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Sports and academic performance of LGBTQ+ student-athletes in Iba, Zambales, Philippines

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Abstract

This study assessed the level of performance of LGBTQ+ student-athletes at President Ramon Magsaysay State University, Iba, Zambales, Philippines particularly in terms of sports performance and academic performance. The study used a quantitative descriptive research design and employed a survey questionnaire as the primary data-gathering instrument. Fifty LGBTQ+ student-athletes from the College of Teacher Education served as respondents, selected through purposive sampling because they possessed the characteristics needed for the investigation. The questionnaire measured respondents' profile variables and their assessment of performance using a four-point Likert scale. Data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, weighted mean, and analysis of variance. Findings revealed that most respondents were bisexual, aged 20 to 21 years old, and enrolled in the Bachelor of Physical Education program. Respondents strongly agreed that LGBTQ+ student-athletes demonstrated favorable sports performance and academic performance. Sports performance was influenced by social support, role modeling, motivation, acceptance from peers, coaches, and teammates, and access to training and institutional support. Academic performance was associated with pressure to perform, academic support, eligibility requirements, resilience, and time management. Significant differences were found in sports performance when grouped according to gender identity and course, while no significant differences were found in academic performance when grouped according to profile variables. The study concludes that inclusive, supportive, and affirming academic and athletic environments are essential in sustaining the performance of LGBTQ+ student-athletes.

Keywords: LGBTQ+ student-athletes; Sports performance; Academic performance; Inclusion; Physical education

1. Introduction

Student-athletes are expected to balance academic obligations and athletic participation while maintaining discipline, motivation, and personal well-being. Their dual role requires effective time management, commitment to training, compliance with academic requirements, and adjustment to the social expectations of both school and sport environments. For LGBTQ+ student-athletes, however, this balance may be shaped not only by the ordinary demands of academics and athletics but also by experiences related to sexual orientation, gender identity, identity expression, acceptance, safety, and social inclusion. Studies on LGBTQ+ students and athletes show that they may encounter discrimination, harassment, fear of rejection, pressure to conceal identity, and exclusion from school or team activities, which may affect their well-being, participation, and overall performance [1] [2] [3].

Participation in sports can contribute positively to students' development by promoting confidence, physical wellness, self-esteem, social interaction, teamwork, leadership, discipline, and character formation. Research on youth sport participation indicates that involvement in sports is associated with psychological and social benefits, especially when athletes experience supportive peer relationships, meaningful participation, and a positive team climate [4] [5]. For

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student-athletes, sports may also serve as a space for identity formation, belongingness, resilience, and personal achievement. However, these benefits may not be fully realized when athletic environments are unsafe, exclusionary, or strongly shaped by heteronormative expectations.

Sports environments have historically reflected assumptions about gender, masculinity, femininity, and heterosexuality that may marginalize LGBTQ+ athletes. Literature on LGBTQ+ participation in physical education and athletics notes that LGBTQ+ students and athletes may experience homophobic language, gender stereotyping, peer rejection, silence around sexual orientation and gender identity, and limited institutional support [6] [7]. In some cases, LGBTQ+ athletes may fear discrimination from teammates, coaches, officials, or school authorities, which can result in identity concealment, reduced participation, emotional distress, or disengagement from sports. These realities suggest that athletic performance cannot be examined only through physical or technical ability; it must also be understood in relation to the social and institutional conditions that influence athletes' confidence, motivation, and sense of belonging.

Academic performance is also a significant concern among LGBTQ+ student-athletes because they face overlapping responsibilities and stressors. Like other student-athletes, they must manage class attendance, academic requirements, training schedules, competitions, recovery, and personal responsibilities. However, LGBTQ+ student-athletes may also experience additional stress associated with bullying, discrimination, identity management, lack of acceptance, and limited access to affirming support systems. Research on LGBTQ+ school climate emphasizes that students who experience safer and more supportive educational environments tend to report better academic outcomes, while hostile environments may negatively affect school engagement, attendance, and well-being [8]. Thus, the academic performance of LGBTQ+ student-athletes may be influenced by both their academic-athletic workload and the inclusivity of the school and sports environment.

Despite these challenges, inclusive policies, affirming peers, supportive teachers, coaches, advisers, and athletic administrators can strengthen academic persistence, athletic confidence, and psychosocial well-being among LGBTQ+ student-athletes. Inclusive athletic programs recognize that performance is not only a matter of skill, training, and discipline, but also of safety, respect, identity affirmation, and equal opportunity. When LGBTQ+ student-athletes feel valued as members of their teams and institutions, they are more likely to participate actively, develop confidence, sustain motivation, and perform effectively in both academic and athletic settings. The present study was therefore conducted to assess the performance of LGBTQ+ student-athletes of President Ramon Magsaysay State University in terms of academics and sports, and to determine whether their performance differs according to selected profile variables. The findings may serve as a basis for developing a more inclusive athletic development program that promotes equity, student well-being, and holistic performance.

Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to assess the level of performance of LGBTQ+ student-athletes at President Ramon Magsaysay State University, Iba, Zambales. Specifically, it sought to determine the demographic profile of respondents in terms of age, gender identity, and course; assess their level of performance in terms of sports performance and academic performance; and test whether significant differences exist in the level of performance of LGBTQ+ student-athletes when grouped according to profile variables.

2. Material and methods

The study employed a quantitative descriptive research design. This design was appropriate because the study described the profile of LGBTQ+ student-athletes and measured their assessed level of sports and academic performance without manipulating variables. The descriptive approach allowed the researchers to determine patterns, frequencies, and mean ratings that described the respondents' characteristics and performance indicators.

The respondents were fifty LGBTQ+ student-athletes from the College of Teacher Education of President Ramon Magsaysay State University, Iba, Zambales. They were selected using purposive sampling because the study required participants who were members of the LGBTQ+ community, officially enrolled in the university, and engaged in athletic activities. The original manuscript reported that the study focused on students who participated in university sports activities and belonged to the College of Teacher Education.

The primary research instrument was a researcher-made questionnaire composed of two parts. Part I gathered the profile of respondents in terms of age, gender identity, and course. Part II assessed the level of performance of LGBTQ+ student-athletes in terms of sports performance and academic performance. Responses were measured using a four-point Likert scale: 4.00-3.25, Strongly Agree; 3.24-2.50, Agree; 2.49-1.75, Disagree; and 1.74-1.00, Strongly Disagree.

The questionnaire was validated by experts and was subjected to reliability testing. The Cronbach alpha coefficient for sports performance was .910, interpreted as excellent, while academic performance obtained .857, interpreted as good. These values indicate that the instrument had acceptable internal consistency for measuring the constructs included in the study.

Before data gathering, the researchers sought approval from the college dean and explained the purpose of the study to the respondents. Confidentiality was observed, and the researchers assisted respondents during questionnaire administration when clarification was needed. The collected data were tallied, tabulated, analyzed, and interpreted using frequency, percentage, weighted mean, and analysis of variance. The 0.05 level of significance was used in testing the null hypothesis.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Profile of the Respondents

Table 1 presents the profile of the fifty LGBTQ+ student-athlete respondents. In terms of gender identity, the largest group was bisexual, with 20 respondents or 40.00%, followed by gay respondents with 15 or 30.00%. The majority were 20 to 21 years old, with 23 respondents or 46.00%, and the computed mean age was 20.22 years old. In terms of course, most respondents were enrolled in Bachelor of Physical Education, with 19 respondents or 38.00%.

Table 1 Profile of the Respondents

Profile Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender identity	Lesbian	2	4.00%
	Gay	15	30.00%
	Bisexual	20	40.00%
	Transgender	5	10.00%
	Queer/Questioning	8	16.00%
Age	18-19 years old	17	34.00%
	20-21 years old	23	46.00%
	22-23 years old	10	20.00%
Course	BEED	10	20.00%
	BSE-English	8	16.00%
	BSE-Filipino	7	14.00%
	BSE-Mathematics	2	4.00%
	BSE-Social Studies	1	2.00%
	BSE-Science	3	6.00%
	BPED	19	38.00%

The dominance of bisexual respondents indicates that LGBTQ+ student-athletes are not a homogeneous group and that support programs should account for varied identities within the LGBTQ+ spectrum. The concentration of respondents in the 20-21 age bracket suggests that most were young adults navigating identity development, academic responsibilities, and athletic participation. The strong representation from BPED reflects the natural connection between physical education programs and student-athlete participation.

LGBTQ+ athletes continue to make significant contributions to the world of sports, challenging stereotypes and inspiring others with their achievements. There are efforts to promote inclusivity and diversity within sporting organizations and institutions are gradually gaining momentum, driven by advocacy groups, policy reforms, and the courage of individuals who refuse to be silenced or sidelined [9].

Athletes in their early twenties benefit from the cumulative experience gained through years of participation in organized sports, including youth leagues, high school teams, and collegiate programs. This background equips them with the technical skills, tactical knowledge, and mental toughness needed to excel at the highest levels of competition [10].

Pursuing in any degree allows any students to deepen their involvement in academics or non-academics while gaining the knowledge and skills necessary for as long as they would feel the belongingness [11].

3.2. Level of Sports Performance

The respondents strongly agreed that LGBTQ+ student-athletes demonstrated favorable sports performance, with an overall weighted mean of 3.39. The highest-rated indicators were social support and acceptance from peers, coaches, and teammates; the role of LGBTQ+ student-athletes as role models who affirm identities and inspire others; and strong motivation, commitment, and passion for sport, each obtaining a weighted mean of 3.50. These results indicate that performance is strengthened when athletes are supported, accepted, and motivated in inclusive athletic environments.

Table 2 Level of Sports Performance

Sports Performance Indicator	Weighted Mean	Interpretation	Rank
Social support and acceptance affect athletic experience and performance.	3.50	Strongly Agree	2
LGBTQ+ student-athletes serve as role models and inspire others.	3.50	Strongly Agree	2
Motivation, commitment, and passion drive excellence in sport.	3.50	Strongly Agree	2
Skills and expertise may come from aptitude, training, and commitment.	3.46	Strongly Agree	4
Authentic identity expression influences sports performance.	3.38	Strongly Agree	5
Overall Weighted Mean	3.39	Strongly Agree	

The findings support the idea that sports performance is not determined solely by physical ability. Social support, identity affirmation, role modeling, institutional acceptance, and coaching quality contribute to athletic confidence and persistence. Respondents also recognized that LGBTQ+ student-athletes may face unique stressors such as discrimination, bullying, or concerns about coming out. These stressors make inclusive team climates and respectful coaching practices essential.

When surrounded by understanding and supportive individuals, the athletes can thrive both personally and athletically. Social support provides them with a sense of belonging and validation, allowing them to focus more fully on their training and competition without the burden of concealing or managing their identities. Embracing for who they are, the athletes can fully channel their energy and passion into their sport, leading to enhanced motivation, confidence, and resilience. In sports, despite facing unique obstacles related to their sexual orientation or gender identity, still there is demonstration of a remarkable resilience and determination to succeed, often surpassing expectations and achieving excellence in their chosen sports [11].

In addition, the visibility in sports challenges stereotypes and provides a beacon of hope and representation for LGBTQ+ individuals navigating their identities within sports culture. By excelling in their chosen sports while being authentic to their identities, athletes demonstrate that sexual orientation and gender identity need not be barriers to success in athletics [3].

3.3. Level of Academic Performance

The respondents also strongly agreed that LGBTQ+ student-athletes demonstrated favorable academic performance, with an overall weighted mean of 3.45. The highest-rated indicator was that LGBTQ+ student-athletes may experience additional stress and pressure to perform well academically due to expectations from coaches, teammates, and themselves, with a weighted mean of 3.54. This was followed by the importance of supportive coaches, academic advisors, and teammates, with a weighted mean of 3.52, and motivation to maintain academic eligibility for scholarships or collegiate sports participation, with a weighted mean of 3.50.

Table 3 Level of Academic Performance

Academic Performance Indicator	Weighted Mean	Interpretation	Rank
Academic pressure from coaches, teammates, and self-expectations affects performance.	3.54	Strongly Agree	1
Support from coaches, advisors, and teammates affects academic success.	3.52	Strongly Agree	2
Eligibility requirements motivate attention to academics.	3.50	Strongly Agree	3
Tutoring and advising enhance academic performance.	3.46	Strongly Agree	5
Resilience and advocacy support positive academic and athletic engagement.	3.46	Strongly Agree	5
Overall Weighted Mean	3.45	Strongly Agree	

The findings show that academic performance is closely tied to support systems, eligibility requirements, self-discipline, and resilience. Although LGBTQ+ student-athletes may experience discrimination or identity management challenges, the results suggest that structured academic support, inclusive relationships, and motivation to remain eligible for athletic participation help sustain academic performance. The relatively high ratings also suggest that respondents recognized both the challenges and strengths of LGBTQ+ student-athletes.

In sports, there may be a prevailing expectation for athletes to conform to traditional notions of masculinity or femininity, which can create added stress for LGBTQ+ individuals who may not fit these molds. This pressure to conform can extend to academic performance as well, as they strive to meet expectations both on and off the field [12]

Additionally, the dynamics within sports teams and coaching environments can intensify the academic pressure experienced by LGBTQ+ student-athletes. Coaches and teammates may inadvertently or even intentionally contribute to an atmosphere where academic success is linked to acceptance or respect [13].

3.4. Summary of Performance Assessment

Overall, respondents strongly agreed that LGBTQ+ student-athletes performed positively in both sports and academics. Academic performance obtained a slightly higher mean than sports performance, although both dimensions fell within the Strongly Agree range. The overall grand mean was 3.42.

Table 4 Summary of Performance Assessment

Dimension	Overall Weighted Mean	Qualitative Interpretation
Sports Performance	3.39	Strongly Agree
Academic Performance	3.45	Strongly Agree
Overall Grand Mean	3.42	Strongly Agree

3.5. Test of Difference

Analysis of variance showed that sports performance significantly differed when respondents were grouped according to gender identity and course, with significance values of 0.034 and 0.004, respectively. However, sports performance did not significantly differ according to age, with a significance value of 0.830. This means that differences in athletic experience and performance may be shaped by identity-related and course-related contexts, but not necessarily by age among the respondents.

For academic performance, the computed significance values for gender identity, age, and course were greater than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted for all profile variables in terms of academic performance. This means that respondents had generally similar academic performance assessments regardless of gender identity, age, or course. The result suggests that the academic demands of being a student-athlete may create similar expectations and discipline across respondent groups.

Table 5 Test of Difference

Performance Dimension	Profile Variable	Significance Value	Decision	Interpretation
Sports Performance	Gender identity	0.034	Reject Ho	Significant
	Age	0.830	Accept Ho	Not Significant
	Course	0.004	Reject Ho	Significant
Academic Performance	Gender identity	0.391	Accept Ho	Not Significant
	Age	0.418	Accept Ho	Not Significant
	Course	0.393	Accept Ho	Not Significant

These results indicate that inclusive sports programs must pay attention to differences among LGBTQ+ identities and academic programs. Course-related differences may reflect variations in athletic exposure, training opportunities, curricular orientation, and participation in physical education activities. However, the absence of significant differences in academic performance indicates that academic support and expectations may apply consistently across profile groups.

4. .Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study concludes that the majority of LGBTQ+ student-athlete respondents were bisexual, young adults, and enrolled in the Bachelor of Physical Education program. The respondents strongly agreed that LGBTQ+ student-athletes demonstrated positive performance in both sports and academics. Sports performance was strongly associated with social support, acceptance, motivation, role modeling, identity affirmation, and access to coaching and training resources. Academic performance was strongly associated with academic pressure, eligibility requirements, support from coaches and academic advisors, resilience, and time management. Significant differences were found in sports performance when grouped according to gender identity and course, while no significant difference was found when grouped according to age. Academic performance did not significantly differ when respondents were grouped according to gender identity, age, or course. These results suggest that the athletic experiences of LGBTQ+ student-athletes may vary by identity and academic program, while their academic performance tends to be more consistent across profile variables. Overall, affirming and inclusive institutional support remains essential in helping LGBTQ+ student-athletes succeed academically and athletically.

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are as follows:

- Educational institutions may strengthen inclusive policies and programs that explicitly protect LGBTQ+ student-athletes from discrimination, bullying, harassment, and exclusion in both academic and athletic settings. These policies should be communicated clearly to students, faculty, coaches, trainers, and administrators.
- Coaches and physical education instructors may create team climates where LGBTQ+ athletes feel accepted, respected, and safe to participate. Training on inclusive coaching, respectful language, identity sensitivity, and mental health referral systems may be provided regularly.
- The university may prioritize the physical health and injury-prevention needs of LGBTQ+ student-athletes by providing access to proper training, conditioning, nutrition guidance, sufficient rest, and athlete-centered health services. Health professionals should be prepared to address the unique concerns of LGBTQ+ athletes in a respectful and confidential manner.
- Academic advisors and faculty may provide structured academic support such as tutoring, advising, flexible consultation, and monitoring of eligibility requirements. Since student-athletes must balance academic and athletic responsibilities, coordinated support between faculty and coaches is recommended.

Future researchers may conduct related studies with a larger sample size, broader institutional coverage, mixed-methods design, and additional variables such as mental health, team climate, coaching behavior, academic support, and experiences of discrimination. Qualitative interviews may also provide deeper insights into the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ student-athletes.

Compliance with ethical standards

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All the authors of must disclose the possible conflicts of interest/ Competing Interests they may have with publication of the manuscript or an institution or product that is mentioned in the manuscript and/or is important to the outcome of the study presented. Authors should also disclose conflict of interest with products that compete with those mentioned in their manuscript.

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study."

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