



WINNING IT BOTH: STORIES OF SECONDARY ACADEMIC ACHIEVER STUDENT-ATHLETES

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Abstract:

Learners' experiences at school should not only be limited to performing academic tasks, but should also focus on physical activities since the main goal of education is to develop a child holistically. The study explored the experiences of academic achiever student-athletes and how they excelled in academics and sports fields. Qualitative research using multiple case studies was used as its design. Eight key informants who were academic achiever student-athletes from five secondary schools in the division of Eastern Samar were purposively selected as study key informants. Results of the study revealed that in order to cope with the pressure brought about by being an academic achiever and an athlete at the same time, the student-athlete should manage well his/her time spent studying and training. Also, goal setting was the key to all their sports and academic-related tasks. Further, social media applications were used by student-athletes in catching up with their missed lessons while in training. Parents' involvement was also identified as another factor in achieving both academics and sports. It is recommended that a strong support system from the school and parents be in place.

Keywords: student-athlete, academic achiever, case study, sports participation, physical education

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1. Introduction

Students' holistic development is one of the main goals in the basic and higher education institutions today. Schools should not be only limited to academic tasks but should also focus on other performance tasks such as sports participation. Some studies (Riciputi and Erdal, 2017; Beron and Piquero, 2016; Muñoz-Bullón et al., 2017) have been conducted on the influence of sports participation on the academic achievement of students. The development of learners' critical thinking (Abril et al., 2022), the ability to ask questions and the capability to innovate things are not possible if a learner is not physically fit (Amazona and Allegado, 2018). Aside from focusing on academic-related activities, students should engage themselves also in extra-curricular activities (Rodriguez and Abocejo, 2018) to boost their physical well-being.

Despite the positive results of *“sports participation in the academic performance and behavior of students, still there are student-athletes who struggle academically. In the Eastern Visayas Regional Athletic Association (EVRAA) Meet 2018 organized by the Department of Education (DepEd)”*, the Eastern Samar Division had 634 athletes who participated in the regional athletic meet. Among the student-athletes, only 12 percent got a weighted average of 90 percent and above for the school year 2017-2018. These students are considered achievers based on the DepEd grading system policy. This indicates that, despite their hectic schedule for concentration training which usually runs almost a month, some student-athletes are still able to get high marks on their academic performance.

There is a dearth of studies and available literatures dealing with the impact of sports participation on the academic performance of students. Also, conducted researches on how student-athletes maintain their excellent academic performance simultaneous with their sports participation is still less explored, particularly in the province of Eastern Samar, Philippines. Accordingly, this study explored the lived experiences (Calipusan-Elnar and Abocejo, 2021) of secondary student-athletes and the effective mechanisms that made them excel in their academic performance and sports participation and be an inspiration to other students to be encouraged and actively participate in the different sports events in schools.

1.1 Study Objectives

The study explored the experiences of student-athletes in achieving excellent academic performance in secondary schools in the Division of Eastern Samar. Specifically, it examined the (1) experiences of student-athletes in achieving excellence in sports and academics, and (2) the process of how the student-athletes achieved excellent performance in both academics and sports.

2. Literature Review

Sports have been a part of the school curriculum. It pertains to any human activity which primarily focuses on physical exertion, with elements of competition a social engagement in an organized manner (Rowe et al., 2013). Students are encouraged to join different sports competitions to hone their skills and potential. Higher sports participation among school students is evident when parental support is present (Maniam, 2017). As such, participation in sports provides health benefits and leads to the performance goals of institutions (Muñoz-Bullón et al., 2017).

Performance is measured by how well students perform on tests linked to their schoolwork and on other kinds of exams (Magalhães et al., 2020; Cuñado and Abocejo, 2018). This is the overall product of a student over the course of a semester or academic year. The variables that influence students' academic achievement in schools, colleges, and universities have been the subject of several researches (Cabuquin, 2022; Saraspe and Abocejo, 2020; Polson, 2013; Mingo and Abocejo, 2021; Tokan and Imakulata, 2019; Rees and Joshep, 2010; 2014; Fernandez and Abocejo, 2014). *“Student effort, previous or prior academic performance, self-motivation, the socioeconomic status of the parents of the students, age, the number of hours of study per day, admission points, various entry qualifications, tuition trends, and the students’ area of residence (rural or urban) are some of the variables identified and reported to have an impact on the academic performance of students”* (Ali et al., 2013; Chaubey et al., 2016; Al Shehry and Youssif, 2017).

Student-athletes have always been revered inside and outside the school. Zhou et al. (2022) argued that student-athletes possess a healthier life than non-student athletes. This is because, they are used to training, competitions and strict discipline implementation. This skill however may sometimes lead to stigma and stereotyping among their peers and teachers. Some studies (Chow et al., 2020; Beron and Piquero, 2016; Cabuquin, 2022; Chaubey et al., 2016; Firth-Clark et al., 2019) revealed that student-athletes are a group prone to prejudice, negative feelings, and stereotypes, and are stigmatized in the campus community.

This attitude towards student-athletes may influence their behavior towards the academic achievement (Toka and Imakulata, 2019). Furthermore, student-athletes are preoccupied with extra tasks at school ranging from academic to sports-related tasks. Because of this, athletes tend to practice mental toughness to overcome pressure, adversity, and failures to perform at their best (Pandian et al., 2022).

Students’ sports participation contributed to positive behavior and attitude. Engaging in sports activities increases learners’ motivation and fosters teamwork and self-discipline which results in positive academic performance (Rees and Joshep, 2010). Students who engage in sports are generally more sociable, and confident and tend to have higher self-esteem (Sziraki, 2011). Furthermore, athletes become more responsible when it comes to academic achievement and more involved in order to maintain their sports participation (McCorkle, 2012). Additionally, engaging in sports enhanced athletes' judgments of academic success, mental processes, and being more rational and

patient, which resulted in a noticeable improvement in student-athletes' attendance in class (Ignacio and Rodolfo, 2017).

3. Research Methodology

The researchers used the multiple case study method which is a type of qualitative research design that focuses on in-depth investigations of a group of persons within the same unit (McLeod, 2014). This method was used to explore the lived experiences of student-athletes and to identify the effective measures used by the student-athletes in achieving excellent academic performance while participating in sporting events.

A purposive sampling technique was used in determining the key informants (KIs) of the study. The KIs of the study were eight (8) junior high school student-athletes within the Division of Eastern Samar who are qualified for the EVRAA Meet 2019 and have a general weighted average (GWA) of ninety percent (90 percent) and above for the school year 2018-2019. Five (5) selected secondary schools in the Division of Eastern Samar participated. The schools were selected due to the high prevalence of student-athletes who meet the minimum qualifications to be KIs in the study.

Permission was sought from the school head of the five (5) selected secondary schools in the Division of Eastern Samar to conduct the study. Consent forms and parents' permits were also distributed to the KIs to formally ask them for their participation in the study. The KIs were then oriented and informed as to the whole process of the study. Then a face-to-face interview followed. Thematic analysis of Clark and Braun (2013) was used to analyze the generated qualitative data.

All the KIs volunteered to take part in the study after the purpose of the study was explained to them. As informed during the pre-study briefing orientation, the names of the students were kept confidential throughout the study. Interviews were conducted in their respective schools and at their convenient time. The KIs shared only the data that they were comfortable sharing.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings of the study were extracted from the significant statements of the key informants of the study using Clark and Braun (2013) thematic analysis. Two main themes were generated from the statements with corresponding sub-themes.

Theme 1: Jack of Two Trades – The Coping Mechanisms of Student-athletes

The student enters the school to be developed holistically and not only the intellect that is being nourished and nurtured. Some students opt to participate in co-curricular activities including sports. Maintaining a good academic standing and sport participation had been quite a problem for some students. One result of this study tackles the coping mechanism of student-athlete-academic-achievers in balancing their academic performance and sports participation.

Subtheme 1.1: Managing Time Well

All students are pressured in engaging in different activities in school. Part of their requirements are projects, reporting, examinations (Mingoa and Abocejo, 2021), co-curricular activities, and even participation in different school organizations (Molina et al., 2021). Essentially, student-athletes has more than enough to handle in their hands. On top of the academic requirements, they need to insert time for regular trainings, practices, competitions, medical check-ups, among others. And to be more organized, it bears important to have a schedule of their different activities to evade cramming all the activities in a day, they need to adhere to their schedules so that no important activity, be it academics or sports, are left out.

"It really is about time management. We usually have our practice from five up until seven or eight after class. And they also told me that I should not sacrifice class hours for practice." (Key Informant 1, lines 13-15)

Being a student-athlete requires a lot of dedication, hard work and time management (Camia et al., 2020). Aside from balancing all their athletic requirements, they also must handle being full-time students. Though student-athletes are constrained with time yet found strategies to manage them (Hoover, 2012). Student-athletes who can manage their time well for both academic and sports activities would have favorable academic performance. As such, constant reminders and follow up from teachers and coaches are necessary to maintain and enhance the student athlete's academic endeavors.

Subtheme 1.2: Being Self-Efficacious

Students are driven by their desire and belief that they can do hard tasks because they believe they can. Setting goals helps student-athletes accomplish the tasks they need or want to complete in their lives. Students at school engage in different activities and sometimes it is difficult for them to do several things at a time. Being a student-athlete and at the same time an academic achiever are two things which are really difficult to accomplish (Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2018), but because of goal setting, they are able to surpass these difficult situations. Goals motivate these student-athletes to complete tasks and improve in many facets of academic pursuits (Healy, 2020; Firth-Clark et al., 2019)

"It's all about goal setting, sometimes it is really tiring, but because I have a goal that really I should win a medal during the EVRAA meet and it was realized for the record (laughs) and I was able to do good in sports and academics. I have always seen to it that I will not loss focus on my studies because I was a consistent honor since elementary and I can't just give up my academics just for the EVRAA meet." (Key Informant 3, lines 12-15)

Goal setting has many benefits in life and in sports. Setting goals helps motivate people to perform better and finish assignments in both academic and athletic contexts (Polson, 2013). Proper motivation is the key to how these student-athlete-academic-

achievers surpass all challenges which come their way (Santillan and Madrigal, 2021). Student-athletes who still manage to excel academically despite their involvement in sports manifest prevalent self-efficacy in the way they deal with difficult situations (Castagna, 2022; Anibaba, 2018; Stahlke, 2021). The goal set by the student-athlete serves as a guide and a reminder of the reason why they need to double their effort just to meet their goals.

Subtheme 1.3: PM (Private Message) is the Key

Technology has been an essential component in the life of these student-athletes. Through technology, most especially social media applications like Facebook Messenger, these students are able to cope and be updated with their lessons. Even when they are sent on athletic training, social media is the reason why they stay on top of things with their classroom group chatrooms and other such convenient forms of communication made possible by recent technological advances.

“We created a group chat whose members are my classmates, I let post the lessons that they had discussed while I was still on Balangiga, Samar, Philippines so that I can catch up with the lessons. I also had a classmate which is also an athlete, while we are on the concentration training venue, we review the lesson that was posted on our group chat.” (Key Informant 6, lines 39-42)

Today's student-athletes benefit from the usage of social media as a learning tool. Social media is rapidly being used as a study tool, especially by today's technology-savvy students. Web applications like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram used to be almost solely used to take a vacation from academics (Ahmadi, 2019; Flanigan and Babchuk, 2015). Social media can be an alternate tool for learning while student-athlete are away from school for the training of their sporting event. Social media can have a profound impact on the process of learning in higher education by offering new possibilities for learners and teachers (Abbas et al., 2019). Both students and teachers need to utilize social media as an enabler for learning, by doing so, makes communication between and among the students and teachers easier and faster.

Theme 2: Never Fail Expectations

Student-athletes who at the same time maintain good academic standing are bombarded with lots of duties from academic to athletic-related tasks. Student-athlete-academic-achievers tend to be more competitive at school and they always make sure to be the best at all things they do because they always want to make their parents proud of them even if sometimes, they experience exhaustion and tiredness. Some of them had been doing good both in sports and in academics for quite some time, so they are expected by their parents to maintain or even surpass their performance in sports and academics in the previous years.

“Even if sometimes it is so tiring, I still push myself to do good because I don’t want to fail my parents, since elementary I was an athlete who always qualified for EVRAA meet and at the same time a consistent honor. My parents always expect me to receive medals (laughs) at the end of the school year that why I always put my best.” (Key Informant 7, lines 19 – 21)

In general, parental expectations have been found to play a critical role in children’s academic success (Dagalea et al., 2022). Parents that have higher standards for their children see their children's grades rise (Schneider, 2018), achieve higher scores on standardized tests (Ma et al., 2018), and stay in school longer than students with parents who have very low expectations (Jeynes, 2018). Furthermore, Parietti (2015) noted that the parents are very influential with regards to the athletic and academic performance of their children. Undoubtedly, parents need to help children in their academic and sports journey to gain the best results being student-athletes (Epstein, 2019).

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

From the different themes generated it was concluded that in order to cope with the pressure brought by being an academic achiever and at the same time achiever in sports, a student-athlete should know how to manage well the time that is spent on his/her studies and in training for the sport he/she participated. It is also important to set goals, in order to be motivated in all the things a student-athlete is doing. Also, social media should be utilized by student-athlete who is out of school for sports training in catching up on lessons missed at school. Parents play important role in the performance of a student-athlete may it be in academics or in sports. Parents who show intense support to their children result in good academic and sports performance of their child.

It is recommended that schools should provide a support system for student-athletes so that they will be able to cope with the rigors of training, competitions and practices and the demands of the academic aspects of the learners by making sure that student-athletes performance is monitored regularly and should be given extra consideration in the submission of academic requirements. Parents should give full support to their student-athletes and should be made aware of the impact of their encouragement towards the achievement of these athletes’ goals. Finally, schools should develop a virtual learning system, where student-athletes will be informed of the ongoing lessons and will have the chance to submit requirements even if they are not physically present in the classroom.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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