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Karate Self-Defense as an Effort to Develop Life Skills for Teenage Karate Practitioners: A Narrative Study

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Abstract

Karate is a martial art from Japan. Karate should not only focus on physical abilities and techniques. It also plays an important role in developing authentic life skills, especially for young karate practitioners. Objectives: The objective of this study is to explore how karate as a martial art can be used as a means of developing life skills for young karate practitioners. Methods: The research method used is a narrative literature review, which aims to provide information and knowledge through the analysis of previously published literature. The participants are documents in the form of relevant articles from 2021 to 2025, with criteria including being written in Indonesian and English. The data analysis technique used is thematic narrative analysis. Results: Ten relevant articles were identified as research findings. Specifically, the results indicate that structured and programmed karate training can optimize interpersonal and intrapersonal life skills such as motivation, respect, cooperation, sportsmanship, discipline, responsibility, and empathy. These skills are closely aligned with the values of bushido in karate. However, there are challenges in internalizing such character traits, including the perception that karate is associated with violent activities, varying quality of instructors, and competitive pressure that causes anxiety. Conclusion: It is concluded that karate is an effective medium for developing character values and life skills for young karateka, but this requires a holistic and comprehensive approach.

Keywords: *Karate, Self-defense, Life Skills, Character Values, Narrative Studies*

INTRODUCTION

Karate is dominant in terms of physicality and technique, as can be seen in its powerful and fast movements (Yudhistira et al., 2021). More specifically, karate consists of combat (kumite) and forms (kata), both of which are very dominant in terms of technique and physicality. However, karate is not only about these aspects; several other aspects, such as behavioral science, which consists of psychology and sociology, also play a significant role in karate.

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This is reflected in the karate pledge, which states that one must be able to maintain one's personality, be honest, improve one's performance, maintain good manners, and control oneself. This pledge is not only recited during training, but also applied and carried over into everyday life. Addressing this as the foundational basis for a karateka essentially involves cultivating character traits such as ethics, discipline, respect, and so on. These aspects are often referred to as life skills.

Life skills can be classified as intrapersonal, which focus more on concentration, goal setting, emotional regulation, and perseverance, while interpersonal aspects include a supportive spirit, honesty, respect, and teamwork (Rusmana, Sumber, & Manusia, 2021). In fact, these life skills are largely embodied in the karate pledge. However, their implementation cannot yet be said to be optimal.

Some studies focus more on physical aspects, such as Yudhistira's study on the development of agility tests, physical training programs, and so on (Yudhistira et al., 2021; Yudhistira & Tomoliyus, 2020), One study discusses the application of leadership style by a karate coach (Rohmah, Candra, Hadi, & Yudhistira, 2024). Another study discusses life skills and the impact of extracurricular activities on students' life skills, which indeed have a positive effect on a student's life skills (Rusmana et al., 2021)

It is very relevant that life skills need to be developed in young karate practitioners. For young karate practitioners, the training process teaches life skills such as discipline, increased motivation, focus, and striving to achieve goals through programmed and planned training. Every movement contains philosophical meanings such as consistency, patience, and precision. This can be seen when, even when tired during training, kohai remain focused, consistent in their training, and have a high fighting spirit. Through training, they also learn how to control their emotions, which may arise when facing difficulties in competitions. Therefore, karate is not only about physical development but also mental development, which plays an important role. In this context, it is important for karate to cultivate life skills that benefit young karateka in both societal aspects and training. In response to this, the role of karate in developing life skills for young karateka has some gaps in information and issues that are not explicitly explained. These information gaps are important to address through a narrative review to provide a description of the role of karate in the development of life skills.

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Some of these shortcomings have created a gap in terms of issues such as (1) karate still not being optimally linked to community life, meaning that karate training is often considered separate from professional and social life. In reality, the skills gained from karate include respect, discipline, and cooperation. However, how karate can help young karateka adapt to social life has not been widely discussed. Point (2) most existing studies focus more on the physical effects of karate training, while the psychological aspects of character development have not received special attention. There is a need for academic discourse that provides information and insights into how karate positively impacts life skills. In this context, the research objective is to conduct a narrative review on how karate as a martial art contributes to the development of life skills for young karate practitioners. It is hoped that this information will serve as a valuable academic resource for both academics and practitioners of karate.

METHOD

The research method is a literature review with a narrative review type (Yudhistira, Kurnianto, Candra, Ulinnuha, & Wicaksono, 2023). Narrative review is a type of traditional literature review that aims to provide information that has not yet been obtained by academics and practitioners (Hadi & Yudhistira, 2024). Although narrative reviews are simple in nature, they can serve as credible references because they are based on relevant and up-to-date articles. Considering that there is not much research available on life skills in karate, it is necessary to summarize relevant studies as a basis for knowledge and to enable practical application.

RESULT

Based on an analysis of documents in the form of articles, ebooks, and relevant textbooks, 10 documents have been selected as the basis for discussion, as follows:

Table 1. Description of relevant document analysis results

No	Penulis	Judul	Hasil	Kontribusi
1	(Zulfika & Zumrotun, 2024)	The application of karate in discipline	Regular karate training contributes to improved discipline and a sense of responsibility.	Karate builds discipline and responsibility.
2	(Syafikah, Rijaluddin, & Temmassonge, 2025)	Karate training as a measure to prevent sexual violence against elementary school children	Karate training can boost children's self-confidence and physical abilities, and enable them to recognize dangerous situations and	Karate as self-defense and confidence building for children.

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			respond appropriately.	
3	(Sari, Muhith, & Fatmawati, 2022)	Implementation of life skills education to improve student independence	The activities include a program to develop life skills, covering computer skills, an English club, and karate.	Karate supports life skills programs in schools.
4	(Langsa, 2021)	Motivation for karate athletes to achieve	Karateka motivation is relatively good in various regional, provincial, and national championships.	Karate influences athletes' motivation to achieve.
5	(Widyastuti, Dewanti, Erlina, & Septiyanto, 2025)	Socialization of character values through karate	Discipline is improved through karate training in the form of regular practice.	Karate as a medium for socializing character values (discipline).
6	(Dunan & Sulistiandari, 2023)	The influence of self-confidence and motivation on competition performance	Self-confidence and motivation play an important role in determining match performance.	Karate builds self-confidence and motivation in competition.
7	(Kurniwan, Sianti, Yustia, Annisaa, & Rohana, 2022)	Karate: Effective tools to improve social, emotional, and executive functions of students with autism	Karate training for children with autism has been proven to reduce emotional problems and develop social values.	Inclusive karate for children with special needs.
8	(Dİlekçİ, 2025)	Karate Attitude Reliability Study Scale Development : Validity and realibility	Karate preserves traditional values that remain relevant in the modern world.	Karate as a preservation of traditional values.
9	(Manopo, Sambeka, & Masoko, 2024)	A Descriptive Study of Formation Based on Bushido Ethical Values.	Some karate practitioners apply the values of bushido in their training, which influences their lifestyle and shapes their ethical values.	Karate internalizes the ethical values of bushido.
10	(Yasim, Nur Rahmat & Amiluhur, Eurico Alfian, 2024)	Behind the movements and stances: Internalization of bushido values into karate-do in Makassar	Karate as a medium for character building that enables athletes to grow into individuals who are broad-minded, empathetic, resilient, and in line with noble values.	Karate shapes character based on the noble values of bushido.

DISCUSSION

Karate as an effort to develop life skills in kohai

Karate has an optimal positive impact on the development of life skills in kohai. This can be seen in qualitative research showing that children who practice karate in a planned and routine manner are able to improve their responsibility, cooperation, and sense of responsibility (Dunan & Sulistiandari, 2023; Sari et al., 2022; Syafikah et al., 2025; Zulfika

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& Zumrotun, 2024). Discipline is gained through consistent karate training, while responsibility emerges when kohai are taught to take responsibility for their own actions. Life skills such as commitment, time management, and adherence to guidelines and rules are the tangible results of karate training. This is in line with the concept of education through sport, where sport is not only seen as a physical activity but also a means of instilling life values that are oriented towards long-term character building (Andriansyah, Alwasi, Ramadhan, Zahra, & Riski, 2025). **Therefore**, karate training is not just about achievements but about developing students who possess noble life skills. Additionally, through teachings such as respect, courage, and perseverance, karate serves as a holistic educational tool. Karate is an attractive option for developing life skills in young students, fostering responsible individuals.

Karate as a means of social development, such as empathy, respect, and cooperation

Karate shapes social and interpersonal values. Training involves interaction with fellow kohai, through the practice of bushido values of respect, self-control, honesty, and empathy, encouraging the internalization of positive values (Yasim, Nur Rahmat & Amiluhur, Eurico Alfian, 2024). In the training environment, kohai begin to learn to communicate, respect each other, and form values of cooperation (Widyastuti et al., 2025). The interactions that occur in the dojo show that karate is not merely a physical activity, but also a systematic socialization process that builds solidarity, a sense of belonging, and interpersonal communication skills (Yasim & Amiluhur, 2024). A small example is karate, which does not require training equipment. Other kohai friends can help by lending them the equipment. Furthermore, there are rules for every training session, such as bowing before entering the training area as a sign of respect and to foster a sense of belonging to the training area.

Furthermore, although karate is essentially a martial art and tends to be an individual sport, cooperation and empathy are still embedded in training and competition situations. For example, when one athlete is competing in a team event and their teammates cheer them on, this shows mutual support. Empathy emerges when an athlete is injured, and teammates deeply feel the pain they are experiencing. This serves as evidence that despite being a martial art and inherently individualistic, empathy,

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cooperation, and respect are still cultivated. This underscores that the noble teachings of karate remain relevant in the modern era (Dİlekçİ, 2025; Manopo et al., 2024)

Challenges in character development through karate

Karate is a martial art and is considered a tough sport. Of course, there are challenges to be faced. One of these challenges is the public perception that equates karate with violence, which hinders the development of enthusiasm for karate among young people. In addition, the quality of training provided by coaches in delivering exercises or lessons varies greatly, which can affect the effectiveness of character internalization. Furthermore, some coaches still have a narrow perspective on karate, focusing more on its competitive aspects, which can sometimes diminish the social aspects of the sport. Additionally, the pressure in competitions can lead to anxiety and a lack of positive attitude if not managed properly. Furthermore, the evaluation system for character development is more difficult to measure than physical and technical aspects, so a personalized approach is necessary. Therefore, family environment and cultural factors also play a significant role in determining how strongly karate values can be internalized. This requires synergy between coaches, parents, and educational institutions so that karate can truly become a medium for holistic character building.

CONCLUSION

Karate contributes to the development of life skills for young karate practitioners through the teaching of values such as responsibility, perseverance, cooperation, and discipline. However, in the process of character development, there are still challenges such as the perception that karate is a violent sport, variations in teaching methods among instructors that can affect the psychology of younger practitioners, and the pressure of competitions that can lead to anxiety when athletes cannot manage it effectively. Therefore, a holistic approach is needed to develop life skills and character more effectively. Additionally, in evaluations related to life skills, a personal approach and discussion are necessary, as we cannot achieve optimal results by relying solely on survey distribution.

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