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**Submission date:** 13-Sep-2026 12:54PM (UTC+0800)

**Submission ID:** 3030364816

**File name:** Article\_Ettania.docx (703.98K)

**Word count:** 3929

**Character count:** 24384

# EXPLORING CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES IN GYMNASTICS TRAINING IN A NORTH JAKARTA ALLEY: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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## **Abstract**

The widespread phenomenon currently circulating on social media and television news is the gymnastics training activity for children conducted in a narrow alley (gang) in North Jakarta. This activity represents an alternative use of open space, given that North Jakarta is known as one of the areas with highly dense residential settlements, resulting in limited open space available for the community, particularly children. Gymnastics training in this alley setting functions not merely as physical activity or exercise, but also as a space for self-expression, identity formation, and social interaction. On the other hand, this practice also raises various risks and challenges, particularly related to the risk of physical injury caused by inadequate safety standards of the facilities and infrastructure. Despite these risks, the children remain undeterred, consistently practicing with high enthusiasm during their training schedule. Therefore, this study aims to explore the meaning children attach to practicing gymnastics, identify the factors that motivate them to engage in the activity, examine how coaches and children perceive the safety of the existing facilities, and understand the factors driving children's motivation to practice gymnastics in the alleys of North Jakarta. *This study employs a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach*, to be conducted on Jalan Pluit Dalam III, RT 7 RW 8, Penjaringan, North Jakarta. Data collection techniques involve triangulation, comprising interviews, observation, and documentation. Data analysis follows the stages of data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. This research constitutes basic research at Technology Readiness Level (TRL) 1, exploring how children experience gymnastics training in the alleys of North Jakarta. The findings obtained serve as an initial foundation for transforming these principles into more complex applied research in the future.

**Keywords:** Children's Experiences; Gymnastics; Children's Sports; North Jakarta; Phenomenological Study

## **INTRODUCTION**

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child UN Convention on the Rights of the Child "Every child has the right to rest and play, and to participate in various cultural and artistic activities." One of the key points that can be drawn from this article is that every child is free to play, move, and explore themselves through physical activities (Dengah et al., 2021; Mubarok, 2022). Gymnastics is a form of physical activity and exercise designed to improve strength, agility, coordination, balance, and overall physical fitness (Gaspari et al., 2024; Rahmadani et al., 2025; Romanova et al., 2023).

As the nation's administrative and economic hub, Jakarta continues to experience rapid infrastructure development. This has fueled urbanization, as people from rural areas migrate to the city, hoping to improve their standard of living (Carolyn & Kurniati, 2025; Januari et al., 2024). Geographically, this situation is complicated by the fact that 40% of Jakarta lies below sea level (Chairani et al., 2024). North Jakarta is a metropolitan area characterized by the rapid growth of high-rise buildings and highly dynamic community activity. According to the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), North Jakarta has a population density of 12,445 people per square kilometer (BPS, 2024), consequently, this area features densely populated neighborhoods and a shortage of adequate public spaces for the community, particularly for children. A recent viral video has drawn attention to the unique reality of children practicing gymnastics in the narrow alleys of North Jakarta. This phenomenon represents an alternative use of these alleys as free gymnastics training spaces for children, making it a social issue worthy of further exploration.

In an effort to create an active, healthy, and high-achieving environment, the safety aspects of gymnastics are often overlooked. The phenomenon observed is a gap between children's motivation and the safety standards of existing facilities (Farhan Nur Sya'ban & Moh. Amin Tohari, 2024). This creates a conflict between the risk of physical injury due to substandard facilities and equipment and the children's high level of enthusiasm for training, leading to a dilemma in the development of young athletes. An unsuitable environment such as this narrow alley and makeshift equipment are external risk factors that can cause serious physical injuries during training. If left unaddressed, these conditions not only endanger the children's safety but also hinder their competitive spirit in the future.

Currently, research on children's public spaces is limited to formal spaces such as city parks, resulting in a gap in the literature regarding the use of informal spaces such as alleys. This study aims to complement existing research by exploring the subjective dimensions of children's gymnastics practice in alleys in North Jakarta through a phenomenological approach to uncover the meaning behind the children's experiences.

## **METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach, which aims to comprehensively and deeply understand and explore human experiences, focusing on how individuals or groups perceive and assign meaning to the world. Furthermore, the phenomenological approach places strong emphasis on the quality of experience and subjective meanings in everyday life whether emotional, social, or physical. This study focuses on exploring children's experiences in gymnastics practice in a neighborhood in North Jakarta. The research location is on Jalan Pluit Dalam III, RT 7 RW 8 Penjaringan, North Jakarta.

Data collection techniques included interviews, observation, and documentation. Data analysis techniques comprised data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

This study utilized informants consisting of a gymnastics coach and six children who actively participate in gymnastics training in Gang Jakarta Utara. The children were selected as the primary informants because they are the ones who directly experience and interpret the gymnastics training process in their daily lives. Meanwhile, the coach served as a supporting informant, providing information regarding the conduct of the training sessions and the interactions that occurred during the activities. The involvement of these two groups of informants aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the children's experiences during gymnastics training, so that various aspects related to their feelings, motivation, social interactions, challenges, and the meanings they construct from these experiences could be described more comprehensively in accordance with the phenomenological approach used in this study.

**Table 1. Data**

| No | Informant's Name | Informant Status                              |
|----|------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| 1  | Informant Y      | Gymnastics Coach                              |
| 2  | Informant H      | Children Participating in Gymnastics Practice |
| 3  | Informant Ai     | Children Participating in Gymnastics Practice |
| 4  | Informant Ki     | Children Participating in Gymnastics Practice |
| 5  | Informant Ke     | Children Participating in Gymnastics Practice |
| 6  | Informant Ka     | Children Participating in Gymnastics Practice |
| 7  | Informant Ad     | Children Participating in Gymnastics Practice |



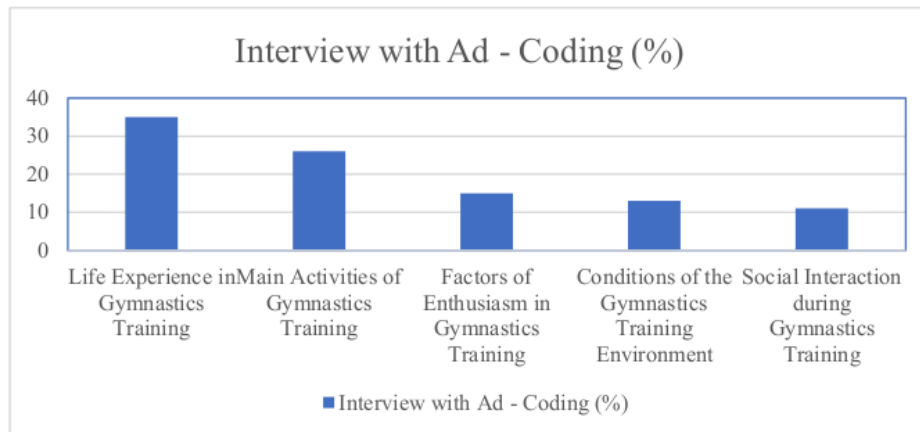


**Figure 2. Interview with Ad**

The results of the coding of interviews with informants, which were analyzed using QSR NVivo 12 to identify the main themes that emerged regarding their experiences participating in gymnastics training in Gang Jakarta Utara. The most dominant theme from Informant Ad was “Life Experiences in Participating in Gymnastics Training,” accounting for approximately 35% of the data, indicating that Informant Ad views his involvement in gymnastics training as an experience that has provided various lessons and positive impacts on his life.

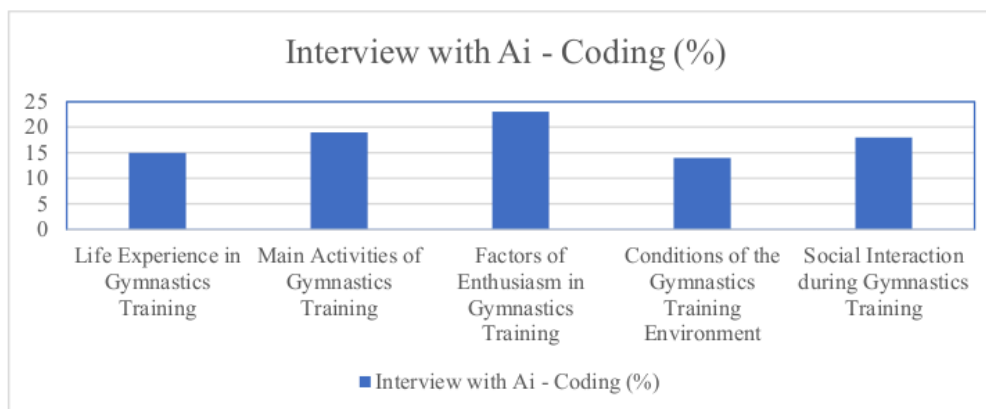


**Figure 3. Interview with Ai**

The most dominant theme among Ai’s informants was “Factors Contributing to Enthusiasm in Gymnastics Training,” accounting for approximately 23 percent, indicating that Ai’s informants’ experiences in participating in gymnastics training

were largely influenced by the enthusiasm, interest, and motivation that drove them to continue training actively.

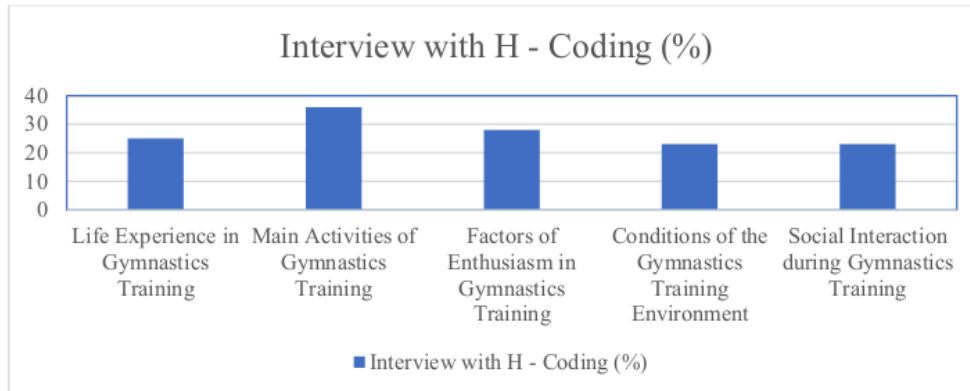


**Figure 4. Interview with H**

Based on the analysis of the transcribed interview with Informant H, the most dominant theme was “The Meaning of Gymnastics Training,” accounting for approximately 35% of the analysis. This indicates that Informant H views gymnastics training as an important, enjoyable activity that provides benefits for him.

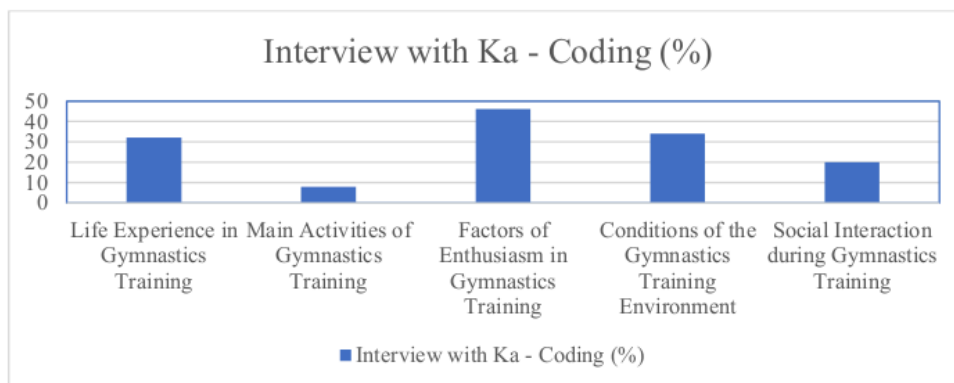


**Figure 5. Interview with Ka**

Based on the analysis of the transcribed interview with informant Ka, the most dominant theme was “Factors Contributing to Enthusiasm in Gymnastics Training,” accounting for approximately 46% of the data, indicating that informant Ka possesses a high level of enthusiasm and motivation in participating in gymnastics training.

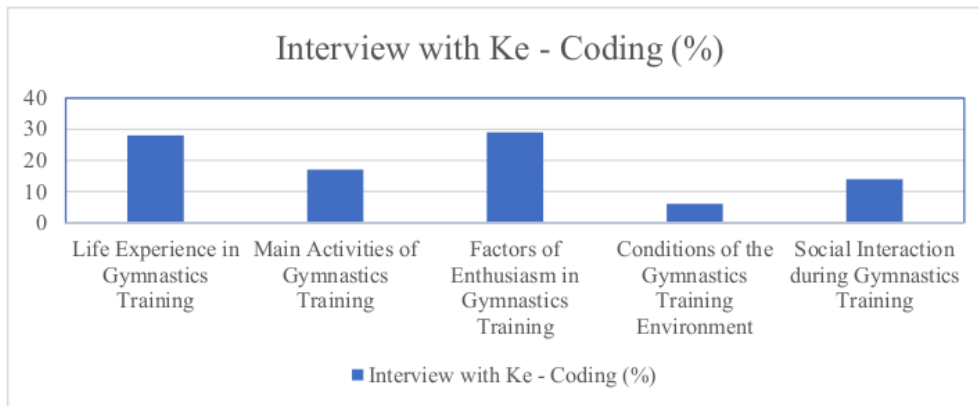


**Figure 6. Interview with Ke**

Based on the analysis of the coding results from the interview with Informant Ke, the most dominant theme was “Factors Contributing to Enthusiasm in Gymnastics Training,” accounting for approximately 29 percent, indicating that Informant Ke has a high level of enthusiasm and motivation for participating in gymnastics training.

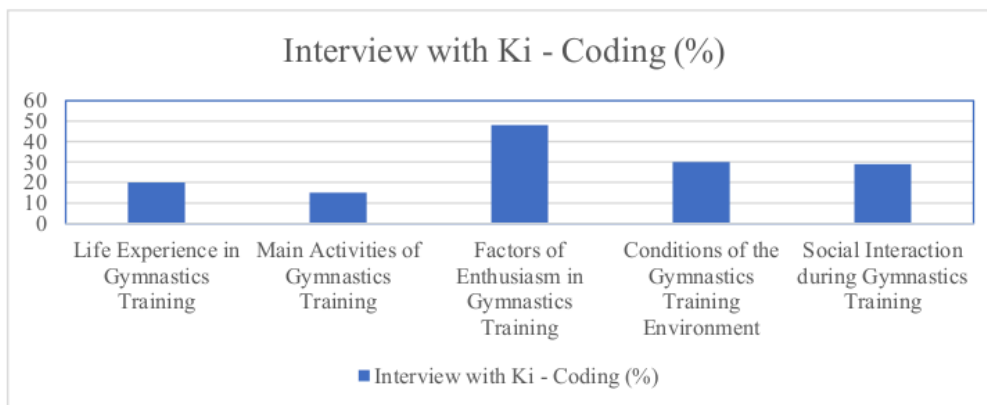


**Figure 7. Interview with Ki**

Based on the analysis of the coding results from the interview with informant Ki, the most dominant theme was “Factors Contributing to Enthusiasm in Gymnastics Training,” accounting for approximately 48% of the data, indicating that informant Ki possesses a high level of enthusiasm and motivation in participating in gymnastics training.

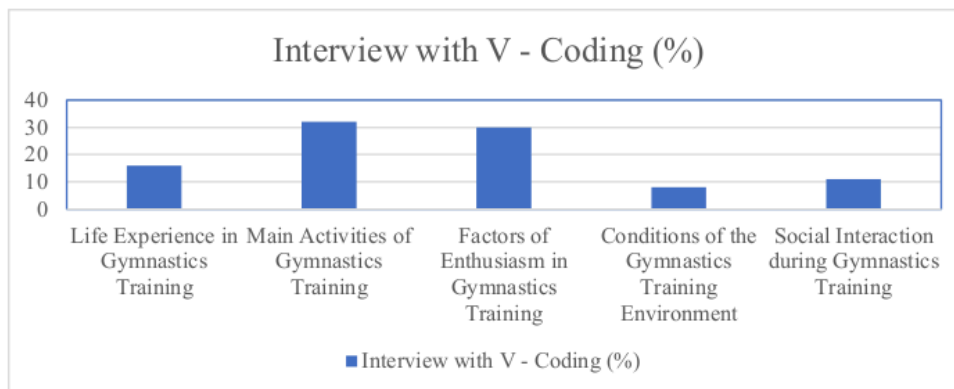


**Figure 8.** Interview with V

Based on the analysis of the transcribed interview with Informant V, the most dominant theme was “The Meaning of Gymnastics Training,” accounting for approximately 32% of the analysis, indicating that Informant V views gymnastics training as an important, enjoyable activity that provides benefits for him.

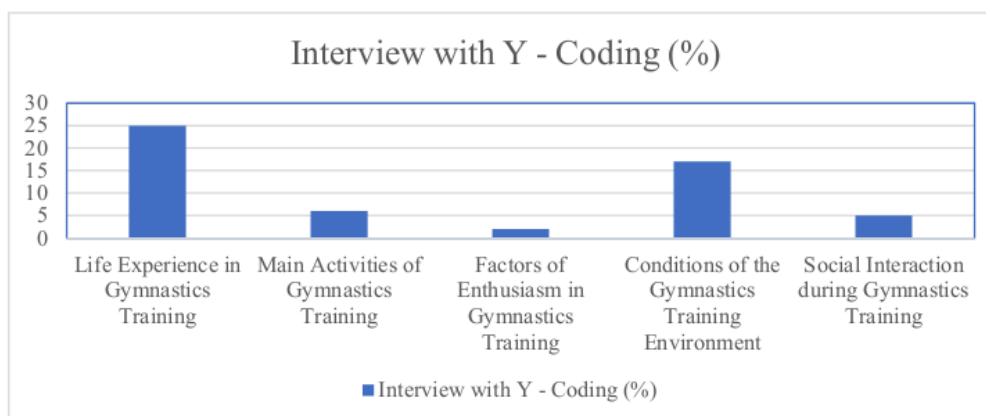


**Figure 9.** Interview with Y

The coding results of the interview with the coach (Informant Y) revealed that the most dominant theme, accounting for approximately 25%, was “Life Experiences in Participating in Gymnastics Training,” indicating that the coach (Informant Y) placed greater emphasis on the various experiences gained during the gymnastics training process.

Overall, these coding results show that the coach views gymnastics training as an activity that provides valuable experiences and is supported by a conducive training environment.

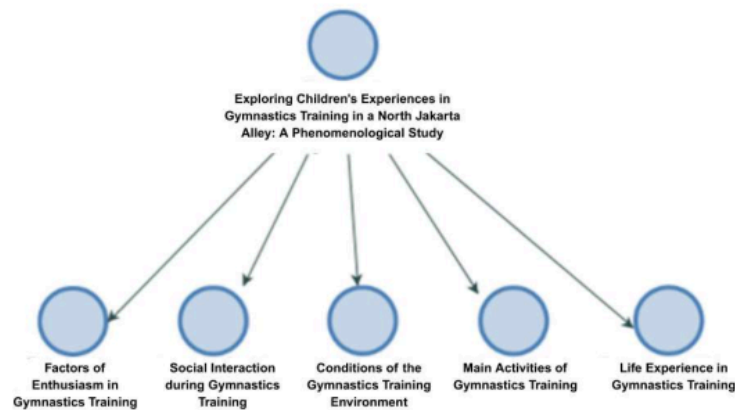


**Figure 10.** Project MAP

A project map resulting from the analysis of all interview data using QSR NVivo, illustrating the relationship between children's experiential exploration in gymnastics training and the five main themes that emerged in the study. This map shows that children's experiences in participating in gymnastics training are influenced by various interrelated aspects, namely Factors of Enthusiasm in Gymnastics Training, Social Interactions During Gymnastics Training, the Gymnastics Training Environment, the Meaning of Gymnastics Training Activities, and Life Experiences in Participating in Gymnastics Training. These interconnections indicate that children's experiences in gymnastics training are shaped not only by their enthusiasm and motivation to train but also by the social relationships they form, a supportive training environment, the meaning they ascribe to gymnastics activities, and the various experiences gained during training. Overall, this project map illustrates that these five themes collectively contribute to shaping children's holistic experiences in gymnastics training.

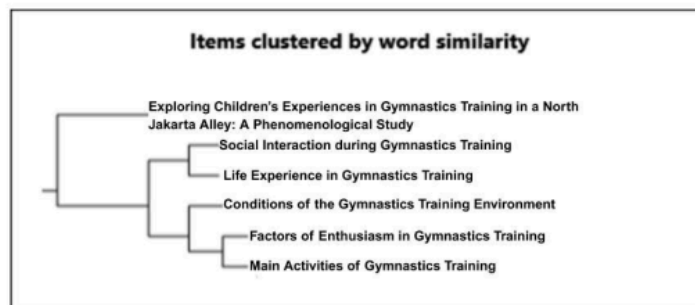


**Figure 11.** Item similarity

The results of grouping nodes based on word and meaning similarity in the figure above show the interconnections among themes in children's experiences during gymnastics practice. The analysis reveals that "children's exploration of experiences in gymnastics practice" is the main theme closely related to several subthemes, such as social interaction, life experiences during practice, and the practice environment. Furthermore, the factors influencing children's enthusiasm also appear to be closely linked to the meaning of the gymnastics activities themselves, indicating that children's level of interest and enthusiasm is influenced by how they interpret these activities. Overall, this clustering illustrates that children's experiences, environment, social interactions, and psychological factors are interrelated in shaping their perceptions of and engagement in gymnastics training.

## **Discussion**

### **Children's Lived Experiences Participating in Gymnastics Training in a Neighborhood in North Jakarta**

The results of the study indicate that children's experiences participating in gymnastics training in the alleys of North Jakarta are positive and meaningful for their development. This finding is evident from the dominance of the theme "Life Experiences in Participating in Gymnastics Training" among several informants, particularly informant Ad and the coach (informant Y). The children expressed that gymnastics training <sup>3</sup> is not merely a physical activity but also an integral part of their daily lives, providing opportunities to learn new skills, build courage, practice discipline, and develop self-confidence. Through regular training, the children gained experiences that shaped how they faced challenges, including when they struggled with certain movements or sustained minor injuries during practice. From a phenomenological perspective, these experiences became part of the meaning making process that the children directly experienced during their involvement in gymnastics.

### **The Significance of Gymnastics Training Amid Limited Facilities and Infrastructure**

Based on the research findings, children perceive gymnastics training as a fun and beneficial activity that provides positive value for themselves. The theme "The

Meaning of Gymnastics Training” was the dominant theme among Informant H and Informant V, and it emerged quite frequently among nearly all informants. Although training took place in an alleyway setting with limited facilities and infrastructure compared to formal sports facilities, these conditions did not diminish the meaning the children attributed to the training activity. For them, gymnastics serves as a means to channel energy, develop physical abilities, gain new experiences, and achieve accomplishments commensurate with their individual abilities. These findings indicate that the meaning of an activity is not always determined by the completeness of facilities but is more influenced by the subjective experiences individuals have while engaging in the activity (Althoff et al., 2025; Knobloch et al., 2017; Tse et al., 2026). Thus, limited facilities do not constitute a major obstacle for children in continuing to view gymnastics training as a valuable and important activity in their lives.

### **Factors That Drive Children’s Enthusiasm for Participating in Gymnastics Practice**

The results of the study indicate that enthusiasm is one of the strongest factors shaping children’s experiences during gymnastics training. The theme of “Factors of Enthusiasm in Gymnastics Training” was the most dominant theme among informants Ai, Ka, Ke, and Ki. This high level of enthusiasm was influenced by various factors, such as enjoyment of gymnastics, the desire to master new movements, motivation to improve one’s skills, and support from friends and coaches. In addition, successfully performing certain movements also provides a sense of satisfaction that encourages children to continue participating in practice. These findings indicate that intrinsic motivation plays a major role in maintaining children’s engagement in sports activities (Liu et al., 2023; Shan et al., 2026; Sierra-Díaz et al., 2019). Children do not participate in practice because of external pressure, but rather because they enjoy the practice process and experience direct benefits from the activities they engage in.

### **The Effect of Training Environment Conditions on Children’s Sense of Safety, Comfort, and Motivation**

The research findings indicate that the training environment plays a significant role in shaping children’s experiences while participating in gymnastics.

The theme of the gymnastics training environment emerged among all informants and was cited at a relatively high rate by informant Ka, informant Ki, and the coach (informant Y). The training environment, located in an alleyway, was not always perceived as an obstacle by the children. On the contrary, they felt quite comfortable because the training location was close to their homes, easily accessible, and situated in a familiar environment. The presence of peers and support from the surrounding community also helped create a conducive training atmosphere. Despite limitations in space and training facilities, the children still demonstrated high motivation to participate in gymnastics activities. These findings indicate that a sense of safety and comfort is determined not only by the quality of physical facilities but also by the social atmosphere and emotional bonds formed within the training environment (Li, 2025; Mahgoub et al., 2025; Pradarelli et al., 2024).

#### **Social Interactions Among Children, Coaches, and the Surrounding Environment During the Training Process**

The research findings indicate that social interaction is an important part of children's experiences during gymnastics practice. The theme of "Social Interaction During Gymnastics Practice" emerged consistently among all informants, although it was not always the dominant theme. Based on the interview results, the children explained that gymnastics training serves as a means to form friendships, collaborate, help one another, and share experiences with other participants. Additionally, positive relationships between the children and their coaches are fostered through guidance, instruction, and support provided during training sessions. Coaches serve not only as instructors but also as figures who motivate the children and build their self-confidence. On the other hand, a supportive and accepting environment also strengthens the children's social experiences. Therefore, the social interactions formed during practice are a key factor in sustaining the children's participation in gymnastics (Bergan et al., 2021; Church & Bateman, 2019).

Overall, the research findings indicate that children's experiences participating in gymnastics training in North Jakarta's alleyways result from the interaction of various interrelated factors, namely their life experiences during training, the meaning they ascribe to the training activities, factors that foster

enthusiasm, the training environment, and the social interactions formed during the training process. These findings are supported by the results of the Project Map and NVivo Cluster Analysis, which reveal a close relationship among these five themes. Children view gymnastics not only as a sporting activity but also as a space for learning, socializing, developing personal skills, and gaining meaningful life experiences. Thus, gymnastics training in the alleys of North Jakarta can be understood as a holistic experience that involves the physical, psychological, and social aspects of children's lives.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the findings of the study titled "Exploring Children's Experiences in Gymnastics Training in a North Jakarta Alley: A Phenomenological Study," it can be concluded that children's experiences participating in gymnastics training are positive and meaningful, and contribute to their physical, psychological, and social development. Children view gymnastics training as a fun and beneficial activity that provides various valuable life experiences, such as building courage, discipline, self-confidence, and the ability to face challenges. Although conducted in an alleyway setting with limited facilities and infrastructure, children still perceive gymnastics training as an important activity because it provides opportunities to learn, play, exercise, and develop their abilities. The children's enthusiasm for participating in training is driven by their interest in gymnastics, their desire to master new movements, their motivation to continue improving, and the support they receive from friends and coaches. Additionally, the training environment which is close to their homes, easily accessible, and characterized by a friendly atmosphere helps create a sense of safety and comfort and further boosts the children's motivation to train. The social interactions that develop between the child, the coach, and the surrounding environment also foster positive experiences through friendships, cooperation, mutual support, and encouragement throughout the training process. Thus, children's experiences in gymnastics training in North Jakarta are shaped by the interplay of life experiences, the meaning of the training activities, factors contributing to enthusiasm, environmental conditions, and social interactions, which together form meaningful experiences in the children's lives.

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