



Comprehensive Analysis of the Perception of Virtues in 5–6-Year-Old Preschoolers with Different Judo Experience Based on an Authorial Scale

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Abstract

Objectives. The study aimed to analyze the perception and development of virtues in 5–6-year-old children with varying experience in activities based on the philosophy of judo.

Materials and Methods. This study involved 36 preschool children divided into three groups according to their judo experience: novices (no prior practice), one year, and two years of practice. At this age stage, training excluded throwing techniques and focused on fundamental elements, preparatory exercises, and play-based forms aligned with judo principles. An authorial observation scale was developed to assess four virtues — friendship, respect, honesty, and participation. Data were collected through structured observations during physical activity sessions and analyzed quantitatively.

Results. Children with longer judo experience demonstrated significantly higher scores across all assessed virtues compared to novices. The two-year practice group achieved the highest results in friendship and respect, indicating the positive role of judo-based educational activity in fostering moral values.

Conclusions. The study highlights the importance of integrating judo-based activities not only as physical training but also as a pedagogical tool for cultivating social and emotional competence in early childhood. The findings confirm the effectiveness of the authorial observation scale for monitoring virtue development in preschool education.

Keywords: virtues, preschool children, judo philosophy, preschool education, virtue observation scale, development.

Introduction

The development of virtues in early childhood is a crucial aspect of education, contributing to the formation of prosocial behavior, emotional regulation, and readiness for social interaction (Wulandari & Suhma, 2024; Chi-Kin Lee et al., 2024). In recent years, researchers have increasingly emphasized the importance of integrating value-based content into physical education to support holistic child development (Arda Tuncdemir et al., 2022). Martial arts, particularly judo, have drawn attention as effective pedagogical tools for transmitting values through structured physical activity (Song, 2022; Kwok, 2024).

Judo, founded on the philosophy of mutual benefit and personal growth, naturally incorporates virtues such as respect, friendship, honesty, and responsibility into

its training process. While many studies highlight the virtues and social benefits of judo in school-aged children, there remains a lack of empirical research targeting preschoolers—especially those in the critical age of 5–6 years (Križalkovičová et al., 2024). Furthermore, few studies offer observation-based tools adapted for this age group, capable of capturing subtle dynamics in the development of virtues during regular judo sessions (Jadwiszczak et al., 2025).

A core issue addressed in this study is the relationship between the amount of judo experience and the perception of key virtues in preschool children (Soengkonon, 2024; Martín-Rodríguez et al., 2024). Despite judo's educational potential, it is not yet fully understood how the duration of practice affects value development at such an early age (Garbeloto, F., Miarka, B., Guimarães, 2023).

Research question of this study is that preschool children with more extensive judo experience will demonstrate a higher level of virtue development than those with less or no experience. The purpose of the study is to perform

a comprehensive analysis of the perception of virtues in 5–6-year-old preschoolers with different judo experience levels, using an authorial observation scale specifically designed for early childhood education settings.

Materials and Methods

Participants and Setting

The study involved 36 preschool boys (5–6 years old) participating in a judo educational program at the Vsevolods Zelonis Sports School in Riga, Latvia. Only boys were included to ensure sample homogeneity and clarity of results, as no girls were enrolled in these groups. The judo sessions lasted 45 minutes each and were conducted three times per week according to each group's schedule. Participants were divided into three groups of 12 children based on their prior judo experience:

- Group 1: two years of participation in the judo-based program.
- Group 2: one year of participation.
- Group 3: no prior judo experience (control group).

The activities were adapted for this age group and did not include formal judo techniques such as throws but focused on preparatory exercises, imitation drills, cooperative games, and partner tasks. These activities aimed to promote social interaction, emotional regulation, and virtues development through physical engagement, in accordance with the educational philosophy of Jigoro Kano (Shishida, 2012).

Virtue Assessment Observation Scale Development

The author developed an original instrument - the Virtue Assessment Observation Scale - to assess the manifestation of virtues in preschool children involved in physical activity related to the philosophy of judo. The scale employs a hierarchical framework with three analytical levels: virtues (macro-level), criteria (meso-level), and indicators (micro-level). Its construction was based on a thorough review of recent pedagogical and developmental psychology literature (Jarilkapovich, 2025; Borich & Tombari, 2021; Birhan et al., 2021) and practical experience in preschool sports education.

Structure of the Virtue Assessment Observation Scale

The scale includes four core virtues essential for children's virtues and social development: friendship, respect, honesty, and participation. Each virtue is operationalized by specific criteria reflecting observable behavioral tendencies. Criteria are further divided into 26 concrete behavioral indicators, which are rated on a 3-point Likert-type scale: 3 – consistently observed, 2 – occasionally observed, and 1 – not observed. Overall, the scale contains 11 criteria and 26 indicators. This structure supports both quantitative evaluation and qualitative interpretation of virtues development within physical education contexts.

Data Collection Procedure

Structured observations were performed by the author and a trained research assistant during routine judo-based physical education sessions. Each session lasted

approximately 45 minutes and was conducted three times weekly, depending on the group schedule. Observations focused on naturally occurring behaviors without researcher interference or instruction. The Virtue Assessment Observation Scale was used to systematically record each child's behavioral manifestations of the defined virtues during collaborative and free-movement activities.

Statistical Analysis

Each behavioral indicator was rated on the 3-point scale, and scores were normalized using min–max transformation to enable comparison across groups. Descriptive statistics (median and interquartile ranges) were computed. The non-parametric Kruskal–Wallis H test was applied to identify differences between the three groups, followed by post-hoc pairwise comparisons with Bonferroni correction. Effect sizes were calculated using Cohen's *f* statistic to assess the magnitude of observed differences. Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 29, with inter-rater reliability cross-validated to ensure consistency of observations (McCredie & Morey, 2018).

Ethical Considerations

The study received approval from the Ethics Committee of the Latvian Academy of Sport Education (LASE) (May 31, 2024, No. 3/51813). Parental informed consent was obtained for all child participants. The research adhered strictly to ethical standards governing scientific investigations involving minors, prioritizing participant safety and compliance with established ethical norms. The investigation focused on examining the influence of judo philosophy-based exercises on children's virtues development within the Health and Physical Activity curriculum of a preschool educational institution.

Results

Participants were assessed on 26 indicators, grouped into 11 criteria and 4 virtues: Friendship, Respect, Honesty, and Participation. Scores were normalized using two-staged min-max normalization and converted into a scale from 0 to 1. Median values and interquartile ranges (Q1–Q3) for each virtue are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics indicators for virtue assessments according to the author's methodology

Groups	Virtues	Median	Q1-Q3
VZSS without experience (n=12)	Friendship	0.260	0.109-0.734
	Respect	0.292	0.083-0.632
	Honesty	0.083	0.000-0.493
	Participation	0.375	0.000-0.500
VZSS 1 year (n=12)	Friendship	0.688	0.396-0.922
	Respect	0.972	0.792-1.000
	Honesty	0.972	0.667-1.000
	Participation	1.000	0.813-1.000
VZSS 2 years (n=12)	Friendship	0.802	0.427-1.000
	Respect	1.000	0.903-1.000
	Honesty	1.000	0.917-1.000
	Participation	1.000	1.000-1.000

As seen in Table 1, children with two years of judo experience demonstrated the highest median scores across all virtues. A progressive trend is observed in each virtue, with values increasing from the group with no experience to the group with two years of training. This pattern suggests that sustained participation in judo-based educational activities positively correlates with the development of prosocial values.

As illustrated in Fig. 1-4 below, preschoolers with longer judo experience (2 years) demonstrated higher median scores in all four virtues compared to novices. The boxplots show a progressive increase in scores with increased training duration, with visibly reduced variability in the most experienced group.

The group with two years of experience consistently scored higher than the other groups, especially for honesty and participation. The novice group showed the lowest scores in all categories, indicating minimal spontaneous development of virtues without structured pedagogical intervention.

The effect sizes in statistically significant tests ranged from medium to large, confirming the practical significance of the results.

The non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis H test was used to determine if there were statistically significant differences in virtue scores among the three independent groups.

For each virtue, the following were computed:

- H-value and p-value (Kruskal-Wallis test exact significance was used in view of small sample sizes);
- Post-hoc comparisons using Bonferroni adjustment;
- Effect size coefficients: Cohen's f for overall Kruskal-Wallis test and Cohen's r for pairwise comparisons;
- Z-statistics and mean ranks.

Friendship

The results of a comparative analysis of the friendship virtue between the three groups are illustrated in Fig. 1 and Tables 2 and 3 below.

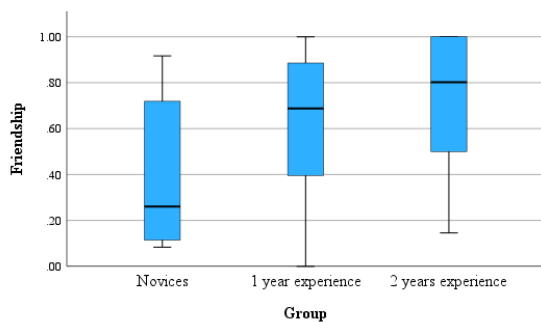


Fig. 1. Distribution of scores on friendship across groups of children with different experience in judo training

The below table summarises the results obtained in the Kruskal-Wallis test for the virtue friendship.

Despite the overall significance of the Kruskal-Wallis test exceeds the threshold of 0.05, the effect size estimation (Cohen's f being larger than 0.4 signifying large difference between the groups) makes us to proceed with

Table 2. Virtue: Friendship – Kruskal-Wallis test results

Group	n	Mean Rank	Kruskal-Wallis H-statistic	p	Cohen's f
Novices	12	12.88			
1-year experience	12	19.42	5.961	0.051	0.453
2-year experience	12	23.21			(large effect)

further pairwise comparisons (Table 3) and to confirm the statistically significant difference between the two extreme groups: novices and children with 2-year experience.

Table 3. Virtue: Friendship - pairwise comparisons across groups

Comparison	Z statistic	p-value (adjusted)	Cohen's r
Novices vs 1-year experience	1.528	0.380	0.311 (medium effect)
Novices vs 2-year experience	2.413	0.047	0.493 (medium effect)
1-year vs 2-year experience	0.885	1.000	0.181 (small effect)

Children in the 1-year experience group have their friendship scores in between of the groups of novices and 2-year experience group, but the effect sizes are smaller and these differences do not reach the level of statistical significance.

Respect

The results of a comparative analysis of the respect virtue between the three groups are illustrated in Fig. 2 and Tables 4 and 5 below.

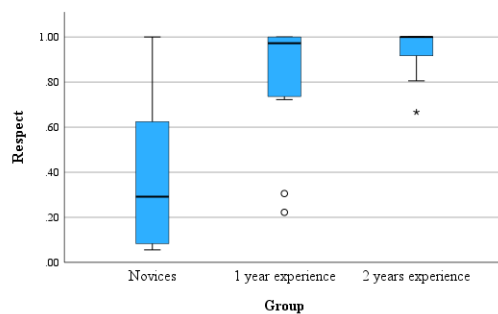


Fig. 2. Distribution of scores on respect across groups of children with different experience in judo training

The below table summarises the results obtained in the Kruskal-Wallis test for the virtue respect.

The overall significance of the Kruskal-Wallis test and the effect size estimation (Cohen's f being larger than 0.4 signifying large difference between the groups) make us to proceed with further pairwise comparisons (Table 5) and to confirm the statistically significant difference between the

Table 4. Virtue: Respect – Kruskal-Wallis test results

Group	n	Mean Rank	Kruskal-Wallis H-statistic	p	Cohen's f
Novices	12	10.00			
1-year experience	12	20.96	13.612	0.001	0.798 (large effect)
2-year experience	12	24.54			

novices on the one side and both experienced groups on the other side.

Table 5. Virtue: Respect - pairwise comparisons across groups

Comparison	Z statistic	p-value (adjusted)	Cohen's r
Novices vs 1-year experience	2.668	0.023	0.545 (large effect)
Novices vs 2-year experience	3.541	0.001	0.723 (large effect)
1-year vs 2-year experience	0.873	1.000	0.178 (small effect)

Despite children in 2-year experience group demonstrate higher scores on virtue respect than those in 1-year experience group, the difference between them has small effect size and is not statistically significant.

Honesty

The results of a comparative analysis of the honesty virtue between the three groups are illustrated in Fig. 3 and Tables 6 and 7 below.

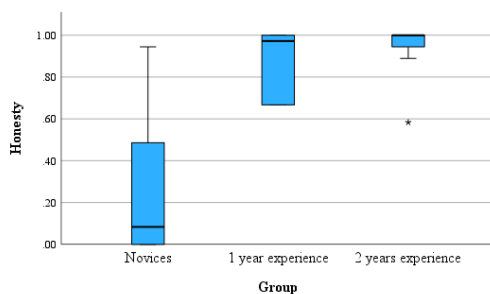


Fig. 3. Distribution of scores on honesty across groups of children with different experience in judo training

The below table summarises the results obtained in the Kruskal-Wallis test for the virtue honesty and subsequent post-hoc group pairwise comparison.

Table 6. Virtue: Honesty – Kruskal-Wallis test results

Group	n	Mean Rank	Kruskal-Wallis H-statistic	p	Cohen's f
Novices	12	8.38			
1-year experience	12	21.38	19.097	<0.001	1.096 (large effect)
2-year experience	12	25.75			

Similarly to the above analysis of the virtue respect, the overall significance of the Kruskal-Wallis test and the effect size estimation make us to proceed with further pairwise comparisons (Table 7) and to confirm the statistically significant difference between the novices on the one side and both experienced groups on the other side.

Table 7. Virtue: Honesty - pairwise comparisons across groups

Comparison	Z statistic	p-value (adjusted)	Cohen's r
Novices vs 1-year experience	3.143	0.005	0.642 (large effect)
Novices vs 2-year experience	4.201	<0.001	0.858 (large effect)
1-year vs 2-year experience	1.058	0.870	0.216 (small effect)

Despite children in 2-year experience group demonstrate higher scores on virtue honesty than those in 1-year experience group, the difference between them has small effect size and is not statistically significant.

Participation

The results of a comparative analysis of the participation virtue between the three groups are illustrated in Fig. 4 and Tables 8 and 9 below.

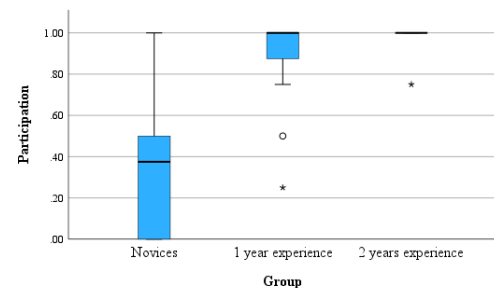


Fig. 4. Distribution of scores on participation across groups of children with different experience in judo training

Table 8 summarises the results obtained in the Kruskal-Wallis test for the virtue participation.

Table 8. Virtue: Participation – Kruskal-Wallis test results

Group	n	Mean Rank	Kruskal-Wallis H-statistic	p	Cohen's f
Novices	12	8.50			
1-year experience	12	22.00	20.959	<0.001	0.453 (large effect)
2-year experience	12	25.00			

The overall significance of the Kruskal-Wallis test and the large effect size estimation make us to proceed with further pairwise comparisons (Table 7) and, as in the previous two comparisons, to confirm the statistically significant difference between the novices on the one side and both experienced groups on the other side.

Table 9. Virtue: Participation - pairwise comparisons across groups

Comparison	Z statistic	p-value (adjusted)	Cohen's r
Novices vs 1-year experience	3.516	0.001	0.718 (large effect)
Novices vs 2-year experience	4.297	<0.001	0.877 (large effect)
1-year vs 2-year experience	0.435	1.000	0.089 (no effect)

Again, children in 2-year experience group demonstrate higher scores on virtue participation than those in 1-year experience group, but the difference between them has negligible effect size and is not statistically significant.

The results of all four virtue development comparisons confirm that preschoolers with more extensive judo experience demonstrate higher levels of virtues, especially honesty and participation. This supports the view that judo, as a discipline based on ethical behavior, provides a favorable environment for values-based education. These findings are consistent with previous research highlighting the role of martial arts in social-emotional learning. The structured and repetitive nature of judo may enhance prosocial behavior even in the early stages of development.

Discussion

The aim of this study is to investigate the perception and development of the virtues of Friendship, Respect, Honesty and Participation in preschool children with different levels of experience in judo philosophy-based physical activity. The results provide strong evidence that structured physical activity based on judo philosophy significantly contributes to the development of virtues in preschool children (Kowalczyk et al., 2023). Data analysis revealed a consistent and positive trend in the development of virtues corresponding to the amount of experience in judo philosophy-based physical activity, with the highest scores observed in the group with two years of experience (Krauze et al., 2024).

The most pronounced differences were found in the domains of Honesty and Participation, where the effect sizes were large and statistically significant between the novice and two-year experience groups. These results are in line with the core principles of judo, which emphasize ethical behavior, self-control and mutual respect. Because judo-philosophy-based activities often require rule-following, fair play, and cooperation, they inherently provide a context for the development of these virtues (Kano & Murata, 2005; Bradić, 2023).

Interestingly, although both the one- and two-year-old groups outperformed novices on most virtues, no significant differences were observed between the two experienced groups in follow-up comparisons, suggesting a possible threshold effect: the development of most virtues may occur during the initial period of structured instruction in judo-philosophy-based physical activity. This is consistent with findings from other early childhood interventions indicating that the most rapid virtuous and behavioral gains occur during the first months of systematic social-emotional learning (Blewitt et al., 2021; Mondì et al., 2021).

The observed low scores among novice children on all virtues may reflect the limitations of unstructured or spontaneous virtue development at this age. This highlights the importance of intentional pedagogical efforts to nurture social and ethical competencies. The results of this study support the growing body of literature advocating for values-based curriculum in early childhood, particularly those that include physical activity based on judo philosophy (Jotov & Ratković, 2024; Parry et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the author's observation scale used in the study was effective in differentiating the levels of virtue among children with different levels of involvement in physical activity based on judo philosophy. Its structure, including 11 criteria and 26 indicators, allowed for a nuanced assessment adapted to preschoolers' developmental stages. This supports the methodological validity of using structured observation instruments in studies of virtue education in preschoolers (Davison et al., 2016).

However, several limitations of the study should be acknowledged. Although the sample size was sufficient for non-parametric statistical procedures, it limits the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, the limited number of participant groups and the short duration of the observation period restricted the ability to track the dynamics of virtues development in preschoolers over time (Killen & Dahl, 2021; Alexander, 2016). Previous studies emphasize the importance of longitudinal designs and broader sample coverage when exploring value formation in early childhood (Niyozova, 2025). Future research should therefore consider expanding the sample size, applying longitudinal approaches, and testing the developed observation scale across diverse preschool environments and within alternative physical education models rooted in judo philosophy (Kozdras, 2019).

Conclusions

The results of this study indicate that preschool children's recognition and embodiment of the virtues of friendship, respect, honesty, and participation are significantly related to the length of their participation in judo-based educational programs. Analysis of the data revealed a clear and consistent pattern: children who had been practicing judo for two years scored significantly higher on all measured virtues compared to those with shorter or no previous experience.

The observation instrument developed by the author, the Virtue Observation Scale, was found to be a reliable and valid tool for assessing and comparing social and ethical behavior among preschool children in a judo-based physical education program. Statistically significant differences emerged not only between novices and experienced participants, but also between children with one and two years of training, highlighting the progressive nature of virtue acquisition over time.

These findings support the inclusion of Judo-based educational initiatives in preschool curricula as an effective approach to fostering positive behavior and character development. Furthermore, the study highlights the need for ongoing and systematic participation in such programs to promote sustainable development of virtues during the formative years.

Implications for Practice:

Integrate structured, value-based physical education activities based on Judo philosophy into preschool

educational frameworks, emphasizing virtues such as friendship, respect, honesty, and participation.

Ensure continuity and frequency of the program, as long-term participation (at least one year) significantly enhances virtue development in children aged 5 to 6 years.

Use validated observation tools such as the Virtue Observation Scale to regularly monitor and assess social and virtuous behaviors during early childhood.

Provide training for preschool teachers and coaches in values-based pedagogy inspired by the philosophy of judo to support a consistent focus on cultivating kind and ethical behavior.

Promote an environment that encourages the internalization and practical application of virtues beyond physical exercise and into everyday social interactions.

Promote collaboration between parents, teachers, and coaches to enhance the development of virtues in both educational settings and at home.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest related to this study.

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Комплексний аналіз сприйняття чеснот у дошкільнят віком 5–6 років з різним досвідом занять дзюдо на основі авторської шкали

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Авторський вклад: А – дизайн дослідження; В – збір даних; С – статаналіз; D – підготовка рукопису; Е – збір коштів

Реферат. Стаття: 7 с., 9 табл., 4 рис., 28 джерел.

Мета дослідження. Дослідження мало на меті проаналізувати сприйняття та розвиток чеснот у дітей віком 5–6 років з різним досвідом занять, заснованих на філософії дзюдо.

Матеріали та методи. У представленому дослідженні взяли участь 36 дітей дошкільного віку, розділених на три групи залежно від їхнього досвіду в дзюдо: новачки (без попереднього досвіду), один рік і два роки практики. На цьому віковому етапі тренування не включали техніки кидків і зосереджувалися на основних елементах, підготовчих вправах та ігрових формах, що відповідають принципам дзюдо. Розроблено авторську шкалу спостереження для оцінки чотирьох чеснот — дружби, поваги, чесності та залучення. Збір даних здійснювався за допомогою структурованих спостережень під час занять фізичною активністю та піддавався кількісному аналізу.

Результати. Діти з тривалішим досвідом занять дзюдо продемонстрували значно вищі показники за всіма оцінюваними чеснотами порівняно з новачками. У групі, яка мала дворічну практику, було досягнуто найвищих результатів у категоріях дружба та повага, що свідчить про позитивну роль освітньої діяльності на основі дзюдо у вихованні моральних цінностей.

Висновки. Дослідження підкреслює важливість інтеграції занять на основі дзюдо не тільки як фізичного тренування, але й як педагогічного інструменту для культивування соціальної та емоційної компетентності в ранньому дитинстві. Результати підтверджують ефективність застосування авторської шкали спостереження для моніторингу розвитку чеснот у дошкільній освіті.

Ключові слова: чесноти, діти дошкільного віку, філософія дзюдо, дошкільна освіта, шкала спостереження за чеснотами, розвиток.

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