

**RESEARCH PAPER****Prospects and Challenges Encountered by Varsity Student-Athletes:
Perspectives from Wushu Varsity Athletes****¹Muhammad Dawood, ²Dr. Asif Ali* and ³Fariq Ahmed**

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Corresponding Author asif.ali@gcu.edu.pk**ABSTRACT**

This study delves into the comprehensive examination of the unique challenges and growth potential among wushu players in Pakistan. The study engaged a diverse sample of 160 wushu players from ten different universities. This sample displayed a balanced gender distribution and an age range of 19 to 25 years. Data collection was accomplished through a 39-item Liker-type survey with a Cronbach's alpha value 0.885. Data analysis primarily utilized simple descriptive statistics. The findings revealed noteworthy concerns among wushu players, primarily in the areas of nutritional support and fitness training, highlighting notable deficiencies. In contrast, wushu players also expressed a generalized satisfaction with the quality of facilities and equipment, coaching, financial incentives, administrative management and academic performance support within their respective universities. By proactively addressing the identified challenges and capitalizing on the strengths outlined in this study, the stakeholders might significantly enhance the overall experience and performance of wushu players.

Keywords: Pakistan, Problems, Prospects, University, Wushu Players**Introduction**

The Chinese martial arts, officially referred as Wushu or Kung-Fu (Han et al., 2021), comprises of two primary subcategories Sanda (modern fight) and Taolu (traditional floral demonstration) (Huang et al., 2016). These disciplines have gained recognition as official sports for regular competitions organized under Higher Education Commissions. Recently, this sport has gained popularity among the university level student-athletes of Pakistan as well. However, the research landscape currently lacks a thorough exploration of the specific challenges and opportunities faced by wushu student athletes, highlighting notable gap in understanding their unique problems and experiences in this sport.

In realm of higher education institutions, student athletes have faced distinctive challenges (Fuchs et al., 2016). They grapple with the complex balance between their academic responsibilities and their athletic pursuits or objectives (Aquilina & Henry, 2010). This persistent workload may diminish their efficiency to excel in both domains (Kumar & Mohammad, 2019). Similarly, as compared to their non-athletes peers, student-athletes may encounter unique challenges in the aligning their athletic goals with academic obligations as emphasized by Buhaş et al. (2023).

On the other hand, it was also observed that college athletes receiving financial inducements (sports scholarships) showed higher levels of motivation to participate in sports and showed more favorable evaluations of coaches and athletic training than those who did not receive financial benefits from educational institutions (Clancy et al., 2017).

Poor financial incentives were also observed to have negative impact on players' effectiveness and perceptions of sports participation, effort invested in skill development, fitness progress, and instruction (Hextrum, 2018). Since factors like fitness training, sports coaching, facilities, and financial incentives and benefits are seen to be necessary for sports success, these factors may be considered as proxies for performance in wushu.

Correspondingly, the necessity for financial incentives can be acknowledged in the context of athletes' multiple responsibilities and some increased workload in comparison to non-athlete students (Ali et al., 2022). The necessity for financial incentives is also evident considering athletes' workload as compared to non-athletes. Thus by providing them with additional financial incentives and adequate nutrition the unique roles of student athletes might be compensated (Kisska-Schulze & Epstein, 2018). Additionally, scholarships, cash grants, transportation services, fee waivers, stipends during preparation and competitions and free supplies of sports gear can all be used as rewards for players (Zaarour & Bargal, 2023).

Prior studies also indicated that supporting student athletes with enough funding might boost their participation in sports. Similarly, funding may also increase facilities and athletic equipment, motivation to compete, physical effort invested in winning, stress levels, and contentment (Taks et al., 2014). These elements taken together may lead to greater desire in getting instruction from qualified instructors, improved physical fitness, and ultimately enhanced performance.

Conversely, young athletes need the adequate diet and nutrition not just for their athletic performance but also for their overall development of health. The majority of the time, neither coaches nor athletes have the sufficient awareness related to diet and nutrition to successfully create a plan that can lead to adequate nutrition (Cotugna et al., 2005). Therefore, athletes and coaches should have access to the nutrition educational programs as it is essential for athletes to be knowledgeable about nutrition in order to achieve successful results (Torres-McGehee et al., 2012).

Nevertheless, physical fitness training, especially at the local and state level colleges, is thought to be one of the major determinants of athletic performance (Rice et al., 2016). One of the main factors in the growth of expert players is the coach's competence and ability to offer feedback, which helps players improve their abilities and methods (Han et al., 2015). This indicates the requirement for an organized, methodical, and scientific training curriculum and proper guideline related to nutrition and diet for student wushu athletes throughout the academic year in universities, under the supervision of qualified and experienced physical fitness instructors.

In context of higher education institutions of Pakistan, their financial condition of sports sector is underdeveloped. Consequently, wushu student-athletes often encounter challenges in various areas including facilities like professional equipment, specialized nutrition and financial incentives. Hence, to investigate and inspect the challenges faced by the Wushu players at university level was the primary objective of this study. The findings of the study might aid the researchers, scholars and concerned people to pinpoint issues faced by university-level wushu players. Addressing these issues may also contribute in the enhancement and advancement of wushu players at university level.

Literature Review

A cross-sectional study by Jakiwa et al. (2022) on student athletes suggested that the level of sports participation among student-athletes may not significantly affect their academic success. These findings also challenged the common assumption of the negative influences of high-level sports participation on academic performance. A recurring theme in the literature related to university-level student-athletes is the need to strike a delicate balance between athletic commitments and academic responsibilities.

Another study conducted on student athletes reported the considerable challenges faced by these individuals, including managing assignment deadlines, attending classes alongside demanding training schedules, and excelling in both academics and sports (Kumar and Mohammad (2019)). Excelling in both academics and sports requires effective management of training, recovery, and academic commitments. Similarly, another study conducted to investigate unique challenges faced by student-athletes, such as the risk of overtraining and burnout, emphasized the importance of open communication between athletes and coaches (Gomez et al., 2018). Hence, meticulous planning coupled with adequate recovery might effectively tackle these challenges.

In a similar vein, a study conducted by Nthangeni et al. (2021) on athlete students highlights a spectrum of motivations and obstacles. These athletes were driven by personal enjoyment, family pride, forming friendships, and aspirations to excel academically within a reasonable timeframe. However, they also had to grapple with challenges including scheduling conflicts, parental academic pressures, limited support structures and the ongoing need to balance academic rigor with sports commitments. Correspondingly, an empirical study by Magdato (2021), conducted on school level athletes suggested that these athletes experienced a lot of obstacles related to the field of sports administration, imbalanced academics with sports career and personality development.

Conversely, the internal challenges impacting the academic performance of student-athletes are ubiquitous and not confined to geographical boundaries. A study conducted by Apaak and Sarpong (2015) on the student athletes identified time constraints and physical/emotional strain as significant challenges. The study stated that collaborative efforts between university management and sports administrators to create conducive schedules and provide counseling support to student-athletes.

Material and Methods

Research Design

This study was designed as a cross-sectional questionnaire-based survey to find out the problems and prospects of Wushu players who have participated in university level competitions.

Sample and Population

In this study, the entire population was considered as sample due to small size of population. The total population comprised of 160 wushu players from 10 different universities of Pakistan evenly divided between male and female with ages ranging from 19 to 25 years.

Instruments

Demographic and personal information section

Demographic section consisted of 12 items, comprising fundamental inquiries like name of university, study year, name of department, age, gender, residence, family income, scholarship status, scholarship type, highest level playing and experience in wushu.

Questionnaire for Problems and Prospects

A 39 item Likert-Type Questionnaire was taken from the past studies (Ali et al., 2022; Ali et al., 2016). Previously, this instrument was tailored to assess the challenges and prospects faced by hockey players only. However, given that this study comprises of wushu players as population, a slight adjustment of replacing 'hockey' with 'wushu' was made before employing the tool. The investigation revealed that this instrument had high levels of validity and consistency, with a Cronbach's Alpha score of 0.885.

Data Collection

Participants were asked to provide their candid opinions by choosing the option that best presents their viewpoints. Each respondent filled the questionnaire willingly, with their consent obtained. Additionally, permission was taken from their managers and coaches as well to include them in the sample. Participants were guaranteed that their data would exclusively be utilized for research purposes and will be treated with utmost priority. They were also explicitly informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point.

Data Analysis

For data analysis, SPSS version 22 was employed. Simple descriptive analysis was applied to determine the frequencies and percentages.

Results and Discussion

Wushu student athletes at university level represented their perceptions about the factors of facilities & equipment, fitness training, coaching, financial benefits & incentives, management and administration, academic performance/challenges, nutrition and diet.

Table 1
Variable of the study

Variables	f	%age	M	SD
Facilities & equipment			1.79	.410
Sufficient	126	78.7		
Insufficient	34	21.3		
Fitness Training			1.56	.498
Sufficient	90	56.2		
Insufficient	70	43.8		
Coaching			1.98	.157
Sufficient	156	97.6		
Insufficient	4	2.4		
Financial benefits & incentives			1.93	.264
Sufficient	148	92.5		
Insufficient	12	7.5		
Management and Administration			1.89	.309
Good	143	89.4		
Bad	17	10.6		
Academic Performance/Challenges			1.94	.498
Appropriate	150	93.7		
Inappropriate	10	6.3		
Nutrition and diet			1.56	.498
Sufficient	90	56.2		
Insufficient	70	43.8		

Note: *f*= frequency, % = percentage, *M*= mean, *SD*= standard deviation

The descriptive analysis revealed that the variables had a maximum mean of 3.00 and a minimum mean of 1.00. However, variables with a mean greater than 1.5 were classified as above average, whereas those falling below or near 1.5 were deemed below average. Table 4.1 illustrates that (78.7%) of the wushu student players reported sufficient provision of the quantity and quality of the facilities and equipment. Conversely, (21.3%) of wushu student athletes reported a deficiency in this regard. Similarly, in terms of the factors of fitness and training slightly over half of the wushu student players (56.2%) reported sufficient facilities, whereas (43.8%) of them reported insufficient fitness and training facilities and also expressed their dissatisfaction with the available resources.

Additionally, wide majority of the wushu players (97.6%) presented their opinion that they had been provided sufficient coaching, and very few of the wushu athletes (2.4%) reported that they had insufficient coaching. Regarding the variable of financial benefits and incentives, majority of wushu student athletes (92.5%) reported the sufficient level of financial benefits and incentives, and less than one-tenth of Wushu players (7.5%) were deprived of financial benefits and incentives. Moreover, the factor of management and administration concluded that the majority of participants (89.4%) gave their opinion good level of management and administration, while approximately one-tenth of the wushu players (10.6%) recorded their bad expressions for management and administration.

In terms of academic performance and challenges, (93.7%) participants recorded that they had appropriate academic performance and (6.3%) of the wushu athletes did not perform well. Furthermore, more than half of the wushu players (56.2%) gave their thoughts that they had sufficient nutrition and diet and more than two-fifth of the wushu student athletes (46.8%) remained deficient of nutrition and diet.

Discussion

The study aimed to comprehensively evaluate the challenges and obstacles encountered by the university level wushu athletes. The findings of the study revealed a predominantly positive sentiment among athletes concerning facilities and equipment, management and administration, coaching and financial incentives. Nevertheless, certain apprehensions were voiced regarding the adequacy of fitness training and the completeness of dietary and nutritional provisions.

The findings of this study underscore potential disparities in physical fitness among student wushu athletes, highlighting imperative for specialized fitness programs. It was observed that athletes with un-structured fitness programs exhibited lower levels of physical fitness as compared to their well-trained counterparts. Additionally, it was also observed that comprehensive fitness training might also play a vital role in development of wushu athlete, highlighting the importance of a holistic training regimen that encompasses both wushu techniques and physical conditioning.

Similarly, it was also observed that athletes experiencing inadequacies in facilities and equipment might exhibit a diminished level of motivation. Furthermore, a deficiency in amenities may also heighten the risk of injuries, underscoring the critical importance of well-equipped training environments for athlete's performance and safety (Agarwal & Arora, 2020). Whereas, in the realm of nutrition and diet, a significant proportion of these athletes exhibited substantial dietary concerns. This lack of nutrition not only impacted their immediate performance but also exerted a lasting influence on their long-term success and overall well-being.

Conversely, dearth of coaching, sub-par coaching standards and inadequate strategic training were observed to have a detrimental impact on wushu athlete's performance. Previous studies also indicated that insufficient coaching might lead to technical deficiencies and diminished overall potential of players Taylor and Garratt (2010). Whereas, improper management and administration emerged as another finding that may have disadvantageous effects on athletic performance. Participants lacking sports administration were observed to have reduced opportunities and hindered player development Liu and Lin (2012). Therefore, it is imperative to implement rigorous coaching programs coupled with robust sports administration ensuring seamless operations and athlete support systems.

However, it was also indicated that more than half of these athletes reported that they received sufficient financial benefits and incentives. Although they reported obstacles during and after their athletic careers including lack of financial assistance and support services however, the athletic scholarship program assists them with sufficient financial assistance to lessen their financial disparities Jeukendrup (2017). In addition, in terms of

academic performance and challenges, the findings revealed that wushu student athletes reported satisfactory academic performance as well. It was also observed that these athletes outperformed ordinary students in various academic aspects Lumpkin and Favor (2013).

Recommendations

Specific food regimens, in collaboration of nutritionists, should also be designed for these wushu athletes to maximize their performance. To improve athletes' development, universities should make investment in state-of-the-art training facilities and high-quality equipment. An extensive fitness program suited to their rare needs should also be implemented to improve the physical preparedness of wushu players. Individualized fitness programs and regular fitness evaluation should also be conducted to make players achieve maximum performance. Lastly, by developing incentive schemes and rewarding the exceptional achievements, athlete's commitment to the sport might be encouraged.

Conclusion

This research illuminates the distinctive challenges and opportunities faced by university-level wushu athletes in Pakistan. While athletes generally expressed satisfaction regarding coaching, management, academic performance and financial incentives, noteworthy concerns arose in fitness training, nutrition and the availability of facilities and equipment. To enhance the experience of student-athletes of wushu at university level, it is imperative to invest in modern training facilities and equipment. Moreover, to implement comprehensive fitness programs and the provision of specialized dietary plans are also essential in this regard. Addressing these issues may not only benefit wushu athletes but also contribute to the growth and recognition of wushu within the higher education landscape in Pakistan.

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