



Information Article

Self-Relaxation (Autogenic Relaxation) and Its Relationship to Learning Basic Artistic Gymnastics Skills for Female Students

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ARTICLE INFO ABSTRACT

Keywords:

This study aims to identify autogenic relaxation (self-relaxation) and its relationship to learning basic artistic gymnastics skills among female students. The researcher developed a dedicated autogenic relaxation questionnaire, validated by specialized experts, and utilized standardized performance tests for basic artistic gymnastics skills.

The importance of relaxation in sports lies in reducing athletes' susceptibility to over-arousal, enhancing emotional control, managing challenging situations with composure, delaying the onset of fatigue, positively regulating high tension before and after competition, and improving kinesthetic awareness.

The researcher adopted a descriptive correlational approach and processed the data using SPSS. The findings revealed a significant positive correlation between the research variables; autogenic relaxation plays a crucial role prior to skill execution by promoting complete muscle relaxation and reducing anxiety and fear, which otherwise cause technical errors and muscle spasms. The study recommends greater emphasis on psychological readiness through deep breathing, mental calmness, and motor imagery (visualization) before skill performance.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26400/Sep/69/3>



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1. Introduction

Relaxation represents one of the fundamental dimensions of pre-competition preparation procedures, as it contributes to reducing unwanted tension and arousal that may arise under such circumstances. Numerous views emphasize the importance of relaxation before competition; however, one of the most important considerations is appropriate timing in relation to the onset of performance. A prolonged period of relaxation may have an adverse effect; instead of facilitating good performance, it may lead to increased arousal and negatively affect performance.

Relaxation is defined as a temporary and deliberate withdrawal from activity that allows the individual to recharge and fully restore physical and emotional energy. Relaxation is characterized by the absence of activity and tension and represents a period of stillness and reduced sensory engagement. The optimal state of relaxation that an individual can attain is referred to as the **zero arousal level**, although individual differences exist in this state.

Relaxation is also defined as the complete cessation of all muscular contractions and tension. It is further defined as the ability to control the parts of the body in order to prevent or reduce tension.

Petrovsky defined relaxation as a state of calmness that develops in an individual following the removal of tension after an intense emotional experience or strenuous physical effort.

The importance of relaxation lies in making athletes less susceptible to excessive arousal and enabling them to control their emotions, cope calmly with difficult situations, and delay the onset of signs of fatigue. Relaxation is also important for reducing high levels of tension to a positively controlled level immediately before and after competition, enhancing awareness of kinesthetic sensations, facilitating sleep during the final days preceding participation in important competitions, using relaxation during intervals when the nature of the competition permits, and relieving tension in specific muscle groups during competition.

Research Problem

Psychological preparation in the sports field represents an economical investment in time and effort for achieving the best possible results, as it is associated with the overall physical, physiological, and functional components of performance. Several methods are used for psychological training and preparation. Although each method differs in the way it is applied, they share the objective of reducing the psychological pressures faced by athletes, particularly in sports characterized by high levels of arousal and excitement.

Through reviewing previous studies concerned with the psychological aspect, the researcher did not identify a study addressing the practical application of self-relaxation among female students, particularly in women's artistic gymnastics, or its effect on the front handspring event in women's artistic gymnastics. This motivated the researcher to investigate this problem and identify the effect of female students' self-relaxation on learning the performance of the front handspring skill in artistic gymnastics on the floor exercise mat, considering this variable as an indicator of integration in the application of motor performance. The researcher believes that relaxation may contribute to achieving optimal performance without errors or hesitation.



Research Objectives

1. To identify the level of self-relaxation among female artistic gymnastics students through a questionnaire.
2. To determine the correlational relationship between self-relaxation and selected basic gymnastics skills among female students.

Study Terminology

Self-Relaxation

- Self-relaxation is the emotional state characterized by reduced tension, in which there is no arousal, particularly from negative sources such as anger, anxiety, or fear (Klaus et al., 1991).
- It is also described as a form of mild euphoria originating from the frontal lobe of the brain, whereby the posterior cortex sends signals to the anterior cortex through a mild calming effect. [Citation needed]. Relaxation can be achieved through meditation, self-administered therapies, breathing exercises, progressive muscle relaxation, and other methods (Louis Maalouf, 1986).

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Relaxation

Mental relaxation is a process in which the athlete focuses on reducing the breathing rate and clearing the mind of thoughts and distractions in order to concentrate on the task at hand. This helps the athlete focus and reduce anxiety before performance. Relaxation techniques are used to reduce anxiety and control arousal levels. Several techniques are available to athletes, but the most commonly used include focused breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, listening to music, and mental relaxation.

Focused breathing is a process in which the athlete concentrates on prolonging each breath in order to reduce both breathing rate and heart rate. Focused breathing is commonly used in yoga and is a relaxation technique that usually begins by slowly counting inhalations and exhalations while gradually increasing the duration of each. Focused breathing alleviates anxiety and reduces arousal levels.

Progressive muscle relaxation is a process in which the athlete progresses from one end of the body to the other, gradually contracting and then relaxing the muscles. The process usually begins with the toes, where the athlete contracts the muscles controlling the toes, followed by the feet and legs, and then progresses upward through the trunk toward the arms, neck, and head. Progressive muscle relaxation alleviates anxiety and reduces arousal levels.

Music is also frequently used to regulate athletes' levels of arousal and anxiety. It can be used to promote relaxation and calm the athlete, as well as to provide psychological stimulation. Depending on the type of music being listened to, music may increase arousal when it is below the level required for performance or decrease it when necessary (Manbar Wahiba, 1991).

2.2 Uses of Relaxation

Relaxation can be used in the sports field in the following situations:

• Before the warm-up period:

It is preferable to begin the warm-up period with some form of relaxation so that the athlete becomes aware of their psychological, physical, and mental state and develops a clear understanding of what should be done afterward. The greater the athlete's tension, the greater the need for deeper relaxation.



• When learning a new skill or tactical plan:

It has been found that excessive instructions or overpractice may negatively affect the outcomes achieved. However, when training periods are interspersed with periods of relaxation, several negative factors that may interfere with continued benefit from the learning process can be eliminated (Abdul Sattar Ibrahim, 1993).

• As one of the procedures for achieving calmness:

Relaxation represents one of the important dimensions of procedures used to reach an appropriate level of calmness, as it contributes to restoring a state of balance and reducing the likelihood of injury when tension increases.

• Before practicing mental imagery:

Relaxation is considered the first step before practicing any form of imagery before, during, or after competition.

2.3 Types of Relaxation

Relaxation is generally divided into two types:

First: Muscular relaxation.

Second: Mental (cognitive) relaxation.

First: Muscular Relaxation

(Greg Wilkinson, 2013)

Muscular relaxation includes several methods, all of which share the same objective of reaching the required level of relaxation but differ in the means used to achieve this state. Rateb identified several common methods used in the sports field to achieve relaxation in the presence of physical tension, arranged according to their degree of difficulty:

- Self-relaxation.
- Imagery relaxation.
- Sequential relaxation.
- Biofeedback relaxation.
- Relaxation during exertion.
- Localized relaxation.
- Single-breath relaxation.

2.4 Self-Relaxation

Self-relaxation is considered a shortened form of progressive relaxation training. It is a simple method that can be learned easily and depends primarily on the athlete's ability to identify areas of tension within the muscle groups of the body. The athlete then uses slow and easy breathing while imagining tension leaving the body through deep inhalation and exhalation.

It is recommended that the initial sessions be conducted under the supervision of a coach. After a small number of sessions, the athlete may be able to perform this type of training independently. If difficulty is encountered, these instructions may be recorded on an audio recording or provided in written form.

When reading the instructions to the athlete, the coach is advised to speak slowly and calmly and to pause at appropriate moments. The coach should also assist the athlete in focusing on the muscles and experiencing the sensation of relaxation.

2.5 Objectives and Principles of Self-Relaxation

A. Objectives of Self-Relaxation

First: To reduce the time required to achieve complete relaxation of all parts of the body.





Second: To reduce the amount of self-instruction required to relax each muscle group.

Third: To coordinate the relaxation of muscle groups so that complete relaxation of all parts of the body can be achieved within a short period of time.

B. Principles of Self-Relaxation

Instructions should be delivered slowly and calmly, with appropriate pauses and appropriately timed rest periods that facilitate the relaxation process. The athlete should be assisted in focusing on the muscle groups and in experiencing the sensation of relaxation.

Second: Mental (Cognitive) Relaxation

After completing muscular relaxation training, muscular relaxation plays a role in reducing muscular tension and consequently contributes to reducing mental tension. Merely focusing on relaxation isolates the brain from other stimuli and directs attention toward the muscles, thereby promoting mental relaxation. At this stage, the individual attempts to focus on a particular point, think about it, and direct their thoughts in the desired direction (Tariq Abdulrahman, 2010).

2.6 Relaxation Exercises

1. Autogenic Training Exercise

This exercise depends on the individual's own internal processes. It involves the use of visual imagery and conscious interaction with the body in order to reduce tension and anxiety. The individual imagines a particular place or a calm situation and repeats certain words or suggestions that may promote relaxation and reduce muscular tension. The individual then begins focusing on breathing, attempting to relax, slow the heart rate, and experience relaxation in the legs and arms.

2. Yoga Exercise

Yoga, Tai Chi, and Qigong are ancient practices that combine rhythmic breathing with a series of physical postures. These practices improve body flexibility and balance and increase mental concentration, which helps divert attention away from racing thoughts. However, these exercises are not recommended for individuals with health problems or serious conditions, or for those who are usually physically inactive, as they may be relatively demanding exercises.

3. Deep-Breathing Exercise

Deep breathing counteracts the effects of stress by slowing the heart rate and lowering blood pressure, according to Dr. Judith Tutin. Deep breathing can be performed by taking a five-minute break, standing upright, closing the eyes, placing one hand on the abdomen to feel the movement of air, breathing in slowly while sensing the air entering the body, and then exhaling through the mouth.

4. Progressive Muscle Relaxation Exercise

This exercise involves slowly tensing and then relaxing the muscles. It can be performed by initially tensing the muscles of the toes and then progressing gradually upward through the body. Each muscle contraction should be maintained for 5 seconds, followed by 30 seconds of relaxation, and the procedure should then be repeated. This exercise helps the individual focus on the difference between muscular tension and relaxation, thereby increasing awareness of bodily sensations by concentrating on each muscle group separately.



5. Breathing Exercises to Promote Relaxation

Breathing exercises are simple exercises that can be practiced without substantial effort to improve sleep quality and increase levels of comfort and relaxation. The following section presents several simple breathing exercises.

Breathing Exercises

The following are some of the most important simple breathing exercises that may produce a substantial improvement in relaxation levels.

Deep Breathing

Many individuals tend to take shallow and short breaths, which may result in reduced energy levels in addition to persistent feelings of anxiety.

Therefore, taking deep breaths may help increase energy and alleviate anxiety. The following steps can be followed:

- Sit or lie in a comfortable position. You may lie on your back on a bed or sit in a chair with your neck, shoulders, and head fully and properly supported against the back of the chair.
- Inhale deeply through the nose and allow the abdomen to expand with air.
- Exhale through the nose.
- Place one hand on the abdomen and the other on the chest, and observe the movement of both hands as the chest and abdomen move during inhalation and exhalation.
- Continue breathing deeply and carefully observe the movement of your hands. The hand placed on the abdomen should move more than the hand placed on the chest to ensure that the exercise is being performed correctly and that the intended benefit is obtained.
- Repeat this exercise several times daily.

Pursed-Lip Breathing

This type of breathing technique helps deliberately slow the rate of inhalation and exhalation while performing certain physical activities and exercises, such as weightlifting and climbing stairs.

The following steps should be followed:

- Relax the shoulders and neck as much as possible.
- Keep the mouth closed while breathing slowly through the nose for two consecutive counts.
- Purse the lips as though preparing to whistle.
- Exhale slowly through the pursed lips.
- Repeat this exercise several times daily as desired.

Breathing Combined with Progressive Muscle Relaxation

This type of breathing technique helps promote both physical and mental relaxation. The following steps should be followed:

- Lie comfortably on your back, either on the floor or on a bed.
- Take several deep breaths before beginning in order to promote muscular relaxation.
- Take a deep breath and, while doing so, tense the muscles of the feet as much as possible.
- Exhale slowly through the nose while relaxing the foot muscles.
- Take a deep breath and, while doing so, tense the calf muscles as much as possible.



- Exhale slowly through the nose while relaxing the calf muscles.
- Continue breathing in this manner while changing the muscle group each time until a substantial proportion of the body's muscles have been progressively covered, beginning with the soles of the feet and progressing upward to the face and fingertips.

Equal Breathing

This type of breathing exercise helps the body gradually become accustomed to inhaling and exhaling for equal periods of time, making breathing easier, more stable, and more regular.

The following steps should be followed:

1. Sit in a comfortable position.
2. Breathe through the nose several times, ensuring that the duration of inhalation is equal to the duration of exhalation.
3. Try repeating a word or short phrase during inhalation and repeat the same word or phrase during exhalation to help maintain exactly equal inhalation and exhalation durations with each breath.
4. Take a short pause without inhaling or exhaling for several seconds, and then resume breathing.
5. Continue breathing in this manner for 5 minutes.

1. Types and Methods of Breathing

Although most individuals may not be aware of this, there are two different types of breathing patterns, as follows:

1. Thoracic or Throat Breathing

- In this type, the individual takes only shallow, rapid breaths and is usually unaware of the breathing pattern, particularly when experiencing tension, anxiety, or psychological pressure.
- This type of breathing may disrupt oxygen and carbon dioxide levels in the body, which may result in several health problems, such as dizziness, rapid heartbeat, and muscular tension.

2. Abdominal Breathing

- In this type of breathing, breaths are deep rather than shallow, in contrast to the previous type.
- This is the breathing pattern typically observed in infants and the pattern naturally adopted by the body during deep sleep.

1. Floor Exercise Skills in Gymnastics

A. Straddle Forward Roll

A beginner or learner may be taught the skill from the standing position and then move into the squat position in order to learn the basic steps. Some coaches teach beginners or learners directly from the squat position, and both are considered correct starting positions for males and females.

From the squat position, the beginner bends the knees to an angle of approximately 45° and places the hands on the floor in front of the knees, approximately shoulder-width apart. Both feet remain fully in contact with the floor with no space between them. Support is then transferred from the legs to the hands. As the chin is tucked toward the chest, the hips are lifted upward, the arms are flexed, and the knees are extended to generate rotational momentum. The neck, back, and hips then successively contact the mat. After the hands leave the mat, the knees are flexed rapidly



to assume a tucked position with the knees touching the chest. At this stage, the legs may either be held with the hands or left unsupported while the arms are extended forward. The knees are then extended to reach the standing position and complete the roll. Finally, the beginner or student raises the arms upward and returns to the starting position. This applies to both males and females (Suzan Salim, 2015).

B. Cartwheel

The cartwheel in gymnastics is performed using the same technical steps on the floor exercise mat. The coach initially teaches the learner to perform the skill along a straight line on the floor exercise mat. The movement is then transferred from the floor to the balance beam, with the only difference being that the feet land close together and the arms are held upward. This skill may be performed during the mount, in the middle of the beam, and as a dismount from the beam.

3. Research Procedures

3.1 Research Method

The researcher used the descriptive method with a correlational approach, which is “a research method through which information and data are collected regarding a particular phenomenon or reality for the purpose of identifying the phenomenon under study and determining its current status” (Obaidat, 2000).

3.2 Research Population and Sample

The research population consisted of 30 first-year female students from the College of Physical Education and Sports Sciences, University of Diyala / College of Basic Education. The research sample was selected purposively and was limited to 15 female students, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Population and Sample

First-Year Female Students – College of Physical Education and Sports Sciences, Basic Education, Diyala	Number
Research population	30
Sample	30
Research sample	15
Pilot experiment	10
Percentage	50%
Morning study	

3.3 Research Tools and Data Collection Methods

The researcher used the following devices and tools:

1. Arabic and foreign references.
2. Measurement and testing.
3. The Internet.
4. Self-relaxation questionnaire, Appendix 1.
5. Tests of floor exercise skills in women's artistic gymnastics.
6. Evaluation form No. 2.

3.4 Research Instrument

1. Self-Relaxation Questionnaire

After reviewing educational and Arabic literature, research, and studies addressing self-relaxation, the researcher developed a questionnaire specifically for self-relaxation. It was limited to three domains: (1) self-relaxation, (2) progressive muscle relaxation, and (3) visual imagery. The questionnaire consisted of 25 items, with three response alternatives for each item. Scores ranging from 1 to 3 were assigned to each positive response, and the total score of the scale was 75.



2. Scientific Foundations of the Questionnaire

Self-Relaxation Questionnaire	Value
Validity	0.77
Reliability	0.87
Objectivity	Significant

3. Validity and Reliability of the Questionnaire

To verify the validity of the test, the researcher presented the 25-item questionnaire to a group of reviewers and specialists in educational psychology, measurement, and evaluation for assessment. Pearson's correlation coefficient was also calculated for the questionnaire domains and reached 0.77, which was statistically significant. The reliability coefficient was 0.87, while Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.74, indicating a good and acceptable level of scale reliability.

4. Questionnaire Scoring

The questionnaire consists of three response alternatives. Positive items are scored from 1 to 3, while the scoring is reversed for negative items. The highest possible score on the scale is 75, and the lowest possible score is 25.

1. Tests of Floor Exercise Skills in Women's Artistic Gymnastics

First: Straddle Forward Roll Skill Test on the Floor Exercise Mat

(Khuraibet, 1989, p. 189)

- **Purpose of the test:** To measure the ability to perform the straddle forward roll.
- **Equipment:** Floor exercise mat.
- The instructional units for the skills included a simplified explanation and demonstration of the skills under study and provided a general idea of how they should be performed for the purpose of preparing for the pre-tests.
- **Test procedure:** The participant performs a straddle forward roll on the floor exercise mat.
- **Scoring:** Artistic gymnastics judges evaluate the test out of 10 points.
- **Number of attempts:** Each participant is given two attempts, and the better score is recorded.

Second: Cartwheel Skill Test

(Khuraibet, Risan, 1989) (4)

- **Purpose of the test:** To measure the ability to perform the cartwheel.
- **Equipment:** Floor exercise mat.
- **Test procedure:** The participant performs the cartwheel.
- **Scoring:** Artistic gymnastics judges evaluate the test out of 10 points.
- **Number of attempts:** Each participant is given two attempts, and the better score is recorded.

3.5 Pilot Experiment for the Questionnaire

The researcher conducted a pilot experiment on 10 female students who were not included in the research sample on Tuesday, 15/4/2025. The purposes of the pilot experiment were:

1. To determine the time required to conduct the test or for participants to respond to the items of the scale.
2. To identify and address the obstacles and difficulties encountered by the female students or participants.
3. To explain the scale instructions and response alternatives to the female students.



3.6 Pre-Tests

The researcher conducted pre-tests for the female students in the floor exercise skills of artistic gymnastics on Tuesday, 29/4/2025, with the assistance of the research team.

3.7 Main Experiment for the Floor Exercise Skill Tests and the Scale

The questionnaire and tests of selected women's artistic gymnastics floor exercise skills were administered to the research sample, consisting of 15 first-year female students from the Department of Physical Education and Sports Sciences, University of Diyala, on 1/5/2025. The female students completed the questionnaire, after which the data were tabulated and statistically analyzed.

3.7 Statistical Methods

The researcher used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to extract and analyze the statistical data.

4. Presentation and Discussion of the Results

4.1 Achievement of the Research Objective of Identifying the Correlational Relationship Between the Self-Relaxation Questionnaire and Floor Exercise Skill Tests in Women's Gymnastics

Table 2. Relationship Between the Research Variables: Results of the Gymnastics Floor Exercise Skill Tests and the Self-Control Questionnaire

Variables	Unit	Straddle Forward Roll		Cartwheel		r-value	Score	Significance
		M	SD	M	SD			
Self-relaxation questionnaire	Score	12.20	0.78	11.49	0.69	0.78	0.000	Significant

Significant at a significance level of 0.005.

The results indicated a statistically significant correlational relationship between the two variables of self-relaxation and floor exercise skills in women's artistic gymnastics. This indicates a good level of self-control over the body muscles during artistic gymnastics floor exercise activities, including the straddle forward roll and the cartwheel. Self-relaxation produced greater results in the learning process, as the self-relaxation method contributed to faster learning, economy of effort and time, enthusiasm, and enjoyment (Zaghloul, 2021, p. 61).

The use of self-relaxation also demonstrated effectiveness in the learning process, encouraging the student to engage in further observation and follow-up. The researcher attributes a positive effect to self-relaxation in the development of performance during skill learning. It contributed to relieving tension in the muscle groups used during motor performance, which was positively reflected in improved motor performance and control of body parts through increased muscular awareness and economy in the number of muscle groups involved in performance. It also enhanced a state of balance between muscular contraction and relaxation as rapidly as possible, provided the appropriate movement pathway with a high degree of smoothness, and shortened performance time. Relaxation is one of the methods that contributes substantially to the development and mastery of sports skills, particularly those requiring precision, concentration, and specific technical execution.

5. Conclusion

In light of the research results, the researcher concluded that self-relaxation had a clear effect on reducing the level of tension among female students while learning gymnastics skills. Self-relaxation reduced the high level of arousal in the muscle groups involved in performance, thereby producing better results. It also contributed to a



noticeable improvement in the learning process and quality of performance and reduced the time and effort required during the learning process.

The researcher recommends the use of self-relaxation as part of psychological preparation because of its positive effect on psychological emotions in sports competition situations. She also recommends greater attention to the psychological preparation of female students in order to develop their psychological skills within the daily training curriculum alongside physical and skill preparation. In addition, psychological methods that contribute to reducing psychological pressure among female students should be used before performing gymnastics events or skills. Further studies and research should also be conducted on different age groups, and relaxation methods should be applied in other sports activities.

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Appendix (1). Self-Relaxation Questionnaire

No.	Statement	Yes	No	To Some Extent
1	Relaxation helps clear the mind and improve concentration while practicing gymnastics.			
2	Relaxation helps overcome tension when performing the skill.			
3	Relaxation facilitates the learning process.			
4	Relaxation improves the quality of performance.			
5	Relaxation reduces the level of stress resulting from psychological pressures.			
6	Relaxation enhances the ability to control feelings of anger.			
7	Relaxation provides the confidence necessary to deal with changing situations during performance.			
8	Relaxation helps promote positive thinking during performance.			
9	Relaxation enhances psychological comfort while performing the movement.			
10	Relaxation helps with time management and the prioritization of performance.			
11	Relaxation helps organize movements.			
12	I feel completely relaxed when performing the activity in more spacious areas.			
13	Relaxation helps facilitate communication with colleagues during performance.			
14	Relaxation originates from within and assists in mentally visualizing the skill.			
15	Relaxation depends on repeating words in the mind, which leads to improved skill performance.			
17	Relaxation enhances neuromuscular coordination during performance.			
18	Relaxation helps promote positive thinking and reinforces strengths.			
19	My level of relaxation increases when I take a deep breath.			
20	Using music during exercises increases the level of relaxation.			
22	My level of relaxation increases when I see the audience present, which motivates me to achieve better performance.			
23	Appropriate lighting helps increase the level of relaxation during performance.			
24	I use specific exercises to increase my level of relaxation.			
25	I consume certain foods that increase my level of relaxation on competition days.			