

PEDAGOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR APPLYING FREESTYLE WRESTLING EXERCISES AND TECHNIQUES TO DEVELOP THE PHYSICAL FITNESS OF GENERAL SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS (GRADES 5–9)

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Abstract

The development of students' physical fitness has become one of the priority objectives of modern school education. Physical education is expected not only to improve children's health but also to foster motor competence, social responsibility, emotional resilience, and lifelong engagement in physical activity. Among various sports incorporated into school physical education, freestyle wrestling has considerable educational value because it integrates strength, speed, agility, flexibility, balance, coordination, and tactical thinking within a single learning process. The purpose of this theoretical review is to examine the pedagogical foundations for integrating freestyle wrestling exercises and techniques into physical education classes for students in Grades 5–9. The study is based on an analysis of contemporary scientific literature, international recommendations, and pedagogical theories related to physical education and motor learning. The review indicates that appropriately selected wrestling exercises improve physical preparedness while simultaneously enhancing students' discipline, confidence, cooperation, and self-control. The findings also suggest that wrestling-based activities increase students' motivation toward physical education lessons by providing diverse, engaging, and developmentally appropriate learning experiences. Successful implementation requires systematic lesson planning, qualified teachers, adherence to safety standards, and consideration of students' age and individual characteristics. The paper concludes that freestyle wrestling can serve as an effective pedagogical tool for

improving both physical fitness and holistic personality development in secondary school students.

Keywords

freestyle wrestling, physical fitness, physical education, secondary school students, pedagogical foundations, motor development, adolescents, school sports.

Introduction. Improving children's physical fitness remains one of the major priorities of educational systems worldwide. Rapid technological development, sedentary lifestyles, prolonged screen time, and reduced daily physical activity have contributed to declining levels of physical fitness among adolescents. Consequently, schools play a crucial role in providing structured opportunities for physical development through scientifically organized physical education programs. Students in Grades 5–9 (approximately 11–15 years old) experience significant physical, physiological, cognitive, and emotional changes. During this period, muscular strength, coordination, balance, flexibility, speed, and endurance develop rapidly, making adolescence a particularly favorable stage for acquiring fundamental movement skills and sport-specific abilities. Educational researchers emphasize that instructional methods during this stage should encourage comprehensive physical development while maintaining students' motivation and ensuring safety.

Freestyle wrestling is recognized as one of the oldest and most comprehensive sports. Unlike many traditional physical exercises that primarily target individual physical qualities, wrestling simultaneously develops multiple components of fitness through dynamic movement patterns. Wrestling activities require students to coordinate movements, maintain balance, react quickly, solve movement problems, and cooperate with partners under controlled conditions. Therefore, freestyle wrestling possesses significant educational potential within school physical education curricula. The objective of this review is to analyze the pedagogical foundations for using freestyle

wrestling exercises and techniques to improve the physical fitness of students in Grades 5–9 and to identify methodological principles for their effective implementation in school settings.

Theoretical Foundations

Modern educational theory emphasizes learner-centered approaches in physical education. Constructivist pedagogy encourages students to acquire movement skills through active participation, exploration, and problem-solving rather than passive repetition. Freestyle wrestling naturally supports these principles because students continuously adapt their movements in response to changing situations.

Motor learning theories also provide strong support for the educational use of wrestling. According to contemporary research, effective motor skill acquisition requires repeated practice under varied conditions, immediate feedback, progressive complexity, and meaningful learning tasks. Wrestling exercises provide opportunities for continuous movement adaptation, helping students improve coordination, spatial awareness, balance, and reaction speed.

Competency-based education further highlights the importance of integrating physical, cognitive, emotional, and social competencies within educational practice. Wrestling activities simultaneously develop technical abilities, tactical thinking, communication, responsibility, and emotional regulation, making them particularly suitable for competency-oriented physical education.

Pedagogical Principles for Applying Freestyle Wrestling Exercises

The successful integration of freestyle wrestling into school physical education depends on several pedagogical principles.

Age Appropriateness. Instruction should correspond to students' developmental characteristics. Students in Grades 5–6 should primarily perform exercises focusing on body control, movement coordination, balance, flexibility, and basic locomotor skills.

More advanced technical elements may gradually be introduced in Grades 7–9 after students have acquired sufficient physical readiness.

Progressive Learning. Teaching should progress from simple to complex. Initial instruction should include fundamental wrestling positions, movement patterns, safe falling techniques, partner exercises, and elementary technical actions before introducing more sophisticated movements.

Individualization. Students differ in physical abilities, confidence, learning speed, and previous sports experience. Teachers should therefore adapt activities according to individual needs and provide differentiated instruction to maximize learning outcomes.

Safety. Safety remains the primary requirement during wrestling instruction. Appropriate warm-up exercises, soft training surfaces, qualified supervision, controlled partner activities, and correct demonstration of techniques significantly reduce injury risks while improving learning efficiency.

Motivation

Student motivation increases when lessons include enjoyable, cooperative, and game-based activities. Wrestling games, partner challenges, and movement competitions encourage active participation while maintaining educational objectives.

Educational Benefits of Freestyle Wrestling. Freestyle wrestling contributes to students' development in several interconnected dimensions.

Physical Development. Scientific literature consistently demonstrates that wrestling exercises effectively improve muscular strength, speed, agility, flexibility, coordination, endurance, balance, and reaction time. Dynamic body movements activate large muscle groups while enhancing neuromuscular coordination and postural control.

The multidirectional movement patterns characteristic of freestyle wrestling requires students to accelerate, decelerate, rotate, maintain stability, and rapidly change

body position. Such activities provide comprehensive physical conditioning that supports both athletic performance and everyday functional movement.

Motor Skill Development

Motor competence represents one of the primary objectives of school physical education. Wrestling develops both fundamental movement skills and sport-specific abilities. Students improve body awareness, movement precision, spatial orientation, bilateral coordination, and movement efficiency.

Repeated practice of wrestling techniques strengthens motor memory and facilitates the transfer of movement skills to other sports such as gymnastics, athletics, football, basketball, volleyball, and martial arts.

Psychological Development. Participation in wrestling activities positively influences students' psychological well-being. Controlled physical challenges encourage perseverance, courage, confidence, concentration, emotional stability, and self-discipline. Students gradually learn to manage success and failure appropriately while developing resilience and self-regulation. Such psychological qualities are valuable not only in sports but also in academic learning and everyday life.

Social Development. Partner-based learning creates opportunities for communication, cooperation, respect, empathy, and responsibility. Students learn to follow rules, respect opponents, support teammates, and demonstrate fair play. The social interaction inherent in wrestling activities strengthens classroom relationships while promoting positive behavioral values essential for holistic education.

Methodological Recommendations for Physical Education Teachers

Effective implementation requires systematic instructional planning. Teachers should begin each lesson with general warm-up exercises followed by mobility activities preparing students for wrestling movements. The main instructional phase should include progressively organized exercises emphasizing movement quality rather than

competitive performance. Teachers should continuously monitor students' technique, provide immediate corrective feedback, and encourage cooperative learning. Assessment should evaluate students' overall physical progress, technical improvement, participation, discipline, cooperation, and adherence to safety rules rather than competitive success alone. Schools should also provide appropriate sports facilities, safe training equipment, and opportunities for teachers to improve their professional competencies through continuous training in wrestling methodology.

Discussion. The reviewed literature consistently supports the educational value of freestyle wrestling within school physical education. Researchers agree that wrestling-based instruction contributes simultaneously to physical fitness, motor competence, emotional development, and social learning. Despite these advantages, successful implementation requires careful methodological planning. Teachers should avoid excessive competitive pressure and instead emphasize educational objectives, student well-being, gradual progression, and inclusive participation. Integrating wrestling exercises into the physical education curriculum aligns with contemporary educational priorities emphasizing health promotion, lifelong physical activity, competency-based learning, and holistic student development.

Conclusion. This theoretical review demonstrates that freestyle wrestling possesses substantial pedagogical potential for improving the physical fitness of students in Grades 5–9. The comprehensive nature of wrestling exercises enables simultaneous development of strength, speed, agility, endurance, flexibility, coordination, balance, and motor competence while fostering psychological resilience and positive social behavior. The educational effectiveness of wrestling depends on scientifically organized instruction that considers students' developmental characteristics, individual differences, motivation, and safety requirements. Schools that integrate age-appropriate wrestling exercises into physical education programs can significantly enhance both students'

physical preparedness and their overall educational development. Future studies should focus on experimental investigations examining the long-term effectiveness of structured freestyle wrestling programs in improving physical fitness among secondary school students.

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