

Fighting on the Edge: Lived Experiences of Stick Fighters in Arnis sa Bangko

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Abstract. Arnis sa Bangko is a traditional Filipino martial arts competition practiced on a narrow wooden bench, incorporating stick fighting techniques and balance, coordination, and strategic movement. Despite its cultural importance and continued practice in Paete, Laguna, research on the experiences of participants is limited. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the motivations, challenges, and meanings associated with participating in Arnis sa Bangko. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, the research involved fourteen Arnis practitioners selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed through thematic analysis to uncover recurring patterns and themes within the participants' narratives. Results indicated that motivation for participating in Arnis sa Bangko stemmed from a passion for the martial art, pride in culture, personal satisfaction, and a dedication to preserving local traditions. Participants described the activity as physically demanding and psychologically taxing due to the risks of injury, the need to maintain balance, and the pressure of competition. However, participation fostered resilience, discipline, self-confidence, emotional regulation, and camaraderie with practitioners. Additionally, participants viewed Arnis sa Bangko as an important cultural practice that strengthens community ties and facilitates the transmission of Filipino martial arts heritage to future generations. In conclusion, Arnis sa Bangko serves as both a sporting activity and a cultural heritage practice that contributes to personal growth and cultural identity. The findings offer valuable insights for educators, coaches, cultural advocates, and policymakers who aim to promote indigenous sports and preserve traditional Filipino martial arts through educational, cultural, and community initiatives.

Keywords: Arnis; Indigenous Sports; Filipino Martial Arts; Live Experiences, Phenomonology

Introduction

Arnis was designated as the national sport and martial art of the Philippines with the enactment of RA 9850, better known as the "Arnis Law." The art of Arnis is also known by different names in various provinces, including eskrima, garrote, arnes de mano, baston, and others (RA 9850). There are different ways of practicing it, based on the tradition or system of the leader of the groups of Arnis practitioners. In public schools, Arnis is included as part of physical education classes in basic and secondary education. It is also popular in athletic meets such as Batang Pinoy (Youth Games) and Palarong Pambansa (National Game). Arnis is not just a sport; it also showcases the dynamic skills and physical prowess of the players, as well as the creativity of the players and their coaches. In Godhania's study (2001), Arnis has two types: traditional arnis and sports arnis. Traditional Arnis is the practice of Arnis for self-defense or fighting, using weapons such as sticks, knives, and bare hands. Many groups have different ways of practicing it. While sport arnis is more focused on how to win in a competitive sparring or form competition. There has been no in-depth study of the differences between the two and the number of people who practice them. According to Jocano & Peneyra (2020) and Nepangue (2001), Arnis has gone through many years of changes from a simple way of practicing how to defend oneself with sticks to becoming part of physical education classes, fight choreography in films, and part of competitive sports. But in the so-called traditional methods of Arnis training, freestyle sparring is a big deal, but it is a type of sparring that is not about points or winning by the number of points obtained in a fight, but how to effectively use the knowledge and skills of Arnis in a real or close to reality of a real fight using a stick, knife, or sword.

One of the unique forms of Arnis sparring is the one being held every November 2nd of the year in a barangay in the Municipality of Paete in the province of Laguna, where players from various neighboring towns, such as Lumban, Maligaya, Kalayaan, Magdalena, Pakil, show their fighting skills using their Arnis knowledge. The fight is held on a long wooden bench, which is called "Arnis sa Bangko." This is from the concept of the famous Maestro in the town of Paete, a unique type of Arnis competition that cannot be said to resemble the famous sports Arnis because the players do not wear body armor. They fight using a rattan stick that is covered with a rubber tube on the fourth part of it to prevent serious musculoskeletal injuries to the participants. The fight lasts for two or three minutes with three sets of sparring. Points are awarded for hitting specific parts of the opponent's body: three points for hitting the opponent's head, two points for hitting the opponent's trunk and weapon arm, and one point for any part of the opponent's limbs. The one who hit the most points was declared the winner. Dropping the baton or falling from the bench is considered a defeat in the fight. It is governed by a referee and three judges. The practice of Arnis among the people of Paete and its neighboring towns can be said to be a type of traditional Arnis; their knowledge and skills in Arnis are inherited from their parents and previous generations.

Paete is a town in the province of Laguna known for its woodcarving industry, and also for the annual performance of the Cenaculo during Lent, which depicts through a stage drama the life and crucifixion of Jesus (Kibin, 2024), along with the traditions, the participants in the Cenaculo act as Roman soldiers wearing elaborate homemade armor and masks depicting a Roman Centurion. And part of this is their training in Arnis, which they inherited from their previous generations who were also active in Moro-Moro, a stage drama depicting the complex conflict between Christians and Muslims during the Al-Ándalus period in the Spanish peninsula. This is the result of the tradition of passing on the practice of Arnis. Its practitioners hold an annual prize-winning event every month of July where arnisadors compete with rattan sticks. Players do not wear protective equipment and wear ordinary civilian clothing (Baet, 2010; Nague, 2011). Winners receive a cash prize and a sack of rice. One of the competitions is held every November during the fiesta of a barangay in Paete, and it is called Arnis sa Bangko.

The researchers who are also Arnis practitioners have been watching and supporting this field for several years. Aside from the uniqueness of Arnis sa Bangko as a type of Arnis competition, the participants have different main goals why they participate in this annual game. They are also ordinary citizens of their community, but in their participation, they experience injury. They will also see an increase in emotional outbursts while playing, but they should follow the timing and rules of the game. Studying their experiences of why they participate in the aforementioned game, what their preparations are, and how they overcome difficulties in preparation and in the game is important in order to better see their characteristics as Arnis players. These can provide additional knowledge regarding how a player in any sport should prepare themselves to face the stress of playing in the field of competitive sport. It will show what their lives are like as participants in this type of play, using the knowledge and wisdom of what can be said to be a traditional type of Arnis. Some parts of "Arnis sa Bangko" can also be adapted for some lead-up or innovative fun sparring in students' physical education classes.

Arnis sa Bangko is a unique adaptation of the traditional Filipino martial art, Arnis, performed while standing or balancing on a long wooden bench, which is called in Tagalog language as "bangko". This variation requires not only skill in stick fighting but also balance, measure, coordination, and focus. Despite its cultural and athletic significance, research in Arnis sa Bangko remains limited, often confined to selected schools and local competitions. Understanding the lived experiences of those who participate in Arnis sa Bangko can provide valuable insights into the challenges, motivations, and cultural meanings attached to this indigenous sport. Through a phenomenological approach, this study aims to explore how participants experience, perceive, and give meaning to their engagement in this annual stick prize fighting event.

This research contributes to a deeper understanding of Arnis sa Bangko as both a sport and a cultural expression rooted in Filipino heritage, highlighting its role in developing physical skills while preserving tradition and identity. The findings may guide educators and coaches in integrating indigenous games into physical education curricula through more contextualized and culturally responsive teaching approaches. For students and athletes, the study can foster greater appreciation and pride in Filipino martial traditions, encouraging active participation and cultural connection. It also provides cultural advocates and policymakers with evidence to support initiatives that promote and preserve local sports and indigenous heritage. Furthermore, the study offers valuable qualitative insights that can serve as a foundation for future research on indigenous and modified martial arts, contributing to the broader fields of sports science, education, and cultural studies.

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study examines the experiences of participants in Arnis sa Bangko, a unique stick fighting competition held in Paete, Laguna. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, it examines the motivations, challenges, physical and emotional experiences of participants, and the meanings they attribute to their participation in this indigenous martial arts tradition. The study was limited to selected Arnis sa Bangko practitioners with actual competitive experience and did not include other forms of traditional Arnis practices or Arnis sports competitions. It focused solely on the narratives and perceptions of participants and did not examine athletic performance, technical skills, injury rates, or competition outcomes. As such, the findings are limited to the experiences of the participants involved in the study and are not intended to be generalized to all Arnis practitioners.

Literature Review

Arnis as the National Martial Art and Sport of the Philippines

Arnis plays an important role in Philippine culture and education. With the enactment of Republic Act No. 9850, also known as the Arnis Act, Arnis was officially declared the national martial art and sport of the Philippines. The law recognizes the importance of preserving and promoting indigenous Filipino martial traditions and mandates the integration of Arnis into the country's education system. Known by various names such as Eskrima, Kali, Garrote, Baston, and Arnes de Mano, Arnis reflects the diversity of martial traditions found in different regions of the Philippines (Wiley 2001). Beyond its role as a combat system, Arnis serves as a cultural symbol that reflects the identity, resilience, and heritage of the Filipino people. The inclusion of Arnis in physical education programs and national sporting events such as the Palarong Pambansa and Batang Pinoy demonstrates its growing relevance in contemporary Filipino society. Through these initiatives, Arnis has not only been preserved as a cultural practice but also developed as a competitive sport that promotes physical health, discipline, and sportsmanship among Filipino youth.

Traditional and Sport Arnis

The evolution of Arnis has led to the emergence of two main forms: traditional Arnis and sport Arnis. According to Godhanian (2001), traditional Arnis focuses on practical self-defense and combat applications involving sticks, edged weapons, and unarmed techniques. Instruction is often passed down through family lineages, local communities, and martial arts organizations, resulting in diverse training systems and methods. In contrast, sport Arnis emphasizes competition and standardized rules designed to ensure safety and fairness. Competitive formats include points-based forms of competition and sparring events governed by national and international regulations. While sport Arnis has contributed to the wider acceptance and institutionalization of the martial art, some practitioners argue that it is very different from traditional methods that emphasize realism and combat effectiveness. Jocano and Peneyra (2020) and Nepangue (2001) have observed that Arnis continues to adapt to changing social contexts, evolving from a practical fighting system to an educational activity, performance art, and competitive sport. Despite these developments, sparring, whether pre-arranged or freesparring, remains a core component of many traditional systems because it allows practitioners to test their skills under conditions that approximate real combat situations.

Sparring and Experiential Learning in Arnis

Sparring is widely recognized as an integral part of martial arts training. Within traditional Arnis, sparring, whether pre-arranged or freestyle, provides practitioners with opportunities to apply techniques, develop timing and distance control, improve reflexes, and cultivate mental discipline. Unlike competitive point-based sports, traditional sparring often emphasizes flexibility, strategic thinking, and realistic application of techniques. Experiential learning theories suggest that hands-on participation in physical activities enhances the acquisition and retention of skills. Through repeated participation in sparring activities, practitioners develop not only technical proficiency but also confidence, emotional control, and resilience (Vacarro et al. 2011). These results contribute to the holistic development of martial artists and reinforce the value of Arnis education beyond physical conditioning.

Indigenous Martial Arts and Cultural Preservation

Indigenous sports and martial arts play an important role in preserving cultural heritage and strengthening community identity. Arnis represents a living tradition that connects contemporary practitioners to historical skills and cultural values that have been passed down through generations. The continued practice of traditional forms of Arnis serves as a means of preserving indigenous knowledge while enhancing cultural pride among participants. Scholars have argued that indigenous games and martial arts

traditions provide unique opportunities for culturally responsive education. By incorporating local cultural practices into educational settings, students develop a deeper appreciation for their heritage and form stronger connections with their communities (Sachez & Sanchez, 2021). As such, preserving traditional Arnis practices not only contributes to the development of the sport but also to the preservation of culture.

Arnis Practice and Cultural Tradition in Paete, Laguna

The municipality of Paete in Laguna is widely recognized for its rich cultural traditions, particularly woodcarving, religious performances, and arnis martial arts practices that are included in religious performances. Historical accounts indicate that Arnis has long been deeply rooted in the cultural life of the community. Participation in traditional performances such as Cenaculo and Moro-Moro has helped pass down fighting skills from generation to generation. According to Baet (2010) and Naguem (2011), Arnis practitioners in Paete continue to participate in traditional competitions that emphasize practical fighting skills rather than standardized sports formats. These events are characterized by minimal protective equipment and strong community participation, reflecting the historical roots of Filipino martial traditions. Through these practices, Arnis remains an important vehicle for preserving local identity and knowledge across generations.

Arnis sa Bangko as a Unique Martial Arts Competition

Among the unique fighting traditions of Paete is Arnis sa Bangko, a unique form of competitive stick fighting that is practiced on a narrow wooden bench. The event combines traditional Arnis techniques with the added challenge of maintaining balance while engaging an opponent. Participants use rattan sticks that are partially covered with rubber tubing to reduce the risk of serious injury while maintaining the competitive nature of the encounter. Arnis sa Bangko differs from the conventional sport of Arnis in several ways. Participants do not wear the usual protective gear, and success depends not only on striking ability but also on balance, coordination, and tactical movement. The competition reflects local interpretations of fighting skills and serves as a community-centered event that celebrates tradition, bravery, and sportsmanship. The annual Arnis sa Bangko event demonstrates the continued vitality of indigenous martial arts practices in local communities. Its survival suggests that traditional forms of competition continue to have cultural significance despite the increasing popularity of standardized sports formats.

Motivation and Participation in Martial Arts

Participation in martial arts is influenced by a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Cynarski, 2019). Intrinsic motivations include personal growth, mastery of skills, enjoyment, self-discipline, and cultural appreciation. Extrinsic motivations may involve competition, social recognition, rewards, and community acceptance. Research on martial arts participation indicates that practitioners often experience improvements in self-confidence, emotional regulation, perseverance, and resilience. These benefits contribute to continued participation in training and competition. In traditional martial arts settings, cultural identity and the desire to preserve heritage also emerge as important motivations for participation. In the context of Arnis sa Bangko, participants may be motivated by a combination of personal challenge, community tradition, cultural pride, and competitive goals. Understanding these motivations can provide important insights into the factors that sustain participation in indigenous martial arts practices.

Challenges and Risks in Traditional Martial Arts Competition

Traditional martial arts competitions often involve physical and psychological challenges. Participants may experience risks of injury, physical fatigue, performance anxiety, and emotional stress. The ability to manage fear, maintain concentration, and demonstrate discipline under pressure reflects important psychological skills developed through participation in martial arts (Pauha, 2024). These experiences contribute to personal growth and can strengthen an individual's ability to cope with adversity both inside and outside of the sporting environment. In Arnis sa Bangko, these challenges are heightened by the need to maintain balance on a narrow bench while fighting.

Phenomenological Studies of Sports Experiences

Phenomenology aims to understand how individuals perceive and interpret their life experiences. In sports research, phenomenological methods have been used to explore athletes' experiences of competition, training, motivation, identity formation, and personal development. Applying a phenomenological perspective to Arnis sa Bangko allows researchers to examine how participants experience the activity from their own perspectives. Such an approach provides a rich description of physical sensations, emotions, motivations, and cultural meanings that may not be captured through quantitative methods. By focusing on participants'

narratives, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of how participation in Arnis sa Bangko shapes personal identity, cultural values, and sports experiences.

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a qualitative phenomenological research design to capture and interpret the experiences of participants in Arnis sa Bangko. This approach was chosen because it allowed for an in-depth exploration of the participants' personal perspectives, focusing on how they perceived, understood, and interpreted their participation in this unique Filipino martial arts form. Rather than relying on numerical data, the study emphasized the rich and descriptive narratives derived from participants' narratives, allowing for a deeper understanding of their physical, emotional, and cognitive experiences while practicing Arnis sa Bangko. Through this design, the researcher sought to explore the essence of the phenomenon by identifying common themes and patterns that emerged in individual experiences. The phenomenological approach was particularly suitable because it provided a structured yet flexible framework for examining how participants understood the challenges, motivations, and cultural significance associated with their practice, ultimately offering a holistic and meaningful interpretation of their lived realities.

Sampling Design

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that only individuals with direct and meaningful experience with Arnis sa Bangko would be included in the study. Specifically, the study involved fifteen stick fighters from the municipality of Paete, from its surrounding towns, and from those practitioners coming outside the Laguna province who had actively participated in Arnis sa Bangko for at least one year. This criterion was established to ensure that participants had sufficient experience, skill development, and personal involvement in the activity, allowing them to provide rich and detailed descriptions of their life experiences. The use of purposive sampling allowed the researcher to purposefully identify participants who could best contribute to the depth and relevance of the data, especially those who had experienced the physical, technical, and cultural aspects of the sport over an extended period of time. By focusing on individuals from Paete and nearby communities where traditional practices and local sports are often preserved, the study also ensured that participants' experiences were grounded in a shared cultural context, thereby enhancing the authenticity and significance of the findings.

Research Locale

The study was conducted at the town of Paete, Laguna, during the 2025 Arnis sa Bangko competition, organized by the Arnis Paete Club. This activity is part of the annual Barangay 3 Ermita fiesta celebration. In this study, researchers conducted a face-to-face interview with target participants from among the stick fighters present at the said event.

Research Participants

This study included all fourteen (14) stick fighters who participated in the annual Arnis sa Bangko Tournament. They were from the town of Paete and neighboring towns, including two from the national capital region, particularly from Quezon, Valenzuela, and Paranaque cities.

Research Instrument

The study used a semi-structured interview guide as the primary research instrument, designed to elicit in-depth narratives about the participants' experiences of Arnis sa Bangko. Interview questions focused on key aspects such as their personal experiences, challenges faced, motivations for participation, and the cultural and personal meanings they attributed to the practice. Open-ended questions were used to allow participants to freely express their thoughts and provide rich and detailed responses, while follow-up probes were used to clarify and deepen the discussion. The instrument was reviewed and validated by experts in qualitative research and physical education to ensure clarity, relevance, and appropriateness to the study objectives.

Data Gathering Procedure

Data gathered from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis to systematically identify, organize, and interpret patterns of meaning within the participants' narratives. The audio-recorded interviews were first translated verbatim to ensure accuracy and completeness of the data. The researcher then conducted repeated readings of the transcripts to achieve familiarization and immersion in the data. Initial codes were

generated by identifying key statements and meaningful units related to the participants' experiences of Arnis sa Bangko. These codes were then grouped into broader categories and later developed into themes that captured the essence of the participants' experiences. Throughout the analysis, careful attention was paid to maintaining the authenticity of the participants' voices while also interpreting the underlying meanings of their responses. To enhance the reliability of the findings, methods such as member checking, peer debriefing, and maintaining an audit trail were used, ensuring that interpretations were credible, consistent, and based on data.

Use of Artificial Intelligence-Assisted Language Tools

The participants' narratives were primarily expressed in Filipino/Tagalog. To facilitate the translation of these narratives into English and enhance the clarity of the research report, artificial intelligence-assisted language tools, specifically Google Translate and Grammarly, were utilized. Google Translate was employed to assist in the initial translation of participants' responses, while Grammarly was used to review grammar, spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure. The use of these tools was limited to language support and editing purposes only. All translated narratives were carefully reviewed and verified by the researcher against the original Filipino responses to ensure that the intended meanings, cultural nuances, and contextual expressions of the participants were accurately preserved. Furthermore, the interpretation, coding, thematic analysis, and generation of findings remained solely the responsibility of the researcher. The use of AI-assisted language tools contributed to the accuracy, readability, and quality of the research manuscript while maintaining the authenticity and trustworthiness of the participants' narratives.

Results and Discussions

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

The demographic profile of the participants revealed several common characteristics that provide context for their participation in Arnis sa Bangko. In terms of age, the participants were primarily adults ranging from their late 20s to their late 40s, indicating that participation in this stick fighting continues beyond youth and into adulthood. This suggests that Arnis sa Bangko attracts individuals with a long-term interest and dedication to Filipino martial arts rather than a short-term or recreational interest. In terms of occupation, participants came from diverse working-class backgrounds, including tricycle drivers, construction workers, farmers, painters, martial arts instructors, and a university student. This diversity reflects the accessibility of Arnis sa Bangko to different socio-economic groups, demonstrating that participation is not limited by professional status but is driven by shared interests and cultural connections. In terms of experience, most of the participants had several years of Arnis experience, ranging from beginners who were participating in the bench format for the first time to seasoned practitioners with over a decade of training in traditional Arnis. This indicates that while Arnis sa Bangko may be new to some, it is generally participated in by individuals who already have basic Arnis knowledge and skills. Geographically, the participants were drawn from Paete and its neighboring towns in Laguna, as well as nearby areas such as Lumban, San Pedro Magdelana, Kalayaan, and even urban locations such as Parañaque, Valenzuela, and Quezon City. This indicates that while Arnis sa Bangko is deeply rooted in Paete, its influence and appeal extended beyond the local community, attracting practitioners from different regions. In this study, the demographic findings indicate that Arnis sa Bangko participants were mostly mature, experienced Arnis practitioners from diverse occupational and geographic backgrounds who share a common interest in preserving and engaging with Filipino martial arts traditions.

Emerged Themes

An analysis of the participants' narratives revealed several recurring themes that captured the essence of their Arnis sa Bangko experiences. These themes reflected not only the physical and technical aspects of participation but also the emotional, social, and cultural dimensions of the practice.

Theme 1: Arnis sa Bangko as a Source of Passion and Personal Fulfillment

Participants consistently described their participation in Arnis sa Bangko as highly rewarding and rooted in passion. Many expressed that their participation brought them joy, satisfaction, and a sense of purpose. Statements such as feeling "happy," "fulfilled," and describing Arnis as their "passion" emphasize the inherent motivation that drives continued participation. For some, it is not just a hobby but a meaningful pursuit that shapes their identity and lifestyle.

Participants shared:

"I feel good, it's okay. I really experienced a fall because the bench wasn't in my training, so now I'm going to prepare the training for the stance and leg strength, so I don't fall. I'm happy because I have many friends and acquaintances, and that's what I want. It's a challenge. Ah, I'm testing what the difference is between the bench and the flat, play evenly." (Stick fighter 1 from Kalayaan, Laguna)

(Maganda ang pakiramdam ko, ayos naman po. Talagang naranasan ko 'yung mahulog kasi wala sa training ko 'yung bangko, kaya ngayon, paghahandaan ko po ang training na para sa tindig ng tayo at tibay ng binti para hindi po mahulog. masaya po kasi nakakarami po ako ng kaibigan, kakilala, at 'yun po, 'yun po ang gusto ko. isa po siyang challenging. Ah, tini-testing ko po kung ano po ang kaibahan ng sa bangko at sa patag sa pantay lang po maglaro.)

"I'm still happy even though I lost there because we fell. After all, I was disqualified. Ah, next year we'll meet again in the Bench Tournament. We'll try again so that we can upgrade our technique in the field of Arnis de mano." (Stick fighter 2 from Paete, Laguna)

(Masaya pa rin ako kahit natalo ako doon dahil natalo kami. Tatal, na-disqualify naman ako. Ah, sa susunod na taon magkikita ulit tayo sa Bench Tournament. Susubukan natin ulit para ma-upgrade natin ang ating teknik sa larangan ng Arnis de mano.)

"It hurts when you get hit. I just want to say that I like it. This is the sport I like. That's really the only sport I know. It's not like basketball or anything else. That's really the only sport I like." (Stick fighter 3 from Lumban Town)

(Masakit din pag tinamaan, Inaano ko lang po na gusto ko 'to eh. Ito 'yung gusto kong sports. 'Yun lang po kasi talaga 'yung gusto kong sports. Hindi po ano sa basketball o iba pa. 'Yan lang po talaga.)

The experience of personal fulfillment from participating in Arnis sa Bangko aligns with Cynarski's (2009) study on the humanistic theory of martial arts, which emphasizes personal and ethical development and the cultural significance of martial arts training as a path to self-improvement. Those who participated in Arnis sa Bangko experienced personal fulfillment in their training and participation in a form of prize fighting. The hardships and pains they experience in training and competing in Arnis sa Bangko, regardless of the outcome, whether winning or losing, are an experience that gives them fulfillment.

Theme 2: Physical and Psychological Demands of Participation

Participants' experiences highlighted the intense physical and mental demands of Arnis sa Bangko. On the physical side, participants reported body aches, fatigue, and the challenge of maintaining balance on the bench. On the psychological side, feelings of nervousness, fear of falling, and pressure while playing were commonly expressed, especially among first-time participants. Despite these challenges, many reported that nervousness decreased once the game began, indicating adaptation and mental stability.

Participants narrated:

"I only fought there once. It got a little heated. It's okay. It feels better. The officials fixed it." (Stick fighter 7 from Lumban Town)

(Yung isang beses lang naman na nakipaglaban ako diyan. Medyo nagka-initan. Okay lang. Mas maganda sa pakiramdam. Naayos naman ng officials.)

"During my first game, I was really nervous, but now, at least, it's a little less than at first. When it comes to fighting, I focus on how to hit and avoid the opponent's attacks." (Stick fighter 4 from Kalayaan Town)

(Noong unang laro ko, talagang nanerbiyos ako, pero ngayon, kahit paano, ay kaunti na lang sa simula. Pag nakikipagpaluan na, pokus na sa kung paano makakatama at makakaiwas sa yabat ng kalaban.)

The aforementioned feeling of fear of fighting on the bench decreases once they start fighting and supports the view of Vacarro et al. (2011) that fear of a full-contact fight is reduced through training and actual fighting. This is what the participants mentioned when they were interviewed during the data gathering of this study.

Theme 3: Adapting and Developing Skills in a Unique Fighting Setting

Participants highlighted the uniqueness of fighting on a bench compared to traditional ground-based Arnis. The need for specialized skills such as balance, footwork, distance management, and controlled movement emerged as a major theme. Several participants shared experiences of falling or struggling initially, highlighting the learning curve and the need for specific preparation. Over time, participants viewed these challenges as opportunities for growth and skill improvement.

Participants narrated:

"Fighting on a bench is different; you have to maintain your balance so you don't fall, then you have to watch out for your opponent's attack, and your distance has to be right. Think about it, if you miss a shot or fall, you still lose." (Stick fighter 6 from Town of Paete)

(Iba kasi ang pakikipaglaban sa bangko, kailangan mo maintain ang balance para hindi mahulog, tapos babantayan mo pa ang atake ng kalaban, yun distance mo dapat tama. Isipin mo 'yon, pag nagkamali sa putok ang ulo mo o kaya ay hulog, eh di talo ka pa.)

"It's important in training, what you're training yourself, let's not think about comparing who we're going to fight. For example, we know that, oh, this guy is good, this guy is good, we're nervous. No matter who it is, as long as you have positivity, you have commitment, and the preparation, you can do it; we know that. Even if we say we didn't win, at least we showed good performance against him." (Stick fighter 10 from Paranaque City)

(Mahalaga sa pagsasanay kung ano ang sinasanay mo sa iyong sarili; huwag nating isipin ang pagkukumpara kung sino ang makakalaban natin. Halimbawa, alam natin na, oh, magaling ang taong ito, magaling ang taong ito, kinakabahan tayo. Kahit sino pa man iyon, basta't positibo ang iyong loob, may dedikasyon ka, at may paghahanda, kaya mo iyan; alam natin 'yan. Kahit sabihin nating hindi tayo nanalo, at least nagpakita tayo ng magandang performance laban sa kanya.)

Theme 4: Discipline, Self-Control, and Personal Growth

A strong theme that emerged was the development of discipline and self-control through participation. Participants emphasized the importance of maintaining composure, avoiding anger, and displaying sportsmanship during matches. Some even reflected on how Arnis had positively influenced their behavior, helping them to be more disciplined and less prone to aggression. This highlights the role of Arnis sa Bangko in character development beyond physical training.

Participants shared:

"Those who want to join Arnis sa Bangko, we must have a very good attitude; our habit is not to let our temper get in the way. There must be discipline in playing. Ah, they have rules that say when you get hit, don't get angry. That should be the basis of an Arnis de mano in the Bench Tournament, Arnis skills." (Stick fighter 3 from the Town of Magdalena)

(Yung mga gustong sumali sa Arnis sa Bangko, meron po tayong dapat na baon-baon na attitude, 'yung ugali po natin ay ating huwag ilagay dito 'yung init ng ulo. Dito po dapat may disiplina sa paglalaro. Ah, meron po silang rules na sinasabi kapag tinamaan, huwag po mainit ang ulo. 'Yun po dapat ang maging baon ng isang Arnis de mano sa tournament ng Bench Tournament, Arnis skills po.)

"Practice, then listen to the teacher. When you're going to fight, you really need discipline. First of all, for yourself." (Stick fighter 5 from Town of Pakil, Laguna)

(Nagpapractice po, tapos makinig din po sa maestro. Na pagka ho lalaban ka, kailangan mo rin po talaga ng disiplina. Unang-una sa sarili.)

Theme 5: Social Connection and Sense of Community

Participants described Arnis sa Bangko as a social activity that fosters camaraderie and connection. Many mentioned making friends, building relationships, and enjoying a sense of belonging within the Arnis community. Interaction with fellow practitioners, masters, and even opponents contributed to a positive and supportive environment, which fostered continued participation.

Participants shared:

"I feel good, it's okay. I really experienced a fall because the bench wasn't in my training, so now I'm going to prepare the training for the stance and leg strength, so I don't fall. I'm happy because I have many friends and acquaintances, and that's what I want." (Stick fighter 1 from Kalayaan, Laguna)

(Maganda ang pakiramdam ko, ayos naman po. Talagang naranasan ko 'yung mahulog kasi wala sa training ko 'yung bangko, kaya ngayon, paghahandaan ko po ang training na para sa tindig ng tayo at tibay ng binti para hindi po mahulog. Masaya po kasi nakakarami po ako ng kaibigan, kakilala, at 'yun po, 'yun po ang gusto ko.)

This is the good thing about Arnis, after you fight with another guy, you will become friends. You shouldn't harbor any grudges because we are all practicing Arnis together; who else would meet in this event? (Stick fighter 13 from Pakil, Laguna)

(Ito ang maganda sa Arnis eh, pagkatapos mo makapaluan magiging kaibigan mo. Hindi naman dapat magtanim ng galit kasi pare-pareho tayong nag-aarnis, sino pa ba ang magkikita sa ganitong pagtatago.)

The participants' sense of community with their fellow stick-fighters supports Teemu Pauha's (2024) proposition that the dangers and hardships of a type of extreme sport are related to the sense of meaning derived from belonging to a community that enjoys the same type of activity. Like the participants in this type of Arnis competition, the participants, although fighting, identify with each other as belonging to the same group of people who share a common type of activity.

Theme 6: Cultural Pride and Preservation of Filipino Heritage

A key theme was the strong sense of cultural identity associated with Arnis sa Bangko. Participants expressed a desire to preserve and promote the Filipino martial art, often citing the importance of passing on the tradition to the youth. Some viewed their participation as a responsibility to ensure that Arnis remains alive and relevant. The local nature of the practice, especially its roots in Paete, further strengthened this cultural connection.

Participants narrated:

"I've been involved in this sport for a few years now, because arnis is part of the tradition here in Paete, so I'm just continuing what those who came before us did." (Stick fighter 9, from Paete, Laguna)

(Ilang taon na rin naman akong nasali sa larong ito, bahagi na kasi ng tradisyon dito sa Paete ang arnis, kaya tinutuloy ko lang ang mga ginawa nung mga nauna.)

"It's a family tradition, my father taught us, and I'm just continuing it. It's like he's with me when I'm practicing." (Stick fighter 8 from Paete, Laguna)

(Tradisyon na po ng pamilya, ang tatay ko po ang nagturo sa amin, eto tinutuloy ko lang. Parang kasama ko rin sya pag nag-aarnis.)

Although arnis is already part of physical education in the country, it is noteworthy that the types of arnis taught in schools are limited to sporting forms (Anajao et al., 2026). In terms of art form, what has been taught to physical education teachers is limited and focuses only on the practice of contemporary types of arnis (Wiley, 2012). The practice of what can be considered traditional types of arnis training is very rare, as some teachers have a background in traditional arnis (Pacres, 2025). Arnis sa Bangko can be adapted to the context of physical education. Similar to the studies of Sanchez & Sanchez (2021), this type of arnis can be preserved and more appreciated by the public if integrated into arnis activities in physical education classes.

Theme 7: Motivation to Teach and Inspire the Next Generation

Many participants expressed a commitment to sharing their knowledge with others, especially the younger generation. Teaching children, relatives, and students was seen as a way to preserve the tradition and inspire interest in Arnis. Participants viewed themselves as role models, reinforcing the idea that their participation went beyond personal benefit to community impact.

Participants shared:

"Arnis sa Bangko is great. I love Arnis because I've been training with it since my son was born." (Stick fighter 8 from Kalayaan, Laguna)

(Maganda po 'yung sa Bangko Tournament po kasi love ko po 'tong Arnis kasi hanggang sa anak ko nga po ay na-te-training ko.)

"I have three sons; they are now practicing arnis. That's why I am gradually introducing and making them understand Arnis de Mano or cultural Arnis sa Bangko here in Paete." (Stick fighter 10 from Paete Laguna)

(Tatlo po 'yung anak kong lalaki. na, estudyante na rin po. Kaya 'yun po, inuunti-unti ko po sa kanilang ipaalam at saka ipaintindi 'yung Arnis de Mano o cultural po dito sa Paete na Arnis sa Bangko.)

Paete is a town known for its artists, especially in the fields of sculpture and painting. One of the traditions of this town is the practice and fighting using the art of Arnis de Mano (Africano, 2005). Therefore, it can be said that the practice and use of this art has become part of the families in this area. This is related to

the study of Tan (2004), that martial arts become part of the tradition of a community, and it is preserved but can be reinterpreted over time. Although there is no concrete study yet on how the tradition of arnis in Paete came to be, Arnis sa Bangko was formed from the experience and desire of people who are trying to preserve the tradition of arnis in Paete.

Theme 8: Arnis sa Bangko as an Ongoing Challenge and Lifelong Engagement

Participants viewed Arnis sa Bangko as an ongoing challenge that motivates continuous improvement. Whether it was overcoming fear, refining techniques, or preparing for future competitions, the experience was described as dynamic and evolving. Even those who experienced setbacks, such as losing or losing matches, expressed a strong desire to return, improve, and continue participating.

Summary of Results

The findings of this study revealed that the life experiences of Arnis sa Bangko participants were multifaceted, across physical, psychological, social, and cultural dimensions. Participants consistently described their participation as deeply rooted in passion and personal fulfillment, supporting the idea that intrinsic motivation plays a significant role in continued participation in traditional sports. At the same time, the sport presents significant physical and psychological demands, particularly in terms of balance, stamina, and fear or nervousness management, especially for first-time participants. These findings highlight that Arnis sa Bangko is not simply a variation of Arnis but a specialized skill that requires adaptation and skill development unique to its setting. Additionally, the study highlighted the importance of discipline, self-control, and mental preparedness, which participants identified as essential to overcoming challenges and maintaining sportsmanship. This is in line with the broader philosophy of Filipino martial arts, where character building is as important as technical skill. Social interaction also emerged as an important aspect, with participants valuing camaraderie, friendship, and community belonging, suggesting that Arnis sa Bangko functions as both a competitive and social activity. More importantly, the findings highlighted a strong sense of cultural pride and responsibility among participants, who viewed their participation as a way of preserving and promoting Filipino heritage. The desire to educate and inspire the younger generation further reinforces the role of Arnis sa Bangko as a vehicle for the transmission and preservation of culture.

Ethical Considerations

The study strictly adhered to established research ethics protocols. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection, ensuring that they were fully aware of the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by assigning pseudonyms and safeguarding all collected data. In addition, the researcher ensured that participation was voluntary and that no physical, psychological, or social harm was inflicted on the participants throughout the conduct of the study. The study utilized AI-assisted language tools solely for translation and grammar checking. No participant identifiers were entered into these platforms. All translated narratives were reviewed by the researcher to ensure that the original meanings and contextual nuances of participants' responses were preserved.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that Arnis sa Bangko serves as a holistic activity that goes beyond physical competition, encompassing personal passion, cultural identity, and social connection. The experiences of the participants showed that the sport not only promotes physical ability but also psychological resilience, discipline, and a sense of purpose. In addition, it plays an important role in strengthening cultural awareness and promoting the preservation of Filipino martial arts traditions. As such, Arnis sa Bangko can be considered both a sport and an important cultural skill that contributes to individual growth and community development.

Recommendations

In lieu of the findings, several recommendations are proposed. First, physical educators and curriculum developers may consider incorporating Arnis sa Bangko and other indigenous martial arts into physical education programs to promote culturally relevant learning experiences. Second, training programs should be developed to address the specific physical and technical demands of the sport, particularly focusing on balance, footwork, and safety measures to reduce the risk of injury. Third, local government units and cultural organizations are encouraged to support and promote Arnis sa Bangko through festivals, competitions, and community-based initiatives to ensure its preservation and wider recognition. Fourth, practitioners and masters can continue to teach and train younger generations to maintain interest and participation in the sport.

Finally, future researchers are encouraged to conduct additional studies, including comparative, experimental, or mixed methods research, to expand the understanding of indigenous martial arts and their role in education, culture, and sports development.

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