



ANALYSIS OF THE EXPERIENCES OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT-ATHLETES IN A PRIVATE SCHOOL

(Case study)

Dave Ian Salas ^a, Eljun Arquita ^b, Abycelle Ranque ^c, Abycelle Ranque ^d, Jonathan Palco ^{e*}

^{a-d} *The College of Maasin, Tunga-tunga, Maasin City, 6600, Philippines*

^b *Southern Leyte State University – Maasin City Campus, Tunga-tunga, Maasin City, 6600, Philippines*

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Abstract

Schools do not only develop the knowledge and skills of every student but do also enhance their athletic skills, especially those students who are aligned with sports. This study explored on the positive and negative experiences and aspirations of undergraduate student-athletes on sports at The College of Maasin. Under qualitative research design, it utilized a purposive sampling technique. Seven informants from each undergraduate program took part in an in-depth semi-structured interview. The thematic method of analysis was employed to generate major themes and subthemes. Findings revealed that earned privilege, parent support, stress relief, and self-discipline are among the positive experiences undergraduate student-athletes have from participating in the institution's sports program. On the other hand, negative experiences include inadequate school support services and a decline in self-confidence. With this, college student-athletes aspire to improve the institution's sports program through higher tuition fee discounts, improved facilities and equipment, and enhanced coaching and athlete development. They believed that these could entice students to participate in the institution's sports program.

Keywords: Lived experiences, private school, student-athletes, sports program

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*Corresponding author: Jonathan Palco. ORCID ID. <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-6793-6800>
E-mail: jpalco@southernleytestateu.edu.ph

1. Introduction

Students should try to engage in a variety of activities that will allow them to grow holistically, rather than just concentrating on the academic aspects of learning (Garcia, 2021). The 21st century education recognizes the importance of sports in fostering good health and well-being as well as the development of values and skills that last a lifetime. Student-athletes are individuals who participate in competitive organized sports that are supported by the institution where they are enrolled in.

As they juggle their responsibilities as students and athletes, they face a particular unique set of challenges (Simon & Docherty, 2014). In a study conducted at Leyte Normal University by Garcia (2021), softball athletes claimed that time management is challenging. Morgan (2005) discovered that student-athletes frequently expressed difficulty finding time for academic tasks after fulfilling their athletic responsibilities. Additionally, Singer (2008) revealed in a case study involving African-American football players at a major college that they struggled with time demands because they put more time into football than they did in school.

Another stressor that collegiate athletes face was a lack of perceived support (Weigand et al., 2013). Colleges, for example, offer various levels of student support services to address student needs in and out of the classroom, depending on funding; however, student-athletes place little emphasis on utilizing these student support services (Demas, 2017; Horton, 2015). Not all educational institutions invest a series number of resources into creating strategies that open paths for a sports life along with academic studies (Hacıfazlıoğlu, 2021). Moreover, Rosete et al. (2022) mentioned that one of the problems institutions faced is the availability of sports facilities and equipment. Research has shown that the availability and conditions of sports equipment and facilities in most schools in developing countries is below standard, resulting in poor sports involvement and a lack of interest in participating in sports-related activities (Orunaboka & Nwachukwu, 2012).

Conversely, Bryan (2019) noted that student-athletes have discussed the parental support they receive. According to Santillan and Madrigal (2021), they described their parents' physical, emotional, and financial support as factors that contributed to their holistic sports and academic experiences. In line with Keegan et al.'s (2010) findings, parents can have a positive impact on their children's motivation by offering such support.

Furthermore, participation in school athletics fosters self-discipline, according to the National Federation of State High School Associations (2002). The interview results suggested that the participants had already exercised time management and organization between schoolwork and sports training (Santillan & Madrigal, 2021).

There are 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that seek to transform the world. One of them is Quality Education, which strives to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote opportunities for lifelong learning. The goal is for all learners to have the knowledge and skills necessary to advance sustainable development by the year 2030. This can be accomplished by letting them develop not only academically but also holistically.

Like any other schools, The College of Maasin provides its students with a variety of extracurricular activities, including sports. This allows students to develop their character while also learning new skills. Student-athletes are a distinct group of students with demands and challenges that set them apart from their peers who are not actively engaged in sports. However, at the aforementioned school, the lives of student-athletes were less discussed. Hence, the researchers believed that this study will shed light on what it is like for students to take classes and participate in sports at the same time. This is also to fill a gap left by other researchers when conducting their research. A study by Steed (2019), for instance, focuses solely on the experiences of nursing student athletes.

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of college student-athletes at The College of Maasin. Specifically, the following objectives were addressed: (1) to explore on the positive and negative experiences of college student-athletes in the sports program of The College of Maasin and (2) to determine the aspirations of college student-athletes to improve the sports program of the institution.

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

This is a qualitative, exploratory case study which aimed to explore on the lived experiences of college student-athletes. According to Yin (2013), the case study method is appropriate when the researcher seeks to explain a current situation or social circumstance, has limited or no control over the events, and is exploring a contemporary phenomenon. Hancock and Algozzine (2011) emphasized that the ultimate goal of case study research is to understand the situation under investigation primarily from the participant's, not the researcher's perspective. Moreover, the exploratory case study provides "a broad discussion approach that enhanced the researchers' learning from participants through exploration to fill in literature gaps" (Lakunz & Strom, 2017).

2.2. Research Environment

The study was conducted at The College of Maasin, formerly known as Maasin Institute, located at R. Kangleon Street, Tunga-Tunga, Maasin City. It is a private school founded on August 25, 1924 by Rev. Angel C. Espina. It offers academic programs from basic to higher education. Undergraduate programs include Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN), Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (BSBA), Bachelor of Science in Accountancy (BSA), Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEED), Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSED), Bachelor of Arts (AB), Bachelor of Science in Information Technology (BSIT) and Food Preparation and Services Technology (FPST). BSN, BSA, and BEED programs are, in fact, ACSCU-ACI Accredited Level I.

2.3. Research Informants

The study focused on college student-athletes at The College of Maasin, but only one research informant from each undergraduate program was included. Qualitative studies traditionally include a smaller number of participants (Patton, 2015). Six participants, according to Guest et al. (2006), can be sufficient for qualitative analysis, especially when it comes to data saturation, which takes place when the researcher can no longer develop data, themes, or codes. In the study used a purposeful sampling technique was used. It is described by Patton (2002) as a process of seeking participants who are likely to provide robust information. Kyngas et al. (2011) asserted that this technique is suitable for qualitative studies where the researcher is interested in the informants who have the best knowledge concerning the research topic. The selection criteria were as follows: (a) must be enrolled at The College of Maasin for the academic year 2022-2023, (b) a varsity student in any sport, and (c) a varsity in the first and second semesters of the academic year 2022-2023. On the basis of these, the researchers can purposefully select participants who can contribute an in-depth, information-rich understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Klenke et al., 2016).

2.4. Research Instrument

In this study, an in-depth semi-structured interview has been carried out, with an open-ended, researcher-made questionnaire serving as an interview guide. Patton (2015) explained that in qualitative studies, the researcher is the instrument of the study. One way to collect data from the participants is through interviews (Patton, 2015). Elmusharaf (2013) defined an interview as a technique that involves oral questioning of participants, collects data as it answers the questions posed, and is recorded in either written or audio form, or a combination of both. Additionally, the interview questions were developed based on the concepts discovered during the review of relevant literature. Afterward, it was presented to the panel of experts who evaluated it for grammar and alignment with the research questions.

2.5. Data Collection Procedure

The initial step in this study was to ask for approval from the school where the research was conducted. After being approved, the researchers purposefully selected research informants based on the predetermined criteria. An informed consent form was given to each participant who had been identified before the interview began. Thyer (2010) explained that one way to achieve ethics in a study is to provide the participants with a consent form. It included a discussion of the purpose of the study, confidentiality, and the digital recording method. The one-on-one interview took place at a time that was convenient for both the participants and the researchers. To ensure their privacy, participants were given the option of selecting the location of their interview. The interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim so that the researchers could reflect on the information obtained. Following that, the participants received a copy of the interview transcripts for accuracy and cross-checking. After participant validation, all collected data were analyzed and interpreted.

2.6. Data Analysis

This study employed the thematic method of analysis. It is a method for analyzing qualitative data that entails searching across a data set to identify, analyze, and report repeated patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) developed the following six-step framework for thematic analysis: Step 1: Familiarizing yourself with the data; Step 2: Generating Initial Codes; Step 3: Searching for Themes; Step 4: Reviewing Themes; Step 5: Defining and Naming Themes; and Step 6: Producing the Report/Manuscript.

3. Results and Discussion

Three themes emerged during the conduct of research with corresponding subthemes. And these are as follows:

3.1. Positive Experiences

Based on their accounts, four subthemes about the positive experiences of The College of Maasin student-athletes were generated: earned privilege, parent support, stress relief, and self-discipline.

Earned Privilege. When asked to describe the institution's sports program, some research informants gave affirmative responses.

"Kanang nindot sija..." [It is great.] Research Informant No. 7 replied.

"Excellent... naexperience man naho ilang gihatag..." [Excellent. I experienced what they offered.] Research Informant No. 6 answered.

These responses stem from the fact that a tuition fee discount has been provided to student-athletes at The College of Maasin. After being asked what kind of support the institution provides to student-athletes, Research Informant No. 1 said, *"Karon, ang kadtong ilahang discount ... kadtong 15% discount."* [As of right now, it is the 15% discount.]

This is similar to the study by Fuller et al. (2017), which found that high school student-athletes were granted privileges at their schools as a result of their participation in athletics. Some studies also believe that one of the privileges enjoyed by college student-athletes is financial support (Baucom & Lantz, 2001).

Parent Support. The majority of the research informants reported that their parents had provided them with moral and financial support in their academic and athletic endeavors.

"For example, magduwa naa sila kanunay muhatag ug kuan ... syempre financial ing ana" [For example, they always provide financial support during games.] Research Informant No. 7 stated.

Research Informant No. 2 expressed, *"My family supports me with my academic and athletic endeavor is that they encourage, motivate me and provide resources that I need."*

Furthermore, research informants said that the support they received from their parents motivated them to do better in academics and sports.

Research Informant No. 4 mentioned, "*So, through their support, namotivate ko nga mu strive pa para muduwa then, mu study as a student unya mao to, mainspired ko tungod sa ilang kuan ...support.*" [Their support motivates me to continue to play and study.]

"*Mao nang dako jug impact nga ahung parents nagsuporta mas ganahan paka nga muapil paka ani mupadajun.*" [This is why my parents' support has a huge impact.] Research Informant No. 3 asserted.

The research informants' statements then complement to prior research by Santillan and Madrigal (2021), which found that parental support contributes to student-athletes' overall athletic and academic experiences. Hence, Keegan et al.'s (2010) findings noted that parents can have a positive impact on their children's motivation by offering such support.

Stress Relief. Research informants sought to emphasize that participating in sports served as a stress reliever when asked about what encourages them to join the institution's sports program.

As quoted by Research Informant No. 6, "*... nanginahanglan, nangita man ko'g kalingawan.*" [I was looking for something to do.]

"*... usa pud na ka mura'g outlet para somehow ma ... mas ma relieve ang stress sa academics*" [It helps me in some way to cope with the stress from academics.] Research Informant No. 1 explained.

Sports education at university level has a positive effect on students' strategies to cope with stress (Dogan, 2020). Deryahanolu et al. (2016) have reported that individuals who participate in sports have lower stress levels.

Self-Discipline. As student-athletes, they have learned to set priorities and avoid procrastination to manage their time and balance athletic activities and academic work.

Research Informant No. 5 discussed, "*... get organize and know what should be done first before the others*" "*I don't make rooms for procrastinations as possible as I could in order for me to get work done as early as possible.*"

"*I always finished all my schoolwork as early as I could so that I wouldn't have to worry about schoolwork if we had our training.*" Research Informant No. 2 noted.

According to Schley (2002), there have been various studies and surveys that show that participation in school athletics not only improves academic achievement but can also have a good impact in other areas. In their study, Billonid et al. (2020) proved that sports participation developed self-discipline among student-athletes. This is corroborated by the study of Santillan and Madrigal (2021), whose interview results indicated that the participants had already practiced time management and organization between academics and sports training.

3.2. *Negative Experiences*

The interviewed student-athletes who participated in the institution's sports program also encountered certain negative experiences, including inadequate school support services and a decline in self-confidence.

Inadequate School Support Services. Other research informants described the institution's sports program as in need of improvement due to a lack of school support.

"*Siguro... kanang... dapat iimprove pa...*" [It needs to be improved.] remarked Research Informant No. 1.

Research Informant No. 4 said, "*Ang ahung ikasulti is ... kanang ... wa sila kaajoy supporta, though naa silay kuan ... kanang, gamay which is kadto lageng nay less sa tuition but sa kanang nay, sa ilang equipments, facilities nila, di kaajo supportive ang CM.*" [Despite offering a tuition fee discount, they still lack support in terms of equipment and facilities.]

This is comparable to the study by Orunaboka and Nwachukwu (2012), which found that most schools in developing countries lack adequate sports facilities and equipment. The study of Okyere et al. (2019) disclosed that in Tano and North high schools, the various schools' sports facilities were insufficient. Rosete et al. (2022) also mentioned that one of the problems in Sultan Kudarat State University is the availability of sports facilities and equipment.

Declined Self-Confidence. Two research informants spoke about their parents' lack of support.

Research Informant No. 1 shared, "*... sa ahung sports man gud kay ever since jud pod kay murag dili nila gusto ...*" [Since then, they have not supported me in my sports.]

As a result, research informants believe it eventually leads to a decline in self-confidence.

Research Informant No. 3 expressed, "*... ahung self-confidence that time is mura'g na down jud ko until nga niabot sa point nga di napud ko ganahan mo training.*" [At that time, I started to lose confidence to the point where I no longer wanted to go to trainings.]

In light of this, Bryan (2019) emphasized the importance of parental support for student-athletes' decisions to participate in collegiate sports as well as support for their academic endeavors. Once students receive that initial guidance and support, they begin to believe in themselves and learn to have confidence in persisting in their academic journey (Beghetto, 2004; Harmening & Jacob, 2015; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Aspirations for Sports Program Improvement

Based on their personal experiences, the research informants were able to give aspirations regarding how the institution's sports program may be improved. Three themes developed from the clustering of all of their responses: higher tuition fee discounts, improved facilities and equipment, and enhanced coaching and athlete development.

Higher Tuition Fee Discount. Three of the seven research informants talked about a higher discount on their tuition fees.

"*Para nahu no? kay dapat kanang ila pang ... unsa na ... sakaan pa ang ilahang mga, for example, mga benefits like the discount of the student athlete.*" [For me, they should provide more benefits, such as higher tuition fee discounts for student-athletes.] Research Informant No. 1 asserted.

Research Informant No. 3 said, "... *dak-an dak-an gamay sa CM ang discount sa kuan ba sa sports program, kay murag mas madani pa ang mga student ug apil ug ingani nga mga program sa school.*" [Increase tuition fee discount to encourage students to participate in the institution's sports program.]

Improved Facilities and Equipment. The research informants believed that one of the school's roles in supporting student-athletes is to provide appropriate equipment and facilities.

"... *ang mga equipments, ang net alisdan na, kanang bag-o napud, then ang mga bola dapat mga original ...*" [The equipment, including the net and balls, need to be replaced with new and original ones.] Research Informant No. 4 emphasized.

Research Informant No. 5 added, "*Kuan ... sports equipments and training areas. Mao na ahong nakit-an naho na lacking sa kani nga institution...*" [What I observe as lacking in this institution are sports equipment and training areas.]

As stated by Rosete et al. (2022), it is strongly recommended to ensure the usability and upgrading of sports facilities and equipment. In his survey, Lindsey (2009) found that 68% of students thought the availability of sports facilities was very significant in deciding on whether to continue participating in college sports. In addition, sports equipment has proven to be the most important aspect of progress that motivates effective participation in sports events (Omalawon, 2000).

Enhanced Coaching and Athlete Development. Including on the list of things to improve in the institution's sports program are coaches and trainings. Research Informant No. 4 stressed, "... *kanang mga coach and trainor, dapat kana pung effective nga makatigo gajud, then kuan ang training, dapat more on trainings pajud kay usahay ra makatraining, mao ra magtraining ug hapit na ...*" [There should be effective coaches and regular trainings.]

4. Conclusions

It came to light that the positive experiences of college student-athletes in The College of Maasin's sports program include earned privilege, parent support, stress relief, and self-discipline. The institution granted them the privilege, specifically the tuition fee discount. They mentioned that their parents had provided them with moral and financial support, which motivated them to do better in academics and sports. It was pointed out that participation in sports acted as a stress reliever or a means to cope with academic stress. In order to manage their time effectively and balance their academic and athletic commitments, they have also learned to set priorities and refrain from procrastination.

The negative experiences, on the other hand, include inadequate school support services and declined self-confidence. College student-athletes perceived a lack of support from the institution's sports program in terms of sports equipment and facilities. It has been noted as well that parents' lack of support has an impact on their self-confidence and decision to participate in sports.

With this, college student-athletes aspire to improve the institution's sports program through higher tuition fee discounts, improved facilities and equipment, and enhanced

coaching and athlete development. They believed that these could entice students to participate in the institution's sports program.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests and Ethics

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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