

# SPORTS Motivation, Coach-Athlete Relationship, and Sports Engagement among Senior High School ATHLETES

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## ABSTRACT

This study aimed to determine the influence of sports motivation, coach-athlete relationships, and sports engagement among senior high school athletes. A descriptive-correlational design was used for a quantitative study focused on public school senior high school athletes in Davao City, using complete enumeration sampling. Data were collected using adapted research instruments, validated by a panel of experts, and subjected to reliability testing. The mean, standard deviation, Pearson product-moment correlation, and multiple regression were used for data analysis. Based on the findings, the levels of sports motivation, coach-athlete relationship, and sports engagement among senior high school athletes were all very high. The results revealed that the coach-athlete relationship did not significantly predict sports motivation, and sports motivation did not significantly predict sports engagement. However, a statistically significant direct effect was found from the coach-athlete relationship to sports engagement, indicating that a positive relationship with coaches discreetly enhances athletes' engagement in sports. The unexplained adjustment suggests that additional factors may influence both motivation and engagement. These findings underscore the importance of coach-athlete dynamics in fostering sports engagement, independent of athletes' motivation levels.

**KEYWORDS:** *Education, sports motivation, coach-athlete relationship, sports engagement, Philippines*

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## INTRODUCTION

Sports engagement refers to athletes' level of involvement, commitment, and emotional investment in their sport (Kuokkanen et al., 2022). However, several challenges impacted their overall experience and participation (Bates et

al., 2024). Globally, the percentage of senior high school athletes who did not engage in sports was significant. According to a study, only 39% of senior high school students engaged in organized sports, marking a steep decline from nearly 90% in earlier grades (Smith, 2024). Similarly, Project Play (2023) reported a concerning trend of declining sports engagement, noting that approximately 61% of students were not involved in organized sports by their senior year, with a 7% drop in engagement among older youth from 2019 to 2022.

Moreover, the absence of physical education in public schools negatively affected senior high school students' sports engagement in Nigeria (Bolarinwa, 2019). In Saxony, Germany, Thompson et al. (2022) found that 30% of student-athletes end their sports careers during upper secondary school within a year. In contrast, there were fifty to seventy percent of the Westernized nations where youth engaged in an organized sport. However, thirty-five percent of these leave the programs annually (Battaglia et al., 2024). As a result, the Masters of Sports and Recreation launched the South African Schools' Sports Program to address problems related to students' sports engagement (McCarthy, 2014).

In the Philippines, based on the 2019 Food and Nutrition Research Institute (FNRI) Expanded National Nutrition Survey (ENNS), 85% of Filipino adolescents were insufficiently active in sports, with only 15% engaged (Cagas et al., 2022). Furthermore, the engagement in sports numbers decreased to seventy-two percent in the year 2021, according to the findings of IJEHSS (2021), and increased again in 2022 by eighty-four percent based on the report of the 2022 Philippine Report Card on Physical Activity (PMC, 2022) due to systematic neglect of sports infrastructure and physical education programs, which created a generational decline in sports engagement (Cagas et al., 2022).

In the Davao Region, student engagement in sports declined by 15%, primarily due to challenges that hinder consistent participation (Rabuya, 2024). Moreover, Uyan (2017) noted that policies that prioritize academics often limit students' opportunities to engage in sports. Similarly, in Davao City, Potenciando et al. (2024) emphasized that low motivation and a lack of institutional support also contribute to reduced involvement in sports. This study was conducted because most studies on sports engagement have focused solely on college student-athletes at schools outside the Philippines, particularly in Westernized countries such as the United States and Europe (Pandya, 2021). In the Philippines, sports engagement faces significant gaps, particularly in geography and gender. Rural areas have limited access to sports opportunities, prompting

initiatives such as the Philippine Commission's Women in Sports program to use digital outreach to expand access, especially for young women (Kiram, 2022). Cultural and social norms further hinder female participation by reinforcing gender biases that discourage women from engaging in sports (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2016; Kiram, 2022). Studies in regions like Davao Oriental highlight that women often receive less time and priority in sports, and their engagement is shaped by a motivational climate influenced by cultural expectations (Andacao & Linganay, 2021; Rabuya, 2024). Despite national efforts to promote female involvement, data show that men still dominate sports programs in the Davao Region, reflecting persistent disparities (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2016; Philippine Sports Commission, 2022). This study seeks to explore the causes behind low student sports engagement, particularly among senior high school athletes, to identify barriers and inform strategies for improvement.

The results of the study will be disseminated to school administrators, sports coordinators, coaches, student-athletes, and other relevant groups through various means, such as School Learning Action Cell (SLAC) sessions, publications, and public research forums, at the division, local, national, or international levels. The researcher shared the study results with coaches and sports administrators across different schools by providing them access via shared links. This is important to school administrators because it provides evidence-based insights that can inform policy decisions, program planning, and resource allocation related to student sports engagement.

### **Statement of the Problem**

This study determined the influence of sports motivation, coach-athlete relationship and sports engagement among senior high school athletes. More specifically, it sought answers to the following questions:

1. What is the level of sports motivation among Senior High School athletes in terms of Intrinsic Motivation; Integrated; Identified; Introjected; External; and Amotivated?
2. What is the level of coach-athlete relationship among Senior High School athletes in terms of Closeness; Co-orientation; and Complementarity?
3. What is the level of sports engagement among Senior High School athletes in terms of Vigor; Dedication; and Absorption?
4. Is there a significant relationship between: sports motivation and sports engagement; and coach-athlete relationship and sports engagement?
5. Do sports motivation and coach-athlete relationship significantly influence the

sports engagement of senior high school athletes?

## METHODOLOGY

*Research Design.* This study utilized quantitative research, specifically a descriptive correlational design focusing on the effectiveness of the coach-athlete relationship and its correlation with the extent of sports engagement. This design was appropriate because the study aimed to determine whether a variable (coach-athlete relationship) changed in response to another variable (sports engagement). The mediating variable (sports motivation) was introduced between the two variables to assess whether it had an effect and, if so, the extent of that effect.

*Research Locale.* This study was conducted in Davao City, Davao del Sur, Philippines. Three schools in this locality were chosen and assigned the initials A, B, and C for confidentiality purposes.

*Research Respondents.* The population selected for this study was enumerated completely. The population and the sample respondents per school were all senior high school athletes who competed in the 2024 Cluster Meet for Cluster II public schools of the Davao City Division and were automatically included as respondents in this study. However, inclusion criteria were followed, which included the following: senior high school student-athletes who were currently enrolled in their respective public schools of Cluster II schools in the Davao City Division for the school year 2024-2025, were active members of their school's Sports Club, were student-athletes aged seventeen years old and below, and had attended the recent Cluster Meet. Exclusion criteria were as follows: senior high school student-athletes enrolled in private schools and student-athletes aged 18 years and above.

*Data Gathering Procedures.* The researcher asked the dean of the graduate school for written permission to conduct data collection for his research. Thereafter, a formal request letter to conduct the research was sent to the Office of the Schools Division Superintendent in Davao City. Following the school principals' approval and signature, the researcher collaborated closely with the school registrar to obtain the population of senior high school students enrolled for the academic year 2024-2025 in the respective institutions.

*Statistical Tool.* The study employed several statistical tools to analyze the data. The **mean** was used to determine the average levels of sports motivation, coach-athlete relationship, and sports engagement, while the **standard deviation** assessed the variation and dispersion of these data. To examine the relationships between the variables, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson *r*) was utilized. Finally, multiple regression analysis was performed to evaluate the interrelationships among the variables and to verify the beta coefficients within the mediation analysis.

*Ethical Considerations.* The study underwent a rigorous ethical review process to ensure the protection and well-being of all participants. Prior to data collection, the researcher obtained certification and approval from the University of the Immaculate Conception Research Ethics Committee. Throughout the research process, the research team strictly adhered to the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Furthermore, informed consent was a fundamental component of the ethical framework. Before administering the survey, the researcher ensured that student respondents and, for those aged 16 to 17, their parents, read and signed the required informed consent, minor assent, and parental consent forms.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Level of Sports Motivation among Senior High School Athletes

Table 1 shows that the overall mean for sports motivation is 4.27, indicating that it is consistently high among senior high school athletes. It implies that senior high school athletes displayed an overall extreme level of sports motivation, characterized by intrinsic, integrated, and identified motivation. Based on the definition of sports motivation as the internal or external drive that directs, energizes, and sustains athletic behavior (Karageorghis & Terry, 2025), this high level suggests that these athletes are not only committed to their training and performance but are also likely benefiting from goal-oriented focus, persistence during challenges, and a readiness to excel in their athletic pursuits.

Table 1  
*Level of Sports Motivation among Senior High School Athletes*

| Indicators | Mean | SD  | Description |
|------------|------|-----|-------------|
| Intrinsic  | 4.97 | .17 | Very High   |
| Integrated | 4.79 | .42 | Very High   |

|              |      |     |           |
|--------------|------|-----|-----------|
| Identified   | 4.97 | .16 | Very High |
| Introjected  | 3.95 | .51 | High      |
| Eternal      | 2.45 | .71 | Low       |
| Amotivated   | 1.48 | .33 | Very Low  |
| Overall Mean | 4.27 | .18 | Very High |

The results align with the study by Spray and Warburton (2022), which highlights that motivation serves as the psychological fuel that energizes athletes toward goals such as participating in and excelling at sports. The high intrinsic motivation observed in these results supports this notion, as student-athletes showed enjoyment of learning, improvement, and discovery of new strategies, demonstrating that their drive stems from internal satisfaction rather than external rewards.

**Level of Coach-Athlete Relationship among Senior High School Athletes**

In Table 2, the coach-athlete relationship is 4.88. It is described as very high, indicating that the coach-athlete relationship among senior high school athletes is consistently positive. This means that athletes generally perceive their coaches as supportive, trustworthy, and respectful, which likely contributes to a more motivating and cohesive sports environment. Such a strong relationship can enhance athletes' confidence, satisfaction, and overall performance in their respective sports.

According to Gullu (2018), coaches were among the most influential figures in an athlete's life, directly impacting their success. The study's findings support that notion, as athletes reported high levels of trust, communication, and mutual respect with their coaches. Items such as *respect for the coach's efforts* and *working well with us to achieve the set goals* reflect a strong emotional and behavioral bond, suggesting that the coach is both respected and effective in engaging with the athletes.

**Table 2**  
*Level of Coach-Athlete Relationship among Senior High School Athletes*

| Indicators      | Mean | SD  | Description |
|-----------------|------|-----|-------------|
| Closeness       | 4.85 | .17 | Very High   |
| Co-orientation  | 4.85 | .22 | Very High   |
| Complementarity | 4.92 | .15 | Very High   |
| Overall Mean    | 4.88 | .12 | Very High   |

Furthermore, the data reflected what Longakit et al. (2024) and Jiahao & Jing (2024) highlighted: a strong coach-athlete relationship serves as a critical mediator between both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and overall athlete engagement. High-quality relationships fulfill psychological needs, such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness, as outlined in Self-Determination Theory (Subtext, 2024), and are thus instrumental in enhancing motivation while reducing amotivation. This matches the study's findings, where amotivation was very low, and both intrinsic and identified motivation were very high an outcome likely supported by the positive coach-athlete dynamics.

Level of Sports Engagement among Senior High School Athletes

Table 3 presents the level of sports engagement. The overall mean of 4.68, described as very high, indicates that senior high school athletes consistently engage in sports. This indicates that these athletes are highly involved, focused, and emotionally invested in their sports activities. Such a high level of engagement suggests strong motivation, commitment, and enjoyment in their participation, which are essential factors for sustained performance, personal development, and long-term involvement in athletics.

Table 3  
*Level of Sports Engagement among Senior High School Athletes*

| Indicators   | Mean | SD  | Description |
|--------------|------|-----|-------------|
| Vigor        | 4.83 | .32 | Very High   |
| Dedication   | 4.99 | .06 | Very High   |
| Absorption   | 4.24 | .13 | Very High   |
| Overall Mean | 4.68 | .12 | Very High   |

The findings of this study align closely with those of Longakit et al. (2025), who conceptualized sports engagement as a multidimensional state comprising vigor, dedication, and absorption, framed within the dualistic model of passion, with harmonious passion identified as a key predictor of sustained engagement. The athletes' enjoyment and sense of fulfillment in their sports activities reflect what Raimundi et al. (2024) described as the fun and immersive nature of sport participation.

Significance of the Relationship between Sports Motivation,  
Coach-Athlete Relationship, and Sports Engagement

The correlation of the variables is presented in Table 4. It is shown that sports motivation has a weak, nonsignificant positive relationship with sports

engagement ( $r = .05$ ;  $p > .05$ ). This suggests that raising sports motivation does not guarantee a significant increase in sports engagement among senior high school students.

**Table 4**  
*Significance of the Relationship between Sports Motivation ,Coach-Athlete Relationship and Sports Engagement of Senior High School Students*

|                                                  | r  | p-value | Remarks         |
|--------------------------------------------------|----|---------|-----------------|
| Sports Motivation and Sports Engagement          | .0 | .45     | Not Significant |
| Coach-athlete Relationship and Sports Engagement | .1 | .02     | Significant     |

The finding is contrary to the study of Trigueros et al. (2021), which found that sports motivation is positively and significantly correlated with sports engagement among athletes. Their research demonstrated that higher levels of self-determined motivation were associated with increased athlete engagement, as measured by the Athlete Engagement Questionnaire, and that motivation plays a key role in fostering greater involvement and persistence in sports activities (Graña et al., 2021).

Likewise, there is no significant relationship between sports motivation and the coach-athlete relationship, as revealed in Table 4 ( $r = .09$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This implies that any increase in sports motivation will not significantly increase the coach-athlete relationship. The result aligns with studies showing that the relationship between sports motivation and the coach-athlete relationship is not always significant or strong. For example, Avci, Çepikkurt, and Kızıldağ Kale (2018) found that the coach-athlete relationship is positively associated with the coach-created motivational climate, but this finding does not necessarily imply that increases in an athlete's sports motivation will significantly enhance the coach-athlete relationship itself. Their findings suggest that the quality of the coach-athlete relationship is more closely linked to interpersonal factors such as communication, emotional closeness, and the training environment, rather than to the athlete's individual level of sports motivation (Avci et al., 2018).

However, the coach-athlete relationship has a significant, positive association with sports engagement, though this association is weak. It suggests that any increase in the positive coach-athlete relationship will increase sports engagement among senior high school students. The result validates the proposition of Longakit et al. (2024), who found that the coach-athlete

relationship, characterized by closeness, commitment, and complementarity, has a significant, positive effect on athletes' sports engagement. Their study demonstrated that stronger, more positive coach-athlete relationships enhance athlete engagement by fulfilling psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, even when the relationship is statistically weak; any improvement in the coach-athlete relationship is associated with increased engagement among student-athletes.

**Significance of the Influence of Sports Motivation,  
Coach-Athlete Relationship on Sports Engagement**

In Table 5, only the coach-athlete relationship was used as the predictor, because the relationship between social support and sports engagement was not significant (Table 4). The coach-athlete relationship shows a p-value of .00, which is less than the .05 level of significance (2-tailed) with a positive standardized beta value of 0.16. It means that the coach-athlete relationship is a significant predictor of sports engagement. The finding implies that the coach-athlete relationship is the key driver in this model, showing a meaningful and statistically significant relationship with sports engagement. This means that for every unit increase in the level of the coach-athlete relationship, there is a corresponding increase of .16 in the level of sports engagement among senior high school athletes.

In addition, the influence of the coach-athlete relationship is significant ( $p < .05$ ). It means that the overall regression model is statistically significant, indicating that the set of domains used to measure the coach-athlete relationship significantly predicts sports engagement. Meanwhile, the model explains 25 percent of the variance in sports engagement among senior high school students, as indicated by  $R^2 = .25$ . This means that 75 percent of the variance is attributable to factors other than the coach-athlete relationship.

**Table 5**  
*Significance of the Influence of Coach-athlete Relationship on Sports Engagement of Senior High School Students*

| Singular Influence of the Predictors |       | Standardized Coefficients | t    | p-value | Remarks     |
|--------------------------------------|-------|---------------------------|------|---------|-------------|
| <b>Coach-athlete Relationship</b>    |       | 0.159                     | 2.36 | .019    | Significant |
| R                                    | 0.159 |                           |      |         |             |
| R <sup>2</sup>                       | 0.25  |                           |      |         |             |
| F                                    | 5.575 |                           |      |         |             |

This finding indicated that there was no significant relationship between sports motivation and sports engagement, suggesting that social support did not significantly influence athletes' level of engagement in sports, unlike the coach-athlete relationship. The overall regression model is significant, indicating that the coach-athlete relationship as a predictor can reliably explain variance in sports engagement. However, this suggests that other factors, not captured in this study, contribute to sports engagement.

Finally, the results of the study support the theories underpinning this study, namely Relational-Cultural Theory and the 3+1 Cs Model (Jowett, 2007), which provide a theoretical basis for the idea that the coach-athlete relationship can have a direct and significant effect on sports engagement, independent of sports motivation. Relational-Cultural Theory suggests that growth-fostering relationships are the primary source of psychological well-being and engagement. In the sports context, this means a positive, supportive, and trusting coach-athlete relationship can directly enhance an athlete's sense of belonging, value, and engagement in their sport, regardless of their underlying motivation. The theory emphasizes that connection and mutual empathy are fundamental for sustained involvement and thriving in any domain, including athletics (Fletcher & Roberts, 2013).

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