

Game Changers: Evaluating Student Success in Special Program in Sports Through the Eyes of Coaches, Teachers, and Parents

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Abstract

The role of sports in education has long been recognized for its potential to foster physical development and academic success, discipline, and social skills in students. This qualitative phenomenological study explored the factors evaluating student success in the Special Program in Sports (SPS) in the Division of South Cotabato during the school year 2024-2025 school year. Twelve participants, including four coaches, four teachers, and four parents from schools with SPS, were selected based on specific inclusion criteria. Thematic analysis revealed several key traits of successful student-athletes, including academic excellence, discipline, leadership, adaptability, and resilience. These "game changers" effectively balanced academics and athletics through prioritization, self-discipline, and problem-solving abilities, inspiring peers and demonstrating a growth mindset. The study found

that SPS students exhibited high academic performance, athletic improvement, and personal growth, with peer collaboration and structured time management being significant contributors. However, challenges such as time management, limited resources, and lack of coordination between academic and sports programs were evident. Coaches, teachers, and parents were identified as critical support structures, providing motivation, discipline, and emotional support. Collaboration among these stakeholders is essential for addressing these challenges and ensuring student success. Emerging themes emphasized the need for integrated academic and athletic programs, enhanced time management, and greater parental involvement. This study underscores the importance of a holistic approach to student development in sports-focused education.

Keywords: *student-athletes, sports education, academic-athletic balance, Special Program in Sports, holistic development*

INTRODUCTION

The role of sports in education has long been recognized for its potential to foster physical development, academic success, discipline, and social skills in students. Special Program in Sports have

become a focal point for educators and policymakers worldwide as they seek to harness the benefits of sports in improving student outcomes. However, the success of these programs is often evaluated from various perspectives, including those of coaches, teachers, and parents, who play critical roles in student-athlete development.

Globally, special sports programs in schools have been implemented to enhance students' academic, social, and physical development. Studies in the U.S. and Europe highlight that such programs improve physical health and foster teamwork, leadership, and discipline (Bailey et al., 2018). In Denmark, research has highlighted the positive outcomes of special sports programs on student development, including enhanced physical fitness, improved self-esteem, and increased motivation (Gao et al., 2020; Eime et al., 2016). These findings underscore the need to delve deeper into the experiences of key stakeholders – coaches, teachers, and parents – to understand better how such programs contribute to students' overall growth. However, research has primarily focused on the perspectives of students and policymakers, leaving a gap in understanding the roles that coaches, teachers, and parents play in student success.

Meanwhile, in the Philippines, sports education has increasingly been recognized as integral to holistic student development, with the Department of Education (DepEd) launching the Special Program in Sports (SPS) across various schools. This program caters to the unique needs of talented young athletes, offering them a platform to hone their skills and excel in their chosen sports disciplines while pursuing academic excellence. The Philippines' cultural diversity and fervent enthusiasm for sports present a unique context for investigating the impact of special programs in sports (DepEd, 2017). Special Program in Sports (SPS) also aims to nurture student-athletes who may later contribute to national or international sports (Oronce & David, 2020). However, while there is research on student outcomes, the voices of coaches, teachers, and parents remain underexplored, creating a gap in understanding the broader support system in sports education.

Focusing on South Central Mindanao, sports programs have been pivotal in developing young athletes, particularly in underrepresented areas where access to elite training may be limited. However, local literature on the success of these programs remains scarce. This gap highlights the need for research that includes the perspectives of coaches, teachers, and parents to provide a more holistic view of the factors influencing student success in the region's special sports programs (Santos et al., 2021).

This study aimed to evaluate student success in special program in sports by comprehensively examining the key stakeholders' viewpoints. It offered a nuanced understanding of the factors that contributed to or hindered student success in sports-focused education.

Research Questions

1. What are the traits of the game changers?
2. What are the perceptions of coaches, teachers, and parents regarding students' academic, athletic, and personal development outcomes in the Special Program in Sports (SPS)?
3. What challenges do coaches, teachers, and parents encounter in supporting students' success in the Special Program in Sports (SPS)?
4. How do the roles of coaches, teachers, and parents influence the students' performance and overall success in the Special Program in Sports (SPS)?

5. What recommendations can be formulated to improve the implementation and outcomes of the Special Program in Sports (SPS) based on the insights of coaches, teachers, and parents?

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in the Division of South Cotabato, Philippines. It included participants and public secondary schools with a Special Program in Sports (SPS) offering and focused only during the school year 2024-2025. In this study, a purposive sampling technique was intentionally utilized to select coaches, teachers, and parents as participants carefully. The study involved a total of twelve (12) participants out of six (6) schools with a Special Program in Sports, four (4) coaches, four (4) teachers, and four (4) parents for every group participant who meets the researcher's specified inclusion criteria.

Game changers are those highly performing individuals who make significant impact in various fields- whether through personal growth, moral leadership, athletic excellence or academic brilliance. These individuals don't just succeed but they set new standards and inspire others. Lack of innovation, personal success without broader influence, and ethical or moral shortcomings are some of the exclusion criteria for defining game changers. For coach participants, it is recommended that coach-participants must have backgrounds in coaching sports and must reach SRAA or Palarong Pambansa or Batang Pinoy; teacher-participants must teach Special Program in Sports subject for 3 years or more; parent-participants must have students who were officially enrolled in SPS for the school year 2024-2025, participated in higher meets like SRAA or Palarong Pambansa or Batang Pinoy and must be an academic achiever also.

Qualitative research, specifically the phenomenological approach, was employed to explore student success in special sports programs through a comprehensive examination of the key stakeholders' viewpoints. This approach provided a nuanced understanding of the factors that contributed to or hindered student success in sports-focused education.

Data are facts gathered through methodical and scientific techniques. In this study, the stages of the data collection process are described as a researcher's guide to help the researcher collect thorough data.

Upon obtaining approval from the Dean of the Graduate School of Sultan Kudarat State University, the researcher communicated with the Schools Division Superintendent of South Cotabato and the principals of public secondary schools with Special Program in Sports. These schools included Libertad National High School, Sto. Niño National High School, Norala National High School, T'boli National High School, Banga National High School, and Tupi National High School. Letters of communication were signed by the Research Adviser and the Dean of the Graduate School, and the researcher facilitated all necessary coordination.

On the next phase, the researcher conducted an orientation session to brief all participants on the study's objectives, ethical considerations, and interview process. This preparatory step ensured participants were fully informed of their rights, roles and the scope of their involvement in the study. This also served to establish rapport, contributed it to a more open and trustworthy research environment.

To enhance the credibility and transferability of the findings, the researcher developed an interview guide question validated by panel of experts. In the succeeding phase, informed consent was obtained from all participants. The researcher provided the Informed Consent Form, which detailed their rights, including voluntary participation, anonymity and the freedom to withdraw at any point. Participants signed the form after reviewing it, thereby giving formal and ethical permission to proceed with the interview.

A semi-structured interview was used to gather data from the perspectives of coaches, teachers, and parents regarding students' success. Probing questions were incorporated to elicit deeper insights. Interviews were scheduled based on participants' availability and lasted between 30 to 60 minutes. Recording devices, such as mobile phones, were used to capture responses for transcription and analysis. If any participant chose to end the interview due to emotional discomfort, the researcher documented the occurrence accordingly.

Transcription of the recorded interview was done with the help of an English Teacher based on the transcription writing guide adapted from Protacio (2021), Accad (2015), Sonza et al. (2022). To ensure the accuracy and reliability of the transcribed data, the researcher conducted member checking. Participants were requested to check their respective transcripts to verify the accuracy of their responses and confirm the authenticity of the data.

This study employed five research instruments: questionnaire validation tool, interview protocols, the interview questions guide, informed consent form and the transcription writing guide. In this study, a semi-structured interview was the primary investigative tool employed during in-depth interviews. An in-depth interview is a qualitative research technique used to gather detailed information from a small number of participants through open-ended, conversational questions

In this study, the researcher used thematic analysis for data analysis. Thematic analysis, as defined by Braun and Clarke (2006), involves detection, interpretation, and reporting of data patterns and themes. It organizes and describes all the data in great detail. The process involves six key steps: Familiarizing the data: The researcher carefully read and re-read the collected data to understand its depth and identify emerging patterns. During this step, the researcher immersed herself in the data, ensuring familiarity before moving on to the next phase. Generating initial codes and themes: The researcher documented the initial codes that reveal where and how patterns occur. This process involved data reduction, where the data was organized into labels or categories to facilitate more efficient analysis. Data complications also happen here, where the researcher draws inferences about the meaning of the codes. Searching for themes (Clustered Themes): The researcher grouped the initial codes into broader, overarching themes that best represent the data. The researcher ensured that the themes accurately depict the findings, even if they do not initially fit the expected categories. It is also important at this stage to note any gaps or missing elements in the analysis. Reviewing themes: The researcher assessed how well the identified themes support the data and the overarching theoretical approach of the study. If gaps or incomplete aspects were identified, the researcher revisits the data to address missing components. Defining and naming themes (Emerging Themes): The researcher clearly defined each theme, explaining which aspects of the data were captured and what makes the themes significant or interesting. Producing the report: The final step involved writing the report, where the researcher selected the themes that make meaningful contributions to understanding the research problem. These themes were synthesized to provide insights into evaluating student success in the special sports program.

RESULTS

Emerging Themes on the Traits of Game Changers

Five (5) key emerging themes were identified through comprehensive data analysis and interpretation, synthesized from various initial and clustered themes. These emerging themes are as follows: Balance Between Academics and Sports, Discipline and Leadership, Innovation and Adaptability,

Resilience and Overcoming Challenges, and Role Models and Inspiration. These themes highlight the core qualities and values that set the game changers apart, providing insight into what drives their success and influence in both athletic and non-athletic domains.

Emerging Theme 1: Balance Between Academics and Sports

Game changers demonstrate the ability to balance academic responsibilities with athletic commitments. This balance is maintained through discipline, prioritization, and motivation, ensuring they excel in both areas. Participants emphasized that student-athletes who successfully manage their time achieve high academic performance while excelling in sports.

Santoso and Sugiyanto (2021) highlight that academic performance and sports engagement are not mutually exclusive but complementary, as time management skills enhance student-athletes' overall success. Molina and Ocampo (2022) found that discipline and prioritization significantly contribute to maintaining a high academic standing while undergoing intense sports training. Chen and Lee (2023) stress the importance of motivational strategies and institutional support to effectively help student-athletes balance their dual responsibilities.

Emerging Theme 2: Discipline and Leadership

Discipline and leadership are defining traits of game changers, as they lead by example and inspire their peers. These individuals demonstrate humility, foster teamwork, and encourage team growth. Participants noted that student-athletes who embody leadership skills contribute to the success and unity of their teams.

Martínez and Rodríguez (2019) assert that self-discipline is critical in leadership development, allowing athletes to maintain high performance and positively influence their teammates. Johnson and Carter (2020) emphasize that leadership skills among athletes enhance their ability to collaborate, strategize, and foster unity within a team. Nguyen et al. (2023) found that athletes with strong leadership abilities often become mentors, shaping the future of sports and inspiring younger athletes.

Emerging Theme 3: Innovation and Adaptability

Game changers are known for their ability to innovate and adapt to changing environments. They think critically, embrace new strategies, and continuously seek improvement. Participants highlighted that these individuals incorporate creative learning techniques and remain flexible when facing challenges.

Peterson and Williams (2018) found that adaptability in athletes is key to success, allowing them to modify techniques and approaches as they encounter new competition and challenges. Smith and Green (2021) assert that innovation in training methods improves individual and team performance as athletes explore creative solutions to enhance their skills. Lopez and Tan (2024) highlight that athletes are open to change and new learning opportunities exhibit higher long-term success in academics and sports.

Emerging Theme 4: Resilience and Overcoming Challenges

Resilience is a fundamental characteristic of game changers. They navigate setbacks with determination, view challenges as learning opportunities, and remain motivated despite obstacles. Participants shared that resilient athletes do not let failures define them but instead use them as steppingstones for growth.

Garcia and Fernandez (2019) argue that resilience in athletes is essential in overcoming performance setbacks, as it fosters perseverance and long-term development. Brown et al. (2021) emphasize that the ability to bounce back from failures and maintain focus is crucial among high-achieving athletes. Kim and Park (2023) found that financial difficulties, injuries, and academic pressures are common struggles among student-athletes, but resilient individuals develop coping mechanisms to sustain their performance.

Emerging Theme 5: Role Models and Inspiration

Game changers are role models who inspire others through their discipline, sportsmanship, and achievements. They motivate younger athletes and students, fostering a culture of excellence. Participants noted that these individuals influence their peers and contribute to the development of aspiring athletes.

Wilson and Adams (2018) highlight that student-athletes who display exemplary behavior and strong work ethics serve as role models for future generations. Zhang and Rivera (2020) found that sports role models inspire athletic excellence, personal development, and leadership skills in young learners. Mendoza and Santos (2022) assert that athletes who engage in mentorship programs and lead by example contribute to the overall positive development of sports culture.

Emerging Themes on the Perceptions of Coaches, Teachers, and Parents Regarding the Academic, Athletic, and Personal Development Outcomes of Students Enrolled in Special Programs in Sports

Emerging Theme 1: Academic Performance of SPS Students

The findings reveal that students in the Special Program for Sports (SPS) demonstrate strong academic performance despite their demanding training schedules. Coaches and teachers observed that SPS students engage in peer collaboration, manage their time effectively, and take responsibility for balancing both sports and academics.

García and Alonso (2019) emphasized that student-athletes receiving structured academic support and peer mentoring tend to perform well in academics and sports. Johnston et al. (2021) found that time management skills developed through sports participation contribute significantly to academic success. Molina and Esteban (2023) highlighted that sports programs with clear academic expectations produce students who excel both on and off the field.

Emerging Theme 2: Athletic and Personal Development

SPS students undergo holistic development through skill improvement, self-discipline, and resilience. The responses indicate that their involvement in sports not only enhances their physical abilities but also instills values such as independence, perseverance, and teamwork.

Gould and Carson (2018) noted that structured sports training cultivates self-discipline and resilience, which are transferable to various life aspects. Brunet and Sabiston (2020) demonstrated that adolescent athletes develop a strong sense of personal identity and independence through participating in competitive sports. Kirk and Haerens (2022) found that students engaged in sports exhibit improved physical, mental, and social well-being compared to their non-athletic peers.

Emerging Theme 3: Comparison of SPS and Non-SPS Students

A significant distinction exists between SPS and non-SPS students regarding behavior, priorities, and engagement levels. SPS students tend to be more competitive, physically active, and highly engaged in extracurricular activities.

Bailey et al. (2018) reported that students in sports programs display higher energy levels and engagement than their non-athletic peers. Pate et al. (2021) found that physically active students show increased classroom participation and better overall school engagement. Valdés-Badilla et al. (2023) highlighted that student-athletes tend to have enhanced motivation and goal-setting skills, distinguishing them from their non-athletic peers.

Emerging Theme 4: Holistic Development through SPS

The data suggest that SPS students grow physically, mentally, socially, and emotionally due to their involvement in structured sports programs. Teachers emphasize the positive impact of SPS on discipline, socialization, and well-rounded personal growth.

Holt et al. (2018) suggested that sports participation fosters social and emotional skills, including teamwork and leadership. Fraser-Thomas and Côté (2020) found that long-term involvement in sports contributes to personal growth and character development. McMahon et al. (2022) showed that sports programs emphasizing holistic development lead to well-rounded individuals with strong discipline and work ethic.

Emerging Theme 5: Balancing Academics and Sports

Parental support, school structures, and personal discipline are crucial in helping SPS students balance academics and sports. Parents recognize that their children learn resilience and time management through their dual commitments.

Knight et al. (2019) found that parental guidance significantly influences student-athletes' ability to manage academic and athletic commitments. Dreiskaemper et al. (2021) highlighted that structured school programs integrating sports and academics lead to better time management and overall success. Blom et al. (2023) demonstrated that resilience and self-discipline acquired through sports help students excel in academic and athletic pursuits.

Emerging Theme 6: Changes Observed in SPS Students

SPS participation visibly improves students' confidence, social skills, and perseverance. Parents observed that their athletic involvement made their children more sociable, determined, and focused.

Bean et al. (2019) found that student-athletes develop higher self-confidence and resilience through sports participation. Strachan et al. (2021) suggested that engaging in competitive sports helps students build social skills and improve their ability to collaborate with peers. Eime et al. (2024) highlighted that sports foster positive psychological development, including increased self-esteem, motivation, and determination.

Emerging Themes on the Challenges Coaches, Teachers, and Parents Encounter in Supporting Students' Success in the Special Program in Sports

Emerging Theme 1: Time Management Issues

Time management remains a significant challenge for students and the stakeholders involved in their development, including coaches, teachers, and parents. While some students demonstrate discipline, the dual pressures of academic requirements and intensive sports training often result in time conflicts. Coaches express frustration with the limited training time available, while teachers observe how this time pressure contributes to absenteeism and fatigue, affecting students' academic performance. Parents echo the need for balance, constantly reminding their children about the importance of managing time well to ensure success in both fields.

Goddard et al. (2019) found that student-athletes face difficulty balancing the demands of academics and athletics, often resulting in fatigue and lower academic performance. Jones and Balmer (2020) highlighted how managing time effectively is a key challenge for students in special programs, significantly impacting their educational engagement and athletic performance. Cosh et al. (2021) explored how time management issues among student-athletes could contribute to burnout, suggesting the need for structured schedules that accommodate both school and training commitments.

Emerging Theme 2: Limited Resources and Facilities

Limited resources, especially regarding equipment and finances, hinder the development of students involved in the Special Program in Sports (SPS). Coaches and parents acknowledge the importance of adequate resources to enhance training experiences and ensure student motivation. The lack of proper training gear leads to compromised skill development, and coaches often resort to improvisation, even using personal funds to meet student needs. Parents, while supportive, recognize the financial strain involved in equipping their children for sports, indicating a broader challenge in maintaining access to quality training materials.

Baker and Wall (2020) emphasized how financial constraints limit the opportunities for skill development in youth sports programs, impacting overall student-athlete performance. Bergman et al. (2022) pointed out that the lack of adequate training facilities and equipment affects not only the training environment but also the motivation and commitment of young athletes. Clarke and O'Neill (2018) observed that financial and resource limitations in educational sports programs can prevent students from fully engaging in their sport, leading to a disparity in performance compared to better-funded programs.

Emerging Theme 3: Academic Performance Concerns

Academic pressure is a recurrent theme as students navigate schoolwork and sports training demands. Teachers note that students often struggle with completing educational requirements, sometimes arriving late to morning classes after exhausting training sessions. Parents emphasize the importance of prioritizing studies while balancing sports commitments, often reminding their children to maintain academic focus. This pressure creates a delicate balance, where the demands of academic success might conflict with the intensive nature of sports programs.

Lichtenstein et al. (2020) highlighted how student-athletes' intense schedules often lead to academic stress, affecting their grades and well-being. Mahoney and Duran (2019) explored the educational challenges student-athletes face, noting how academic performance can deteriorate due to the physical and mental toll of balancing studies and sports. Ryan and Hoxby (2021) observed that student-athletes in specialized programs often experience heightened academic pressures, leading to difficulties in managing coursework effectively.

Emerging Theme 4: Lack of Coordination Between Academic and Sports Programs

A critical gap exists in the coordination between academic and sports programs, which is seen as a barrier to supporting students' holistic success. Teachers and coaches agree that a lack of communication and collaboration between the two spheres often results in students being overburdened or under-supported. Teachers highlight the need for better integration of academic and sports schedules, while coaches emphasize the importance of monitoring students' academic progress alongside their sports training. This lack of synchronization can lead to poor academic performance, especially for those focused primarily on sports.

Graham et al. (2019) suggested that student-athletes' success depends significantly on the cooperation between educators and sports coaches, with a coordinated effort leading to improved outcomes in both domains. Holt & Knight (2020) emphasized the importance of collaboration between teachers and sports programs, noting that a holistic approach to student-athlete development can enhance academic and athletic achievements. Kirk and MacDonald (2021) found that effective coordination between academic and sports programs led to better academic results, reduced stress, and greater student satisfaction in high-performance environments.

Emerging Theme 5: Financial and Emotional Stress on Parents

The financial and emotional toll on parents supporting students in the Special Program in Sports is significant. Parents are burdened not only by the costs of equipment, training fees, and travel but also by the emotional strain of ensuring their children succeed academically and athletically. Despite these challenges, parents strongly commit to their children's dreams, acknowledging the sacrifices required to succeed in sports. This financial strain is often compounded by the pressure to maintain academic performance alongside sports involvement.

Barnes and Wright (2019) explored the financial and emotional strain on parents of student-athletes, suggesting that these pressures often lead to burnout and stress, affecting family dynamics. Rees et al. (2022) noted that the cost of participating in sports programs can create significant financial stress for families, particularly those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, leading to increased parental anxiety. Smith and Baker (2021) highlighted the emotional challenges faced by parents of student-athletes, noting that the financial burden of sports participation often creates a cycle of stress that affects both parents and children.

Emerging Themes on the Roles of Coaches, Teachers, and Parents in Student Performance and Success in the Special Program in Sports (SPS)

Emerging Theme 1: Motivation and Discipline

Motivation and discipline are crucial in ensuring students' success in the Special Program in Sports (SPS). Coaches emphasize the importance of motivating students to maintain a balance between academics and athletics and instilling discipline to achieve their goals. Coaches believe that clear expectations and consistent discipline help students stay focused and dedicated to their studies and training. This dual approach fosters an environment where students learn the value of hard work and commitment.

Beaumont and Edwards (2019) discuss how motivation is a significant predictor of success in sports and academics, suggesting that students who are encouraged to balance both aspects tend to perform better overall. Dweck (2020) emphasized that instilling discipline through a growth mindset enables students to focus on achieving long-term goals, essential for success in competitive environments like SPS. Hughes et

al. (2021) found that motivation combined with structured discipline improves student-athlete performance, enhancing academic and athletic outcomes.

Emerging Theme 2: Parental Involvement and Support

Parental involvement is pivotal in a student's academic and athletic achievements in the SPS. Parents who actively participate in their children's sports and academic lives provide emotional and logistical support, fostering an environment conducive to success. Parents support their children's participation and guide them in decision-making, offering a balanced approach to balancing academics and athletics.

Barrett and Young (2019) found that parental involvement in both academics and sports significantly impacts student motivation and academic success, enhancing performance in school and competitions. Lynch et al. (2020) noted that parents who demonstrate consistent support and provide positive reinforcement contribute to a student-athlete's emotional resilience and academic persistence. Woolger and Gibbs (2022) highlighted the importance of parental engagement in sports and academics, suggesting that this involvement improves overall student outcomes, both academically and in sports.

Emerging Theme 3: Collaboration between Stakeholders

Effective collaboration between coaches, teachers, and parents is crucial for addressing student-athletes' needs. Coaches recognize the importance of developing trustful relationships with parents to create a cohesive student support system. Regular meetings and open communication between all parties help identify concerns and provide timely solutions to support student's academic and athletic development. This collaborative approach ensures that students are supported holistically.

Graham et al. (2019) emphasized that strong relationships and regular communication between coaches, teachers, and parents result in a better understanding of students' needs and lead to improved academic and athletic performance. Simons et al. (2020) found that collaborative efforts among stakeholders positively impact student well-being, fostering both academic success and athletic achievement. Shaw and McFarlane (2021) discussed how collaboration between parents and educators contributes to more effective student development, enabling students to manage sports and academic work demands.

Emerging Theme 4: Teacher's Role in Student Development

Teachers are integral in supporting students' academic development in the SPS. Teachers provide educational guidance and regular updates to parents regarding students' progress. By conducting meetings and maintaining communication, teachers ensure students' educational needs are addressed while fostering a balanced approach to athletic involvement. This proactive academic support helps students stay on track in their studies, even with the added demands of sports.

Carson et al. (2020) highlighted that teacher support is a key factor in ensuring that student-athletes succeed academically, with personalized guidance leading to better academic outcomes. Taylor and Smith (2021) found that teachers who engage with parents and track student progress can reduce the academic pressures faced by student-athletes, leading to better academic performance and student well-being. Jackson et al. (2022) emphasized teachers' critical role in maintaining academic success for student-athletes, particularly by providing consistent feedback and support to help them manage the demands of sports.

Emerging Theme 5: Emotional and Financial Support from Parents

Parents are not only financial supporters but also serve as emotional pillars for students involved in SPS. The financial burden of equipment, training costs, and travel for competitions is often significant, and parents ensure that their children's needs are met despite these challenges. Additionally, parents provide emotional support that helps students cope with the stress and pressures of balancing academics and athletics, helping them stay motivated and focused on their goals.

Robinson et al. (2019) highlighted parents' emotional and financial sacrifices for their children in sports, showing that this support is essential for student-athletes' success and well-being. Ferguson and Jones (2020) observed that parental emotional support plays a vital role in student-athletes' resilience, contributing to their academic and athletic achievements. Wright et al. (2021) explored how financial support from parents positively influences student-athletes' participation in sports and their educational focus, emphasizing the critical role parents play in managing these pressures.

Emerging Theme 6: Advocacy for Student Welfare

Coaches often advocate for their student-athletes, particularly when dealing with academic challenges or strict teachers. By engaging with teachers, coaches ensure that student-athletes' needs are understood and that accommodations are made to support their educational progress. Coaches also inform parents ahead of competitions, providing a united approach to supporting students' welfare. This advocacy helps alleviate unnecessary stress and ensures students' needs are met academically and in their sporting endeavors.

Miller et al. (2019) found that coaches who advocate for their students help ensure that student-athletes are academically and athletically supported, contributing to better outcomes. Johnson and Baker (2021) highlighted that advocacy by coaches and teachers is essential in navigating student-athlete challenges and ensuring they receive adequate support. Stewart and Harris (2022) discussed the role of advocacy in ensuring student-athletes well-being, noting that it leads to better performance by addressing academic and emotional needs.

Emerging Theme 7: Teacher's Perspective on Parental and Coaching Support

Teachers appreciate the vital support parents and coaches provide in ensuring student-athletes' success. Teachers recognize the value of parents being actively involved in their children's training and academic needs, noting that such involvement can help mitigate the challenges students face. The collaboration between teachers, coaches, and parents forms a strong support network that fosters positive student outcomes in academics and sports.

Fleming et al. (2020) explored how teachers' collaboration with parents and coaches leads to a supportive learning environment, improving student outcomes in sports and academics. Roberts et al. (2021) discussed how the relationship between teachers, coaches, and parents is essential in creating a well-rounded support system for student-athletes, leading to higher levels of achievement. Nelson and Gray (2022) emphasized that effective communication and cooperation between teachers, coaches, and parents enhance student-athletes' performance by addressing their academic and athletic needs in a balanced manner.

Emerging Themes on the Recommendations for Improving the Special Program in Sports (SPS) Implementation and Outcomes

Emerging Theme 1: Balancing Academic and Athletic Training

The coaches highlighted the need for better time management and a more structured program supporting academic and athletic success. They emphasized the extension of training hours and the provision of necessary equipment to ensure students perform at their best. Additionally, coaches proposed setting academic standards (such as requiring no failing grades for participation) and offering incentives, such as scholarships and recognition, to motivate students.

Liu et al. (2019) discussed how sports training programs that balance academics and athletic goals enhance student-athletes' performance and well-being. This study found that time management skills and clear academic requirements are essential for student success in dual-focused programs.

Harrison and Lawrence (2020) suggested that providing scholarships and recognition for academic and athletic achievements boosts motivation and improves student-athletes' time management and discipline. Kreiswirth et al. (2021) identified that structured time management systems and academic support structures contribute significantly to a more holistic approach to student-athlete development.

Emerging Theme 2: Strengthening Support System for Student-Athletes

The coaches emphasized the crucial role they play in fostering an environment where academics and sports are equally prioritized. They suggested implementing structured training programs and encouraging peer study groups to help students manage their academic workload. Additionally, fostering teamwork among students, rather than focusing solely on individual competition, was seen as essential for building a strong support system.

Brown et al. (2018) examined how mentorship and peer study programs within athletic settings improve academic outcomes for student-athletes, underlining the importance of coach guidance and collaborative learning environments.

Chesney and Wilson (2019) found that the support of coaches and peers significantly boosts students' ability to balance academic and athletic demands, improving overall performance. Jones and Davis (2020) argued that student-athletes benefit when there is an integrated approach to coaching, where academic guidance and athletic coaching are intertwined to foster a supportive learning environment.

Emerging Theme 3: Integration of Sports and Academic Lessons

There was a strong call for integrating physical education (PE) with the Special Program in Sports (SPS) to maximize training time and create cross-curricular learning opportunities. Teachers also suggested bringing in guest speakers or incorporating arts into sports to help students develop skills that transcend just athletic performance, including discipline and career development. Students should be actively involved in planning and executing activities, which can enhance their learning experience and overall engagement.

Smith et al. (2020) recommended that sports programs be integrated with academic subjects like PE to provide students with a holistic educational experience, where athletic and academic disciplines complement each other. Watson and Johnson (2019) discussed the benefits of interdisciplinary learning models, where sports and academic subjects are merged to foster greater student engagement and improved skill development.

Davies and Hurst (2021) highlighted the importance of student involvement in planning sports-related activities, as it builds teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving skills, contributing to better academic and athletic performance.

Emerging Theme 4: Professional Development for Teachers

There was a consensus that teachers must engage in continuous professional development, including attending seminars and staying up-to-date with sports regulations, to better support students in both academic and athletic pursuits. By having updated knowledge, teachers can more effectively transfer skills and understanding to students, ensuring that they benefit from the latest information and strategies.

Thompson et al. (2020) found that continuous professional development in sports-related teaching helps educators to transfer knowledge more effectively and keep up with the latest teaching practices, benefiting both students' academic and athletic development.

Miller and Roberts (2019) emphasized the importance of ongoing sports training for educators to ensure they are equipped to teach the evolving rules and techniques, benefiting student-athletes' learning experiences. Hughes and Martin (2021) advocated for regular teacher training in sports programs to ensure that teachers can confidently manage dual-focused curriculums that integrate academic subjects with athletic training.

Emerging Theme 5: Parental Support for Student-Athletes

Parents were seen as crucial pillars of support in fostering both academic and athletic success. Establishing study routines, allowing for independence in decision-making, and boosting self-esteem were viewed as ways to help students balance their academic and athletic commitments. Parental involvement was seen as essential for promoting time management skills and encouraging students to stay motivated and focused.

Martin and Thompson (2018) highlighted how parental involvement in creating study routines and fostering independence in decision-making improves students' academic and athletic success.

McClelland and Clark (2019) explored how parents' emotional and motivational support directly influences the self-confidence and performance of student-athletes in both academic and athletic settings. Sullivan et al. (2020) found that parental support, particularly in balancing time for both academic studies and athletic training, helps reduce stress and enhances overall student performance.

Conclusions

The traits of game changers emphasize a holistic approach to success in academics and sports. By exhibiting discipline, leadership, innovation, and resilience, game changers excel individually, inspire and influence others around them. These traits contribute to their ability to adapt to challenges, maintain motivation, and lead by example, ultimately shaping them into influential figures in the athletic field and their communities.

Special Program in Sports enhances students' athletic abilities and significantly contributes to their academic performance and personal growth. The integrated approach of balancing academics and sports, along with strong support systems from coaches, teachers, and parents, ensures the holistic development of students. As such, SPS is an effective framework for fostering well-rounded individuals who excel in their educational and athletic pursuits, exhibiting improved discipline, resilience, and social interaction. These

outcomes underscore the program's value in shaping student-athletes capable of thriving in multiple aspects of their lives.

The challenges identified in the study underscore the need for a more integrated approach to supporting student-athletes. Addressing time management issues, improving coordination between academic and sports programs, and providing better resources and facilities are essential for enhancing the effectiveness of the Special Program in Sports. Additionally, supporting parents financially and emotionally is crucial in ensuring students can successfully navigate the demands of academic and athletic commitments. Overcoming these challenges will require collaboration among coaches, teachers, parents, and school administrators to create a more balanced, supportive environment for student-athletes.

The collaboration between coaches, teachers, and parents is integral to students' success in the Special Program in Sports. Their collective efforts in providing motivation, discipline, emotional and financial support, and academic guidance contribute significantly to students' ability to succeed both in athletics and academics. Regular communication and strong partnerships among all stakeholders help create an environment conducive to student-athletes' growth and achievement. Therefore, fostering a collaborative approach and continuous support from all parties is essential to improving the overall outcomes of the SPS.

A holistic approach incorporating academic incentives, structured training schedules, and continuous support from coaches, peers, and parents is crucial for optimizing the SPS. Integrating sports with academic curricula and ensuring that teachers are well-trained in education and sports are pivotal for fostering student-athletes' success. Further collaboration between schools, families, and the community is necessary to achieve balanced academic and athletic growth.

Recommendations

1. Sports Coordinators and Teachers may provide tailored time management workshops for students and faculty, emphasizing prioritization techniques and resilience strategies to cope with the dual pressures of academics and athletics. Coaches may work closely with teachers to monitor the academic performance of student-athletes and offer continuous feedback to parents, ensuring a balanced approach to both spheres. Furthermore, peer support networks may be established among SPS students, encouraging them to work together in academics and sports and fostering collaboration and mutual growth.

2. Teachers and Coaches may foster a collaborative environment by engaging in regular communication and joint planning sessions to align academic and sports goals. Teachers and coaches may work together to identify students struggling with balancing both areas and provide individualized support. They can also encourage students to set academic and athletic goals, ensuring that each student receives guidance on achieving success in both spheres. By cultivating a culture of teamwork and open communication between academic and athletic staff, students can experience a more seamless integration of their educational and athletic pursuits.

3. DepEd, Curriculum Developers, and School Administrators may develop and implement a comprehensive and synchronized support framework that integrates academic and athletic curricula. This framework may include structured time management programs, ensuring students in the SPS can effectively balance academic and sports commitments. Resource pools for training equipment and facilities should be created to mitigate limitations and provide adequate financial support, or scholarships are available to

reduce the economic burden on parents. Coordinating academic and sports schedules to prevent conflicts will help alleviate absenteeism and exhaustion, allowing for holistic student development.

4. Coaches may focus on mentoring student-athletes' athletic skills and mental toughness. They may integrate values like discipline, leadership and resilience into training. Teachers may provide flexible academic support through remedial sessions, adjusted deadlines and tailored learning strategies, and help students balance the rigors of both academics and sports. They may use sports-related content to boost engagement. They may work with coaches to monitor student progress. Parents may offer emotional support and help ensure that students maintain a healthy work-life balance. They may also provide financial and logistical support for sports.

5. Parents may increase engagement with the school by participating in workshops and meetings better to understand the SPS's academic and athletic demands. Support their child financially and emotionally, emphasize balancing their academic and athletic responsibilities. Encourage resilience by celebrating small and large achievements and continue to play an active role in the decision-making process regarding your child's education and athletic participation.

6. Future Researchers may investigate the long-term impacts of balancing academics and athletics on student well-being, focusing on mental health, stress levels, and overall development. Further research could explore the role of parental involvement in shaping the success of student-athletes and the effectiveness of structured time management programs in reducing absenteeism and burnout.

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