

Development of student athletes' social competence in the Individual Plan and Program of Studies at the Academy of Physical Education in Katowice

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Background

Universities in Poland, especially physical education academies, introduce measures that make the process of studying easier for student athletes. The most common of such measures is the individualised course of studies, which focuses on lowering the requirements of attendance in class as guaranteed by the Law for the Higher Education from 2005. Starting from the year 2005, the Individual Plan and Program of Studies (IPPS) is functioning at the Academy of Physical Education in Katowice. According to the university's student handbook, the requirements for student athletes to be included in the program are as follows: being a member of the National Polish Team, its reserve team or the universiade team; being an individual Olympic sports athlete and having a First Sport Rank (pierwsza klasa sportowa), Sport Champion Rank (klasa mistrzowska) or International Champion Rank (klasa mistrzowska międzynarodowa); being in a sport team competing in central championships organised by Polish Sport Associations. According to faculty's guideline, the students of IPPS are entitled to: modify their study plan and curriculum through modifying courses determined by the curriculum, as long as the results defined by the curriculum are attained; modifying study plans by individually distributing the implementation of courses across semesters. As long as the requirements regarding achieved effects are met, a student taking part in the IPPS can attend classes in a different form than defined in the regular timetable, sign up to any study group, participate in classes of both full-time studies and extramural studies, take exams in paper form on an individually selected date. At the Academy of Physical Education in Katowice, in the year 2018/2019 the IPPS program included 473 student athletes, this group consisted of 133 students with Champion Rank and 27 with International Champion Rank. Student with ranks achieve the same educational outcomes as students studying according to the regular schedule. However, pursuing a university education in addition to training sport professionally in a flexible schedule such as IPPS necessitates a degree of independence and the ability to make autonomous decisions. From the university's perspective, a student athlete (as a subject of an education process) becomes the party responsible for adjusting the study plan to suit his/her own needs and abilities. The aim of this research was to identify which support systems and IPPS elements are the most helpful for student athletes, according to their own evaluation.

Participants and procedure

The study included student athletes who take part in the IPPS program at the Academy of Physical Education in Katowice. The sample consisted of 108 student athletes (58 males, 50 females) aged 19-41 (M = 22.8), majoring in either physical education, sport, management, physiotherapy, tourism and recreation, physical activity and public health nutrition or personal training with sport dietetics.

The method of the diagnostic survey using the questionnaire technique was applied. The survey was conducted in the years 2018-2019. The questionnaire consists of 23 items. All items were assessed on 5-point scale: strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), don't know (3), agree (4), strongly agree (5), and descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviations were calculated. In order to compare male and female students evaluations in each of the items, the one-way ANOVA was applied. The assumed significance level was set at $\alpha < 0.05$.

The sample of student athletes was evenly distributed between four general sport categories (table 1). However, more men were participating in individual sport (71%) than in team sport (29%), and slightly more women were participating in summer sport (66%) than in winter sport (34%).

Table 1. Percentage of respondents according to sport type

Sport type	Total		Female		Male	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Summer sport	64	59,25	33	66,00	31	53,45
Winter sport	44	40,74	17	34,00	27	46,55
Total	108	100%	50	100%	58	100%
Team sport	41	37,96	24	48,00	17	29,31
Individual sport	67	62,03	26	52,00	41	70,69
Total	108	100%	50	100%	58	100%

Results

The mean values of student athletes ratings, regarding the support and helpfulness of IPPS program elements and the support of their social environment in reconciling studying and sport training are presented in table 2. The student athletes consider the flexible time table and the individually determined class attendance requirements the most helpful element of IPPS. The least helpful element of the IPPS program, according to student athletes, was scientific advice and assistance. Results revealed significant sex differences in ratings of the two items. Female athletes rated the support from family and friends higher than males, but the support from the club and sponsors was rated higher by males.

Table 2. Types of support for student athletes, means and sex differences

Types of support	Total n=108		Females n=50		Males n=58		p
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Helpfulness ratings of IPPS elements by student athletes							
Flexible timetable	4,59	0,67	4,56	0,76	4,62	0,59	0,64
Individually determined class attendance requirements	4,51	0,62	4,52	0,68	4,50	0,57	0,87
Flexible exam timetable	4,21	0,93	4,28	0,99	4,16	0,87	0,49
Email contact with the lecturer	3,95	0,96	3,96	0,99	3,95	0,94	0,95
Possibility to extend study period	4,30	0,79	4,36	0,80	4,24	0,78	0,44
Scholarship	3,70	1,16	3,74	1,16	3,67	1,18	0,76
Scientific advice and assistance	3,50	0,96	3,60	0,86	3,41	1,04	0,32
Ratings of support from social environment by student athletes							
Coaches and teammates	3,71	0,55	3,74	0,56	3,69	0,54	0,64
Club and sponsors	3,17	0,89	2,94*	0,91	3,36*	0,83	0,01*
Family and friends	3,94	0,31	4,00*	0,00	3,88*	0,42	0,04*

* p < 0,05

The mean values of student athletes ratings regarding challenges and potential reasons for leaving university, are presented in table 3. The student athletes consider not having enough time to study to be the most challenging obstacle. The most likely reason for leaving university according to student athletes, was a lack of support from the university. Results revealed significant sex difference in rating of one item in challenges category. The male student athletes rated the personal life challenges (lack of motivation, family problems) higher than females.

Table 3. Challenges and reasons for leaving university, means and sex differences

Challenges and reasons for leaving University	Total n=108		Females n=50		Males n=58		p
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Challenges							
Study problems (not meeting the requirements)	2,92	1,15	2,78	1,11	3,03	1,18	0,25
Not enough time to study	3,92	0,97	3,84	1,06	3,98	0,89	0,45
Sport challenges (coach/club)	2,46	1,07	2,40	0,93	2,52	1,19	0,57
Personal life challenges (lack of motivation, family problems)	2,50	1,07	2,14*	0,86	2,81*	1,15	0,00*
University/training facilities distance	3,47	1,34	3,48	1,30	3,47	1,38	0,96
Financial challenges	3,42	1,25	3,30	1,28	3,52	1,22	0,37
Potential reasons for leaving university							
Lack of time	3,52	1,18	3,34	1,21	3,67	1,15	0,15
Family-related reasons	3,48	1,09	3,48	1,03	3,48	1,14	0,99
Poor study results	2,49	0,98	2,52	0,95	2,47	1,01	0,78
Poor sport results	2,82	1,17	2,70	1,15	2,93	1,20	0,31
Lack of motivation	3,06	1,02	2,88	0,94	3,21	1,07	0,10
Lack of support from university	3,70	0,97	3,56	0,99	3,83	0,94	0,15
Financial reasons	3,61	1,06	3,52	1,03	3,69	1,08	0,41

* p < 0,05

Conclusions

Research regarding the opinions of student athletes about IPPS at the Academy of Physical Education in Katowice showed that the factors of the program that are the most helpful in reconciling their education with their sport career are: a flexible schedule and the ability to individually determine the class attendance requirements. Furthermore, the least helpful element of IPPS program is scientific advice and assistance. Because of the student athletes insight, the IPPS program elements can be improved on with a better understanding of students' needs and struggles.

The research results suggest a necessity to continue monitoring the implementation of the IPPS program and to undertake actions to motivate the students to continue their studies, despite the difficulties with reconciling studying and sport training.

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