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**KENDO AND THE IMPROVEMENT
OF COMPETENCY**

by

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALTY

I - BANH Hai Dang - declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institute of tertiary education. Information derived from the published and unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given in the bibliography.

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ABSTRACT

Kendo is a contemporary Japanese sword fighting, which is based on *Kenjutsu* – the mere killing techniques using the traditional sword of *katana*. The philosophy of *Kendo* concentrates on the training of the body and the cultivation of the personality.

Competency is defined as “the ability to successfully meet complex demands in a particular context through the mobilization of psychosocial prerequisite (including both cognitive and non-cognitive aspects)” (Rychen & Salganik, 2003, p. 43).

From a modern point of view, *Kendo* and competency share interesting common points since the two fields both relate to human skills, abilities, behaviors etc. and their improvement and functioning. However, there are hardly any preceding works in the academia that have thoroughly examined the connection between *Kendo* and competency.

The purpose of this research is to find out if *Kendo* pay contribution, in any way, to the improvement of certain specific competencies. Literature review has suggested the competencies most likely be improved are positive self-image, self-control, tenacity and interpersonal awareness.

This research was designed from a qualitative approach. The methodology consists of two types of investigation: literature review and personal interviewing. Literature review included relevant works in the fields of *Kendo* and competency. The interviews were based on standardized open-ended approach, which served the purpose of deeply investigating the experiences of participants.

During the interview process, four participants were orally recruited and all of them had fully answered the questions and completed the interviews. The results from this study indicate that *Kendo* does in fact pay contribution, to some degree, to the improvement of competency of practitioners. Besides, the role of *Kendo* in the improvement of every practitioner is different. As the *Kendo*'s ideologies had suggested, the martial art cultivates competencies with its physical, mental and philosophical aspects.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The author's first impression about *Kendo* was more or less a sport of venting and swinging bamboo sticks. Perhaps it is the impression anyone would receive should they visit a *Kendojo* in the middle of a training session. Its symphony of the sound of smashing bamboo, the harmonious chanting of practitioners, the earth-trembling footwork, the flashing movements of bodies and the powerful and threatening battle cry would make any outsider associate *Kendo* with an energetic and physically dynamic type of practice. It was also the author's belief when he started practicing *Kendo* in June 2010. It did not take long for him to realize that the martial art was not quite the way it looked like.

As he was sweating, and even shedding his blood, on the wooden floors, the author found it was not solely the spectacular techniques or the fierce duels but also the cultural, aesthetic and mental elements lying within the Japanese martial art that attracted him. They are the way the *gi* and *hakama* are worn so neatly, the way people display *reigi* towards the god of the *dojo* – according to Japanese belief – and to each other, even the way footwears are so carefully arranged in pairs in lines towards the door, and mostly the way a match is fought: always with form and style and demonstration of the fullness of spirit. He realized *Kendo* is an art of dignity.

Gradually, the author had made more and more remarkable progresses in practice. He was less drawn into the dynamics and fast pace natured to the duels and more aware of his own execution of technique. He had now started to see his opponents' intention through their movement and manipulate it to his own advantage.

He was also less hesitant while facing a more experienced practitioner. To a certain extent, his heightened technical proficiency might account for the progress. But it also seemed to be made by mental enhancement. Indeed, the author found himself calmer and more self-controlled during training.

Even more so, he felt more tranquil outside of the *dojo* as well. His communication became easier and he realized there were more people being fond of him than he used to think. His work started to look up not only because his relations with colleagues were improved but he was also dealing better with tight deadlines.

Furthermore, he wondered whether it was his own experience or there is any other *Kendo* practitioners who demonstrate similar types of behaviors. Out of curiosity, he went on to find evidence to satisfy his concern. He started the search by finding books about Japanese culture and philosophies – among which, “Bushido: The Soul of Japan” by Nitobe Inazo (1969) stood out as a great generic knowledge provider and an inspiration. He continued to pose his questions to fellow practitioners and to look through all kinds of sources for information.

The search actually revealed quite amusing facts. Along with a number of positive responses confirming heightened self-confidence from the people being asked, he found articles discussing the same phenomena. McBride (2012) covered a case in which a *sushi* shop was saved \$1000 from a robbery by a 23-year-old *Kendo* practitioner named Taupuru Brightwell. He was reportedly very responsive and managed to “not to hesitate and keep control of the situation” and explicitly accredited his act to the martial training. "It is not resorting straight to violence, but instead you look at the situation and make the best of it that you can." – the hero added. Another amazing story was published by Kosaka (2012) about Alexander

Bennett – 7-dan *Kendo* master from New Zealand – and his way to achievements in the world of *Budo*. From a starting point as ordinary as any practitioners' could be, he had been through various phases of a martial artist's and a martial scholar's career with countless of peaks and valleys. However, there was one characteristic that had been shining on throughout his accomplishing life. It was the tenacity he had gained from years of training that encouraged him to carry on.

Excited about his findings, the author wondered if *Kendo* had truly brought about such fascinating progresses. Could mental improvements be directly attributed to the practice of the martial art or was it just an inevitable achievement of age and/or other life experiences? As far as personal experiences go, including his own, such enhanced mentality inclined to be more demonstrative the more time is invested and efforts are put in training. It was this interesting tendency that puzzled him about the contribution of *Kendo* to the mental improvements of practitioners and encouraged him to conduct this research to satisfy his concern.

1.2 BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

In this section, the author examines an extended range of knowledge of *Kendo* to attain an overview of its characteristics and ideology, along with finding a theory that best describes, explains and categorizes the human abilities and personalities displayed in the aforementioned cases on a scientific basis. By doing so, he aims to pinpoint the common human cultivating factors that both *Kendo* and the theory are related with, thence assume an interactive connection between the two themes. The author will then utilize this connection to theorize the human development ideology of *Kendo* and test his hypothesis to find an answer to the research question.

1.2.1 WHAT IS KENDO?

Upon starting out with this project, the author first traced back the history of *Kendo* in order to gain the most thorough understanding of the martial art. By doing so, he would be able to examine the defining and distinctive characteristics of *Kendo* which could possibly be the origin of its positive mental effects. While such knowledge is readily acquirable at any *Kendojo*, from instructors or senior practitioners, what he aimed to retrieve was scientifically reliable sources of information. Only these sources are qualified support for his work.

According to the All Japan *Kendo* Federation (2003), *Kendo* was originated from *Kenjutsu* – a school of fighting where fighters execute killing techniques with the *katana*.

The earliest introduction of *katana* was dated back in the ninth century among the northern territories of Japan. Through a long period of battling with a wealth of different designs being created and tested, the *katana* became more and more improved in terms of shape, specification, material and producing technology. Eventually the designs reached their peak and the result was a lightly curved sword with broad and thick blade and single razor-sharp cutting edge that is unique in the world of weaponry (All Japan *Kendo* Federation, 2003).

However, Green and Svinth (2011) had discussed that “from a military standpoint, the sword was arguably no more than a subsidiary weapon for ancient and medieval Japanese soldiers. Depending on the era in question, weapons of choice were either bows and arrows or spears. The single-edged two-handed sword (*Nihon-to* or *katana*) served as the last line of defense and was mostly used in the rather

ignorable act of removing the heads from fallen enemies”. Indeed, the *katana* was yet to play a remarkable role in the Japanese warfare.

Only until the fifteenth century did some fighting schools begin to emphasize on the importance of sword fighting (Green and Svinth, 2011). Especially with the introduction of guns later on, sword techniques were developed with the aim to replace troops in heavy armors with mobile units to restore the balance on the battlefield via melee combating. This laid a foundation for exclusive sword fighting institutions to be established and developed into large varieties of different styles which would then be passed down through generations until present as *Kenjutsu* (All Japan *Kendo* Federation, 2003).

When peace came to reign over Japan again in the *Edo* Period (1603-1867), fighters ceased to look for battle feats in killing. Instead, many of them began traveling from one locality to another, seeking challenges with other fighters to further hone their skills and gain themselves reputations as martial artists. At the same time, some did so to find a chance of being recruited under service to feudal lords. It was during this period that martial arts had made a large step forwards, transforming from mere sets of killing techniques into schools of thought. There were three remarkable movements within this improvement:

“First, martial arts were intellectualized. This meant the development of highly structured holistic curricula that were pertinent to combat, personal development, and even political acumen. From the 1630s onward, there was a proliferation of treatises outlining the universalistic relevance of martial arts theory and principles to all aspects of the warrior’s life.[...]

Second, there was overt spiritualization. From the late seventeenth century on, swordsmanship was infused with esoteric ideals of breath and energy transmission (*ki*), Zen and Confucian concepts, and the like, and training in martial technique came to be seen as a vehicle for “enlightenment” (Imamura 1989, 79). Medieval swordsmanship (*Kenjutsu*) was characterized by deeply spiritual principles, but these elements became more pronounced during the *Tokugawa* Period, and many *ryuha* became in many ways pseudo-cult religions.

Third there was a conspicuous pacification of *Kenjutsu*. The object of training evolved into killing the ego and refining character, and avoiding conflict altogether. Under this doctrine, a truly great warrior was said to be able to win the fight without drawing his sword; his was a “spirit of non-lethality” (Rogers 1998, 135”).

(Green and Svinth, 2011)

Being among the major martial arts, *Kenjutsu* did not exclude itself from the tides of evolution. Despite the fact that swordsmanship was no longer in high demand for teaching comparing to the warring periods, sword fighting schools had expanded in large number due to the authority’s requirement upon the *samurai*’s of maintaining their readiness for battle (Green and Svinth, 2011). However, the former sword techniques, which had served the sole purpose of killing, were now being converted into ones that enhance the personal cultivation of the practitioners via the application of both powerful techniques and refined way of living the life (All Japan *Kendo* Federation, 2003). Such movements were reflected in various documented teachings, including those by the two great sword masters of the time: “*Heiho Kadensho* (The Life-giving Sword)” by Yagyu Munenori and “*Gorin-no-sho* (The Book of Five Rings)” by Miyamoto Musashi. Indeed, these two classic books had paid a large

contribution in setting a foothold for the philosophy of *Kendo* to formulate and bloom. A thorough analysis of the ideology of these two books will be provided in Chapter 2 of this research paper.

Towards the end of seventeenth century, the practice of swordsmanship was further limited by the government via legislative restriction of dueling. This posed a demand for technical reinvention towards sword fighting schools. It was explained by Green and Svinth (2011) as followed:

“Some *ryuha* tried to retain a battle-oriented curriculum, but many were becoming increasingly esoteric and technically impotent. *Kenjutsu* of this kind was referred to rather derogatorily as flowery swordsmanship (*kaho kenpo*).”

However:

“It was this “flowerization” of *Kenjutsu* that provided the catalyst for its ultimate “sportification”, with the gradual promotion of protective training equipment (*bogu*) and bamboo swords (*shinai*), thereby making possible full-contact fencing bouts. [...]

Originally, many swordsmen clung to the traditional methods of forms (*kata*) practice and were skeptical about full-contact training, but by the late eighteenth century, most major *Kenjutsu ryuha* incorporated both training methods to differing degrees.”

It was the establishment of this new full-contact style of training – called *shinai-uchikomi-geiko* – which paved the road for the commencement of the new technical system of *Kendo*.

On the other hand, it should not be ignored that the major part of such innovation was brought about by the invention and development of new training equipment: *bogu* and *shinai*. Naganuma Shirozaemon Kunisato of the renowned

Jikishinkage-ryu school of classic martial art was the one to be accredited for initiating the use of *bogu* (Green and Svinth, 2011; All Japan *Kendo* Federation, 2003) as a complete set of four pieces:

- *Men*: the mask – protects the head and the throat
- *Kote*: the gauntlet – protects the hands and the forearms
- *Do*: the armor – protects the chest and abdomen
- *Tare*: protects the lower body

Through a long period of usage, *bogu* had undergone many changes in design, material and production technology but the basic components of the set remained the same and are still used in contemporary *Kendo*.

At the same time, the weapon of the martial art – the bamboo sword – also had quite a history. The initial design of the bamboo sword originated in the eighteenth century, popularized by the *Shinkage-ryu* school (Green and Svinth, 2011). Being named *fukuro-shinai* – literally means “bagged bamboo sword” – it consists of many slats of bamboo bound together by a leather fitting. During the 1800s of the *Edo* Era, this prototype was replaced by an upgrade called *yotsuwari-shinai*. The new type of *shinai* was constructed by four jointed bamboo slats. Such design proved superior flexibility and durability, which is still in favored of by modern *Kendo* (All Japan *Kendo* Federation, 2003).

The new set of training equipment enabled a new system of technique. With the practitioners now properly protected, the sword masters started to revise the *waza*'s and classify them into corresponding striking points on the body (Green and

Svinth, 2011; All Japan *Kendo* Federation, 2003). This stage marked a significant technical transition between *Kenjutsu* and *Kendo*.

The *Meiji* Restoration (1868 - 1912) was undoubtedly a milestone in the history of not only the country and its society themselves but also of Japanese swordsmanship. Along with the vanishing of the *samurai* class, the prohibition of carriage of *katana* and the rapid modernization of warfare, *Kenjutsu* fell into oblivion (Green and Svinth, 2011; All Japan *Kendo* Federation, 2003). Fortunately, *Sakakibara Kenkichi* (1830 – 1894) - the sword master from the school of *Jikishinkage-ryu*, who directly served the *Tokugawa shogunate* and was teaching *Kenjutsu* at the military academy of *Kobusho* – had managed to save the traditional martial art from disappearance. He put on a series of swordsmanship performance, called *gekiken kogyo*, aiming to restore public interest towards the traditional martial art and at the same time generating income for swordsmen who became unemployed due to the Restoration. The act had gained remarkable success and inspired a massive number of sequential performances across the country. Regrettably, the movements, being dubbed “shameful exploitation of once-indelible warrior honor and pride”, received plenty of disapproval from the press and were eventually banned due to the government being cautious of possible rebellion scheming (Green and Svinth, 2011). However, they were triumphant with regards to paving the way for swordsmanship to return to training programs.

Their accomplishment included the introduction and teaching of modified *Kenjutsu* to the Tokyo Metropolitan Police, meaning the recruitment of the former sword masters to the earning positions of teachers of swordsmanship. Owing to *Sakakibara Kenkichi*'s and his fellow swordsmen's efforts, martial arts had later on made their way to the country's educational system (Green and Svinth, 2011). Further

substantial impacts comprised of the establishment of *Dai-Nippon Butoku-Kai* – the official institution which plays the role of nurturing Japanese traditional martial arts - and the publication of *Bushido* by *Nitobe Inazo* (1862 – 1933) – a valuable literature work compiling and examining the warriors’ codes of ethic. By now, as discussed by Green and Svinth (2011), “the martial arts passed through a kind of “civilizing process”, thereby adapting with the times into spiritual “Ways” where warriors not only trained their bodies but also their minds.”

Finally, in 1912, the *Dai-Nippon Teikoku Kendo Kata* – renamed later as *Nippon Kendo Kata* – was introduced. “The establishment of the *Kendo Kata* provided for the unification of many schools to enable them to pass on to later generations the techniques and spirit of the Japanese sword, and to remedy improper use of hands which had been caused by bamboo sword training and to correct inaccurate strikes which were not at the right angle to the opponent. It was thought that the *Shinai* (bamboo sword) was to be treated as an alternative of the Japanese sword” (All Japan *Kendo* Federation, 2003). This set of forms had completed the evolution of Japanese swordsmanship and eventually officialized the terminology and concepts of *Kendo*.

To sum up, *Kendo* is a contemporary sword fighting art that had a long history of evolution: from decapitation technique to structured style of fighting to public performance art and eventually “sportified” martial art. With time, *Kendo* had inherited the technical aspects of *Kenjutsu* and reinvented them into its own system of striking based on corresponding bodily points, using an exclusive set of training equipment as alternatives to the real *katana* and armors. More importantly, in succession to the spirit of *Kenjutsu*, it had established itself as a refined fighting

school, putting emphasis on the duality of physical training and the cultivation of personalities under the ideology of the true “Way”.

1.2.2 THE IDEOLOGY OF *KENDO*

As a result of the transformation of *Kendo*, there was a tendency that some practitioners turned to using dishonest maneuvers merely to score points to win and diverged greatly from the original spirit (Green and Svinth, 2011). In response to this and to further regulate the practice of the art, the All Japan Kendo Federation (2007) had established “Concept of Kendo and Purpose of Practicing Kendo” and “The Mindset of Kendo Instruction and Its Explanation” to officially provide an ideological guideline for training.

It is stated in the document that “The concept of Kendo is to discipline the human character through the application of the principles of the Katana (sword)”. Indeed, the relation to *katana* is undoubtedly vital since *kendo* is an art deeply rooted in the use of real sword. The fighters are supposed to utilize the *shinai* in the same manners they would with a *katana*, including cutting motions, correct part of the sword used, angle of the cut, etc. But most importantly, the fighters are to always assume a spiritual stance which occurred in the fatality of a real duel (Green and Svinth, 2011). In a deeper analysis, Bennett (2009) had discussed that “despite the absence of the ingredient of fear and reality of serious death or injury that warriors of old needed to overcome, the actual process and mechanics for engagement remains fairly much the same, and it is this process that lies at the essence of *kendo*”.

So how is the human character disciplined within that training environment? Just like any other martial arts and sports also, the key of development is to overcome obstacles and hardship to strive for the better. However, to one’s surprise, Bennett

(2009) revealed that in *Kendo*, challenges are not much presented from the opponent though he is superior in skills. What a practitioner exerts himself to win over is his own weak points. The weaknesses of one in *Kendo* are called *shikai* - literally “the four sicknesses of the heart” – consist of “surprise”, “fear”, “doubt”, and “confusion”. Bennett (2009) added:

“For example, when faced with an opponent who is particularly large, has a strong presence, or is renowned for their skill, this could incite fear. If they attempt something unexpected such as a flashy technique, you may find yourself becoming a little surprised. Your opponent may try to entice you into making an attack against your will by leaving a target open for attack. This may cause doubt as you wonder whether it is safe to make an attack. Similarly you may be momentarily confused as to the best course of action or which technique to employ”.

Indeed, the occurrence of only one of the four in a split second might result in one’s defeat. The defeat is not solely losing a point in match, but the spirit being overwhelmed. Conversely, one does not simply win over his opponent by a cut. By successfully doing so, he has won over his own weakness, thus further refines his spiritual character. This ideology suggests the development of a better personality in real life, since surprise, fear, doubt and confusion are undoubtedly the factors adhering to the difficulties one has to prevail over as a human being.

In addition to “Concept of Kendo”, “Purpose of Practicing Kendo” enhances the ideology of *Kendo* with the aspects of building good social relations and a well-functioning society:

“The purpose of practicing Kendo is:

[...]

To associate with others with sincerity,

And to forever pursue the cultivation of oneself.

This will make one be able:

To love his/her country and society,

To contribute to the development of culture

And to promote peace and prosperity among all peoples”.

(All Japan Kendo Federation, 2007)

Regarding the relations between a practitioner and the others, Bennett (2009) commented:

“Your opponent in a match or training is a valuable partner whose cooperation affords you the opportunity to face your fears front-on, with no choice to run away from them”.

Perhaps this is one of the most unique elements of Japanese martial arts. In the warring ages, an opposing swordsman would make all efforts to take one’s life, putting an end to its advancement even with the cost of his own. What a contemporary swordsman do, in contrast, is making opportunities for other to carry on and make progress. Therefore “your opponent should always be respected for their assistance in your progress. If you are successful in striking your opponent, you are teaching them of their weaknesses, and likewise a successful strike made against you is a perfect opportunity to assess your own faults” (Bennett, 2009). In fact, while the cultivation of the self in *Kendo* can be done by individuals, the process would be

greatly stimulated with the cooperation of fellow practitioners. This not only improves social collaboration but also inspires mutual respects, which are foundation to a civilized society.

To sum up this section, the ideology of *Kendo* suggests that the developed physicality and mentality of a practitioner would lead to qualities and traits that come to his aid in living the life. One would be able to stay confident and calm in unfavorable conditions, thus dealing better with problems. Moreover, by keeping on training with other practitioners, one would provide chances for them to grow as human being and encourage them to carry on the expansion of training to nurture a well-functioning society.

1.2.3 COMPETENCY/COMPETENCE

Having thoroughly examined the concept of *Kendo*, the author then went on to find a theory that can define, categorize and explain the mental effects that many practitioners, including himself, had been experiencing in relations with the martial art. What terminology could best generalize the abilities to stay calm and to read other's intention through their actions? What are the skills to establish good social relations? What are the specific abilities that *Kendo* would improve should there be any? While these questions were puzzling his mind, he was introduced to the concept of competency/competence.

First of all, the terms “competency” and “competence” are slightly different in meaning. According to Delamare Le Deist and Winterton (2005), “‘competence’ generally refers to functional areas and ‘competency’ to behavioral areas but usage is inconsistent”. Indeed, in most sources that discuss this theme, these two terms are very regularly interchanged one with the other. Moreover, the author's intention is to

interpret the behavioral demonstration discussed in section 1.1 into personalities and/or specific traits and skills then relate them to those theoretically enhanced by *Kendo*. Therefore, from this point onwards, the author will exclusively use the word “competency”. This also helps maintain the unification and clarity of the paper.

The definition of competency varies in different contexts. In the most general view, it is referred to as “the ability to successfully meet complex demands in a particular context through the mobilization of psychosocial prerequisite (including both cognitive and non-cognitive aspects)” (Rychen & Salganik, 2003, p. 43). “This definition implies that competence is not a static state of human ability, rather is considered to be a dynamic operation and coordination of human resources in dealing with demands in a given context” (Kim, Park, and Youn, 2008).

From the perspective of the field of human resource management, Ennis (2008) stated that “A competency is the capability of applying or using knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviors, and personal characteristics to successfully perform critical work tasks, specific functions, or operate in a given role or position. Personal characteristics may be mental/intellectual/cognitive, social/emotional/attitudinal, and physical/psychomotor attributes necessary to perform the job”. In short, a competent employee should display “knowledge, skill, ability, or characteristic associated with high performance on a job” (Mirabile, 1997, p. 21).

Considering the context of this research, the author chose to resort to Kim et al.’s description (2007), regarding competency as “underlying characteristic of an individual that is causally related to [...] superior performance in a [...] situation” and as “individuals’ autonomous and active involvement in dealing with environments”. Indeed, this description can be closely related to the evidences of high-level

situational reaction and personality attributed to *Kendo*, which were discussed earlier in section 1.1.

Kim et al. (2007) further argued that competencies have four essential characteristics: “wholeness”, “mobilization”, “context-dependency”, and “learnability”.

- “Wholeness” refers to competencies’ inclusion of both perceptive and affective, or physical and mental, abilities.

- “Mobilization” describes the demonstration of the abilities.

- “Context-dependency” refers to the variousness of skills in coping with different situations.

- “Learnability” describe the abilities being obtainable or enhanced through practical involvement in many aspects of life.

In fact, “wholeness” and “learnability” are two characteristics that closely describe the achievements one can attain from practicing in *Kendo* (discussed in section 1.2.2). The former relates to *Kendo*’s emphasis on the duality of physical and mental abilities while the latter to the abilities being acquired by the practitioners, either by themselves or with the help of others, and keep growing better.

Last but not least, regarding the categories of competencies Kim et al. (2007) had concluded with three major spheres of “managing the self”, “relating to others”, and “managing tools”.

While “managing tools” – dealing with information processing skills – does not really have much in connection with *Kendo*, “relating to others” covers the social

aspects of the art. Regarding this domain, “the OECD [*Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development*] presents interacting in socially heterogeneous groups as another key competency. This key competency covers building an effective relationship with others, collaborating, and dealing with conflict” (Kim et al.,2007). These qualities are also ones that prevail in a practitioner who persists in the true Way of the martial art (All Japan Kendo Federation, 2007). At the same time, Kim et al. (2007) added that “those who are competent in interacting well with others are able to open other’s opinions, open to consider the different roles in a variety of situations, and to be aware of other’s feeling”. Even though the quality of recognizing one’s emotions was not exactly what the researcher had achieved, he did experience some situations where he recognized one’s intention. In a larger sense, both skills require and can be attributed to a good sense of connection between one and the other.

The domain of managing self “is related with individuals’ autonomy, one that the OECD proposes as one of key competences for individual’s successful life and a well-functioning society” (Kim et al.,2007). Without a doubt, these two factors are the key concepts of *Kendo* (All Japan Kendo Federation, 2007). They are, again, the ideologies which a cultivated practitioners would be able to achieve as a human being. Furthermore, “this competency deals with personal identity, which enables individuals to understand the large contexts, to create personal life plans and projects, and to claim one’s rights, interests, limits, and needs. In addition to identity, the Ministry of Education in New Zealand (2007) emphasizes self-motivation or a “can-do” attitude” (Kim et al.,2007). In section 1.1, the researcher has discussed the display of tenacity as an indicator of mental achievement of the acclaimed practitioner Alexander Bennett. Regarding the definition of the competency, it is suggested that in his case, *Kendo* had nurtured his resoluteness.

In conclusion, competencies are a set of skills, behaviours, characteristics etc. which allow an individual person to successfully complete a task or perform with superior quality in different situations, under various conditions. Competencies include both physical and mental abilities, are demonstrative with variousness and can be learned and improved in real life experiences. The three major spheres of competencies consist of self-managing, human-relation and information processing abilities.

1.3 HYPOTHESIS

As discussed in the previous sections, competencies share many characteristics in common with the theoretical achievements of a *Kendo* practitioner. They consist of both physical and mental aspects. They enable high quality functioning of individual as well as foster good relation among people, thus promoting successful personal lives and the well-being of society. With all the arguments supported by scientific references and facts stated above, the author hypothesizes that certain competencies are the achievements that *Kendo* practitioners obtain during training. In other words, it is possible that *Kendo* pays certain amount of contribution to the improvements of specific competencies dissimilar to other martial arts.

In order to provide a justification to this statement, the author will conduct further investigation, of which the process, methods and results will be disclosed in the next chapters.

1.4 PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTION

Does *Kendo* pay contribution to the improvement of the hypothesized set of competencies?

1.5 STATEMENT OF RESEARCH

Unfortunately, there are hardly any preceding works in the academia that have thoroughly examined the connection between *Kendo* and competency. Indeed, the author could not find any formerly constructed theoretical framework that could fit in the context of this research.

Among the relevant literature the author had found, Dann's (1978) "Kendo in Japanese martial culture: swordsmanship as self-cultivation" was in the closest domain to this research. His work provides a detailed insight and analysis about the culture of Japanese martial arts, and of *Kendo* in particular, in its close relation with Japanese society. It also discusses the role of *Kendo* in the process of human development and how maturation in *Kendo* performance indicates and supports maturation of the individual – and vice versa - and how both of them contribute to the social and cultural good. However, the spheres of personal cultivation in Dann's research were investigated in the common sense of this term. They were discussed rather in general terminology as "morality", "virtue", "spirituality" etc. than specific "characteristics", "abilities" or "behaviours".

Another remarkable work to be named is "Psychotherapeutic aspects of the martial arts" by Weiser, Kutz, Jacobson and Weiser (1995). This qualitative research project was conducted upon the effects of *Karate* in physical and mental treatment. It describes in details the symptoms and the progresses in cases where the subjects practice the martial art. It also investigates the mental sufferings, such as "anxiety"

and “despair”, and how the practitioners managed to overcome such hardship to become more self-confident and calm. At the same time, in this paper, *Karate* were analyzed from a well-rounded point of view of both its physical and mental ideologies. On the same token, its case-study structure suggests a good methodological solution. Unfortunately, there are certain differences between *Karate* and *Kendo*, and this work went too deep in medical aspects, Weiser, Kutz, Jacobson and Weiser’s paper was not much of a great support in terms of theoretical framework.

It would be a mistake to not mentioning Joko’s “The Leaders of Bushido: A Study of the Leadership Practices of Black Belt Martial Artists” (2009). This quantitative research compares and contrasts the demonstration of leadership ability among proficient martial art practitioners of a large variety of styles and schools. Joko had conducted an extensive investigation upon the physicality, mentality and philosophy of the arts, including *Kendo*, as well as different approaches and theories regarding leadership. The author find his research share several interesting common points with Joko’s since leadership can be closely related with competencies, if not among them. The dissimilarities between the two works, though, lie in the research point views. While Joko stands from the quantitative perspective which examines the overall relations, the author assumes the qualitative counterpart that looks deeper into the characteristics.

In general, the author realizes there has been a gap in the knowledge in the conjunct spheres of *Kendo* and competency (in the specific sense this paper relates to as formerly discussed). Those works which focus deeply in *Kendo* did not theorize the martial art with competency perspective and theories, while competency-related literature did not thoroughly investigate *Kendo*. Therefore, by conducting this

research project, the author aims to contribute to this field of knowledge with his own perspectives and findings. The purpose of this research is to establish an initial connection between *Kendo* and competency and fill in such literature gap.

1.6 PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

In the previous sections, the author had largely investigated the knowledge regarding *Kendo* and competency. In fact, he had constructed a theoretical framework that connects the two concepts. What the research still lacks, however, is convincing evidences collected with a structured and scientifically reliable method. In order to test the hypothesis and turn out with a just conclusion, the author chose to interview the practitioners of *Kendo* and find out if the martial art actually improves their competencies in any way. The outcomes of the interviews would also help determine which of their competencies were improved and which remained unchanged.

The methodology of interviews will be revealed in chapter 3 and their outcomes in chapter 4.

1.7 RESEARCH DESIGN

As it has suggested from previous sections, this research utilized two types of investigation: literature review and personal interview.

Regarding literature, the author sought to cover that related to *Kendo* and Japanese martial arts and competency, as well as academic works which fall into the conjunction of these two domains.

The data collecting process consists of one-on-one interviews with participants being *Kendo* practitioners. The participants are asked questions about their life experiences, of which the answers will show competencies' behavioral indicators.

Due to the natures of competencies' demonstration being varied from one individual to another, the researcher chose to ask open-ended questions so that he is able to reveal more details and look deeply into each case to have the fairest assessment. Besides, the questions asked are ones designed in advance with a fixed set of keywords. This serves the purpose of unified decoding.

Further description and details, along with an analysis of limitation of methodology is included in chapter 3.

1.8 ASSUMPTIONS, LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE OF STUDY

With the interview method stated above, the researcher assumes that all participants reply accurately and with complete honesty to the interview questions. Also, the participants are expected to be able to describe their experiences to their best.

The limitations of the research may include its theoretical framework which was built exclusively by the researcher with hardly any preceding works to support and/or compare and contrast.

The final purpose of the author is to prove that *Kendo* promotes the improvement of competencies, which means the mechanism of the improvements, the degree to which competencies grow, the converse effects of competencies on *Kendo* etc. are not variables being studied.

Further analysis of these factors is covered in chapter 3.

1.9 SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH

The success of this research would pay contribution to the relevant field of knowledge in different ways. Although the literature in *Kendo* and competency has been largely enhanced over the years, there is hardly any research reported in English that addresses these two themes in an interactive relation. The positive outcome of this research would provide an initial knowledge of such relation and fill in the gap in the field.

Even though, through its concepts and ideology, *Kendo* does suggest positive effects on personal cultivation and they had been, in fact, unofficially admitted among practitioners. However, there were particularly few scientific materials that confirmed this statement. This research would provide fundamental understanding of *Kendo* so that practitioners would be able to find their gaining direction of training.

Last but not least, the findings could be used to evaluate a practitioner's progress in *Kendo*. The behavioral characteristics that are described in the research might act as indicators of the improvements in both martial skills and personal abilities. This also suggest a possibility of developing a new evaluation system which could assess *Kendo* practitioners based on their personal and social capability along with the traditional ranking system.

1.10 ORGANIZATION OF CHAPTERS

Chapter 1 introduces the topic, provides background historical and conceptual knowledge of *Kendo* and competency, analyzes the characteristics and establishes a theoretical framework of the two themes, states the hypothesis and research question, discuss the pros and cons of the research and lists the definition of key terms.

Chapter 2 further examines the literature of *Kendo* and competency to support the theoretical framework.

Chapter 3 discusses the methodology used for the research, describes the procedures of research, explains the positive and negative aspects of methods.

Chapter 4 reports the research findings of this study after conducting interviews, analyzes the data.

Chapter 5 presents the conclusion of the research, provides suggestions for further study.

1.11 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Bogu: *Kendo*'s armor

Budo: Japanese martial arts

Dan: *Kendo*'s ranking system

Gekiken kogyo: performance of modified *kenjutsu*

Gi: *Kendo*'s topwear

Hakama: Japanese traditional split-skirt pants.

Kata: *Kendo*'s forms

Katana: Japanese sword

Kendo: "sportified" version of the Japanese traditional swordplay

Kendojo: training halls for *Kendo*

Kenjutsu: Japanese traditional swordplay

Kiai: a focused mental state, also the loud screaming representing such mental state

Kyu: *Kendo*'s ranking system, lower than *dan*

Maai: distance

Reigi: etiquette

Ryuha: a style within a school of Japanese martial art

Shikai: literally “the four sicknesses of heart”, referring to mental weaknesses one tries to overcome in *Kendo*

Shinai: *Kendo*'s bamboo swords

Shinai-uchikomi-geiko: full-contact training using *shinai*

Waza: common term for martial arts' techniques

1.12 SUMMARY

This chapter provided an introduction of what *Kendo* and competency are and how they could be related. The hypothesis, statement of research, purpose of research, and the primary research question was mentioned, followed by the significance of research, limitations and list of key terms.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to properly answer the primary research question stated earlier in section 1.4:

Does *Kendo* pay contribution to the improvement of the hypothesized set of competencies?

The author continued to further research the relevant literature. While the former was the main issue of which solution will conclude the whole research, the latter suggested that the researcher investigate the behavioral indicators of competencies. The aim of this chapter was to provide more support to the hypothesis to strengthen the argument and determine the competencies which are most likely be improved by *Kendo*.

2.1 ADDITIONAL KENDO LITERATURE

With the fundamental characteristics of *Kendo* examined in chapter 1, of which the outcome was the hypothesis that *Kendo* improves competencies, perhaps it is best to develop the research by providing more supplemental literature on the practitioners' perception of the martial art. This will help the researcher get to understand more about how their *Kendo* is practiced and personality cultivated. The process of such cultivation would be revealed through behavioral changes in their daily lives. Knowing that the training and understanding of *Kendo* vary from one individual to another, the researcher's intention was to find the most common patterns of such elements and interpret them into corresponding competencies.

Among the practitioners, the acknowledged masters' acquisition of the best skills and most profound – if not complete – comprehension of the martial art is

unquestionable. This had suggested that the author trace back in history to find the teachings of the forefathers of Japanese swordsmanship. Although *Kendo* had deviated substantially from its predecessor, *Kenjutsu*, in terms of techniques, its spirits were almost fully inherited, especially those regarding the cultivation of the swordsman as human being.

Within the sphere of the ancient knowledge of Japanese swordsmanship, “The Book of Five Rings” was one of the most famous and profoundly influencing works. The book was written by Miyamoto Musashi (1584-1645) – a renowned master who was believed to be the most skilled swordsman in history. He was widely known for his victories in many duels from a young age and also as the founder of Hyoho Niten Ichi-ryu – or Niten-ryu in short – school of sword fighting. Musashi’s “The Book of Five Rings” consists of not only the essentials of *Kenjutsu* but also of strategy, tactics and especially philosophy of life and personal cultivation which he himself had concluded with.

“The Book of Five Rings” includes five volumes, which in turns are Books of Earth, Water, Fire, Wind and the Void/Emptiness. In the Book of Earth, Musashi had provided explanation of the organization of the volumes.

- Book of Earth gives an overview of the art of fighting and how Musashi adopted his own approach. He also argued that “it is difficult to know the true Way through swordsmanship alone. From large places one knows small places, from the shallows one goes to the depths. Because a straight road is made by leveling the earth and hardening it with gravel, I call the first volume Earth, as if it were a straight road mapped out on the ground”.

- Book of Water in general discusses the flexibility and diversity of a Strategist and compare it to the character of Water which takes any form and shape and size and is clear but deep at the same time. This volume also describes the fighting strategies and techniques of Niten-ryu.
- Book of Fire is about fighting attitude and way of thinking. Both of them have to possess the character of Fire: fight with a powerful stance, make oneself large and fierce and think as fast as a fire. The various battling tactics are also mentioned.
- Book of Wind provides analysis and critiques of other schools.
- Book of the Void/Emptiness describes the highest level of discipline of the art. It allows the swordsman to let go of the thoughts that occupy his mind and fight freely.

The reason the author chose to review Musashi's work was because, according to Wilson (2012), the book was not merely a guide for fighters, though written by an acclaimed master of fighting. Indeed, it has "found a much broader readership in recent years. Since its first English translation, its study has been touted as the equivalent of an MBA in Japanese business strategy—a competitive art, to be sure". Most importantly, "anyone whose life involves conflict may benefit from studying the techniques laid out in this slender volume". The teachings within "The Book of Five Rings" – which was based on Musashi's personal life experience and enlightenment - certainly still prove valuable in contemporary settings, not only in the field of military but also daily life.

Among his philosophies of personal cultivation, perhaps determination was the aspect that was most strongly emphasized on. To understand the true Way is definitely a grueling and tedious journey. Indeed, Musashi had spent fifty years of his

62-year-life to come to fully comprehend his Way. And it is even more so to be able to apply the Way and master it. Throughout the length of “The Book of Five Rings”, Musashi constantly insisted on the relentless pursuing of the Way by “studying hard”, “pondering” on the words and “not deviating even a little” from it. Indeed, this is no different from the philosophy of the Way of the Sword – *Kendo*.

Besides, one would easily find the sense of controlling oneself lingering in many parts of the book. Regarding this matter, Musashi provided suggestion that when one is wielding a sword, as well as dealing with other’s Strategy, he must always assume a tranquil mental stance. The sword master also discussed the crucial use of mental attack to gain advantages and stated that one should remain calm all the time with a mind no different than that in non-conflicting situations in order to utilize the Way. Such teachings denote a reference to self-control ability.

At the same time, the spirit of winning, not struggling or conflicting, is one that is strongly demonstrated. Indeed, all the techniques and strategies presented in the book served the one purpose of winning. The sword master himself also exhibits this spirit in the way he argue his Niten-ryu being the true and best Way and unable to lose to any other schools. It is absolute self-belief that was on display.

Lastly, the explanation of the Way is persistently provided in relations with the practitioner’ opponent. Furthermore, Musashi regarded the understanding of the opponent’s strategy, tactic, technique and spiritual stance as vital as understanding oneself in order to seize victor and develop one’s self. Indeed this holds true in the contemporary settings where one’s functioning is always in interaction with others’. The significance of understanding other’s mind in the teachings of “The Book of Five Rings” is out of question.

Besides Miyamoto Musashi's book, the teachings written by Yagyu Munenori (1571-1646) had also covered large domains of personal cultivation. Yagyu was famous for being appointed as the swordsmanship instructor of two of the Tokugawa family's *shogun*'s. His book – named *Heiho kadensho*, translated by Wilson (2012) as “The Life-giving Sword” – was a treatise on his own *Shinkage-ryu* school of swordsmanship, his doctrine as a politician and a display of his philosophy on living the life all at the same time.

In contrast to Musashi's “The Book of Five Rings” which concentrates on the practical side of the Strategy and the Way with detailed technical description, “The Life-giving sword” assumed a point of view deeply connected with Zen Buddhism. As the translate title – which is also the title of the most important chapter – suggests, Yagyu considered the sword a means to save live, though not deny its primary use of killing. In his own school of swordsmanship, he divides the martial art into three tiers: those for the low-ranked soldiers, for the serving generals and for the lords. He regards the third of biggest significance because of its excellence in strategic thinking. While a soldier only fights individually, a lord has to take into consideration the lives of thousands of soldiers. With that said, if one masters the skills and techniques, he realizes the fighting art; one who practice the Strategy can achieve the art of governing.

The three major sections of “The Life-giving sword” include:

- "The Shoe-Presenting Bridge": an introduction to the school of *Shinkage-ryu*, with statements of the principles and a list of *waza*.
- "The Death-Dealing Sword": further technical discussion and explanation of foundational philosophies.

- "The Life-Giving Sword": the final chapter where technical and psychological and philosophical aspects are examined with regard to the martial art as both fighting and personal cultivating device.

Being deeply influenced by Zen Buddhism, the book is full of reference to the discipline of emptiness/nothingness:

“Training in technique is done to transcend training itself, by taking training to the ultimate the swordsman goes beyond the fetters of technique”.

“Swordsmanship can be executed with interference from the mind”.

Even though such references imply meanings far beyond the conventional perception about the training of mentality, they do have connection to some degree with the tranquilization of one’s mind that can be related to self-control abilities.

The influence of Zen also suggests mental training by which one can see through others’ minds:

“Emptiness is a concept that transcends conceptual thinking. With Emptiness a swordsman is able to see the inside and the outside, the active and the pre-active. To be able to judge an opponent's actions before they are manifested. This is achieved through tremendous meditation”.

“Emptiness is the mind of your opponent, the mind has no form and no color and is a void. Buddhism teaches you that the mind is Emptiness”.

“Having no conflicts in association with friends from beginning to end is a matter of seeing into the principles of a relationship, this too is a martial art of the mind”.

These texts discuss the training of understanding other's mind. In relations between a swordsman and others, his calmness, enlightened by Zen, is the key to seize an advantageous position.

In fact, "The Life-giving sword" shares a common perspective with "The Book of Five Rings" in pursuing the Way of learning the art:

"In the Great Learning it says to extend your knowledge to all things, to know people of the world to and understand the principles of all existing things. If you do not understand the principles of things then nothing will come of your actions."

"Studying is a way of making a clean sweep of your mind. What you don't understand obstructs your mind and everything becomes difficult."

For one to comprehend and cultivate the self in the Way, he is required to adhere to and faithfully study these teachings with resoluteness.

Regardless of fundamentally different perspectives in composing the teachings, "The Book of Five Rings" by Miyamoto Musashi and "The Life-giving sword" by Yagyu Munenori both present some common patterns regarding personal cultivation. Both of the books suggest improvements in the recognition and control of self, resoluteness and the understanding of people.

Having examined the patterns of swordsmanship training during the ancient times, the researcher went on searching for literature written by contemporary sword masters so as to understand how the old philosophies have been adapted to the modern society. Among a very limited number of *Kendo* books written in English, Miyazaki Masataka's (2010) "Kendo is my Philosophy" proved worthy of an investigation. This interesting book includes citations from Eastern and Western

philosophers, ancient and contemporary, all to compare and contrast in relations with the theme of modern teachings of *Kendo*. Miyazaki, a Kyoshi 7-*dan* practitioner and a professor of English Literature and Classical Philosophy, had discussed the philosophy of his *Kendo* and also of his life with deep insights. Other themes mentioned in the book include practitioners overcoming life hardship and misfortune, problems of age, life and death and mental excellence.

In the book, Miyazaki looked into the amazing example of Mochida Moriji, known as “The Great Swordsman” in the Showa Era, who was the last one ever awarded the rank of 10-*dan*:

“When he [*Mochida*] mentions ‘old age’, he is philosophically alluding to one’s ‘whole life’ since birth. Mochida passed away at the age of 90 after having trained in kendo for 85 years. Even when he was suffering from a serious illness for three years, to my great surprise I discovered that he had been training his left arm by continuously striking one of his pillows”.

Miyazaki also added that the old age “is thought to be deeply connected with the ‘path’ of a philosophical life. This ‘path’ is long and unchanging and serves one purpose in that it is a path of personal cultivation that meanders continuously onwards until the individual arrives at the signpost marking the end of life”. Indeed, the training of *Kendo* takes a long time and in Mochida’s case it took fifty years until he mastered the basics. But even more so, it was the training of the Self that takes a whole life and a great deal of determination and commitment.

At the same time, Miyazaki refers to the “troubled soul” in *Kendo* and the way to overcome it by cultivating the belief in one’s self:

“Keizo Horigome makes some interesting observations about troubled states of the soul in kendo where mental factors such as ‘surprise, fear, doubt, and hesitation’ [*shikai*] have a large impact on individual performance. He argues strongly that “as the troubles of our soul come from within, we must train ourselves everyday to eliminate them”. In kendo, if we follow the thought of Epictetus, ideally a practitioner should not take confidence in relation to their opponent, but should focus that confidence on themselves”.

To sum up this section, it is suggested that the practitioners of swordsmanship from the ancient to the modern ages have been training themselves not only in the Way of the sword but also the Way of cultivated personality. Even though it differs, one swordsman from another, in the philosophies and approaches of training, the cultivation mostly covers the spheres of recognizing and controlling one’s self, determination to get better and the understanding of other people.

From the perspective of competency research, the author then interpreted such characters into more specific terms that can be related with the setting of contemporary life to further enhance his argument. The author now hypothesized that the training of *Kendo* improves four competencies which are positive self-image, self-control, tenacity and interpersonal awareness.

2.2 BEHAVIORAL INDICATOR OF COMPETENCY

The initial phases of research on *Kendo* and competency had resulted in the construction of the hypothesis and research question mentioned earlier. In order to test this hypothesis, it is suggested that the author conduct interviews with *Kendo* practitioners to find out if the participants’ competencies were improved in any way

during training. Therefore, the author went on to investigate the methods that can justify such improvements.

According to ISC Professional (n.d) – a leading provider of interview skills coaching - “Competency-based interviews (also called structured interviews) are interviews where each question is designed to test one or more specific skills. The answer is then matched against pre-decided criteria and marked accordingly. For example, the interviewers may want to test the candidate's ability to deal with stress by asking first how the candidate generally handles stress and then asking the candidate to provide an example of a situation where he worked under pressure”. Besides, “Competency-based interviews (also called structured or behavioural interviews) are more systematic, with each question targetting a specific skill or competency. Candidates are asked questions relating to their behaviour in specific circumstances, which they then need to back up with concrete examples” (ISC Professional, n.d). It is suggested that to examine one’s competency, the researcher will have to examine, a set of corresponding behaviors. In other words, if a participant displays behaviors representing a competency, it can be concluded that he or she possesses that competency. Also, structured behavioral interviews would allow the author to compare and contrast competencies among the participants thanks to their unification in format.

To prepare for the interview, the author had found a list of indicators of the four behaviors mentioned in the last section which *Kendo* possibly improves. The following was obtained from the documents of Victoria University of Wellington (n.d), The National Life/Work Centre (n.d) and Government of British Columbia Canada (n.d):

- **Positive self- image:** believe in oneself, be stimulated by challenging goals, be confident in one's ability to overcome obstacles, display confidence while taking on new responsibilities, emphasize the positive aspects of difficult situations etc.
- **Self-control:** remains calm when personally attacked, keeps things in perspective despite fatigue or frustration, cope effectively with ambiguity, works effectively under tight deadlines etc.
- **Tenacity:** stick with a problem until it is resolved, repeatedly push others to do something, demonstrate unflagging energy in pursuing a problem, keep trying to achieve a goal despite encountering obstacles, demonstrate repeated efforts to complete a task etc.
- **Interpersonal awareness:** see things from others' viewpoint, draw inferences about others' concerns and interests, understand the unspoken meaning in a situation, sense others' emotional states and ways of thinking, detect the concerns, interests or emotions which seem to lie behind what people say, be aware of the feelings of others etc.

2.1 SUMMARY

To sum up, in chapter 2 the author had examined supplemental literature to further enhance the theoretical framework of the research and, more importantly, specify the competencies likely be improved by *Kendo* as well as construct a theory by which the hypothesis can be tested.

The results of the research will be disclosed and analyzed in chapter 4 and conclusion drawn in chapter 5.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to find out whether *Kendo* contributes to the improvement of human competencies, a set of methods had been exclusively developed. Chapter 3 is written to provide description of and explanation about the research methods used. The details regarding literature or research subjects will be covered in other chapters. This chapter is divided into four sections: 1) Statement of research methodology, 2) Description of methods, 3) Phases of research and 4) Limitations of methodology.

3.1 STATEMENT OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research approach was adopted to design this research. Berg (2001) had stated that “quality refers to the what, how, when, and where of a thing- its essence and ambience. Qualitative research thus refers to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things”. Indeed, the main focus of the research is to evaluate the competencies of individual *Kendo* practitioners by means of their corresponding behavior interpretation. On the other hand, since varieties of background, lifestyle, training condition, training level etc. should not be neglected, such behaviors may display over a wide range. This requires a flexible approach to each individual, yet a uniform structure to serve the purpose of data interpretation. Also, competencies, as discussed, are reflected in behaviors. Therefore, qualitative approach is necessary because it allows the author to observe and thoroughly examine the participants’ behaviors.

This research project’s methodology consists of two types of investigation: literature review and personal interviewing.

As defined by Boote and Beile (2005), literature review is “an evaluative report of studies found in the literature related to your selected area. The review

should describe, summarize, evaluate and clarify this literature. It should give a theoretical basis for the research and help you determine the nature of your own research”; and it “goes beyond the search for information and includes the identification and articulation of relationships between the literature and your field of research”. The researcher’s purposes of doing literature review are:

- To gain understanding about *Kendo* and human competencies
- To give a justification for the research topic
- To make sure the research is not a replication of any preceding work
- To compare and contrast the theory with previously developed theories
- To support the research theoretically
- To outline flaws and/or gaps of previous research
- To find out how the research project will contribute to the current knowledge of the field

And also:

- To refine the topic and narrow down the number of competencies which are most possibly influenced by *Kendo*.
- To get familiar with relevant concepts and terminology of *Kendo* and competencies
- To build a theoretical framework which connects *Kendo* and the improvement of competencies
- To identify the key issues within the theoretical framework
- To develop a hypothesis and argument that *Kendo* does help improve competencies

Literature review is an obligatory part of research, and it is as much vital for a research project closely related to the ideology of *Kendo*. With *Kendo* being deeply rooted in *Kenjutsu*, it is suggested that the author trace back to the very origin of *Kenjutsu*'s ideology to attain a proper comprehension of its modern counterpart. Such knowledge can be best acquired via the documented teachings of sword masters of the old ages. These teachings are the true essence of the art that the masters, after years and years of fighting and studying, had come into conclusion with. Without this knowledge, it is impossible to build a connection between swordsmanship and competencies.

At the same time, examining documented teachings written by contemporary sword masters is also crucial. These works reflect the application of the ancient ideology in the modern setting and thus play the role of bridging the theory to the practical daily life. They pick up where the old teachings left off.

Last but not least, the literature about competencies is to be handled properly. The research topic requires understanding of the concept itself, as well as knowledge of its mechanism: how the competencies are formed, categorized and displayed etc. Human competency is a complicated theme that involves different fields including psychology and education. Therefore, relevant information is to be obtained and treated adequately.

To sum up, a thoroughly conducted literature review will largely benefit the research project in terms of outlining research framework, keeping the research on track and ensuring the accuracy of the outcome.

With regards to personal interview in social science research, Kvale (1996) had stated: "With qualitative research interviews you try to understand something

from the subjects' point of view and to uncover the meaning of their experiences. Interviews allow people to convey to others a situation from their own perspective and in their own words. Research interviews are based on the conversations of everyday life. They are conversations with structure and purpose that are defined and controlled by the researcher". Also, qualitative interviews are categorized into a) informal conversational interview, b) general interview guide approach and c) standardized open-ended interview (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). Considering the purposes of this methodology, the author chose to conduct standardized open-ended interviews. The openness enables the interviewees to reveal their experiences and opinions more freely and diversely, allowing the author to focus on different details that help answer his questions, according to Turner (2010).

In general, personal interview is the method that best complements literature research in this project. It helps researcher get to know each individual research participants better, thus come to understand the mechanism of competencies in every single personality. Indeed, it is the most useful tool to test whether the hypothesis holds true in the real life setting or not.

3.2 DESCRIPTION OF METHODS

This section describes how the aforementioned methods are applied in this research project.

Regarding literature, the author collected and reviewed all sorts of material relevant to human competencies and *Kendo*. While the former was largely achievable, the latter required more thorough examination. Even though the author, being a practitioner himself, had reached a certain level of training and understanding of the martial arts, most of his relevant knowledge was obtained directly via training and

communication in informal ways. This is due to the nature of *Kendo* being a traditional martial art, passing through different generations mostly in the form of interactive training. And it holds true to all others such as Judo, Aikido, Kyudo and so on. However, an academic research is one that is strictly based on concrete proofs. Therefore, so as to provide the most convincing supports to the research, the author had found established documents of teachings of *Kendo*. These works are widely acknowledged and usable for academic works.

By the same token, the interviews were specifically designed so that participants were free to speak their mind and able to reveal their experiences to the fullest details. The settings where interviews were conducted were comfortable, informal and suitable for long talk. Interview schedules were carefully chosen as well to ensure that interviewees were absolutely available. Since the participants are recruited orally, the author provides a verbal consent including all relevant information to make sure that they can make informed decision about whether to participate. All this was done to prevent any possible misunderstanding, legal issue or pressure upon interviewees.

Trial interviews had also been conducted in order to test and refine interviewing techniques and tools beforehand. The four interviewees presented in the research were the officially chosen ones.

As stated in Section 3.1, standardized open-ended interviews were to be used. The language of the interview questions was simple and clear, allowing complete understanding of the researcher's intentions and concerns as well as paying attention to the freedom of expression on the respondents' behalf. The questions regarding different aspects were asked separately, allowing interviewees to fully focus on one

matter at a time. Different sections of the interviews were announced clearly to prevent confusion.

Interview questions were based on the competencies' behavioral indicators which show during their life experiences in relations with *Kendo*. Even though their forms might vary flexibly to suit different situations of the conversations, they were specifically phrased with a fixed set of key words so that the author could decode the data in appropriate term later on. At the same time, this eliminates any kind of biasing connotation in such multi-participants research. These questions could range from “How **confident** were you taking on new responsibilities earlier in your life/during your age of 30s?” or “How often would you keep making **repeated efforts** to complete a task?” or “What can you **guess** about one's **emotion** from interacting with him or her?” to “Would you **remain calm** were you arguing with you parents?” or “Could you see the **positive aspects** of difficult situations during that period of your life?”. The interviewer might raise more specific questions focusing on different details and experiences varied with every individual respondent. Questions were also given in advance to the interpreter to confirm fully comprehensible interpretation into Japanese.

Since the author only speaks Vietnamese and English, in the cases of interviewing Japanese speakers, an interpreter was in charge of interpreting the conversation from English into Japanese and vice versa. Not only the interpreter's skills proved efficient for accurate information transmission, he himself also had good knowledge in *Kendo*. This enabled the author to ask more technical questions.

During the whole conversation, the researcher remained completely neutral. All emotional expressions were kept as mild as possible. On the other hand, the

researcher encouraged interviewees to give detailed responses, along with keeping the environment friendly and comfortable. A relaxing manner was adopted to conduct the interviews.

The main tool used by the author for interviews was a voice recorder. The machine was of high quality and capable of recording long tracks without any disruption. It was also carefully set up and placed so as not to distract the interviewees in any way. The author hardly took note because it was unnecessary with the help of the recorder. Moreover, it was important to maintain positive contacts with respondents and keep the conversation going smoothly.

The criteria of selecting research subjects were simple while aimed to attain the most accurate results. The purpose of this research, again, is to find out whether *Kendo* contributes to the improvement of competencies. If the hypothesis would be true, it should have an equal chance to occur to any practitioner (even though it might not be to all practitioners!). Therefore, research participants were chosen on a random basis in terms of age, genre, family background, education, occupation, nationality and years of *Kendo* experience. The detailed accounts of the interviewees are provided along with the interview results in Chapter 4.

However, the author limited the research population to only *dan* holders. This was done to make sure that the chosen interviewees had undergone a decent amount of training and achieved a certain level of understanding of the martial art. Such practitioners should more likely be able to apply the art into their daily lives. It also helped minimize mistakes in attributing improvement of competencies to the practice of kendo while the true cause might have been other activities and/or experiences. It was because the system of *dan* is an official system worldwide which evaluates, with

justice, the fulfillment of techniques as well as the comprehension of the ideology of *Kendo* of the practitioners via many different principles, ranging from clothing to etiquette to proper execution of techniques. On that account, those who passed such examination should prove qualified for the research.

3.3 PHASES OF RESEARCH

This section describes the steps in which the research was conducted. These steps are mentioned in chronological order.

The author started out with doing literature review in the two main themes: *Kendo* and human competencies. In spite of the fact that the author is a *Kendo* practitioner himself who had a decent amount of knowledge of the martial art, he intended to find published documents as well as other reliable sources in order to build a solid foundation for the work.

On the other hand, the author was new in the field of competency. For that reason, he examined plenty of sources related to such field and established a structured theory, consisting of concepts, patterns, mechanism etc., as a support for the research.

In the second phase, the author combined the understanding of *Kendo* with the theory of competencies so as to find common characteristics between the two factors. A theoretical framework was developed to link *Kendo* to the improvement of human abilities.

After further research on such common characteristics, in phase three, the author hypothesized that *Kendo* does improve certain competencies. This helped narrow down the topic and specify the aim of the research.

With the hypothesis clearly formed, the author would then go on to the fourth phase looking for further information to test it. With the theoretical foundation carefully examined, he was now finding factual information via interviewing real life *Kendo* practitioners.

In the fifth phase, the author would summarize the outcomes of the interviews to find out whose and which competencies were improved among those asked.

Based on the provided individuals' details, phase six would carry out an analysis on whether such improvements were brought about by the practice of *Kendo* or by any other factors. At this point, an accurate conclusion to the whole research would be drawn.

3.4 LIMITATIONS OF METHODOLOGY

Although the research was carefully designed and conducted, there are still limitations and shortcomings to it.

First of all, the author's Japanese language skills were insufficient to find, read or understand Japanese materials related to *Kendo*. He had to completely rely on sources which were originally written in or translated into English. This prevented the author from examining exclusive Japanese materials. Nevertheless, the selected English materials were from reliable sources, which can make up for this shortcoming.

The author also was not able to interview Japanese-speaking research subjects adequately. The interpreter, though speaks fluent English and Japanese, was not always available. This reduced the flexibility in setting the interview schedules. However, it did not affect the procedures and/or the results of the interviews.

Secondly, the building of theoretical framework had to cope with difficulties of lacking preceding research works in the theme of *Kendo*. The amount of published academic research on *Kendo* and its contribution to the daily life was scarce. Although the publications on *Kendo* are diverse and of good quality, more scientific works are needed to contribute to the academia of this topic. During the literature research phase, the author found mostly research works on the physicality of the martial art – analysis of movements in *Kendo*, anatomy of injuries in *Kendo*, reducing bacteria and odour in *Kendo* equipments etc. – and there was hardly any report regarding the mental aspects of *Kendo*. The author had to construct his theory from the ground with little scientific support.

Finally, the research subject selection criteria still have shortcomings. Choosing to include only *dan* holders (“*yudansha*”) in the research, the author left out *kyu* holders (“*mudansha*”). Although the *yudansha*’s are more likely to have higher amount of training and deeper understanding about the martial art, thus more likely to be qualified for the research, there are some individual *mudansha*’s who may also have achieved the fulfillments equal to *yudansha*’s but, for different reasons, have not taken grading tests for *dan* promotion. The author had also witnessed cases where practitioners could achieve remarkable competent improvement within a relatively short period of time after they started *Kendo*, which took place even before the occurrence of their technical achievements in training. However, such special cases are few and may not represent the major population of practitioner.

The research participants were selected from the locality of Beppu city, Oita Prefecture, Japan since it was most convenient for the author to do so. This may diminish the diversity of the research outcome. The lacking of advanced level

Kendoka (7-dan and 8-dan) in the selection of interviewees was also due to local unavailability.

The researcher also did not cover occupation, education and family background as research variables. In spite of the fact that these elements affect the formation and enhancement of competency, they do not alter the manner in which the participants practice *Kendo*. The descendants of *Kendo* families, should there be any, would be treated equally as other practitioners. Despite their advantage of being introduced to *Kendo* since early childhood, these descendants remain in question whether they benefit from the martial art in terms of mental maturity.

By the same token, it is hard to analyze research subjects who are both high in age and experienced in *Kendo*, as well as those who engage in large varieties of social activities and/or occupation. The problem with these people was that it is difficult to separate competent achievements brought about by *Kendo* and those by their living experiences. It is even more so because of the nature of *Kendo* being in a mutually interactive relation with the aging process. Regarding such matter, the author tried to obtain further details which allow more accurate data interpretation via interview. For instance, an interviewee claimed to have his self-image competency improved by taking part in both his school's *Kendo* club and baseball club. It puzzled the author about whether *Kendo* did contribute to the improvement or it was baseball that solely did. The author then raised questions to compare and contrast the two activities: which one did he take up first (*Kendo* or baseball); what did he think about the competitiveness in *Kendo* and baseball etc. The answers of these questions are the key to determine the role of *Kendo* in his achievement. The aim of this research is to confirm the function of *Kendo* on its own so the contribution of other activities is irrelevant.

With all the analysis of limitations stated above, the author decided to adhere to the initial selection criteria. However, a different methodology will be built to fully address aforementioned issues in the future projects.

3.5 SUMMARY

The design of this research was created on a qualitative approach. There are two types of investigation used: literature review and personal interview. The relevant literature includes that of *Kendo* and competency and works that fall into the conjunct of the two themes.

The interview participants are *Kendo* practitioners who possess the rank of *dan*. Other factors like age, genre, family background, education, occupation, nationality and years of *Kendo* experience are on random basis. Interview questions are open-ended and aimed to investigation the participants' behavioral indicators of competencies.

The methodology contains limitations such as the researcher's incompetence of Japanese language which affected literature review and interview processes, the lack of preceding theoretical framework and the limitation of choosing participants due to locality.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH RESULTS

This chapter describes the findings of the research. It includes the statement of purpose, research question, interviewing procedures and research results with regards to the refined hypothesis mentioned in chapter 2.

4.1 STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to determine whether *Kendo* improves four competencies of interviewees, which are positive self-image, self-control, tenacity and interpersonal awareness. The role that *Kendo* plays in the process of their improvement would also be deduced.

4.2 RESEARCH QUESTION

As stated in the previous chapters, the primary research question which this research project was conducted to answer is:

Does *Kendo* pay contribution to the improvement of the hypothesized set of competencies?

4.3 INTERVIEWING PROCEDURES

The author started out by designing the interview questions. As described in chapter 2 and 3, the questions are open-ended and based on the behavioral indicators of the four competencies mentioned earlier. However, the initial questions were in general terms and were used as outlines of contents for interview. Based on those outlines and the situations, the researcher altered the questions to get most details. Examples of these questions were provided in chapter 3.

During the interview process, apart from trial interviewees, four participants were officially recruited and all of them had fully answered the questions and completed the interviews. The interviews were conducted separately on different days, in Japanese language and with the assistant of the interpreter. The participants and interpreter were in good physical and mental conditions and under no pressure of time or space or affected by external interferences. They also had complete understanding of the research topic.

The locations where the interviews had been conducted included school halls and restaurants. These places were comfortable, informal and served the long talks well. Every interview was fully recorded. A relaxed manner was adopted by both the researcher and the participants throughout the conversations. All the participants were assured that their personal information would not be disclosed under any circumstances.

The interviews were purposely divided into four separate sections with different sets of questions corresponding four competencies. The beginning and ending of each section were also announced clearly. The participants fully understood the questions and responded appropriately.

4.4 RESEARCH RESULTS

This section summarizes the outcomes of the interviews and is divided into four sub-sections corresponding four interview participants.

4.4.1 PARTICIPANT “A”

Genre: Male

Age: 20 years

Experience: 8 years

Rank: 3-*dan*

Before taking up *Kendo*, “A” was a shy and introvert person. When he first came to *Kendo*, he “felt very awkward having a *shinai* and actually hitting opponents with that”. His *Kendo* teacher also said he was “too kind” and that he “had to have some aggressiveness to actually move forward in *Kendo*”. “A” said that he had no problem communicating with people, but he found it difficult to state his own opinions. However, during secondary and high school, that issue was getting better. “A” claimed that the change was because of *Kendo*. He explained that as he got older, he gradually became a senior member of the *Kendo* club. “A” said because of the influence of the senior-junior relations in Japanese culture in his club, he “naturally” became one who had the responsibility to manage and “nurture” the junior members. And the condition was the same regarding his life at school. “A” stated he was “strict” to his juniors and he believed it was the best way to pass down *Kendo* and train the younger generations and also to convey his ideas to others. However, he claimed that outside of *Kendo* he was more like a friend than a senior.

Before *Kendo*, “A” was already playing baseball. He believed, in “sports” like baseball and *Kendo*, there are “goals to achieve” as well as “obstacles to overcome”. They are all in a “process” that one has to “endure”. In that sense he had “learned to endure” well in life. He also related the role of “team play” in baseball to *Kendo*. In baseball, he “had to keep up with other team members to achieve the goals”. However, in *Kendo*, even though there are team fights, the actual matches are one-on-one, so the goals are also more individual. Because of that individuality, he “saw

more weaker side” of himself as he strove for the goals, hence tried harder to improve them.

“A” stated that during *Kendo* his ability to read others’ intentions had been improved. “A” referred to the sword fighting of the old ages when one needed to predict one’s opponent’s moves to win and survive and stated that it still holds true in *Kendo* and he had learned the skill through the martial art. When asked about how he applied that skill in daily life, he made an example of him attending a meeting. He said he would “try to be in a calm position” and assume “a posture” from which he could handle anything that popped out even though they might “anger” and “upset” him. He could not give “an estimation of how much or the percentage he could see through people” but if one has “a proper posture to receiving what other people said, it is possible to lead them in the correct way”. What he usually did was he “poke people intendedly” to upset them so that he could see how they react. He accredited the learning of his tactic to *Kendo* and did what a practitioner would do: “to feint a move to open them up”.

4.4.2 PARTICIPANT “B”

Genre: Male

Age: 61 years

Experience: 48 years

Rank: *Renshi 6-dan*

“B” has a great belief in his own abilities and is confident in solving problems in his life. He has an “original personality of being positive”. Even though he admitted there were “things in life that he got surprised or shocked about”, he always

used his “intelligence and mentality” along with the past experiences as support and managed to overcome such things. He attributed that ability to *Kendo*’s teachings and his experiences as a former police officer.

“B” referred to one of his experiences when he was in the police force. He was in an explosive removal squad, who were to put on protective gears while carrying out their duty. When he was on duty himself, he failed to put on the gears. He said “if it were to explode I’d rather be blown apart than having a hand missing or being blind”. He admitted it was a wrong attitude because if accident had happened to him, his seniors would have had to take responsibility. In fact, he was scolded by his seniors. Still, despite his verbal confirmation of changing his manner on duty, it happened many times. “B” said he did so because he was in his 20s. However, the seniors also gradually became trusted in him.

He further added that partly due to his attitude at work, he sometimes got into fights with his colleagues. He regretted some of those cases but generally speaking he was the one who “endured” the problem until it eased up to solve it. He knew if he reacted right away it would more likely be worsened because the only thing he could see was the situation and his emotions themselves, but the consequences. Whenever he had such problems, he went to *Kendo* practice and “going all at it”. He said by spending all his energy, *Kendo* helped his mind become “blank” and release the stress.

Another experience to remember was when he volunteered to teach *Kendo* in a *dojo* full of primary school kids. While he paid a great effort on teaching the essential basics, especially the right etiquettes, the kids and their parents did not treat it with respect. All they wanted was “B” teaches the kids techniques so that they could win

the tournaments. He ended up leaving the *dojo* after teaching for three years since the conflicts were unable to solve. “B” explained his emphasis on that method of teaching that “it was okay for the kids to lose back then. If they were to concentrate on the right manners then, it would lead them to victory later on”. But, he said, “the parents, all they saw in the situation was winning or losing” and they were “ignorant” about what he said. To him, teaching the *Kendo*’s core values, which are also human values should be top priority. In that sense, it was the parents who upset him most. That was why he left.

Regarding the relations with people, both inside and outside *Kendo*, he emphasized on the “*maai*” [distance]. “If the distance were too close, there’s a possibility that you’re having a conflict with them. For example: if you were in a position where you’re too much into one person’s privacy or they’re too much into your privacy, there’re gonna be some kind of conflict. So it’s important to understand and control the distance between the person and yourself. It’s not about running away but having a correct distance to have a correct relation with the person. [...] In life, the distance might be close but it doesn’t mean you’re all the way together because you need to leave some room for the person to move around as an independent person”. “B” mentioned the situation with his wife: she was into *Arashi* [Japanese group] and whenever they were on TV, B had to stay away. That way, when he went to take a bottle of *sake*, his wife would not interfere. “B” admitted when he was young he did not understand that well and made mistakes in relations with people.

4.4.3 PARTICIPANT “C”

Genre: Female

Age: 18 years

Experience: 3 years

Rank: *2-dan*

Originally and before *Kendo*, “C” used to have problem talking to people. She even had problem stating opinions to her close friends. But since her taking up *Kendo*, because the “bonds” between members within the *Kendo* circle were “really strong”, she was “enabled to speak herself out more. And even if she made any mistake, that wouldn’t be any problem and they’d just welcome it”. Also, when she started out, she could not vocalize *kiai* well but later on she became able to do it loud with power. She confirmed that as she improved her *kiai*, her confidence was also improved too. Before *Kendo*, she also did not have confidence to take on new responsibilities. If there were an election, she would always avoid it. Since starting *Kendo*, she came to realize what she really wanted to do and chose to do it. If she were to be assigned to some managerial post in the *Kendo* circle, she would be glad to handle it.

Before *Kendo*, when conflicts happened, “C” was shy to express her own opinion and attitude, which usually led to her opinion being ignored or overpowered. Such cases changed with *Kendo*. She gave an example that sometimes her parents told her to pass a *Kendo* practice to do something else but she explained to them how she would prefer *Kendo*, because she liked it, and ended up going to practice without having to fight with them. *Kendo* was also accredited for training her willingness to cope with difficulties. She did not always succeed in dealing with tough conditions or multiple tasks at one time, but *Kendo* made her willing to “challenge and finish them off”.

In *Kendo*, “C” encountered with a couple of technical difficulties. The way she had been dealing with them was to invent and practice many kinds of cross-training repeatedly. She claimed to improve her *Kendo* that way.

“C” stated that most of the obstacles her had been facing in her life so far came from relations with people, especially friends. She “had trouble getting into the group”. Even though she did receive advice from teachers, she failed to apply their advice. At the same time, she had trouble with friends in *Kendo* circle as well during the first two years in high school. In her third year, though, she began to understand her friends, both inside and outside *Kendo*, and became closer to them.

“C” admitted she was not able to read other’s intentions in *Kendo* well yet. However, “C” claimed she could guess other’s emotion or intention to some extent in daily life. She was not sure if such ability was related to *Kendo*, but after starting *Kendo*, at some points, she “started thinking of what they are trying to say behind what they said”. She felt that, because of *Kendo*, though she could not see it clearly all the time, “the focus on that was much bigger”. Also, she was able to realize the change in attitude of other people. An example being a student not hanging out with his group of friend anymore, she could see that it was because they had trouble with one another, they might not like the other any more.

4.4.4 PARTICIPANT “D”

Genre: Male

Age: 44 years

Experience: 15 years (from 7 to 15 year-old; then from 37 to 44)

Rank: 3-*dan*

“D” regarded self-confidence rather a matter of one’s own character than one developed by *Kendo*. He said there might have been changes to some aspects but he was too small when he first started to realize. “D” was also one who is “driven” by challenging goals. The more demanding the requirement is, the more determined he became to fulfill it. He was a founding member of a *Kendo* group in the city where he gathered his peers to practice. “D” said because the older *Kendo* teachers and seniors were, to him, quite conservative in training style, he set up the group to be able to train his own way.

He admitted he was not really good in staying calm. But because of *Kendo* he had gained some level of it. He provided an example about a film festival he participated in the past in New York. He had to speak English – which he was not proficient in – and got even more anxious since it felt to him to some extent like he was the “one who represented Japan”. He said it seemed that people from other countries regarded Japanese people as best self-controlled people. While he was not quite one of those, he tried to restrain his anxiety. “D” kept reminding himself he is a *kenshi* – swordsman – and a *kenshi* was supposed not to be “openly-panicky” under any circumstances. He actually managed to use that mentality to bring down the nerves and it “went pretty well”. Another story was about his quitting smoking. “D” used to smoke a lot and attempted to quit some times but to no success. But later on, when he took up *Kendo* again, he totally got rid of it. He attributed such “willpower” to the martial art.

Regarding solving problem, his method was to analyze the cause of it, thus finding possible solution. When he had managed to specify the solution, he would adhere to it rigorously and “never to run away”. Even if the initial plan failed, he would pick up with another and keep on. It happened the same in his *Kendo*. Due to a

gap in “D”’s *Kendo* background, he dealt with several problems restarting it. Also, as his training progressed, he was dealing with an increasing number of technical difficulties. He said he tried to solve them by practicing diligently in different ways: on his own, with partners and thinking about *Kendo* all the time.

Regarding relations with people, because “D” was running his own business of photos shooting and filming, he was to meet a lot of people. And every time he met someone, especially new acquaintance or customer, he used the skills that he also used in *Kendo* to examine their character. Such skills included eye contact and/or observing body movement. “D” stated he almost “did it sub-consciously as a side-effect of *Kendo*” and “didn’t have to think twice about it”. Most of the time he figured out the intentions and emotions of others and came up with the ways to deal with them effectively. He claimed even in situations where there were language barriers, he still managed to do so. For “D”, he did not practice *Kendo* solely on and because of this skill, but it was like “a big bonus” to him.

4.5 SUMMARY

The interviews had been conducted with firm adherence to the purpose of study. All four participants had responded to the questions with enthusiasm and to the fullest details. The research results had come out with the desired level of content. The analysis of research results and conclusion of the research is disclosed in chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

As mentioned throughout the research, the primary research question is:

Does *Kendo* pay contribution to the improvement of the hypothesized set of competencies?

This final chapter briefly summarizes the methods, approach and findings, draws conclusions from the research results and provides recommendations for further studies or research areas related to the field of *Kendo* and competency.

5.1 METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

This research was designed from a qualitative approach. The phases of research included:

- Initial literature review
- Theoretical framework and hypothesis construction
- Further literature review
- Interview
- Data analysis and conclusion

5.2 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The interviews had been conducted with regards to the methodology and approach, primary research question, hypothesis and purpose of study stated earlier. All four participants had fully responded to the questions with enthusiasm,

comprehension and desired level of detail. The results of the interviews were summarized in chapter 4.

Again, the purpose of this study was to determine whether *Kendo* improves four competencies of practitioners, which are positive self-image, self-control, tenacity and interpersonal awareness. The experiences of participants, revealed in the interviews, are analyzed with regards to the behavioral indicators of these four competencies:

- **Positive self- image:** believe in oneself, be stimulated by challenging goals, be confident in one's ability to overcome obstacles, display confidence while taking on new responsibilities, emphasize the positive aspects of difficult situations etc.

- **Self-control:** remains calm when personally attacked, keeps things in perspective despite fatigue or frustration, cope effectively with ambiguity, works effectively under tight deadlines etc.

- **Tenacity:** stick with a problem until it is resolved, repeatedly push others to do something, demonstrate unflagging energy in pursuing a problem, keep trying to achieve a goal despite encountering obstacles, demonstrate repeated efforts to complete a task etc.

- **Interpersonal awareness:** see things from others' viewpoint, draw inferences about others' concerns and interests, understand the unspoken meaning in a situation, sense others' emotional states and ways of thinking, detect the concerns, interests or emotions which seem to lie behind what people say, be aware of the feelings of others etc.

This section discusses and interprets the outcomes of the research. The details of the participants are examined separately and generalized in the conclusion section.

5.2.1 PARTICIPANT “A”

Participant “A” had grown from a shy young boy into an example of a senior member of the circles. As he was getting older, he gradually took the responsibility of taking care of his juniors, both inside and outside *Kendo*. However, considering the profound influence of the senior-junior relations in Japanese culture and society that he mentioned – which gives the seniors a somewhat dominating power - his attainment of confidence should rather be attributed to his advanced age than *Kendo*. Other than a brief reference to *Kendo*, participant “A” mainly focused on his confidence towards his juniors. His weak points earlier in his life, which were “too kind”, lack of “aggressiveness” and “difficult to state opinion”, had somewhat been solved as he grew, since he was now “strict” and insisted on a rigid style of passing the ideas. However, those attitudes were only towards the juniors. In addition, his friendliness in the more informal settings outside of *Kendo* could either be a hint of an easy-going person or a not-very-confident person being taken from his sphere of power. Generally, participant “A” did not show convincing indicators of positive self-image competency.

Participant “A” was a determined athlete who sets his own goals to pursue. He referred to both *Kendo* and baseball as his device for training himself. He clearly understood the different mechanisms of the two and compared and contrasted them clearly. He also confirmed of the ability to “endure” the processes of life, among which were his 8 years in *Kendo* and a longer period in baseball, and has actually achieved some of their goals. The indicators of tenacity competency were in display in participant “A”. However, he mentioned and, to some extent, categorized *Kendo* as

“sports”. This might show that the role of *Kendo* in his improvement of tenacity was a kind of physical training rather than mental or philosophical.

Regarding the relations with people, participant “A” had applied *Kendo* tactic well: “to feint a move to open them up”. He showed good understanding of the philosophy of *Kendo* in relating to the opponent as well as the “proper posture”. He could recognize and knew how to manipulate people by their emotions. At the same time, he also learned to control himself. If he became emotional, he would be able to maneuver the situations. Indeed, his tactics in dealing with this matter were similar to that adopted by Miyamoto Musashi (1645). Participant “A” showed clear indicators of self-control and interpersonal awareness competencies.

5.2.2 PARTICIPANT “B”

Being a *Kendo* master, he clearly comprehended the philosophies of *Kendo* and applied them well in his personal cultivation.

Possessing an “original personality of being positive”, he had great belief in himself. Even though he had encounters tough situations, his attitude was what brought him forwards. His self-confidence also demonstrated in his daredevil act of not wearing protective gears when removing explosives. Even though he attributed his attitude to *Kendo*, his statement was rather weak. The author found his positive self-image was more of an inborn character.

However, *Kendo* did help him in stressful situations. Even though he was an “enduring” type of person and knew the disadvantages of his temper, he still needed stress-relief activities. In this case, *Kendo* acted as a physical treatment, which helped him remain calm, thus improving the mental endurance. *Kendo* should be accredited for his self-control competency.

Besides, his story about the *dojo* with small kids revealed his great tenacity. In spite of the fact that the kids and their parents did not treat his teachings of *Kendo* with respect, he still insisted on his way. Moreover, he also demonstrated great determination in *Kendo* himself by insisting on its long-term purpose of cultivating the personality, rather than short-term victory. And only after three years of putting all efforts to change the others' attitude, but of no use, did he give up on his task. That was undoubtedly a great demonstration of tenacity supported by *Kendo*.

Last but not least, he referred to an interesting case between him and his wife with regards to their relations. A man at his age would least likely be interested in contemporary groups like *Arashi*, but knowing his wife's preference, he managed to keep his position at a good distance to not interfering her. It was clear that after a long period in life living together, he should be one who understands his wife most. But his applying of swordsman's tactics in this case displayed his high level attainment in the martial art. His reference to "*maai*" reminded the author of Musashi's teachings regarding the use of extra-short or extra-long swords (1645). Neither could defeat a properly distanced swordsman. Participant "B" has absolutely gained great interpersonal awareness competency.

5.2.3 PARTICIPANT "C"

Participant "C" was a really shy person. However, she could compare and contrast her behaviors during the process of *Kendo* training well. Before *Kendo* she was introvert and could not communicate with confidence. However, since started *Kendo*, her confidence was improved to some extent. The clearest evidence should be her doing *kiai*. Generally, *kiai* refers to the focused mental stage of practitioners, which also means and indicator of determination to fight. Consequently, a loud *kiai* represents a healthy personality. Besides, the practice of *kiai* has always been an

awkward experience. Participant “C”’s good *kiai* was a display of her improved self-confidence. Also, the setting of the *Kendo* circle, which had “strong bonds” between members, nurtured her personality. In fact, her description of the circle could be related to the optimal *Kendo* setting promoted in the “Concept of *Kendo*” (All Japan *Kendo* Federation, 2007). Participant’s “C” reference to her willingness to take a new responsibility was good evidence as well. Additionally, with her mentioning of pure technical training, *Kendo* was like a physical training device for her positive self-image.

The ability to control herself was not demonstrated as clear, though. Regarding such matter, participant “C” could only provide one weak example of how she managed herself in conflict. In fact, the situation with her parents could not be generalized as an indicator, because the conflicts between family members are more likely and easy to be settled than between strangers or other social relations. Therefore, her self-control competency has not been justified.

Similarly, participant “C” failed to give example of her determination in daily life. Even though she demonstrated good spirit and effort in training *Kendo*, no further evidence was presented. Her endurance regarding issues with her friend could not be seen as one. The improvement of her relations with friends was essentially resulted from their being together during the three years in the same school and the good environment of the *Kendo* circle itself rather than from *Kendo*. Participant “C”’s tenacity was not displayed.

Finally, her interpersonal awareness competency was also not improved. Her experience regarding this competency was vague and could not stand as indicator. Even though she did realize a sour relation between the person and his group of

friends, cases like this were clear to understand and did not require any improved skill more than that possessed by an ordinary person.

5.2.4 PARTICIPANT “D”

Despite his great gap in his *Kendo* career, this participant had achieved good skills with *Kendo* to some aspects.

He himself had great self-confidence to start with. He believed in his ability so much that he felt more stimulated the more challenging the goals were. His establishment of his own *Kendo* group was also a good example. The task of managing such group required not only *Kendo* skills, but also management, negotiation, communication skills and reputation as well. It was nothing like an easy task. However, since he had great positive self-image originally, and he himself did not specifically attribute his ability to *Kendo*, the contribution of *Kendo* to this competency was unjustified.

His example of keeping calm in such situation was of great value and justification. Although he could speak some English, he was nowhere near proficiency. Considering his tough situation where he not only had to keep his face but also – as much as he felt – the reputation of his country, his English skill would in fact be diminished further. However, by adopting the spirit of a swordsman – he managed to stay calm and finish his task well. Indeed, this example reminded the author of Zen Buddhism-influenced teachings of Yagyu Munenori (2012) and Miyazaki (2010) to remain tranquil under any circumstances. His self-control competency should be attributed to the training of swordsmanship.

His indicators of tenacity were also demonstrative. The two examples given included his quitting of smoking and his return to *Kendo*. Firstly, giving up smoking,

especially to heavy smokers, should be one of the hardest tasks. In fact, he had failed many times doing so. But as soon as he took up *Kendo* again, he finally succeeded. Secondly, it was his past experience in *Kendo* that helped him in restarting it. In dealing with technical difficulties, he utilized his “will power” to train even harder, thus managed to get back in shape. Furthermore, his generic reference to his pursuing the determined solutions to problems, as well as pursuing the problems themselves, which “happened the same in my *Kendo*” had also solidified the indicators of his tenacity.

Last but not least, participant “D” had displayed the application of *Kendo* philosophy in dealing with people in life. Although he admitted that he did not practice *Kendo* to purposely train such tactic, he received it naturally. He claimed to succeed most of the time and more importantly, he “did it sub-consciously”. He was definitely proficient in the tactic, and even more so because the inability to contact verbally could not diminish his skill. Again, the application of “the eye to observe” by Musashi (1645) was demonstrative and it is a clear representation of interpersonal awareness competency.

The research results had suggested that *Kendo* does help improve four competencies: positive self-image, self-control, tenacity and interpersonal awareness. In this section, the author has examined the behavioral indicators of competencies of all four research participants. Their competencies being improved by *Kendo* are summarized below:

- Participant “A”: self-control, tenacity, interpersonal awareness

He adopted a somewhat athletic approach to *Kendo*. Although he demonstrated good knowledge about the philosophy of the martial art, his benefit from *Kendo* mainly came from its physical aspects (efforts in training, feinting attacks).

- Participant “B”: self-control, tenacity, interpersonal awareness

This participant benefited largely from *Kendo* from both physical (stress-relief) and mental (pursuing of true spirit, concept of distance) aspects. His innate strong character had also helped him with his achievements.

- Participant “C”: positive self-image

This participant had a conventional, “high school student” approach to the martial art. Her lacking of improved competencies could be resulted from many factors: lack of experience, serene personality (due to being a girl), lack of understanding of *Kendo* philosophy, young age etc.

- Participant “D”: self-control, tenacity, interpersonal awareness

Participant “D” had a somewhat special background of *Kendo* with considerable years of gap. Still, he benefited remarkably from training in *Kendo*, mainly from its mental aspect (swordsmen’s mentality, sensing other people).

The next section will draw the final conclusions of this research.

5.3 CONCLUSION

The results from this study indicate that *Kendo* does in fact contribute, to some degree, the improvement of the set of competencies hypothesized; positive self-image, self-control, tenacity and interpersonal awareness. Nonetheless the degree of the improvement varies from one individual to another. As the *Kendo*’s ideologies

had suggested, the martial art cultivates competencies with its physical, mental and philosophy aspects.

It can also be deduced that while *Kendo* can be trained in plenty of manners and approaches, it still demonstrates positive effects on practitioners. However, it takes time for a practitioner to get to a certain level to benefit from the martial art. Furthermore, it suggests that conventional approach without deep understanding of *Kendo* may not result in positive improvements in competencies.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

As a narrowly focused research, this project could not avoid certain limitations and flaws. Other researchers may further develop this topic based on the following aspects: designing different data collecting method, focusing on practitioners of one of the sexes, examining the competencies of *kyu*-holding practitioners etc.

The recommended topics for future research may include: the competency demonstration of 7 and 8-dan *Kendo* practitioners, the role of age in *Kendo*, the effects of competencies on the training of *Kendo*, the differences in training benefits in different sexes, the varieties of approaches to *Kendo* etc, Orientalism in *Kendo* etc.

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