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The Psychological Factors Influencing Athletes' Sports Performance

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Abstract

The present study aims to analyze the psychological factors influencing athletes' sporting performance, focusing on the interaction between motivation, competitive anxiety, self-confidence, and toughness. To achieve this, a quantitative approach was employed, utilizing questionnaires distributed among student-athletes from various sports majors at the college level.

The findings revealed a clear and direct relationship between self-confidence and intrinsic motivation, both of which were linked to improved sporting performance. In contrast, it was found that high levels of competitive anxiety negatively impact performance, manifesting in issues such as lack of concentration, poor decision-making, and increased body tension. Furthermore, the research identified psychological resilience as a crucial factor that serves to buffer against the adverse effects of stress and anxiety during competitions. Notably, more resilient athletes demonstrated greater fortitude in recovering from failures and maintaining composure under pressure.

These results underscore the importance of adopting a balanced approach to both psychological and physical development during training. Consequently, the study emphasizes the value of incorporating mental conditioning as an integral component of sports training programs. It recommends that coaches, educators, and sports psychologists implement targeted interventions focused on fostering motivation, self-confidence, resilience, and effective anxiety management, ultimately assisting athletes in reaching their maximum potential and performing consistently at a high level.

Keywords: Psychological Factors, Athlete's Sports Performance, Social Cognitive Theory

Introduction

Mental well-being is a crucial factor in an athlete's performance, as psychological aspects such as motivation, stress management, confidence, and concentration have a significant influence on success in sports. This study investigates the relationship between these psychological factors and peak performance, with the goal of identifying methods to enhance mental strength and improve athletic achievements. Physical fitness is essential; however, it is also crucial for an athlete to be in the right state of mind for a particular competition, as this state is shaped by motivation, anxiety, and other psychological factors that are vital to the athlete's success. Earlier studies maintain that mental toughness, self-efficacy, concentration, support, goal setting, mindfulness, and resilience combine to create the basis upon which athlete performance is measured (Jones *et al*., 2007; Bandura, 1997; Orlick & Partington, 1988 [14]).

The research was conducted to investigate the relationship between observational learning, self-efficacy, and social support as predictors of athletic performance in schools. In terms of observational learning, it is apparent even at this time in the explanation of understanding through their and his self-efficacy. Some have developed a keen interest in related and understandable observations, having seen and heard others draw forth the gathered results of their behavior as they learn how to perform. Ashford, Edmunds, and Craven, in a 2018 research paper, indicated that athletes can learn new technical skills or strategies simply by observing expert models, and that the personality of the model and feedback are vital to this process. Not the least of which is self-efficacy: the belief by the athlete in his capacities to succeed. The review by Feltz, Short, and Sullivan (2017) presented sufficient evidence to demonstrate a strong connection between self-efficacy and athletic performance across various sports. O'Brien, Jones, and Smith (2019) have researched how self-efficacy can be developed through various interventions to enhance the performance results of athletes. This is the comfort, care, and assistance that can be perceived by the athlete, as opposed to the information they would receive from others, and thus forms an important source of psychological well-being and performance. Freeman, Hardy, and Callow (2018) have positively linked social support, whether from a coach or peer, with athletes' coping abilities in stressful situations and effective performance. Further investigated in studies of Chen, Li, and Wei (2020) were the various sources of social support available to athletes and their relative contributions to performance-related variables.

Performance problems have been plaguing a few University of San Jose Recoletos (USJ-R) teams. As a result, the researchers began investigating the psychological and team dynamics-related variables that underlie these problems. While there is extensive literature on the various individual psychological aspects that affect sporting performance, limited research examines the interaction between individual psychological aspects and team dynamics, such as team cohesion and communication, about athletic performance within the university sports context, like USJ-R. This study aims to fill that gap by investigating the effects of various team factors and individual psychological factors, such as motivation, stress management, attention, and social support, on the performance of athletes from USJ-R. The ultimate application is thus to recommend approaches to performance enhancement, considering both team and individual perspectives, for coaches, sports psychologists, and athletes.

Theoretical Background

Several psychological factors affecting the performance of athletes are established theories that depict the complex interplay between personality characteristics, the environment, and learned behaviors. One of the most prominent theories is Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), which postulates that behavior is shaped through reciprocal determinism, meaning that there is an ongoing interaction between personal, behavioral, and environmental factors. Following this thread highlights the importance of observational learning, self-efficacy, and social support, all of which are crucial to understanding sports performance within that specific framework. Through observation from coaches and teammates, athletes learn techniques and strategies for refining their movement skills by modeling. Hence, they develop the conviction that leads to higher self-efficacy, equating to self-affirmative efforts such as motivation, resilience, and taking on challenges despite the odds. In contrast, social support refers to an athlete's ability to cope with and motivate themselves to perform better under various circumstances.

As theorized by SCT, Deci and Ryan's SDT posits that intrinsic motivation for athletes is provided in fulfilling specific psychological needs such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Athletes tend to perform well and stay in sports for extended periods when they feel a sense of self-congruence and competence, as well as an experience of connection with others. Theoretically, SDT aims to bridge the interface between motivation and confidence, enabling performance and well-being, while SCT primarily explains environmental and behavioral influences. While attempting to understand the internal processes of motivation in athletes, CBT further enhances this perspective by recognizing how specific thought patterns and beliefs influence the emotions and behavior of athletes. According to the research, replacing negative patterns of thinking with positive ones can help enhance confidence, concentration, and performance. Both theories offer a comprehensive framework for understanding how internal and external factors impact performance.

This year, the University of San Jose-Recoletos (USJ-R) has researched SCT, utilizing its second lenses of SDT and CBT, to demonstrate how its athletes develop and sustain their high-performance levels. This study examines how USJ-R athletes enhance their skills through observational learning and the self-belief that influences their training and competition. It also aims to identify the extent to which social support systems, teammates, and mentors influence the psychological well-being and athletic performance of athletes. In this way, the research aims to identify effective strategies for both the mental and physical aspects of sports. By doing so, the study will provide practical insights for coaches, educators, and sports psychologists on how to enhance athlete development. These discoveries will significantly contribute to the broader discourse of sports psychology, particularly in the collegiate Philippine context.

Social Cognitive Theory in Psychological Factors and Sports Performance

According to Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, learning is a social phenomenon that occurs through observation, imitation, and modeling. The process of learning is facilitated by environmental reinforcement and cognitive processes. SCT assumes that human beings are proactive and self-regulating agents of development, rather than just passive recipients of environmental influences. This constitutes a fundamental element for understanding the psychological factors in athletic sports performance, as SCT posits that the athlete's behavior, cognitive processes, and environment interact to result in learning and performance. What the athlete observes in their coaches or peers, and the attendant consequences of this observation, greatly influence the athlete's confidence and motivation, extending to their subsequent performance.

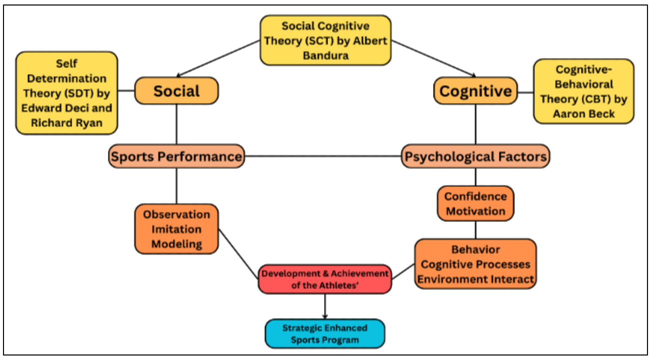

Fig 1: Conceptual Framework of the Research Study

Method

This study utilizes a descriptive correlational survey to explore the correlations between psychological traits and sports performance. The descriptive approach examines psychological traits such as imitation and modeling in their natural occurrence, while the correlational approach investigates the relationship between sporting performance and these variables. This enables objective examination of the psychological climate of sports and its correlation with performance.

This research examines the psychological influences on athletic performance, focusing on student-athletes from the University of San Jose–Recoletos, who are currently training under the university's excellent sports programs and facilities. The respondents consist of 40 student-athletes selected through a stratified random sampling technique across various sports, including basketball, volleyball, badminton, lawn tennis, chess, and football. This method ensures a broad representation of experiences and performance levels among the participants. The study follows a quantitative research design and utilizes a correlational survey method to explore the relationships between key psychological constructs—motivation, self-efficacy, and social support—and their potential impact on athletic performance. The findings are expected to support the development of targeted training programs and psychological interventions designed to enhance athletic performance.

A self-developed questionnaire will be used to gather data, which will be categorized into three sections: demographic characteristics, sports performance levels, and psychological factors affecting sports achievement. In section two, the performance levels of the respondents will be evaluated using a rating scale from 1 (Never) to 4 (Always). In Section Three, the evaluation focuses on motivation, confidence, and other traits, along the same scale as in Section Two. Informed consent will be obtained after orientation, which will include an explanation of the study objectives and procedures. The researchers will analyze and report their findings, including conclusions and recommendations, after collecting the data.

Results and Discussion

This chapter concludes the study by dealing with the summary of findings, conclusions, and recommendations on examining the psychological factors influencing athletes' sports performance.

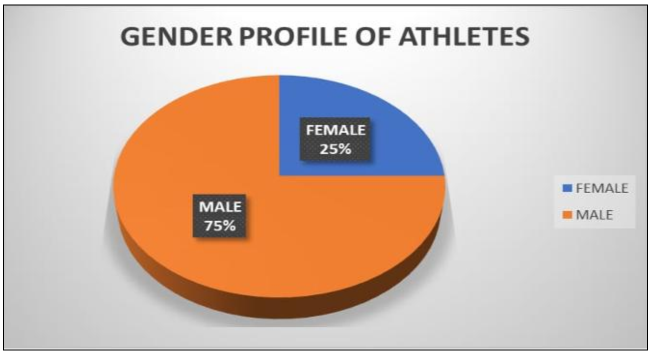

Fig 2: Gender Profile of the Athletes

The pie chart titled "Gender Profile of Athletes" shows, by image, a distribution of athletes between genders, with the male population accounting for 75% and the female population representing 25%. This descriptive data speaks volumes about the gender disparity; in almost every way, male athletes far outweigh their female counterparts. Studies such as this could now warrant further exploration to determine the factors that tend to disfavor women in sports, including program accessibility, cultural perceptions, or institutional support. The reality of an existing gap necessitates the implementation of inclusive strategies and policies that encourage women and foster gender equity within athletic communities.

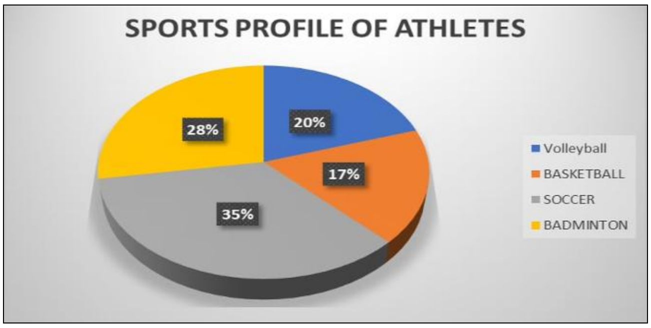

Fig 3: Sports Profile of the Athletes

The pie chart, entitled "Sports Profile of Athletes," illustrates the distribution of athletes across four selected sports spheres. The largest share of athletes participates in Soccer, which accounts for 35% of the total (in grey). This is followed in turn by Badminton, with 28% (in yellow), Volleyball with 20% (in blue), and Basketball last with 17% (in orange). The numbers show that Soccer is the most preferred among the surveyed athletes, while Basketball ranks lowest in participation. Interest and participation in certain sports vary depending on the accessibility of facilities, cultural inclination, institutional support, and the availability of coaching. Further investigation should therefore be conducted into these issues and the development of ways to initiate a better balance in participation among the entire sports community.

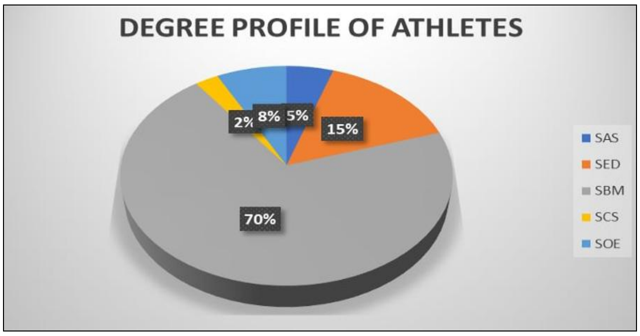

Fig 4: Degree Profile of Athletes

The pie chart entitled "Degree profile of athletes" shows the distribution of athletes among academic programs. The bulk of athletes, comprising 70%, are in the School of Business and Management (SBM), as represented in grey. Next comes the School of Education (SED) with 15% (in orange), followed by the School of Arts and Sciences (SAS) with 8% (in blue), School of Computer Studies (SCS) with 5% (in dark blue), and the smallest school of Engineering (SOE), with 2% (in yellow). This data indicates that there are too many athletes enrolled in programs related to business, suggesting that this may be a flexible or popular course among student-athletes. On the contrary, Engineering and Computer Studies perceive a very low number of athletes, which could be due to the heavy academic requirements of these courses or class timings being in conflict. This evidence would set the stage for research to determine which educational programs influence or accommodate student-athlete involvement.

Table 1: The Level Sport Performance of Athletes

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Observation			
I improve my sports performance by observing other athletes' techniques.	3.58	0.501	*Always*
Observing my teammates during practice helps refine my skills.	3.60	0.545	Always
I pay attention to strategies used by successful athletes in my sport.	3.78	0.423	*Always*
Watching athletes during competition provides insights for improvement.	3.83	0.385	*Always*
Observational learning is a key part of my training routine.	3.75	0.439	*Always*
Imitation			
I imitate top athletes' techniques to improve my performance.	3.40	0.496	*Always*
I replicate the actions of more experienced athletes during practice.	3.50	0.555	*Always*
I believe imitation enhances my sports performance.	3.43	0.636	*Always*
I actively practice imitating skills I observe in others.	3.43	0.594	*Always*
Imitating techniques from coaches or peers has improved my skills.	3.56	0.594	*Always*
Modeling			
I look up to certain athletes as role models.	3.45	0.714	*Always*
Modeling my behavior after successful athletes helps motivate me.	3.55	0.504	*Always*
I adapt training routines based on elite athletes' practices.	3.63	0.490	*Always*
My performance improves when I model my approach after athletes I admire.	3.60	0.496	*Always*
Modeling successful athletes. behavior is a key to my development.	3.56	0.594	*Always*
General Weight Average	3.58	0.531	

Legend: 1.00-1.75 (Never); 1.76-2.50 (Seldom); 2.51-3.25 (Sometimes); 3.26-4.00 (Always)

In the Observation category, the highest mean (3.83) was for "Watching athletes during competition provides insights for improvement," supported by Williams & Hodges (2015), who found that live performance observation sharpens tactical awareness and situational learning. The lowest mean (3.58) was "I improve my sports performance by observing other athletes' techniques," which aligns with Rathwell & Young (2016), who noted that general observation, without contextual or strategic focus, has limited developmental value. In the Imitation section, "Imitating techniques from coaches or peers has improved my skills" scored the highest (3.56), supported by Gatti *et al.* (2021), who emphasized that guided imitation from trusted sources enhances skill acquisition. The lowest (3.40) was "I imitate top athletes' techniques to improve my performance," echoing Toner *et al.* (2016), who argued that rigid mimicry of elite techniques can hinder natural development if not adjusted to the individual's context. For Modeling, "I adapt training routines based on elite athletes' practices" had the highest mean (3.63), which supports Erickson *et al.* (2017), who stressed the positive impact of flexible, athlete-specific modeling strategies. Conversely, "I look up to certain athletes as role models" had the lowest mean (3.45), reflecting Bandura's updated social learning discussions (Zimmerman, 2016), where role modeling alone—without personal engagement- may have limited behavioral influence.

Table 2: The Level of Psychological Factors Influencing Athletes' Performance

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Observational Learning			
I learn new techniques by observing my teammates and coaches.	3.63	0.540	*Always*
Observing my teammates during practice helps refine my skills.	3.70	0.464	*Always*
Watching others perform well motivates me to enhance my skills.	3.65	0.533	*Always*
I use visual learning (e.g., videos, demonstrations) to improve my techniques.	3.63	0.490	*Always*
Seeing the success of my peers inspires me to work hard.	3.65	0.483	*Always*
Self-Efficacy			
I am confident in my ability to achieve sports goals.	3.58	0.636	*Always*
I believe I can overcome challenges in sport.	3.60	0.632	*Always*
My self-confidence improves sports performance.	3.68	0.474	*Always*
I feel capable of handling the pressures of competition.	3.43	0.636	*Always*
I set achievable goals for myself in sports.	3.70	0.464	*Always*
Social Support			
I receive emotional support from my friends and family.	3.60	0.545	*Always*
My coaches provide guidance for success.	3.78	0.423	*Always*
My teammates support me during victories and losses.	3.43	0.675	*Always*
Social support motivates me to perform better.	3.70	0.464	*Always*
I rely on teammates for support during tough times.	3.60	0.545	*Always*
General Weight Average	3.62	0.534	

Legend: 1.00-1.75 (Never); 1.76-2.50 (Seldom); 2.51-3.25 (Sometimes); 3.26-4.00 (Always)

Observational Learning: The highest mean (3.70) in this section was for "Observing my teammates during practice helps refine my skills," which could align with Sullivan *et al.* (2020), who noted the direct relevance of peer observation in a training context. The lowest mean (3.63) was for "Watching athletes during competition provides insights for improvement," and "I learn new techniques by observing my teammates and coaches, " potentially supported by Ashford *et al.* (2022), who suggested that the complexity of competition might hinder clear learning of specific skills. Self-Efficacy: The highest score (3.70) was for "Imitating techniques from coaches or peers has improved my skills," resonating with Feltz *et al.* (2017), who highlighted the influence of credible models on self-belief. The lowest mean (3.43) came from "I actively practice imitating skills I observe in others," possibly reflecting Williams & Hodges' (2019) argument that mere imitation without focused practice may be limited. Social Support: The highest mean (3.78) was for "Modeling my behavior after successful athletes helps motivate me," supported by Schunk & Usher (2016), who found motivational benefits in emulating successful role models. The lowest mean (3.43) was for "I adapt training routines based on elite athletes' practices," consistent with Mujika *et al*. (2018), who cautioned against the direct adoption of elite training by non-elite athletes.

Table 3: The Correlation Between Sports Performance and Psychological Factors

Correlation Matrix		
		Sports Performance
Psychological Factors	Person r	0.756
	df	38
	p-value	<.001

$p < .05$ = significant

Results revealed a strong positive relationship between psychological factors and sports performance. This has been evidenced by Pearson's r value of 0.756, indicating that as psychological constructs such as motivation, self-efficacy, and social support increase, one can expect a corresponding improvement in athletic performance. Internally, the result with degrees of freedom (df) = 38 and an observed p-value of less than .001 makes the correlation statistically significant. This means that the likelihood of the result occurring by random chance is extremely low—making it highly doubtful concerning its chance occurrence, or in other words, very unlikely to be a coincidence. Such findings further emphasize the importance of psychological factors in enhancing the sports performance of student-athletes at the University of San Jose–Recoletos.

Table 4: Demographic Profile Psychological Factors and Sports Performance

		Psychological Factors	Sports Performance
Age	Person r	0.014	0.207
	df	38	38
	p-value	0.932	0.199
Sex	F	0.272	1.066
	df-1	1	1
	df-2	11.7	14.7
	p	0.612	0.319
Sports	F	1.95	1.15
	df-1	3	3
	df-2	36	36
	p	0.138	0.342

$p < .05$ = significant

Statistical analysis, as shown in Table 5, provided evidence against the relationship between any of the demographic variables, such as age, sex, and type of sport, and the measured variables of sports performance or psychological factors. Specifically, neither age, when tested against sports performance ($p = 0.199$), nor psychological factors ($p = 0.932$) reached the significance level of 0.05, indicating at best a weak correlation between the two. Likewise, ANOVA test results for sex showed no significant difference in both sports performance ($p = 0.319$) and psychological factors ($p = 0.612$). The type of sport was also not distinguished by either sports performance ($p = 0.342$) or psychological factors ($p = 0.138$). These findings strongly suggest that demographic variables, such as age, sex, or type of sport, do not significantly influence either psychological or performance parameters, implying that psychological factors may have a more direct impact on enhancing sports performance rather than demographic factors. Thus, the "Degree" variable was excluded from statistical analyses because the sample sizes for some programs were too small, namely, two from the School of Arts and Sciences (SAS) and one from the School of Computer Studies (SCS). With such limited representation, meaningful analysis could not be done on the degree variable. Therefore, no conclusions can be drawn regarding the interplay of the academic degree programs with the athletes' sports performance or psychological constructs. A larger and more balanced sampling across degree programs would be necessary to perform meaningful analyses of this variable.

Results indicate that strategic improvement programs regarding athletes should adopt a psychological approach (observational learning, self-efficacy, social support), as opposed to demographic characteristics—namely, age, gender, type of sport, or academic background (Beauchamp *et al*., 2019; Mahoney *et al*., 2014; Gardner & Moore, 2017; Nicholls *et al*., 2010; Connolly, 2017) [2, 11, 7, 13, 5]. Psychological skills should be enhanced through interventions and instruction, including skill modeling, peer mentoring, video reviews, and internal and external team-building activities designed to prepare the mental field, boost motivation, and provide resilience for their team. Building this environment will emphasize psychological support for athletes, open lines of communication with coaches and teammates, and a collaborative setting geared toward achieving high performance. Given the limited role demographic factors play in overall success in sport, the idea is that if the psychological components incorporated into developmental programs are regarded as basic tools to ensure equity, consistency, and effectiveness, then performance outcomes for all athletes will be enhanced.

Conclusion

Psychological factors, as this study illustrates, have a significant impact on athletes' performance in sports. Observational learning, imitation, and modeling play an enormous role in skill acquisition and motivation. Athletes can look at others, study their techniques, and replicate them. While self-efficacy is one of the more important determinants of success, being confident in one's ability provides the mental resilience required to achieve one's goals. The emotional balance and motivation given by social support from coaches, teammates, and family are the backbone to an athlete's performance under stress. This investigation further demonstrates that psychological factors are considered equal to physical training in achieving athletic success, highlighting the need for deliberate psychological preparation in sports development.

Every sports program should include psychological training to enhance the athlete's performance. Coaches should also allow athletes to observe elite performers and analyze their techniques to facilitate observational learning. The training should encompass imitation drills whereby practice aids in crafting the skill while allowing room for individual adaptation. Further, establishing self-efficacy with goal-setting protocols, self-confidence strategies, and mental resilience training will keep the athlete firmly on track. Most importantly, a strong support system of teammates, coaches, and families greatly aids in motivating and stabilizing an athlete emotionally in his quest for sporting success.

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