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RESEARCH FINDINGS

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Research Findings

This Chapter explains the main findings collected after the application of the ESTPORT questionnaire to the student-athletes from the four universities, comparing data from the pre and post-test. The questionnaire was previously designed and validated by research team (Sánchez-Pato, et al., 2016).

The first purpose of this project was to design and validate a questionnaire about the perceptions of elite student-athletes at university relating to their dual career. In the initial creation of the instrument, constructs were defined and three dimensions were established: academic life, sporting life and sports tutor. After a process of 'back translation', experts ($n = 8$) agreed the construct to ensure content validity, the dimensions and the questionnaire questions. Statistical analysis of the items showed adequate comprehension to confirm content validity of participants ($n = 30$). In construct validity ($n = 73$), the results showed correct psychometric quality, internal consistency, reliability and adequacy of the structural model. The instrument had evidence of external validity, since the results were congruent with the main findings of the research. Finally, the "ESTPORT-survey: Questionnaire about the perceptions of dual career student-athletes" (Sánchez-Pato et al., 2016) was found to be a valid and reliable assessment instrument, consisting of 84 questions (in Spanish and English language), that enables the perception of elite student-athletes to be known about their dual career whilst at university.

In summary, this assessment tool had two categories: (a) Socio-demographic and contextual variables (i.e., "Which level in sport do you participate?"); and (b) Dual Career issues (i.e., "Do your studies interfere with your athletic performance?"). The second category contemplated three dimensions about the dual career: "Academic life" (i.e., "How much do you value having access to 'Distance learning' as part of the services and feature of your dual career at your university?"), "Sporting life" (i.e., "How much do you

value the ‘Sport monitoring’ services and features as part of having a dual career at your university?’), and “Sports Tutor” (i.e., “How highly do you value these services and features of the dual career at your university ‘Dual career sports tutors?’”). Most of the questionnaire items used a Likert scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”).

The final version “ESTPORT-survey”, about the perceptions of the dual career, were assessed by the student-athletes without the presence of the trainer or teacher. The time approximately for each questionnaire (pre and post) were about 30 minutes (Appendix 8.2. ESTPORT-Survey).

This chapter explains the main findings collected after application of the ESTPORT-survey to the student-athletes from the five universities, comparing data from the pre and post-test.

1. UCAM Catholic University of Murcia (Spain)

Methodology

The aim was to find out whether any differences between the perceptions of the sports students about sport and their academic work exist, as well as that about the support provided by the University.

- *Participants:* There were 108 respondents to the questionnaire. Student-athletes were defined by those who were performing at the maximum level of their sport whilst studying at university. Students at UCAM were exempt from paying tuition fees for the duration of their studies. Participants were mostly performing their sport by representing the university in competition and thought Spanish championships, although there were a high number participating in championships at both European and International levels. Although to a lesser extent, some competed within the Olympic Games. Some students were also either at a professional or semi-professional level thus, gained support from other entities other than UCAM for their dual career, mainly from sports clubs and a lesser extent by the Higher Council of Sport through government aid.

- *Instrument: “ESTPORT-survey”*: The student-athletes were measured using the Spanish version of the “ESTPORT-survey: Questionnaire about the perceptions of dual career student-athletes” (Sánchez-Pato et al., 2016). The instrument was composed of 84 questions about “Academic life”, “Sporting life”, and “Sports Tutor”. The perception of the student-athletes was assessed twice: pre-test and post-test.
- *Procedure*: The student-athletes complete the questionnaires anonymously and individually, in a relatively relaxed situation, without being subject to study or competition pressure, without the presence of the coach or teacher (time: 30 minutes). Questionnaires were accessed online. The subjects did not receive any additional explanation about the purpose of the questionnaire except to the one that appeared within the instrument itself. However, they were given an information document about the project so that they were fully aware about the project ESTPORT itself.

Academic Life

One of the main motivations of the athletes to study university was to increase the chances of getting a job once their sports career ends. “Enjoy studying” and “wanting to improve their education” are other reasons that athletes responded. Sports performance is an element that seems to influence the performance of athletes, since it is not always easy to achieve whilst having an “academic life”. Additional findings were that students defined themselves as athlete-students rather than student-athletes as sport is seen as the priority before their studies, both for the time they dedicate to their sport and for it being a priority in that moment of their lives.

With regard to the perception of difficulty in matching sports with their studies, student-athletes find it difficult, although they value to a great extent the flexible curriculum that exists at the UCAM, as well as the ability to have distance learning and the existence of the figure of the sports tutor. The expectations of the athletes once they finish, indicate that they would like to work in what they have studied, although still wanted to continue their sports career. Student-athletes recognised the importance of having

the support of both their coach and their families as well as friends and the sports service of the University, being of particular importance. In this university, the athletes mentioned the methodological strategies that the teachers implement in order to support the dual career. It should be noted that the pattern of studying for the athletes was not very different to non-athlete-students, as they take 1-2 years for an academic course compared to 1 year.

With regard to the perception of difficulty in matching sport with their studies, student-athletes find it consistently difficult, although they value to a great extent the flexible curriculum that exists at UCAM, as well as the ability to have distance learning and the existence of the Sports Tutor. The expectations of the athletes once they finish, indicated that they would like to work in what they have studied, although still wanted to continue their sports career. Student-athletes recognised the importance of having the support of both their coach and families as well as friends and the sports service of the University, being of particular importance. In this university, the athletes mentioned the methodological strategies that the teachers implement in order to support the dual career. It should be noted that the pattern of studying for the athletes was not very different to non-athlete-students, as they take 1-2 years for an academic course compared to 1 year.

In relation to the information that the athletes have about their circumstances, there is a great lack of knowledge regarding the national and regional regulations that affect them as high level athletes, since more than half do not have that information. About half of the students at UCAM also do not know the academic regulations of the University regarding elite athletes. This is a key finding to help inform and improve future actions regarding raising awareness about such regulations for student-athletes.

To conclude, the above highlights positive perceptions by athletes about their studies at UCAM, such as: the virtual tools that favour the dual career student, the importance it has for athletes to learn what they are taught in their studies, and the ability for them to be able to finish their studies; the importance of studies to achieve knowledge, as well as obtaining a degree to find a future job once their studies are completed.

Sporting Life

The sports career seems to present itself as an aid to face the 'academic race' and sports training so that they do not interfere with student-athletes' academic performance, as suggested by previous research (Jonker, Elferink-Gemser, & Visscher, 2009; Lorenzo & Bueno, 2012). This reinforces the present findings that show that the athletes of UCAM have a high load of training, with approximately half of them training 4-5 days a week and between 11 and 20 hours a week. Most athletes here, believed that training does not interfere with their academic performance.

There could be a direct relationship with the teaching support tools that athletes have, being the most used of the virtual campus. In this sense, to obtain positive results by combining sports career and academic training, the literature reflects both the need to promote ethical and sustainable sports practices and the development of an elite sports system, which would be effective in the identification and the promotion of sports talents, respecting the education / training needs of young athletes (David, 2004).

With respect to the sports career, the results stand out that the athletes would like to dedicate themselves to what they have studied once they finish their "sport race", as well as athletic performance, again highlighting why the athletes not only identify with the Sports Tutor to provide support to achieve their dual career, but are also aware of the importance of studying for their future career to enable them to make a living when their sports career ends.

Sports Tutor

One of the key gaps in the literature currently around the dual career, is to know how best to enable student-athletes to be successful in gaining a career post studying, by not allowing their sporting performance to negatively affect their future careers. The figure of the personal Sports Tutor was introduced with them aim to help achieve this, by providing individualized advice about their academic studies and particular sport, thought to be one route to achieving success for the dual career student

(Álvarez, Pérez, López, & González, 2014; López de Subijana, Barriopedro, & Conde, 2015; Vilanova & Puig, 2013). Therefore, it was necessary to know the perceptions of the dual career student-athletes about the “Sports Tutor”.

In this research, differences were found between the perceptions of the amateur, semi-professional or professional athletes, with the latter preferring the Sports Tutor more than the other two groups. Overall, the student-athletes valued the services and features highly, regarding the dual career at this university. A strong relationship with the Sports Tutor was found, shown by regularly keeping in touch, mainly by email. According to the perceived results, the student-athletes supported the interaction between the Sports Tutor and the Sports University Service as a mechanism that was good to facilitate the dual career. In addition, they presented high scores of perceptions about the relevance of the Sports Tutor, mainly because they needed someone who would listen to them and who was available for this purpose.

Other high scores by the student-athletes were for the need of a Sports Tutor for “personal support” more than for “academic support” or “time management”. Most of the student-athletes showed that they prefer the Sports Tutor to advise/help them with how to contact teachers, how to justify any academic assistance on the basis of training and/or competitions, or how to overcome aspects of teaching and learning (e.g. seminar help, placement support), among others. Finally, the student-athletes perceived the “student-tutor” or “peer-tutor” highly, mainly as a way to help them to prepare for exams and to inform them of any changes generally. To sum up, the student-athletes perceived the Sports Tutor as a mentor to guide the academic, sporting and personal life of their dual career.

2. University of Rome Foro Itálico (Italy)

The findings below illustrate a summary of the student-athlete perceptions at the University of Rome Foro following the implementation of the Sports Tutorship model.

Methodology

There were 139 identified as student-athletes from those who have competed in the Olympic Games, as well as having participated within regional, national, European and World competitions and contests. From this sample, a sub-sample of 26 was taken, made up of those student-athletes who had only competed within the Olympics and in international competition. This was to provide a comparative analysis with the subsample at UCAM of similar types of students.

The student-athlete at the University of Rome Foro Italico is not officially enrolled as this category of student, this happens after detecting and selecting student-athletes who are then provided with individual support; and any BA degree or MA degree regulations are also tailor-made to the different needs of different athletes.

No significant differences were found between the perceptions of student-athletes' academic and sporting life before the implementation of the DuASTUn model. The following details findings post implementation of the Sports Tutorship Model.

Academic Life

Most of the student-athletes affirmed that their studies and their athletic performance affected each other due to the difficulty of organising both their time dedicated to their studies and to their sports competitions and training. They tended to consider themselves mainly as athlete-students and not as student-athletes. The main barriers perceived for the dual career were the fact that both students' work and training schedules were not flexible and that lecturers of their university didn't implement learning and teaching strategies that supported having a dual career. Moreover, URFI's student-athletes were not aware of the national and regional legislation regarding elite athletes and they claim to be unaware of the academic regulations of the university regarding the student-athletes.

From the questionnaire, the biggest problem was the lack of information about the rights and guidance for the student-athletes as well as a lack of

involvement of university instructors in supporting this kind of students and in using personalized and distance learning tools. The student-athletes felt the Sports Tutor should help them manage administration and legal issues, inform them about annual exams and provide them with new and flexible learning methodologies.

Sporting Life

The application of DUCASTUN model – derived and developed from UCAM’s tutorship model – to a small sample of student-athletes from CONI (Italian Olympic Committee) showed the effectiveness of the UCAM’s model ESTPORT and its sustainability and possible adaptation to another context. The data from the questionnaire administered to the sub-sample demonstrated that when the tutorship system has a Sports Tutor seen as an administrative support and the lecturer/instructor as a facilitator and a counsellor (capable of using Web.2.0-based communication technologies and social network as flexible learning environments), then the Tutorship system is really effective. Its effectiveness can be measured and evaluated in terms of showing student-athletes’ satisfaction and increase in motivation towards their studies and athletic performance who feel part of a learning community in which their rights are respected, and their skills and competencies recognized and enhanced.

Sports Tutor

To conclude, DUCASTUN and UCAM’s tutoring models represent an example of how the personalised pedagogy of care, inspired by educationists such as Paulo Freire, Don Lorenzo Milani or the Spanish Víctor García Hoz, can be updated, put into practice and turned into a pedagogical model capable of enhancing the skills for life in the new generations of young athletes.

3. University of Malta (Malta)

The findings below illustrate a summary of the student-athlete perceptions at the University of Malta following the implementation of the Sports Tutorship model.

Methodology

Twenty-one student-athletes filled in the preliminary questionnaire. As a follow-up study, six student-athletes who participated the ESTPORT pilot study filled in the same questionnaire. A comparison of the main results in both studies in Malta is presented below. Most athletes in the preliminary and the follow-up studies consider themselves to be amateurs or semi-professionals, have been in high performance competition for more than five years, are currently attending a first degree course of 3-4 years, dedicate about 22 hours of lectures and extra study, up to 20 hours of training, and work part-time for up to 15 hours a week.

Academic Life

Student-athletes were asked if their studies interfere with their athletic performance, and the majority of the respondents in the preliminary study replied that it does, particularly during the exam period and when lectures clash with their training times or when they need to compete in international competitions. On the other hand, most of the student-athletes in the follow-up study replied that it doesn't, stating that the sport-tutors helped them when they needed to be excused from lectures, particularly given attendance at the University of Malta is compulsory. Findings from the questionnaire before and after the implementation of ESTPORT, illustrated that student-athletes found that their athletic performance affected their academic studies, as they needed to dedicate many hours on training and because they were then too tired to study after their training sessions.

Sporting Life

Student-athletes responded that they considered their studies to be more important than their athletic career, stating that it's very hard to earn a living from sport in Malta. However, while the majority of the respondents in the preliminary study described balancing their sporting life with their academic study as hard, most of the respondents in the follow-up study described it as normal. Almost all respondents in both studies replied that they have support from their family, coaches and friends in this order and lecturers were placed fourth. However, a much larger percentage of student-athletes who participated in the ESTPORT pilot study chose the lecturers as the individuals that support them to achieve balance between sports and studies.

Students were also asked about the barriers in achieving a good balance between their sporting life and their studies. A larger percentage of students in the preliminary study, when compared to the follow-up study, attributed this challenge to their University lack of flexibility in their schedule. While very few students in the preliminary study replied that their lecturers implement teaching and learning strategies that promote dual career, half the student-athletes in the follow-up study stated they do, and explained that lecturers were flexible, moved times of lectures to accommodate their training and gave assignment titles very early to allow planning ahead.

Sports Tutor

When the respondents were asked if they are aware of the academic regulations of University regarding student-athletes, half the respondents of the preliminary study stated they were not, while the other half said they didn't know if there are any. On the other hand, the majority of the student-athletes in the follow-up study insisted they were aware of the regulations.

Compared to the respondents of the preliminary study, less students in the follow-up study stated that their academic commitment interferes

with their training. The most difficult aspects to co-ordinate with their studies mentioned in both studies was daily training, training camps and competition. A majority of the student-athletes in the preliminary study stated that after they finish their athletic career they would like to continue to be involved in sport, while about a fourth of them stated they would like to work in a job they studied for. On the other hand, all student-athletes in the follow-up study would like to remain in sport.

The final set of questions were directed towards the sports tutorship model. Student-athletes in the follow-up study stated that their sports tutor contacted them mainly during lectures or by email and that he mainly facilitated their academic success through dealing with other lecturing staff. They also said that they need the sport-tutorship service to have someone to listen to them, for academic support, to help them in time-management, and to liaise with University staff. They felt the main areas they would like the sports tutor to advise them on were changes in exam dates and solving administrative issues.

4. Leeds Trinity University (United Kingdom)

We are going to expose the Pre and post-survey discussion, in relation to three dimensions: academic and sport life and sports tutor.

Methodology

The pre implementation surveys were distributed to 10 student-athletes, who were identified via the internal recruitment methods discussed in the implementation methodology. The post-implementation study was completed by 14 available student-athletes currently studying at Leeds Trinity University, and 3 graduated student athletes who had experienced two years of sport tutor support. For both surveys the student athletes ages ranged from 18-23. Pre-implementation an even gender split was seen. Post implementation an increase in female student-athletes completing the survey was seen, 53% were female and 47% male. Although a small

sample, this allowed a comparison to be directly drawn between pre and post. Identifying that the Sport Tutor model had benefitted and was valued by the student-athletes studying at Leeds Trinity University.

Every student-athlete identified three main support groups for achieving a good balance between sporting life and studies. These were, family, coaches and friends. A fourth support group was Sport University Service, in the post-implementation survey 100% of student-athletes identified Sport University Service as a key support system. This supports Leeds Trinity University's decision to ensure a dual approach between academics and sport development.

Academic Life

There were varying responses to identifying barriers to achieving a good balance between sporting life and studies; this variation indicates how the demands placed on each student-athlete are very different. Therefore they cannot be supported in the same manner.

Sporting Life

Another indication of the varying demands was the deviation in training hours between student-athletes in both their pre and post implementation surveys. The varying ranging of hours dedicated to training each week indicates once again, the importance of a student-athlete led model.

In the pre-implementation survey, only 20% of student-athletes recognised the support available, post-implementation this rose to 100%. Every student-athlete identifying the support channels available demonstrates that the core of implementation relating to create awareness was successful.

Sports Tutor

In the pre-implementation findings, it was evident that student-athletes recognised there was a tutorship system being implemented however

none had utilised it. Three had spoken with their Sports Tutors, but this was in their position as a lecturer rather than tutor. Post-implementation, 100% of students recognised they had a designated Sports Tutor and 85% had utilised them. Student-athletes had also begun to recognise the contribution that Sports Tutors had offered in achieving academic success.

This brief discussion of pre and post implementation survey results indicates that Leeds Trinity University has successfully created awareness of the model among student-athletes. It can be argued that the results in relation to utilisation of support link heavily to the student-athletes led approach adopted throughout the implementation process.

5. University of Thessaly (Greece)

The findings below illustrate a summary of the student-athlete perceptions at the University of Thessaly following the implementation of the Sports Tutorship model. The purpose of the survey was to provide information regarding the academic life, sporting life and the Sports Tutor of students-athletes of the University of Thessaly. Two surveys were conducted: a) before the implementation of the Sports Tutorship model, and b) after the implementation of the Sports Tutorship model.

Methodology

- *Participants*: A sample of 46 students-athletes from the Department of Physical Education Sport Sciences of the University of Thessaly was selected for the purpose of this study. Seventeen of them were females and twenty-nine were males. Their mean age ranged from 18 to 24 years ($M=20.60$, $SD=1.52$).
- *Instrument*: For the purpose of the present study a specific questionnaire was designed (Sanchez-Pato, A. et al., 2016). The questionnaire consisted of 49 items and provide information regarding socio-demographic data, academic life, sport life and sports tutor of the students-athletes.

- *Procedure:* The method chosen for the purpose of the present study was that of self-completed questionnaires. Researchers informed all students that their participation was completely voluntary and the individual responses would be held in confidence and they will be held in confidence and only for academic purpose. Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences.

Findings revealed that there were no procedures for the dual career of student-athletes in the Department of Physical Education & Sport Sciences. After the Sports Tutor was implemented through Sports Tutorship model, it was evident that there were student-athletes at the University and all participated in National Championships, while five participated in International Competition and in University championships. Twenty-two of the student-athletes considered themselves as amateurs, twenty-one as semi-professionals and three as professional athletes, and all of them reported that they were high-level athletes.

In terms of their 'identity' all considered themselves as student-athletes versus athlete-students and 80% believed that their studies were the most important part for them. In addition, all student-athletes thought that their studies interfered with their athletic performance while 80% of them believed that their athletic performance interfered with their studies.

Academic life

Regarding their academic life results showed that 80% plan further studies while 20% employment in the area of their study. All of them have no support from their coach to study, while they have support from their family to their studies. The most important barriers towards achieving a good balance between their sporting life and their studies are: a) The university is far away from my home, b) The university is far from my training site c) I am usually tired d) Students' schedules are not flexible. None of the students-athletes know the state legislation regarding the elite athletes.

Sporting Life

Regarding their sport life results showed that training sessions per week vary from 6 to 10 sessions, while, training hours per week vary from 5-10, to more than 20 hours.

All of them find it difficult to coordinate daily training with their studies, and all of them plan to continue to be involve in sport.

Sports Tutor

After the implementation of the Sports Tutor, findings from the second questionnaire follow-up showed that students felt there was frequent contact with the Sports Tutor mainly by e-mail, SMS, personal and group meetings. Student-athletes also felt the Sports Tutor helped them in solving issues relating to the exam calendar, changing exam dates, how to contact teachers and how to solve administrative issues. Students also reported that Sports Tutor is a very useful service, for their academic support, for their personal support, for time management and for liaising with the university.