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The Relationship between Career Plateau, Exercise Satisfaction, Exercise Commitment, and Career Transition Intention of Student Athletes

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Abstract. The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between career plateau, exercise satisfaction, exercise commitment and career transition intention of student athletes. For the study, student athletes registered with the Seoul City Sports Council were the population, which were surveyed from March to May 2020. Specifically, most participants were student athletes studying National Sport University, and some of which were middle and high school student athletes. A total of 340 student athletes were sampled using convenience sampling method, but 306 were finally used in the data analysis excepting incomplete or faithless questionnaires. The data analysis was conducted through frequency analysis, Cronbach's α, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), correlation analysis and Structural Equation Model (SEM) using SPSS 21.0 and AMOS 21.0. Firstly, career plateau of student athletes negatively had a significant effect on exercise satisfaction and exercise commitment. Secondly, career plateau of student athletes partially had a significant impact on career transition intention. Lastly, exercise commitment negatively had a significant effect on career transition intention. Therefore, supervisors need to closely manage the career plateau of student athletes.

Keywords: career plateau, exercise satisfaction, exercise commitment, career transition intention, athletes.

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INTRODUCTION

An occupation is an economic and social activity that people engage in continuously as well as a means that determines their social position, and is also an opportunity to achieve self-realization. As such, it is very important for an individual to decide his or her occupation in life [1]. A career is a series of experiences and activities that individuals acquire with regard to their work throughout their life, and is important to everyone since it has a continuing impact spanning the past, present, and future. Moreover, unlike those entering other occupational clusters, student athletes usually begin their involvement with sports at a young age, making efforts to secure professionalism in sports rather than their studies and experiencing a consistent career. In addition, athletes face career transition earlier than people in other occupations, for a range of reasons that can include injury, failure to be admitted to a school, decline in physical capacity, and slump [2]. Most athletes tend to make more of an effort to improve their physical performance, and prepare their career path according to this performance. It is critical to note that even an outstanding athlete cannot avoid retirement – that is, a career transition – which means that his/her career inevitably stagnates at some point. The problem is that athletes have difficulty accepting this unavoidable career plateau, and also see retirement from playing sports as social retirement. As a result, student athletes experience such practical difficulties as lack of preparation or adaptation when they suddenly change their career path, and this is an important aspect in terms of managing the shift in their career path from the life of a student athlete.

In general, career plateaus can be classified into objective plateaus that can actually be observed and subjective plateaus perceived through feelings and attitudes; career plateaus can also be classified according to contents and structural characteristics in terms of life story [3]. However, psychological influences such as the pressure of an intensive match and the outcome of the match, or anxiety due to injury, are significant for the career plateau of student athletes in a way that is different from those in general occupations. For this reason, approaches in terms of sports psychology and sociology of sports to occupational change such as retirement and career transition rather than management have mainly been

taken to manage the career plateau of student athletes [4]. However, a decrease in stagnant athletic performance and lack of professionalism faced by student athletes may affect the performance of their athletic club or team, and spoil the mood of their athletic club or team, thus having effects beyond the level of the individual. As such, beyond the personal level, the career of a student athlete should also be managed at the athlete club or team level, but it is actually difficult to expect such systematic management in the lives of student athletes.

Most previous studies related to career plateaus have worked from the perspective of organizational and human resources. It was verified that the career plateau of relevant personnel in sports field reduced their job satisfaction and organizational commitment and caused turnover [5], and in particular, that structural career plateau and content career plateau had an effect on negative job attitude and task behavior [6], and a similar result was also shown among employees in athletic organizations[3], [7].

In terms of human resources, the success and failure of a service corporation depends on systematic application of rational career management and continuous career development by the organization. Student athletes also can grow further by continuously maintaining and managing their athletic performance, developing a new technique or moving to a position of responsibility in their athletic club [8],[9]. On the other hand, if personal career is stagnant in the organization, it is difficult for individuals to be active. In particular, if student athletes have poor athletic performance and recognize their limitations in sports by themselves, they will face difficulties such as uncertain activities as an athlete, including a lack of opportunities to participate in competition, or to be admitted to a school of higher grade. This also becomes a reason for them to leave their school or team, move to another school or team at a lower level, give up their athletic career, and select a new career path. Therefore, the following hypotheses were formulated in this study in terms of individual career management and efficient team or athletic club management in order to investigate the career plateau, exercise satisfaction, exercise commitment and career transition intention of student athletes, and improve the suitability and efficiency of team (athletic club) operation.

H1 : The career plateau of student athletes will affect their exercise satisfaction.

H2 : The career plateau of student athletes will affect their exercise commitment.

H3 : The career plateau of student athletes will affect their career transition intention.

H4 : The exercise satisfaction and exercise commitment of student athletes will affect their career transition intention.

2. Materials and methods

In this study, student athletes officially listed as athletes by the Korea Sports Council as of March 2020 were set as the population and targeted elite student athletes from March to May 2020 were investigated. The convenient sampling method was used for sampling, and 340 completed questionnaires were collected from respondents within three organizations dedicated to intensively fostering athletes, with 306 analyzed after 34 were excluded.

In terms of the general characteristics of the research subjects, there were 185 male subjects (60.5%) and 121 female subjects (39.5%). For the form of affiliation, 89 of the respondents were student athletes in middle and high school athletic clubs (29%) while 217 were student athletes in university athletic clubs (71%). In terms of sports career, 179 were student athletes (58.5%) with a career history of 5 to 10 years, which was the majority; this was followed by 88 student athletes with a career history of over 10 years (28.8%) and 39 student athletes with a career history shorter than 5 years (12,7%). For prizes won, 177 student athletes had won a prize at a national athletic meet (57.8%), 56 had won a prize at an international athletic meet (18.3%), 29 student athletes had won a prize from an athletic meet hosted by a metropolitan city or a small city (9.5%), and 44 student athletes had never won a prize (14.4%). To break the group down by sport, 52 student athletes played baseball (17%), 40 participated in judo (13.1%), 33 were marksmen (10.8%), 24 played badminton, 20 played golf, and 14 participated in taekwondo and weightlifting (59.1%), indicating various sports entries.

2.1 Investigation tool

The questionnaire consisted of 29 questions including 6 questions regarding demographic characteristics, 10 questions regarding the recognition of career plateau by student athletes, and 4 questions for exercise satisfaction, 5 questions for exercise commitment, and 4 questions for career transition intention with regard to student athletes, and was prepared in 5-point Likert-type scale.

2.1.1 Career Plateau

Career plateau indicates the degree of desire for job performance in an affiliated organization, and it is represented by expectation or anxiety about promotion [10]. In this study, the career plateau in a sports

organization was supplemented with a structural plateau indicating "There is a limitation in the growth at an athletic club" and content plateau indicating "It is necessary to expand a new capability for exercise performance" based on the study conducted by Kim and Kim [1], who classified the career plateau in a sports organization into two child elements, and a total of 10 questions were selected. In addition, Cronbach's α of the relevant factor ranged between .849 and .921, indicating that internal consistency had been secured.

2.1.2 Exercise Satisfaction

In the study conducted by Widmeyer and Williams [11] on exercise satisfaction, the intent was to measure positive emotional condition regarding the growth that student athletes established through exercise performance based on the satisfaction factors of the team recognized by student athletes. Specifically, the questionnaire for exercise satisfaction consisted of four single questions, and Cronbach's α of the relevant factor was .855.

2.1.3 Exercise Commitment

Exercise commitment means that a student athlete commits to the relevant athletic club or team by carrying out his/her duties, such as training or participating in athletic matches, so it is possible to approach the exercise commitment in a manner similar to organizational commitment [12]. In this study, Exercise Commitment was modified and supplemented with five single questions to measure the attachment and sense of affiliation of student athletes to their athletic club or team at the time of exercise performance (training, match, etc.) based on the study conducted by Seo and Kim [13], and Cronbach's α of the relevant factor was .844.

2.1.4. Career Transition Intention

The intent of an employee to leave his/her organization or get a job in another organization mentioned in a study conducted by Kim [14] was modified and supplemented to make it applicable to career transition intention. Such intention was referred to as career transition intention in consideration of the characteristics of student athletes, as it can include transfer to another school, giving up on entering school and discontinuing one's athletic career rather than turnover (changing jobs). Cronbach's α of career transition intent measured with four single factors was .916, meaning that it is considered as a reliable measuring tool.

2.2 Validity and reliability of the research tool

In this study, the suitability of questions and the validity of contents of the questionnaire that was developed based on the previous studies were discussed with 2 professors in sport management, and sport pedagogy. The construction validity was obtained through a confirmatory factor analysis by distributing, examining and collecting the above questionnaire.

As shown in table 1, the confirmatory factor analysis was carried out using the maximum likelihood (ML), to verify the relationship between measurement variables set based on the previous studies. The results showed that in terms of career plateau, content plateau was .784~.936, structural plateau was .907~.931, exercise satisfaction was .914~.919, exercise commitment was .716~.921, and career transition intention was .838~879, confirming that all factors met standard values, as shown in Table 1[15]. Also, the internal composite reliability in all dimensions was .797~.873, indicating internal consistency, and the calculated Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value was .606~.746, obtaining convergent validity [16].

The confirmatory factor analysis result for each variable showed χ^2=383.044 (df=142, p=.000) based on the goodness of fit, indicating that it was inappropriate, but CFI=.948, TLI=.938, SRMR=.056 and RMSEA=.065, indicating that the goodness of fit value reached the recommended or the optimal level [17].

Table 1. Result of confirmatory factor analysis

Factor		Questions	S.C.	t	Sig	CR	AVE
Career plateau	structural plateau	1				.846	.702
		2	.907	11.693	.000		
		3	.931	11.743	.000		
	content plateau	1				.873	.746
		2	.926	17.930	.000		
		3	.936	19.261	.000		

	4	.888	18.991	.000		
	5	.784	12.699	.000		
Exercise Satisfaction	1				.862	729
	2	.919	24.378	.000		
	3	.914	14.513	.000		
Exercise commitment	1				.797	.606
	2	.921	9.514	.000		
	3	.838	14.160	.000		
	4	.716	15.239	.000		
Career Transition Intention	1				.846	.607
	2	.853	18.538	.000		
	3	.859	20.067	.000		
	4	.879	19.070			
Total	x^2=383.044 df=142 p=.000, CFI=.948 TLI=.938, RMSEA=.065 SRMR=.056					

***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05

2.3 Procedure of study and data processing

In this study, a description on the contents of the questionnaire was provided to the survey targets, and after asking for their cooperation, they were asked to respond to each question using a self-evaluation method. Most of their responses were collected on the spot, and some were later collected through revisit after a certain period of time. With exception of the copies of the questionnaire that were not faithfully answered, frequency analysis and correlation analysis were carried out suing SPSS 21.0 version, which is a statistical package program for Windows. Confirmatory factor analysis and structure equation model analysis (SEM analysis) for verifying the hypotheses were performed using AMOS 21.0version.

3. Results

3.1 Correlation between variables

As a result of verifying the discriminant validity by analyzing the correlation between the variables, The results showed that in terms of career plateau (structural plateau, contents plateau), exercise satisfaction and exercise commitment showed a negative correlation at 95 confidence level and career transition intention variables showed a positive correlation at 95 confidence level as shown in table 2. Also, all correlation coefficients were below .80, indicating that there was no multicollinearity problem [16].

Table 2. Correlation between individual factors

	structural plateau	Contents plateau	Exercise Satisfaction	Exercise commitment	Career Transition Intention
structural plateau	702a)				
Contents plateau	.444*	746a)			
Exercise Satisfaction	-.427**	-.646**	729a)		
Exercise commitment	-.353**	-.515**	.661**	606a)	
Career Transition	.575**	.413**	-.498**	-.472**	607a)

Intention

*p<.05, **p<.01 a) Ave

3.2 Verification of goodness of fit for the research model

The structural model for the relationship between the career plateau (structural plateau, content plateau), exercise satisfaction, exercise commitment and career transition intention student athletes set in this study was verified, and the results showed χ^2=461.007 (df=143, p=.000) and TLI=.919, CFI=.932, RMSEA=.085 and SRMR=.078 as shown, confirming the goodness of fit of the model. Tucker and Lewis [18] stated that if TLI and CFI were over .90, the goodness of fit index was satisfactory. Browne and Cudeck [19] asserted that if the RMSEA value was between .05 and .08, it was satisfactory goodness of fit, and if the RMSEA value was over .10, it was unsatisfactory goodness of fit, securing the goodness of fit.

Table 3. Results of verification for appropriateness in research model

χ^2	df	p	RMSEA	SRMR	TLI	CFI
461.077	143	.000	.085	.078	.919	.932

3.3. Hypothesis Test

As shown in table 4, The path coefficient value for the relationship between the structural career plateau and exercise satisfaction of student athletes (Hypothesis 1-1) was statistically significant (β=-.238, t=-3.030), so Hypothesis 1-1 that "Structural career plateau has a negative effect on exercise satisfaction" was adopted. The path coefficient value for the relationship between the content career plateau and exercise satisfaction of student athletes (Hypothesis 1-2) was also statistically significant (β=-.704, t=-10.327), so Hypothesis 1-2 that "Content career plateau has a negative effect on exercise satisfaction" was also adopted.

The path coefficient value for the relationship between the structural career plateau and exercise commitment of student athletes (Hypothesis 2-1) was also statistically significant (β=-.290, t=-4.241), so Hypothesis 2-1 that "Structural career plateau has a negative effect on exercise commitment" was adopted. The path coefficient value for the relationship between content career plateau and exercise commitment of student athletes (Hypothesis 2-2) was also statistically significant (β=-.446, t=-7.652), so Hypothesis 2-2 of "Content career plateau has a negative effect on exercise commitment" was adopted.

The path coefficient value for the relationship between the structural career plateau and career transition intention of student athletes (Hypothesis 3-1) was also statistically significant (β=.617, t=6.314), so Hypothesis 3-1 of "Structural career plateau has a positive effect on career transition intention" was adopted, but the path coefficient value for the relationship between the content career plateau and career transition intention of athletes (Hypothesis 3-2) was not statistically significant (β=-.073, t=-.805), so Hypothesis 3-2 of "Content career plateau has a positive effect on career transition intention" was rejected.

Finally, the path coefficient value for the relationship between exercise satisfaction and career transition intent (Hypothesis 4-1) of student athletes in the verification of the relationship between exercise satisfaction, exercise commitment and career transition intent of student athletes was not statistically significant (β=-.098, t=-1.362), so Hypothesis 4-1 that "Exercise satisfaction has a negative effect on career transition intention" was rejected, and the path coefficient value for the relationship between exercise commitment and career transition intent (Hypothesis 4-2) of student athletes was statistically significant (β=-.401, t=-4.365), so Hypothesis 4-2 of "Exercise commitment has a negative effect on career transition intention" was adopted.

Table 4. Result of hypothesis verification

Hypothesis	Path Analysis	S.C.	S.E.	C.R(t)	Sig	Remark
H1-1	Structural plateau → Exercise satisfaction	-.238	.079	-3.030	.002	Accept
H1-2	Contents plateau→ Exercise satisfaction	-.704	.068	-10.327	.000	Accept
H2-1	Structural plateau → Exercise Commitment	-.290	.068	-4.247	.000	Accept
H2-2	Contents plateau →	-.446	.058	-7.652	.000	Accept

	Exercise Commitment					
H3-1	Structural plateau → Career Transition Intention	.617	.098	6.314	.000	Accept
H3-2	Contents plateau → Career Transition Intention	-.073	.090	-.805	.421	Reject
H4-1	Exercise satisfaction → Career Transition Intention	-.098	.072	-1.362	.173	Reject
H4-2	Exercise commitment → Career Transition Intention	-.401	.092	-4.365	.000	Accept

***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05

4. Discussion

In this study, the relationship between the career plateau of student athletes and their exercise satisfaction, exercise commitment, and career transition intention was investigated and discussed, as follows.

First, the structural career plateau and content career plateau of student athletes had a negative effect on their exercise satisfaction. Conventionally, the career management of student athletes is carried out after their retirement, so there is a limitation when it comes to preparing for their career development after their retirement [20]. Therefore, student athletes lose confidence in their athletic performance by themselves and may become passive when their athletic performance has declined and they recognize their lowered position within their athletic club. All of this means that close attention and consultation are necessary to see if their declining athletic performance is simply caused by a slump or not, and if there is another career path they need beyond their athletic career.

Second, the structural career plateau and content career plateau of student athletes had a negative effect on their exercise commitment. It has been reported that student athletes are frustrated with their reality and feel discouraged when they strongly perceive that they have reached a career plateau [21], and such perception of a career plateau affects their sense of stagnation in growth and leads to a sense of comparative deprivation [22], which prevents them from committing to their tasks [23]. It should be noted that preceding studies on student athletes are not enough so there is a limitation on the discussion targeting a nurse organization or a service organization, so careful examination is necessary. Third, the structural career plateau of student athletes had a positive effect on their career transition intention while their content career plateau had no effect on their career transition intention. This can be regarded as echoing the findings of preceding studies, which indicate that people move to another department or consider turnover (changing jobs) when they perceive a sense of structural plateau such that their promotion is suspended in their organization or their position has dropped [21], [24]. Therefore, student athletes look for another school or another team at a lower level, consider transferring to another school when they become a substitute player, and even give up their athletic career when entering a school of a higher grade. As such, it is considered that the career plateau of student athletes is an important factor in deciding their career path.

Finally, the exercise satisfaction of student athletes had no effect on their career transition intention, and their exercise commitment had a negative effect on their career transition intention. This indicates that the concentration, which can be significant in displaying their athletic performance and emotional attachment and commitment to their athletic club, has an importance to their athletic performance and environment that goes beyond their satisfaction. In addition, student athletes have the intent to change their career path as their exercise commitment is lowered, a finding that can be considered as echoing that of a previous study indicating that a member who has difficulty in commitment has high turnover intention in the theory of organizational behavior [25], [26]. Therefore, it is necessary to help student athletes to manage their careers continuously by establishing the physical environment and emotional bonds that allow them to commit to their exercise.

Research discussion is aimed at persuading readers by comparing with other research studies and proposing possible solutions or useful suggestions for solving certain research outcomes, etc. Research results and discussion can be written in one section.

5. Conclusions

In this study, the relationships between the career plateau of student athletes and their exercise satisfaction, exercise commitment, and career transition intention were investigated, and the following

conclusions were drawn.

First, the career plateau of student athletes had a negative effect on their exercise satisfaction. Specifically, both a structural career plateau and a content career plateau had negative effects on their exercise satisfaction.

Second, the career plateau of student athletes had a negative effect on their exercise satisfaction. Specifically, both a structural career plateau and a content career plateau had negative effects on their exercise commitment. The above two results indicate that student athletes lose their exercise satisfaction and exercise commitment when they perceive their position and treatment in their affiliated athletic club or team and their athletic performance have been lowered. As this may affect individual performance as well as the performance of their affiliated athletic club or team, the relevant personnel in the athletic club should recognize that systematic career management of student athletes can directly influence the performance of the athletic club, and pay more attention to the career plateau of student athletes.

Third, the career plateau of student athletes had a partially positive effect on their career transition intention. Specifically, the structural career plateau of student athletes had a positive effect on their career transition intention. This indicates that student athletes seriously consider transferring to another school or giving up their athletic career after becoming a substitute player or being moved to a lower position in their athletic club, so efforts to prevent the career plateau of student athletes and consideration of measures to re-educate a slump-ridden student athlete should be made at the same time.

Finally, the exercise satisfaction and exercise commitment of student athletes had a partially negative effect on their career transition intention. Specifically, the exercise commitment of student athletes had a negative effect on their career transition intention. Student athletes intend to change their career path when they are unable to achieve their desired athletic performance or commit to their exercise, as the findings of this study show. Therefore, more stable and improved career management of student athletes is necessary.

The limitations and proposal of this study are as follows. First, there is a limitation in this study that unspecified student athletes from middle schools, high schools, and universities were sampled. Therefore, a more systematic and specific approach to sampling should be secured. Second, the career plateau of student athletes that they experience before their retirement should be managed throughout their lifetime and by their athletic club, since the purpose of life as a student athlete is outstanding athletic performance, so the re-examination of career plateaus targeting athletic clubs is necessary in the future.

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