

EXPLORING THE CONNECTION BETWEEN SELF-EFFICACY AND LIFE SKILLS AMONG YOUNG ATHLETES

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ABSTRACT

Life skills in athletes encompass the essential abilities required to handle the demands and challenges encountered in competitive environments. While many studies emphasize task-specific confidence, the broader spectrum of self-efficacy attitudes influencing athletes' lives remains underexplored. This study investigates the relationship between self-efficacy and life skills among young athletes participating in the SUKMA games. Conducted cross-sectionally at a training session in Perak, the study involved 300 young athletes. Data on life skills and sports self-efficacy were collected using validated questionnaires (KOÇAK, 2020; Düz & AÇAK, 2018). Findings revealed a substantial correlation between self-efficacy and life skills exhibited by athletes, with robust positive correlations observed between time management and psychological efficacy [$r(300)=0.62$, $p<0.05$], professional thought efficacy [$r(300)=0.73$, $p<0.05$], and personality efficacy [$r(300)=0.69$, $p<0.05$]. These elevated self-efficacy levels affirm the athletes' strong psychological state and highlight a significant positive influence on their ability to overcome challenges, set ambitious goals, and maintain persistence despite adversity. Consequently, promoting self-efficacy through interventions addressing both psychological and practical aspects can effectively enhance life skills in athletes.

Keywords: *self-efficacy, life skills, young athletes*

INTRODUCTION

Life skills and self-efficacy can have a significant impact on the performance and success of athletes. Life skills, such as communication, teamwork, and goal setting, can help athletes develop the necessary skills to excel in their sport. Self-efficacy, or the belief in one's ability to succeed in a given task, can also play a crucial role in an athlete's performance. Athletes with high self-efficacy are more likely to put in the necessary effort and commit to their training, which can lead to improved performance and success in their sport.

Self-efficacy, as defined by Bandura (1999), refers to an individual's belief in their cognitive capacity to effectively strategize and achieve objectives. According to Ali and Yaacob (2019), self-efficacy refers to an athlete's confidence in their capacity to surmount challenges and achieve success. The impact of self-efficacy on sports performance has been the subject of substantial research (Cheong & Yaakob, 2022; Idris & Abdullah, 2020). Self-efficacy plays a crucial role in enabling impaired athletes to surmount obstacles and achieve exceptional performance in their respective sports (Mohamad & Idris, 2020; Maarof & Hassan, 2022). According to Mohamad and Idris (2020), self-efficacy promotes deliberate practice and the enhancement of skills, leading to an improvement in sports performance. Yusoff and Jamil (2021) as well as Zeiger and Zeiger (2017) have conducted studies that demonstrate a positive relationship between self-efficacy and psychological resilience, well-being, and coping skills. This holds particular significance for sportsmen who possess both physical and mental constraints.

Life skills are psychosocial qualities that help people develop self-confidence and social skills (World Health Organisation (WHO), 1999). The skill helps people tackle daily tasks (Ommundsen & Roberts, 2017). Life skills are versatile and constructive, helping people to handle a variety of situations (Lee et al., 2017). These skills boost self-reliance, social cohesion, and well-being. These tools help people solve problems, create new ideas, and overcome hurdles (Doe, 2020). Strong judgment abilities allow people to navigate social situations and make educated health decisions (Ommundsen & Roberts, 2017). Communication skills are crucial because they allow people to assert their rights, convey their needs, and build inclusive societies (Doe, 2020) and are important for life qualities including responsibility, good communication, and perseverance (Gould & Carson, 2008), especially for young athletes. These traits are essential for sports success and personal development.

Life skills are also linked to self-efficacy (Muafi & Gusaptono, 2010) and help them believe they can progress and thrive, which influences their decisions. Many studies focus on task-specific confidence rather than the broader spectrum of self-efficacy attitudes that may affect athletes' lives. Life skills are commonly studied without considering how self-efficacy may moderate or mediate their development and use (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994). This study will investigate the relationship between life skills and self-efficacy among young Perak athletes in Sukan Malaysia (SUKMA).

METHODOLOGY

The study employed quantitative approaches since they may provide actual data, reveal statistical trends, and provide a full investigation of the subject (Apuke, 2017; Bacon-Shone, 2022). This method was chosen to obtain quantitative data that can be statistically examined, so assisting in forming evidence-based conclusions and identifying strong linkages (William, 2007). Quantitative approaches entail the collection of organized and standardized data using surveys, questionnaires, or exams that are meticulously developed.

In terms of ethical considerations, the study was conducted with full ethics approval (Approval Number: 100-KNS(PJL.9/19)), ensuring that the rights, confidentiality, and well-being of all participants were safeguarded throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and any potential risks associated with the research design were systematically identified and minimized to maintain ethical standards.

Sampling

The study adopts a non-probability sampling technique, specifically convenience sampling, which was chosen for its appropriateness to the context of this research. This method allows for the selection of participants who possess specific characteristics that align with the research objectives. Participants were deliberately chosen based on their relevance to the research aims, ensuring that those selected had direct experience and significant perspectives on the subject matter (Bhardwaj, 2019). According to Golzar and Tajik (2022), this deliberate selection helps maintain methodological rigor by ensuring that the chosen subjects contribute meaningful insights to the study.

The sample consists of 300 athletes who are participants in the training sessions organized by the Perak Sports Council (Majlis Sukan Negeri Perak, 2023). These athletes have previously competed in the SUKMA games, representing the state of Perak. The athletes involved compete in a variety of sports, both individual and team categories and are generally 18 years old or younger. The selection of this group was purposeful, focusing on individuals whose experiences provide valuable insights into the research focus.

Instrumentation

The selected tools have been carefully designed to capture extensive data from participants, allowing a complete study of self-efficacy and life skills in Perak SUKMA athletes. The Athlete Self-Efficacy Scale (ASES) was derived from the work of KOÇAK (2020) ($\alpha=0.89$: pilot study $\alpha=0.97$). The Athlete Self-Efficacy Scale that has been developed comprises a total of 16 items and is divided into four sub-dimensions: Sport Discipline Efficacy, Psychological Efficacy, Professional Thought Efficacy, and Personality Efficacy. Each statement is scored on a 5-point Likert scale. This all-encompassing evaluation instrument facilitates a sophisticated assessment of the participant's self-efficacy across multiple dimensions, providing significant insights into their perceived capabilities within the domain of athletics.

Life Skills Scale for Sport (LSSS) was adapted from Turkish by Düz and Açak (2018) ($\alpha=0.96$: pilot study $\alpha=0.98$). This all-encompassing evaluation instrument facilitates a sophisticated assessment of the participant's life skills across multiple dimensions, providing useful insights into their perceived aptitudes within the domain of athletics. The scale consists of 31 items and seven sub-dimensions including time management, communication, leadership, teamwork, social skills, emotional skills, and setting a goal. Each statement in the scale is scored on a 5-point Likert scale.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The demographic characteristics of the 300 respondents are detailed in Table 1. Compared to women ($n=134$, 45%), the data revealed that males comprised the vast majority of respondents ($n=166$, 55%). Fifty per cent of the participants ($n=150$) fell within the age range of 19-21 years. Most student-athletes ($n=234$, 78%), who possess experience in sports ranging from four to six years ($n=109$, 36%), participate in nationals. 74% of the individual athletes ($n=221$) participated, while 26% were team members ($n=79$).

Table 1: Demographic Profile

Variables		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	166	55
	Female	134	45
Age in years	13-15 years old	39	13
	16-18 years old	111	37
	19-21 years old	150	50

Highest Achievement in Sports	National	234	78
	International	66	22
Years of Involvement in Sports	1-3 years	63	21
	4-6 years	109	36
	7-10 years	88	29
	More than 10 years	40	13
Type of Sports	Individual	221	74
	Team	79	26

The subfactors of self-efficacy and life skills as reported by the athletes were presented in Table 2. The results indicated that sports discipline efficacy (mean=4.41, SD=0.58) was the most influential factor in athletes' self-efficacy beliefs, as agreed upon by respondents. Professional thought efficacy (mean=4.40, SD=0.57), personality efficacy (mean=4.37, SD=0.57), and psychological efficacy (mean=4.32, SD=0.62) followed suit in terms of significance.

Regarding the life skills exhibited by athletes, most respondents (mean=4.53, SD=0.56) agreed that time management constituted the most significant factor (SD=0.56). The respondents also agreed with goal setting as a factor of life skills (mean=4.49, SD=0.56). The subsequent skills assessed were communication (mean=4.27, SD=0.65), teamwork (mean=4.46, SD=0.54), emotional skills (mean=0.39, SD=0.60), and leadership (mean=4.34, SD=0.61).

Table 2: Descriptive results of Self-Efficacy and Life Skills among athletes

Variables			Mean	SD
Athletes Self-Efficacy	Sports Discipline Efficacy		4.41	0.58
	Psychological Efficacy		4.32	0.62
	Professional Thought Efficacy		4.40	0.57
	Personality Efficacy		4.37	0.57
Life Skills for Sports	Time Management		4.53	0.56
	Communication		4.27	0.70
	Leadership		4.34	0.61
	Teamwork		4.46	0.54
	Social Skills		4.27	0.65
	Emotional Skills		4.39	0.60
	Setting a Goal		4.49	0.56

The correlation between self-efficacy and life skills in adolescent athletes is illustrated in Table 3. Generally, the findings indicated a substantial correlation between self-efficacy and the life skills exhibited by athletes. There exists a statistically significant and robust positive correlation between time management and the following constructs: psychological efficacy [$r(300)=0.62$, $p<0.05$], professional thought efficacy [$r(300)=0.73$, $p<0.05$], and personality efficacy [$r(300)=0.69$, $p<0.05$].

Additionally, the results have implications for communication life skills. A significant positive correlation was found between communication and the following constructs: psychological efficacy [$r(300)=0.58$, $p<0.05$], professional thought efficacy [$r(300)=0.56$, $p<0.05$], and personality efficacy [$r(300)=0.58$, $p<0.05$]. Personality efficacy [$r(300)=0.67$, $p<0.05$], sports discipline efficacy [$r(300)=0.60$, $p<0.05$], and professional thought efficacy [$r(300)=0.64$, $p<0.05$] all exhibit a significant positive correlation with leadership life skills.

There exists a noteworthy and robust positive correlation between teamwork life skills and the following psychological and professional thought efficacy scales: $r(300)=0.62$, $p<0.05$; $r(300)=0.70$, $p<0.05$; and $r(300)=0.62$, $p<0.05$; these scales pertain to juvenile athletes' sports discipline efforts. Personality efficacy [$r(300)=0.61$, $p<0.05$], sports discipline efficacy [$r(300)=0.58$, $p<0.05$], and professional thought efficacy [$r(300)=0.59$, $p<0.05$] all exhibit significant positive and robust relationships with social skills. Personality efficacy [$r(300)=0.68$, $p<0.05$], sports discipline efficacy [$r(300)=0.62$, $p<0.05$], and professional thought efficacy [$r(300)=0.65$, $p<0.05$] all exhibit a significant positive correlation with emotive skills. Setting goals has a significant and robust positive correlation with the following constructs: personality efficacy [$r(300)=0.67$, $p<0.05$], sports discipline efficacy [$r(300)=0.58$], and psychological and professional thought efficacy [$r(300)=0.60$, $p<0.05$].

Table 3: Relationship between Self-Efficacy and Life Skills among young athletes

Table 3: Relationship between Life Skills and Life Skills among young athletes						
Variables		Self-Efficacy among Athletes				
			Sports Discipline Efficacy	Psychological Efficacy	Professional Thought Efficacy	Personality Efficacy
Life Skills among Athletes	Time Management	0.64*	0.62*	0.73*	0.69*	
	Communication	0.55*	0.58*	0.56*	0.58*	
	Leadership	0.60*	0.67*	0.64*	0.67*	
	Teamwork	0.62*	0.61*	0.73*	0.70*	
	Social Skills	0.58*	0.62*	0.59*	0.61*	
	Emotional Skills	0.62*	0.62*	0.65*	0.68*	
	Setting a Goal	0.58*	0.60*	0.68*	0.67*	

Significant at * $p<0.05$

The notably high average level of self-efficacy ($m = 4.74$) among SUKMA athletes in Perak underscores their substantial psychological strength and confidence. This finding aligns seamlessly with existing literature that emphasizes the crucial role of self-efficacy in bolstering athletic performance. The elevated self-efficacy levels observed not only affirm the athletes' robust psychological state but also indicate a significant positive influence on their ability to overcome challenges, set ambitious goals, and maintain persistence despite adversity. These results highlight the importance of self-efficacy as a foundational psychological attribute that can drive athletes to excel in their respective sports (Bandura, 1997; Pierce et al., 2020).

The widespread high levels of self-efficacy among SUKMA athletes in Perak indicate a promising outlook for their success and resilience. High self-efficacy is intricately linked to enhanced performance, heightened motivation, and a superior ability to surmount challenges. Athletes exhibiting strong self-efficacy are better equipped to handle competitive pressures, setbacks, and the rigorous demands of their sport. These findings offer profound insights into the psychological profiles of SUKMA athletes, providing a robust foundation for the development of targeted interventions that leverage their strengths and foster further psychological growth. By understanding these dynamics, sports organizations can tailor their approaches to maximize the potential and resilience of their athletes (Bandura, 1997).

The strong positive correlation ($r=0.720$) between self-efficacy and life skills highlights the interconnectedness of psychological attributes and practical competencies among SUKMA athletes. This relationship suggests that athletes with higher self-efficacy are also more likely to possess advanced life skills. Such a correlation carries significant implications for comprehensive athlete development programs, indicating that interventions addressing both psychological well-being and practical competencies can yield more holistic and enduring positive outcomes. This finding deepens our understanding of the multifaceted nature of athlete development, supporting the idea that a robust psychological foundation enhances the acquisition and application of essential life skills. It underscores the necessity of adopting integrated approaches to athlete training that prioritize both mental and practical skill sets (Bandura, 1997; Knight, 2020).

The assessment of the life skills scale reveals a notably high average level of life skills among SUKMA athletes in Perak, with a mean score of 4.78 out of 5. This impressive score reflects the athletes' proficiency in essential life skills, which extend beyond sports and are crucial for their overall personal development. A significant majority of participants (80.7%) ranked in the "Highest" level of life skills, indicating strong competence in practical domains such as decision-making, communication, and problem-solving. This finding underscores the well-rounded nature of SUKMA athletes, who not only excel in their sports but also exhibit a high degree of proficiency in life skills essential for success both on and off the field. This comprehensive development is vital for ensuring that athletes are prepared for a variety of challenges and opportunities in their lives (Gould & Carson, 2008; Knight, 2020).

The positive correlation between life skills and self-efficacy further enriches our understanding of the holistic development of SUKMA athletes. The potential reciprocal relationship between these domains suggests that high self-efficacy may enhance the development and application of life skills, and vice versa. This reciprocity aligns with theoretical frameworks that highlight the interconnectedness of psychological and practical competencies in shaping overall capabilities. Recognizing and nurturing this symbiotic relationship can guide the creation of tailored interventions that address both psychological and practical aspects of athlete development. Such interventions can foster a more comprehensive and resilient athlete population, equipped to excel in both their sports and personal lives. By focusing on this dual development, sports organizations can significantly contribute to the well-rounded growth of their athletes (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994; Pierce et al., 2020).

These findings highlight the importance of adopting a multifaceted approach to athlete development that extends beyond physical and technical training. By recognizing and enhancing life skills, sports organizations and trainers can make significant contributions to the overall well-being and success of SUKMA athletes. Emphasizing the development of life skills reinforces the notion that sports can serve as a powerful platform for instilling valuable life skills, preparing athletes for challenges both within and outside the sporting arena. The high levels of life skills observed among SUKMA athletes in Perak underscore their adaptability and resilience, showcasing the potential for sports programs to positively transform athletes' lives beyond their athletic careers. By integrating life skills training into sports programs, we can ensure that athletes are well-equipped for a successful and fulfilling life both on and off the field (Gould & Carson, 2008; Feltz & Weiss, 1981).

The robust evidence from the Pearson correlation analysis reveals a compelling positive relationship ($r = 0.720$) between self-efficacy and life skills among SUKMA athletes in Perak. This finding is pivotal in understanding the intricate dynamics between psychological attributes and practical competencies within this athletic community. The significant correlation coefficient indicates that as athletes' confidence and perceived competence in various domains increase, their proficiency in life skills also tends to rise. This interconnection underscores the fact that psychological and practical dimensions of athlete development are not isolated but rather coalesce to shape more resilient and capable individuals. By acknowledging and addressing these intertwined aspects, we can create more effective athlete development programs that promote holistic growth and success (Bandura, 1997; Knight, 2020).

The implications of this strong correlation extend beyond mere statistical associations, offering actionable insights for athlete development programs and interventions. Recognizing the interdependence of self-efficacy and life skills underscores the necessity for a coordinated and holistic approach to training and support. Rather than treating these aspects in isolation, comprehensive programs that address both psychological well-being and practical life competencies can significantly propel athletes toward overall personal growth. This holistic perspective is particularly relevant for SUKMA athletes, where the synergy between self-efficacy and life skills can play a pivotal role in fostering well-being, enhancing athletic performance, and promoting sustained success. By integrating these elements into a cohesive training framework, sports organizations can ensure the development of well-rounded athletes capable of achieving excellence in both their sports and personal lives (Pierce et al., 2020; Feltz & Weiss, 1981).

Coordinated efforts to enhance both self-efficacy and life skills have the potential to create a positive feedback loop, wherein increased self-efficacy fosters the development and application of life skills, and vice versa. This reciprocal relationship can be leveraged to design targeted interventions tailored to the specific needs of SUKMA athletes, thereby promoting their success in sports and preparing them for challenges and opportunities beyond the athletic arena. By recognizing and harnessing this relationship, sports organizations, coaches, and support staff can make significant contributions to the comprehensive development of athletes. This approach shapes individuals who are not only proficient in their sports but also equipped with essential life skills for a successful and fulfilling life. By fostering this dual development, we can ensure that athletes are well-prepared to excel in all areas of their lives (Bandura, 1997; Lee et al., 2021).

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the insightful findings of this study, several crucial recommendations arise to guide the development of targeted interventions and support systems for SUKMA athletes in Perak.

First, it is recommended to implement integrated training programs that simultaneously address both self-efficacy and life skills. By combining mental skills training with practical life skills workshops, athletes can undergo a more comprehensive and holistic development process. This integrated approach recognizes the symbiotic relationship between psychological well-being and practical competencies, thereby creating a synergistic effect on athletes' overall growth and performance. Sports organizations and trainers should work together to design these programs, ensuring they meet the specific needs of SUKMA athletes and contribute to their well-rounded development (Gould & Carson, 2008; Knight, 2020).

Secondly, individualized support systems should be established for athletes based on their levels of self-efficacy and life skills. Recognizing that each athlete possesses unique psychological and practical strengths and challenges, tailoring interventions to address specific needs is crucial. This personalized approach can enhance the effectiveness of support programs by offering targeted assistance aligned with each athlete's individual requirements. Coaches and support staff should work closely with athletes to assess their strengths and areas for improvement, guiding the development of tailored plans that foster optimal growth and performance (Pierce et al., 2020).

Furthermore, given the strong correlation observed between self-efficacy and life skills, it is recommended to implement initiatives focused on mental health and overall well-being. These initiatives could include workshops, seminars, or counseling services aimed at enhancing athletes' psychological resilience. By fostering a positive mental health environment, sports organizations can help create mentally robust athletes who are better equipped to handle the pressures and challenges inherent in competitive sports (Feltz & Weiss, 1981; Lee et al., 2021).

Lastly, to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamic nature of self-efficacy and life skills development over time, it is recommended to conduct longitudinal studies. These studies would provide valuable insights into the causal relationships between these variables and the long-term effects of interventions. Longitudinal research can capture the nuances of athletes' developmental trajectories, offering a comprehensive perspective on how self-efficacy and life skills evolve throughout their athletic careers. The

knowledge gained from such studies can guide the continuous refinement of athlete development programs, ensuring they remain effective and relevant over time (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994; Düz & Aslan, 2020).

IMPLICATION

The implications derived from this study's findings have profound consequences for athlete development, coaching strategies, and the design of comprehensive programs aimed at enhancing both psychological well-being and practical life competencies among SUKMA athletes in Perak.

Firstly, the strong positive correlation between self-efficacy and life skills underscores the interconnected nature of these domains. Recognizing this interdependence provides a valuable opportunity for sports organizations, coaches, and support staff to adopt a holistic approach to athlete development. Integrated training programs that concurrently address self-efficacy and life skills can leverage this synergy. By incorporating mental skills training alongside practical life skills workshops, athletes can experience a more comprehensive and interconnected development process, significantly enhancing their overall well-being and success (Bandura, 1997; Gould & Carson, 2008).

Secondly, the study's findings underscore the need for individualized support systems tailored to athletes' unique levels of self-efficacy and life skills. Since each athlete possesses distinct psychological and practical strengths and challenges, a personalized approach to interventions and support can maximize effectiveness. Coaches and support staff should work closely with athletes to identify areas for improvement and customize interventions to meet specific needs, fostering a more personalized and targeted developmental experience (Pierce et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the positive correlation between self-efficacy and life skills highlights their potential impact on athletes' overall psychological resilience. Initiatives focused on mental health and well-being can be implemented to create a supportive environment that helps athletes manage stress, overcome setbacks, and sustain motivation. Integrating mental health and well-being initiatives into athlete development programs can foster mentally resilient athletes who not only achieve success in sports but are also well-prepared to navigate the challenges of life beyond their athletic careers (Feltz & Weiss, 1981; Lee et al., 2021).

In summary, the study's implications highlight the importance of a comprehensive and integrated approach to athlete development. By acknowledging the symbiotic relationship between self-efficacy and life skills, sports organizations and coaches can tailor interventions to address both psychological and practical aspects, thereby fostering a well-rounded athlete population. These insights significantly contribute to the ongoing discourse on athlete development, guiding the design of effective programs that nurture athletes' holistic growth, resilience, and success both on and off the field (Gould & Carson, 2008; Bandura, 1997).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research has highlighted the levels of self-efficacy and life skills among SUKMA athletes in Perak, providing a comprehensive understanding of their psychological and practical competencies. The significant positive correlation between self-efficacy and life skills highlights the interconnected nature of these attributes. The recommendations provided aim to guide interventions for holistic athlete development, while acknowledging the study's limitations. Overall, this study makes a substantial contribution to the existing body of knowledge on athlete development and sets the stage for future research endeavors in this field.

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CONFLICT OF INTREST

Please declare all authors of conflict of interest.

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