

## Harnessing judo for youth development in hard-to-reach communities: case studies from UK schools and clubs

Item Type	Conference contribution
Authors	Cloak, Ross;Lane, Andrew;Roberts, Karen;Prescott, Katie;Blanes, Richard;Craig, Louisa;Buckle, Kelly;Scobbie, David;Moffat, Aidan;Bieniek, Bartosz;Nicholls, Paul;McClusky-Lynch, Rachel
Citation	Cloak, R., Lane, A., Roberts, K. et al. (2025) Harnessing judo for youth development in hard-to-reach communities: case studies from UK schools and clubs, in Sertić, H., Segedi, I. & Čorak, S. (eds.) Proceedings book, 8th Scientific and Professional Conference, "Applicable research in judo", 12th-13th November 2025. Zagreb, Croatia, pp. 159-163.
Publisher	University of Zagreb Faculty of Kinesiology
Download date	2026-05-10 17:57:54
License	<a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/</a>
Link to Item	<a href="https://wlv.openrepository.com/handle/2436/626220">https://wlv.openrepository.com/handle/2436/626220</a>

# Harnessing Judo for Youth Development in Hard-to-Reach Communities: Case Studies from UK Schools and Clubs

Ross Cloak<sup>1</sup>, Andrew M. Lane<sup>1</sup>, Karen Roberts<sup>2</sup>, Katie Prescott<sup>3</sup>, Richard Blanes<sup>4</sup>, Louisa Craig<sup>5</sup>, Kelly Buckle<sup>5</sup>, David Scobbie<sup>6</sup>, Aidan Moffat<sup>6</sup>, Bartosz Bieniek<sup>7</sup>, Paul Nicholls<sup>8</sup>, Rachel McClusky-Lynch<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Wolverhampton, UK; <sup>2</sup>British Judo, UK; <sup>3</sup>Active Surrey, UK

<sup>4</sup>Clacton County High School, UK; <sup>5</sup>Our Lady and St Chad Catholic Academy, UK; <sup>6</sup>Tayside Judo Club, Scotland, UK; <sup>7</sup>Dundee & Angus College, UK; <sup>8</sup>Orchard Mead Academy, UK

**Abstract:** Combat sports such as judo are increasingly recognised as effective vehicles for supporting youth development, particularly among young people facing disadvantages, behavioural challenges, or social exclusion. This paper synthesises case study evidence from judo-based interventions delivered between 2022 and 2024 across schools and communities in five UK regions (Clacton, Leicester, Wolverhampton, Surrey, and Perth). Judo was used as an everyday vehicle for engagement rather than as a controlled experimental intervention. The interventions engaged over 120 children and adolescents (aged 8–17) identified as at risk of exclusion, low in confidence, or with limited access to sport. Data sources included attendance and behaviour records, student and staff reflections, and parental testimonies. Findings consistently highlighted improvements in emotional regulation, confidence, peer relationships, and school engagement. For example, one school reported a 75% reduction in suspensions following the programme, while others observed participants joining local judo clubs after initial exposure. The results demonstrate the value of judo as a low-cost, scalable, and inclusive intervention aligned with educational and public health priorities. Importantly, they illustrate how the structured challenge, discipline, and respect embedded in judo can foster resilience and belonging among hard-to-reach youth. These practice-led insights support further co-constructed research into the long-term educational, psychological, and community impacts of judo-based interventions.

Keywords: judo, youth development, emotion regulation, school engagement, case studies

## Introduction

Sport-based interventions are increasingly recognised as tools for improving young people's physical, emotional, and behavioural wellbeing, particularly in disadvantaged communities (Bailey et al., 2009; Coalter, 2013). While mainstream team sports dominate provision, combat sports such as judo offer structured, values-driven contexts for personal development through challenge, discipline, and respect (Vertonghen & Theeboom, 2010). Judo, founded on *seiryoku zenyo* (maximum efficiency) and *jita kyoei* (mutual welfare and benefit), provides a unique setting for fostering emotional regulation, confidence, and social skills (Lakes & Hoyt, 2004).

Recent frameworks such as Lane's CALM model (*Cultivating Awareness, Learning, and Mastery*) highlight how combat sports can reduce anger and violence by explicitly linking

physical challenge with emotional regulation, goal-setting, and resilience (Lane, 2025). CALM integrates behaviour change theory, particularly the COM-B model (Michie et al., 2011), and mood regulation frameworks (Beedie et al., 2022) to demonstrate how structured sport can provide motivation, capability, and opportunity—the three pillars required for behaviour change. This conceptual foundation supports the argument that judo-based interventions can address both individual vulnerabilities (e.g., emotional dysregulation) and systemic barriers (e.g., low access to sport) by embedding psychological learning within physical practice.

This study aims to synthesise case study evidence from judo-based interventions delivered in UK schools and community settings between 2022 and 2024, in order to evaluate how judo contributes to youth development.

## **Methods**

This was a retrospective, naturalistic evaluation of judo sessions delivered as part of normal school and community activity. Programmes were not pre-designed as research interventions; rather, data were collated afterwards to understand emerging patterns and shared outcomes. This study used a multi-site case study approach to examine the outcomes of judo-based interventions delivered in school and community settings across six UK locations. Each intervention was independently organised by local school staff, coaches, or development officers, and data was later compiled and analysed to identify shared themes and reported outcomes. The aim was to capture the impact of judo as a behavioural and inclusion-focused intervention for children and young people considered disengaged or underserved by traditional school sport provision.

Unlike a controlled intervention study, this project analysed naturally occurring judo programmes that were already running in schools and clubs. The research team synthesised existing records and reflections after delivery to identify recurring outcomes and mechanisms. This approach prioritises ecological validity and real-world relevance over experimental control.

**Settings and participants.** Interventions took place in Clacton County High School (Essex), Orchard Mead Academy (Leicester), Our Lady and St Chad Catholic Academy (Wolverhampton), primary and junior schools in Surrey (via School Games), and Perth Grammar School/community clubs (Scotland). Participants ( $n > 120$ ; ages 8–17) were identified as vulnerable due to behavioural challenges, low confidence, poor attendance, SEND (special educational needs and disability), or limited access to sport.

## **Intervention format.**

Judo was used as an everyday vehicle for engagement rather than as a controlled experimental intervention. All interventions used judo as the central delivery mechanism, facilitated by qualified coaches with experience in inclusive and school-based sport. The format varied by site, reflecting the realities of school timetabling, staffing, and community resources. This variability is a strength, as it demonstrates that judo can be flexibly embedded within existing systems — enhancing ecological validity by showing how interventions work under real-world conditions rather than controlled laboratory settings. Techniques practiced included Fundamental

Movements, Ukemi (Breakfalls), Basic Standing Techniques (Nage-waza) and Basic Groundwork (Ne-waza)

Delivery modes included:

- Programmes varied between 4–10 weeks, typically involving weekly 45–60-minute sessions within PE or enrichment timetables. All sessions took place on mats with participants in judogi. Activities included warm-ups, ukemi (breakfalls), basic standing throws (nage-waza), and groundwork (ne-waza).
- Participants continued their normal PE and extracurricular activities; the judo sessions were integrated into existing provision.
- Targeted enrichment: Small-group sessions timetabled for children identified as vulnerable (e.g., those at risk of exclusion, with SEND needs, or with poor attendance). These sessions provided focused support within the school day.
- Pastoral and behaviour units: In some schools, judo was embedded within pastoral care timetables, aligning with broader behaviour management strategies.
- Single-day events and festivals: Larger-scale judo taster days and School Games competitions were used to introduce groups of students to judo in an engaging, celebratory context. These often included medals, belts, and certificates, offering visible rewards and immediate recognition.
- Community linkage: Several interventions included pathways into local judo clubs, providing continuity beyond school and reinforcing opportunities for sustained participation.

Connection to COM-B. Ecological validity meant that interventions naturally aligned with the three drivers of behaviour change:

- Capability: Students developed physical skills (throws, falls, holds) alongside psychological skills (self-regulation, discipline, emotional control).
- Opportunity: Sessions were embedded into the existing school timetable and supported by trusted adults, meaning students had structured, accessible opportunities to participate.
- Motivation: The use of visible rewards (belts, certificates), relational reinforcement (praise from coaches/teachers), and personal pride in progression fostered both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation.

Connection to CALM. The varied delivery contexts also reflected CALM's emphasis on *Cultivating Awareness, Learning, and Mastery*:

- Students became aware of their emotions through the immediate feedback of judo practice (e.g., success or failure in a throw).
- They learned strategies for control and persistence within a respectful, rule-bound context.
- Over time, they developed mastery, transferring skills from the dojo into classrooms, friendships, and family life.

In sum, the diversity of delivery formats strengthens the ecological validity of the interventions, showing that judo can be adapted to different educational realities while still engaging the COM-

B drivers of behaviour change and following the CALM pathway toward emotional growth and resilience.

In terms of measures, no formal psychometric scales were used. Emotional regulation, behaviour, and confidence were inferred from existing school behaviour and attendance records, teacher and coach observations, and qualitative reflections from students and parents.

### **Data collection**

To enhance rigor and efficiency in our thematic analysis, we used artificial intelligence tools (large language models / AI-assisted coding) for initial coding and pattern detection, drawing on precedents such as Holtrop et al. (2024) and Turobov, Coyle, & Harding (2024), who have shown that AI can reliably support initial stages of qualitative data processing while preserving researcher-led theme development. Human oversight was applied to verify AI-suggested codes, adjust context and meaning, and integrate findings into the COM-B / CALM framework.

### **Results**

Findings across sites showed consistent improvements in emotional regulation, behaviour, confidence, and school engagement. Despite methodological variation, the combined results provide strong practice-based evidence of judo's impact in challenging educational settings.

**1. Emotional regulation and behaviour.** Judo participation was linked with greater self-control and fewer classroom incidents. At Orchard Mead Academy, suspensions fell by 75% among girls and 50% among boys. In Clacton and Perth, teachers described “transformational” changes in attention and peer interactions, while Surrey schools reported better rule-following and courtesy.

**2. Confidence and belonging.** Students reported increased pride and connection. At Our Lady and St Chad, PE participation among girls rose by 26%. Surrey and Ippon Judo events gave disengaged pupils visible success, medals, and recognition, with some girls continuing judo at clubs. One Surrey case highlighted two brothers whose participation extended to family engagement and aspirations for progression.

**3. School engagement.** Attendance and punctuality improved. At Orchard Mead, 60% of participants gained at least 5% in attendance; at Our Lady and St Chad, attendance rose from 77% to 88%. In Perth, students previously attending less than half the time began re-engaging with school.

### **Discussion**

The findings provide compelling evidence of judo's potential as a school- and community-based intervention. Improvements in emotional regulation, confidence, and attendance were observed across diverse contexts, supporting judo as a flexible, values-based tool for youth engagement.

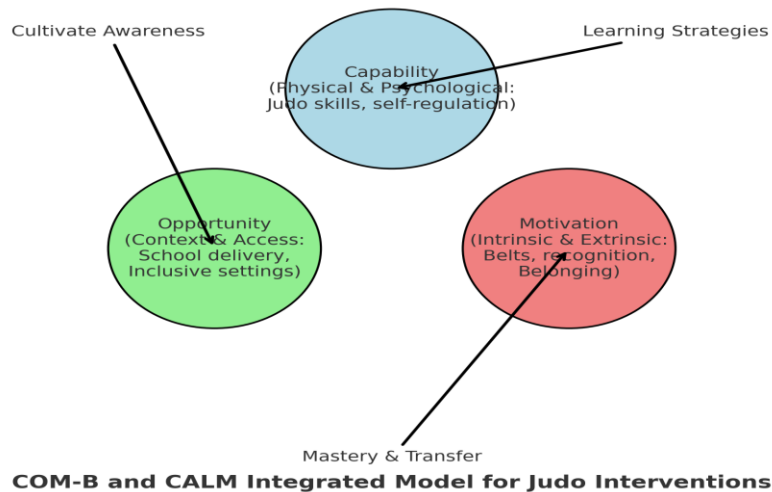
The COM-B model (Michie et al., 2011) offers a structured explanation for why these interventions worked. Judo enhanced *capability* by teaching both physical skills (throws, falls, holds) and psychological skills (self-regulation, confidence, respect). It created *opportunity* by embedding sessions within schools and offering inclusive formats that reached children

otherwise excluded from sport. Finally, it increased *motivation* by providing immediate recognition (belts, certificates), visible progression, and a sense of belonging. The synergy of these three elements explains why young people engaged and why behaviour change was observed. This aligns with broader evidence that effective interventions must tackle multiple behavioural determinants simultaneously (Michie et al., 2011; Greenhalgh & Papoutsi, 2018).

The CALM model (Lane, 2025) further illustrates how combat sports interventions cultivate awareness of emotions, foster learning of adaptive strategies, and develop mastery through repetition. Our case study findings mirror these stages: students reported becoming more aware of their emotional triggers, learning to manage them in structured judo settings, and transferring these skills into classrooms and peer relationships. CALM therefore provides both a theoretical rationale and a practical blueprint for scaling such programmes.

These results are consistent with prior evidence that martial arts training can improve self-control and reduce aggression (Lakes & Hoyt, 2004; Lafuente et al., 2021; Vertonghen & Theeboom, 2010). What distinguishes this study is the ecological validity: interventions were delivered in real-world, disadvantaged settings where traditional approaches often fail (Coalter, 2013). This highlights the power of judo as both an accessible sport and a psychosocial intervention.

**Figure 1:** Integration of the COM-B framework with the CALM model to explain behaviour change in judo interventions.



This study’s naturalistic design means there was no control group, pre-post standardised measurement, or consistent data capture across sites. However, this ecological realism strengthens the findings’ relevance to everyday educational and community settings. Overall, judo offered a structured, values-based context that fostered confidence, resilience, and positive relationships with school. Its unique combination of challenge, respectful contact, and moral education aligns with behaviour change models such as COM-B (Michie et al., 2011) and CALM

(Lane, 2025), emphasising motivation, opportunity, and capability development. These results support embedding judo into school inclusion and wellbeing strategies, while future research should examine long-term effects on resilience, attainment, and sustained physical activity.

## Conclusion

This practice-led study demonstrates that judo interventions can foster meaningful improvements in emotional regulation, behaviour, confidence, and school engagement among disadvantaged youth. By situating these findings within the COM-B and CALM frameworks, we illustrate how judo not only engages young people but also builds transferable life skills that reduce risk of disengagement and antisocial behaviour. Future research should co-construct scalable models integrating practitioner expertise with behaviour change theory, and evaluate long-term outcomes in resilience, wellbeing, and academic attainment.

## References

- Bailey, R., Armour, K., Kirk, D., Jess, M., Pickup, I., & Sandford, R. (2009). The educational benefits claimed for physical education and school sport: An academic review. *Research Papers in Education*, 24(1), 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02671520701809817>
- Beedie, C. J., Lane, A. M., Udberg, R., & Terry, P. C. (2022). The 4R model of mood and emotion for sustainable mental health in organisational settings. *Sustainability*, 14(18), 11670. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su141811670>
- Coalter, F. (2013). *Sport for development: What game are we playing?* Routledge.
- Greenhalgh, T., & Papoutsi, C. (2018). Studying complexity in health services research: Desperately seeking an overdue paradigm shift. *BMC Medicine*, 16(1), 95. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12916-018-1089-4>
- Holtrop, J. S., Amaya, M., McCarville, E., & Foster, A. M. (2024). AI-driven targeted qualitative analysis: A useful new tool. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 39(6), 1393–1398. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-024-08302-3>
- Lafuente, J. C., Zubiaur, M., & Gutiérrez-García, C. (2021). Effects of martial arts and combat sports training on anger and aggression: A systematic review. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 61, 101611. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2021.101611>
- Lakes, K. D., & Hoyt, W. T. (2004). Promoting self-regulation through school-based martial arts training. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 25(3), 283–302. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2004.04.002>
- Lane, A. M. (2025). CALM: Cultivating awareness, learning, and mastery to reduce anger and violence through combat sports. *Youth*, 5(2), 45. <https://doi.org/10.3390/youth5020045>
- Michie, S., van Stralen, M. M., & West, R. (2011). The behaviour change wheel: A new method for characterising and designing behaviour change interventions. *Implementation Science*, 6(1), 42. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1748-5908-6-42>
- Smith, B., Williams, O., Bone, L., & the Moving Social Work Co-production Collective. (2022). *Co-production: A resource to guide co-producing research in the sport, exercise, and*

- health sciences. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 14(2), 159–187.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2022.2052946>
- Turobov, A., Coyle, D., & Harding, M. (2024). Using ChatGPT for thematic analysis. *arXiv preprint*. <https://arxiv.org/abs/2405.08828>
- Vertonghen, J., & Theeboom, M. (2010). The social-psychological outcomes of martial arts practice among youth: A review. *Journal of Sports Science and Medicine*, 9, 528–537.