
THE IMPACT OF A SPORT ACTIVITY ON STUDENTS' MENTAL WELL-BEING AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE: A CASE STUDY OF THE SUKO'S DAY X KAMSIS 3.0 PROGRAM

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Abstract

This study uses SuKo's Day X KAMSIS 3.0 at Politeknik Tawau Sabah as a case study to investigate how sports activities affect students' mental health and academic performance. Sports have become more widely seen as a beneficial intervention in the face of increased concerns about student mental health and academic stress. A structured questionnaire was given to students at the Department of Tourism and Hospitality as part of the research's quantitative methodology. The survey focused on three primary topics, like demographic data, the impact of athletics on mental health, and the relationship between athletics and academic achievement. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and trends, were used to analyse the data. According to the findings, most students felt that playing sports may help them manage their anxiety, feel less stressed, become more confident, and generally have better mental health. Additionally, students believed that playing sports improved their concentration, energy, discipline, and performance in education. These results are consistent with other research showing the positive effects of regular exercise on the mind and body. The study concludes by showing that involvement in sports has a positive impact on academic performance and mental health. Therefore, it is advised that educational institutions embrace planned sports programmes as a method to boost students' academic achievement and overall development.

Keywords sports activities, students, mental health, academic performance, SuKo's Day X KAMSIS 3.0

INTRODUCTION

Sports activities play a vital role in students' lives, not only enhancing physical health but also significantly contributing to mental well-being and academic performance. As educational institutions increasingly recognize the need to nurture holistic student development, the intersection between mental health and academic excellence has garnered growing attention. Numerous studies have highlighted the benefits of sports participation in reducing stress, boosting self-confidence, and increasing academic motivation among students.

Mental health, encompassing emotional, psychological, and social well-being, is a critical factor in shaping a student's life. According to Kubzansky et al. (2015), mental health reflects positive life functioning, influenced by both social and biological factors. During the COVID-19 pandemic,

research by Li et al. (2023) revealed a significant decline in youth physical fitness accompanied by a rise in mental health issues, illustrating the vulnerability of young individuals when deprived of physical activity. Similarly, Zhong et al. (2024) emphasized the correlation between physical inactivity and the rise in psychological distress among youth.

Sports, as structured physical activities governed by rules and aimed at developing skills, have been shown to improve not just physical capabilities but also cognitive functioning and emotional regulation (Tan et al., 2024). McPherson et al. (2018) found that consistent engagement in sports significantly enhances cognitive functions and academic achievement among high school students. Furthermore, Xiang et al. (2017) highlighted mental health as a mediating factor between physical fitness and academic outcomes, reinforcing the role of emotional well-being in educational success.

Despite these findings, students with limited engagement in sports may face adverse effects on their emotional well-being and academic achievement. Rahman et al. (2021) found that during the endemic period, many students demonstrated reduced interest in co-curricular activities, particularly sports, which may have contributed to declining academic motivation and performance. A lack of awareness regarding the benefits of sports further exacerbates the problem, underlining the need for structured programs to foster sports participation.

This study was undertaken following the SuKo's Day X KAMSIS 3.0 Program, a recurring event at Politeknik Tawau Sabah aimed at promoting sports involvement through activities such as volleyball, track events, and futsal. The initiative provided a timely opportunity to examine the effects of sports participation on students' emotional and academic outcomes.

Although there is growing recognition of the benefits of sports in student development, many students still exhibit low participation rates in physical activities. This trend is associated with increased stress levels, reduced motivation, and diminished academic performance. The lack of structured engagement and awareness about the mental and academic benefits of sports necessitates a deeper investigation into this issue, especially within the context of local institutions like Politeknik Tawau. Thus, this research aims to clarify the extent to which sports may improve the cognitive and intellectual dimensions of students.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

This research included 185 participants from the Department of Tourism and Hospitality at Politeknik Tawau Sabah. The participants were chosen from a total population of 332 students across Semesters 1 to 5. The minimal sample size was established from the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table. Participants were selected by a convenience sampling method during the SuKo's Day X KAMSIS 3.0 event.

Instrumentation

The research instrument was a structured questionnaire designed for obtaining quantitative data. It was composed of 13 items and was divided into three sections (A, B, and C). Sections B and C employed a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) to assess the degree of agreement with each statement.

Section A: Demographics (4 items)

- Item 1: Age of respondents (options: 18–20, 21–23, 24 and above)
- Item 2: Gender (options: Male, Female)

- Item 3: Program enrolled (options: Diploma in Tourism Management (DUP), Diploma in Recreational Tourism (DRT))
- Item 4: Frequency of weekly sports participation (options: Once a week, 2–3 times, 4–5 times, Daily)

Section B: Impact of Sports on Mental Well-being (4 items)

- Item 5: “I feel that participating in sports reduces my stress.”
- Item 6: “Sports activities help me improve my self-confidence.”
- Item 7: “Participating in sports helps me manage or reduce anxiety.”
- Item 8: “Overall, sports have a positive effect on my mental well-being.”

These items were formulated to assess emotional and psychological responses linked to sports involvement.

Section C: Impact of Sports on Academic Performance (5 items)

- Item 9: “Sports help me to focus better on my academic tasks.”
- Item 10: “After sports, I feel more energized to study.”
- Item 11: “Being involved in sports helps me build discipline in my academic work.”
- Item 12: “Participating in sports helps me cope with academic stress.”
- Item 13: “Engaging in sports improves my academic performance overall.”

These questions were designed to explore how physical activity correlates with academic engagement, motivation, and self-regulation.

Data Collection

An online Google Form was used to gather data both during and after the SuKo's Day X KAMSIS 3.0 program. Participation was voluntary and confidential. The questionnaire was provided in English and Bahasa Melayu to cater the language preferences. Participants were given instructions to respond according to their personal experiences and perceptions during or after the event.

Statistical Analysis

Responses were analysed using descriptive statistics, mainly frequency and percentage, to identify patterns and trends in mental and academic outcomes.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Section A: Demographic Information

The demographic data provide meaningful context for understanding the population involved in this study.

Item 1 – Age of respondents

90.3% of the responders, or 167 people, were between the ages of 18 and 20. meanwhile, 9.2% (17 respondents) were between the ages of 21 and 23 years, while only 0.5% (1 individual) fell to the 24 years and older category. This suggests that the poll primarily aged in their late teens to early twenties.

Item 2 - Gender

The gender distribution was almost equal. A small majority of the respondents were female, including 51.9% (96 respondents), while 48.1% (89 individuals) were male. This balance allowed the data to

accurately represent the viewpoints and experiences of both male and female students concerning sports engagement and its impact on mental well-being and academic achievement.

Item 3 - Program enrolled

Regarding academic programs, 62.2% (115 respondents) were enrolled in the Diploma in Tourism Management (DUP), whereas 37.8% (70 respondents) were enrolled in the Diploma in Recreational Tourism (DRT). This combination provides information about the potential effects of sports on students in several tourism-related areas.

Item 4 - Frequency of weekly sports participation

A majority of 53%, equal to 98 respondents, indicated that they engage in sports activities two to three times weekly. Furthermore, 30.3% (56 respondents) reported participating in sports once a week, while 9.2% (17 respondents) indicated everyday involvement in sports. A minority, 7.6% or 14 respondents, indicated engagement in sports four to five times weekly. The data indicate that the majority of students regularly participate in sports, highlighting an excellent level of physical activity among the participants.

Section B: The Impact of Sports on Mental Status

Item 5 – Sports reduce stress

The statistics indicated that 95.7% of respondents recognised the beneficial impact of sports on stress reduction, with 56.8% in agreement and 38.9% in strong agreement. Only 3.8% expressed uncertainty, and a minimal 0.5% expressed disagreement. The findings align with Lubans et al. (2016), who discovered that physical activity decreases cortisol levels and promotes the release of neurotransmitters including serotonin and dopamine, which assist in regulating emotional states and reducing stress in youth.

Item 6 – Sports improve self confidence

In this context, 93.5% of students acknowledged that sports enhanced their self-confidence, with 48.1% in agree and 45.4% in strong agreement, while merely 6.5% expressed uncertainty. Eime et al. (2013) claim that engagement in sport develops a sense of accomplishment and community, enhancing psychological resilience and self-esteem in teenagers. The increased consistency rate from this study supports their conclusions.

Item 7 – Sports reduce anxiety

90% of respondents recognised that sports reduced their anxiety, with 50.8% strongly agreeing and 40% agreeing, while 9.2% expressed uncertainty. Rebar et al. (2015) established through a meta-analysis that exercise significantly minimises both acute and chronic anxiety symptoms. This study confirms the therapeutic efficacy of sports in reducing stress and anxiety among teenagers.

Item 8 – Overall, sports improve mental health

A substantial 98.4% of students claimed that sports had a beneficial effect on their mental health, with 51.4% strongly agreeing and 47% agreeing, while merely 1.6% expressed hesitation. Biddle et al. (2019) suggest that consistent engagement in sports enhances emotional stability and acts as a protective factor against depression. These findings correspond with the World Health Organization's (2018) global health strategy, which recommends for sports as a fundamental component in improving community mental health.

Section C: The Impact of Sports on Academic Performance

Item 9 – Sports improve academic focus

88.7% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that sports enhance their academic concentration (56.8% agreed, 31.9% strongly agreed), while 9.7% were uncertain and 1.6% disagreed. This study

aligns with Donnelly et al. (2016), who highlighted that physical activity improves cognitive skills, including attention and memory, which are crucial for optimal academic achievement.

Item 10 – Sports increase energy for studying

A total of 79.4% acknowledged that sports enhanced their energy levels for studying (45.9% agreed, 33.5% strongly agreed). Simultaneously, 14.6% expressed uncertainty, while 5.9% stated disagreement. These results align with Singh et al. (2012), who discovered that physical exercise enhances vitality, diminishes fatigue, and increases preparedness for engaging in learning activities.

Item 11 – Sports enhance self-discipline in academics

90.3% stated that sports enhanced their academic discipline (50.8% agree, 39.5% strongly agree), with only 9.2% uncertain and 0.5% disagreeing. Hill et al. (2015) underscored that sports facilitate the development of essential self-regulatory behaviours in kids, such as time management and delayed gratification—skills fundamentally associated with academic discipline and achievement.

Item 12 – Sports reduce academic-related stress

In this part, 93.5% of students believed sports helpful in lowering academic stress (48.1% agreed, 45.4% strongly agreed), while 3.8% were uncertain and 2.7% disagreed. Pascoe et al. (2020) suggest that participation in physical exercise serves as an efficient coping mechanism to mitigate academic burnout, especially during high-pressure times like examinations or deadlines.

Item 13 – Sports improve overall academic performance

Ultimately, 86.5% of participants affirmed that sports enhanced their academic performance (49.2% agreed, 37.3% strongly agreed), whereas 12.4% were uncertain and 1.1% disagreed. This supports the findings of Trudeau and Shephard (2008), who discovered that children who engage in physical activity typically score better on academic tests than their passive peers because they have better cognitive and emotional control.

CONCLUSION

The study demonstrates that sports improve students' mental health and academic achievement. Active sports involvement reduces stress, boosts self-confidence, and reduces anxiety; consequently, it enhances emotional well-being. It helps with focus, energy, and discipline. Integrating sports into academic settings can help students improve their general well-being and academic performance.

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