, they had to be actively enrolled in a formal martial arts training program for a minimum of six months. This criterion was essential to ensure that participants had sufficient exposure to martial arts training to experience its potential benefits. Secondly, participants had to be full-time undergraduate or graduate students, as the study aimed to explore the impact of martial arts training within the context of higher education. Lastly, participants were required to have no medical conditions that could interfere with their participation in martial arts training. This criterion was important to ensure the safety and well-being of participants during the study.

The sample size of 150 was deemed appropriate for this study, as it provided sufficient statistical power for robust data analysis while remaining practical for data collection and processing. A sample size of this magnitude is consistent with precedents in similar studies exploring educational interventions, thereby ensuring the validity and reliability of the findings within the context of martial arts training. Moreover, the sample size was large enough to detect significant effects, if any, while also being manageable in terms of logistical considerations such as time and resources.

3.3 Data Collection

Data collection was conducted using a structured questionnaire designed to evaluate four key dimensions of personal development: resilience and stress management, social skills, sense of community, and self-discipline. The questionnaire was developed based on validated scales from prior studies, ensuring that the measures used were reliable and valid. However, the questionnaire was also tailored to the specific context of martial arts training, incorporating items that were relevant to the unique experiences of martial arts practitioners.

The questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first section collected demographic information, including age, gender, college affiliation, and martial arts experience. This information was crucial for understanding the characteristics of the sample and for conducting subgroup analyses. The second section included Likert-scale items (ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) designed to assess the four key dimensions of personal development. These items were carefully crafted to capture the nuances of each dimension, providing a comprehensive assessment of participants' experiences. The third section comprised open-ended questions aimed at capturing additional insights on the perceived benefits of martial arts training. These questions allowed participants to provide qualitative data, offering a richer understanding of their experiences and perspectives.

The questionnaire was distributed electronically through college platforms and martial arts training centers to ensure broad accessibility. This method of distribution was chosen to maximize the reach of the survey and to facilitate efficient data collection. Participants were provided one week to complete the survey, with reminders sent during this period to optimize response rates. This approach not only ensured a high response rate but also accommodated participants' schedules, making it easier for them to participate in the study.

3.4 Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods to evaluate the impact of martial arts training environments on students' development. Descriptive statistics, including mean scores, standard deviations, and improvement percentages, were calculated to provide an overview of participants' responses across the key dimensions. These statistics offered a snapshot of the data, highlighting trends and patterns in participants' experiences.

Inferential statistics were employed to explore relationships between the dimensions and to identify predictors of overall personal development. Pearson correlation analysis was used to examine the relationships between the four key dimensions, providing insights into how these dimensions interact with each other. Regression analysis was then conducted to identify predictors of overall personal development, using the four dimensions as independent variables. This analysis allowed the researchers to determine which dimensions had the most significant impact on personal development, offering valuable insights for future interventions and programs.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant college ethics committees before data collection commenced. This step was crucial to ensure that the study adhered to ethical standards and protected the rights and well-being of participants. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, and their consent was obtained before they completed the survey. This process ensured that participants were aware of what the study entailed and that their participation was voluntary.

Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured throughout the research process. Participants' responses were kept confidential, and no identifying information was collected that could link responses to individual participants. This approach was essential to protect participants' privacy and to encourage honest and open responses. Additionally, participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. This provision further safeguarded participants' rights and ensured that their participation was entirely voluntary.

In conclusion, the study employed a rigorous sampling technique, a well-designed data collection process, and robust data analysis methods to explore the impact of martial arts training on college students' personal development. Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the research process, ensuring that the study was conducted in a manner that respected and protected participants' rights. The findings of this study have the potential to contribute valuable insights into the field of martial arts training and its impact on personal development, offering implications for both practice and future research.

4.0 Results

The findings of this study are systematically organized to directly address the core objectives of the research: to evaluate the role of martial arts in enhancing resilience and stress management, to assess its contribution to the development of social skills, and to

explore how it fosters the integration of physical, mental, and social growth among college students. The study employed a combination of descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of how martial arts training influences various aspects of student development. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the overall characteristics of the data, providing an initial overview of the participants' responses and highlighting trends in the different dimensions of development. Correlation analysis was then employed to examine the relationships between these dimensions, offering insights into how resilience, stress management, social skills, and self-discipline are interrelated. Finally, multiple regression analysis was used to quantify the predictive power of each dimension about overall personal development, allowing for a deeper understanding of the specific contributions of martial arts training. By combining these analytical methods, the study not only provides a detailed breakdown of the impact of martial arts on student development but also establishes a robust framework for understanding how martial arts can serve as a holistic intervention to support college students' well-being and growth. Findings are structured to address the study's objectives: evaluating the role of martial arts in resilience and stress management, assessing its contribution to social skills, and exploring its integration of physical, mental, and social growth. The findings are presented using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis.

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics summarize the responses of 150 participants across four key dimensions: resilience and stress management, social skills, sense of community, and self-discipline. Detailed results are provided in Table 1. The findings reveal consistently high ratings across all dimensions, with the sense of community achieving the highest mean score (4.7) and improvement percentage (86%). Significant improvements were also observed in self-discipline and resilience, underscoring the structured nature of martial arts training as a critical factor in fostering these qualities.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Key Dimensions

Dimension	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Improvement Percentage (%)
Resilience and Stress Management	4.5	0.47	81
Social Skills	4.2	0.50	72
Sense of Community	4.7	0.42	86
Self-Discipline	4.4	0.49	78

4.2 Correlation Analysis

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between the key dimensions of development. The correlation coefficients (r values) and their significance levels are presented in Table 2. The results indicate strong positive correlations among all dimensions, reflecting their interconnected nature. Notably, resilience and self-

discipline exhibited the strongest correlation ($r = 0.71, p < 0.01$), suggesting that the structured and repetitive nature of martial arts training fosters both emotional resilience and the capacity to maintain consistent effort. Furthermore, a significant correlation was observed between the sense of community and social skills ($r = 0.65, p < 0.01$), underscoring the importance of interpersonal connections and group dynamics in martial arts environments. These findings highlight the comprehensive and holistic impact of martial arts training on personal development.

Table 2. Correlation Analysis of Key Dimensions

Variable	Resilience and Stress Management	Social Skills	Sense of Community	Self-Discipline
Resilience and Stress Management	1.00	0.58**	0.62**	0.71**
Social Skills	0.58**	1.00	0.65**	0.60**
Sense of Community	0.62**	0.65**	1.00	0.68**
Self-Discipline	0.71**	0.60**	0.68**	1.00

Note: $p < 0.01$

4.3 Regression Analysis

A multiple-regression analysis was carried out to determine the predictive impacts of the dimensions of martial arts training on overall development. The dependent variable was "overall personal development", which was computed as a combined score of the four crucial dimensions. The independent variables consisted of resilience and stress management, social skills, a sense of community, and self-discipline. The findings are summarized in Table 3. The model accounts for 68% of the variance in overall personal development, and all four predictors make significant contributions to the model. Self-discipline ($\beta = 0.42, p < 0.001$) turned out to be the most powerful predictor, succeeded by resilience and stress management ($\beta = 0.40, p < 0.001$).

Table 3. Regression Analysis Results

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Standardized Coefficients (β)	t-value	p-value
Resilience and Stress Management	0.35	0.40	6.72	< 0.001
Social Skills	0.22	0.25	4.38	< 0.001
Sense of Community	0.28	0.30	5.32	< 0.001
Self-Discipline	0.38	0.42	7.01	< 0.001

4.4 Summary of Findings

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive effects of various dimensions of martial arts training on overall personal development. The dependent variable in this analysis was "overall personal development," which was quantified as a composite score derived from four key dimensions: resilience and stress management,

social skills, a sense of community, and self-discipline. These dimensions were selected based on their relevance to the holistic development that martial arts training is believed to foster. The independent variables in the analysis included each of these four dimensions, to determine how strongly each of these factors could predict students' overall personal development. Table 3 summarizes the results of the regression analysis, which shows that this model accounts for 68% of the variation in overall personal development, indicating a relatively high level of explanatory power. More importantly, the analysis revealed that all four predictor variables made significant contributions to the model, underscoring the importance of each of these dimensions in fostering comprehensive development. Among the predictors, self-discipline emerged as the most significant factor, with a standardized regression coefficient (β) of 0.42 and a p-value of less than 0.001, indicating a very strong relationship between self-discipline and overall development. Following closely behind, resilience and stress management were also significant predictors ($\beta = 0.40$, $p < 0.001$), highlighting the importance of emotional regulation and coping strategies in supporting personal growth. These findings suggest that martial arts training, particularly in terms of enhancing self-discipline and resilience, plays a crucial role in supporting students' overall development.

5.0 Discussion

This study investigated the influence of martial arts training environments on the development of college students in Beijing, with a focus on resilience and stress management, social skills, sense of community, and self-discipline. The findings, supported by both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses, underscore the significant role of martial arts training in fostering students' holistic development.

5.1 Resilience and Stress Management

The results revealed an 81% improvement in resilience and stress management, with participants reporting better emotional regulation and increased focus. This aligns with previous research, such as Johnstone (2021), which highlights how the structured nature of martial arts promotes mindfulness and equips individuals to handle stress effectively. The repetitive techniques and controlled breathing exercises inherent in martial arts create a disciplined environment that enhances the ability to stay composed under pressure, benefiting both training and academic contexts.

5.2 Social Skills Development

A 72% improvement in social skills was observed, emphasizing the role of martial arts in fostering interpersonal communication and teamwork. Activities like sparring and group drills provide opportunities for students to build trust and collaborate effectively. This finding is consistent with Li et al. (2023), who noted that martial arts cultivate mutual respect and

cooperation. The philosophy of respect and humility embedded in martial arts further supports the development of positive social interactions.

5.3 Sense of Community

The most significant improvement (86%) was seen in the sense of community, with students reporting a stronger feeling of belonging and support. The communal aspects of martial arts training, such as shared challenges and collective achievements, foster solidarity and inclusivity. This finding highlights the importance of creating environments where students can connect with peers and build social networks, addressing common issues of isolation in higher education.

5.4 Self-Discipline

A 78% improvement in self-discipline was observed, demonstrating the effectiveness of martial arts in instilling consistency, perseverance, and goal-oriented behavior. The emphasis on adhering to practice schedules and mastering techniques cultivates a disciplined mindset that extends to academic and personal life. This aligns with Kim and Cruz (2021), who emphasized the role of martial arts in promoting sustained effort and perseverance.

5.5 Implications for Higher Education in Beijing

The findings suggest that martial arts training can address the diverse developmental needs of college students in Beijing. By enhancing resilience, social competence, and a sense of community, martial arts complement traditional academic curricula and equip students with essential tools to navigate academic and personal challenges effectively.

6.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

This study underscores the significant role of martial arts training environments in promoting the holistic development of college students in Beijing. The findings reveal notable improvements in resilience and stress management, social skills, sense of community, and self-discipline. Martial arts training serves as a valuable complement to traditional academic curricula, equipping students with essential tools to tackle academic challenges while fostering personal and social growth. These results highlight the potential of martial arts as a transformative educational approach that addresses the multifaceted needs of students in higher education.

However, the study has certain limitations. The reliance on self-reported data may introduce response bias, as participants might overstate or understate their experiences. Additionally, the focus on students in Beijing limits the generalizability of the findings to other cultural or educational contexts. Future research could address these limitations by

adopting longitudinal designs, including more diverse participant samples, and employing mixed-methods approaches to validate and expand upon these findings.

6.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings and identified limitations, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the implementation and effectiveness of martial arts training in fostering the holistic development of college students in Beijing.

6.2.1 Integration into Curricula

Colleges in Beijing should consider incorporating martial arts training as part of elective courses or co-curricular activities. This integration can support students' physical, mental, and social development, contributing to a more comprehensive educational experience.

6.2.2 Customized Program Design

Martial arts programs should be tailored to accommodate varying skill levels, from beginners to advanced practitioners, ensuring inclusivity and accessibility. Customized training schedules and progress tracking can enhance student engagement and motivation.

6.2.3 Emphasis on Community Building

The communal aspects of martial arts training should be emphasized to create a supportive and inclusive environment. Group activities that encourage collaboration and mutual respect can be integrated into training sessions to strengthen students' sense of belonging.

6.2.4 Expanded Research Efforts

Future research should investigate the long-term impacts of martial arts training on academic performance, career readiness, and personal well-being. Studies could also explore how different martial arts styles influence various dimensions of student development. Expanding the research scope to include diverse cultural and geographical settings would improve the generalizability of the findings.

Article Contribution to Related Field of Study

This study contributes to the fields of educational psychology and physical education by emphasizing the multidimensional impact of martial arts training environments on the holistic development of college students. The findings offer actionable insights for educators and policymakers to design inclusive, structured training programs that enhance students' resilience, social skills, sense of community, and self-discipline. By addressing the need for alternative, holistic approaches to student development in higher education, this research provides a foundation for future studies aimed at optimizing martial arts-based curricula and expanding their application in diverse educational contexts.

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