

# UNIVERSITY ATHLETES' PERSPECTIVES ON THE DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSFER OF LIFE SKILL THROUGH SPORT

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## ABSTRACT

*The present study was conducted to assess university sport's contribution to the growth of an important life skill (interpersonal communication skills). The application of these life skills to other aspects of life has also been taken into account. The cross-sectional survey was conducted on (n=335) student-athletes of Public and Private sector universities through stratified random sampling technique. As there was no standardized tool which could measure the proposed variables, therefore; a self-made close ended questionnaire was developed and used to gather the data. The questionnaire was accordingly validated through experts in the field and then made reliable with the help of Cronbach's alpha method. The SPSS version 24 was used to analyze the collected data set. In total (61.8%) recognized the role sport plays in improving leadership skills, while (24.2%) and (32.8%) respectively opted the option of somewhat disagree and strongly disagree on the role that coach performed in developing and then transferring an interpersonal communication skill among athletes. The inferential statistics indicated that sport has a positive role in developing interpersonal communication skills ( $p < 0.05$ ), and poor negative association between sport and the transition of these life skills to other domains of life ( $r(335) = .341$ , while  $P < .005$ ). Given the significant role of sport in developing interpersonal communication skills, it is necessary to develop and promote sport participation among students. The transfer of life skills is suggested to be reinforced, with more emphasis on important domains of life.*

**Keywords:** Development, transfer, interpersonal communication skills, self-perceived, sports experience, university athletes

## Introduction:

The term life skills denote the skills and techniques one need in various aspects of life. Life skills are actually the set of attributed that enable an individual efficiently, effectively and deal with day today challenges. The other term used for life skills is psychosocial competency. Different reputed scholars and organizations have defined the term life skills in different ways.

Life skills are considered as essential part which helps individuals to meet the challenges in the present constantly changing environment. Over the past several years, the rapid change in the global economies has been matched with the alteration in technology. As a result, the important aspects of human lives such as education, workplace, business and home life are significantly impacting to a maximum extent. In these circumstances, one need to have life skills such as decision making, interpersonal communication, ability to deal with stress and anxiety (Carreres-Ponsoda et al., 2012; Eim et al., 2013).

A variety of institutions are working to develop and promote various life skills among individuals and sport is considered as an important tool for youth development (Larson, 2000). Over the history, sport has been recognized as an important mean for personal development. The youth sport organizations, port society, and general psychology are working upon the life skills development through sport (Seligman, 2002). These agencies have developed large scale intervention programs. For example, Weiss, Stuntz, Bhalla, Bolter, & Price, (2013) presented a sport model of First Tee life skills through golf. Likewise, Hellion and Walsh (2002) established a Teaching Responsibility through Physical Education and Sport (TRPES). Petitpas et., (2002) presented Play It Smart (Petitpas et al., 2002), and Danish (2000) established Sports United to Promote Education and Recreation program with the focal aim of youth development.

Sport psychologists have taken a great interest in the development of life skills through sport. Additionally, they have worked upon the factors influencing the link between sport and the development of life skills among youth. Some researchers have worked upon the development of an important life skill of self-esteem (Slutzky & Simpkins, 2009). Others have conducted research on talent development (Burgess & Naughton, 2010), while another explored the development of leadership qualities through sport (Extejt & Smith, 2009). Likewise, some researchers, Camiré and

Trudel (2010) carried out their research and found that sport is an important medium for character development and Trudeau and Shephard (2010) found a positive link between sport participation and students' academic achievements. Though, the majority has worked to explore the two important areas a) whether and to what extent various life skills are developed through sport? and b) whether and to what extent these developed life skills are transferred to other important domains of life? However, some studies revealed that sport has no direct role in the development of life skills, while some studies indicated that life skills can be learned if the program is conducted in an organized way. These contradictory findings attract the interest of researchers.

Studies carried out in Western society have shown a positive role for sport in improving essential life skills (Hodge, Danish, & Martin, 2013; Hayden et al., 2015; Park, Lavalley, & Tod, 2013). According to Doty (2006) sport develops good character among adolescents. Another study conducted by Chen, Snyder and Magner (2010) revealed a positive role of sport in developing the quality of athletic identity among athletes whereas, Smith and Westerbeek (2007) found that the realization of social responsibility among youth and adolescents can be developed through an organized sport. Other studies, for example, Vidoni and Ward (2009) revealed an important role of sport in developing essential social skills, build prosocial values (Brunelle, Danish, & Forneris, 2007), and the develop the psychological competency of self-esteem (Pedersen & Seidman, 2004). Findings of various studies revealed that sport helps developing students, psychological abilities such as emotional intelligence, self-esteem, the ability to cope with stress, body image and emotional distress (Gerber & Pühse, 2008; Harrison & Narayan, 2003; Kort-Butler & Hagewen, 2011; Poitras et al., 2016).

Sport psychologists not only interested in the area of life skills development, but the transfer of these skills to other domains is of great importance. Camire et al., (2009) illustrated in this regard that coaches play a significant role in transmitting the life skills

learned through sport to the classroom and other important life areas. Researchers suggested that coaches are required to create a favourable coaching climate where athletes can learn the essential life skills through sport. Additionally, Gould, Collins, Lauer and Chung (2007) suggested that coaches at private and technical schools may also concentrate on moving life skills to other areas of life. According to Camiré et al., (2012), therefore, the coaches used various methods to develop life skills and then transfer those life skills to other important areas of life. Findings revealed that athletes feel complications in transferring life skills to other domain; for the reason, coaches might take into consideration this problem and learn train athletes the application of life skills in their real world. It is therefore suggested that the coach can use a deliberate approach to build and then transfer life skills onto other important aspects of life, including family, community and academics (Trottier & Robitaille, 2014).

Various researchers have worked upon the theory of life skills transfer. Researchers usually relate the concept of transfer to the change in the behaviour of youth development. Studies, for example, Wright, Ding and Pickering (2010) and Walsh, Ozaeta and Wright (2010) have focused to analyze the concept of transferring life skills in the perspective of students' behaviour and absenteeism in their class, but they have not focused to analyze the two important questions a) what and b) how these abilities are applicable? However, one study, Walsh, Ozaeta, and Wright (2007) assessed the perception of athletes that Which life skills have they gained through sport and how they have used these life skills in their learning environment? Their results showed that respondents recognized the role of sport in the development of life skills and the improvement of their academic performance. However, their study has several limitations such as a) the development of specific skills through sport and b) the specific sport program that helped them develop life skills and academic enhancement (Allen, Rhind, & Koshy, 2015). Research indicated that responsibility-based curriculum helps prepare students more responsible in personal,

social and emotional aspects. However, the transfer of these responsibilities outside the classroom environment is under research (Gordon, 2010). This is proposed, therefore, that the researcher will focus on the experiences of the students in moving life skills to other essential life domains.

Experts in the area of youth development through sport found that the restricted knowledge of student life skills imparts limitations on the willingness of students to use these skills in other life environments. The study found that lack of knowledge and limited comprehension of students from the perspective of life skills to create difficulties in the transition of life skills to other environments (Danish, 2002). Another study Petitpas et al (2005) revealed that athletes do not worry about transferring life skills developed through sport in their important life domains, whereas the results indicated by sport have no direct connection with the development of life skills among its participants (Holt et al., 2008).

The interpersonal communication skills are considered as one of the important areas of life skills. These skills are important, especially, when we make relationship, connection with other people around us and henceforth have an important role of what makes us successful human? Communication skills are considered as a sub-set of interpersonal skills. These include problem solving, decision making and making an ability to deal with diverse populations. Therefore, physical educationists and other sport personnel not only encourage people, but motivate them to participate in sport. Proper and effective communication of a coach are the pre-requisites of a successful planning strategy and other technical aspects of a game. Coach, trainer and athletes are required to have an effective medium of communication for their success in sport (Robert, Weinberg, & Gould, 2015). Experts in the field of sport psychology demonstrated that effective communication skills have central importance, therefore; it has a positive impact upon the personal growth and physical exercise (Jowett & Wylleman, 2006). Likewise, good and strong communication are the

pre-requisites for becoming a successful sport and exercise professional (Vargas-Tonsing & Guan, 2007; Robert et al., 2015).

Keeping in mind the above brief discussion on developing and then transferring life skills to other realms of life; it deems it fitting to conduct a study in Pakistan's homeland region. According to the knowledge of researchers, lack of research prevails in the area of life skills development and then transfer among student-athletes. Therefore, the present study was conducted on important life skill of Interpersonal communication identified from amongst the life skills.

### **HYPOTHESES**

Ha 1 Sport has a significant role in the development of an essential life skill of interpersonal skills among university-level student-athletes.

Ha 2 Sport has a significant role in the transfer of an essential life skill of interpersonal skills among university-level student-athletes.

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The materials and methods section of the paper defines the steps which the researcher is supposed to undergo for identifying the research problem, procedure of collecting data and analysis of these data to evaluate critically the overall validity and reliability of the study. This part of the research paper describes the steps taken to arrive at certain findings and conclusion of the study.

#### **Participants**

The term population refers to the accumulation of subjects, objects or members having uniformity in their characteristics. In this present study, the population was all male and female student-athletes participated in various competitive sport events such as intercollege, intervarsity and all Pakistan inter-varsity hosted by both private and public sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It was often difficult to contact the whole

population, therefore a representative sample consisting  $n=389$  was selected with the help of stratified sampling technique from a probability sampling. Out of 389, male student-athletes were and female student-athletes were.

### **Research Design**

For the present study, we adopted the descriptive survey method. It indicates the gathering of data regarding current conditions and thus knowing the actual prevailing state of affairs. Besides a collection of data, the descriptive survey involves measurement, classification, analysis, comparison and interpretation.

To conduct the present study, we adopted a cross-sectional survey from a descriptive model. According to Gorard and Stephen (2013), descriptive research design is usually undertaken to analyze the current situation to know the prevailing status of affairs. Apart from these, it involves measuring, classifying, comparing and interpreting the collected data. Considering the nature of the study, use of cross-sectional research was appropriate to obtain the set objectives. Survey technique was used to collect the required information from both male and female student-athletes at university level of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

### **Research Instrumentation**

The validity and reliability of any research much depend upon the tool which the researchers used for data collection tools. Since, there has been no other standardized tool available to collect data in accordance with the proposed variables of the study. Therefore, a self-administered tool was developed after a brief review of the related literature. The developed tool was then administered among experts in the field for content and face validity and after having been critical inspection by experts, only valid items were included in the final draft.

Reliability of the tool was tested over a sample of 30 student-athletes having different social-culture and sport backgrounds.

Cronbach's Alpha reliability technique was used to measure the reliability evidence, which was founded 0.84.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

Data was collected through personal visits of the sampled students in their respective universities. In this regard, a help was taken from the Directorate of Sport of and other teachers of Health and Physical Education departments of their respective university. After obtaining a written permission from the university Director Sport, the student-athletes were handed over the questionnaires along with verbal instructions on filling the questionnaire. The participants were assured that their responses would solely be used for research work. At the movement, some questionnaires were received back on the spot, while a minor portion of the participants belongs to far flung areas were distributed the first time and collected back over a two weeks' time. Out of 389, we received back 342 questionnaires. However, 7 spoiled questionnaires were excluded and finally 335 accordingly filled questionnaires were processed in data analysis.

### **Statistical Analysis**

The collected responses were properly organized and tabulated. Appropriate statistical tests were used for data analysis. The score of 335 participants was accordingly classified and statistical treatment was given to test the set hypotheses in order to obtain authentic results. Therefore, descriptive as well as inferential statistical tests were applied to analyze the data.



## RESULTS

### Descriptive Analysis

The development of an interpersonal communication skills was analyzed from six (06) sub-skills and the responses have been presented in the form of percentage in table 1.

**Table No. 1**  
**Participants responses towards various interpersonal communication skills developed through sport**

<i>Participation in sport has developed me:</i>					
Statement	SA	SWA	NU	SWDA	SDA
The leadership skills	61.8	18.5	6.3	9.0	4.5
The ability to sacrifice for the greater good	24.2	36.4	31.3	6.9	1.2
The skill of recognizing other's needs	28.7	34.3	26.6	8.7	1.8
The ability to communicate with varsity of people	48.4	29.3	13.1	7.8	1.5
The quality of teamwork through participation in sports	55.8	28.7	4.8	8.4	2.4
Coach helped me in developing these skills	11.2	19.3	13.7	23.5	32.3

The table 01 shows that a large portion of the population (61.8 percent) recognized the role of sport in improving leadership skills. When asking the second item, (24.2%) and 36.4%) respectively strongly agreed and somewhat agreed on the role of sport in developing the ability to sacrifice for the greater good. The skills of recognizing other needs developed through sport were acknowledged by (28%) and (34.3%) with the respectively strongly agreement and somewhat agreement. The majority of participants (48.4 percent) and (29.3 percent) respectively agreed strongly on the role of sport in developing the ability to communicate with a diverse population and agreed somewhat. The analyzed responses showed that over 50 % of respondents recognized the role of sport in the quality of teamwork, whereas (23.5 percent) and (32.3 percent) somewhat disagree and strongly disagree with the role of a coach in improving interpersonal communication skills among athletes, respectively.

## Testing of Hypotheses

**Ha 1 Sport has a significant role in the development of an essential life skill of interpersonal skills among university-level student-athletes.**

**Table No. 2**  
**Linear Regression Model**

<i>Model</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>Adj</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
1	.703 <sup>a</sup>	.494	.482	1.54551	64.623	.000 <sup>b</sup>
<i>Coefficients</i>						
<i>Model</i>		<i>Unstandardized Coefficients</i>		<i>Standardized Coefficients</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
		<i>B</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>Beta</i>		
1	(Constant)	59.642	1.342		7.976	.000
	Participation in Sport	.476	.031	.788	72.075	.000

*a. Predictors: (Constant), Sport Participation b. Dependent Variable: Development of Interpersonal Communication Skills*  **$\alpha = 0.05$**

The data analyzed showed that sport has played a significant role of (49%) in the development of interpersonal communication skills. In addition, it can be assumed that the growth of interpersonal communication skills will increase with the expansion of participation in sport. The p value is lesser than the significant value ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**Ha 2 Sport has a significant role in the transfer of an essential life skill of interpersonal skills among university-level student-athletes.**

**Table No. 3**  
**Linear Regression Model**

<i>Model</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>Adj R<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
1	.341 <sup>a</sup>	.116	.113	.73890	64.623	.000 <sup>b</sup>
<i>Coefficients</i>						
<i>Model</i>		<i>Unstandardized Coefficients</i>		<i>Standardized Coefficients</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
		<i>B</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>Beta</i>		
1	(Constant)	5.343	.314		16.993	.000
	Participation in Sport	-.864	.131	.341	6.611	.000

*b. Predictors: (Constant), Sport Participation* *b. Dependent Variable: Transfer of Interpersonal Communication Skills* **a = 0.05**

The table 03 shows the findings about the role of sport in transmitting interpersonal communication skills' essential life skills. The R<sup>2</sup> (.116) explains the diversion between dependent and independent variables. The analyzed data revealed that (11%) variation occurred in the transfer of an important life skill of interpersonal communication skills due to sport participation. The value of t (6.61) and p (.000) described that sport has a significant role in transferring interpersonal communication skills among university student-athletes.

## **DISCUSSION**

According to the first hypothesis, statistical research found that sport played a significant role in developing a significant life skill in interpersonal skills among student-athletes. This means that participation in sport has vital significance for the growth of important interpersonal communication skills. This result supports the claim of Gano-Overway et al. (2009) who found that participation in sport has developed interpersonal communication skills among athletes. Others have shown that the ability of communication in a personal situation or in a group situation can be developed with the help of sport (Burgoon, Guerrero, & Floyd, 2016).

In response to the second hypothesis, statistical inferences of the present research found that university sport produced a weak role in transferring the developed life skill of interpersonal communication to other important life domains among university student. This is an important finding in the understanding of the link between sport and transfer of life skills. When we analyzed the perception of athletes, almost all agreed that they use interpersonal communication skills in other domains of life on their personal agreement. The results demonstrate two things. Firstly, sport has no clear link with the transfer of the life skills gained in other areas of life through sport. Secondly, if the sport program is designed in an organized way, coaches and trainers can do this job of transfer of life skills. However, our findings suggest that there might be several factors that hinders the transfer of life skills among students. A similar result has been found by Danish, Petitpas and Hale (1993) that athletes lack of awareness about the skills they developed through sport is one of the impediments in the way of transfer of life skills in other important life domains. These findings indicate that coaches and trainers should concentrate on life skills development and then pass these life skills among students. Keeping in view the importance of a coach in transferring life skills, one study revealed that sport environment provides an opportunity of developing life skills, however; the deliberate

teaching system is of great help in the creation and transition of life skills (Theokas, 2009). From these findings, it is clear that in the context of life skills growth and transition through sport, coaches need to encourage the use of a deliberate teaching approach to life skills. The same findings were obtained from the study of Camiré, Forneris, Trudel and Bernard, (2011) that with the aid of a deliberate teaching approach, the full production and transfer of life skills through sport can be achieved. Therefore, they suggest the coach might implement this approach while designing and planning a youth development through sport.

## **CONCLUSION**

The research was carried out to explore the role of university-based sport in developing and transmitting essential life skills in interpersonal communication based on the student-athletes' self-perceived sporting experiences at university level of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The study highlighted the fact that maximum amount of variations exists among the perception of student-athletes on their lived experiences pertaining to the university sport program. It was examined that the student-athletes had the ability to build and pass life skills while being engaged in university sport activities where proper teaching life was not guaranteed. These results indicate that frequent participation in sport will lead to the development and transition of life skills, however; deliberate coaching is of utmost importance. It has also been stated that neither student-athletes taught nor advised to build and pass life skills with the help of participation in sport. One of the drawbacks of this analysis is that we weren't evaluating why coaches don't pay their role in teaching life skills through sport? It is therefore proposed that future work should be ensured in order to examine a coach's role in the development and then pass life skills among the student-athletes. Therefore, effective development strategies must be pursued not only in sports or other formal activities, but in all environments where young people socialize and mature if we expect them to develop into capable and responsible citizens.

## **RESEARCH LIMITATION AND AREA OF FUTURE RESEARCH**

Because of limitation of time and expenditure, we decided to include student-athletes participated in a competitive sport at university level, therefore; the results obtained through this study might be interpreted with carefulness. It is hoped that expanding future research by adding large sample size from another level of educational institutions such school and colleges will add in the integrity of research.

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