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Blending Recreational Activities for Gymnast: A new paradigma of sports development

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A B S T R A C T

The purpose of this study is to assess the effects of a hybrid training technique that integrates recreational activities into gymnastics programs in public schools in the Philippines. It addresses athlete burnout, low motivation, and dropout rates that are frequent in traditional high intensity training. It is based on the Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) theory, the Fun Integration Theory, and the Motor Learning Theory. Using approved procedures, a quantitative descriptive survey was carried out with forty gymnasts in order to evaluate their motivation and the feedback they received from their training. Comparing a group that had participated in traditional training with a group that had participated in recreational training, both before and after the training, indicated that the recreational training group had demonstrated better levels of enjoyment, motivation, and skill acquisitions. The findings provide support for the use of various learning methodologies that are fun, cooperative, and adaptable in order to improve both physical and psychosocial development. By providing a framework that is both cost-effective and culturally relevant, this study helps to fill a gap in the existing local research and offers a foundation for reinventing gymnastics instruction in public schools in the Philippines.

RESUMO

O objetivo deste estudo é avaliar os efeitos de uma técnica de treinamento híbrida que integra atividades recreativas aos programas de ginástica em escolas públicas das Filipinas. A técnica aborda o esgotamento profissional, a baixa motivação e as altas taxas de abandono frequentes em treinamentos tradicionais de alta intensidade. Baseia-se na Teoria do Desenvolvimento do Atleta a Longo Prazo (DALP), na Teoria da Integração da Diversão e na Teoria da Aprendizagem Motora. Utilizando procedimentos aprovados, foi realizado um levantamento quantitativo descritivo com quarenta ginastas para avaliar sua motivação e o feedback recebido do treinamento. A comparação entre um grupo que participou do treinamento tradicional e um grupo que participou do treinamento recreativo, tanto antes quanto depois do treinamento, indicou que o grupo do treinamento recreativo demonstrou níveis mais elevados de prazer, motivação e aquisição de habilidades. Os resultados apoiam o uso de diversas metodologias de aprendizagem que sejam divertidas, cooperativas e adaptáveis para aprimorar o desenvolvimento físico e psicossocial. Ao fornecer uma estrutura que seja simultaneamente economicamente viável e culturalmente relevante, este estudo ajuda a preencher uma lacuna na pesquisa local existente e oferece uma base para reinventar o ensino da ginástica nas escolas públicas das Filipinas

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Introduction

In the Philippine public-school system, student-athletes face significant challenges in balancing competitive demands with long-term athletic development. This is particularly evident in gymnastics, where intensive training often leads to physical exhaustion, mental fatigue, and high attrition rates post-competition (Philippine Sports Commission, 2021). Traditional training methods, while effective in achieving short-term competitive success, may inadvertently contribute to athlete burnout, especially among adolescents.

The current state of gymnastics training in Philippine public schools reveals several critical challenges that hinder optimal athlete development. Most training programs rely heavily on traditional, high-intensity drills that emphasize repetitive skill execution. While this approach yields short-term competitive results, it often leads to physical burnout and mental fatigue among student-athletes. The lack of structured periodization in training further exacerbates the problem, as athletes frequently experience overtraining syndrome without adequate recovery phases. This rigid methodology not only limits the development of foundational athletic skills like agility and spatial awareness but also contributes to high attrition rates post-competition, with many promising gymnasts dropping out due to exhaustion or loss of motivation.

Compounding these issues are significant resource constraints prevalent in public school settings. Many institutions lack proper gymnastics facilities, forcing coaches to improvise training spaces and equipment. Budget limitations restrict access to specialized coaching, physiotherapy, and sports science support, placing Filipino gymnasts at a disadvantage compared to privately trained athletes. Additionally, the demanding dual role of student-athletes creates tension between academic responsibilities and training commitments, with many struggling to balance schoolwork with the rigorous demands of competitive gymnastics.

Despite these challenges, opportunities exist to enhance training outcomes through innovative approaches. Recreational-integrated training presents a viable solution, particularly given the Filipino youth's positive response to collaborative, play-based learning environments. By incorporating structured yet enjoyable training variations, coaches could potentially improve skill retention while reducing burnout. Furthermore, the growing emphasis on grassroots sports development by DepEd and local government units suggests increasing institutional support for sustainable athlete development programs. Addressing these systemic issues through culturally adapted, resource-efficient training models could significantly improve both performance outcomes and long-term athlete retention in school-based gymnastics programs. As a teacher and gymnastics coach despite achieving victories in higher-level competitions, many student-athletes exhibit signs of decreased motivation and

prolonged recovery periods, suggesting a need for training innovations that prioritize both performance and well-being.

This study explores the integration of recreational activities into formal gymnastics training as a potential solution. Recreational training models emphasizing fun, collaboration, and skill diversification have shown promise in reducing burnout in sports psychology literature (Weinberg & Gould, 2023). However, limited research has examined their applicability within resource-constrained Philippine school settings, where facilities and funding for specialized training are often lacking

The integration of recreational activities into gymnastics training represents a transformative approach to sports development, challenging traditional models that prioritize rigid, high-intensity specialization. This chapter synthesizes international and Philippine-based literature to establish the theoretical and empirical foundations supporting the blending of recreational methods into gymnastics training. The discussion is organized into three key themes: (1) the global perspective on diversified athletic development, (2) regional and local insights on gymnastics training in the Philippines, and (3) sports science principles validating recreational integration. By examining these dimensions, this review justifies the study's proposed hybrid model as a viable strategy for fostering greater athlete performance, retention, and holistic growth.

Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) model provides a foundational framework for understanding how structured yet flexible training phases optimize athletic potential. Their research emphasizes that young athletes progress through distinct developmental stages—from fundamental movement skills to sport-specific mastery—and that early specialization can hinder long-term success. Instead, they advocate for a multi-sport approach in early stages to build a broad motor skill base, which later translates into higher sport-specific proficiency (Varghese et al., 2022). This aligns with the present study's objective of incorporating recreational play into gymnastics, as it ensures athletes develop foundational agility, balance, and coordination before advancing to complex routines.

Mosher's (2022) seminal work on youth sport specialization highlights the psychological and physiological risks of premature intensive training, including burnout, overuse injuries, and diminished long-term participation. His findings suggest that children engaged in diversified physical activities exhibit greater motor competence and sustained interest in sports compared to those forced into early specialization. Supporting this, Rinta-Antila et al. (2024) conducted a longitudinal study demonstrating that athletes who participated in multiple sports during adolescence were more likely to remain active in adulthood. Their research directly supports this study's hypothesis that blending recreational activities into gymnastics can mitigate attrition by maintaining athletes' enthusiasm and reducing monotony.

Lucia et al (2021) expand on the cognitive advantages of diversified training, demonstrating that exposure to different movement patterns enhances neural plasticity, decision-making speed, and adaptability in young athletes. Their research indicates that gymnasts who engage in supplementary activities (e.g., dance, martial arts, or team sports) develop better spatial awareness and creativity—traits crucial for advanced gymnastics performance. Similarly, Nery et al. (2023) explore the neurological benefits of play, showing that unstructured, enjoyable physical activities stimulate brain regions responsible for motor learning and emotional regulation. These findings reinforce the argument that recreational integration in gymnastics training can accelerate skill acquisition while reducing mental fatigue.

Fullerton et al. (2023) present an international consensus statement advocating for multi-activity training in youth sports. Their guidelines, endorsed by leading sports medicine organizations, emphasize that early diversification reduces injury risks, enhances overall athleticism, and prolongs sporting careers. Yakes (2024) research further supports this, demonstrating that resistance training combined with recreational movement games improves strength and injury resilience in young gymnasts. Collectively, these studies validate the necessity of a balanced training model, where structured gymnastics drills are supplemented with recreational play to optimize athlete development.

Meanwhile, a study on Philippine gymnastics identifies socio-economic and cultural factors that limit participation, including high costs, lack of accessible facilities, and parental preference for mainstream sports like basketball. His findings suggest that rigid, competition-focused training models further deter potential athletes, particularly in lower-income communities. This study's recreational approach addresses these barriers by proposing low-cost, play-based training methods that make gymnastics more inclusive and appealing to a broader demographic (Sirén et al., 2023).

The Philippine Sports Commission's (2021) national report on youth athlete burnout reveals alarming dropout rates in gymnastics, attributing them to excessive training loads and insufficient recovery periods. Sandbakk et al. (2025) compares traditional Philippine gymnastics coaching methods—often characterized by repetitive drills and early specialization—with modern, athlete-centered approaches. Her work suggests that integrating recreational elements could modernize local training systems, making them more sustainable and enjoyable. These insights directly inform this study's framework, which seeks to balance technical rigor with recreational engagement to reduce burnout.

Tan and Reyes (2020) examine cross-training effects on Filipino collegiate athletes, finding that those who engaged in supplementary recreational activities (e.g., swimming, dance) exhibited greater endurance, flexibility, and mental resilience than their single-sport counterparts. Their mixed-methods study highlights the cultural acceptability of hybrid training in the Philippines, supporting the feasibility of this study's proposed model.

Additionally, Upadhyay (2024) analysis of Filipino adolescent athletes underscores the need for varied training stimuli to prevent plateaus, further justifying the incorporation of recreational play into gymnastics regimens.

Guohui and Xiujin (2024) also provide compelling evidence that play-based activities enhance motor skill acquisition and creative problem-solving in athletes. Visek's Fun Integration Theory, in particular, establishes a direct correlation between enjoyment and long-term sports commitment, suggesting that gymnasts who perceive training as fun are more likely to persist and excel. This theory aligns with the study's goal of redefining gymnastics training as an engaging, dynamic process rather than a repetitive, high-pressure regimen.

Zumwalt (2023) research on youth resistance training demonstrates that varied movement patterns reduce overuse injuries—a critical concern in gymnastics, where repetitive motions strain joints and muscles. By incorporating recreational games that emphasize different movement mechanics (e.g., jumping, rolling, balancing), coaches can distribute physical stress more evenly, promoting longevity in the sport.

Lishman (2023) and the Philippine Gymnastics Federation (2022) both highlight the psychological toll of early specialization, including anxiety and loss of motivation. Recreational activities serve as a mental "reset," reducing stress and reigniting passion for the sport. This study leverages these findings to argue that a blended training model can produce not only physically superior athletes but also mentally resilient ones.

While existing literature extensively documents the benefits of diversified training, few studies explicitly examine recreational integration in gymnastics, particularly within the Philippine context. This study bridges that gap by proposing a culturally adaptable model that merges play-based activities with technical gymnastics training. The reviewed literature collectively supports the hypothesis that such an approach can enhance athlete performance, retention, and overall well-being, ultimately fostering the development of "greater athletes"—those who excel not just in skill, but in passion, creativity, and longevity in the sport.

Methodology

This study used a quantitative descriptive survey approach to obtain measurable data from 40 gymnasts in training programs that included recreational activities. The major goal was to assess participants' demographic profiles, motivation levels, and impressions of training feedback regarding this integration.

The study, which was guided by the Long-Term Athlete Development approach, Fun Learning Theory, and Motor Learning Theory, aimed to examine intrinsic motivation, competence, play a significant psychological role in motivating individuals to stay engaged in sports. A standardized questionnaire with three elements was used to collect data: demographic information, a modified Sport Motivation Scale, and a training feedback scale, all of which were assessed on a 5-point Likert scale.

The study followed an Input-Process-Output paradigm, with inputs including demographic and training background data, processes evaluating motivation and feedback responses, and outputs reflecting the impact of leisure activities on performance, engagement, and skill acquisition.

Data was collected using Google Forms, assuring efficiency and accuracy. Expert validation and pilot testing confirmed the instrument's reliability and content suitability. Demographic, motivational, and training feedback trends were interpreted using descriptive statistical analyses, which included frequencies, percentages, and mean scores.

Overall, this quantitative approach gave objective insights into how incorporating recreational activities affects gymnast motivation and training outcomes, hence providing evidence-based recommendations for sports development and coaching techniques.

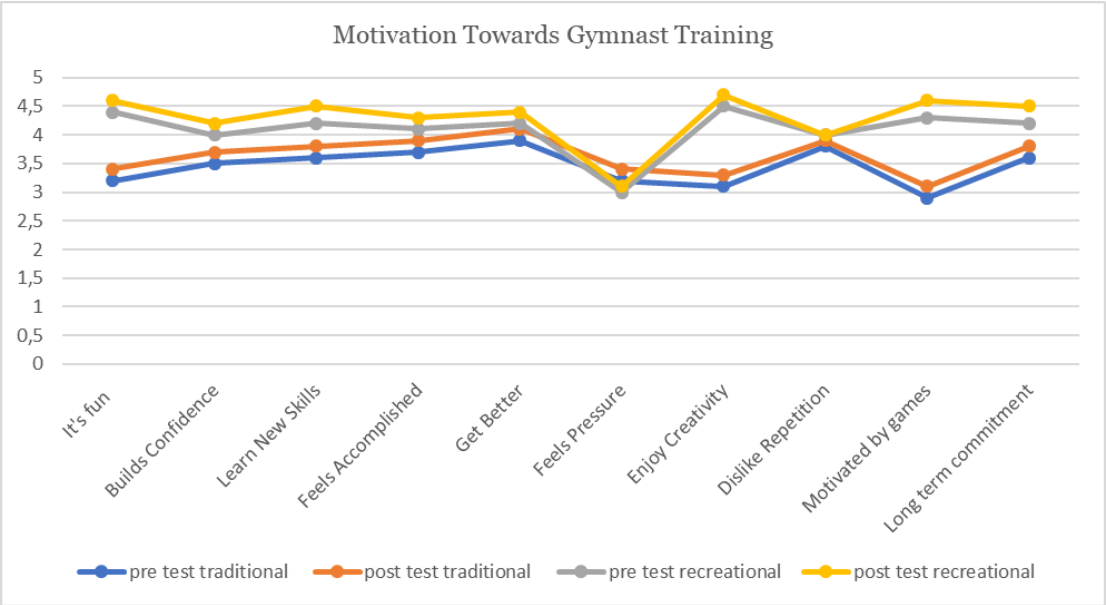
Result and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the findings from the pre-test and post-test assessments conducted on two groups of gymnasts: one exposed to traditional training methods and another to enjoyment-based (recreational) training. The goal was to measure motivation, perceived skill acquisition, and overall training experience. Both quantitative rating scales and categorical responses were analyzed.

A 10-item questionnaire measured motivation-related aspects such as enjoyment, confidence, skill acquisition, and long-term commitment. Figure 1 summarizes the average scores from the pre-test and post-test for both groups.

Figure 1.

Motivation Towards Gymnast Training



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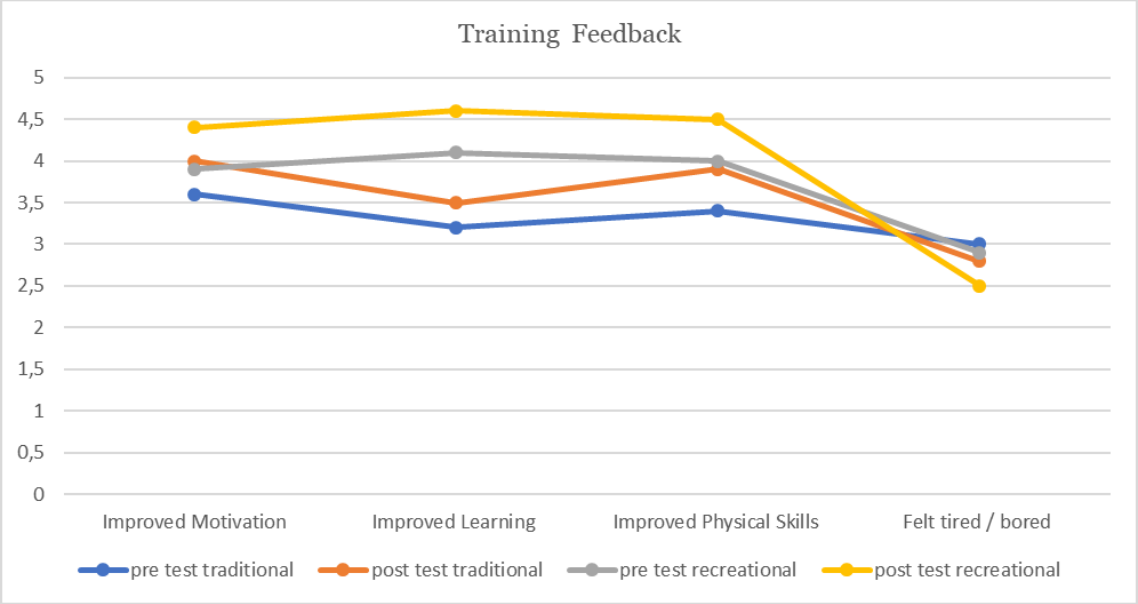
The first area of analysis focused on motivation and training experience, using a 10-item questionnaire that evaluated various aspects such as enjoyment, confidence, skill acquisition, pressure, creativity, and long-term commitment. The traditional training group demonstrated modest improvements across most items. For example, the item "It's fun" increased slightly from 3.2 to 3.4, and "Builds confidence" rose from 3.5 to 3.7. Similar trends were seen for items like "Learn new skills" (3.6 to 3.8) and "Feels accomplished" (3.7 to 3.9). Notably, the highest post-test scores for this group were in physical progression areas such as "Get better" (3.9 to 4.1). However, items related to enjoyment, creativity, and game motivation remained low, with only minimal changes such as "Enjoy creativity" (3.1 to 3.3) and "Motivated by games" (2.9 to 3.1). Furthermore, the score for "Feels pressure" slightly increased from 3.2 to 3.4, reflecting a continued sense of stress or performance anxiety in the traditional setup.

In contrast, the recreational training group exhibited stronger improvements across all 10 indicators. Their pre-test scores were already higher in most areas, indicating positive expectations prior to training. For instance, the score for "It's fun" rose from 4.4 to 4.6, and "Enjoy creativity" increased from 4.5 to 4.7. These results highlight the group's increased motivation and satisfaction with the training. Similarly, items like "Learn new skills" (4.2 to 4.5), "Feels accomplished" (4.1 to 4.3), and "Long-term commitment" (4.2 to 4.5) reflected greater engagement and persistence. The item "Motivated by games" increased from 4.3 to 4.6, demonstrating the strong impact of game-based learning on sustaining interest and participation. Even with "Feels pressure," there was only a slight increase from 3.0 to 3.1, indicating a stable and more relaxed training environment compared to the traditional group.

Overall, the comparison between the two groups shows that while traditional training may contribute to physical gains and confidence building, it lacks in promoting intrinsic motivation and long-term enjoyment. On the other hand, the recreational training group showed holistic development, characterized by higher enjoyment, creativity, motivation, and skill acquisition. These findings strongly support the use of the Fun Integration Theory, which emphasizes the importance of enjoyable, socially interactive, and varied training approaches in youth sports development.

Figure 2.

Training Feedback



The figure above presents the evaluation results regarding the gymnasts' perceptions of training effectiveness using four feedback statements. Responses were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 – Strongly Disagree to 5 – Strongly Agree). These statements assessed perceptions of physical performance, excitement, boredom/fatigue, and skill acquisition.

In terms of perceived physical performance, gymnasts in the traditional group rated the training at 3.6 during the pre-test, which increased slightly to 4.0 in the post-test. This indicates moderate expectations that were somewhat met. Meanwhile, those in the recreational group rated their pre-test expectation at 3.9, which improved to 4.4 in the post-test—the highest among all groups. This suggests that the dynamic and game-based nature of the training fostered greater physical engagement and output.

When it came to excitement toward training activities, the traditional group started with a low pre-test score of 3.2 and improved slightly to 3.5 post-test, reflecting minor gains in enthusiasm. The recreational group, however, began with a higher expectation score of 4.1, which rose to 4.6 in the post-test, confirming that enjoyment-based elements successfully heightened gymnasts' motivation and interest.

Regarding boredom or fatigue, the traditional group began with a moderate score of 3.0 and slightly improved to 2.8. This shows that while some aspects of the training may have been engaging, the structure remained mentally tiring for some participants. The recreational group started with a score of 2.9, already anticipating minimal fatigue, and further reduced it to 2.5 in the post-test. This decline illustrates how recreational activities contributed to reducing mental fatigue and sustaining energy throughout the training.

In terms of skill acquisition, the traditional group's pre-test score was 3.4, which improved to 3.9, indicating that repetition and structure helped in learning new skills.

However, the recreational group began with a higher pre-test expectation of 4.0 and saw a strong improvement to 4.5 post-test, the highest among all statements. This result affirms that integrating games and creative approaches into training can enhance learning by making sessions more memorable and engaging.

Conclusion

Overall, the traditional group showed moderate gains across all indicators, particularly in physical skills and learning. However, motivation and excitement remained relatively low, and boredom was still present. In contrast, the recreational group demonstrated significant improvements across all areas. These findings support the integration of enjoyment-based strategies in training, in line with the Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) model, which emphasizes the importance of variety and fun in sustaining athlete interest and enhancing performance.

The findings of this study align with international research emphasizing the role of intrinsic motivation, enjoyment, and creative engagement in sustaining long-term athlete development. The results corroborate the principles laid out in the Fun Integration Theory (Visek et al., 2021) and the Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) model, both of which argue that varied, engaging, and socially enjoyable training experiences are key drivers of athletic growth and retention—particularly among adolescents. Moreover, the consistent improvement in motivation and skill acquisition among gymnasts exposed to enjoyment-based training mirrors conclusions from global studies that show enhanced psychological well-being and performance when athletes experience lower stress and higher enjoyment in training environments.

This study was conducted in response to the limited research available in the Philippine context on integrating recreational methods into formal sports training, especially in gymnastics. While global literature widely affirms the benefits of diversified and recreational-integrated training models highlighting reduced burnout, improved motor learning, and long-term athlete retention there remains a critical gap in localized data that accounts for the cultural, structural, and resource-based challenges unique to Philippine public schools.

The reviewed literature substantiates the effectiveness of hybrid training approaches from a global standpoint, including insights from the Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) model, Fun Integration Theory, and sports science findings on cognitive and physical development. Studies by Mosher (2022), Fullerton et al. (2023), and Lucia et al. (2021) demonstrate how recreational engagement enhances neural adaptability, reduces injury risks, and sustains motivation in youth athletes. Meanwhile, local studies by Tan and Reyes (2020) and Upadhyay (2024) offer early evidence that Filipino athletes also benefit from cross-training and varied physical activities, yet these are rarely formalized within school-based gymnastics programs.

Despite this wealth of international evidence, few studies have explored how these models translate into resource-constrained environments such as those found in Philippine public schools. Gymnastics training in these settings often faces challenges such as lack of equipment, limited coach specialization, and rigid training structures all of which may limit the successful application of conventional high-performance models. Therefore, by contextualizing this study within public school settings, it bridges theory and practice, providing valuable insights into how motivation and training outcomes can be enhanced through cost-effective, culturally adaptable strategies.

The results underscore the urgency of developing national frameworks that support recreational integration in physical education and grassroots sports development, particularly during early adolescence a critical period for fostering lifelong physical literacy. More importantly, this study affirms that improving athlete well-being does not always require advanced resources; rather, it calls for an innovative shift in coaching philosophy one that prioritizes enjoyment, inclusivity, and holistic development alongside technical excellence. Through this lens, the study contributes both to the global discourse on sustainable youth training and to the urgently needed body of knowledge within the Philippine educational and athletic systems.

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