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The Effect of Special Exercises on the Effectiveness of Counter and Compound-Counter Attacks for National Youth Judo Players

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ABSTRACT: This study is directed towards determining how certain exercises influence the performance of counter and combined counter-attacks by youth judo practitioners. The researcher applied the experimental way on two groups (group with no training, and group undergoing training) using tests before and after the intervention. The target audience of the study was 43 young judo players competing at 2025 Iraqi Championships. After that, a random sample composed of 32 players was recruited, and the participants were divided into two groups: the experimental group and the control group (16 participants in each). The specific exercises were carried out for three months (5 exercises were held during a week with duration of each of them lasting 15 to 30 minutes). Results of the study revealed that there were significant improvements in the experimental and control groups in terms of performance of counter-attacks and combined counter-attacks with the experimental group scoring better than the control one. The researcher suggests inclusion of counter-attack and combined counter-attack exercises into youth training program to make this method of youth training more efficient.

INTRODUCTION:

Judo can be considered an Olympic martial art due to its complex nature. The sport's physical, technical, tactical, and psychological demands work together over a short period of time where rapid changes and constant rhythm occur. In judo, success depends on how quickly an athlete can react to the changing elements of a match, choose the right strategy at the right moment, and perform the techniques properly. Therefore, tactics are one of the most important aspects of success in judo.

With the increasing development of regional and international competitions, increased speed of the game, and variability of styles both in attacking and defending, the level of athlete success in judo is now determined not only by the individual skills and techniques mastered by the athlete but also by how high quality skills and tactics are applied in a combination way. In contemporary times, the success level of an athlete in judo can be defined through their abilities to integrate skills and tactics, changing between attack and defense quickly, and taking advantage of the mistakes of other opponents to earn points and win. In addition to that, the modern rules of judo contribute to the increasing importance of tactics that are based on the initiative and being able to attack at the right moment.

The experience in practice and technical analysis of youth competitions, especially at the level of national teams (due to the fact that the researcher is an ex-international and member of the Iraqi Judo Federation administration), provides evidence that many players fail to turn their defensive actions into effective attacks or maintain their tactical effectiveness while fighting with opponents who can attack and defend their position. This can be proved by the reduction of scoring rate or lack of tactical control at the most important moments of the match, which shows the necessity of developing exercise and training methods that can contribute to increasing the performance of judo players. Also, it has been stated that “In contemporary judo, sport relies greatly on the combination of skill execution with tactical actions, especially in such situations where the athlete needs to switch from attack to defense instantly” (Franchini & Artioli 2013). From this perspective, the counter and combined counter

will be pointed out as created approaches corresponding to the present requirements of judo. The application of this approach is related to the sequence of skillful and tactical processes that happen during one situation. The approach begins with forcing the opponent to make the first step or blocking his attack in such a way that creates the opportunity for making the highly effective combined counter. This becomes possible due to the perfect timing of action and the fast decision-making process, as well as the ability to analyze the movements of the opponent and possess the skills necessary to perform a combination of various offensive actions simultaneously.

The youth age group is a crucial stage in developing a well-rounded athlete, representing a transitional phase between advanced learning and the demands of high-level performance. This makes developing combined tactical aspects an urgent necessity for preparing athletes capable of competing at the highest levels. Hence, the importance of employing modern exercises methods based on the scientific analysis of performance and utilizing assistive technologies such as video analysis to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of tactical performance.

The significance of this research lies in two main aspects: its scientific importance and its contribution to enriching the literature related to tactical exercises in judo by addressing the counter-attack and combined counter-attack as a structured exercises approach. In addition to its practical importance, it provides an applicable exercises program for youth coaches that enhances the ability to capitalize on the opponent's attack and turn it into decisive points or situations, and raises the efficiency of performance during the fight by improving the speed of transition between situations and the accuracy of timing, which is reflected in the results of the competitions.

RESEARCH PROBLEM:

Modern judo is characterized by rapid transitions between attack and defense, and its increasing reliance on tactical sequences and capitalizing on the opponent's mistakes in short, decisive moments. Through technical observation of youth matches, the researcher noted that some players – despite possessing a good skill set – do not achieve the expected level of competitive performance due to poor reading of the opponent's attack and timing of the appropriate response, as well as limited use of complex actions within the counter-attack.

Therefore, the research problem is represented by the following main question: What is the effect of the specialized exercises prepared by the researcher on developing the effectiveness of counter-attack and combined counter-attack performance among young judo players.

Research Objectives:

- To identify the effect of specialized exercises on the effectiveness of counter-attack and combined counter-attack among young judo players.
- To identify the differences in the effect of specialized exercises on the effectiveness of counter-attack and combined counter-attack among young judo players.

Research Hypotheses:

- There is an effect of specialized exercises on the effectiveness of counter-attack and combined counter-attack among young judo players.
- There are differences between the post-test measurements of the control group and the post-test measurements of the experimental group in terms of attack effectiveness, favoring the experimental group.

Research Procedures:

Research Methodology:

The researcher adopted the experimental method with a two-group design (control and experimental) using pre-test and post-test.

Research Population and Sample:

The research population consisted of young players participating in the Iraqi championships for the 2025 season, totaling 43 players representing Iraqi clubs. A random sample of 32 players was selected, with 16 players in the control group and 16 players

in the experimental group. The total sample represents 74.41% of the population. Players who achieved first-fourth place at the national level in Iraq were selected to participate in the research experiment and exercises methodology.

Performance Measurement and Evaluation Tools:

The study was greatly aided by the assistance of a panel of three qualified judges from the Iraqi Judo Federation. An evaluation form was handed out amongst them, which assigned points to the athlete on a scale of 50. The form serves to reflect the judge's perspective regarding the athlete's competence in applying counter-attacks and combined counter-attacks in his performances (working with a partner).

Instrument Validity and Reliability: The researcher verified the content validity by presenting the evaluation form to experts and specialized judges to ensure its comprehensiveness and the clarity of its items. The reliability of the judging was also verified through a pilot application and the calculation of a correlation/agreement coefficient between the judges' scores before finalizing the results.

Pre-Tests

The pre-tests were conducted on November 11, 2025, with the research sample in the exercises hall of the Iraqi Judo Federation in Al-Bayaa, adjacent to the Second Karkh Education Directorate, under standardized conditions and procedures. Exercises Methodology (Specific Exercises)

The researcher designed a set of exercises specific to the counter-attack and combined counter-attack styles (two skills, three skills). The exercises consist of skill sequences that begin with a response to an attack by the opponent. The player then breaks the opponent's movement sequence with a suitable skill, followed by the completion of an attack sequence composed of two or three skills. The difficulty and complexity were gradually increased according to the structure and sequence of the skills, in accordance with the requirements of judo.

The exercises were implemented starting on November 18, 2025, and continued for three months, with two exercises sessions per week. The exercises were incorporated into the main part of the general exercises session, lasting between 15 and 30 minutes, resulting in a total of 24 exercises sessions. The researcher gradually increased the intensity from 70% to 100% of the maximum intensity. Post-tests

After the completion of the specific exercises, post-tests were conducted on February 17, 2026, under the same conditions as the pre-tests. The results were then entered into final data collection forms for appropriate statistical analysis.

Statistical methods:

The researcher used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to perform the statistical analyses.

Presentation, Analysis, and Discussion of Results:

Presentation, analysis, and discussion of the results of the counter and compound-counter attacks accuracy test for the control and experimental groups:

Presentation and analysis of the results of the t-test for the differences between the pre- and post-test results for the control and experimental groups in the counter and compound-counter attacks accuracy test:

Table (1) shows the arithmetic mean of difference, deviation of differences, calculated t-value, error level, and significance of the differences between the pre- and post-test results in the counter and compound-counter attacks accuracy test for the control group.

Tests	Unit of Measurement	Arithmetic mean of difference	Standard deviation of differences	Calculated t-value	Level (Sig.)	Type sig
Counter and Compound-	Score	3.500	1.049	8.174	0.000	Sig

Counter Attacks Accuracy						
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The tabulated t-value (2.571) is at a significance level of (0.05) for degrees of freedom (16 - 1 = 15).

Table (2) shows the arithmetic mean of difference, deviation of differences, calculated t-value, error level, and significance of the differences between the pre- and post-test results in the counter and compound-counter attacks accuracy test for the experimental group.

Tests	Unit of Measurement	Arithmetic mean of difference	Standard deviation of differences	Calculated t-value	Level (Sig.)	Type sig
Counter and Compound-Counter Attacks Accuracy	Score	11.167	0.408	67.000	0.000	Sig

The tabulated t-value (2.571) is at a significance level of (0.05) for degrees of freedom (16 - 1 = 15).

Presentation the results of the percentage change between the pre- and post-test scores for the control and experimental groups in the counter and compound-counter attacks accuracy tests are presented and analyzed.

Table (3) Arithmetic means in the pre- and post-tests, the difference between the two means, and the percentage improvement in the counter and compound-counter attacks accuracy test for the control group

Tests	Unit of Measurement	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Difference	Improvement Rate (%)
Counter and Compound-Counter Attacks Accuracy	Score	39.0	42.5	3.500	8.975

Table (4) shows the arithmetic means in the pre- and post-tests, the difference between the two means, and the percentage improvement in the counter and compound-counter attacks accuracy test for the experimental group.

Tests	Unit of Measurement	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Difference	Improvement Rate (%)
Counter and Compound-Counter Attacks Accuracy	Score	37.167	48.333	11.167	30.046

Presentation and analysis of the t-test results between the control and experimental groups in the post-test for the accuracy of counterattacks and combined counterattacks.

Table (5) presents the means, standard deviations, calculated t-value, error level, and significance of the differences between the control and experimental groups in the post-test for the counter and compound-counter attacks accuracy.

Tests	Unit of Measurement	Control group		Experimental group		Calculated t-value	Level (Sig.)	Type sig
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Counter and Compound-Counter Attacks Accuracy	Score	42.500	4.037	48.333	3.669	2.619	0.026	Significant

The tabulated t-value (2.228) is at a significance level of (0.05) with (30) degrees of freedom.

Effect Size: The effect size for the post-test comparison between the two groups was estimated using Cohen's coefficient (d) based on the t -value and the sample size ($n = 16$) for each group. $d \approx 0.926$, which is practically a large effect. The intragroup effect size (d_z) was estimated using $d_z = t/\sqrt{n}$. For the control group, $d_z \approx 2.043$, and for the experimental group, $d_z \approx 16.750$. The large d_z for the experimental group is explained by the lower dispersion (deviation) in the post-test results and the larger magnitude of improvement.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The research results (Tables 1-5) showed a significant improvement in the accuracy of counter-attack and combined counter-attack performance in both research groups, with the experimental group clearly outperforming the control group in terms of the degree of improvement and percentage of development. These results can be explained in light of the principle of exercises specificity and the neuromuscular coordination resulting from repeated practice situations that simulate real combat, in addition to organizing exercises within skill sequences (two and three skills) that develop decision-making and motor timing.

First: Discussion of the Control Group Results (Before-After)

Tables 1 and 3 provide evidence that there are significant differences of importance in terms of the post-test results ($t=8.174$, $p=0.000$); this means that the average score increased from 39 to 42.5, which is equal to 8.975% of development occurrence. Even though the increase is lower than the experimental one, the improvement is not surprising when normal exercises workload is maintained, as the improvements in tactical performance take place in steps because of a long-time exposure to specific exercises and situations (randori). This complies with the findings of Sterkowicz and co-authors, who claimed that better skill performance implies mastering throws within coordination program, which links different skills and tactics (Sterkowicz et al., 2000). The same can be claimed with the help of technical assessment that provides evidence of the fact that the competitive performance improvement needs to organize exercises sessions according to the characteristics of the fight process (Franchini et al., 2013).

Second: Discussion of the experimental group results (before-after).

The data in Tables 2 and 4 showed a very significant improvement in the post-test ($t=67.000$, $p=0.000$), with the mean increasing from 37.167 to 48.333, representing a 30.046% improvement. This leap indicates that the exercises focusing on counter-attack and combined counter-attack techniques successfully enhanced the efficiency of transitioning from defense to offense by activating the "action-reaction" principle and linking skills within a single movement sequence. This result aligns with (Sacripanti's) theory, which emphasized that the effectiveness of modern judo is linked to the ability to combine skills in successive sequences (combination) or to transform an opponent's action into a direct offensive opportunity (action-reaction) (Costache, 2010; Jerri, et al., 2024; Radhi, & Obaid, 2020). Furthermore, studies analyzing fights indicate that capitalizing on an opponent's momentum and responding quickly with combined or counter-techniques is associated with winning proficiency in combat sports, and that developing decision-making and timing skills is a crucial factor in the success of a counter-attack (Loio Pinto et al., 2020).

From a skill-strategic development perspective, exercises players to read their opponent's intentions through kumi-kata (hand gestures), entry angle, and displacement trajectory enhances their ability to choose the appropriate response in a short time. Studies on hand modeling in judo have shown that hand shape directly determines possible attack and defense options. Therefore, exercises hand-related stances enhances a player's readiness to make more accurate counter-attack decisions (Loio Pinto et al., 2020).

Third: Post-test comparison between the two groups.

The results in Table (5) show significant differences in the post-test in favor of the experimental group ($t=2.619$, $p=0.026$), with the experimental group's mean score being (48.333) compared to (42.500) for the control group. These differences indicate that incorporating counter-attack and combined counter-attack drills into the main part of the exercises unit for three months is sufficient to produce a clear advantage over regular exercises. This finding aligns with judo technique and tactics reviews that confirm exercises focused on a specific tactical pattern (such as the counterattack) enhances performance efficiency more than general, non-specific exercises (Pérez-Gutiérrez & Gutiérrez-García, 2011). Furthermore, analyses of high-level bouts demonstrate that the most effective attack systems are not simply individual attacks, but rather are linked to the context of the

grip, movement, and angle of entry—variables that can be targeted with compound exercises similar to that employed in this research (Lopes-Silva et al., 2024)

Fourth: Interpretation of Effect Size.

The effect size for the post-test comparison between the two groups was ($d \approx 0.926$), a statistically significant effect. This indicates that the differences are not only statistically significant but also have practical implications for competition results. This trend underscores that designing exercises as short, semi-competitive situations (15–30 minutes) with progressively increasing intensity up to 100% helps stabilize the rapid motor responses specific to the counterattack. These responses are also linked to the physiological demands of judo, which are characterized by short, repetitive periods of exertion within an exertion/rest ratio of approximately 2:1 to 3:1 (Franchini & Artioli, 2013).

Fifth: The results are linked to the nature of modern judo rules.

Documents from the International Judo Federation indicate that modern rule modifications aim to make fighting more dynamic, encourage initiative and decisiveness, and reduce passive play patterns. This increases the importance of exercises in rapid transitions from defense to attack and capitalizing on opportunities (Marcon et al., 2013). Therefore, focusing on counter-attacks and combined counter-attacks aligns with the general trend of competition development and provides young athletes with practical tactical tools for scoring and minimizing penalties.

Thus, the results support the research hypotheses, demonstrating a significant improvement in post-test scores within both groups and a clear advantage for the experimental group. This indicates the effectiveness of the proposed exercises methodology in developing the accuracy of tactical performance in judo among young athletes.

CONCLUSIONS

- Exercises in counter-attack and combined counter-attack techniques proved highly effective in improving the performance accuracy of young judo players, compared to regular exercises.
- A clear and significant improvement was observed in both groups in the post-test. However, the degree of improvement and rate of development were significantly greater in the experimental group (30.046%) compared to the control group (8.975%).
- The post-test showed significant differences between the two groups in favor of the experimental group, confirming the effectiveness of incorporating targeted, combined tactical exercises into the exercises program.
- The large effect size ($d \approx 0.926$) indicates that the effect of the methodology is not only statistical but also practical and can be reflected in the results of actual competitions.
- Exercises players in skill sequences (two-to-three skills) within sparring situations enhances their ability to transition from defense to offense and improves their timing and decision-making efficiency.

Recommendations

- Incorporate counter-attack and combined counter-attack drills into youth and junior exercises programs, with consistent weekly doses within the main exercises session.
- Implement a gradual increase in the complexity of skill sequences (from two to three skills) with a gradual increase in intensity to ensure the stability of motor responses without a sudden increase in workload.
- Emphasis is put on training kumi-kata grip positions, entry angles, and dislocation as the most important factors for successful counter-attacking.
- Video analysis and an established refereeing system shall be utilized to measure performance efficiency during competitive exercises, correlating feedback with some indicators (such as timing, skill selection, and using opponent's speed).
- Additional research is necessary to investigate the above-mentioned aspects for other age groups, such as juniors, youth, or advanced competitors, as well as for other parameters, like scoring efficiency, penalty rate, or tactical controlling indicators.

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Appendix (1) Counter and Compound-Counter Attacks Exercises (10 exercises) the following exercises are presented in English and Japanese to support the practical application of the counterattack and combined counter-attack technique in judo exercises.

No.	English	Japanese (日本語)
1	Drill 1: Grip-bait + counter combination (Seoi-nage → Ouchi-gari) Goal: rapid defense-to-attack transition with 2-technique chain. Execution: Uke attacks Seoi-nage; Tori absorbs (taisabaki), counters with Seoi-nage entry, then immediately finishes with Ouchi-gari. Dose: 4×6 reps/side, 60 s rest.	ドリル1: 複合カウンター（背負投-大内刈） 目的：防御から攻撃への素早い切り替え（2連続技）。 方法：受が背負投を仕掛ける。取は体捌きで受け流し、背負投の入りをカウンターし、そのまま大内刈で仕上げる。 量：左右各4×6回、休息60秒。
2	Drill 2: Kuzushi stop → combo finish (Ouchi-gari → Koshi-guruma) Goal: exploit opponent reaction after stopping momentum.	ドリル2: 崩しで止めて複合（大内刈-腰車） 目的：止めた後の反応を利用する。

	Execution: as Uke drives forward, Tori controls sleeve/lapel, uses Ouchi-gari as a stop, then instantly switches to Koshi-guruma. Dose: 3×8 reps, 60–90 s rest.	方法：受が前に圧をかける時、取は袖・襟を制して大内刈で止め、すぐ腰車へ切り替える。 量：3×8回、休息60～90秒。
3	Drill 3: Counter vs Uchi-mata (Tai-otoshi → Kouchi-gari) Goal: read rotation and chain two attacks. Execution: Uke attacks Uchi-mata; Tori pivots outside, executes Tai-otoshi, then immediately adds Kouchi-gari to break the base. Dose: 4×5 reps/side.	ドリル3: 内股への複合カウンター（体落-小内刈） 目的：回転方向を読み、2連続で攻める。 方法：受が内股。取は外へ体捌きし体落、その直後に小内刈で支え足を刈る。 量：左右各4×5回。
4	Drill 4: Counter vs hip throw attempt (Sasae-tsuri-komi-ashi → Osoto-gari) Goal: change angle from inside to outside. Execution: as Uke attempts hip entry, Tori unloads backward, blocks with Sasae-tsuri-komi-ashi, then transitions to Osoto-gari. Dose: 3×6 reps.	ドリル4: 腰技への複合カウンター（支釣込足-大外刈） 目的：内側から外側へ角度を変える。 方法：受が腰に入る。取は後ろへ荷重を抜き、支釣込足で止めてから大外刈へ移行。 量：3×6回。
5	Drill 5: Throw-to-hold chain (Ouchi-gari → Kesa-gatame) Goal: immediate standing-to-ground continuation. Execution: after a successful/partial Ouchi-gari, follow to the mat and secure Kesa-gatame within 3 seconds. Dose: 5 rounds × 45 s on / 45 s off.	ドリル5: 投げから固めへ（大内刈-袈裟固） 目的：立技から寝技へ即時につなぐ。 方法：大内刈の後、すぐ追い込み、3秒以内に袈裟固を作る。 量：45秒×5本（休息45秒）。
6	Drill 6: Double response to opponent pull (Kouchi-gari → Seoi-nage) Goal: exploit backward pull/retreat. Execution: when Uke retreats/pulls back, Tori uses Kouchi-gari to replant the foot, then instantly enters Seoi-nage. Dose: 4×6 reps.	ドリル6: 引きへの複合（小内刈-背負投） 目的：後退・引きの反応を利用。 方法：受が下がる/引く時、取は小内刈で足を戻させ、すぐ背負投に入る。 量：4×6回。
7	Drill 7: Counter vs Osoto-gari (Gaeshi → Tai-otoshi) Goal: flip the axis then finish with a second technique. Execution: on Osoto-gari attack, Tori performs a gaeshi (reversal) and immediately turns into Tai-otoshi to complete the action. Dose: 3×5 reps/side.	ドリル7: 大外刈への複合カウンター（返し-体落） 目的：軸を返して2手目で仕上げる。 方法：受が大外刈。取は返しで切り返し、そのまま体落へ連結して完結。 量：左右各3×5回。
8	Drill 8: Fast decision drill (3 cues = 3 combos) Goal: increase decision speed under pressure. Execution: coach calls cue (1/2/3). Each cue corresponds to a preset combo (e.g., 1: Seoi→Kouchi, 2: Tai-otoshi→Ouchi, 3: Sasae→Osoto). Execute immediately after Uke initiates. Dose: 6 rounds × 30 s on / 30 s off.	ドリル8: 高速判断（合図3つ-複合3パターン） 目的：プレッシャー下での意思決定速度向上。 方法：指導者が(1/2/3)を指示。各番号に複合技を割り当て（例：1=背負投→小内刈、2=体落→大内刈、3=支釣込足→大外刈）。受の動き出し直後に実行。 量：30秒×6本（休息30秒）。

9	Drill 9: Constraint randori (fixed attack, combo counter only) Goal: competition-like application with tactical control. Execution: coach restricts Uke to a single attack (e.g., Uchi-mata). Tori must respond using a 2- or 3-technique counter chain within 5 seconds. Dose: 4 rounds × 2 min.	ドリル9: 制約乱取り（攻撃固定-複合カウンター） 目的：戦いに近い状況で戦術を整理。 方法：受の攻撃を一つに限定（例：内股のみ）。取は5秒以内に2～3連続のカウンター複合で返す。 量：2分×4本。
10	Drill 10: 3-stage counter combo with timing (Kouchi-gari → Seoi-nage → Ouchi-gari) Goal: build a three-technique counter chain. Execution: on push-pull exchange, start with Kouchi-gari to disrupt the base, enter Seoi-nage, then finish with Ouchi-gari if resistance occurs. Dose: 3×4 reps/side, 90 s rest.	ドリル10: 3連続複合（小内刈-背負投-大内刈） 目的：3段階の複合カウンターを構築。 方法：押し引きの攻防で、小内刈で土台を崩し、背負投に入り、抵抗が出たら大内刈で仕上げる。 量：左右各3×4回、休息90秒。