

POSITIVE CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL FOOTBALL PLAYERS IN PERAK, MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between motivational factors and classroom discipline among secondary school football players in Hilir Perak, Malaysia. Quantitative analysis revealed high levels of parental support ($M = 5.65$), student interest ($M = 6.20$), and overall positive discipline ($M = 5.01$), contradicting negative stereotypes of student-athletes. While parental support moderately correlates with student interest ($r = .611$, $p < .001$), a weak correlation exists between interest in football and classroom behaviour ($r = .241$, $p < .005$). The highest-rated factor for behavioural change was coach authority ($M = 5.45$), suggesting that discipline is primarily driven by the program's extrinsic structure rather than personal fervour for the sport. Consequently, school sports function as an effective disciplinary tool when anchored by professional leadership and clear social expectations.

Keywords: Student-Athlete, Sports Participation, Classroom Discipline, Secondary School, Parental Support

INTRODUCTION

The discourse surrounding student discipline in Malaysian secondary schools is frequently dominated by media reports highlighting behavioural problems, which often perpetuate the perception of ineffective school-based solutions (Yahaya et al., 2009). While the Ministry of Education has consistently issued guidelines and researchers have proposed alternative strategies, such as the use of Islamic approaches (Remly et al., 2022; Zainal & Hassan, 2009), the public narrative remains skewed toward deficit. In contrast, a substantial body of research champions extracurricular sports as a proactive tool for building positive behaviour and essential life skills (Athar et al., 2023; Bonaventure & Claire, 2020; Shaharuddin et al., 2018). Proponents argue that sports intrinsically teach values like honesty, discipline, perseverance, and teamwork (Kumar & Kumar, 2017; Purnomo et al., 2024), which are intended to transfer directly to the classroom. Despite this potential, a pervasive negative stereotype persists in Malaysia, suggesting that student-athletes, particularly in time-consuming sports like football, suffer academically or contribute to classroom distraction. Achieving behavioural benefits from sports requires intentional effort from all stakeholders. Teachers must motivate students, and authorities must ensure adequate facilities.

Crucially, parental support is a critical variable in determining engagement (Jiang et al., 2025; Topuz, 2020), yet parental involvement remains inconsistent or even detrimental when involving excessive pressure (Bonavolontà et al., 2021; Masià et al., 2013). Low student interest also remains a significant obstacle to program success (Cuong & Tuan, 2022; Xuanchen, 2022). There is currently a critical gap in empirical data specifically quantifying the classroom behaviour of Malaysian football players when factoring in these interests and support dynamics. Guan and Cheng's (2022) study establishes a direct link between school football and positive student psychology, and Baidya and Das (2024) validate sports as a strategy for the reinforcement of conduct.

To bridge this gap, the research objectives (RO) of this study are to assess the measured levels of parental support, student interest, and positive classroom behaviour among football players; to determine the correlational link between parental support and student interest; and to analyse the relationship between these motivational factors and observed classroom discipline. By achieving these objectives, the research aims to provide evidence that can shift the narrative from anecdotal stereotyping to evidence-based support for student-athletes. The research questions (RQ) guiding this inquiry first ask what the level of parental support (RQ1), the level of student interest (RQ2), and the level of positive classroom behaviour (RQ3) are among secondary school football players in the Hilir Perak district. The study then explores the relational dynamics between these variables, specifically questioning whether a significant relationship exists between parental support and student interest (RQ4). Furthermore, the research seeks to determine if there is a significant relationship between student interest and classroom behaviour (RQ5), and finally, if there is a significant relationship between parental support and classroom behaviour (RQ6).

METHODOLOGY

Participants and Procedure

This study utilized a cross-sectional survey design to observe variables at a single point in time among secondary school football players in the Hilir Perak district (Wang & Cheng, 2020). Within the 15 schools in the district, the target population was estimated at 450 students. Based on the sample size determination table by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), a minimum sample of 205 was required; consequently, 215 questionnaires were distributed via purposive sampling to ensure a representative data set. Following administrative and parental consent, the survey was administered in a controlled setting during team training sessions.

Instrument

The Self-administered Instrument was adapted from established (Chang et al., 2021; Coşkuner et al., 2021; Mollel & Otieno, 2022) and reviewed for content validity by two subject matter experts. To ensure linguistic equivalence, the items were back-translated into Malay by an expert holding a PhD in English Studies from a UK university. Pilot testing yielded a high Cronbach's alpha of .926. The instrument utilized a 10-point scale for the two items measuring parental support and student interest to maximize sensitivity, while a 7-point scale was applied to the 15 behavioural items to reduce cognitive load during the multi-item assessment.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics. Descriptive statistics established mean scores (M), while Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients (r) were used to test Research Questions 4 and 5. Because Pearson's r is a scale-invariant measure, it was an appropriate method for analysing the linear relationship between the 10-point and 7-point data sets.

RESULT

The final sample comprised 215 student-athletes drawn from 15 educational institutions, specifically 14 National Secondary Schools (SMK) and one Vocational College (KV) within the Hilir Perak District. This cohort was predominantly composed of upper secondary students (88.8%), largely representing the Under 18 (U18) competitive division, while only a small minority (11.2%) belonged to the lower secondary level. Furthermore, 62.3% of respondents had participated in football at the district level or higher, indicating that the participants were largely experienced and dedicated athletes well-positioned to provide insight into the developmental effects of the sport.

Motivational Factors

Analysis of the motivational factors revealed that both parental support and student interest were rated at a moderately high level. Regarding RQ1, the mean score for parental support was $M=5.65$ (on a 10-point scale). For RQ2, student interest in representing the school recorded a slightly higher mean of $M=6.20$. As presented in Table 1, these figures indicate that the respondents perceive a positive environment for sports participation from both external (parental) and internal (personal interest) perspectives.

Table 1: Summary of Parental Support and Student Interest Scores

Item	Mean	Level
Parental support for students representing the school's team	5.65	Medium High
Students' interest in representing the school's football team	6.20	Medium High

Level of Positive Classroom Behaviour

Regarding RQ3, the analysis indicates that secondary school football players exhibit a high level of positive classroom behaviour, evidenced by an overall mean score of 5.01 on a 7-point scale. These findings confirm that respondents maintain a strong standard of conduct across all measured categories, directly challenging the negative stereotype of student-athletes as classroom distractions. As shown in Table 2, the highest-scoring sub-construct was Relationships with Teachers and Peers ($M=5.22$), followed by Focus on Learning ($M=5.14$) and Self-Discipline Awareness ($M=4.68$). Notably, the highest-rated individual item ($M=5.45$) revealed that a coach's encouragement and reprimands are primary drivers of disciplinary change. This suggests that the structured authority within a football team serves as a critical antecedent for positive behaviour that successfully transfers to the school environment. Conversely, while players reported a slightly lower mean for emotional control in challenging situations ($M=4.40$), this score remains within the moderately high range.

Table 2: Mean Scores and Interpretations for Student Discipline Behaviour Items

No	Questionnaire (item)	Mean	Level
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A.	Self-discipline	4.675	High
		3	
1.	Obey classroom rules	5.00	High
2.	Managing day-to-day time	4.79	High
3.	Avoiding procrastination	4.68	High
4.	Completing tasks on time	4.51	High
5.	Controlling emotions in challenging situations	4.40	Medium High

B. Relationships with teachers and friends	5.216	High
	7	
1. Respect for teachers and coaches (and authorities)	5.40	Very High
2. Be responsible for actions	5.28	High
3. Comply with school policies and regulations	5.24	High
4. Avoiding conflicts with teachers and peers	5.14	High
5. Punctuality for classes and training	5.01	High
C. Learning focus	5.140	High
	5	
1. Remembering the coach's message to maintain behavior	5.45	Very High
2. Applying sports achievements as motivation to behave well	5.19	High
3. Taking care of the team's image	5.11	High
4. Taking the positive value of sports for an academic boost	5.08	High
5. Recognize the importance of sports for academic benefits	4.88	High

Correlation Analysis Linking Motivation to Behaviour

The correlation analysis provides a critical test of the study's conceptual framework, revealing distinct roles for home-based support and sport-related motivation. Regarding RQ4, a moderate and statistically significant positive correlation ($r = .611$, $p < .001$) was observed between parental support and student interest, confirming that a supportive home environment is vital for fostering a student's initial motivation to represent their school. For RQ5, the relationship between student interest and classroom behaviour yielded a much weaker, though still significant, positive correlation ($r = .241$, $p < .005$). This low magnitude suggests that the high levels of positive discipline reported among these athletes are not primarily driven by personal passion for the sport, but rather by the structured conduct inherent to the football program. Finally, regarding RQ6, the correlation between parental support and classroom behaviour resulted in a coefficient of $r = .308$, $p < 0.005$. These results collectively affirm that while parental support builds interest, the football team environment, enforced by the coach's authority, serves as the primary mechanism for promoting positive behaviour and dismantling negative athlete stereotypes.

Table 3: Correlation values between variables

Domain	Parental support	Students' interest in football	Disciplined behavior
Parental support	1	.611**	.308**
Students' interest in the sport of football		1	.241**

Disciplined behavior	1
**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)	
*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)	

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide a significant empirical challenge to the persistent stereotype that student-athletes in Malaysia are behavioural liabilities. By synthesizing the descriptive and correlational results, a clearer picture emerges of how the football environment, rather than just individual passion, shapes student conduct. The most striking finding is the high level of positive classroom behaviour ($M=5.01$) reported by football players. This evidence directly contradicts the deficit-based narrative often found in Malaysian media (Yahaya et al., 2009). The fact that "Relationships with Teachers and Peers" and "Focus on Learning" were among the highest-scoring sub-constructs suggests that these athletes are not only disciplined but are integrated, pro-social members of the school community. This supports the argument that sports serve as a proactive tool for building life skills (Athar et al., 2023; Shaharuddin et al., 2018).

A critical nuance in the data is the "Interest-Behaviour Paradox." While students reported high interest in football ($M=6.20$), the correlation between this interest and their classroom behavior was surprisingly weak ($r=.241$). This indicates that simply "loving the game" is not enough to guarantee good behaviour. Instead, the high item-mean for a coach's encouragement and reprimands suggests that external structure is the primary driver of discipline. From a behavioral psychology perspective, the coach acts as the authority figure who reinforces the "consequences" of behaviour (Baidya & Das, 2024). In the Malaysian context, the football field becomes a "controlled laboratory" where discipline is non-negotiable. The high behaviour scores suggest that students are successfully transferring this "coach-led discipline" into the classroom, even if their internal interest in football is motivated by other factors.

The strong correlation between parental support and student interest ($r=.611$) confirms that the home environment is the gatekeeper of athletic engagement. Parents who support their children's participation effectively "fuel" the interest required to keep the student in the program (Jiang et al., 2025). However, because the link between parental support and behaviour (RQ6) is often mediated by the sport's structure, the school football program acts as a "disciplinary bridge." Parents get the student to the field, but the coach and the team structure refine the student's behaviour.

These results affirm that school football participation is an effective strategy for promoting a stable learning environment. Rather than viewing football as a distraction, school administrators should view it as a behavioural intervention. The coach should be recognized not just as a tactical trainer, but as a key stakeholder in the school's disciplinary framework.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study provides robust empirical evidence to dismantle the stereotype that school sports participation correlates with poor discipline, as secondary school football players in the Hilir Perak district demonstrated a high level of positive classroom behaviour ($M=5.01$). The findings indicate that while parental support acts as the primary engine for student interest ($r = .611$), the actual transfer of discipline to the classroom is driven more by the structured authority of the coaching environment than by individual passion for the sport ($r = .241$). By highlighting that the highest-rated driver of change was the coach's reinforcement ($M=5.45$), the research underscores that school football serves as a deliberate behavioural intervention where sporting values act as a positive antecedent for constructive classroom conduct. Ultimately, these results suggest that educational stakeholders should shift from a deficit-based view of student-athletes toward a model of holistic development, leveraging the structured nature of sports to reinforce the behavioural backbone of an effective learning environment.

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