

The Psychological Attributes Associated with College Students who Play Sports and Academic Performance

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Received: April 14, 2018; **Published:** July 18, 2018

Abstract

Background: The study explored the psychological attributes that existed in collegiate athletes regarding the mental preparation for athletic and academic performances. Moreover, the psychological attributes which were analyzed consisted of goal-setting, self-talk, motivation, mental imagery, self-confidence, focus, peak performance, relaxation techniques, perseverance, and personal drive. Additionally, the sample consisted of 80 collegiate student-athlete participants consisting of 15 male soccer players, 19 male basketball players, 17 female volleyball players, and 29 female soccer players. The results for the research study showed the athletes used psychological attributes to enhance the quality of athletic and academic performance.

Keywords: Psychological Attributes; College Students; Play Sports

Background

Past studies have indicated correlations between sports play and academia. Vecsey [1] mentioned during a study on “*A Balance of Academics and Athletes*”, how one athlete showed high levels of academic achievements that contributed to focus. In addition, athletes use the same type of strategies to perform well in sports. Raalte and Brewer [2] stated athletes transfer knowledge such as positive self-talk to enhance other aspects in life. There was further mention how mental imagery is used by athletes to improve performance outside of sports play. Williams [3] stated that athletes set high standards and strive for increased levels of personal growth. With practice, an athlete has the ability to harnesses psychological aspects from sports play into academic performance. Athletes have the ability to set high standards in academics, as they do during sports play, which in return may lead to overall academic success. Individuals can set high standards beyond academics leading toward a successful life.

Student-athletes can learn to focus on academics the way they focus on sports. Exploring additional research in this area will create opportunities for student-athletes in the area of academic performance. Enhancing academic performance can increase grade point average (GPA), confidence, credibility, career choices, college degree, and overall knowledge just to name a few. Collegiate athletes may create additional opportunities which were not previously anticipated. One opportunity may include a more prestigious career leading to an overall successful life.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose for the study consisted of analyzing the psychological attributes that exist between students who participate in sports and academic performance. The positive mental attributes used during athletic performance consist of mental focus, imagery, self-con-

confidence, motivation, relaxation techniques, and perseverance. Each of the mental attributes mentioned are commonly used by successful athletes during sports performance. The mental attributes have been successfully used in all facets of life which can be applied toward academic settings.

Finding positive attributes can educate student-athletes of all age groups, to the importance of also excelling in the realm of academia. Student-athletes need to understand the significance of performing well in the arena of education. Athletes can learn to apply positive mental attributes to enhance the quality of life and work through any potential challenges throughout one's lifetime.

The results of the study will be useful for student-athletes at any level and prepare them to focus more on academics. Student-athletes will understand the importance of putting an emphasis on academic performance before reaching college. The same motivation and drive used to excel in sports play can be transferred to performing well in the classroom. One example of this includes an athlete using the same level of motivation to play sports and study for an exam.

When athletes perform well in sports and academics they increase the opportunity for a successful career after playing sports. Positive results from the study could increase the types of opportunities and overall success for many athletes. The results of the study found correlations that existed between sports play and academics, further educating individuals on how to integrate these skills with the student-athlete population.

Educational Significance

The educational significance was to find these positive psychological attributes which would educate athletes on how to use them toward enhancing academic performance. Finding positive psychological attributes may alter the perception student-athletes may have regarding academia. Any psychological attributes used between sports play and academics could increase academic success. Subsequently, the results of this study will help student-athletes' overall outlook on academic performance.

Athletes should do well in academics so life after sports may be more productive. Student-athletes need to understand the reality that sports play could end at any time without warning. A solid education and college degree will go further than a career playing professional sports, assuming one is fortunate enough to excel to such levels. Therefore, athletes could look at academics as the back-up plan for finding success after athletics.

Psychological Factors

Each psychological factor explored regarding collegiate athletes' sports performance and academic achievements was examined. Williams [3] stated that psychological factors include goal-setting, motivation, self-talk, focus, mental imagery, perseverance, attitude, relaxation techniques, peak performance, and self-confidence. Each factor mentioned by the researcher has been successfully used by individuals to enhance both athletic and academic performance.

Murphy [4] stated student-athletes have shown significant improvements during sports play when they used psychological factors to enhance the quality of performance. His research further noted that each factor used during sports performance has the potential to transfer the same concepts to other life challenges. Therefore, student-athletes may use psychological attributes to increase overall academic success.

Stressors and Behaviors in Collegiate Athletes

Student athletes can find themselves with added pressure and stressors while maintaining their athletic status. Etzel, *et al.* [5] discussed how most athletes are faced with everyday pressure, stress, and expectations from individuals and peers around them. Student-athletes can deal with these situations more diligently if they were provided with the skills and knowledge to do so. Williams [3] stated how athletes have a high level of pressure placed on them whether they are playing sports or not. Ideally, teaching student-athletes how to

handle the pressure of sports and academia in a positive manner is an optimal goal. Raalte and Brewer [2] stated collegiate athletes have additional stress to succeed in athletics and academic performance. Student athletes have to find a way to decrease the level of pressure so they may excel in both academics and athletic achievements.

Research Design

The research design explored specific areas pertinent for the development of a mixed methodological research. The qualitative research examined the meaning for the study. Moreover, it provided a clearer understanding for the educational significance behind the study.

The quantitative research allowed for examining any relationship which existed between variables. Furthermore, statistical analysis was used to measure the data.

The types of instrumentation used for gathering data included two surveys and one questionnaire that had five short answers. The surveys were used to gather quantitative data and the questionnaire with short answers was used to gather qualitative data. The methodological procedures included examining frequencies, means, minimum/maximal, standard deviation, and a multivariate analysis of data for the quantitative analysis. Furthermore, the procedures for the qualitative analysis consisted of graphing the responses from each of the short answer questions and examining the frequency of responses from the true/false questions.

Selection of Participants

The research study was conducted using a random selection process that allows each student athlete an equal opportunity to be selected as a participant for the study. For the mixed methods study, a minimum of 50-100 participants were needed. The sample size did vary, meaning there were only 80 participants which added to the credibility of the research. The sample ranged from 18 - 30 years of age consisting of males and female athletes. Furthermore, the NCAA Division I collegiate student-athlete participants consisted of 15 male soccer players, 19 male basketball players, 17 female volleyball players, and 29 female soccer players.

Data Analysis

The data was gathered by the use of questionnaires, surveys, short answers, and literature review. The surveys allowed the students to elaborate on the types of positive psychological components which are used during sports play and academic performance. Furthermore, the data from the surveys was calculated using statistical analysis to calculate a multivariate analysis of data, calculating frequencies, means, standard deviation, minimal/maximal, and percentages.

The questionnaire consisted of true and false questions which provided a significant amount of data beyond psychological attributes, such as the athletes' perceptions. Furthermore, the questionnaire included a short answer section that allowed the participants to expound on psychological attributes regarding sport and academic performance. Moreover, the data obtained examined GPA's and participant perceptions regarding athletics and academia. The data was calculated using statistical analysis, charts, and graphs.

Statistical Analysis

Gender, sports play, and GPA were the independent variables whereas, the psychological attributes were the dependent variables. The variables in the study were considered in order to determine the calculations for statistical analysis. The surveys were analyzed by running frequencies, means, standard deviation, minimal/maximal values, one-way analysis of variance, one-sample *t*-tests, and percentages. Moreover, the research was measuring which psychological attributes were used during both sports play and academic achievements. The true/false questions and short answers were put on an excel sheet and then graphed or put into a table to represent the responses.

Results

What psychological attributes exist between athletic participation and academic performance? Analyzing the question, consisted of examining the data from Survey 1, Survey 2, and Short Answer 3, which asked the participants to elaborate in their own words which psychological attributes they used for athletic and academic performance combined. Survey 1 and Survey 2 were designed with questions specifically designed to look for ten psychological attributes successfully used with enhancing the quality of sport and academic performance. Goal-setting, self-talk, motivation, mental imagery, self-confidence, focus, peak performance, relaxation techniques, perseverance, and personal drive were the psychological attributes listed. Each of the psychological attributes were coded using a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), indicating the level at which each athlete utilizes the mental skills.

Figure 1 shows the statistical comparisons for each of the psychological attributes used while mentally preparing for athletic and academic performance. The participants were asked to elaborate in their own words which psychological attributes they used to enhance the quality of athletic and academic performance combined. The most commonly used psychological attributes ranked in the order of Mental Imagery (n = 73), Focus (n = 63), Motivation (n = 59), Self-confidence (n = 41), Goal-setting (n = 35), Personal Drive (n = 35), Relaxation Techniques (n = 24, Perseverance (n = 22), Self-talk (n = 20), followed by Peak performance (n = 11).

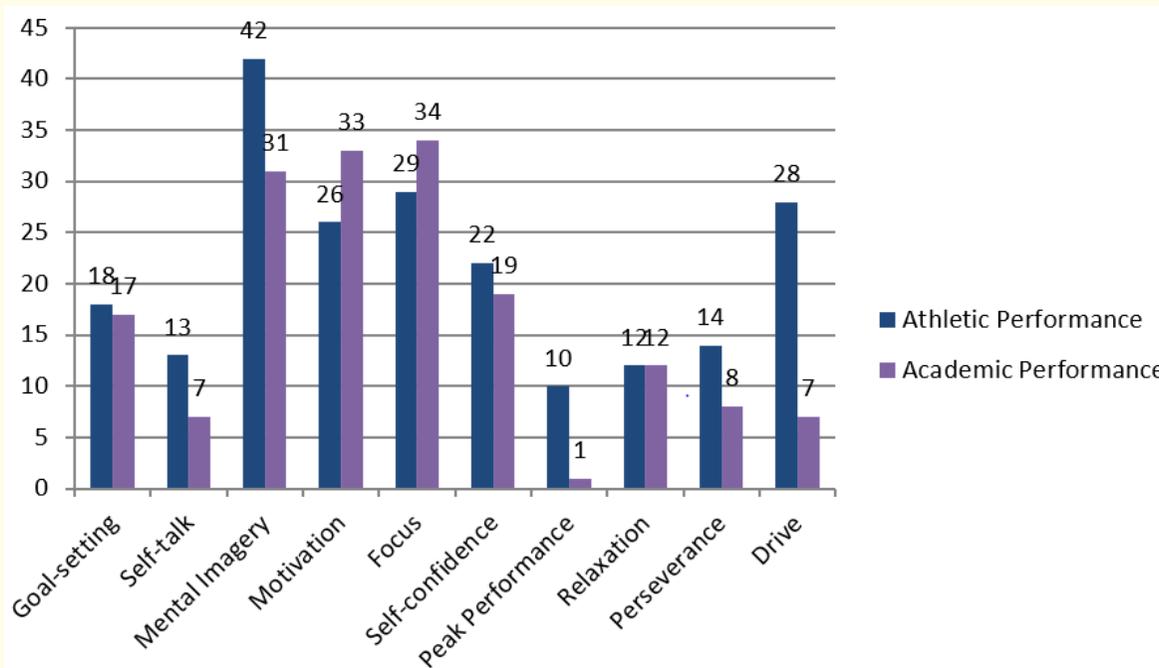


Figure 1: Represents the psychological attributes used to enhance the quality of preparation in athletic and academic performance.

In summary, the results from figure 1 showed the participants utilized several psychological attributes to enhance the quality of preparation in athletic and academic performance combined. The most commonly used attribute consisted of mental imagery, focus, motivation, self-confidence, goal-setting, personal drive, relaxation techniques, perseverance, self-talk, and peak performance. The results showed mental imagery and focus, followed by motivation as the top three psychological attributes used in athletic and academic per-

formance combined. The results for this research question support the alternative hypothesis (Ho2) which states there are psychological attributes that exist between students who participate in sports and academic performance.

Discussion of Findings

The results showed that all ten psychological attributes measured were all relevant for enhancing the quality of athletic performance and academic achievements. Additionally, the responses also showed the athletes shared many of the same perceptions regarding the use of psychological attributes. Goal-setting, self-talk, motivation, mental imagery, self-confidence, focus, peak performance, relaxation techniques, perseverance, and personal drive were all used by each of the 80 athletes to improve athletic and academic performances.

According to the results, mental imagery, focus, and personal drive were the three most commonly used psychological attributes for enhancing the quality of athletic performance. This finding shows powerful attributes that have a history of extraordinary success when used. Focus and motivation, followed by mental imagery were the top three most commonly used psychological attributes while improving the quality of academic performance. Moreover, the results were quite similar to the results for athletic performance. The results showed mental imagery and focus, followed by motivation as the top three psychological attributes used in athletic and academic performance combined. More importantly, those results make perfect sense when comparing all three sets of data analysis [6-9].

Conclusions

The purpose for the study consisted of analyzing the psychological attributes that existed between students who participate in sports and academic performance. The results for the study did show positive outcomes with the use of goal-setting, self-talk, motivation, mental imagery, self-confidence, focus, peak performance, relaxation techniques, perseverance, and personal drive. Furthermore, each of the attributes was utilized by the athletes to mentally prepare for athletic and academic performances.

The results showed that athletes shared many of the same perceptions regarding the use of psychological attributes in athletic and academic performance. One interesting finding included how the average GPA for collegiate athletes was 3.39, a high number compared to previous studies. Moreover, the GPA correlates with the results that showed the athletes used psychological attributes to enhance the quality of academics. More importantly, the results for each of the research questions showed positive outcomes for collegiate athletes within the realm of athletic and academic performance.

The study did provide useful insight regarding how athletes perceive the use of psychological attributes and how athletes utilize each skill to mentally enhance the quality of athletic and academic performance. Overall, using such skills could be used to improve more facets of life than just athletics and academia.

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Volume 7 Issue 8 August 2018

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