

Psychological Readiness for Competition: Examining the Relationship Between Self-Esteem and Competitive Anxiety Among Netball Players

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ABSTRACT

Background: The inconsistent performance of netball players in Sepang, Selangor, highlights the importance of understanding psychological factors influencing athletic outcomes. Existing studies have inadequately explored the interplay between psychological readiness, self-esteem, and competition anxiety, leaving a gap in targeted interventions to enhance athlete performance. This study provides novel insights into how these variables relate to and predict readiness. **Purpose:** The objective of this study was to examine the correlations and predictive relationships between psychological readiness, self-esteem, and competition anxiety among netball players in Sepang. **Methods:** A quantitative correlational design was utilized, involving 84 netball players selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using validated instruments: the Athletic Coping Skills Inventory (ACSI-28) to measure psychological readiness, the Sport Anxiety Scale (SAS-2) to assess competition anxiety, and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) for self-esteem. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS Version 26, employing descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, and regression analysis. **Results:** Findings revealed moderate to high psychological readiness, with adaptability scoring the highest ($M = 3.06$) and anxiety freedom the lowest ($M = 2.25$). Self-esteem showed a significant negative correlation with psychological readiness ($r = -0.396, p < .01$), while competition anxiety exhibited a positive correlation ($r = 0.390, p < .01$). Regression analysis confirmed competition anxiety as a significant positive predictor and self-esteem as a negative predictor of psychological readiness. **Conclusion:** This study advances the understanding of psychological readiness in athletes, emphasizing the need for balanced self-esteem and effective anxiety management strategies. Limitations include a small sample size and regional focus, reducing generalizability. Future research should adopt longitudinal approaches and diverse samples to validate findings. Interventions targeting psychological readiness are recommended to improve athletic performance.

Keywords: Psychological Readiness; Self-Esteem; Competition Anxiety; Netball; Athletic Performance

INTRODUCTION

The performance of netball players in Sepang, Selangor, has been consistently subpar, with teams ranking among the lowest in state-level competitions from 2021 to 2023. This trend raises concerns about the psychological readiness of athletes, which encompasses their ability to manage competition stress, maintain focus, and sustain motivation under pressure. Psychological readiness is crucial for peak performance, yet its relationship with factors like self-esteem and competition anxiety remains unclear among these athletes. Self-esteem, a critical determinant of confidence and motivation, varies widely among players, potentially influencing their ability to recover from setbacks and perform consistently. While high self-esteem is generally considered beneficial, excessive confidence may reduce the emphasis on psychological preparation. Conversely, low self-esteem may exacerbate feelings of inadequacy, further hindering performance.

Competition anxiety, which includes both cognitive and somatic components, poses another significant challenge. Moderate levels of anxiety may enhance focus and motivation, but excessive anxiety can disrupt concentration, increase physical tension, and impair overall performance. Without a clear understanding of how anxiety influences psychological readiness, interventions remain insufficient to address these challenges. Despite the critical role of psychological factors in sports performance, research focusing on the interplay of psychological readiness, self-esteem, and competition anxiety among netball players in

Sepang is limited. Addressing this gap is essential to identify strategies for improving athletes' mental preparedness, boosting their self-esteem, and managing competition anxiety effectively. This study seeks to fill this gap by exploring these relationships and their implications for enhancing performance outcomes.

Psychological readiness refers to an athlete's mental and emotional state, ensuring optimal performance during competitions. It encompasses factors such as self-confidence, focus, emotional control, and adaptability (Shaari et al., 2023). High levels of psychological readiness allow athletes to perform effectively under pressure, manage stress, and sustain motivation (Kaplanova, 2019). According to Adriana Kaplanova (2020), athletes with higher psychological readiness demonstrate greater resilience and adaptability, which are vital in competitive sports. Studies on team sports, including hockey and football, indicate that psychological readiness enhances athletes' ability to handle setbacks, maintain focus, and perform consistently (Pa et al., 2024).

However, achieving psychological readiness is challenging due to various internal and external factors. Key barriers include anxiety, lack of confidence, and insufficient mental preparation. Kaplanova (2020) highlights that athletes with inadequate psychological readiness often struggle with emotional regulation and decision-making under stress. Thus, understanding and fostering psychological readiness are critical for improving athletic performance.

Self-esteem reflects an individual's evaluation of their self-worth and plays a pivotal role in motivation, emotional resilience, and performance. High self-esteem is associated with confidence, intrinsic motivation, and the ability to recover from failures (Sedikides et al., 2004). Athletes with higher self-esteem tend to take calculated risks, remain optimistic, and adapt to challenges more effectively (Zeigler-Hill, 2013). In team sports, self-esteem contributes to players' ability to trust their skills and make quick decisions under pressure (Noh et al., 2024). However, excessive self-esteem can lead to overconfidence, reducing the focus on preparation (Pa et al., 2024). Conversely, low self-esteem may exacerbate negative thoughts, impairing motivation and resilience (Dodgson, 1998). According to Fuentes-García et al. (2023), athletes with low self-esteem are more prone to performance anxiety and struggle to recover from setbacks. These findings suggest that while self-esteem is a critical factor in sports, maintaining a balanced perception of self-worth is essential for consistent performance.

In netball, where quick decision-making and teamwork are critical, self-esteem influences players' ability to handle competitive pressure and interact effectively with teammates. Studies like Yao Shang et al. (2021) indicate that self-esteem mediates the relationship between body image and psychological well-being, emphasizing its role in fostering emotional stability in athletes.

Competition anxiety is a psychological response to the pressures of performing in competitive environments. It is typically categorized into cognitive anxiety (negative thoughts and doubts) and somatic anxiety (physical symptoms like increased heart rate and muscle tension) (Smith et al., 2023). Moderate levels of competition anxiety can enhance performance by increasing focus and motivation, but excessive anxiety often disrupts concentration and impairs decision-making (Rosario, 2024). Somatic anxiety significantly affects physical performance, while cognitive anxiety disrupts mental preparedness (Mushawwir et al., 2024). Athletes experiencing high levels of competition anxiety often struggle to balance focus and execution, resulting in inconsistent performance. According to Tarmizi et al. (2024), excessive anxiety impairs athletes' ability to implement strategies effectively, especially in team sports requiring coordination and rapid decision-making.

Research suggests that competition anxiety's impact varies based on an athlete's

psychological readiness. Athletes with strong psychological preparedness are more likely to channel anxiety into productive energy (Lazarus, 1991). Conversely, those with poor readiness are more prone to performance declines. Effective anxiety management strategies, such as mindfulness and cognitive-behavioral techniques, have proven beneficial in reducing anxiety and enhancing readiness (Smith et al., 2023).

The interplay between psychological readiness, self-esteem, and competition anxiety significantly impacts athletic performance. Studies show that athletes with high psychological readiness are better equipped to manage competition anxiety and maintain consistent performance (Kaplanova, 2021). Self-esteem further moderates these relationships, with balanced self-esteem supporting resilience and focus during high-pressure situations (Fuentes-García et al., 2023). However, the relationship is complex. High self-esteem may reduce psychological readiness if athletes overestimate their abilities and neglect preparation (Pa et al., 2024). Similarly, excessive competition anxiety can undermine psychological readiness by overwhelming athletes' coping mechanisms (Rosario, 2024). These findings suggest the need for targeted interventions to balance self-esteem, manage anxiety, and enhance psychological readiness.

The study examines the psychological readiness of netball players and its relationship with self-esteem and competition anxiety. Psychological readiness refers to an athlete's mental and emotional state to face competitive challenges. Previous research highlights its role in optimizing performance and handling stress (Kaplanova, 2019). Self-esteem, or one's perception of self-worth, affects motivation and emotional resilience, with high self-esteem often linked to confidence and positive outcomes (Sedikides et al., 2004). Competition anxiety, encompassing cognitive and somatic dimensions, significantly influences focus and performance under pressure (Smith et al., 2023). This study investigates how these factors interact among netball players in Sepang, Selangor, where performance levels have been consistently low. The objectives were: 1) To evaluate the psychological readiness, competition anxiety, and self-esteem of netball players, 2) to examine the relationship between psychological readiness, self-esteem, and competition anxiety. 3) to assess the influence of psychological readiness on self-esteem and competition anxiety.

METHOD

A non-experimental, correlational research design was used to investigate the relationships between variables without manipulation. The study utilized surveys to collect data, which were analyzed quantitatively. This approach was chosen because it allows for identifying relationships between psychological readiness, self-esteem, and competition anxiety in a real-world setting (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study involved 84 netball players from Sepang, Selangor, selected using purposive sampling. This sampling method was chosen to ensure the participants met specific criteria relevant to the study, such as being active players in district-level competitions. Purposive sampling ensures the representation of the target population (Shaffie, 1991).

The Athletic Coping Skills Inventory (ACSI-28) was used to assess psychological readiness across seven subscales: adversity, goal setting, achievement motivation, anxiety freedom, pressure response, adaptability, and concentration. The inventory consists of 28 items, rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (almost never) to 4 (almost always). The ACSI-28 demonstrated a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.76, indicating good internal consistency (Smith et al., 1994). The Sport Anxiety Scale (SAS-2) measured competition anxiety, focusing on three subscales: focus disruption, somatic anxiety, and worry. This scale comprises 15 items, with responses rated on a 4-point Likert scale from 1 (not at all) to 4 (very often). The SAS-2 has shown a strong reliability coefficient, with

a Cronbach's alpha of 0.80 (Smith, 2003), making it suitable for assessing the anxiety experienced by athletes in competitive scenarios. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) evaluated self-esteem through 10 items, rated on a 4-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The scale includes reverse-coded items to ensure internal consistency and robust analysis. The RSES reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.75, establishing its reliability for measuring self-perceptions of worth and competence).

Data collection was conducted through paper-based surveys distributed during district-level netball competitions in Sepang. Before participants completed the surveys, they were informed about the study's purpose, assured of the confidentiality of their responses, and provided with instructions for filling out the questionnaires. Surveys were administered under the researcher's supervision to clarify any potential ambiguities, ensuring accurate and reliable responses. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS Version 26. Ethical protocols were strictly adhered to throughout the study. Participants were fully informed about the study's objectives, their right to withdraw at any time, and the confidentiality of their responses. Informed consent was obtained prior to participation, ensuring that participants voluntarily agreed to partake in the research. Additionally, all collected data were anonymized to protect the identity and privacy of the respondents. These measures ensured that the study met ethical standards and respected the participants' rights and well-being.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

1. Descriptive statistics

The descriptive statistics for psychological readiness, competition anxiety, and self-esteem are presented in Table 1. Psychological readiness was evaluated through seven subscales, and the results indicated moderate to high levels across most dimensions. Similarly, competition anxiety was analysed through its subscales, revealing a notable impact of somatic anxiety and focus disruption on athletes' performance. Self-esteem levels were categorized as moderately low.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

Variable	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Interpretation
Psychological Readiness			
- Adversity	2.97	0.49	Moderately High
- Goal Setting	2.90	0.54	Moderately High
- Achievement Motivation	2.88	0.55	Moderately High
- Anxiety Freedom	2.25	0.63	Moderately Low
- Pressure Response	2.60	0.50	Moderately High
- Adaptability	3.06	0.53	Moderately High
- Concentration	2.46	0.49	Moderate
Competition Anxiety			
- Focus Disruption	3.13	0.64	Moderately High
- Somatic Anxiety	3.21	0.57	Moderately High
- Worry	2.90	0.44	Moderately High
Self-Esteem	2.33	0.47	Moderately Low

The descriptive analysis indicated that the players' levels of psychological readiness ranged from moderate to high across the various subscales. Adaptability, defined as the ability to adjust to changing circumstances during competition, recorded the highest mean score (M = 3.06, SD = 0.53), demonstrating that players were generally capable of adapting to challenges on the court. Similarly, adversity handling (M = 2.97, SD = 0.49) and goal-setting abilities (M = 2.90, SD = 0.54) were moderately high, highlighting the players' preparedness to handle setbacks and set performance objectives.

However, anxiety freedom, which measures the ability to remain calm and composed, recorded the lowest mean score ($M = 2.25$, $SD = 0.63$), suggesting that managing anxiety remained a significant challenge for the players.

In terms of competition anxiety, somatic anxiety, characterized by physical symptoms such as increased heart rate and muscle tension, emerged as the most prominent component, with the highest mean score ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 0.57$). This finding underscores the physical impact of anxiety during competition. Focus disruption ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 0.64$) and worry ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 0.44$) also scored moderately high, indicating that anxiety significantly affected both physical and mental aspects of performance. Self-esteem was found to be moderately low among the players ($M = 2.33$, $SD = 0.47$). This suggests that while players had some level of self-worth, there was substantial room for improvement. Low self-esteem may hinder players from fully leveraging their abilities, particularly in high-pressure situations.

2. Correlation Analysis

The relationships between psychological readiness, self-esteem, and competition anxiety were analyzed using Pearson's correlation. The results showed:

- 1) A negative correlation between psychological readiness and self-esteem ($r = -0.396$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that higher self-esteem was associated with lower psychological preparation efforts.
- 2) A positive correlation between psychological readiness and competition anxiety ($r = 0.390$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that manageable anxiety levels can enhance athletes' psychological readiness.

3. Regression Analysis

Regression analysis identified the predictive relationships between psychological readiness (dependent variable) and self-esteem and competition anxiety (independent variables). The results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Regression Analysis Results

Variable	B	SE B	Beta	t	p	R ²	Interpretation
Self-Esteem	-0.282	0.072	-0.396	-3.905	0.001**	0.157	Negative Predictor
Competition Anxiety	0.233	0.061	0.390	3.831	0.001**	0.152	Positive Predictor

The results showed: Self-esteem was a significant negative predictor of psychological readiness, explaining 15.7% of the variance. This indicates that high self-esteem may lead to less focus on mental preparation. Competition anxiety was a significant positive predictor, accounting for 15.2% of the variance. This suggests that anxiety, when managed effectively, can improve psychological readiness.

Overall, the results indicate that psychological readiness among netball players in Sepang is influenced by both self-esteem and competition anxiety. While the players demonstrated moderate to high levels of readiness in areas like adaptability and adversity handling, they struggled with anxiety management. Self-esteem, although generally considered beneficial, showed a negative relationship with psychological readiness in this study, underscoring the potential risks of overconfidence. Conversely, competition anxiety had a positive impact on readiness, suggesting that it can serve as a motivational force when kept within manageable levels.

These findings underscore the importance of developing tailored interventions to improve psychological readiness, particularly through strategies to balance self-esteem and manage competition anxiety effectively. Such interventions can help players better

prepare for high-pressure scenarios, ultimately enhancing their performance and confidence on the court.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the interplay between psychological readiness, self-esteem, and competition anxiety among netball players in Sepang, Selangor. The results highlight critical factors affecting athletes' mental and emotional preparedness for competition, offering implications for intervention strategies to enhance performance.

1. Psychological Readiness

Psychological readiness emerged as a vital component of athletic performance, with adaptability and adversity handling scoring the highest among the subscales. These results indicate that netball players are generally equipped to manage challenges and adjust to changing conditions during matches. However, the low scores in anxiety freedom and concentration highlight significant areas of concern. The inability to manage anxiety and maintain focus during high-pressure situations could impair overall performance, consistent with previous research emphasizing the role of anxiety regulation in psychological preparedness (Kaplanova, 2019). This underscores the need for targeted interventions to enhance athletes' ability to remain calm and focused under pressure.

2. Self-Esteem

The study revealed a negative relationship between self-esteem and psychological readiness, a finding that deviates from conventional views. While high self-esteem is often associated with confidence and resilience, the results suggest that players with elevated self-esteem may deprioritize psychological preparation, potentially due to overconfidence. This aligns with the findings by Pa et al. (2024), who noted that athletes with high self-esteem might perceive themselves as intrinsically capable, reducing their emphasis on mental readiness. Conversely, players with lower self-esteem might dedicate more effort to psychological preparation, seeking to compensate for their perceived weaknesses (Shaari et al., 2023). This dual dynamic highlights the complexity of self-esteem's role in athletic performance and the need for balanced self-perceptions among athletes.

3. Competition Anxiety

Competition anxiety, particularly somatic anxiety, was a significant factor influencing psychological readiness. Players reported experiencing heightened physical symptoms of anxiety, such as increased heart rate and muscle tension, which could affect their ability to perform optimally. Despite this, the positive correlation between competition anxiety and psychological readiness suggests that manageable levels of anxiety can act as a motivational force, driving athletes to prepare more thoroughly for competition. This finding supports the notion that anxiety, when controlled, can enhance focus and readiness (Rosario, 2024). However, excessive anxiety remains a concern, as it can disrupt concentration and hinder performance (Smith et al., 2023). Strategies to balance anxiety levels are therefore critical for fostering optimal psychological readiness.

4. Interplay Between Psychological Readiness, Self-Esteem, and Competition Anxiety

The relationships between the key variables in this study reveal a complex interplay. While self-esteem negatively predicted psychological readiness, competition anxiety positively influenced it. These findings highlight the need for nuanced approaches to athlete development. For instance, interventions aimed at managing competition anxiety should focus on maintaining it within beneficial levels, allowing it to serve as a motivational driver without overwhelming the athlete. Simultaneously, fostering balanced self-esteem is essential to ensure that players remain confident while still prioritizing psychological

preparation.

The results align with theories suggesting that psychological readiness is not solely dependent on self-esteem or anxiety but rather on how these factors interact (Lazarus, 1991). Athletes with moderate self-esteem and manageable anxiety are likely to exhibit higher psychological readiness, as they balance confidence with a proactive approach to preparation.

5. Implications for Athlete Development

The findings emphasize the importance of psychological interventions in athletic training. Techniques such as mindfulness, relaxation training, and cognitive-behavioral strategies can help athletes manage anxiety effectively and enhance their focus during competition (Mushawwir et al., 2024). Additionally, programs aimed at developing balanced self-esteem can encourage athletes to recognize their strengths while addressing areas for improvement, ensuring sustained motivation and readiness. Collaboration between coaches and sports psychologists is crucial to implement these strategies effectively.

6. Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides important insights, it is not without limitations. The sample size was relatively small, and the focus on a single district limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research should explore these relationships in larger, more diverse populations to validate and expand upon the results. Additionally, longitudinal studies could provide a deeper understanding of how these psychological factors evolve and impact performance in different competitive contexts.

CONCLUSION

The study underscores the critical role of psychological readiness, self-esteem, and competition anxiety in athletic performance. While manageable competition anxiety can enhance readiness, excessive anxiety, and imbalanced self-esteem may hinder preparation and performance. Tailored interventions addressing these factors can significantly enhance athletes' psychological resilience and overall competitiveness, paving the way for improved outcomes in high-pressure scenarios.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The purpose of this paper is to express gratitude to the team that played an important role in this research.

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