

Gymnastics Training Intensity and Postural Control Development among Gymnasts in Selected Universities in Hubei Province, China

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Abstract: This study investigated the relationship between training intensity and postural control ability among 110 gymnasts from three universities in Hubei Province, China (Hanjiang Normal University, Wuhan Sports University, and Central China Normal University). A descriptive-comparative-correlational mixed design was employed, utilizing self-developed questionnaires to assess training intensity (covering eight dimensions, including training volume, cardiovascular intensity, and psychological stress) and postural control ability (including eight aspects such as balance stability, core strength, and proprioception). Data analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between training intensity and postural control ability ($r = 0.72, p < 0.01$), with experienced athletes demonstrating superior performance in dynamic balance and core strength ($F = 6.32, p < 0.01$). The study proposed an adaptive training program incorporating phased intensity progression and specialized recovery strategies. The results provide empirical support for the scientific design of collegiate gymnastics training and emphasize the importance of individualized training regimens.

Keywords: Gymnastics Training Intensity, Postural Control, Neuromuscular Adaptation, Collegiate Athletes.

1. Introduction

Gymnastics places exceptionally high demands on postural control ability, requiring athletes to maintain bodily stability during high-speed rotations, jumps, and static supports. Training intensity, as a core variable for enhancing athletic performance, directly influences the adaptive reorganization of the neuromuscular system. However, existing research predominantly focuses on elite athletes, while empirical analyses targeting collegiate populations remain scarce. Hubei Province, a key hub for cultivating gymnastics talents in China, exhibits representative training models among its collegiate athletes. This study aims to address this gap by integrating Dynamic Systems Theory (DST) to explore the following questions:

- (1) How does training intensity affect postural control ability in collegiate gymnasts?
- (2) Do demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, training experience) moderate this relationship?
- (3) How can adaptive training programs be designed to optimize training outcomes?

2. Literature Review

Postural control relies on the synergistic interaction of core muscle groups, the vestibular system, and proprioception. Research demonstrates that gymnasts exhibit 42% higher gastrocnemius muscle activation during balance beam exercises compared to non-athletes (Rutkowska-Kucharska, 2023) [1], indicating that specialized training enhances neural innervation efficiency in specific muscle groups. Furthermore, psychological resilience (Li, 2021) [2] and training motivation (Han & Teo, 2024) [3] indirectly influence postural stability by modulating attentional allocation.

Training intensity is typically assessed through a combination of heart rate, ratings of perceived exertion (RPE),

and training volume. Petrescu et al. (2023) [4] found that progressive high-intensity training can improve young athletes' dynamic balance ability by 28%, though it requires periodic recovery to prevent overtraining. Cultural differences also influence training design—for instance, traditional Chinese training emphasizes "step-by-step progression," while European models prioritize individualized adjustments (Kolarov et al., 2023) [5].

Existing research predominantly relies on laboratory measurements, lacking athlete self-assessment data, and regional analyses focusing on collegiate athletes remain limited. This study adopts a mixed-methods design, integrating both subjective and objective data to systematically quantify the relationship between training intensity and postural control, while proposing an adaptive training framework.

Grounding our work in Dynamic Systems Theory (DST), we posit that postural control emerges from nonlinear interactions among multiple subsystems—neurological, muscular, and environmental (Forsberg & Koenen, 2022)[6]. Training intensity acts as an external perturbation, modifying system constraints (e.g., muscular load, psychological stress) to drive adaptive reorganization in athletes. For example, high-intensity balance beam training fosters more efficient postural adjustment strategies under unstable conditions (Silva & Martinez, 2021)[7].

3. Research Result

3.1. Demographic Characteristics Analysis

A total of 112 valid samples were collected (38 from Hanjiang Normal University, 36 from Wuhan Sports University, and 38 from Central China Normal University). The demographic characteristics of the sample as show in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics comparing

Number	Classification	Proportion
1	<18 Years old	4.5%(5)
2	19 Years old	25.9%(29)
3	20 Years old	35.7%(40)
4	≥21 Years old	33.9%(38)

Grade: The distribution of grade one to grade four is relatively balanced, with the highest proportion (31.3%). Specific distribution as show in Table 2.

Table 2. Grade comparing

Number	Grade	proportion
1	freshman	23.2%(26)
2	sophomore	31.3%(35)
3	junior	25.9%(29)
4	senior	19.6%(22)

3.2. Training Intensity Assessment Results

The scores of each training intensity dimension were analyzed using Weighted Mean (WM). The results are as show in Table 3.

Table 3. Assessment Results comparing

Dimension	Average (WM)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Grade
volume of training	3.42	0.71	effective
training load	3.18	0.63	effective
Heart rate and cardiovascular intensity	3.05	0.68	effective
Perceived force	3.27	0.59	effective
Fatigue level	3.11	0.72	effective
recovery time	2.94	0.65	effective
Risk of injury and management	3.09	0.61	effective
Skills progress	3.38	0.54	effective

The analysis of training intensity dimensions reveals consistent effectiveness across all measured parameters, as indicated by weighted mean (WM) scores ranging from 2.94 to 3.42 (Table 3). Training volume (WM=3.42±0.71) and skills progression (WM=3.38±0.54) emerged as the highest-rated components, suggesting athletes perceive these aspects as particularly well-developed in their training regimen. The cardiovascular dimension (WM=3.05±0.68) and recovery time (WM=2.94±0.65) scored relatively lower, though still within the effective range (51-75% efficacy). Notably, all standard deviation values remained below 0.72, indicating relatively uniform perceptions among participants. The narrow range of WM scores (0.48 difference between highest and lowest) demonstrates balanced training program design, with no dimension being disproportionately emphasized or neglected. These findings align with contemporary gymnastics training principles that emphasize comprehensive development across physical, technical, and recovery domains. The consistent "effective" ratings across all eight dimensions suggest the training program successfully integrates multiple physiological demands while maintaining appropriate intensity levels. Particularly encouraging is the strong performance in skills progression, which reflects successful translation of training intensity to technical

improvement - a critical outcome measure in artistic gymnastics.

3.3. Self-Assessment Results of Postural Control Development

The dimensional scores of postural control were analyzed as show in Table 4.

Table 4. Self-Assessment Results of Postural Control Development

Dimension	Average (WM)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Grade
stability of equilibrium	3.56	0.58	Highly Developed
force at the core	3.49	0.62	Highly Developed
Alignment and symmetry	3.32	0.67	Develop
Coordination and motion control	3.44	0.54	Highly Developed
Response to external forces	3.21	0.71	Develop
Flexibility and range of motion	3.38	0.63	Highly Developed
proprioception	3.27	0.59	Develop
Consistency and endurance	3.15	0.65	Develop

The postural control assessment demonstrates significant development across all measured dimensions, with particularly strong performance in fundamental gymnastic competencies (Table 4). Stability of equilibrium (WM=3.56±0.58) and force at the core (WM=3.49±0.62) achieved the highest scores, both classified as "Highly Developed" (76-100% efficacy), reflecting elite-level static postural control capabilities essential for apparatus work. Coordination and motion control (WM=3.44±0.54) and flexibility (WM=3.38±0.63) similarly reached highly developed status, indicating superior dynamic control and range of motion - critical for complex skill execution. While alignment/symmetry (WM=3.32±0.67), response to external forces (WM=3.21±0.71), proprioception (WM=3.27±0.59), and consistency/endurance (WM=3.15±0.65) scored slightly lower, all remained in the "Developed" range (51-75% efficacy). The relatively higher SD values (0.54-0.71) compared to training intensity metrics suggest greater individual variability in postural control capacities. These results collectively illustrate a well-balanced postural control profile, with athletes demonstrating particular strengths in the core stability and balance domains that form the foundation for advanced gymnastic performance. The findings support current training methodologies emphasizing proprioceptive development through progressive balance challenges and core stabilization exercises.

3.4. Group Difference Analysis

Statistical analyses including one-way ANOVA and independent samples t-tests were conducted to examine differences in training intensity and postural control across demographic groups.

Gender differences revealed that:

In training intensity: Male athletes scored significantly higher than females in cardiovascular intensity ($t=2.34$, $p=0.021$)

In postural control: Female athletes outperformed males in both balance stability ($t=3.01$, $p=0.003$) and flexibility/range of motion ($t=2.89$, $p=0.005$)

Age-related differences showed:

For training intensity: The ≥ 18 years group demonstrated significantly greater skill progression than other age groups ($F=4.17$, $p=0.008$)

For postural control: 17-year-olds achieved the highest scores in coordination and movement control ($F=3.62$, $p=0.015$)

Training experience differences indicated:

Athletes with >3 years of training exhibited superior performance in both proprioception ($F=6.13$, $p<0.001$) and consistency/endurance ($F=5.74$, $p=0.001$) aspects of postural control. The Group Difference Analysis were analyzed as show in Table 5.

Table 5. Group Difference comparing

Training intensity dimension	Postural Control Dimension	Correlation (r)	P Value
volume of training	stability of equilibrium	0.63**	<0.001
training load	force at the core	0.58**	<0.001
Heart rate and cardiovascular intensity	Flexibility and range of motion	0.42**	0.002
Skills progress	Coordination and motion control	0.67**	<0.001
Perceived force	proprioception	0.38*	0.012

Note: * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$

4. Conclusion

The findings demonstrate a robust relationship between gymnastics training intensity and postural control development, with statistically significant correlations across multiple dimensions. Training volume and skill progression emerged as pivotal factors influencing balance stability ($r=0.63$, $p<0.001$) and coordination ($r=0.67$, $p<0.001$), respectively, highlighting the critical role of structured, high-volume training in enhancing neuromuscular adaptation. Gender-specific differences were evident, with males exhibiting superior cardiovascular intensity ($p=0.021$) and

females excelling in balance stability ($p=0.003$) and flexibility ($p=0.005$), suggesting tailored training approaches may optimize performance outcomes. Age-related patterns revealed that athletes aged ≥ 18 years showed advanced skill progression ($p=0.008$), while 17-year-olds displayed peak coordination abilities ($p=0.015$), emphasizing the importance of age-appropriate programming. Athletes with >3 years of training demonstrated significantly enhanced proprioception ($p<0.001$) and endurance ($p=0.001$), underscoring the cumulative benefits of long-term training. While all training intensity dimensions scored as "effective," the relatively lower recovery time scores ($WM=2.94$) indicate a need for improved recovery protocols. These results advocate for holistic training models that integrate physiological, technical, and recovery components while accounting for demographic variability. The study's focus on collegiate athletes in Hubei Province invites further investigation across diverse populations to enhance generalizability.

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