

Racing Between Deadlines and Finish Lines: A Phenomenological Inquiry into Student-Athletes' Academic and Athletic Experiences

Julius F. Padal Jr.^{1*} Iris B. Arroyo²

Authors Information:

¹⁻²South East Asian Institute of Technology, Inc., Sports Culture and Arts, Tupi, South Cotabato, Philippines

Correspondence:

jpadal72@gmail.com

Article History:

Date Received: April 27, 2026

Date Revised: May 2, 2026

Date Accepted: May 7, 2026

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20085406>

Document ID: 2026IJROMS0060

Recommended Citation:

Padal Jr., J. F., & Arroyo, I. B. (2026). Racing Between Deadlines and Finish Lines: A Phenomenological Inquiry into Student-Athletes' Academic and Athletic Experiences. *International Journal of Research on Multidisciplinary Studies*, 1(4), 64–74. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20085406>

Abstract. Student-athletes frequently encounter difficulties in balancing academic responsibilities and athletic commitments; however, limited qualitative research has examined how they navigate these dual demands within local higher education contexts. This study explored the experiences of student-athletes in managing academic and athletic responsibilities at South East Asian Institute of Technology, Inc. (SEAIT) during the School Year 2025–2026. Using a qualitative phenomenological design, the study involved ten purposively selected student-athletes who participated in semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed through thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and meanings embedded in their experiences. Findings revealed that student-athletes continuously negotiated overlapping academic and athletic roles marked by time constraints, shifting priorities, and pressure to perform effectively in both domains. Participants described highly structured routines that often resulted in physical exhaustion, limited personal time, and emotional stress. Major challenges included conflicts between class schedules and training sessions or competitions, missed academic activities, and difficulties maintaining academic performance. Despite these challenges, participants demonstrated resilience through adaptive coping mechanisms, including effective time management, self-discipline, emotional regulation, and reliance on support from peers, family members, coaches, and selected teachers. The study further revealed inconsistencies in institutional support, particularly regarding schedule flexibility, coordination between academic and athletic programs, and timely financial assistance. As a result, many student-athletes depended more heavily on informal support systems to sustain their dual roles. The findings highlight the importance of developing coordinated, responsive, and student-centered support mechanisms that promote the academic success, well-being, and holistic development of student-athletes in higher education institutions.

Keywords: Academic–Athletic Balance; Coping Strategies; Institutional Support Systems; Student-Athletes; Student-Athlete Experiences

Introduction

In contemporary higher education, student-athletes represent a distinct group whose participation in competitive sports is integrated with academic enrollment. Rather than simply balancing two responsibilities, they construct and negotiate interconnected academic and athletic identities that influence motivation, performance, and engagement across both domains (Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2024). This positioning reflects institutional expectations for holistic development, where athletic excellence is pursued alongside academic achievement. However, existing literature has largely framed student-athlete experiences in terms of performance outcomes, with limited attention to how they subjectively interpret and navigate these intersecting identities within specific educational contexts.

Empirical studies highlight persistent structural constraints that shape student-athlete performance. Time scarcity, scheduling conflicts, and workload intensity remain recurring issues, often affecting academic consistency and recovery time. While time management is frequently identified as a mediating factor in performance outcomes, research suggests that these challenges are not merely individual deficits but are also shaped by institutional scheduling systems and competing organizational demands (Liu & Tareh, 2024; Pujianto et al., 2024). This indicates a need to move beyond describing “lack of balance” toward examining how such constraints are socially and institutionally produced.

Beyond structural pressures, literature also points to psychosocial dimensions such as stress regulation, identity strain, and emotional fatigue. Although sports participation is associated with resilience-building, coping capacities are uneven and often dependent on contextual support systems (Pasno, 2024). Peer, coach, and institutional support structures have been identified as protective factors; however, their effectiveness varies across settings and is not consistently experienced by all student-athletes (Romine, 2023). This suggests a fragmented understanding of how support mechanisms actually function in practice.

Despite these insights, a critical gap remains in the literature: most studies rely on generalized or quantitative frameworks that overlook context-specific, lived interpretations of student-athletes within localized institutional environments. In particular, there is limited phenomenological inquiry into how student-athletes in technical or regional higher education institutions experience, interpret, and make meaning of these academic–athletic intersections.

At the South East Asian Institute of Technology, Inc. (SEAIT), student-athletes are expected to excel academically while participating in structured athletic programs; however, the everyday realities of managing these institutional expectations remain underexplored.

Thus, this study sought to address this gap by exploring the lived experiences of student-athletes at SEAIT during School Year 2025–2026, focusing on how they construct meaning and navigate institutional, academic, and athletic demands within their specific educational context.

Research Questions

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of student-athletes at South East Asian Institute of Technology, Inc. during the school year 2025–2026 as they navigated the complex and often competing demands of academics and athletics. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do student-athletes describe their lived experiences in navigating the simultaneous demands of academics and athletics?
2. What challenges do student-athletes encounter in balancing their academic and athletic responsibilities?
3. How do student-athletes cope with the pressures associated with academic–athletic demands?
4. How do student-athletes perceive the institutional and social support in managing their dual responsibilities?

Scope and Delimitation

This study explored the lived experiences of student-athletes at South East Asian Institute of Technology, Inc. during the School Year 2025–2026, focusing on how they navigated the demands of balancing academics and athletics. Utilizing a phenomenological research design, the study involved ten (10) purposively selected varsity athletes who possessed direct experience of the phenomenon under investigation. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews to elicit in-depth narratives regarding their challenges, coping mechanisms, and perceptions of institutional and social support. The study was limited to qualitative exploration and did not include quantitative measures of academic performance or causal analysis. Furthermore, as the research was confined to a single institution and a small sample size, the findings are not intended for generalization but rather to provide a rich and contextualized understanding of student-athletes' experiences within SEAIT.

Literature Review

Student-Athletes and Dual-Role Demands

Student-athletes operate within a dual-career framework that requires simultaneous engagement in academic and elite athletic performance. Across Scopus- and Web of Science-indexed literature, there is a consistent agreement that this dual engagement produces both developmental benefits and structural strain, depending on institutional support and contextual conditions. A large-scale scoping review across 23 countries ($n > 3,000$ student-athletes) found that dual-career athletes consistently experience time pressure, scheduling conflicts, and role overload due to overlapping academic and athletic demands (De Maio et al., 2025). Dual Career Research in Sport and Education literature, however, presents a nuanced view: while European-based studies emphasize structural barriers such as rigid curricula and limited flexibility, North American studies tend to highlight identity development and transferable life skills as positive outcomes of dual participation (De Maio et al., 2025; Hart et al., 2024). Similarly, a Web of Science–indexed bibliometric review confirms that dual-career research has grown rapidly but remains geographically concentrated in Europe, indicating a gap in global representation and contextual diversity (Vidal-Vilaplana et al., 2022). This suggests that conclusions about dual-career demands may be context-dependent rather than universally applicable.

Lived Experiences of Student-Athletes

International phenomenological and qualitative studies converge on the idea that student-athletes experience identity tension; however, they differ in interpreting whether this tension is adaptive or stressful. Yukhymenko-Lescroart (2024) argues that student-athletes develop intertwined academic and athletic identities that shape motivation and engagement positively when balanced effectively. In contrast, European Scopus-indexed qualitative findings emphasize that identity duality often produces emotional strain when

institutional expectations are misaligned (Hart et al., 2025). This contrast highlights a key synthesis: identity duality itself is not inherently problematic, but becomes either developmental or stressful depending on institutional flexibility, cultural expectations, and support systems. Recent findings from a multinational review further support this, showing that when academic and athletic systems are integrated, student-athletes report higher meaning-making and resilience rather than fragmentation of identity (De Maio et al., 2025). Thus, lived experience is best understood not as a uniform psychological condition but as a contextually mediated negotiation of roles within educational and sport systems.

Challenges in Balancing Academic and Athletic Responsibilities

Across literature, three dominant challenges consistently emerge: time constraints, scheduling conflicts, and fatigue. However, studies diverge in how these challenges influence student outcomes. A systematic review in sport policy research found that elite student-athletes dedicate 20–30 hours per week to training in addition to academic requirements, resulting in chronic time scarcity (Hallmann & Weustenfeld, 2024). This structural overload is associated with academic disengagement and increased risk of burnout in rigid systems. Conversely, recent European Scopus-indexed research suggests that when institutions provide flexible learning arrangements (e.g., online learning, adjusted deadlines), time pressure becomes a manageable developmental challenge rather than a barrier (De Maio et al., 2025). This creates a clear contrast, such as rigid systems bring stress, fatigue, and academic risk, while flexible systems promote discipline, resilience, and adaptability. Furthermore, psychological studies in sport psychology highlight that fatigue and stress are not only consequences of dual demands but also mediating factors that influence whether athletes experience growth or burnout (Hart et al., 2024). This indicates that the same challenge may lead to opposite outcomes depending on institutional and psychological support.

Coping Mechanisms of Student-Athletes

Coping strategies among student-athletes are consistently categorized into adaptive and maladaptive responses, but international literature differs in explaining their origins and effectiveness. Time management, self-discipline, and prioritization are universally identified as core adaptive strategies (Liu & Taresh, 2024). However, Scopus-indexed studies emphasize that these are not purely individual traits but are developed through structured coaching, mentoring, and institutional learning environments (Hart et al., 2025). In contrast, psychological research in sport science highlights resilience as a key internal resource that enables athletes to persist under dual pressure (Pasno, 2024). Yet, comparative findings show that resilience alone is insufficient when institutional support is weak, suggesting that coping is both psychological and structural. Social support systems further differentiate coping effectiveness across contexts. International findings consistently show that athletes with strong networks (coaches, peers, family, academic advisors) report lower stress and higher academic persistence compared to those relying solely on individual coping strategies (Hart et al., 2025). This supports a socio-ecological interpretation of coping, where individual behavior is shaped by environmental support systems.

Institutional and Social Support Systems

Institutional support is widely recognized in literature as a decisive factor in student-athlete success, yet its effectiveness varies significantly across contexts. A large European scoping review found that effective dual-career systems require integrated academic-athletic coordination, including flexible curricula, tutoring, and financial assistance (De Maio et al., 2025). However, the same review reports persistent implementation gaps such as inconsistent scheduling policies and delayed financial support, which reduce effectiveness even in well-designed systems. Similarly, research in sport policy highlights that institutional flexibility is strongly associated with improved academic performance and reduced dropout risk among student-athletes (Hallmann & Weustenfeld, 2024). In contrast, fragmented systems, where academic and athletic departments operate independently, tend to increase role conflict and stress. Social support systems (mentorship, peer networks, and coaching relationships) also play a critical buffering role. Studies consistently show that emotional and informational support reduces isolation and enhances motivation, particularly during high-demand periods such as competition seasons (Hart et al., 2025). Overall, the literature converges on a key synthesis. Student-athlete success is not determined solely by individual ability but by the degree of institutional integration between academic and athletic systems.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore and understand the lived experiences of student-athletes at South East Asian Institute of Technology, Inc., during the School Year 2025–2026 as they navigated the demands of balancing academics and athletics. Phenomenology was

considered appropriate for this study as it focuses on describing and interpreting the essence of individuals' lived experiences from their own perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Through this design, the researcher aimed to gather rich, in-depth narratives that capture how student-athletes perceive, interpret, and make meaning of their dual roles. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to freely express their experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and perceptions of institutional and social support within their academic and athletic contexts.

Sampling Design

This study employed a purposive sampling technique to identify information-rich participants who were most suitable for the phenomenon under investigation. Purposive sampling is commonly used in qualitative phenomenological research to intentionally select individuals who have direct experience with the phenomenon and can provide in-depth and meaningful descriptions of their lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach allowed the researcher to focus on participants who could best articulate their experiences in navigating academic–athletic demands, ensuring that the data gathered were rich, relevant, and aligned with the objectives of the study. Through this method, the study was able to obtain detailed narratives necessary for capturing the essence of the phenomenon under exploration.

Research Locale

This study was conducted at South East Asian Institute of Technology, Inc. (SEAIT), located in Crossing Rubber, Tupi, South Cotabato, Philippines. SEAIT is a private higher education institution that offers various academic programs while also supporting extracurricular activities, including competitive sports programs for student-athletes. The institution serves as an appropriate research locale due to the presence of student-athletes who are simultaneously engaged in academic studies and athletic training, and competitions. The setting provided a relevant context for exploring the lived experiences of student-athletes as they navigate the demands of balancing their academic responsibilities and athletic commitments within an institutional environment that offers both educational and sports development opportunities.

Research Participants

The participants of this study consisted of student-athletes who were actively engaged in both academic studies and varsity sports at SEAIT during the school year 2025–2026. They were selected based on their direct experience in managing the dual demands of academic and athletic responsibilities, making them well-suited to provide rich and meaningful descriptions of the phenomenon under investigation. The study focused on individuals who were able to share in-depth narratives regarding their lived experiences, including the challenges they encountered, the coping strategies they employed, and their perceptions of institutional and social support. Their perspectives served as the primary source of data in understanding the essence of balancing academic–athletic demands within the context of the institution.

Research Instrument

This study utilized a semi-structured interview guide as the primary research instrument to explore the lived experiences of student-athletes in navigating academic–athletic demands. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions designed to elicit rich, detailed, and in-depth narratives regarding participants' experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and perceptions of institutional and social support. Semi-structured interviews were deemed appropriate for phenomenological research as they allow flexibility in questioning while ensuring that all key areas of the phenomenon are adequately explored (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Follow-up questions and probing techniques were also used to encourage participants to elaborate on their responses, thereby capturing the essence and meaning of their lived experiences.

Data Gathering Procedure

The data gathering procedure started with securing permission from SEAIT authorities and obtaining informed consent from the selected student-athlete participants after explaining the purpose, scope, and ethical considerations of the study. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted at a convenient time and place for the participants to ensure comfort, confidentiality, and minimal disruption to their academic and athletic schedules. Open-ended questions with follow-up probes were used to gather rich and detailed responses, and all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim with participants' consent. Transcripts were then organized, verified, and prepared for analysis while ensuring data confidentiality and security throughout the process. To ensure trustworthiness, the study observed credibility through member checking and prolonged engagement with the data; dependability through an audit trail of procedures and coding decisions; confirmability through reflexive journaling to minimize researcher bias; and transferability through thick descriptions of participants' experiences. Thematic analysis followed a

systematic process: data familiarization through repeated reading of transcripts, initial coding of meaningful data segments, grouping of codes into themes, reviewing and refining themes, and defining and naming final themes aligned with the research objectives. Data collection continued until data saturation was reached, meaning no new themes or significant information emerged from successive interviews, ensuring that the experiences of student-athletes were sufficiently captured.

Results and Discussions

Research Question 1: How do student-athletes describe their lived experiences in navigating the simultaneous demands of academics and athletics?

Theme 1: Continuous Role Balancing Between Academics and Athletics

Student-athletes' lived experiences reveal that dual participation in academics and athletics is not merely a scheduling issue but a continuous process of identity switching, time fragmentation, and psychological negotiation. Across accounts, participants consistently described their daily routines as fragmented, requiring constant movement between academic and athletic demands, which limits sustained focus and recovery. This lived fragmentation aligns with Liu and Taresh (2024), who argue that dual-career structures inherently produce discontinuous time use that disrupts deep academic engagement. However, while prior studies often frame this as purely a structural limitation, the present findings suggest a deeper experiential consequence: fragmentation shapes how student-athletes perceive themselves, often blurring the boundary between "student" and "athlete." This identity fluidity further reflects what Hart et al. (2025) describe as situational identity activation, where context determines which identity becomes dominant. However, the present data extend this by showing that identity switching is not neutral—it carries emotional strain due to the cognitive effort required to constantly recalibrate roles. Yukhymenko-Lescroart (2024) emphasizes that dual identity can enhance adaptability, but the current findings suggest that in high-demand environments, adaptability may coexist with exhaustion rather than replace it. Thus, role balancing is better understood not as successful integration but as continuous negotiation under constraint, where stability is rarely achieved and temporary adjustment becomes the norm.

Time Fragmentation Due to Dual Responsibilities. Student-athletes described their daily lives as fragmented between academic requirements and athletic commitments, resulting in continuous switching of tasks and limited sustained focus. This fragmentation of time reflects the structural reality of dual-career demands, where students must constantly adjust to competing schedules and priorities. Similar findings were reported by Liu and Taresh (2024), who emphasized that time fragmentation is a major barrier to effective academic engagement among student-athletes due to overlapping responsibilities in training and schooling. Participant 3 expressed this lived experience in a statement: "*Parang hindi ko na alam kung student ba ako or athlete, kasi from class diretso training agad, then after training aral ulit kahit pagod na.*" (Sometimes I don't even know if I am a student or an athlete, because from class I immediately go to training, then after training I still study even when I am already tired). This statement reflects the lived tension of constantly shifting roles, where student-athletes struggle to maintain balance and continuity in their academic engagement. Yukhymenko-Lescroart (2024) explains that such dual-role identities often create cognitive and emotional strain due to competing expectations from both domains.

Constant Shifting Between Academic and Athletic Identity. Participants also revealed that they frequently shifted their mindset depending on whether they were in academic or athletic settings. This identity switching reflects the dual identity construction of student-athletes, where both academic and athletic selves coexist and influence behavior. Hart et al. (2025) noted that student-athletes often experience identity negotiation, where the dominance of either academic or athletic identity depends on situational demands. Participant 8 shared: "*Kung naa ko sa klase, student ko, pero kung naa sa field, athlete jud ko. Lisod kay usahay maglisod ko og adjust sa duha.*" (When I am in class, I am a student, but when I am on the field, I am really an athlete. It is difficult because sometimes I struggle to adjust between the two). This highlights the fluid yet stressful nature of identity switching, where student-athletes must constantly adapt their mindset. According to Yukhymenko-Lescroart (2024), this dual identity can enhance adaptability but may also create internal conflict when both roles demand high performance simultaneously.

Pressure to Maintain Performance in Both Domains. Student-athletes expressed strong pressure to perform well both academically and athletically, as failure in one area was perceived to negatively affect their overall identity. This performance pressure reflects role strain, where expectations from multiple domains create psychological burden. Hart et al. (2025) found that student-athletes often internalize dual expectations, leading to heightened stress and fear of underperformance. Participant 5 stated: "*Daw indi*

pwede magpahog, kay kinahanglan maayo ka sa eskwela kag sa sports. Kon isa lang ang kapalpakan, mabatyagan mo gid ang pressure." (It feels like you are not allowed to fail or be careless, because you need to be good in school and in sports. If you fail in just one, you really feel the pressure). This illustrates the internalized expectation of perfection across both domains, reinforcing the psychological burden experienced by student-athletes. Pasno (2024) noted that sustained pressure in dual roles may impact emotional well-being, although it can also foster resilience over time.

Struggle to Establish Personal Time and Rest. Participants consistently reported a lack of personal time due to overlapping academic and athletic responsibilities. Rest and leisure were often sacrificed to meet deadlines and training demands, leading to fatigue and reduced recovery time. Liu and Taresh (2024) emphasized that inadequate rest is a common consequence of poor time balance among student-athletes. Participant 1 shared: *"Wala na talaga akong time para sa sarili ko, tulog na lang minsan kulang pa, kasi study then training araw-araw."* (I really don't have time for myself anymore, sometimes even sleep is not enough, because it is study then training every day). This reflects the lived exhaustion experienced by student-athletes, where personal well-being is often compromised. Pasno (2024) highlights that lack of recovery time negatively affects both academic performance and athletic efficiency, reinforcing the need for balanced scheduling and institutional awareness.

Research Question 2: What challenges do student-athletes encounter in balancing their academic and athletic responsibilities?

Theme 2: Structural and Personal Constraints in Managing Dual Demands

The challenges experienced by student-athletes reflect an interaction between institutional rigidity and personal exhaustion, rather than isolated difficulties. Scheduling conflicts emerged as the most persistent structural issue, where academic and athletic calendars operate independently, forcing students into unavoidable trade-offs. While Liu and Taresh (2024) identify scheduling conflict as a logistical issue, the present findings reveal a deeper implication: conflicts generate "forced prioritization," where students repeatedly sacrifice one domain, leading to accumulated academic gaps. Missed lessons and deadlines further compound this issue, but more importantly, they create a cascading effect of learning discontinuity. Unlike Hart et al. (2025), who primarily associate missed classes with reduced performance, this study finds that the consequence extends to reduced academic confidence, as students perceive learning as incomplete even when catching up. This indicates that the challenge is not only academic delay but also perceived knowledge insufficiency. Physical exhaustion and mental stress also interact in reinforcing cycles. Pasno (2024) highlights fatigue as a performance limiter; however, the present findings suggest a more complex dynamic where physical exhaustion directly reduces cognitive capacity, intensifying emotional stress. Rather than separate categories, fatigue and stress operate as a combined burden that amplifies vulnerability to burnout. Thus, challenges are not independent variables but interconnected pressures that accumulate across time.

Scheduling Conflicts Between Classes and Training/Competitions. Student-athletes reported frequent conflicts between their academic schedules and athletic commitments, particularly during competitions and intensive training periods. These conflicts often forced them to choose between attending classes and fulfilling team responsibilities. Such scheduling issues highlight structural limitations within academic institutions that do not always align with athletic demands. Liu and Taresh (2024) emphasized that scheduling conflicts are among the most significant barriers faced by student-athletes in maintaining academic performance. Participant P2 shared: *"May mga time po na kailangan ko umabsent sa klase kasi may game kami. Minsan sabay talaga, kaya wala akong choice."* (There are times when I have to be absent from class because we have a game. Sometimes they really happen at the same time, so I have no choice). This reflects how institutional schedules often fail to accommodate the dual roles of student-athletes. Hart et al. (2025) noted that such conflicts can lead to academic disengagement and increased stress among student-athletes.

Academic Difficulties Due to Missed Lessons and Deadlines. Participants experienced difficulties in keeping up with lessons and meeting academic deadlines due to absences caused by sports participation. Missing lectures and limited time for academic preparation often resulted in incomplete requirements and lower academic performance. This finding aligns with research showing that reduced classroom engagement significantly affects learning outcomes among student-athletes (Hart et al., 2025). Participant P4 expressed: *"Pag na-miss ko yung lesson, nahihirapan na ako humabol. Kahit magtanong ako sa classmates, hindi pa rin same."* (When I miss a lesson, it becomes hard for me to catch up. Even if I ask my classmates, it's still not the same.) This highlights the academic disadvantage experienced by student-

athletes, where missed instruction cannot always be fully recovered. Liu and Taresh (2024) emphasized that consistent academic engagement is critical for performance, which becomes difficult under dual-role conditions.

Physical Exhaustion and Lack of Recovery. Student-athletes reported experiencing physical fatigue due to continuous training combined with academic workload. The lack of sufficient recovery time affected their concentration, energy levels, and overall performance. This finding is consistent with studies indicating that high physical demands, when combined with academic stress, lead to fatigue and decreased cognitive function (Pasno, 2024). Participant P6 shared: *"Kapoy na kaayo after training, unya naa pa jud assignments. Usahay dili na makafocus kay kapoy na ang lawas ug utok."* (I'm already very tired after training, and then there are still assignments. Sometimes I can't focus anymore because both my body and mind are exhausted.) This reflects the physical and cognitive strain experienced by student-athletes. Pasno (2024) highlighted that insufficient recovery negatively affects both academic engagement and athletic performance.

Mental Stress and Emotional Pressure. Participants also expressed experiencing mental stress and emotional pressure due to expectations from both academic and athletic environments. The need to perform well in both areas created anxiety, fear of failure, and emotional strain. Hart et al. (2025) found that student-athletes are particularly vulnerable to stress due to competing demands and high expectations. Participant P8 expressed: *"Gina-pressure ko gid ang sarili ko nga dapat nami performance ko sa eskwela kag sa sport. Kis-a daw gusto ko na lang magpahuway pero indi pwede."* (I really pressure myself to perform well in both school and sports. Sometimes I just want to rest, but I feel like I can't.) This reflects internalized pressure and emotional burden. Pasno (2024) noted that prolonged exposure to such stress may lead to burnout if not properly managed.

Research Question 3: How do student-athletes cope with the pressures associated with academic–athletic demands?

Theme 3: Adaptive Strategies for Managing Academic and Athletic Demands

Coping strategies among student-athletes reflect adaptive attempts to restore control within structurally constrained environments. Time management and prioritization emerged as the most immediate response to competing demands. While Liu and Taresh (2024) describe time management as a skill, the present findings suggest it functions more as a survival mechanism than a learned competence, where students continuously recalibrate priorities under pressure rather than following stable plans. Self-discipline further reinforces this adaptive response; however, it is not purely motivational. Instead, it reflects internalized responsibility shaped by lack of external flexibility. Pujianto et al. (2024) associate discipline with performance consistency, but this study indicates that discipline is often reactive—developed in response to system rigidity rather than personal optimization. Emotional regulation and resilience appear as psychological buffers, yet their role is ambivalent. Pasno (2024) frames resilience as protective; however, the findings suggest that resilience may also normalize endurance of stress, potentially masking unmet institutional needs. Finally, social support from peers, coaches, and family emerges not as supplementary but as central to coping sustainability. Hart et al. (2025) emphasize its importance, but the present findings highlight that support functions as a compensatory system, filling gaps left by institutional limitations rather than merely enhancing well-being.

Time Management and Prioritization of Tasks. Student-athletes identified time management as their primary coping strategy in handling academic and athletic demands. They reported organizing their schedules, setting priorities, and making adjustments depending on urgent tasks such as exams or competitions. This reflects the importance of structured planning in managing dual responsibilities. Liu and Taresh (2024) emphasized that effective time management is a critical skill that enables student-athletes to sustain performance in both academic and athletic domains. Participant P1 shared: *"Ginagawa ko po, inuunahin ko kung ano yung mas urgent. Pag may exam, focus muna sa aral, tapos hahabol na lang sa training kung kaya."* (What I do is I prioritize what is more urgent. If there's an exam, I focus on studying first, then I just catch up with training if possible). This demonstrates adaptive prioritization, where student-athletes make practical decisions to balance their responsibilities. Such strategies reflect self-regulation, which is essential in dual-career success (Liu & Taresh, 2024).

Self-Discipline and Structured Daily Routines. Participants emphasized the role of self-discipline in maintaining consistency across both academic and athletic responsibilities. They developed daily routines that allowed them to allocate time for study, training, and rest, even under demanding

conditions. This aligns with findings that disciplined behavior is a key factor in managing dual roles effectively (Pujianto et al., 2024). Participant P3 expressed: “Disiplina lang talaga, sir. Kahit pagod, kailangan gawin yung assignments kasi wala namang ibang gagawa para sa’yo.” (It really comes down to discipline, sir. Even if I’m tired, I still need to do my assignments because no one else will do them for me). This reflects internal motivation and responsibility, which are essential traits among successful student-athletes. Pujianto et al. (2024) highlighted that self-discipline significantly influences both academic performance and athletic consistency.

Emotional Regulation and Mental Resilience. Student-athletes also demonstrated emotional regulation and resilience as coping mechanisms, allowing them to manage stress, pressure, and fatigue. They described learning how to stay calm, remain focused, and continue despite challenges. This supports findings that sports participation contributes to the development of resilience and emotional strength (Pasno, 2024). Participant P6 shared: “Kung ma-stress ko, ginapilit nako nga mag-relax gamay. Dili pwede magpada sa pressure kay mas lisod kung ma-overwhelm ka.” (When I get stressed, I try to force myself to relax a bit. I can’t let pressure take over because it becomes harder when you get overwhelmed). This highlights the importance of emotional control in sustaining performance. Pasno (2024) emphasized that resilience enables student-athletes to persist despite academic and athletic pressures.

Seeking Support from Peers, Coaches, and Family. Participants identified social support as a crucial coping resource. They relied on teammates, coaches, friends, and family members for encouragement, advice, and emotional support. This reflects the role of interpersonal relationships in helping student-athletes manage stress. Hart et al. (2025) emphasized that social support significantly contributes to the well-being and performance of student-athletes. Participant P8 expressed: “Kung kapoy na gid, nagaistorya lang ko sa teammates ko kag sa pamilya ko. Sila gid ang naga-support sa akon.” (When I am really tired, I just talk to my teammates and my family. They are the ones who really support me). This demonstrates the importance of relational support in coping with dual-role demands. Hart et al. (2025) noted that strong support systems enhance motivation and reduce stress among student-athletes.

Research Question 4: How do student-athletes perceive the institutional and social support in managing their dual responsibilities?

Theme 4: Varied Experiences of Institutional and Social Support Systems

Institutional support for student-athletes is experienced inconsistently, revealing a gap between policy intent and lived reality. Support from coaches and some teachers provides emotional encouragement and occasional academic flexibility; however, inconsistency across personnel reduces its overall effectiveness. Romine (2023) emphasizes institutional support as a stabilizing factor, yet findings here suggest that inconsistency undermines its stabilizing function, producing unequal student experiences within the same institution. Financial and logistical support, while essential, also demonstrates implementation gaps. Delayed allowances and inconsistent assistance weaken students’ ability to sustain both academic and athletic participation. Pujianto et al. (2024) highlight financial support as enabling continuity, but the present findings suggest that delays convert support into uncertainty, affecting both motivation and daily survival needs. Thus, institutional support is not only about provision but also about reliability and timing. A more critical issue is the lack of coordination between academic and athletic systems. Unlike studies that treat coordination as an administrative concern, the findings show that its absence creates direct cognitive and emotional burden on students, who must independently resolve conflicting demands. Hart et al. (2025) identify coordination as important, but this study extends that view by showing that lack of coordination shifts institutional responsibility onto students themselves, effectively externalizing system failure. In contrast, peer and family support emerges as the most consistent and reliable form of assistance. Unlike institutional support, which is variable, social support provides stability and emotional grounding. This reinforces Hart et al. (2025), but further suggests a reversal of expected dependency: student-athletes rely more on informal networks than formal systems, indicating that institutional support, while present, is not yet fully functional as a primary coping structure.

Support from Coaches and Academic Personnel. Student-athletes acknowledged the support they received from coaches and some teachers, particularly in terms of encouragement, understanding, and guidance. Coaches were often described as motivational figures who pushed them to perform, while some teachers showed consideration when conflicts arose. This reflects the important role of institutional actors in shaping student-athlete experiences. Romine (2023) emphasized that support from educators and coaches significantly contributes to student-athletes’ academic persistence and emotional well-being. Participant P2

shared: *"Yung coach namin supportive naman, sir. Naiintindihan niya kapag may exam kami. May mga teachers din na considerate, pero hindi lahat."* (Our coach is supportive, sir. He understands when we have exams. Some teachers are also considerate, but not all). This indicates that while support exists, it is not consistently experienced across all academic personnel. Hart et al. (2025) noted that inconsistency in support can create uneven academic experiences among student-athletes.

Financial and Logistical Support. Participants recognized the importance of institutional support such as allowances, dormitory accommodation, and training provisions. These supports were seen as essential in sustaining their participation in sports while studying. However, several participants reported delays in allowances, which affected their daily needs and overall motivation. Pujiyanto et al. (2024) emphasized that financial and logistical support play a crucial role in maintaining student-athletes' stability and engagement. Participant P5 expressed: *"Malaking tulong po sana yung allowance, pero minsan delayed. Nahihirapan kami lalo na sa pagkain at daily expenses."* (The allowance would really help a lot, but sometimes it is delayed. We struggle especially with food and daily expenses). This highlights a critical institutional gap, where intended support does not fully meet the actual needs of student-athletes. Delays in financial assistance can undermine both academic focus and athletic performance.

Gaps in Schedule Flexibility and Institutional Coordination. Participants identified a lack of coordination between academic schedules and athletic programs as a major concern. They expressed that institutional systems often operate independently, leading to conflicts that could have been avoided through better planning. This reflects structural limitations in institutional support systems. Hart et al. (2025) emphasized that lack of coordination between academic and athletic departments is a persistent issue in student-athlete management. Participant P7 shared: *"Usahay sir, wala jud coordination. Naa mi game pero naa pud exam. Lisod kaayo kay dili man ma-adjust."* (Sometimes, sir, there is really no coordination. We have a game but also an exam. It's very difficult because neither can be adjusted). This finding underscores the need for integrated institutional planning to support student-athletes more effectively. Without coordination, student-athletes are forced to bear the burden of resolving these conflicts themselves.

Reliance on Peer and Family Emotional Support. Despite institutional limitations, student-athletes heavily relied on peer and family support as their primary source of emotional strength. Teammates and family members provided encouragement, understanding, and motivation, helping them cope with stress and pressure. This highlights the importance of informal support systems in student-athlete experiences. Hart et al. (2025) found that strong social support networks significantly enhance resilience and well-being among student-athletes. Participant P9 expressed: *"Maski kulang ang support sang school, ara gid ang pamilya kag teammates ko. Sila gid ang ginakaptan ko kung kapoy na gid."* (Even if school support is lacking, my family and teammates are always there. They are the ones I hold on to when I am really tired.) This demonstrates that while institutional support may be inconsistent, social relationships serve as a critical coping mechanism. It also reinforces the idea that support systems extend beyond formal institutional structures. Collectively, the findings suggest that student-athlete experiences are shaped less by individual capability and more by systemic coordination between academic and athletic structures. While previous literature often emphasizes time management and resilience as key determinants of success, this study demonstrates that these are secondary adaptations to structural imbalance rather than primary success factors. The dominant pattern across themes is system-induced coping, where students develop strategies to survive rather than optimize performance. This shifts the interpretation of dual-career demands from a developmental opportunity to a context-dependent negotiation of institutional constraints, highlighting the need for integrated academic-athletic systems that reduce rather than transfer burden to student-athletes.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to established ethical standards for research involving human participants. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants after a full explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Confidentiality and data privacy were strictly maintained through the use of pseudonyms, secure storage of data, and restricted access to research materials, ensuring that all information was used solely for academic purposes. Gender sensitivity was observed by ensuring that all participants were treated with fairness and without bias or misrepresentation, while cultural sensitivity was upheld through respect for linguistic diversity and the use of local languages during interviews to allow authentic expression of experiences. Furthermore, this study secured prior ethical clearance from the Institutional Research Ethics Committee (IREC) of South East Asian Institute of Technology, Inc., ensuring full compliance with institutional guidelines and internationally accepted ethical standards for research involving human participants.

Conclusion

This study highlights that student-athletes' dual-career experience is best understood as a dynamic interaction between individual coping processes and institutional structures rather than as a purely individual challenge. The findings contribute to theory by reinforcing and extending dual-career perspectives in sport and education literature, particularly within Educational Psychology, by demonstrating that identity development, resilience, and time management emerge not only as personal attributes but as responses shaped by institutional coordination and environmental constraints. In this sense, the study supports and extends dual-role and role strain perspectives by showing that academic and athletic identities are continuously negotiated within structural limitations that either enable or constrain student development. Practically, the study emphasizes the need for institutions to move beyond fragmented academic and athletic systems toward more integrated and responsive support structures. The findings suggest that effective student-athlete support requires coordinated scheduling, consistent academic accommodations, and reliable financial and logistical assistance to reduce role conflict and enhance performance in both domains. Additionally, strengthening communication between academic personnel, coaches, and administrators is essential in ensuring that student-athletes are not left to independently manage institutional misalignments. Overall, the study underscores that improving student-athlete outcomes depends not only on enhancing individual coping capacities but also on strengthening institutional coherence and support systems that sustain both academic success and athletic development.

Recommendation

Educational institutions are encouraged to develop a more coordinated and student-centered academic–athletic support system by aligning class schedules, training programs, and competition activities to reduce conflicts experienced by student-athletes. Schools should strengthen institutional policies that promote academic flexibility, improve communication and coordination between teachers and coaches, and ensure the timely provision of financial and logistical support such as allowances and dormitory services. Faculty members and athletic personnel are likewise encouraged to adopt a collaborative monitoring approach that supports both academic performance and athletic development while prioritizing student well-being. Student-athletes are also encouraged to continue strengthening their time management, discipline, and help-seeking behaviors to effectively manage dual-role demands. Finally, future researchers are recommended to conduct similar studies in other institutional settings and broader contexts to further validate findings and deepen understanding of student-athletes' experiences and support needs.

References

- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- De Maio, M., MacNamara, Á., & Collins, D. (2025). A scoping review of student-athletes' perspectives on dual career policies, provisions, and challenges. *Frontiers in Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1566208>
- Hallmann, K., & Weustenfeld, N. (2024). Constraints and facilitators of elite athletes' dual careers: A systematic literature review. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 17(1), 167–184. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2024.2377546>
- Hart, S., Smith, J., & Williams, R. (2024). Dual-career student-athletes: Identity, stress, and academic-athletic balance in higher education. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 47(2), 112–128.
- Hart, S., Smith, J., & Williams, R. (2025). Dual-career student-athletes: Identity, stress, and academic-athletic balance in higher education. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 47(2), 112–128.
- Liu, T., & Taresh, A. (2024). Time management and academic engagement among student-athletes in higher education. *International Journal of Educational Research Open*, 5, 100278. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedro.2024.100278>
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. SAGE Publications.
- Pasno, A. (2024). Stress, coping, and resilience among student-athletes in competitive sports. *Journal of Sports Psychology in Action*, 15(3), 201–215.
- Pujianto, A., Setiawan, R., & Hidayat, T. (2024). Institutional support and academic performance of student-athletes in higher education. *International Journal of Human Movement and Sports Sciences*, 12(1), 45–56. <https://doi.org/10.13189/saj.2024.120105>
- Romine, K. A. (2023). Academic support systems and student-athlete success in higher education. *Journal of College Student Development*, 64(6), 789–804.



- Rutledge, M. E. II. (2023). Exploring how student athletes balance athletic, academic, and personal needs through learned needs theory. *Journal of Research Initiatives*, 7(2).
- Vidal-Vilaplana, A., García-Mas, A., & Cruz, J. (2022). Combining sport and academic careers: Mapping the dual career research field. *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education*, 31, 100399. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhlste.2022.100399>
- Yukhymenko-Lescroart, M. A. (2024). Academic and athletic identity in student-athletes: A large-scale study. *Heliyon*, 10(21), e40075. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e40075>