

A Study of the Relationship Between Anxiety Levels and Participation in Sports Activities Among a Sample of Preparatory Year Students at King Faisal University

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between sports activities and anxiety levels among preparatory year students at King Faisal University, with a focus on gender differences. Anxiety, a prominent challenge in modern society, significantly affects university students due to rapid technological changes and academic pressures, particularly during the preparatory year. The preparatory year is a critical phase for students as they transition into university life, often accompanied by psychological, mental, and physiological stress.

The study employed a descriptive analytical approach to examine the impact of sports activities on reducing different types of anxiety, including state anxiety, test anxiety, and future anxiety. The results revealed an inverse relationship between participation in sports activities and anxiety levels, with male and female participants demonstrating lower anxiety levels compared to non-participants. A strong positive correlation was found between the anxiety levels of male and female non-participants, indicating higher anxiety among those not engaged in sports.

These findings align with previous studies that emphasize the positive role of sports activities in alleviating psychological disturbances, including anxiety, verbal aggression, and physical aggression, particularly in university settings. The study highlights the importance of integrating recreational and sports activities into university programs to reduce anxiety and support students' mental well-being.

The study recommends planning age-appropriate sports programs, easing exam procedures, incorporating practical activities in curricula, and conducting further research on anxiety during the university phase. Additionally, it suggests offering workshops and counseling sessions to strengthen students' psychological resilience and adaptation skills during their preparatory year. These measures aim to enhance students' academic performance and overall mental health.

1. Introduction

Anxiety is considered one of the hallmarks of the modern era, accompanying us throughout our lives, whether in education, work, or our social and family lives. People experience various forms of anxiety while fulfilling the essential daily demands of life. This anxiety can sometimes be normal or even beneficial, helping individuals activate their neurological centers, enhancing their ability to focus, analyze, and make appropriate decisions in various real-life situations. However, some types of anxiety can disrupt an individual's balance, leading to physical, emotional, and psychological symptoms that negatively affect their overall adjustment (Jumel Al-Lail, 1994; Zahran, 1977).

Many people describe our era as an age of anxiety and stress, both individually and collectively, due to its fast-paced, highly volatile nature, characterized by numerous conflicts, tensions, and psychological pressures. Scholars in psychology and psychiatry widely agree that anxiety forms the core of both normal and abnormal psychological experiences, serving as a fundamental entry point for studying human mental health in various fields (Muqbil, 2005).

The concept of anxiety has received significant attention in psychological studies, resulting in numerous definitions. These definitions can be synthesized into one comprehensive explanation: Anxiety is an unpleasant emotional experience felt by an individual when confronted with a threatening or fearful stimulus or when placed in a conflicting or highly frustrating situation. This emotional state is often accompanied by physiological symptoms and affects the individual's perception of surrounding stimuli during the anxious situation (Al-Jazaery, 2004).

University life is one of the critical stages in a person's life, where individuals strive to build an independent personality, learn self-reliance, assert their identity, and form healthy social relationships, enabling them to achieve material and moral success. This phase is crucial for shaping the student's self-identity, as it represents a period of psychological, intellectual, social, and spiritual transformation. University students face numerous challenges and difficulties as they adjust to academic life and its environment.

Engaging in sports activities is one of the most important ways to utilize free time and enhance an individual's mental, physical, and psychological well-being. Utilizing free time, particularly among youth, is vital. As Darwish and Al-Hamahami (1986) emphasize, the future of any society largely depends on how its members spend their leisure time in productive and beneficial ways. On the contrary, among university students, there is a noticeable decline in participation in sports activities during their free time. According to Darwish and Al-Hamahami (1986), a sedentary lifestyle leads to reduced physical capabilities and, subsequently, functional decline, which in turn contributes to both physical and psychological anxiety.

Physical activity serves as a balanced educational tool, especially in this era of psychological pressures, mental challenges, and limited physical activity. Many studies confirm that engaging in sports activities positively addresses psychological, social, health,

and recreational problems, enabling university students to achieve a balanced life (Takriti et al., 1990).

The preparatory year in Saudi universities is a critical phase, as it serves as a transitional year for students entering their designated colleges. It is designed to intensively prepare students for university life by equipping them with the necessary skills to face academic challenges. However, this year is marked by significant psychological, mental, and physiological pressures that negatively affect students' well-being, often resulting in symptoms of tension and anxiety. At King Faisal University, the preparatory year is divided into four quarters, each lasting nine weeks, with mid-term and final assessments at the end of each quarter. These assessments determine students' eligibility to progress to the next quarter or lead to academic dismissal (Yasin et al., 2019).

Through their experience teaching the University Life Skills course and working in student counseling for preparatory year students at King Faisal University, the researchers observed that students frequently complain of persistent anxiety stemming from doubts about their ability to complete the preparatory year and join their designated colleges. This anxiety adversely affects their academic performance. Students attribute this anxiety to the frequent and intense testing and evaluation periods over a relatively short timeframe, which hinders their focus and achievement.

Thus, the idea for this study emerged as a scientific attempt to explore the relationship between engaging in sports activities and anxiety levels among preparatory year students at King Faisal University. This research aims to examine how sports activities can help students cope with psychological pressures arising from various educational challenges within the university preparation program.

2. Study Problem:

The study problem becomes evident through the researchers' work as student counselors in the preparatory year, a critical phase in a student's academic journey. This year serves as a pivotal stage for transitioning into the student's designated college, where they undergo intensive preparation to equip them with the necessary skills to face the challenges of university studies.

The preparatory year is characterized by significant psychological, mental, and physiological pressures that negatively affect students' well-being, often leading to symptoms of stress and anxiety. At King Faisal University, the preparatory year is divided into four quarters, each lasting nine weeks. During the middle and end of each quarter, students undergo assessments to evaluate their ability to progress to the next quarter or face academic dismissal.

The study problem can be formulated into the following research questions:

1. Is there a relationship between male students who engage in sports activities and those who do not?

2. Is there a relationship between female students who engage in sports activities and those who do not?
3. Is there a relationship between male and female students who engage in sports activities?
4. Is there a relationship between male and female students who do not engage in sports activities?

3. The Significance of the Study:

3.1. Theoretical Significance:

1. Shed light on key theoretical concepts, such as the concept of anxiety, the concept of sports activities, and the concept of the preparatory year.
2. Identify the various psychological symptoms of anxiety.
3. Understand the nature, importance, and role of the preparatory year in preparing university students.

3.2. Practical Significance:

1. Explore the relationship between different levels of anxiety and participation in sports activities among preparatory year students.
2. Recognize the role of sports activities in alleviating many psychological emotions, such as anxiety, stress, and excessive emotional reactions.

4. Study Objectives:

This research aims to explore the relationship between participation in sports activities and psychological anxiety levels among preparatory year students at King Faisal University, considering gender differences between males and females.

5. Study Terminology:

5.1. Anxiety:

Anxiety is defined as "a general feeling of panic and fear of impending doom or a disaster about to occur. It is a response to an unspecified threat, often originating from unconscious conflicts, feelings of insecurity, and repressed instinctual desires emanating from within the self" (Jaber & Kafafi, 1988).

It is also defined as a psychological state characterized by fear and tension, often associated with apprehension about the future or the anticipation of an event. Anxiety may also result from psychological conflict between desires and the restrictions preventing their fulfillment (Badran, 2003).

The psychological symptoms of anxiety include general nervous health concerns, instability, fear, hypochondria, maladjustment, poor concentration, absent-mindedness, worry, fear of death, and depression (Al-Anani, 2005).

5.2. Sports Activities:

Sports activities are defined as "organized free games performed by students under conscious guidance and leadership within a well-structured plan to achieve specific and clear objectives" (Dhnun, 1979).

They are also described as activities involving play, whether outdoors or indoors, and participation in sports competitions to achieve the highest possible level of individual performance or spend leisure time effectively (Al-Nassar, 2007).

Additionally, sports activities are defined as "activities encompassing all forms of physical exercise, such as walking, cycling, active play, work-related activities, and recreational activities like gym workouts or active games, in addition to organized and competitive sports" (Al-Enezi et al., 2004).

From the above definitions, sports activities can be considered as the experiences and situations that students encounter both inside and outside the preparatory year. These activities include various programs, such as sports, social, and cultural activities, conducted under the supervision of university administration.

5.3. Preparatory Year:

The preparatory year is an academic year consisting of four semesters, with an additional summer semester in some universities. During this year, students acquire various cognitive, educational, and social skills that help them integrate into university life (Al-Fuhaid, 2024).

At King Faisal University, the preparatory year aims to prepare male and female students for university life by equipping them with essential academic and psychological skills needed for university adaptation and future professional work. It also seeks to enhance discipline, self-awareness, reduce university dropouts, improve critical thinking, and foster a spirit of cooperation and community participation (Yasin et al., 2019).

6. Previous Studies:

6.1. Steven Study (1979):

This study aimed to examine the effect of engaging in sports activities on state anxiety levels using the Spielberger State-Trait Anxiety Inventory on a sample of males. The sample was divided into three groups: the first group engaged in regular sports activities of their choice for 20 minutes, the second group performed relaxation exercises for 20 minutes, and the third group did not participate in any physical activity. The results revealed a statistically significant reduction in anxiety levels in the first and second groups compared to the third group.

6.2. Al-Hashimi Study (2018):

This study sought to determine the impact of physical and sports activities within educational institutions on reducing test anxiety, which is a type of state anxiety triggered by exam situations. These situations evoke feelings of fear and worry, which can hinder an individual's performance during exams if the anxiety levels are high. The researcher found a positive interaction between engaging in educational and sports activities and reducing some psychological issues associated with academic performance, such as test anxiety.

6.3. Zulekha et al. Study (2020):

The study aimed to explore the relationship between future anxiety and participation in sports activities among university students. A descriptive methodology was used on a sample of 60 students (male and female) from the Psychology and Arts faculties at the University of Tlemcen, selected purposively. Two scales were employed: a future anxiety scale and a sports activity scale. Statistical analysis revealed a negative correlation between future anxiety and participation in sports activities. Additionally, there were no differences in future anxiety based on gender or field of study. The study recommended exploring the impact of future anxiety on students' sports activities and its effects on their physical, social, and psychological health.

6.4. Gamal Eldin and Al-Nadheer Study (2022):

This study aimed to highlight the role of female students' participation in recreational sports activities within university dormitories in alleviating some emotional disturbances (anxiety, verbal aggression, physical aggression). A descriptive methodology was adopted, and data were collected through a questionnaire distributed to a sample of 80 female students from five university dormitories at Setif 02 University. The participants were purposively selected and engaged in recreational sports activities within the dormitories. The findings concluded that these activities significantly reduced anxiety and both verbal and physical aggression within the university environment.

6.5. Khalaf and Al-Rawi Study (2023):

The research aimed to measure future anxiety levels among university students and determine the significance of differences based on gender (male, female). The sample included 120 fourth-year students from the College of Education, University of Samarra, equally divided into 60 males and 60 females. To achieve the research objectives, the researchers developed a future anxiety scale comprising 30 items with four response options ("Always applies to me," "Often applies to me," "Rarely applies to me," "Does not apply to me"). The validity and reliability of the scale were confirmed. After applying it to the sample, the results showed a t-value of 8.68, which is higher than the tabulated value of 1.96 at 119 degrees of freedom and a significance level of 0.05, indicating a high level of future anxiety among the sample. There were no statistically significant differences in future anxiety levels based on gender, as male and female students exhibited similar levels of future anxiety.

7. Commentary on Previous Studies:

The previous studies demonstrate the significant impact of engaging in sports activities on reducing anxiety levels in general, whether it is state anxiety, test anxiety, or future anxiety. These studies highlight the importance of sports activities in alleviating emotional disturbances such as anxiety, verbal aggression, and physical aggression among university students. The research also emphasizes that sports activities, whether performed individually or in an organized manner within the university, contribute to improving students' psychological well-being.

8. Research Hypotheses:

- There is an inverse correlation between the scores of male students who engage in sports activities and those who do not.
- There is an inverse correlation between the scores of female students who engage in sports activities and those who do not.
- There is a positive correlation between the scores of male and female students who engage in sports activities.
- There is a positive correlation between the scores of male and female students who do not engage in sports activities.

9. Study Tools:

9.1. Anxiety Scale:

- **Purpose of the Scale:** The scale aims to measure the level of anxiety among the study participants.
- **Description of the Scale:** The final version of the scale consists of 16 items describing the level of anxiety among King Faisal University students.

9.2. Scoring the Scale:

Responses are rated on four levels: Always, Often, Sometimes, Rarely, with scores of 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively. For negative items, the scoring is reversed.

9.3. Steps in Developing the Scale:

The researchers followed the following steps to prepare the scale:

1. Reviewing previous studies and anxiety-related scales.
2. Exploring the theoretical framework related to the concept of anxiety and its explanatory theories. Anxiety is defined as a psychological state characterized by fear and tension, often associated with apprehension about the future, anticipation of an event, or a psychological conflict between desires and the restrictions preventing their fulfillment (Badran, 2003). Operationally, it is defined as "the score obtained by the participant on the questionnaire used in this study."
3. Preparing the initial version of the scale, which consisted of 20 items, based on the theoretical framework and related scales.

4. Submitting the initial version of the scale to five experts in sociology, psychology, and education to evaluate the items in terms of:

- Clarity and relevance of the items to the construct being measured.
- Appropriateness of the items for the study's target population.
- Clarity of the item wording.
- Suggestions for modifications, including additions, deletions, rewording, or any other recommendations.

Items agreed upon by 80% or more of the reviewers were retained, and the necessary modifications were made. The final version of the scale comprised 16 items.

5. Verifying the psychometric properties of the scale as follows:

9.4. Validity of the Scale:

The researchers used internal consistency validity and face validity to ensure the scale's validity.

9.4.1. Internal Consistency Validity:

This method ensures that the items are consistent with one another.

9.4.2. Face Validity:

The scale was reviewed by five faculty members specializing in sociology, psychology, and education to ensure that the items are coherent, aligned, and measure the intended construct. The scale was modified based on their feedback.

Table (1): Agreement Percentages Based on the Opinions of Expert Reviewers

Item Number	Agreement Percentage (%)	Item Number	Agreement Percentage (%)
1	100	10	100
2	99	11	100
3	98	12	100
4	100	13	98
5	100	14	99
6	100	15	80
7	100	16	100
8	100		
9	100		

9.4.3. Construct Validity (Internal Consistency):

The researchers ensured that the items of the study tool exhibited an acceptable level of construct validity to determine the appropriateness of the questionnaire for final

application. Construct validity was measured by calculating the correlation coefficient between each item's score and the total score of the scale.

The researchers computed these correlations, and it was found that all items had high correlation coefficients that were statistically significant. This indicates that the items were closely related to the scale for which they were designed. The results are detailed in the following table:

Table (2): Pearson Correlation Coefficients for Each Item with the Anxiety Scale Among King Faisal University Students

Item Number	Correlation Coefficient	Item Number	Correlation Coefficient
1	0.876	9	0.871
2	0.874	10	0.877
3	0.875	11	0.874
4	0.895	12	0.875
5	0.898	13	0.872
6	0.875	14	0.876
7	0.872	15	0.877
8	0.875	16	0.877

Note: All correlations are significant at a level of 0.01 or lower.

9.4.4. Instrument Reliability

To ensure the reliability of the questionnaire, the researchers used the Cronbach's Alpha formula. The resulting reliability coefficients are presented in the table below, showing strong correlations that are statistically significant at the 0.01 level. Additionally, the researchers calculated reliability using the split-half method to confirm the results.

Table (3): Reliability Coefficient of the Study Instrument

Anxiety Scale	Number of Items	Reliability Coefficient
Anxiety Level Scale	16	0.884

The reliability coefficient in the table indicates that the questionnaire is suitable for application and that its results can be trusted. The reliability coefficient is close to 1.0, demonstrating the instrument's robustness and consistency.

10. Study Results

The study results are determined and discussed in light of the following hypotheses:

10.1. Hypothesis 1:

There is an inverse correlation between the scores of male students who engage in sports activities and those who do not.

Table (4): Pearson Correlation Coefficient for Anxiety Levels Among Male Students Engaging in Recreational Activities vs. Non-Participants

Group	Number	Mean	Pearson Correlation Coefficient	Interpretation
Participants	111	23.78	0.012	Complete inverse correlation
Non-Participants	111	50.9		

10.1.1. Analysis of Hypothesis 1 Results:

From the table above, it is observed that the Pearson Correlation Coefficient is 0.012, indicating an inverse correlation between the scores of male students who participate in sports activities and those who do not. Since the correlation coefficient is less than 1.0, it reflects the positive effect of sports activities on anxiety levels. Specifically, as participation in sports activities increases, anxiety levels decrease.

This result aligns with Steven's study (1979), which aimed to investigate the effect of sports activities on state anxiety levels using the Spielberger State-Trait Anxiety Inventory on a sample of males. It also corresponds with the study by Khalaf and Al-Rawi (2023), which sought to measure the level of future anxiety among university students based on the gender variable (male, female).

10.2. Hypothesis 2:

There is an inverse correlation between the scores of female students who engage in sports activities and those who do not.

Table (5): Pearson Correlation Coefficient for Anxiety Levels Among Female Students Engaging in Recreational Activities vs. Non-Participants

Group	Number	Mean	Pearson Correlation Coefficient	Interpretation
Participants	85	20.88	0.086	Complete inverse correlation
Non-Participants	85	47.58		

10.2.1. Analysis of Hypothesis 2 Results:

The table shows that the Pearson Correlation Coefficient is 0.086, indicating an inverse correlation between the scores of female students who participate in sports activities and those who do not. Since the correlation coefficient is less than 1.0, it suggests a positive effect of sports activities on anxiety levels. Specifically, the higher the level of sports participation among female students, the lower their anxiety levels.

This result aligns with Al-Hashimi's study (2018), which aimed to explore the impact of physical and sports activities within educational institutions in reducing test anxiety. It also agrees with the study by Gamal Eldin and Al-Nadheer (2022), which highlighted the role of female students' participation in recreational sports activities within university dormitories in alleviating certain emotional disturbances (anxiety, verbal aggression, and physical aggression). Furthermore, it is consistent with the study by Khalaf and Al-Rawi (2023), which aimed to measure the level of future anxiety among university students and determine the significance of differences in future anxiety based on the gender variable (male, female).

10.3. Hypothesis 3:

There is a positive correlation between the scores of male and female students who engage in sports activities and those who do not.

Table (6): Pearson Correlation Coefficient Between Scores of Male and Female Students Engaging in Sports Activities vs. Non-Participants

Group	Number	Mean	Pearson Correlation Coefficient	Interpretation
Male Participants	85	24.21	0.875	Strong positive correlation
Female Participants	85	21.04		

10.3.1. Analysis of Hypothesis 3 Results:

The table shows that the Pearson Correlation Coefficient is 0.875, indicating a strong positive correlation between the scores of male and female students who participate in sports activities. Since the correlation coefficient is less than 1.0 and greater than 0.70, this suggests that sports activities positively influence anxiety levels in both male and female students.

This result is consistent with the study by Zulekha et al. (2020), which explored the relationship between future anxiety and participation in sports activities among university students. It also aligns with the study by Khalaf and Al-Rawi (2023), which aimed to measure future anxiety levels among university students and assess the significance of differences based on gender (male, female).

10.4. Hypothesis 4:

There is a positive correlation between the scores of male and female students who do not engage in sports activities.

Table (7): Pearson Correlation Coefficient Between Scores of Male and Female Students Who Do Not Engage in Sports Activities

Group	Number	Mean	Pearson Correlation Coefficient	Interpretation
Male Non-Participants	85	24.21	0.987	Strong positive correlation
Female Non-Participants	85	21.04		

10.4.1. Analysis of Hypothesis 4 Results:

The table indicates that the Pearson Correlation Coefficient is 0.987, reflecting a strong positive correlation between the scores of male and female students who do not engage in sports activities. Since the correlation coefficient is less than 1.0 and greater than 0.70, this suggests that the lack of participation in sports activities contributes to higher anxiety levels in both male and female students.

11. Recommendations

1. Address the increasing prevalence of anxiety among university students due to rapid changes and technological advancements by designing sports programs and activities tailored to their age group.
2. Pay special attention to preparatory year students, as they often experience high levels of anxiety and psychological disturbances due to difficulties in adapting at the start of their university journey.
3. Focus on recreational activities as a type of sports activity suitable for this age group.
4. Conduct further studies and scientific research on the rising rates of anxiety and stress during the university phase.
5. Incorporate activities and practical components into academic curricula to alleviate stress and anxiety and channel students' energies effectively.
6. Ease exam procedures, as they are among the primary causes of heightened anxiety levels among students.
7. Offer seminars and training workshops for guidance to strengthen students' religious values and provide psychological support, particularly for preparatory year students.

12. Conclusion

This study highlights the significant impact of sports and recreational activities on reducing anxiety levels among preparatory year students at King Faisal University. The findings reveal that engaging in sports activities positively influences students' mental well-being by alleviating various forms of anxiety, including test anxiety and future anxiety. Additionally, the study emphasizes the challenges faced by preparatory year students, such as psychological and academic pressures, and underscores the importance of integrating structured sports programs into university settings to promote emotional balance and academic success.

The results align with previous research, affirming the role of sports in addressing emotional disturbances and enhancing students' adaptation to university life. Recommendations include designing age-appropriate sports programs, easing exam-related pressures, and providing workshops and counseling sessions to support students' psychological resilience. These measures aim to foster a healthier academic environment and contribute to the overall mental health and performance of university students.

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