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A Narrative Exploration of Issues in Silat Development From Children To Youth Athletes

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Key words: martial arts, olahraga, curriculum, young athlete development, combat sports, fighting

Abstract

Background. Martial arts come in many forms of practice throughout the world. However, *silat* is the form of martial arts practiced in the Malay civilization with both artistic and contact variations.

Problem and Aim. In Southeast Asia that includes Malaysia, silat is practiced widely, but in various forms. Silat and Pencak silat are widely practiced in Malaysia and Indonesia have been inscribed as a cultural heritage by UNESCO. And while there are many reasons for practicing silat, it can also contribute to the development of young people. So, does this youth development through silat take place? This paper will therefore present a narrative exploration of silat development from childhood to youth to examine how it takes place for youth development, particularly in the Malaysian silat context.

Methods. This study used the literature narrative to chart out the development of silat in Malaysia from the school system in the school curriculum to the policy and legislative level, its challenges, and how it relates to youth development.

Result. This exploratory narrative demonstrates that for holistic youth development through silat, the practice of silat and its development must encompass its various forms, be structured, methodological and systematic. And besides, its combat, self-defence and sports elements, development and practice must incorporate elements of sports science and performance, health and well-being, humanities and social sciences.

Conclusion. For human development purposes, silat should extend beyond its sports, combat, and self-defence components of practice to include the health and developmental components and be holistic. While the initial starting point must be instilling its traditional fundamentals of basic combat and self-defence skills that are psychomotor, at higher levels, silat should be inclusive of affective and cognitive development such as human values with social skills and higher-order thinking skills.

Introduction

There are many forms of martial arts practiced throughout the world. However, compared to other martial arts, *silat* is a form of martial art that is anchored in the cultural traditions and practices of the Malay civilization [Shapie *et al.* 2019a]. Silat has many categories, as a sport [Shapie, Elias 2015a], as a game [Anuar 1987], or competition that requires multiple fitness disciplines such as

speed and reaction time to striking [Shapie *et al.* 2013] and self-defense [Anuar, 2008]. Despite being a self-defense sport, this form of combative sport was designed with a beautiful flow of dance movements uniqueness [Anuar 1993], every step, motion and movement can translate itself in self-defense for attacks of defence [Anuar 1987]. It has an East Asian origin that has both artistic and contact variations [Shapie 2020]. The contact version is weight-classified, unarmed, and full contact

that is similar to judo and taekwondo, but with certain unique movement and step patterns during the competition [Aziz *et al.* 2002, in: Shapie 2020].

In Southeast Asia, besides Malaysia, silat is also widely practiced in Indonesia, Singapore, Brunei, and the Philippines. In Indonesia, it is *pencak silat* that is widely practiced as it originates from there. Moreover, “Traditions of Pencak Silat” have been recently inscribed by UNESCO on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (Decision 14 COM 10b, 15,3). Silat and pencak silat are different, as the former derives from Malaysia and the latter originates from Indonesia. Pencak silat movements are nonetheless inspired by natural animal movements like monkey, snake, tiger and etc. [Maryono 2000], while silat is derived from human anatomical movements [Anuar 1992].

There are several forms of *silat* being practiced by the Malays in Malaysia such as *Silat Melayu Asli*, *Silat Patani*, *Silat Jawi*, *Silat Kedah*, *Silat Seri Patani*, *Gayung Fatani*, *Silat Bunga*, and *Silat Harimau* [Shapie *et al.* 2016]. For this paper, the *Seni Gayung Fatani*, which originates in the Malay Peninsula, will be the focus of discussion due to the silat syllabus that has laid the foundation of the Malaysian Seni Silat Curriculum (*Seni Silat Malaysia*, SSM). It is an original silat system that does not hold techniques taken from other martial art forms or other silat or pencak silat styles [Shapie, Elias 2016].

Generally, the art of Silat is practiced for reasons such as self-defense, spiritual development, sports competition, physical health and fitness, entertainment, as well as psycho-social development [Shapie *et al.* 2019a]. However, in the context of youth, it can also include the three-dimensional domains of psychomotor, affective, and cognitive development other than its traditional cultural, combat, self-defense, and spiritual domains. This youth development dimension in silat youth athlete development will be a new area that will be introduced and highlighted in this paper.

Structure, Policy and Legislation of Sport in Malaysia

In Malaysia, all sports, notwithstanding, have been recognized in the 2009 National Sports Policy in the context of two levels: Sports for All and Sports for Elite (Figure 1). And according to the Sports Development Act, 1997, there are four sports levels in practice: Club level, District Level, State level, and National level (Figure 2). Sports development programmes in the National Sports Policy (2009), begin from the grassroots level that includes the youth. These youth are included in the development curriculum at the school level, where the Education Ministry is involved under Section 5, Sports Development Act (1997) in developing sports at the school level.

Under The First Schedule, Section 2, Sports Development Act (1997), Amendment 2004; Martial Arts have been inserted into the Gazetting; 48th sport. In the staff

warrant of the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the Sports Development Division; The Martial Arts Unit is responsible for developing the Martial Arts programme at the State Department of Youth and Sports, to the District Youth and Sports Office level. The structure of sports development to develop Martial Arts is very well organised in Malaysia.

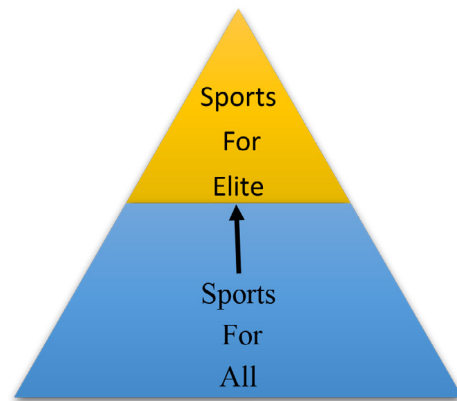


Fig. 1. Sports-for-All to Elite Sport

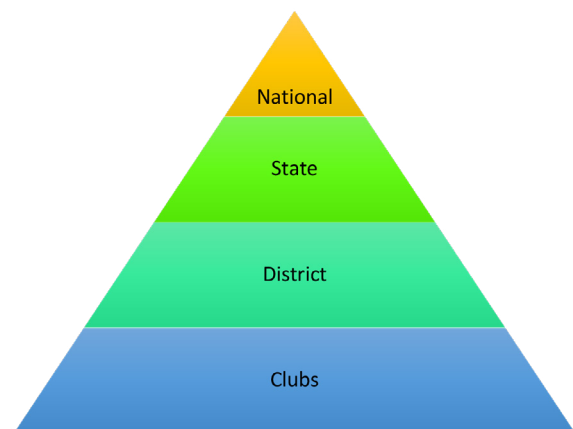


Fig. 2. Sport Levels in Malaysia

At the government level, there are three main levels in the Ministry of Youth and Sports Malaysia, i.e. the District Youth and Sports Office, State Youth and Sports Department, and the Ministry of Youth and Sports at the federal level. In addition, there is the Sports Commissioner's Office to oversee the implementation of sports bodies under the Sports Development Act 1997 with the National Sports Council to coordinate the development of sports, as well as the National Institute of Sports to provide support in sports science.

The collaboration between the structures of the Ministry of Youth and Sports, to the State Youth and Sports Department to the District Youth and Sports Office level with the Sports Bodies registered at the Sports Commissioner's Office, is in the form of sports at the youth level. Sports development at the youth level is included in the assessment of the achievements of sports bodies in the

annual periodisation phase of each sports body, applicable to all levels, i.e. at national, state, district and club.

Forms of Silat and its Development

There are three forms of silat in Malaysia: 1) *Silat Tempur* - sparring form of silat; 2) *Silat Olahraga* - the competitive and combative form of silat in sports competitions; and 3) *Seni Silat Bela Diri* - the martial art and self-defence form of silat.

Silat Tempur is the foundation for developing advanced silat skills for *Silat Olahraga*, and *Silat Bela Diri*. It is meant for children or beginners to silat in developing foundational sparring skills to improve the techniques of punching, kicking, avoiding, and blocking. *Silat Tempur* was created to cater for the missing link in *Silat Combat Sport* for children 7 to 13 years of age. Charging forward or reverse in a straight line is the only direction silat exponent allowed to move, thus giving the opportunity to gain points during competitions. As illustrated in Figure 3, the 2 x 9-meter platform must be made of 5 mm thick rubber mat and are cleaned and marked with respective markings before each match. Continuously, *Silat Tempur* categorized by children and early youth [Shapie, Anuar 2013].

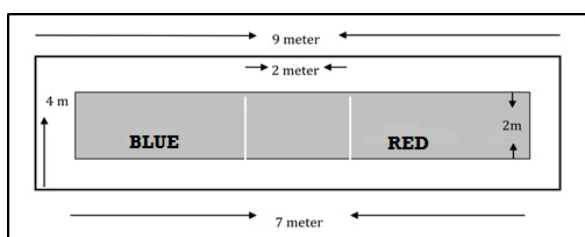


Fig. 3. The arena of Silat Tempur [Shapie, Anuar 2013]

Continuously, *Silat tempur* is categorized by children and adolescents (Shapie, Anuar 2013) from 7 to 13 years old and 14 to 15 years old, respectively. Separated by gender, beginner exponents were allowed to compete with their category up to the age of 17 years old. This is due to the high demand for exponents aged above the original category. During a competition match draw, organizers scrutinized every aspect of silat exponents before the final match schedule. This allows exponents to compete within their range age, silat belt ranking and skills, reducing injury risks during and after competition. It is important for silat coaches to provide excellent silat training [Shapie *et al.* 2016; Al-Syurgawi 2018] with care and precaution to avoid any unwanted injuries before and during competition, Figure 4 and 5 shows an ongoing and winner (Figure 6) of the match, respectively.

Silat Olahraga is the next level form of sporting competition in combative skills and sports excellence in elite, high-performance competitions, and tournaments. It is a transit from silat tempur to compete at senior competitions. It also consists of 3 divisions that

are characterised by age, weight, gender from young teenagers to adolescents, and towards adulthood.



Fig. 4. The silat tempur competition



Fig. 5: International duel between silat exponent from Australia in blue and Malaysia in red



Fig. 6: Silat Tempur Competition in Hotel Grand Ballroom Setting

Silat olahraga is a sport that existed in the midst of development of thousands of silat schools in Archipelago [Anuar 1993]. The ability for a silat exponent to perform attacks and defence such as punching, kicking, throwing, catching, parrying and blocking or/and any skill related silat techniques during combat is what it meant by *Olahraga*. *Silat Olahraga* is competed with two silat exponents just like other common combat sport, however, it is contested withing a seven (7) meter diameter ring called the *bidang laga* (Figure 7). During a normal match, silat exponents will battle it out in a three (3) round of two (2) minutes per round with one (1) minute interval between rounds. However, match timing usually takes longer that the time format because of time stoppages by referees. Stoppages may occur due to many reasons such us silat exponents going outside the *bidang laga*, warnings, injury time or fouls, or any other reasons that may affect the match. Additionally,

a two (2) meter diameter in the center of bidang laga, called *lingkar pemisah* separates exponents before each restart of the contest. Additionally, three divisions separate Silat Olahraga exponents which are age, weight and gender while categorized as adults (17- years old and above), teenagers (14 to 17-years old) and youth (12 to 14-years old).

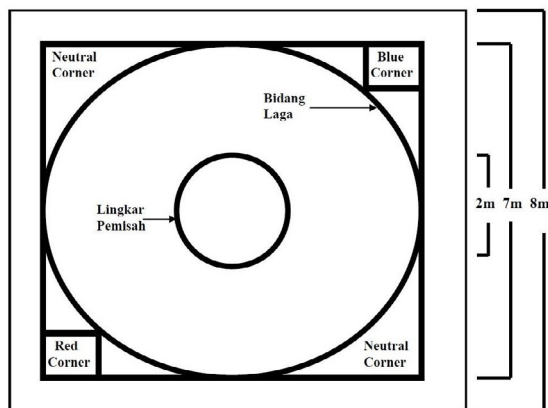


Fig. 7. Silat Olahraga arena [Anuar 1993]

Silat Olahraga is a silat competition while “Silat Tempur” is its simplified grassroots version [Anuar 1993; Shapie *et al.* 2019a; Pawista, Shapie 2019; Shapie *et al.* 2019b; Shapie *et al.* 2018] and to score points, exponents have to incorporate punches, kicking, catching, and topple down [Shapie *et al.* 2016]. However its main focus is based on Seni Silat Malaysia curriculum which includes punching, kicking, blocking and avoiding [Shapie, Elias 2015b; Anuar 2002]. The nature of Silat Olahraga requires exponents to be physically in a high intermittent fitness state which is too demanding for children. Silat Tempur allows exponents to mature and familiarize techniques that are based on Seni Silat Malaysia Curriculums lower belt level in the Silat Belting System (white belt to blue belt: blue belt to brown belt) that involves punch, kick, block, and avoidance.

Silat Bela Diri goes beyond both *silat tempur* and *silat olahraga*. It involves a very advanced skill for real combat and self-defence. While *silat tempur* and *silat olahraga* is primarily practiced in a hall or sporting arena, *silat bela diri* skills are applied anywhere whenever the circumstances require it to do so.

The process of development in Malaysia starts with the development of the silat curriculum, which was later adopted by the Ministry of Education as a co-curriculum activity starting with children on *silat tempur* which is non-contact, but more of sparring. From there, it transits to the sporting component of *silat olahraga* where the silat practitioners take part in the combative competition where there is contact. As suggested by Shapie *et al.* (2016), Silat Tempur can be seen as a stage for young silat exponents to appreciate the combative sports of Silat Olahraga and at the same time aspire to be as good or

not better than idols. Here, they also advanced to elite, high performance and sports excellence competitions [Al-Syurgawi, Shapie 2019].

Besides the development of the silat practitioners and competitors, the development also takes place in coaching development, training, and certification. Eventually, there will be recognition through award presentations covering these categories: Best Newcomer, Talented Athletes, Best Club Awards, Hardworking Athletes, and Best Club Manager.

Silat Curriculum Development from Children to Youth

The curriculum of Silat in Malaysia comprises of 7 levels:

Table 1. Topic in Seni silat Malaysia

No	Topic	Elaboration of Topic
1	Bunga	The pillars of silat attacking and defensive positions
2	Jurus	The art of attack and defense either using weapons or bare hands
3	Belebat	The techniques of receiving strikes and how to counter it back
4	Tapak	The step pattern in silat movements
5	Buah Pukul	The fast action of self defense
6	Tempur Seni	The art of combat
7	Tempur Bela Diri	The speed and powerful movement of self-defense combat [Shapie <i>et al.</i> 2016].

The seven levels were derived from the Malaysian Seni Silat Curriculum (*Seni Silat Malaysia, SSM*) that were developed by *Seni Gayung Fatani Malaysia* can be identified through the belt system from white, blue, yellow, green, red, and black belt [Shapie, Elias 2016]. Additionally, within those levels there are also topics that develop children to youth namely Bunga, Jurus, Belebat, Tapak, Buah Pukul, Tempur Seni, Tempur Bela Diri. Table 1 below explains the topics within SSM.

The development in the Silat Curriculum can be seen in Table 2 in which the syllabus topic can be seen across all 7 levels. Beginners of silat practitioner can be of various ages, often starting at around 7 years of age or younger, will go through lower phases of the curriculum system level 1 and level 2 of lower phase. Completing both levels, from Beginner silat exponents to First Rank Silat Exponent, they then mature into the beginning of youth stages involving level 3 to level 5. At Level 6 and Level 7 silat exponents will gain the title Junior Warrior and Warrior respectively.

The Silat Curriculum clearly illustrates how an individual progresses with structure starting as a beginner all the way to warriorship. Every silat exponent will learn different styles of attacking and defensive skill such as Elakan (avoiding technique movements), Tangkisan (blocking techniques), Tangkapan (catching techniques), Potong (counter strike), Amuk (rampage with

due diligence) and weaponry systems such as sickle, sword, cudgel, kris or a short wavy dagger, rope, walking stick made of hardwood, dagger with straight cutting edge and trisula. The practical self-defense, unarmed self-defense and self-defense knife system also will be given in each silat level.

Method

Since this is an explorative narrative review of silat development in Malaysia from children to youth, neither a qualitative nor quantitative study was conducted. It merely employed literature from various official government documents on national sports policy and development and curriculum development, literature on youth and/or adolescent development in relation to sports, and some published journal articles on silat. These works of literature were then to determine the scope, perimeters, and directions for children to youth development through silat and finally discussed to establish how the system should work from the fundamental foundation level to the peak of the silat sports development pyramid.

Discussions

This discussion will examine two primary areas:

- 1) the issues and challenges in silat development.
- 2) what youth development is all about together with its concepts, approaches,
- and 3) what the elements are for the development of

children and youth in silat.

1) Issues and Challenges in Silat Development

While silat has been relatively well established in Malaysia with its curriculum and recognition, there are still issues that challenge its further development. These include:

- 1) More empowerment for the silat associations to develop their silat programme.
- 2) Having one common curriculum of Seni Silat that can be adopted all over the world that is based on the original Malay Silat art of war without copying other martial arts techniques.
- 3) Ensuring that coaches have a sustainable career.
- 4) Silat athlete development should ensure it is long term.
- 5) More publications and research are needed to support its further development.
- 6) Government support across multiple ministries/ departments and agencies.
- 7) In the light of health pandemic restrictions, new digital technologies are required to enhance the development of martial art.
- 8) The challenge of developing silat through eSports which is now a very popular activity among young people which while may not generate the specific silat skills but can enhance its appreciation and promotion.

2) Development of Youth

Any activity involving youth will have an impact on their development that can lead to either positive or negative outcomes and consequences. Notwithstanding silat, it should contribute to a positive development of the youth. Many studies have realised the importance of

Table 2. Silat Curriculum in Malaysia

Phase	LEVEL						
	Lower Phase (7-13-year olds)		Intermediate Phase (13-18-year olds)			High Phase (18 year ++ olds)	
Level	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Title	Beginner silat	First Rank	Second Rank	Young silat	silat Exponent	Junior Warrior	Warrior
Topic	Exponent	Junior silat Exponent	Junior silat Exponent	Exponent			
Bunga	7 Movements	15 Movements	15 Movements	15 Movements	20 Movements	20 Movements	20 Movements
Jurus	7 Movements	15 Movements	15 Movements	15 Movements	20 Movements	20 Movements	20 Movements
Belebat	Hand Blocking	Leg Blocking	Avoiding/Dodging	Blocking	Catching	Counterattack	Combination of all levels
Tapak	Vertical	Horizontal	Square	Triangle	Round	Star	Combination of all levels
Buah	Learning type of strikes in counterattack	Application of strikes during silat fight	Single strike	Variety or continuous strikes	Receiving and exchanging strikes	Weaponry	With and without weapon
Tempur Seni	Performance Basis	Square Basis	Single strike of soft combat art action	Continuous strikes of soft combat art action	Variety continues strikes of soft combat actions	The art of soft wrestle combat using weapon	Silat Melayu or combination of all levels
Tempur Beladiri	Direct combat	Two-way sparring	Continues avoiding combat	Continues blocking combat	Alternate wrestle	Combat and silat wrestle	The art of self defence

Bunga= the basis of silat movements which consists of steps (depending on level), stances and hand positioning on how to master the defensive and striking position in silat. Jurus = the activities of defending and attacking of silat movements, which are well known as *kata* in karate. Belebat = discipline or specific technique on how to receive attacks during a fight. Tapak= step pattern or floor plan that is used in silat to ease the step movements in silat. Buah= self-defence or counter-attack technique during fight. Tempur Seni= soft combat actions. Tempur Beladiri= hard combat sparring.

the contribution of physical activity to promote youth development among them by Hellison *et al.* [2000]; while Shields *et al.* [1995] demonstrated that physical activity in sport can build character of youth. Likewise, Danish *et al.* [2006] found that sports can enhance adolescent development. Holt [2008, 2016] cited various cases where various types of sporting activities can lead to positive youth development.

Youth development takes place in many contexts, such as theoretically, life stage, chronologically, legally, and through national policies. Nevertheless, since it is a very wide field to discuss and to elaborate, a summary of youth development are in these contexts: character development; physical, socio-cultural, mental, emotional, emotional development that occurs over the life stages; the development of positive youth development, i.e. the 6Cs - Competence, Confidence, Character, Connection, Caring/Compassion, and Contribution; development of positive assets; humanity values; and competency and skills development [Lee *et al.* 2018].

Therefore, in martial arts such as silat, some if not all of these various youth development contexts will take place as they progress through their silat development. The new paradigm for youth development is no more on the deficit of solving youth problems or issues but on the asset model of identifying the talents and strengths of young people and developing them from there while at the same time preventing or intervening them from indulging in at-risk youth activities. The Commonwealth [2017] has identified four policy approaches to youth development: *Deficit approach* - youths as ‘problems’ that need to be resolved, which is more a curative or rehabilitative approach; *Youth for Development* or *Instrumentalist approach* - sees youth as ‘instruments’ for national development; *Equity and welfare approach* - focusing on the basic human needs and the social and economic welfare of the youths; and, the *Asset-based Empowerment approach* - the positive youth development and positive asset model focusing on transforming them based on their strengths and talents.

3) Elements for the Development of Children and Youth in Silat

In silat development of children and youth, it is no longer about developing their sporting excellence and combative/self-defence skills. Youth development should be holistic and include the new dimensions of positive youth development. If these additional dimensions of holistic youth development, there will be ‘added-value’ to silat development for young people. These dimensions will also ensure that both the hard and soft elements of youth development are integrated into their development.

Nevertheless, Figure 8 illustrated the holistic elements of silat development in children and youth that also comprise four sciences: martial arts *combat and self-defence skills* - combat sports; *sports competition and*

elite performance - sport sciences; *sport-for-all, recreation, health and fitness* - health sciences; and *youth and human development* - humanities and social sciences.

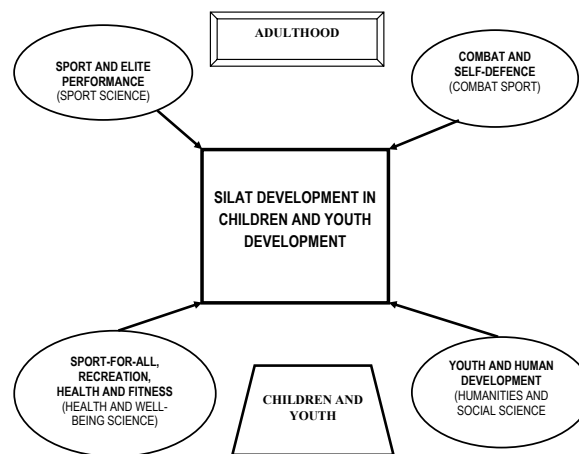


Fig. 8. Elements of Silat Development in Children and Youth

Although generally, silat in children and youth is focused on sports development and performance elements, as well as its traditional element of combat and self-defence, when it comes to children and youth, the recreational and development elements should also be included.

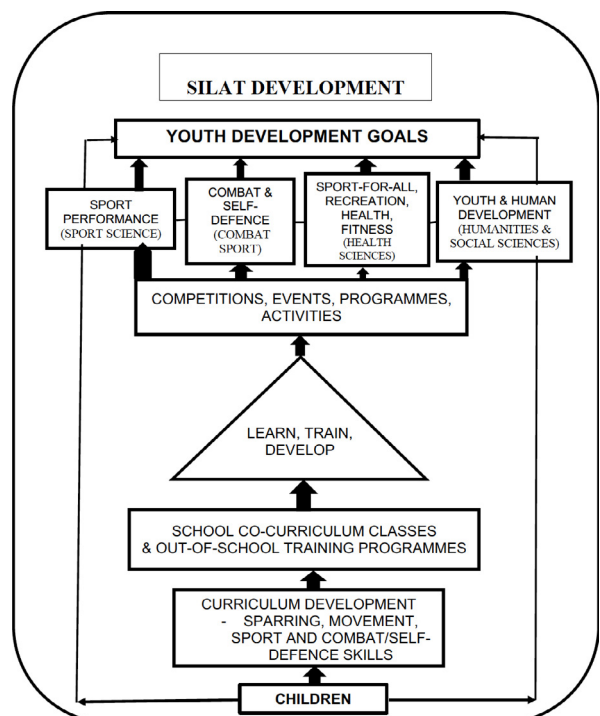


Fig. 9. Flow of Silat Development from Children to Youth

Youth development has many components such as character development; physical, social, cultural, mental, emotional, and psychological development; the 6Cs of Positive Youth Development - Competence, Confidence, Character, Connection, Caring/compassion,

and Contribution; development of their positive assets; humanity and human values; and competencies and skill development. There should also be learning skills in the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains.

The model in Figure 8 demonstrates that for both sport performance and combat/self-defense competencies to be achieved, the sport-for-all/recreational components and human development elements need to be considered to enhance and the growth and development of the youth silat athletes in adulthood.

Figure 9 above demonstrates the flow of silat development from children in the context of youth development that is comprehensive with the inclusion of sports sciences with the contexts of silat as sports science, combat/self-defense, health sciences, and humanities and social sciences.

Conclusions

The practice of silat for children and youth should no longer merely be confined to the sport, combat and self-defense components. While these are the primary goals and purpose of silat, the other health and developmental components should be included for the holistic development of children and young people.

While the initial starting point of young silat practitioners involves the traditional fundamentals of sparring to develop basic combat and self-defence skills, and later on to sports athlete performance and competitions, at a youth level, they should also be instilled with positive values and social skills for them to mature and be fully competent and equipped with both advanced combat, self-defense and sporting skills with human resource and human capital values who can contribute to developmental goals as outlined in the 6th C of positive youth development, i.e. Contribution. These developmental assets are equally as important as traditional silat and sports skills.

To move forward in the future development of youth athletes, these holistic domains of youth development should be incorporated together. These development components of youth silat athletes can be realized and met through programs such as out-of-school programs and activities through non-formal and experiential forms of learning; activities that inculcate human values; embracing ICT and digital tools to promote learning and development; enhance the cognitive, affective, psychomotor learning competencies; instilling a lifelong learning mindset; facilitate overall holistic development; incorporating positive youth assets in silat; promote health development values and lifestyles; and merging all the four sciences in sports science, combat sport, health sciences, and humanity and social sciences.

Besides the traditional classroom sessions and training programs with coaches, mentoring to facilitate youth

development can also be introduced for the silat youth athletes. This new dimension of youth silat development enhances the development of young silat athletes, exponents, and practitioners to add value to their growth and maturity in adulthood and human capital to the development of the nation.

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Narracyjna eksploracja zagadnień związanych z rozwojem sztuki walki silat wśród dzieci i młodych sportowców

Słowa kluczowe: sztuki walki, olahraga, program nauczania, rozwój młodego sportowca, sporty walki, walka

Streszczenie

Tło. Sztuki walki występują w wielu formach na całym świecie. Silat jest jednak formą sztuki walki praktykowaną w cywilizacji malajskiej, z odmianami zarówno artystycznymi, jak i kontaktowymi. Problem i cel. W Azji Południowo-Wschodniej, w tym w Malezji, silat jest powszechnie praktykowany, chociaż w różnych formach. Silat i Pencak silat są powszechnie praktykowane w Malezji i Indonezji, a także zostały wpisane na listę dziedzictwa kulturowego UNESCO. I choć istnieje wiele powodów, dla których warto uprawiać silat, to może on również przyczynić się do rozwoju młodzieży. A zatem, czy ów rozwój młodzieży poprzez silat ma miejsce? W niniejszym artykule autorzy przedstawiają narracyjną eksplorację rozwoju silatu wśród ćwiczących od dzieciństwa do okresu młodości, aby zbadać, w jaki sposób wpływa on na rozwój młodzieży, szczególnie w malezyjskim kontekście silatu. Metody. W pracy wykorzystano narrację, aby nakreślić rozwój silatu w Malezji, począwszy od systemu szkolnego, poprzez program nauczania, aż do poziomu polityki i ustawodawstwa, jego wyzwania oraz to, jak odnosi się do rozwoju młodzieży. Wynik. Ta odkrywczą narracją pokazuje, że dla holistycznego rozwoju młodzieży poprzez silat, praktyka silatu i jej rozwój muszą obejmować jej różne formy, być uporządkowane, metodologiczne i systematyczne. Poza walką, samoobroną i elementami sportowymi, rozwój i praktyka muszą zawierać elementy nauk sportowych, zdrowia i dobrego samopoczucia, nauk humanistycznych i społecznych. Wnioski. Dla celów rozwoju człowieka, silat powinien wykraczać poza swoje sportowe, bojowe i samoobronne komponenty praktyki i obejmować komponenty zdrowotne i rozwojowe, a także być holistyczny. Podczas gdy początkowym punktem wyjścia musi być wpajanie tradycyjnych podstaw podstawowych umiejętności walki i samoobrony, które są psychomotoryczne, na wyższych poziomach, silat powinien obejmować rozwój afektywny i poznawczy, taki jak wartości ludzkie, umiejętności społeczne i umiejętności myślenia wyższego rzędu.