

Adversity, Protective Process, and Positive Adaptation of Secondary School Track and Field Student-Athletes in Balancing Academic-Athletic Performance

Mary Joy A. Sabang ^a, Veronica S. Merlas ^b

^a *maryjoy.sabang@hcdc.edu.ph* & ^b *veronica.merlas@hcdc.edu.ph*

^a*Faculty of Davao City National High School, F. Torres St. Davao City, 8000, Philippines*

^b*Professor of Graduate School at Holy Cross of Davao College, Sta. Ana Avenue, Davao City, 8000, Philippines*

Abstract

Low academic and athletic performance is alarming. I explored the challenges, copings, and insights of secondary school track and field student-athletes in balancing academic and athletic performance using qualitative case study. I purposively selected six participants for an in-depth interview and thematically analyzed the data. I found that student-athletes surmounted the difficulty to balancing academic and athletic demands through managing dual performances. Discipline, goal orientation, support value, resilience and personal growth were learned. I suggest that student-athletes' academic and athletic balance may strengthen through collaborative support from teachers, coaches, and sports coordinators that promotes communication, adaptive coping, reflection, and holistic development. Mediation analysis may be pursued to test how coping, and insights surmounting adversities to positive outcomes and apply Exploratory Factor Analysis to develop a reliable measurement tool.

Keywords: adversity, protective process, positive adaptation, secondary school, track and field student-athletes, balancing academic-athletic performance

Introduction

I have discovered that track and field student-athletes experience low academic and athletic performance as they struggle to balance their academic and athletic commitments. I have noticed that many find it difficult to sustain high academic achievement while maintaining competitive athletic performance, which can lead to fatigue and decreased motivation. According to Anderson (2019), the demanding nature of training schedules contributed to students' reduced focus on academics. Similarly, Brown (2020) emphasized that excessive athletic pressure often leads to poor classroom performance and declining engagement.

International studies have also shown that the challenge of balancing academics and sports persists across different educational systems. I also found that track and field student-athletes in Australia often exhibit low academic productivity due to overlapping training and study hours (Henderson, 2021). I also discovered that in Canada, Lewis (2022) found that the psychological stress of maintaining athletic excellence negatively affects academic consistency and emotional well-being among track and field students.

I observed that in the Philippines, across Davao Region, particularly in Davao City, secondary school student-athletes continue to face low academic achievement and inconsistent athletic outcomes. I learned that Cruz (2021) reported that Filipino track and field student-athletes often compromise study time to meet athletic training demands. Supporting this, I was also shocked to learn that Junio (2016) reported that institutional support and flexible academic arrangements for athletes remain inadequate, especially in public secondary schools in the Davao Region.

Despite these findings, I still noticed that there remains a gap in the literature on how secondary school track and field athletics balance academic and athletic performance within a specific institutional context. I learned that Masten's (2014) study highlighted the importance of understanding resilience among students who face adversity in achieving both academic and athletic goals. However, I also discovered that Kim (2023) noted that few qualitative case studies have been conducted to explore the contextual challenges and success strategies of student-athletes in the Philippine secondary school setting. This case pushed me to conduct my study.

Significance of the Study

This study is important because it examined the case of secondary school track and field athletes to understand how academic and athletic performance are balanced within a single institutional setting. With this, I explored the challenges that student-athletes face in balancing their dual roles as learners and competitors, emphasizing the importance of addressing their holistic needs. My findings guide schools, coaches, and sports organizations in developing flexible academic policies, improving training facilities, and providing stronger psychological and institutional support. I aligned my study with Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 3 on good health and well-being and SDG 4 on quality education, in support of the Vision, Mission, and Goals of Holy Cross of Davao College, which emphasized discipline and holistic development. This study may also provide valuable insights into the lived realities of track and field athletes in the Davao Region, particularly in Davao City, addressing existing research gaps and promoting systems that strengthen resilience, balance, and perseverance among young athletes.

Research Questions

In this study, I examined the success of two track and field student-athletes in overcoming adversity while balancing academic and athletic performance. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What adversities were encountered in balancing academic and athletic performance?
2. What coping strategies do you use in overcoming difficulties in balancing academic and athletic performance?
3. What insights were learned in coping with the adversities of balancing academic and athletic performance?

Theoretical Framework

My case study is anchored on Ann S. Masten's (2014) Resilience Theory, which explains how individuals overcome difficulties and achieve positive outcomes through adaptive processes. The theory emphasizes three key components: adversity, protective processes, and positive adaptation, which describe how people respond to and recover from challenging circumstances.

Conceptual Framework



Figure 1. Resilience Theory by Ann S. Masten (2014)

Assumptions

In this study, I assumed that selected participants, including secondary track and field student-athletes, coaches, sports coordinators, and school clinic personnel, would share their perspectives truthfully and thoughtfully regarding the challenges and triumphs in balancing academic and athletic performance. I also assumed that the experiences observed reflect common situations faced by other secondary schools in similar settings, where balancing academic and athletic performance remains a concern. Furthermore, the insights and coping strategies shared by the participants revealed how resilience and support systems contribute to overcoming challenges. Lastly, I assumed that the case study approach is appropriate for providing an in-depth understanding of the real context, experiences, and lessons drawn from track and field student-athletes at the secondary school level in promoting holistic development.

Methodology

In this section, the steps and methods used in this study are presented. These include the research design, the study locale, the sample and sampling technique, the data-gathering technique, the data-analysis technique, and the study's trustworthiness.

Research Design

I employed a qualitative case study design to explore the challenges and triumphs of secondary school track and field athletes in balancing academic and athletic performance. According to Yin (2018), a case study design allows researchers to investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly evident. Likewise, Creswell (2014) emphasized that a qualitative case study provides a holistic, in-depth exploration of a bounded system that draws on multiple sources of information. I also sought in this study to understand how student-athletes and key stakeholders, such as coaches, sports coordinators, the SPS coordinator, and clinic personnel navigate, support, and reflect on the balance between academic and athletic performance.

Locale of the Study

In this study, I conducted my research in one public secondary school in the Davao Region, particularly in Davao City, due to its strong and proactive sports development programs that support youth athleticism. I considered the city's Aktibo Dabawenyo for Sports Program, which provides structured and accessible training in athletics, as well as Davao City's consistent success in competitions such as the Davao Regional Athletic Association Meet, as indicators of a rich and supportive athletic environment suitable for my study.

Sample and Sampling Technique

In my study, I selected six individuals with the knowledge and relevant experience in the academic and athletic development of a secondary school. I included the athletic coaches, sports coordinator, SPS coordinator, clinic personnel, and student-athletes who had competed in major athletic competitions such as the Davao Regional Athletic Association Meet, where they were declared medalists in their respective events. Their accomplishments and firsthand involvement in high-level competition positioned them to provide meaningful insights into the realities of balancing academic and athletic demands.

I employed purposive sampling, which intentionally identifies information-rich individuals with direct knowledge and firsthand experience, as guided by Creswell and Poth (2018) and the Gentles et al. (2015) study. I also gathered detailed narratives on their challenges, coping strategies, and key insights,

enabling a deeper understanding of student-athletes' academic and athletic performance through IDI.

Data Gathering Technique

I employed IDI as the primary method of data collection in my study. IDI is a qualitative research technique that involves one-on-one interviews designed to explore participants' personal experiences, perspectives, and meanings in detail (Boyce & Neale, 2006). In this technique, I allowed participants to freely express their thoughts and experiences regarding the academic-athletic challenges faced by student-athletes, coping strategies, and insights, yielding rich, detailed, and meaningful data through an IDI guide with open-ended questions to facilitate the conversation, allowing flexibility for follow-up and probing questions as participants' responses unfolded. This method encouraged honest and in-depth sharing in a private setting, enabling the capture of authentic narratives and a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study (Turner, 2010).

Data Analysis Technique

In my study, the data from in-depth interviews were also analyzed using thematic analysis, following the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). In this process, I carefully transcribed the interview data, read and re-read the transcripts to become familiar with the content, and generated initial codes from meaningful segments of the participants' responses. I also organized these codes into potential themes, reviewed them, and refined them to reflect the data patterns accurately. I further defined and named the final themes to capture the essence of participants' experiences with academic-athletic challenges, coping strategies, and insights from student-athletes. In this study, this systematic process allowed me to interpret the data in a way that remained grounded in the participants' narratives while providing a clear and coherent understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Trustworthiness of the Study

In conducting this study, I strictly adhered to the ethical standards outlined in Republic Act No. 10532 and the guidelines of Holy Cross of Davao College's Society for Moral Integration and Legal Ethics (HCDC-SMILE). Next, to ensure the trustworthiness of my study, I established credibility through IDIs, member checking, and peer debriefing to accurately reflect participants' voices. Additionally, transferability was enhanced by providing clear descriptions of the research context and participants. Furthermore, I ensured dependability through systematic documentation of data collection and analysis, and lastly, I strengthened confirmability through reflexive journaling and an audit trail to minimize researcher bias. This process helped present authentic findings on student-athletes' experiences in balancing academic and athletic performance.

Results

In this study, I examined challenges, coping strategies, and insights related to the academic and athletic performance of track and field athletes. I affirmed that track and field athletes overcome difficulties and achieve positive outcomes through adaptive processes: adversity, protective processes, and positive adaptation in their responses to and recovery from challenging circumstances. Essential themes emerged: the integrative process, which highlights that student-athletes engage in daily adaptive strategies like energy management, experiential learning, adaptive decision-making, reflective self-care, and continuous goal reassessment to maintain balance and growth.

Modified Paradigm

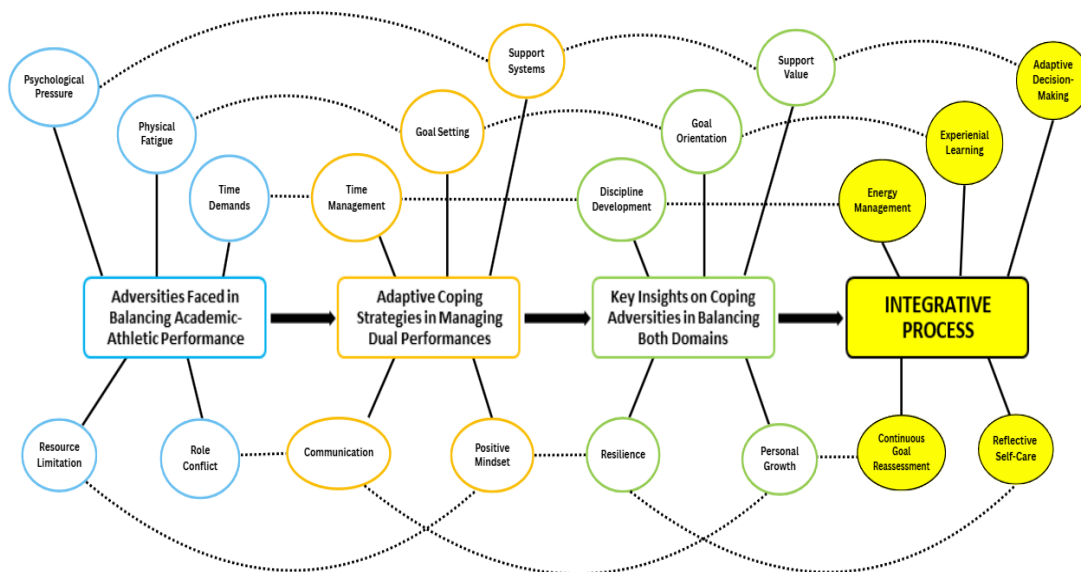


Figure 2. A schematic diagram of the main themes, sub-themes and emerging themes of secondary school track and field athletes in balancing academic-athletic performance.

Adversities Encountered in Balancing Academic and Athletic Performance

I observed the student-athletes in the quiet moments after school. I felt the deep weight of exhaustion and silent stress carried behind their weary eyes and tired steps. One of the student-athletes shared:

Sometimes I feel tired after practice, which makes it difficult to focus on my schoolwork. There are also times when competitions take place close to exam days, which can be stressful. (Page 1, Lines 4-7)

Even the coach and sports coordinator recognized the strain. They shared their observation, stating:

Sometimes they do those activities before proceeding with their training. For that reason, they find it difficult to accomplish their training tasks. (Page 2, Lines 39-40)

The time constraints, since the students need to attend practice, which sometimes ends very late in the morning, make waking up early a challenge because classes start early. (Page 2, Lines 23-25)

The school clinic personnel witnessed as she narrated:

Working with track and field athletes, I've seen how hard it is to juggle classes and training. Early mornings, long practices, travel, and exams leave little room for rest, and even small setbacks, a tough race or a minor injury, can throw everything off. (Page 2, Lines 26-29).

Also, one of the student-athletes shared about physical fatigue, saying:

"Kapoy, usahay kay after class mag-training dayon ko. Wala na ko'y kusog usahay pag abot sa balay para mag study ug magbuhat sa assignments." (Sometimes I feel very tired because right after class, I go straight to training. When I get home, I often no longer have the energy to study or do my assignments.) (Page 3, Lines 48-49)

The athletic coach and clinic personnel also observed this:

Many of them come to me feeling physically exhausted and mentally overwhelmed. (Page 3, Lines 64-65)

This fatigue can reduce focus, memory, and motivation, making it harder to complete academic tasks effectively. (Pages 3-4, Lines 71-72)

In retrospect, the sports coordinator stated:

Sometimes training time extends, resulting in an overstretched training schedule and fatigue. (Page 5, Lines 102-103).

The sports coordinator observed psychological pressure, as he stated:

Expectations create psychological pressure, leading to burnout. (Page 1, Lines 16-18).

The student-athletes also stated:

My coaches expect me to attend training and improve my performance, while my teachers expect me to complete my schoolwork. (Page 6, Lines 118-119)

Teachers expect good academic performance; I also need to dedicate time and effort to training and competitions. (Page 6, Lines 124-125)

Additionally, the athletic coach noted:

Managing both pressures at once can be stressful. (Page 4, Line 81)

Even the sports coordinator and the student-athletes observed resource limitations. They stated:

Most of the time, the lack of equipment, especially the appropriate apparel of athletes, and even the school equipment and facilities, sometimes caused injuries. (Page 1, Lines 4-5)

Sometimes, the lack of quality shoes and even the school track really affects my performance. (Page 1, Lines 14-15)

Injuries are inevitable in the lives of athletes. (Page 1, Line 19)

The student-athlete observed the constant tug of war of role conflict and shared:

My role as a student-athlete means that I have responsibilities in both academics and sports. (Page 6, Lines 116-117)

Both the athletics coach and the sports coordinator stated:

The athlete has to undergo daily training in addition to attending classes. (Page 5, Lines 100-101)

They are forced to choose between school and sports. (Page 7, Line 149)

Procrastination... laziness... sickness... (Page 3, Lines 55-56)

During the interviews, I could clearly see how heavy the student-athletes' experiences were, even without them saying much. Student-athletes often expressed their struggles through long pauses, lowered voices, tired smiles, and hesitant sharing when talking about racing against time, exhaustion, pressure, training, and academic demands. I observed visible signs of fatigue and resilience in their body language, such as slumped shoulders, restless hands, distant yet alert eyes, and slow movements when discussing stress, but also upright posture, firm nods, and confident gestures when talking about discipline, training, and goals. These observations made me realized that student-athletes' resilience is deeply embodied in their expressions and movements, showing that their experiences are not only mentally demanding but also physically and emotionally exhausting. Yet, they continue to push forward with quiet strength. I felt both concern and admiration, as I was emotionally moved by their visible exhaustion, yet inspired by their courage, determination, and ability to still smile and continue despite the pressures they face.

Coping Strategies in Overcoming Difficulties in Balancing Academic and Athletic Performance

As I listened to their journey, I felt the quiet strength and determination behind every sacrifice they made to keep pace with both their dreams and their responsibilities. Student-athletes and sports coordinators shared:

One thing I do is make a simple schedule, so I know when to study and when to train. I also do my homework early, so I don't rush it later. (Page 10, Lines 186-188)

I planned for the tasks I needed to accomplish. I prioritize the most important things first so I won't feel overwhelmed by both my academic responsibilities and my athletic training. (Page 10, Lines 191-194)

Manage their time properly, identify the goals they want to attain, and strengthen their study habits. (Page 10, Lines 202-203)

The sports coordinator observed the goal setting of athletes and stated:

Goals motivate students to stay focused. (Page 13, Lines 256-257)

The student-athletes shared:

I remind myself that both school and sports are important for my future. (Page 8, Lines 159-160)

There are times when I feel physically and mentally exhausted from school and training, but I still try my best to continue and stay committed. (Page 8, Lines 164-165)

The student-athletes appreciated the support systems and shared:

The support from my teachers, coaches, friends, and family helps me a lot. My teachers sometimes give advice about managing schoolwork, and my coaches understand when we have important school tasks. (Page 12, Lines 223-226)

Support from my classmates helps me a lot, especially when they remind me of school tasks or share their notes when I miss lessons due to training or competitions. (Page 12, Lines 234-236)

The clinic personnel echoed this sentiment, noting:

Support from coaches, teachers, family, and peers is essential in helping them stay on track and manage stress. (Page 12, Lines 242-243)

Even the athletic coach emphasized:

They need financial, emotional, physical and spiritual support from the people around them. (Page 12, Lines 247-248)

In bridging the gap, the student-athletes and the sports coordinator stated:

I talk to coaches and teachers, especially when I am struggling academically and with my skills. (Page 18, Lines 375-376)

Talking to my parents and my coaches about my difficulties and struggles in both academics and my sport. Even though it may sound cliché, people who work hard still need encouragement and understanding from others. (Page 12, Lines 229-231)

Even the student-athletes showed a positive mindset, stating:

I remind myself why I started and that my hard work will be worth it in the future. (Page 13, Lines 254-255)

They have to talk to their coaches and teachers about their whereabouts. (Page 10, Line 215)

A positive mindset helps student-athletes stay resilient, perform at their best, and maintain overall health while juggling both responsibilities. (Page 13, Lines 270-271)

With dedication... it is possible to achieve goals... (Page 18, Lines 387-388)

Student-athletes shared that balancing academics and athletics requires planning, discipline, open communication, motivation, and strong support from people around them to manage academic and athletic

demands. During the interviews, I observed gratitude and appreciation in their faces when talking about support, along with disciplined posture and engagement when discussing routines, but also signs of fatigue such as tired smiles, looking down, and quiet sighs when sharing struggles. This made me realize that success among student-athletes is not only about talent but also about discipline, support systems, communication, and resilience in handling continuous academic and athletic pressures. I felt both admiration and concern as I witnessed their struggles and strength, and I was inspired by their determination to continue despite the heavy demands they face.

Insights Learned in Coping with the Adversities of Balancing Academic and Athletic Performance

As I observed their journey, I felt a deep sense of admiration and empathy, realizing how juggling academics and athletics shapes their character and builds resilience beyond the demands of the daily routine. The student-athletes reflected:

Balancing needs discipline and time management. (Page 14, Line 280)

One of the biggest lessons I learned is the importance of discipline and time management. As a student-athlete, I realized I needed to manage my schedule to balance academics and training carefully. (Page 16, Lines 315-318)

If an athlete always keeps in mind the importance of resilience, discipline, self-care, and proper time management, nothing will be impossible. (Page 16, Lines 325-327)

Became more responsible and organized... (Page 17, Line 346-347)

The student-athletes, shaped through struggle, demonstrated goal orientation, stating:

I pushed myself even when overwhelmed. (Page 16, Lines 319-320)

I've watched them push through setbacks yet know when to rest, plan their days carefully, and stay disciplined without burning out. (Page 16, Lines 332-333)

Being patient and strong is important because sometimes things can get stressful, but I keep trying my best. (Page 16, Lines 313-314)

I always remember my goals in school and in sports. (Page 13, Lines 251-252)

In balancing academics and athletics, I realized that having a goal is not enough. You need to work hard to achieve it. Success does not come from simply wishing for something, but from putting in effort and dedication. (Page 14, Lines 285-289)

I realized that if they really persevere, even when struggling with academic tasks, they will succeed as athletes. (Page 15, Lines 306-307)

I also want to make my parents proud and prove that, with dedication, time, and effort, it is possible to achieve what you want in life. (Page 13, Lines 261-262)

The SPS coordinator noted:

Resilience is built in small, consistent choices. (Page 15, Lines 303-304)

The clinic personnel reflected with clarity on resilience, stating:

Nothing without self-care... (Page 16, Lines 330-331)

Listen to your body and prioritize rest and recovery. (Page 14, Lines 301-302)

The student-athletes also shared:

I also learned to take care of myself by getting enough rest, so I don't get too tired. (Page 18, Lines 385-386)

I learned that self-care is important to staying physically and mentally healthy. (Page 16, Lines 321-322)

I follow the things I should do as a coach, take care of myself, and continue to manage my time and my life goals. (Page 16, Lines 337-338)

The student-athletes emphasized the support value and shared:

I am not afraid to ask for support from teachers, coaches, friends, or family. Having a strong support system makes a big difference. (Page 18, Lines 383-384)

It will mold you into a better version of yourself. Challenges encountered in academics and as an athlete can be taken positively, with the overflowing support of family and friends, and growth/maturity prevails. (Page 17, Lines 359-361)

I have to widen my understanding of the athletes because I know they need it the most, and also the support I can extend to them. (Page 14, Lines 297-298)

The sports and SPS coordinator emphasized on the personal growth of student-athletes, saying:

Struggle is normal. What matters is how you respond, recover, and keep showing up stronger each time. (Page 18, Lines 396-397)

Setting clear goals and creating a realistic schedule can help prevent feeling overwhelmed. (Page 18, Lines 380-381)

The athletic coach added:

Losing my previous athletes changed my perspective on life... (Page 17, Lines 368-367)

The student-athletes shared that balancing academics and athletics builds discipline, resilience,

motivation, self-awareness, and personal growth, while teaching them to value rest, support systems, purpose, and commitment despite challenges. I have observed composed posture and engaged expressions when they talked about growth and support, but also tired smiles, lowered eyes, pauses, sighs, and subtle hand movements when they discussed exhaustion, pressure, and self-doubt. It made me realized that student-athlete development is not only academic and athletic, but also deeply emotional and personal, shaped by struggles, resilience, and support systems that build character and foster long-term growth. I felt inspired and humbled by their quiet strength, but also concerned as I witnessed the emotional and physical demands they continue to endure while striving to succeed in both areas.

Beyond the Track: The Integrative Balance of Mind, Body, and Goals

As I reflected on their experiences, I felt deeply moved and empathetic, sensing the exhaustion and emotional weight behind their constant struggle to balance academics and athletics while pushing themselves beyond limits every single day. The student-athletes told me:

One thing I do is make a simple schedule, so I know when to study and when to train. (Page 3, Lines 50-51)

I break down big tasks into smaller, manageable steps and prioritize what needs to be done first. (Page 18, Lines 381-382)

In line with this, the athletics coach stated:

Manage their energy very well and extract the unimportant ones... (Page 11, Line 218)

Both the student-athlete and the sport coordinator shared about the experiential learning, noting:

Stepping outside my comfort zone helps me grow. (Page 14, Lines 290-211)

Experience is the best teacher. It will mold you into a better version of yourself. (Page 17, Line 358-359)

The clinic personnel also noted:

Caring for student-athletes has taught me that balance isn't about perfection; it's about listening, adapting, and adjusting every day. (Page 14, Lines 299-300)

The coach and student-athlete, filled with decision-making, stated:

They must adjust their training when needed. (Page 11, Line 219)

I take a short rest first before studying so I can focus better. (Page 3, Line 52)

Managing both academics and athletics can be difficult, but I stay focused by reminding myself of my goals and what I want to achieve in life. (Page 13, Lines 256-258)

Student-athletes shared about reflective self-care, stating:

I learned to take care of myself by getting enough rest, so I don't get too tired. (Page 16, Lines 312-313)

I helped them balance academics and sports by encouraging good time management, rest, and self-care. (Page 8, Lines 175-177)

I encouraged them to listen to their bodies and maintain a healthy lifestyle. (Page 6, Line 137)

The student-athletes cultivate continuous goal reassessment and express:

I stay focused by remembering my goals in school and in sports. (Page 13, Lines 241-242)

Thinking about the purpose behind my efforts motivates me to keep going even when it becomes challenging. (Page 13, Lines 259-260)

I always remind myself that both school and sports are important for my future. (Page 1, Lines 14-15)

Student-athletes emphasized time management, prioritization, adaptive decision-making, self-care, and continuous goal setting as key strategies for balancing academics and athletics. I observed a focused yet tired expression, pauses while thinking, soft sighs, a lowered gaze, subtle hand movements, and occasional nods when discussing planning, stress, and self-care, all of which showed both mental effort and discipline. This made me realized that balancing academics and athletics is a continuous process of reflection and adaptation, in which student-athletes grow through constant adjustments, resilience, and mindful decision-making, not just time management. I felt deeply moved and inspired by their quiet strength and determination, while also sensing their exhaustion and sacrifices as they continue managing both academic and athletic demands.

Summary of Findings

Based on my analysis, I found that student-athletes navigate adversities through coping strategies and insights alongside an emerging integrative process. Adaptive strategies were used to balance academic and athletic performance.

1. Student-athletes face five main adversities: time demands from overlapping schedules between school and training; physical fatigue from continuous practices and insufficient rest; psychological pressure from expectations and stress; resource limitations, such as inadequate equipment and facilities; and role conflict in balancing academic and athletic performance.
2. Student-athletes cope with balancing academics and athletics through time management in organizing and prioritizing tasks; goal setting in establishing clear objectives to stay focused and motivated; support systems by relying on coaches, teachers, family, and peers for encouragement and assistance; positive mindset by staying optimistic and resilient despite stress and challenges; and communication by openly sharing struggles and needs to gain understanding and support.
3. Student-athletes learned that coping with adversities in balancing academic and athletic performance leads to discipline development through time management and responsibility; goal orientation through clear focus on academic and athletic goals; support value through reliance on coaches, teachers, family, and

peers; resilience through overcoming stress and challenges; and personal growth through improved maturity, self-awareness, and character development.

Discussions

This chapter discusses the findings of this study. I also presented the future directions and implications for practice.

Adversities Faced in Balancing Academic-Athletic Performance

In my study, I have discovered that student-athletes faced five main adversities: time demands from overlapping schedules of school and training; physical fatigue due to continuous practices and lack of rest; psychological pressure from expectations and stress; resource limitations such as inadequate equipment and facilities; and role conflict in balancing academic and athletic performance. My study supports Izzard et al. (2024), who found that academic demands often coincide with peak training and competition schedules, leading to increased pressure and fatigue. Similarly, my study aligns with Xu et al. (2025), who highlighted that the dual demands of academics and athletics can lead to interrelated burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion, reduced motivation, and fatigue across both domains. The findings of my study corroborated these claims that, due to schedule conflicts, limited rest, and the constant need to negotiate priorities, balancing dual roles is structurally demanding and inherently stressful for student-athletes.

However, my finding contradicts the study of Sorkkila et al. (2020), arguing that student-athletes are highly prone to burnout due to a chronic imbalance between academic and athletic demands and insufficient recovery, leading to emotional exhaustion and reduced well-being. While their study emphasizes persistent stress and burnout risk as outcomes of unmanaged dual demands, my findings show that student-athletes experience significant adversities including time demands physical fatigue, psychological pressure, resource limitations, and role conflict.

Adaptive Coping Strategies in Managing Dual Performances

I learned that student-athletes cope with balancing academics and athletics through time management in organizing and prioritizing tasks; goal setting in establishing clear objectives to stay focused and motivated; support systems by relying on coaches, teachers, family, and peers for encouragement and assistance; positive mindset by staying optimistic and resilient despite stress and challenges; and communication by openly sharing struggles and needs to gain understanding and support. My findings agree with Gustafsson et al. (2022), who stated that effective time management, structured routines, and prioritization are critical coping resources that help student-athletes balance training with academic tasks, reduce stress, and prevent overload. Additionally, my current study supports Holt and Dunn's (2023) claim that goal-setting and purpose-driven discipline significantly enhance resilience, enabling athletes to sustain effort even when physically or mentally fatigued. The current findings of my study support the claim that balancing academic performance is cultivated through effective time management, supportive networks, a positive mindset, and clear communication to navigate the competing demands of student-athletes.

However, my findings contrast with Cresswell and Eklund (2006), who found that athletes remain highly vulnerable to burnout despite coping efforts, especially when demands from sport and academics become overwhelming, and recovery is insufficient. While their study emphasizes persistent stress, emotional exhaustion, and reduced motivation due to accumulated pressures despite coping efforts, my findings show that student-athletes are able to cope with challenges effectively through time management, goal setting, support systems, positive mindset, and communication.

Key Insights on Coping Adversities in Balancing Both Domains

I realized that the student-athletes learned that coping with adversities in balancing academic and athletic performance leads to discipline development through time management and responsibility; goal orientation through clear focus on academic and athletic goals; support value through reliance on coaches, teachers, family, and peers; resilience through overcoming stress and challenges; and personal growth through improved maturity, self-awareness, and character development. My findings corroborate Van Rens et al. (2021), who explained that effective self-regulation and disciplined time management are fundamental for managing dual roles and are positively associated with academic persistence and psychological well-being. Likewise, my findings confirm the study by Stambulova and Ryba (2022), which asserts that resilience emerges through consistent effort, adaptations to setbacks, and reflective practice, echoing athlete insights such as learning to persevere even when overwhelmed and growing more responsible and organized over time. The findings of my study align with these claims: discipline, accountability, and intentional choices foster personal growth, demonstrating that challenges can act as developmental catalysts rather than mere obstacles.

However, my findings contrast with Knights and Ruddock-Hudson (2024), who found that even highly disciplined student-athletes may still experience psychological strain when academic workload, competition schedules, and institutional demands are misaligned, suggesting that individual effort has limits without systemic support. While their study emphasizes the limitations of individual effort under structural pressure, my findings highlight that student-athletes learn positive insights such as discipline development, resilience, goal orientation, support value, and personal growth through overcoming these challenges.

Future Directions

Future research may employ mediation analysis to examine whether adaptive coping strategies, as a first mediator, and key insights on coping with adversity, as a secondary mediator, mediate the relationship between the adversities faced by student-athletes as a predictor and their integrative process as an outcome. This model seeks to explain how coping efforts and cognitive insights jointly transform dual-performance challenges into adaptive integrative processes.

Additionally, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) may be conducted to develop and validate a specialized instrument based on the domains of adversities faced, adaptive coping strategies, key insights into coping with adversities, and the integrative process of balancing academic–athletic performance. Data suitability will be assessed using the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. Principal axis factoring with Promax rotation will be employed to identify the underlying factor structure, and internal consistency reliability will be evaluated using Cronbach's alpha.

Implications for Practice

The findings of my study highlighted practical ways to support student-athletes in balancing academic and athletic performance. Coaches and sports coordinators may proactively address the challenges faced by student-athletes by fostering open communication, creating safe spaces for one-on-one or small-group discussions, and encouraging reflective conversations about their academic and athletic challenges.

Teachers may strengthen student-athletes' adaptive coping strategies by teaching effective time management, modelling healthy coping mechanisms, and promoting the use of academic, social, and emotional support systems that help them manage dual-performance demands.

At the same time, educators, coaches, and sports coordinators may reinforce the key insights gained by student-athletes through validating their coping experiences, guiding them in reflective decision-making,

and helping them view challenges as opportunities for resilience, self-discipline, and personal growth. A coordinated academic–athletic support program, where teachers, coaches, and sports coordinators regularly collaborate with student-athletes through shared goal-setting, progress monitoring, and reflective mentorship, may further strengthen their capacity to master, reflect, and thrive in both academic and athletic domains to achieve the integrative process successfully.

My findings indicated that student-athletes' ability to balance academic and athletic performance successfully may be enhanced through collaborative support, adaptive coping development, and reflective guidance. These are further strengthened through integrated academic–athletic mentorship that nurtures their holistic growth and long-term success.

Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the following individuals who, in one way or another, have offered their generous and unselfish support to make this study a reality:

To my research adviser, Dr. Veronica S. Merlas, for her patience, guidance, and unwavering support in teaching and helping me complete my research paper.

Sincere gratitude is extended to the Dean of the Graduate School, Dr. Rey O. Cuizon, for his encouragement, leadership, and institutional support that made this research possible.

I am grateful to the participants in this study for their time, cooperation, and willingness to share their experiences and knowledge, which were essential to the completion of this research.

To my friends, I would acknowledge your help, support and inspirational advice that I can do this for my research paper.

Heartfelt appreciation to my family, who are always believing in me, supports me financially, giving me strength, unconditionally love and support.

Above all, to Almighty Father, for blessing me with good health, wisdom, knowledge, guidance and strength bestowed upon me throughout this study and making the successful completion of this research possible.

References

- Anderson, L. (2019). Academic struggles and athletic pressures among high school athletes: Implications for educational performance. *Journal of Adolescent Education*, 45(2), 115–128.
- Boyce, C., & Neale, P. (2006). *Conducting in-depth interviews: A guide for designing and conducting in-depth interviews for evaluation input*. Pathfinder International.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Brown, K. (2020). Balancing books and sports: The educational cost of athletic commitment in secondary schools. *International Journal of Sports Pedagogy*, 12(3), 201–214.

- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Cresswell, S. L., & Eklund, R. C. (2006). *The nature of athlete burnout: A qualitative study of elite athletes*. *The Sport Psychologist*, 20(1), 1–18.
- Cruz, A. B. (2021). Physical education attitude of adolescent students in the Philippines: Importance of curriculum and teacher support. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 658599.
- Gentles, S. J., Charles, C., Ploeg, J., & McKibbin, K. A. (2015). Sampling in qualitative research: Insights from an overview of the methods literature. *The Qualitative Report*, 20(11), 1772–1789.
- Gustafsson, H., Cosh, S., & Samuel, R. (2022). Managing demands: Time management and performance in student-athletes. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 60, 102110.
- Henderson, J. (2021). Academic productivity and athletic training schedules among Australian student-athletes. *Australian Journal of Physical Education*, 33(1), 55–68.
- Holt, N. L., & Dunn, J. G. H. (2023). Resilience and athlete development: Self-regulatory processes in high-performance settings. *International Journal of Sports Psychology*, 54(2), 112–129.
- Izzard, R., et al. (2024). A longitudinal mixed methods case study investigation of the academic, athletic, psychosocial and psychological impacts of being a sport school student athlete. *Sports Medicine*.
- Junio, J. J. B. (2016). *Factors affecting students' performance in physical education class in Lyceum of the Philippines University-Laguna* (Undergraduate thesis).
- Kim, H. (2023). Resilience and adaptive strategies among Asian student-athletes: A qualitative exploration. *Asian Journal of Education and Psychology*, 18(2), 89–104.
- Knights, S., & Ruddock-Hudson, M. (2024). Experiences of occupational stress and social support in Australian Football League senior coaches. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 11(2), 162–171.
- Lewis, R. (2022). Psychological stress and performance among Canadian secondary student-athletes. *Canadian Journal of Educational Research*, 47(4), 339–352.
- Masten, A. S. (2014). *Ordinary magic: Resilience in development*. Guilford Press.
- Sorkkila, M., Ryba, T. V., Aunola, K., Selänne, H., & Salmela-Aro, K. (2020). *Sport burnout inventory—Dual career form for student-athletes: Assessing validity and reliability in a Finnish sample of adolescent athletes*. *Journal of Sport and Health Science*, 9(4), 358–366.
- Stambulova, N., & Ryba, T. V. (2022). Athletes' careers across cultures: A holistic, developmental, and dynamic perspective. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 15(3), 136–159.
- Turner, D. W. (2010). Qualitative interview design: A practical guide for novice investigators. *The Qualitative Report*, 15(3), 754–760.

Van Rens, F. E. C., Kroeze, R., & van der Kamp, J. (2021). Self-regulated learning and dual career athletes: A longitudinal study on planning and coping behavior. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 53, 101888.

Xu, G., Yang, X., Zhang, Q., & Li, C. (2025). The impact of athlete burnout on academic burnout among college athletes: A multiple mediation model based on emotion regulation and sleep. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 16.

Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Appendix A. Survey Questionnaire

Research Title: Adversity, Protective Process, and Positive Adaptation of Secondary School Track and Field Student-Athletes in Balancing Academic-Athletic Performance

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	PROBING QUESTIONS
What adversities were encountered in balancing academic and athletic performance?	Can you describe the challenges you have personally encountered or observed in balancing academic and athletic performance?	1.1 What specific factors made it challenging to maintain balance between academics and athletics (e.g., time demands, fatigue, schedule conflicts)? 1.2 How did these challenges affect your academic and athletic performance, or overall well-being? 1.3 How did your role (e.g., student-athlete level, sports coordinators, coaches, and teacher) influence these challenges?
What coping strategies do you use in overcoming difficulties in balancing academic and athletic performance?	How do you or they overcome the challenges of balancing academic and athletic performance?	2.1 What strategies or practices do you use or recommend to handle both performances effectively? 2.2 What kind of support or assistance helped you or others overcome these difficulties? 2.3 How do you stay focused and motivated despite competing demands from schoolwork and training?
What insights were learned in coping with the adversities of balancing academic and athletic performance?	What insights have you learned from the experiences or observations in balancing academics and athletics performance?	3.1 What lessons have you learned about resilience, discipline, time management, or self-care? 3.2 How have these experiences shaped your approach to academic success and athletic performance? 3.3 What advice would you share with others who are facing similar challenges?