



Understanding the Perception of student-Athletes Regarding the Potential of Sport in the Development of Life Skills

Dr Wasim Khan, Department of Sports Sciences & Physical Education, Gomal University Dera Ismail Khan, Pakistan, Wasimkhan2057@gmail.com

Dr Mohib Ullah Khan, Department of Sports Sciences & Physical Education, The University of Lahore Mohibullah.khan@ed.uol.edu.pk

Dr Tasleem Arif, Assistant Professor, Department of Sports Sciences & Physical Education, Sarhad University of Science and Information Technology Peshawar, Tasleem.ss@suit.edu.pk

Muhammad Iftikhar, PhD Scholar Health, Physical Education and Sports Sciences, University of Karachi, efeawan@gmail.com

Abstract- It is generally believed that sports participation develops the life skills (self-confidence and leadership) of the participants. These life skills can be easily developed if the sports activities are provided according to the approach and interest of athletes. The researcher specifically examined the potential of sport in the development of selected life skills (i.e. Decision-making skills and interpersonal communication skills) among university athletes. An inductive thematic analysis led to the identification of two main themes. Firstly, it appears that different types of life skill experiences emanated from university sport participation. Results indicated that: participants used sports to develop decision-making and inter-personal communication as life skills. There is a dire need that general students may ensure their sports participation to develop essential life skills, while athletes may maintain sports participation to maximize the life skills in their non-sports setting i.e academic endeavor, family, and community services.

Keywords: Sport, life skills, Decision making, interpersonal-communication, university-athletes.

I. INTRODUCTION

Life skills development is an attractive theme in the area of sports psychology. Researchers emphasize the concept of life skills and it can be considered to develop transferable skills through sports participation such as (teamwork, self-esteem, emotional control, and time management) (Allen & Rhind, 2019; Coakley, 2011; Gould & Carson, 2008; Hemphill, Gordon, & Wright, 2019). In sports psychology, life skills are those attributes developed through sports and transfer into non-sports settings such as academia, family matters, or professional lives (Kendellen and Camiré, 2017). Life skills is an umbrella term encompassing a variety of personal assets like psychosocial skills, disposition, knowledge, and identity construction as well as transformation (Pierce, Gould & Camiré, 2017); pride, humility, courage, and surpassing oneself (Trottier & Robitaille, 2014); trust, tolerance, and discipline (Strachan, Côté, & Deakin, 2011); and motivations, family relations and self-reliance (Jones & Lavallee, 2009).

Life skills are considered physical, behavioral, and cognitive skills necessary for each individual particularly for athletes, which can be transferred to the non-sports setting (Papacharisis, Goudas, Danish & Theodorakis, 2005). According to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 1946), life skills aim to bring positive changes in the behavior to address a balance in three important areas such as knowledge, attitude, and skills (e.g., time management and leadership).

Life skills development is a major justification for each individual to grow up as a dynamic and productive member of the community. In this regard, sports participation is considered the important vehicle to nurture the different essential life skills among the participants (i.e. hard work ethic, commitment, self-confidence, leadership role, and commitment), which can be effective for non-sports setting as well (Arif, Khan, S, & Khan, W, 2019; Arif, Khan, & Sheikh, 2018). Athletes can treat, play their role and behave in polite manners at home, academic lives, and community settings (Danish, Forneris, Hodge, & Heke, 2004). Sports are inherently considered as a good and healthy medium (Agroholm, 2017). In this regard, the discourse of life skills within the context of sports seems positive to develop and increase the participant's psychological, physical as well as social capital (Ronkainen et al., 2020). Life skills are generally applied in the context of health and social events (Spence, 2003). Life skills empower youth to take positive measures regarding the preservation and maintenance of their health and create a positive social relationship (Khera, & Khosla, 2012).

Prosperous and successful lives depend upon the various aspects of life skills such as hard work and commitment (Arif et al., 2019; 2018). Quality and successful life would be possible if considered the life

skills in our lives (Ozmete, 2011). Life skills enable the students in school lives to choose their future career, selection of the courses, and the profession as well (Sharma, 2003). Life skills can be productive for students in the provision of proper guidance, motivation to avoid anti-social behavior, and frequent use of the internet in a negative way as well as to restrict unsocial behavior like smoking and drug abuse (Burdek&, Lawska, 2016).

Sports is believed as an important tool to enable an individual to grow as a useful member of society (Camiré, Trudel&Forneris, 2012; Khan, M.,Jamil, Khan, A.,& Karim, 2012). Better academic outcomes can be achieved through sports participation (Khan et al., 2012; Miller, Melnick, Barnes, Farrell, & Sabo, 2005; Pfeifer &Cornelißen, 2010). Danish colleagues (2005) suggest that high school sports not only develop life skills among students, but it also contributes to educational achievements. Barber and colleagues (2001) reported that sports participation showed higher academic performance, greater autonomy, and greater professional satisfaction. Participants can learn life skills and values through sports that help them prepare to meet the favorable and unfavorable situations and with great patience, courage, and determination (Danish et al., 2004; Holt, 2008). Sports provide an environment for individuals to develop various skills such as teamwork, communication, goal setting, and time management (Camire, Werthner, &Trudel, 2009) as well as learn values such as honesty, patience, and respect (Camire' &Trudel, 2010).

Life skills are a universal debate and evolving of its eight prominent skills (i.e time management, communication, goal setting, problem-solving, teamwork, emotional skill, leadership, and social skills) (Cronin & Allen, 2017). The development of basic life skills strengthens the individuals' capabilities to meet the present-day demands and ready to overcome the issues like poverty, suicide, drug abuse, sexual harassment, and juvenile delinquency (Prajapati, Sharma, & Sharma, 2017). These are fundamental skills necessary for every member of the community. On the other hand, sports may cause and experienced negatively the participant's life skills such as (stress, social exclusion, and ego-oriented climate) (Fraser-Thomas &Côté, 2009; Gould, Flett, & Lauer, 2012; Kendellen&Camiré, 2015). Sports participation is associated with negative sentiments including the addiction to tobacco and use of alcohol (Eccles, Barber, Stone, & Hunt 2003; Melnick, Miller, Sabo, Farrell, &Marnes, 2001). Poor life skills could not highlight and expose the hidden potentials of the students in an efficient manner (Ozmete, 2011). On the other hand, healthy, well-structured, and appropriate sports programs, where the high school students can learn life skills to face and cope withthe challenges of modern life (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007).

It is generally observed in Pakistan, that the majority of schools and college's students have poor approached towards their professional lives, family tussle (relationship and interaction issues), and social bonding, while university students can be considered a mature and advanced stage to learn the necessary life skills within sports context and transfer to other domains of life. In this context, we specifically focused to examine the university athlete's perceptions that how sports participation develops decision-making and interpersonal communication skills and how and to what extent they applied these skills in other domains of life. Moreover, the researchers focused on decision-making and interpersonal communication as life skills, because these can be considered the foundational and essential life skills for athletic success and non-sports endeavors such as academic, family issues, and community services. In our Pakistani context, the general students of universities have a poor approach and skills due to lack or non-participation in sports activities to prepare themselves for professional lives. Moreover, the graduate students have difficulties while choosing/starting the career. Also, these students have a lack of interpersonal communication skills in their respective endeavors. Keeping in view this scenario, we decided to examine the athlete's perceptions regarding the potential of sports in the development of life skills. The current study advances our understanding that how sports develop life skills and transfer into other domains of life while athletes participating in sports events.

II. METHOD

This study aimed to examine the potential of sports in the development of life skills such as decision-making skills and interpersonal communication skills among university athletes. Interviews were conducted with 25 university athletes (15 males, 10 females) with a mean age of 21 and 26 years of age ($M = 22.0$, $SD = 2.46$). An inductive thematic analysis was used to obtain the requisite findings.

Context

The participants for the present study were selected from the university. Universities facilitate sports specifically to prepare the mind and body of the youth and proves them as a healthy and dynamic citizen. Like all other physical activities, the sport has always been effective in achieving academic goals (Khan et

al., 2020). The objectives of these competitions are to draw the university students' attention towards sports to learn the essential life skills to be productive citizens. University sport participation is considered to develop the brain and body of the participants, responsible and remains the asset for a nation (Shulman & Bowen, 2011). University sport is conducted regularly (every year) where both males and females participate in a variety of sports (badminton, football, cricket, hockey, volleyball). The directorate of university sports prepares teams to participate in these competitions.

Participants

A total of 25 university athletes (15 males, 10 females) with a mean age of 21 and 26 years of age ($M = 22.0$, $SD = 2.46$) were purposefully selected and participated in the study. All possible efforts were made to select those athletes who had sports experience. Researchers have suggested that experienced athletes can better help in expressing their sport experiences in the perspective of outcome through participation in sport (Gould & Carson, 2010; Voelker, Gould, & Crawford, 2011). We selected those participants who have taken part in university sport with at least 5 years of sports experience in football ($n = 10$), badminton ($n=5$), and cricket ($n=10$).

Procedure

Approval was obtained from the Departmental Supervisory Committee (DSC) to conduct the study. All the participants carefully read and agreed to volunteer consent. A recruitment letter consisting of principals' author information was distributed among the different departments of the university. Interested participants directly contacted the principal author to schedule the time, date, and venue for the interview. Confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents were assured that their responses would only be used for research purposes. The transcripts of the interviews were recorded and saved in an encrypted file. All the participants were thanked at the end of the interview.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to examine university athletes (male and female) perception regarding the potential of sports in the development of life skills. In semi-structured interviews, the participants expand their perceptions and experiences. Every possible effort has been made to reduce social desirability and the researcher thoroughly explained that this study focused on their university sport experience from the perspective of life skills development through sport. The interview guide consisted of two sections. Several questions on the role of university sport in the development of life skills (e.g., what do you think that university sport provided an opportunity to learn important life skills? What do you think that university sport participation helped you in developing and promoting the most important quality? What do you perceive that the university Sport' setting provided the important opportunity?)

Data Analysis

Written transcripts were made and emailed to participants for review by which all the participants have shown agreement upon the findings obtained from their views. An inductive thematic analysis suggested by (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was conducted. Thematic analysis is a widely used method of analysis in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the first step, the principals' author carefully read the transcripts to familiarize themselves with the data. Secondly, the initial codes (life skills) were generated. Third, the latent themes generated (decision making & interpersonal communication). The fourth step involved reviewing the themes, while in the fifth step, clear names for each theme were generated. The final step consisted of producing the report, whereby vivid quotes were selected to represent the participants' developmental experiences in university sport.

III. FINDINGS

We emerged two important categories from the analyzed data. First, students identified using sport for several decision-making skills such as time management, proper planning, and the ability of calmness both in defeat and victory. Secondly, the role of sport in the development of interpersonal communication skills such as leadership, communication, and teamwork.

Development of Time Management. The following findings have emerged from the decision-making cluster. Participants perceived that it is important to be punctual, like all but one participant ($n=24$) stated that punctuality is one of the important attributes towards the bright future of a student. They

identified that time management is considered as a central mainstay, which helps students in managing their academic assignments and social life situation successfully. One participant (P4) stated:

I want to be punctual. So, you need time management because time is one of the prerequisites for any sport. Most, you need to be time-bound. Like, you have to reach on time to the ground, otherwise; penalties will be imposed. If you say you're punctual but skip to practice in time, you could not perform in a good way. Therefore, you have to be that kind of time-bounded for sport and for.....to be punctual.

One of the participants (P5) stated, 'If you practice on time and reach the ground before the start of the game, you have to be punctual so you can play the game precisely if you do so in your practice and game, it will lead to utilizing these skills in your other domains of life i.e., academics, families and social aspects, you have to be punctual to finish your work well in time'.

Development of Planning. Proper planning is one of the important skills that was included among the decision-making skills and the majority of participants (n=24) acknowledged the role of sport in the development of planning. They believed that proper planning is necessary for the achievement of high standards in sports; besides, twenty-four (24) participants considered that the ability of proper planning they developed in a sports setting and utilize this skill in academic endeavor. For example, one participant (P1) stated:

What factor helpful in the achievement of high marks in an exam, you think-that planning. If you have to set a goal that might need proper planning to achieve, you think it isn't difficult to achieve, that you've remained confident. This is anything I can achieve.

Another participant (P12) expressed that 'preparation of a comprehensive plan will not success of guarantee, but lack of a plan will almost certainly ensure failure'. Participants believed that sports develop the ability of proper planning; in this regard, twenty-three (23) participants added that sport nourished the quality of proper planning. For example, one footballer (P3) stated, 'In sport setting, I can make a trap to capture my goal, so, I accordingly focus to capture the target that is the ultimate goal of my program. So, I always plan and devise, propose a scheme of performing better in the play'.

Bouncing back from defeat. Twenty-three (23) participants acknowledged that active sports participation develops the ability of calmness both in defeat and victory situations. For example, one Cricket player (P1) stated 'when I lose or win a game then I think that victory and defeat are common in each game, therefore; I never over-estimate these but keep the play in progress'. Participants had not acknowledged the role of coaches in the development of life skills through sports. Another participant (P3) in this study reported that a university sports program where coaches are not specifically trained to teach life skills, yet student-athletes added that they can learn life skills without an intentional approach. For example, one participant (P2) stated:

I still note that the game's thinking will prevail in the fairness of the player law and the spirit of sportsmanship. Therefore, with greater endurance, courage, and determination, I face all the favorable and unfavorable circumstances with tolerated behavior. I still stay respectful, empathized and cautious whether it is a question of the supremacy of law to take into account other people's emotions.

Development of Leadership. The following findings have emerged from interpersonal communication. The ability to "leadership team, troop or party" was identified by the participants as being a significant life skill for their success, along with a clear perception that participating in sport would help develop the ability of leadership. All but one participant badminton player (n=24) stated that leadership is one of the important attributes towards the future of a student. They revealed that leadership is the ability to guide, lead any troop, team, or party to reach the destination without or at least restrictions. Twenty-four (24) participants agreed with the vitality and importance of leadership roles in other domains of their lives, especially professional pursuits. One participant (P2) stated:

I am the captain of my team. I think that we are all leaders because you have to lead each other while participating in a game. This tendency leads my emotions that I want to be a successful politician, therefore I am I try to use what I've acquired as a captain.

No single participant acknowledged the role of a coach in the development and later on the transfer of life skills through sport, yet student-athletes can learn life skills in their respective sports.

Development of Communication. Participants believed that communication is an integral part of our daily lives and is considered as one of the significant elements in a sports setting. Therefore, sports scientists, physical educationists, and youth developmental researchers motivate and encourage the different categories of individuals such as children, adolescents, and youth for sports participation. For example, one participant (P3) stated 'the success of a coach in planning strategy and tactical aspects of the game largely depends upon the effective communication. No matter this communication with athletes but also with assistant coaches, trainers, officials, and physical education teachers'. All Participants

(n=25) considered that proper communication plays an important role in different aspects of life such as family, school, and community. In this regard, participants stated that communication equips you how to deal with adversity', how to adjust in a new situation', and how to ask for help when you are in need'. Likewise, one participant (P5) stated:

During play, you acquire how to ask for help because you cannot win alone. I was proud and didn't ask for support, but I didn't help the team afterward. So now I'm asking for help regardless of what people are going to think when I ask for help. I'll need to acquire how to communicate like that when I am a chairperson and need help from subordinates and other ministerial staff.

Development of Teamwork.The majority of participants (n=23) perceived that collaborative work can be developed through sports participation. They opined that teamwork was an important attribute for success in their important domains such as family, community, and sports as people need to be collaborative to build a teamwork environment that promotes a friendship and loyalty-fostering atmosphere. Participants stated that such close-knit relationships empower workers at the same time and connect them to work harder, collaborate and encourage each other. One participant (P1) stated:

If you want to work well with your colleagues and teammates, teamwork is vital. On the different occasions of our lives, you will probably have to work as part of a team; from class projects to birthday party planning. The more you collaborate with others, the more the team achieves its goals. Many workers need to work or partner with others to complete tasks and projects – getting skills and experience in teamwork can make it a much better experience. Even if you work well on your own, using life skills such as self-management is a respected skill for most jobs being a team player.

Almost (n=25) all participants identified teamwork as a crucial part of team sports, as well as an important life skill, is the ability to work together towards a common goal. They indicated that team sports participation allows children to create lasting friendships, improve communication skills, feel a sense of community, and learn to respect their coaches and teammates. They emphasized the role that sports have played in the development of teamwork ability, while participants had not acknowledged the role of coaches in the development of the ability to work together towards a common goal.

IV. DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to examine the perceptions of university athletes regarding the potential of sports participation in the development of life skills. We analyzed and evaluated the athlete's perceptions and emerged the two prominent themes such as decision-making skills and interpersonal communication skills.

Decision-making skills such as (time management, proper planning, and the ability to calm both in defeat and victory, and the ability to take the right decision at the right time are considered imperative attributes for students concerning their academic endeavors.

When analyzing the responses of athletes, time management skill, proper planning, dealing with adversity, and the ability of calmness both in defeat and victory developed through sports, the majority of athletes acknowledged the role of sports in the development of these attributes. Life skills such as teamwork, self-esteem, emotional control, and time management can be developed and transfer through sports participation to professional life (Allen & Rhind, 2019; Coakley, 2011; Gould & Carson, 2008; Hemphill, Gordon, & Wright, 2019). Sports may be considered a compulsory part of every educational curriculum especially at the university level (Bailey, 2006). Physical educationists considered sports as a valuable part of the educational curriculum. Sports are considered a unit of study that helps prepare students for the world in which they live (Bailey, 2006). Positive effects of sports participation such as problem-solving skills and academic performance of the students can be achieved through Volleyball, Basketball, Tennis, Shooting, Dance, Martial Arts, Swimming, and Mountaineering (Basak, Kok, Unver, & Cevirmez, 2014). Student-athletes can be role models for other students due to their specific social sports training (learning of social attributes in a sports setting) (Pawloski & Davidson, 2003). However, students need to enhance their sports and athletic participation for the achievement of maximum life skills.

The second theme emerged from data that sports have played an important role in the development of interpersonal communication as a life skill among the university's student-athletes, the results confirmed that sport has the potential to develop interpersonal communication as a life skill among university students.

We analyzed the athletes' perceptions, we observed that participation in sports helped to develop leadership skills; Involvement in sports helped in developing to communicate with the varsity of people and developed the quality of teamwork. In this regard, participants have opinions that sports

participation can develop the attributes of interpersonal communication skills. Productive and dynamic lives depend upon the various aspects of life skills such as hard work and commitment (Arif et al., 2019; 2018). Sports provide an environment for individuals to develop various skills such as teamwork, communication, goal setting, time management, honesty, patience, and respect (Camire, Werthner, &Trudel, 2009; Camire' &Trudel, 2010). Sports participation prepares athletes to meet the favorable and unfavorable situations and with great patience, courage, and determination (Danish et al., 2004; Holt, 2008).

The results might be interpreted with caution due to the inclusion of university-level student-athletes. Future investigations might be interesting at school, college, and particularly at vulnerable youth of the community to strengthen the credibility of the research.

V. CONCLUSION

The current study was conducted to examine the perception of university athlete's regarding the potential of sports in the development of life skills. The results revealed that both male and female university students have developed decision-making and inter-personal communication as life skills through sports participation. The participants believed that they learn personal gains and transfer life skills to other domains. Hence, it needs further considerations to determine the role of a coach in sports setting like intentional and unintentional teaching approaches to develop the essential life skills of athletes such as (cooperation, honesty, loyalty, empathy, and devotion) required in non-sports settings i-e academic endeavor, family and social settings and with proper parameters.

VI. IMPLICATIONS

The present study is insightful in describing the potential of sport in the development of life skills in our contemporary lives irrespective of gender. This study may be helpful to enhance the life skills development and their transfer through sport participation particularly among female folk, in conservative societies, where religious obligations are dominant over culture.

The current study has the potential to highlight and introduce the sports with the banner of life skills development among youth, their parents, and the community in general. The integrative force of sports towards life skills development may be utilized in a befitting manner like the inclusion of life skills units/chapters in the curriculum at different levels (school, colleges & universities) in the field of sports sciences and physical education. In this regard, athletes might be maximized their worth and potential in a well-educated manner in a sports setting and non-sports setting as well.

This study revealed that sport develops life skills among university students, Therefore, sports might be considered as an integral part of every educational institution such as medical, engineering, and general universities. It is suggested that a minimum of one and half hours (1/12) per week of life skills development through sports may be included in the educational curriculum of each discipline at the university level.

VII. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the present study were supporting the participation in sport for promoting remarkable development in the perspective life skills among university students. However, if the obstructive limitations faced by the researcher during the study are overcome; the results may be more desirable both the perspectives (i.e. development of life skills and its smooth onward transfer through sport). The researcher believes that re-expanding the canvas of geographical and socio-economic boundaries would provide better results that may help in the statistical examination of the role of sport in the development of life skills later on the transfer of these skills to other domains of life. The present study was carried out among the university-level students, the researcher is ambitious to include the larger and diverse population from medical, engineering universities would help in adding to the credibility of future research and this practice would advance the understanding in the relation of the sport with the development and transfer of life skills among students. The current study had not disclosed the athlete's perceptions regarding the role of a coach in the development and transfer of life skills through sports participation. Therefore, the researcher recommends that it would be advantageous to conduct a study to determine the role of a coach in perspective on the development and transfer of life skills through sport among participants.

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