

THE OPINION OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHERS' AT A SECONDARY VOCATIONAL SCHOOL ON THE INCLUSION OF COMBAT SPORTS AND EXERCISES IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION CLASSES

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Abstract

The paper aims to present the opinions of Physical Education teachers at a secondary vocational school on the inclusion of combat sports and exercises in Physical Education classes at primary and secondary schools. The first part describes the theoretical basis for the definition of combat sport, their benefits for health and their inclusion in Physical Education. The second part of the paper presents the results of qualitative research. The data were collected from semi-structured interviews with four Physical Education teachers. Based on qualitative analysis of data, four categories emerged: combat sports as a preparation for other sports and everyday life, combat sports as a mean of healthy development of the pupil, problems with the inclusion of combat sports in Physical Education, the possibility of including combat sports in regular Physical Education.

Keywords

Physical Education; Physical Education teacher; pupil; combat sports; combat exercises; combative game.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Combat sports

Fojtík (1998, p. 5, 7) defines the concept of combat sports as "physical exercises in which a person attempts to defeat the opponent in a fight." This activity can be realized in direct contact with an opponent without equipment - weapons, or with it (Hrabinec, 2017, p. 279). Pavelka and Stich (2012, p. 8) emphasize that combat sports can "include specific exercises that are a direct preparation for defeating the opponent." A significant feature of combat sports is that they include a contact of at least two people. (Reguli, 2005, p. 7). The goal is not only to improve the technique of combat skills and physical abilities but also to change attitudes and, in a way, rebuild cognitive structures. The aim is to create a strong mentality in students in terms of high mental and physical resilience, where the peaks of these qualities are usually reached in adulthood. Besides, there is an effort to promote the quality of being polite to everyone, as the lack of courtesy, according to Eastern

martial arts, is caused by insufficient self-control. Martial arts also teach determination. (Fojtík, 1998, p. 5, 7).

Reguli (2005, p. 19) divides combat sports into three groups: competitive combat sports, self-defence combat sports and complex developing combat sports. Competitive combat sports include, for example, wrestling, boxing, kendo, etc. However, the author admits that combat sports can be divided according to various criteria. A simple division is, for example, according to their relation to sports competition, i.e. competitive and non-competitive categories, or according to the technical equipment used, namely combat sports using weapons, such as fencing, and combat sports using mainly own body, such as karate, boxing, taekwondo, wrestling, sumo, etc. Pavelka and Stich (2012, p. 8) then divide the combat sports into: "preparatory combat exercises (combat tugs, pushing, resistance, combative games), sports fights that have precisely defined rules for individual competitions, self-defence - use of strikes, kicks, grapples and grabs, stabbing, cutting

or randomly acquired weapons, to protect life, health and property."

1.2 Combat exercises

As the research focused on finding out opinions on the use of combat sports in Physical Education in schools, in the following section, we focus on preparatory combat exercises, which are most important for teaching Physical Education to students. Combat exercises are basic simple physical exercises that form the basis of combat didactics. "They serve to develop motor skills and acquire basic motor skills that are necessary for further physical development in combat as well as non-combat physical activities" (Vít, Reguli, Čihounková, Chyba, 2013). Fojtík and Michalov (1996, p. 11) define combat exercises as the most uncomplicated and accessible forms of combat sports without focusing on a specific sport. They state that combat exercises do not require any special training and, in addition to fulfilling the goals of Physical Education, they provide complex basic training for combat sports and self-defence. Compared to combat sports, they are easier, less demanding on the use of tactics. Combat exercises are divided into tugs, pushing, combat resistances and combative games. Slažanský completely identifies with this (2014, p.280). Fojtík and Michalov (1996, p. 21) further emphasize that it is possible to include combat exercises for all age groups and genders. The authors see the meaning of combat exercises as an introduction to the training of combat disciplines but also as a possibility for the general development of an individual. Hrabinec (2017, p. 279) also appreciates the simplicity and ease of training in combat exercises, as well as accessibility for all age groups of boys and girls.

1.3 The health benefits of combat sports

Michalov and Sližík (2010, p. 183) emphasize that combat sports (like other sports) affect both components of health, physical and mental. They also point out

that the original combat systems were also used as remedies. Combat sports can be practised with an emphasis on physical development and proper technique or favour sports concepts, self-defence, meditation, health, etc. Fojtík (1998, p. 9) points out that these concepts are usually interconnected into one whole, which ultimately creates a prerequisite for improving social relations. Hrabinec (2017, p. 280) primarily sees the importance in the contribution to the general development of a person. Combat sports provide the opportunity to use internal and external strength efficiently; they can significantly contribute to the development of motor, orientation, balance and strength skills. During combat training, the respiratory system, cardiovascular system and joint mobility develop favourably. Combat exercises are suitable for students of all body types. Pavelka and Stich (2012, p. 9) point out that combat sports have positive health effects on the human body and general harmonious development. Fojtík (1998, p. 5) also emphasizes that health aspects are significantly represented in combat sports, evident, for example, in posture and breathing. The actual duel with the opponent is mainly about maximal commitment on the physical and mental level. Reguli agrees, (2007, p. 26, 29) and adds that combat sports are beneficial both for boys and girls. They regulate aggression, increase the stability of one's self, enable the development of tactile communication. They also contribute to realistic self-image and the acquisition of greater psychological resilience; they contribute to social compassion and thoughtfulness for fellow practitioners, opponents and other participants, i.e. for the overall integrity of the personality. Martial arts can help cultivate primary instincts and feelings (Overchuk, 2006) or gain self-confidence, self-control and empathy (cf. Smejkal, 2013). Fojtík (1998, p. 5) also points out that combat sports contribute to the feeling of personal safety. Combat training leads to multifaceted

physical activities that help to develop physical versatility and at the same time contribute to the improvement of physical abilities, physical fitness and overall endurance. They also significantly develop psychological resilience by repeatedly exposing practitioners to difficult situations. Fojtík and Michalov (1996, p. 16) had a similar view on the significance of teaching combat sports. They stated that pupils develop not only control of physical movements but also control of mental states, which leads to a better knowledge of their abilities and thus realistic self-image. Combat training also contributes to social learning, compassion and consideration for a fellow practitioner.

1.4 Combat sports in the Framework Educational Programmes (FEP)

Combat sports and especially combat exercises have their place in the Physical Education curriculum for primary and secondary schools. However, the Framework Educational Programmes (hereinafter referred to as the FEP) mention them only briefly. In the FEP for basic education for the subject Physical Education, combat exercises for 1st-stage pupils, such as tugs and pushing are mentioned; for 2nd-stage pupils, the introduction of self-defence, basics of aikido, judo and karate are mentioned (FEP BE, 2020). In the FEP for secondary technical and vocational education, within the subject Physical Education, it is stated only that "basics of self-defence" and "falling techniques" should be taught (FEP STVE, 2017). Secondary schools should logically build on the knowledge of pupils acquired in primary schools. The nonspecific description may be the first possible pitfall of why Physical Education teachers include combat sports in their classes only minimally. (Reguli, Ďurech & Vít, 2007, p. 13). Hrabinec (2017, p. 281) also deals with the issue of including combat sports in classes; he states that the teaching of combat sports in classes is problematic because, in pedagogical

practice, we often encounter a negative attitude to teaching them. The author believes that there may be a widespread myth among teachers about the "difficult to teach" field that is based on their insufficient qualifications in combat sports. From the point of view of safety, Hrabinec (2017, p. 286) further appends that teachers are often afraid of injuries associated with combat exercises. According to statistics, Physical Education is the subject where the highest number of school accidents occurs (Dandová, 2008). Combat sports can be though perceived in a completely different way, in the sense of preventing these injuries. Reguli, Vít and Chvátalová (2011, pp. 4 - 12) state that a significant task of Physical Education is to teach students accident prevention. For this reason, they consider it necessary to include the practice of falling technique, the primary goal of which is to reduce the risk of injury in falls.

Zemková (1997, p. 9) reflects the inclusion of combat sports in teaching. She states that at school, pupils should get elementary training focused not only on the development of motor skills based on the individual proficiency of each student but also they should acquire movement habits and skills arising from combat sports and self-defence. That would create a precondition for improving students orientation in stressful situations and the possibility of forming moral and conative qualities of students in the sense of "fair play."

Pavelka and Stich (2012, p. 10) are convinced that teaching should focus on basic preparatory combat exercises. Falling techniques should not be left out, as they represent the injuries prevention not only in sports but also in everyday life. Combat exercises can be included in the classes in the form of various combative games, which can be motivating for children.

Šmejkal (2013, p. 19) completely identifies with this opinion, and he mentions an entertaining function of combat exercises. The author emphasizes that combat sports should be taught for fun and

entertainment; the effect of the exercise should be improving the physical condition of students, which will result spontaneously.

Fojtík and Michalov (1996, p. 17) state that at secondary school, students should master some basic self-defence skills. From the beginning, the teaching of combat sports should be accompanied by a kind of moral training so that there is no risk of misuse of these skills when teaching self-defence techniques in secondary school. There should be a gradual shift from the cheerful and fun forms that are recommended for primary school pupils to the exercises that are associated with concentration and respect. It is also necessary to follow a specific order, first learn the falling technique and only then include, for example, throws from the standing position. When teaching, it is necessary to respect the necessity of an individual approach to students. It is also essential to follow didactic principles. Pavelka and Stich (2015, p. 8) point out that correctly chosen self-defence instruction always follows didactic principles, is subject to cultural and demographic circumstances, and should be mainly simple and effective. All aspects of each individual should be taken into account when teaching self-defence.

2 AIMS, RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research study aims to present the Physical Education teachers' opinions on including combat sports and combat exercises in Physical Education classes. The research sample consisted of 4 Physical Education teachers at a secondary technical school who regularly use combat exercises in their lessons. The research questions were: What is the opinion of these teachers on combat sports? What importance do they attribute to combat exercises and their inclusion in Physical Education classes? Data collection took place through a semi-structured interview. The obtained data were analyzed using the open coding method. The resulting codes were further categorized.

3 METHODS, PROCEDURE

The specific of the selected secondary technical school where the research was carried out is that in the first as well as subsequent years, approximately 200 hours a year are devoted to combat sports. The school educational program (SEP) is designed according to the Framework Educational Programme for the field of Security and Law Studies - 68-42-M/01. All interviewees are qualified for teaching Physical Education, and in their lessons, they include, among other things, elements of combat sports and combative gymnastics. Elena has been teaching Physical Education there for about 18 years. Jakub has been a Physical Education teacher for more than 45 years. He started his career at an elementary school. Robert is a Physical Education teacher with fifteen years of experience. Jiří has been a Physical Education teacher for 19 years. He used to teach Physical Education at a grammar school and now at a secondary technical school in Brno.

Based on the qualitative analysis, four categories emerged: "Combat sports as a preparation for other sports and the pupil's everyday life." "Combat sports as means of healthy development of the pupil." "Problems with the inclusion of combat sports in Physical Education".

4 RESULTS

4.1 Combat sports as a preparation for other sports and the pupil's everyday life

Interviewees agree that combat sports are crucial preparation for other sports; they are also necessary fundamentals of movement for all children: "*Combat sports are excellent preparation for all sports. The fundamentals, basic exercises, combative gymnastics are, in my opinion, the best thing to start with young children. Then they can find other sports, but this should be the general basis.*" (Elena) To avoid injuries during exercise and sports, knowledge of falling techniques is essential: "*Children must learn those*

combat exercises from an early age, but especially at the primary school, they should address the fundamentals of combat sports, and that is the falling technique because the falling technique is a part of all other sports, games, gymnastics, etc. The falling technique is the basis for other sports and everything in general." Jakub also mentioned the falls and their general importance. "During the training, there may be a higher risk of injury, but if the children learn to fall, then it can rather protect their health. For example, soccer players who can fall well have the lowest percentage of injuries." (Jakub) The fact that combat sports reflect significantly in the normal life of the pupils was confirmed by all interviewees. Elena states: "Well, combat sports, like any other sport, are useful for them, that they seem to be more active, more flexible, tougher. Movement, in general, is, of course, important for them." Robert also comments on these issues concerning the safety and health of students. He states: "Even today, it is important for people to be able to defend themselves and feel safe."

4.2 Combat sports as means of healthy development of the pupil

Regarding the topic of pupil's health, healthy physical and mental development, interviewees most often talk about problems with the physical condition of pupils. They mention that students who do not know the basic Physical Education exercises, not only combat ones, often come from primary school. They do not have fundamental movement training either from primary school or from the family environment: "Children who come to our secondary school are skilful, but they have acquired less and less at primary schools. It is much more usual that they play football, but they have never done a handstand, a cartwheel, a somersault, they have never done anything in pairs. In general, children move far less." (Elena) Robert also comments on the physical condition of the

pupils: "The physical condition of the pupils is, without doubt, not ideal. Children do not move much, they are not used to doing sports, and sometimes they do not have any fundamental training from primary school on which to build." The remarks show that it is not so important which sport the student chooses, but that s/he must do it regularly and with joy. Combat sports are then one of the options that can be beneficial for them physically and mentally. "Combat sports and exercises can certainly contribute to health, develop dexterity, speed, strength, endurance, joint range and everything else. When done properly, it can be of great benefit to students." (Elena) Jiří sees an advantage in the fact that: "Conative qualities are being developed, for sure. Basic combat exercises develop them in the same way as all combat sports. Combat sports have a health benefit for students, both mental and physical." Jakub then comments more concretely on the specificity of combat exercises. "Well, they will surely learn the discipline, then it is a very contact exercise. Above all, they will learn to fall. Otherwise, it's a specific exercise, because the kids aren't usually used to training in pairs. It is also prevention against injuries, whether in sports or generally. Then, in terms of contact, training in pairs, the fact that they get used to practising together, being in close contact, is very emotional for them. Well, for example, in the games, there can be teamwork, cooperation."

Mastering the technique can also have a positive effect on the student's self-esteem. Jiří, for example, mentions the possible benefit of these exercises in connection with the pupil's self-confidence: "They have no problem finding friends and are seldom shy. They can defend themselves, so someone just won't show disrespect." Robert also addresses the issue. He mentions: "Pupils, who do combat sports, are used to physical contact, they can react

promptly and usually do not have a problem in the team."

4.3 Problems with the inclusion of combat sports in Physical Education

According to Robert, the problem with including combat sports is related to the physical condition of pupils: *"Pupils are not used to regular sporting, moving, they are in poor physical condition, and then it is not possible to start new exercises if they cannot do the basic ones."* One of the reasons why there might be a problem with including combat sports in PE classes Elena sees is that the teachers are afraid of doing these exercises with children. She continues that in an interview with teachers from other schools, some state: *"We cannot even do a backward roll with them because we do it one day and the next day half a class will come wearing a neck collar."* She adds that this is why some teachers prefer to exclude these exercises. Jakub also mentions as a possible problem the fact that children come without previous experience and combat skills. *"Those children, if they do not pass the basis at the primary school, then it can be a problem for teachers at secondary school that those children cannot do it. And, of course, when teachers don't do it, they don't have that much experience, and they don't do these exercises themselves, so they don't use it much in class. But everyone should include it because in the FEPs they are mentioned, and as I said, even the teachers at university know learnt the basics of the combat sports."*

Jakub replies to this question that there are problems with the inclusion of combat sports in teaching, especially at primary school. *"Especially female teachers have a problem because the kids misbehave a lot when training in pairs, so they avoid those combat exercises, but they should all do it both at secondary school and primary school."* Robert comments on this statement: *"Among other things, there may be*

problems concerning the teacher due to their inexperience and organizational incompetence." Elena goes on to say that teachers may have little experience. *"Many schools let PE classes be taught by someone who goes around and just doesn't have enough lessons to teach. And they're not PE teachers at all. Because it's suitable, anyway, everyone can do it, and basically, they can do it, yes, when it is necessary, when they have to, but of course, they can't teach this kind of exercises properly. They don't know how to do the spotting; they can't explain how to do it right."*

Elena further states that another thing that could be an obstacle for teachers in including combat exercises came to her mind. *"The children are quite big. It's physically exhausting, and I'm tired of it. Of spotting them. So, maybe that's why teachers don't want to do it. Then it is problematic that our schools are "over-feminized". Fortunately, when the guys teach, they mostly teach PE, but in reality, there would be five female and one male teacher. He can't change much."*

An important issue concerning combat sports is the risk of injury. Physical Education itself, sports clubs within the school or extracurricular activities of a sports nature bring a higher risk of injury as students move. There are then higher demands on the teacher, who should pay increased attention and try to prevent students from injuries. It might seem that combat sports have a much higher risk of injury than other sports. Regarding the risk of injury in connection with combat sports and based on her own experience, Elena comments: *"I do not think that the risk of getting injured when doing combat exercises is higher, on the contrary, I think that if they learn it from the beginning, the risk of injury is minimal."* Even Jakub does not see a much higher risk associated with teaching combat sports. *"I think, for example, the risk of injuries is comparable to teaching Physical Education without elements of combat sports. Of course,*

there must be adequate equipment for that; otherwise, it is a risk comparable to football or hockey."

Robert and Jiří have different opinion on combat sports and the risk of injury. They both think that the risk can sometimes be higher. Jiří states: *"During the exercise itself, there may be a higher risk of injury, the risk of pain. On the other hand, he adds: "If students learn to fall, then it can rather protect their health."*

Adherence to basic safety rules must be emphasized regarding the risks of injury in connection with combat sports. In this sense, Jakub comments on the equipment of the school: *"The school might not have special equipment, for training falling techniques, they should have tatami mats - that could be a problem, for example, in some schools."* That could surely be a problem, as this type of exercise cannot be done without the appropriate school equipment, as the risk of injury to pupils could then be higher.

4.4 Possibilities of including combat sports in education

When asked where Physical Education teachers can get the information and knowledge they need about combat training, Elena says, *"Well, they should have learnt it at the university, right? We should know everything needed. At university, as PE teachers, they taught us everything. So I should be able to handle it normally, to keep the children safe."* Jakub then clarifies this statement: *"Teachers, when they study Physical Education, combat exercises are part of their training. They don't study it in-depth, they don't have many hours, but all Physical Education teachers have to study combat sports for one semester. They should then be able to include this kind of exercise in their classes at least partially. Of course, it is done more by those who do combat sports, or at primary school, those teachers who have more experience with them teach combat sports more, but*

everyone should teach them." In connection with further training for "PE teachers", Elena mentions: *"Well, all teachers should do some continuing development courses all the time, but basically one a year is considered enough, and what you choose is up to you. So I'd say they simply aren't interested."*

Therefore, according to interviewees, teachers should be able to include combat sports basics in their teaching. That is important mainly because combat sports are part of the curricular documents: *"Combat sports are mentioned in the Framework Educational Programmes and should be included in school educational programmes. They are not described in great detail in the FEP, but all schools must include them. That means that primary schools should teach falling techniques plus some small combative games and secondary schools falling techniques, combat exercises and then something basic techniques from judo."* (Jakub)

Jakub comments on the question of where it is possible to get inspiration: *"I have a collection of exercises, I created some of that on my own, and then there are, of course, brochures that describe combat exercises, or Dalibor Zdeněk's book describes a thousand games, combative games appear there too, so that might also be a good source."* Jiří draws mainly from his own experience. Since these are simple basic exercises, he can include them in Physical Education classes for students who do not directly engage in specific combat sports: *"It is not difficult to master them, but then I use what suits me."* Robert adds: *"I most often get inspiration from my colleagues. And also based on personal experience."*

5 DISCUSSION

All the addressed teachers consider it vital to include preparatory combat exercises and combat sports in Physical Education, as they serve as preparation for other sports. Interviewees also point out that combat exercises contribute to the

physical and mental health of students, increase their dexterity and self-confidence, which also Reguli confirms (2005, p. 11). According to the addressed teachers, falling techniques, which are a part of combat exercises, has an irreplaceable role not only in most sports but also in everyday life. The interviewed teachers consider the knowledge of the falling techniques to be important prevention of injuries. This finding completely corresponds with those presented by Pavelka and Stich (2012, p.10).

The research also implies that the interviewed teachers consider the reluctance of students to engage in active movement as a big problem, which leads to the poor physical condition and reduced mobility. They see the reason in, among other things, insufficient physical training at primary schools. This finding does not correspond with the requirement of the orientation of Physical Education towards health, focusing on the prevention and compensation of health impairments related to low physical activity of the entire population and also with the requirement of Czech society for versatility in PE. (Mužík & Vlček, 2016)

According to interviewees, primary and secondary school teachers include combat sports and exercises in the teaching of Physical Education only to a minimal extent. In this context, interviewees point out that the Framework Educational Programmes require the inclusion of these exercises in school educational programs. The obtained results correspond with the statements of Reguli, Ďurech and Vít (2007, p.67). However, these authors also point out the non-specificity of the description of combat sports in the FEP. The interviewees also describe reasons why teachers in primary and secondary schools do not include combat sports in their teaching. The first reason is the poor physical condition of the students. Teachers believe that students would not be able to do such exercises. The second

reason is the problem of maintaining discipline during combat-oriented teaching. The size and weight of students can also be an obstacle that can be quite physically strenuous for a teacher who helps students with exercises. All these views resemble what Hrabinec (2007, p. 281) states, which points to the widespread opinion among primary school teachers that this is a demanding area to teach. The interviewees agree that when studying university, future Physical Education teachers encounter combat sports in theory and practice; but, at the same time, they add that school management allows teachers with other specialisations to teach Physical Education. That partly corresponds with Hrabinec's view (2007, p. 281), which combines a reluctance to include combats with insufficient teacher qualifications. As for the risk of injuries, in the opinion of the interviewed teachers, it is not higher than in other similar sports. Concurrently, everyone agrees that if students learn to use the falling techniques well, it can protect them from injury. Zemková (1997, p.9) and Pavelka and Stich (2012, p.10) have similar opinion. The only reason for the possible higher risk of injuries the interviewees see is the insufficient equipment of schools for combat sports and falling techniques.

Limits of the study

To clarify the findings, it would be appropriate to conduct interviews with teachers from a regular secondary school that does not have a sports specialization. It would also be interesting to do this survey among Physical Education teachers at primary school, especially given that in the FEP for primary education, combat sports have an integral place.

6 CONCLUSION

The paper aimed to present the opinions of Physical Education teachers at a secondary vocational school on the inclusion of combat sports and exercises in

Physical Education classes at primary and secondary schools. In the first part of the article, combat sports, their health significance and inclusion in Physical Education were defined. When comparing the results of the exploratory research with information from the literature, it is clear that combat sports are beneficial for students. In their basics, they should be part of the teaching. Exploratory research among PE teachers confirmed the results of theoretical knowledge that combat sports are significantly reflected in the everyday life of students, both in connection with the falling techniques and the positive qualities they develop in students. For teaching at primary school, the addressed teachers would recommend falling techniques and combative games, at secondary schools to develop falling techniques, combat exercises and possibly include judo or karate. Pupils should therefore start with simple forms of combat exercises and gradually follow with other more complex systems. Combative games are technically undemanding and fun for pupils. Another challenge for teachers is further education in this area. That is necessary not only for this type of sports activity. We must not forget that Physical Education should be taught only by qualified teachers who can provide students with fully-fledged instruction. In accordance with the professional literature, the addressed teachers are convinced that, following didactic principles and all safety measures, increased risk of injury during combat sports in PE classes can be eliminated.

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