



Psychosocial Characteristics in Sports Science Students: A Review of Academic and Athletic Dimensions

Rıdvan OZKAN¹ 

¹ Kastamonu University, Faculty of Sport Sciences, Kastamonu, Türkiye

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Abstract

The purpose of this review study is to examine the psychosocial characteristics that affect the academic and athletic lives of sports science students within a broad framework and to synthesize existing research findings within a thematic framework. The study was conducted using a qualitative research approach and did not collect primary data to interpretatively synthesize the findings, instead relying on a literature review. It examined important topics such as sports science, academic achievement, motivation, academic self-efficacy, athlete identity, career awareness, academic procrastination, psychological and mental resilience, burnout, self-compassion, social connectedness, and counseling support. Literature studies differ in terms of the academic achievement, motivation, and psychosocial well-being of sports science students. A dual career requires balancing both academic and athletic goals, and this process has been shown to have a significant impact on motivation, self-efficacy, stress management, and well-being. Additionally, students' identification as athletes is an important component that influences their decisions regarding education and sports. Furthermore, it has been emphasized that academic success is linked to academic motivation and self-efficacy, while academic procrastination is associated with perceived control and self-regulation strategies. Extraordinary conditions such as the pandemic and contemporary threats such as perceived stress affect resilience and mental health. Consequently, sports sciences form an important basis for the assessment of students' psychosocial characteristics in academic and sporting contexts, the development of support programs, and future experimental and long-term research.

Keywords: Dual Career, Psychosocial Characteristics, Sports Science Students

INTRODUCTION

Psychosocial Framework and Key Variables in Sports Science Students

Sports science students encounter multifaceted development processes for academic and athletic success (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019). In addition to their physical achievements, these students' psychosocial and psychological qualities are also noteworthy. As indicated in the sources, psychosocial elements such as academic stability, motivation, self-efficacy, stress management, identity formation, career knowledge, procrastination tendencies, resilience, and self-compassion affect students' academic success and athletic lives (Aquilina, 2013; Sorkkila et al., 2018).

Dual Career Process and Academic–Athletic Balance

Sports science students have to balance their academic life with their sporting activities. National athletes, in particular, may face many obstacles, such as social life, academic life, preparation and camp periods, family ties, mental state, and career. A study found that among these difficulties, the academic learning process is the most significant problem area and that these issues can negatively affect students' academic and athletic performance (Fişne & Urhan, 2022).

Academic Achievement and Academic Psychosocial Determinants

For sports science students, academic achievement is highly important for both their professional and personal development. According to a study conducted on students of the Faculty of Sports Sciences, it was determined that the faculty's standard of living does not significantly affect academic success, but that sub-elements of academic achievement, such as

academic self-efficacy, applying data, and discovery, greatly affect academic success. According to the study, academic success increases as academic motivation and self-efficacy levels rise (Şirin & Sevilmiş, 2016). These findings are consistent with international research and highlight the important role of psychosocial incentives in learning, revealing that academic self-belief in university students is a significant indicator of learning success (Chemers et al., 2001).

In psychosocial development processes, athlete identity is the way an individual primarily defines themselves through the role of an athlete. Athlete identity has a significant impact on motivation, self-perception, and social adjustment (Brewer et al., 1993). Exercise science, in particular, examines the compatibility between students' athlete identity and their academic life and personal development. This directly influences students' preferences and attitudes regarding learning and sports (Lally & Kerr, 2005; Houle et al., 2010; Uzun & Orhan). According to research in the field, an individual's identity is directly linked to the time and position they spend in sports. A study conducted among students at the Faculty of Sports Sciences at Erzurum Technical University revealed that students who are national athletes have a higher level of athlete identity than students who are not national athletes. It also found that students with 2 to 4 years or more of sports experience had a higher level of athletic identity than students with 1 year or less of sports experience (Karababa et al., 2023).

The Interaction Between Academic and Athletic Motivation

Sports scientists should examine the link between educational adaptation and athletic adaptation to better understand students' motivation and psychosocial characteristics. Ultimately, according to a study conducted on students at Ankara TVF Sports High School, a moderate positive correlation was found between students' desire for academic achievement and their desire for athletic achievement. Furthermore, demographic determinants such as years of sports participation, gender, and age showed significant differences in the levels of student motivation. This study revealed that internal and external motivation, in particular, had a consistent relationship with the desire to achieve (Demirhan & Filiz, 2018).

A study investigated the link between athletic identity and success tendencies and found that female students used more performance and learning methods than male students. Furthermore, researchers found a positive and significant correlation between athletic identity and success tendencies. In addition, it was shown that students with a distinct athletic identity were more inclined to avoid performance (Demir et al., 2018).

University students' academic performance and psychological well-being are affected by a significant psychosocial problem known as academic procrastination. For physical education students, this behavior can be a more pronounced risk factor as a result of intensive training in addition to their coursework obligations. A study conducted with Physical Education Faculty students found that scientific procrastination levels were generally below average, that management was mostly externally controlled, and that course loading patterns were pessimistic. Furthermore, it was determined that scientific procrastination increases as the belief in a control focus rises and that, when all components are considered together, only the control focus is a significant predictor (Alemdağ & Mataracı, 2024). These data are consistent with the global literature showing that academic procrastination is related to perceptions of control and self-regulation strategies (Steel, 2007; Uzun et al., 2025).

When organizing the academic and athletic lives of sports science students, career awareness is very important. In a study conducted with university students studying sports science, a number of demographic and athletic variables, such as gender, age, semester level, athletic status, field of study, and family monthly income, did not create a significant difference

in students' career advancement self-efficacy. The findings indicate that athlete-specific psychosocial characteristics are directly linked to career awareness in the groups of athlete identity, athletic facilitators, and career advancement difficulties (Safi et al., 2023). In this context, we can assume that athletes' psychosocial development is not limited to academic and career planning, but also encompasses psychological aspects related to performance, such as mental health and athletic self-confidence. Indeed, a study conducted on individuals involved in sports-related activities in the Eastern Anatolia Region revealed significant links between mental health and the sub-elements of general athletic self-confidence. Additionally, it was found that resilience capacity significantly affects athletes' athletic self-confidence and mental resilience (Birkök et al., 2022).

Extraordinary, ambiguous situations such as pandemics have made the psychosocial resilience and mental health levels of student athletes even more important. A study conducted on student athletes during the COVID-19 era found that psychological resilience was negatively associated with fatigue, anxiety, and mental health in both student athletes and non-student athletes. Additionally, psychological resilience was found to be positively associated with both COVID-19 anxiety and burnout (Karababa et al., 2023).

These results show that individuals' psychological resilience levels, mental health, and learning performance are affected during stressful and turbulent times. Similarly, technological stimuli and stress levels encountered in daily life are important psychosocial factors that affect the learning success of sports science students. In a study involving students from the Faculty of Sports Sciences, it was observed that as technology addiction and perceived stress levels decreased, academic success increased; as perceived stress levels increased, academic success decreased; and as perceived stress levels increased, technology addiction also increased. Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that technology addiction significantly predicts perceived distress. These results indicate a strong and reciprocal relationship between these two factors (Önal & Filiz, 2023).

Psychological resilience and perseverance in studies are key psychosocial factors that support students' success and help them cope with educational challenges. In a study conducted with primary and secondary school students, positive and meaningful correlations were found between psychological resilience and dedication to studies, perseverance in studies, and learning outcomes. Additionally, it was determined that perseverance in studies played a significant mediating role in the relationship between mental resilience and learning outcomes (Demir, 2023).

These results are consistent with the international literature indicating that academic resilience strengthens students' ability to cope with difficulties. Indeed, Martin and Marsh (2006) define academic resilience as an important psychological construct that enables students to succeed despite failure, stress, and academic demands. This construct has a strong link to academic success.

The main psychosocial determinants influencing students' behaviors in initiating and continuing academic tasks include academic motivation, self-efficacy, and attribution styles. Academic procrastination behavior is also closely linked to these factors. A study conducted with nursing students found that academic self-efficacy was the best predictor of academic procrastination, followed by academic motivation. It was observed that as students' levels of academic self-efficacy and motivation increased, their tendency to procrastinate decreased (Güngörümüş & Kaplan, 2022).

These findings indicate that practices aimed at increasing students' motivational resources and self-efficacy perceptions play a critical role in preventing academic procrastination.

However, students' goal-setting and orientation approaches toward their courses are other important psychosocial factors associated with academic success. A study conducted with students at Süleyman Demirel University's Faculty of Sports Sciences found a low or positive correlation between students' academic engagement levels and their academic goal orientation. Research conducted on sports science students found that this correlation was related to students' academic engagement levels (Doğan et al., 2022).

Sports science students can pursue both their education and athletic careers thanks to a psychosocial skill known as dual career ability. A study conducted on student-athletes revealed significant differences in students' dual career competencies based on factors such as faculty type, scholarship status, and nationality. In particular, distinct differences were found in the subcategories of social intelligence, career planning, dual career management, and adaptation (Karadağ et al., 2024).

These results show that psychosocial skills are important for balancing an individual's academic and athletic life. However, the process of achieving academic success is not limited to individual abilities; environmental factors such as family and teacher support also significantly influence academic achievement. Indeed, according to a study conducted with eighth-grade students, diligence, organization, and regular and timely work, as well as non-academic activities such as music and sports, have been proven to increase success. Furthermore, parents and teachers considered qualities such as regular study, time management, and interest in the subject to be quite important for academic success (Keskin & Özcan, 2024).

The academic success of student athletes is linked not only to personal abilities but also to cultural capital and psychosocial resources inherited from their families. According to a study conducted at sports schools, students' low academic achievement stems from their families' limited cultural resources (Yıldırım, 2021). This demonstrates the important role that an individual's environmental opportunities play in the academic process. It is noted that psychosocial qualities that can be developed at the individual level play an important role in reducing the impact of adverse conditions. Indeed, in a study conducted with students attending sports high schools, no significant difference was found between academic self-efficacy levels and the variables of grade level, gender, parental education level, and family income level, while a significant difference was found in academic self-efficacy levels according to the residence variable (Karakaya et al., 2021).

Sports science students' psychosocial qualities are quite broad and constantly changing, and these qualities simultaneously affect students' academic and athletic progress. Academic success and athletic performance depend on various factors such as students' educational motivation, self-efficacy, stress management, career knowledge, procrastination habits, mental resilience, and self-compassion. Assessing athletic identity, motivational focus, and psychosocial skills as a whole allows for a broader explanation of students' success and well-being (Brewer & Petipas, 2017; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019).

Academic motivation is one of the key psychosocial factors that directly influences how sports science students participate in classes, their success, and their attitude toward school. It has been observed that academically motivated students attend classes regularly, develop a more positive attitude toward learning, and achieve higher academic success. Furthermore, it has been found that students with high academic motivation have a more positive view of their schools and experience less academic anxiety (Korkmazer, 2020). However, academic effort not only affects students' academic success but also influences their overall happiness in life. Indeed, a study conducted reveals a significant link between academic motivation and life

satisfaction. Students with higher academic motivation experience greater life satisfaction (Koç, 2018).

Academic self-efficacy is another important psychosocial factor that influences students' academic outcomes in sports science. Academic self-efficacy refers to a person's belief that they can successfully perform academic tasks. Research has shown that this trait is a clear indicator of academic progress. In particular, it has been found that academic self-efficacy is related to negative psychological states such as anxiety levels and perceptions of failure. On the other hand, students with high levels of self-efficacy have better academic outcomes (Polat, 2017). Similar results have been found in studies conducted on sports science students: gender, sport discipline, nationality, and academic self-efficacy levels showed significant differences, particularly in the sub-dimensions of technical competence, social position, and mental applications (Ulucan & Çetinkaya, 2017).

Sport-Related Psychosocial Resources and Performance-Related Characteristics

Academic motivation is one of the important psychosocial factors affecting learning success. Studies conducted on sports science students have shown that learning success, self-development, applying knowledge, and discovery abilities, as well as academic self-efficacy criteria and academic motivation, significantly affect the quality of faculty life (Sevilmış & Şirin, 2016). These findings indicate that personal sources of motivation and how students perceive their own abilities have a significant impact on their educational journey. Olympic studies show that students' psychological and social qualities affect not only their educational success but also their athletic performance and ability to cope with adversity. Therefore, mental resilience is a critical psychological-social characteristic for students to continue their athletic pursuits and cope with challenges. The mental resilience levels of Olympic studies students differed according to factors such as gender and age. Males had lower attachment levels than females and demonstrated higher mental resilience in some age groups (Savaş et al., 2023). However, it has been determined that mental resilience levels are significantly linked to athletic success; specifically, self-confidence has a positive effect on field performance (Marangoz et al., 2022).

In addition to mental resilience, the ability to engage with sports-related topics is also a significant psychosocial characteristic that influences both athletic success and academic and athletic participation levels for sports science students. Studies have found that the ability to cope with sports events significantly predicts athlete commitment; in particular, focus, the ability to perform well under pressure, self-esteem, and the desire for success have been found to positively affect athlete commitment (Özcan, 2021). However, moderate positive relationships between mental resilience and coping skills with sports-related issues were found in team competitions, while lower levels of positive relationships were observed in individual sports (İlgar & Ayaz, 2023).

This situation demonstrates that the psychosocial qualities of sports science students play a fundamental role in achieving success in both individual and team sports. However, fatigue constitutes another important aspect of the psychosocial structure of sports science students. Studies conducted on students engaged in active sports have found significant, negatively correlated, and moderate connections between athletes' self-compassion and fatigue levels; it has been determined that athletes with high levels of self-compassion experience lower levels of fatigue (Selvi et al., 2023). Similarly, it has been determined that the level of educational support experienced by students is an important protective factor, especially in overcoming fatigue with the help of teachers, and that academic flow plays a unifying role in this context (Atlı & Ağar, 2024).

Similarly, it has been determined that pressure regarding academic expectations positively affects school fatigue, while academic motivation has a reducing effect on fatigue (Dörtyol et al., 2023). On the other hand, the connection between the desire for academic and athletic success among sports science students is also noticeable in terms of psychosocial characteristics. Studies show that there is a moderate connection between the determination to succeed in class and the drive for sporting victory; significant differences were found in the sub-elements of the trend according to factors such as gender, age, and duration of sports participation, and that internal and external motivation, in particular, are positively linked to the desire to achieve success (Filiz & Demirhan, 2018).

Social and Institutional Support Mechanisms

Academic competence and social belonging are among the important factors for sports science students in terms of course adaptation and psychosocial functioning. Studies have found that academic motivation is a clear indicator of perceived academic competence; academic motivation and social belonging together explain approximately 11% of the variance in perceived academic competence. Additionally, a low-level, inverse relationship between academic competence and social belonging has been reported (Han et al., 2022). These findings indicate that academic self-efficacy interacts not only with personal motivation sources but also with students' connections to their social environment. Indeed, the international literature suggests that students' perceptions of academic self-efficacy are closely related to academic motivation and sense of belonging; high levels of self-efficacy support academic participation and achievement, but this connection can take different forms depending on the nature of social relationships (Bandura, 1997; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020).

Sports science is recognized as an important support system for students in terms of mentoring relationships and academic and psychosocial development processes. Research has found a clear link between the advisor's guiding and mentoring role and students' academic motivation; it has been determined that the advisor's guiding approach increases students' academic motivation levels while also reducing their anxiety about future unemployment (Mutlu et al., 2022). These findings are consistent with the international literature, which shows that counselor-student interaction is not limited to academic achievement but also has an impact on students' professional perceptions and psychological well-being. Indeed, studies conducted with university students indicate that perceived advisor support strengthens students' academic goals, self-efficacy perceptions, and career skills; beneficial counseling relationships facilitate students' coping with stress and uncertainty (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; McEwen & McEwen, 2019).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This review study reveals that the psychosocial characteristics guiding both the academic and athletic lives of sports science students present a multifaceted and variable structure. Findings in the literature indicate that factors such as academic goals, self-efficacy, athlete identity, career awareness, academic procrastination, mental resilience, academic perseverance, burnout, social connections, and mentoring relationships play a decisive role in the academic competence and athletic success of sports science students. It has been determined that, particularly for student-athletes in the dual career process, balancing academic and athletic expectations constitutes a significant psychosocial burden and that this situation has direct effects on academic adjustment, motivation, and well-being.

The findings indicate that the main factors supporting academic persistence are not limited to cognitive or individual abilities; they are closely linked to social support networks, embraced culture, mentoring relationships, and psychosocial security components. Mental resilience, self-compassion, and useful coping techniques emerge as significant protective

resources for sports science students facing stress, fatigue, and pressure to succeed. Additionally, it is noted that academic and athletic perseverance develop in a mutually reinforcing manner, and this interaction enhances students' academic engagement and success. In this context, it is recommended that psychosocial support systems be established for student-athletes in sports science programs. Strengthening academic guidance units, promoting practices aimed at enhancing the dual career mindset, and planning activities to increase students' academic self-efficacy, perseverance, and stress management skills are of great importance. Future studies using longitudinal and experimental methodologies to investigate the cause-and-effect interactions of psychosocial indicators on academic and athletic outcomes in greater depth will contribute significantly to the field literature.

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CONTRIBUTION RATE	EXPLANATION	CONTRIBUTORS
Idea or Notion	Form the research hypothesis or idea	Rıdvan OZKAN
Design	To design the method and research design.	Rıdvan OZKAN
Literature Review	Review the literature required for the study	Rıdvan OZKAN
Data Collecting and Processing	Collecting, organizing and reporting data	Rıdvan OZKAN
Discussion and Commentary	Evaluation of the obtained finding	Rıdvan OZKAN
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