

Exploring Academic Stress Among Student Athletes: Challenges and Coping Mechanisms

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the academic stress experienced by 135 student-athletes at the Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology (NEUST) during the 2023-2024 academic year. It aims to identify the sources of stress and assess their effects on academic and athletic performance. This study used a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys to explore factors like time management issues, academic performance, financial concerns, teacher-related factors, and social pressures, with qualitative interviews conducted with 20 student-athletes to gather personal insights. The findings reveal significant stressors include time management challenges, academic struggles, financial insecurity, lack of teacher flexibility, and social expectations. Common issues include difficulty adjusting schedules for unexpected events, neglecting academic support, and feeling pressure from family, peers, and coaches. The results highlight the need for structured interventions, such as improved time management resources, academic counseling, financial support, and more flexible academic policies. A holistic approach to addressing these stressors is vital to the academic and athletic success of student-athletes, ensuring a balanced approach to their dual responsibilities. The study emphasizes the importance of creating a supportive environment that fosters student-athletes well-being, improving their academic performance and athletic achievements.

INTRODUCTION

Student-athletes often experience the dual pressure of balancing academic responsibilities and athletic commitments, which can contribute to elevated levels of academic stress. Academic stress, the pressure students feel to meet academic demands and expectations, has become a significant concern in educational settings (Eisenberg et al., 2019). For student-athletes, the unique stressors of balancing rigorous training schedules, competitions, and academic performance can exacerbate mental health challenges, leading to lower academic achievement and burnout (Beauchamp et al., 2017).

Studies have highlighted that academic stress among student-athletes is often associated with time constraints, lack of sleep, and difficulty maintaining social relationships (Razon et al., 2020). A study by Melnyk et al. (2021) revealed that student-athletes report higher stress levels than their non-athlete peers, primarily due to the demanding nature of their dual roles. Moreover, research by Evans et al. (2023) emphasized that these stressors may negatively affect student-athletes academic performance, contributing to poorer grades and a decline in overall well-being. Coping mechanisms such as time management, social support, and psychological resilience were found to mitigate the effects of academic stress (Horn & Tindle, 2022). However, student-athletes specific needs require tailored intervention programs that address their academic and athletic demands (Gould et al., 2020). The development of such programs is essential in supporting student-athletes' mental health, academic success, and athletic performance, thereby fostering a more balanced and sustainable collegiate experience.

As academic stress among student-athletes continues to gain attention, this study seeks to examine the underlying causes and propose a program development framework to alleviate academic stress. By identifying key stressors and effective coping strategies, this research contributes to the growing body of literature that seeks to support student-athletes in managing their academic and athletic responsibilities more effectively.

At NEUST, student-athletes juggle rigorous academic requirements and demanding training schedules. This study seeks to assess the academic stress levels among NEUST student-athletes, identify its primary sources, and provide data-driven recommendations for developing a support program tailored to their unique needs. The findings aim to contribute to fostering an environment that supports the holistic well-being and success of NEUST student-athletes.

Materials and Methods

A mixed methods approach combines both qualitative and quantitative research techniques to gain a more comprehensive understanding of a research problem. This study enables a holistic exploration of academic stress among 135 NEUST student-athletes during the academic year 2023-2024. A pilot test was conducted involving 20 student-athletes from the Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology who were not part of the main study to ensure the validity and reliability of the instrument. The survey questionnaire was validated by coaches who were former athletes and experts in the field. For reliability testing, Cronbach's Alpha was used, yielding a score of 0.868, indicating that the questionnaire has good reliability.

Quantitative methods. Allow for the collection of measurable data, such as stress levels or academic performance scores, through surveys or standardized tests. These data help establish patterns or trends in how stress affects performance.

Survey Design. A survey instrument was utilized to measure sources of academic stress. Random sampling was employed, and each student-athlete in the NEUST population had an equal chance of being selected for the study. This method ensured that the sample was representative of the population, reducing selection bias and enhancing the validity and generalizability of the findings.

Qualitative methods, interviews, or focus groups provide deeper insights into student-athletes personal experiences, emotions, and coping mechanisms. This rich, narrative data helps to contextualize and explain the numerical findings.

RESULTS

Table 1 Time Management

<u>Time management</u>	<u>Weighted Mean</u>	<u>Verbal Description</u>
1. I fail to create a daily schedule to balance my academic and athletic commitments.	3.09	Often
2. I fail to prioritize my tasks, leaving important academic or athletic responsibilities incomplete.	2.36	Seldom
3. I struggle to balance my academic, athletic, and personal activities effectively.	2.97	Often
4. I fail to stick to the time limits I set for both my academic tasks and athletic training.	3.09	Often
5. I fail to adjust my plans when unexpected events, like	3.10	Often

competitions or travel, interfere with my schedule.

6. I miss deadlines or finish assignments feeling stressed due to juggling academic and athletic demands. 2.93 Often

Grand mean 3.06 Often

Legend: 3.25-4.00: always; 2.50-3.24: often; 1.75-2.49: seldom; 1.00-1.74: never

The data reveals significant insights into the time management challenges faced by respondents balancing academic and athletic commitments. The grand mean of 3.06, interpreted as "Often," indicates that time management issues are prevalent among the group. Among the specific challenges, the highest weighted mean was 3.10, also interpreted as "Often," for the statement, "I fail to adjust my plans when unexpected events, like competitions or travel, interfere with my schedule." This suggests that respondents frequently struggle to adapt their schedules to unforeseen events, underscoring the dynamic nature of balancing academics and athletics, where unexpected changes are common.

On the other hand, the lowest weighted mean was 2.36, interpreted as "Seldom," for the statement, "I fail to prioritize my tasks, leaving important academic or athletic responsibilities incomplete." This indicates that while respondents face challenges in time management, they are relatively better at prioritizing tasks, which can serve as a potential strength to improve overall time management.

The grand mean of 3.06, interpreted as "Often," highlights a consistent difficulty in effectively managing time across various domains of life, such as academic, athletic, and personal activities.

Table 2. Academic Performance

<u>Academic Performance</u>	<u>Weighted Mean</u>	<u>Verbal Description</u>
1. I fail to participate actively in class discussions because of fatigue from sports activities.	2.67	Often
2. I struggle to balance my athletic and academic commitments, resulting in poor grades.	2.67	Often
3. I neglect to seek extra help or resources to improve my academic performance.	3.67	Always
4. I find it hard to stay focused in class after intense practices or games.	2.97	Often
5. I ignore academic weaknesses, prioritizing my athletic goals instead.	3.00	Often
6. I avoid asking teachers or peers for help when I don't understand a topic.	3.37	Often
7. I often feel dissatisfied with my academic achievements due to competing priorities.	2.83	Often
Grand mean	3.02	Often

Legend: 3.25-4.00: always; 2.50-3.24: often; 1.75-2.49: seldom; 1.00-1.74: never

The data reveals significant challenges in academic performance among respondents juggling athletic and academic commitments, as evidenced by a grand mean of 3.02, interpreted as "Often." This indicates that academic struggles are a common concern within this group. The highest weighted mean is 3.67, interpreted as "Always," for the statement: "I neglect to seek extra help or resources to improve my

academic performance." This suggests a persistent reluctance among respondents to actively seek support to enhance their academic outcomes, potentially due to time constraints or a lack of awareness about available resources.

In contrast, the lowest mean score is 2.67, interpreted as "Often," for two statements: "I fail to participate actively in class discussions because of fatigue from sports activities" and "I struggle to balance my athletic and academic commitments, resulting in poor grades." While fatigue and balancing commitments are significant issues, these challenges occur less frequently than neglecting to seek help, highlighting areas where targeted support could alleviate academic struggles.

Table 3. Financial Matters

<u>Financial Matters</u>	<u>Weighted Mean</u>	<u>Verbal Description</u>
1. I worry about not having enough money to cover my basic needs and expenses.	3.19	Often
2. I feel overwhelmed by the pressure to find ways to support myself financially while balancing my studies and training.	2.57	Often
3. I find it difficult to participate in social activities because I cannot afford them.	2.71	Often
4. I feel uncertain about my future financial stability due to limited income opportunities as a student-athlete.	3.35	Always
5. I am often stressed by the need to constantly budget and save, leaving me with little flexibility for unexpected expenses.	3.21	Always
6. My allowance as athlete is not enough to cover all my expenses, which adds to my financial stress.	2.62	Often
Grand mean	2.94	Often

Legend: 3.25-4.00: always; 2.50-3.24: often; 1.75-2.49: seldom; 1.00-1.74: never

The data highlights that financial matters significantly contribute to stress among respondents balancing athletic and academic responsibilities, as reflected in a grand mean of 2.94, interpreted as "Often." The highest weighted mean is 3.35, interpreted as "Always," for the statement: "I feel uncertain about my future financial stability due to limited income opportunities as a student-athlete." This indicates that financial insecurity, particularly concerns about future stability, is a persistent source of stress.

In contrast, the lowest weighted mean is 2.57, interpreted as "Often," for the statement: "I feel overwhelmed by the pressure to find ways to support myself financially while balancing my studies and training." While this remains a source of stress, it occurs less frequently than other financial concerns, suggesting that respondents prioritize immediate worries over long-term pressures.

The grand mean of 2.94 underscores that financial stress is a consistent issue, driven by limited resources, budgeting challenges, and uncertainties about future financial opportunities.

Table 4. Teacher Factor

Teacher-related Factor	Weighted Mean	Verbal Description
1. I feel stressed when teachers do not offer extensions for project submissions due to my participation in competitions.	2.74	Often
2. My teachers do not provide any considerations for my athletic schedule when setting academic deadlines.	2.94	Often
3. I struggle when my teachers do not offer make-up quizzes or alternative assessments when I miss class for athletic commitments.	3.29	Always
4. My teachers do not acknowledge the impact of my sports schedule on my ability to complete academic work on time.	3.04	Often
5. My teachers do not take into account the extra time I need for training and games when assigning coursework.	3.89	Always
6. I feel overwhelmed when there is no option to make up missed lessons or assessments after missing class for athletic reasons.	3.63	Always
7. The lack of flexibility from my teachers creates additional stress when I need to manage both academics and sports.	3.59	Always
Grand mean	3.16	Often

Legend: 3.25-4.00: always; 2.50-3.24: often; 1.75-2.49: seldom; 1.00-1.74: never

The data reveals that teacher-related factors significantly contribute to academic stress among respondents balancing athletic and academic commitments, with a grand mean of 3.16, interpreted as "Often." The highest weighted mean is 3.89, interpreted as "Always," for the statement: "My teachers do not take into account the extra time I need for training and games when assigning coursework." This suggests that the lack of consideration for students' athletic schedules is a major source of stress, with respondents feeling overwhelmed by the demands of both academics and sports.

The lowest weighted mean is 2.74, interpreted as "Often," for the statement: "I feel stressed when teachers do not offer extensions for project submissions due to my participation in competitions." While this remains a source of stress, it occurs less frequently than other issues related to the lack of flexibility from teachers.

The grand mean of 3.16 highlights the consistent stress respondents experience due to teachers' lack of flexibility and understanding regarding their athletic commitments.

Table 5 Social Expectation

<u>Social Expectation</u>	<u>Weighted Mean</u>	<u>Verbal Description</u>
1. I feel pressured by others to perform at my best, even when I am exhausted.	3.13	Often
2. I feel like people expect me to maintain a perfect balance between school, social life, and athletics without support.	2.48	Seldom
3. I feel the weight of the high expectations from my family, coaches, and teammates.	3.08	Often
4. I struggle with the social expectation that I should never show weakness or fatigue, even if I need a break.	3.18	Often
5. I feel the pressure to perform well all the time to meet the expectations of my social circle.	3.73	Always
6. I am often compared to other athletes, which makes me feel the need to constantly outdo my previous performances.	2.17	Seldom
Grand mean 2.96	Often	

Legend: 3.25-4.00: always; 2.50-3.24: often; 1.75-2.49: seldom; 1.00-1.74: never

The data reveals that social expectations contribute significantly to academic stress, with a grand mean of 2.96, interpreted as "Often." The highest weighted mean of 3.73, interpreted as "Always," is for the statement: "I feel the pressure to perform well all the time to meet the expectations of my social circle." This indicates that the pressure to meet social expectations, especially regarding performance, is a major stressor for respondents, as they feel a constant need to excel in academics and athletics. On the other hand, the lowest mean score of 2.17, interpreted as "Seldom," is for the statement: "I am often compared to other athletes, which makes me feel the need to constantly outdo my previous performances." Although comparisons are a stress factor, they occur less frequently than other social pressures.

<u>Academic Stress</u>	<u>Weighted Mean</u>	<u>Verbal Description</u>
Time management	3.06	Often
Academic Performance	3.02	Often
Financial Matters	2.94	Often
Teacher-related Factor	3.16	Often
Social Expectation	2.94	Often
Grand mean	3.16	Often

Legend: 3.25-4.00: always; 2.50-3.24: often; 1.75-2.49: seldom; 1.00-1.74: never

DISCUSSIONS

The following discussion delves into the key challenges faced by student-athletes, as identified in the study, and examines how these factors impact their ability to balance academic and athletic responsibilities. Through a closer look at time management, academic stress, financial concerns, teacher-

related factors, and social expectations, this section explores the underlying issues contributing to their stress and the need for targeted interventions to support their success.

The findings underscore the need for structured interventions to improve respondents' time management skills, a critical challenge often faced by dual-career athletes. As one student-athlete shared, "I feel like I'm constantly juggling between schoolwork, practices, and competitions. It's exhausting trying to fit everything in." This personal account reflects the broader struggles highlighted in previous studies (MacNamara et al., 2010; Stambulova et al., 2015), where student-athletes often experience difficulty balancing their academic and athletic responsibilities. Effective planning and flexibility in managing competing demands are essential. The importance of coping mechanisms such as prioritization, using scheduling tools or applications, and creating contingency plans for unexpected changes can help student-athletes better manage their time. For instance, a respondent noted, "I've started using a digital planner to block time for both school and practice, and it helps me stay on track." Time management workshops and peer mentorship programs can also provide practical guidance and support, as students recognize the value of learning strategies from fellow athletes who have faced similar challenges.

In terms of academic performance, respondents frequently struggle to balance their athletic and academic commitments, as indicated by the grand mean interpreted as "Often." This reflects a persistent challenge that requires targeted support to enhance their ability to manage priorities effectively. As one athlete expressed, "There's always this constant stress of having to prove myself both in the classroom and on the field. It's like I can't give my best to either one." These findings resonate with research that reports academic stress among student-athletes, often resulting from conflicting responsibilities, which can lead to decreased engagement in their studies (Ewing et al., 2018). Similarly, mentorship and academic counseling tailored to the unique needs of student-athletes are vital in addressing these challenges (Lupo et al., 2017). Coping mechanisms such as academic coaching, access to tutoring services, and development of study strategies can help athletes balance their dual commitments. A student-athlete shared, "Having a mentor who understands the struggles has been really helpful in getting me back on track." Encouraging open communication with faculty about their schedules can also foster understanding and accommodations, easing the pressure on student-athletes.

Financial concerns emerged as a significant source of academic stress, with respondents frequently worrying about future financial stability and income limitations, as reflected by the highest mean interpreted as "Always." One participant noted, "I worry about how I'll manage my expenses once my budget runs out. It's hard to focus on school and sports when I'm always thinking about money." This aligns with findings highlighting the financial strain commonly experienced by student-athletes (Kim & Sax, 2014). Budgeting challenges and balancing financial responsibilities with athletic and academic demands only add to their stress. Financial support programs, such as scholarships, financial literacy workshops, and part-time job opportunities tailored to student-athletes' schedules, can help mitigate this stress. Respondents also noted that access to emergency financial aid programs can provide critical relief during times of need, further emphasizing the importance of such initiatives in supporting student-athletes. Teacher-related factors also contribute significantly to the academic stress faced by respondents. A lack of flexibility from teachers, particularly in accommodating athletic schedules when setting deadlines and assignments, was identified as a major stressor. A student-athlete commented, "It's frustrating when professors don't understand that my competition schedule conflicts with their deadlines. Sometimes I feel like I have to choose between my education and my sport." This corresponds with studies emphasizing how rigid academic expectations can amplify stress for student-athletes (Martin & Pritchard, 2013; Lee &

Johnson, 2015). Introducing more adaptable academic policies could significantly reduce these pressures. Coping strategies such as developing negotiation skills to request deadline extensions or alternative assignments and fostering collaborative relationships with teachers can help reduce stress. Institutions could also train faculty on the unique needs of student-athletes to encourage more supportive teaching practices. One respondent shared, “When my professor extended a deadline after I explained my schedule, it made a huge difference. It showed that they cared about my success.”

Finally, social expectations emerged as another critical factor contributing to stress. Respondents often feel pressured to meet the high expectations of peers, family, and coaches, with comparisons to other athletes occasionally adding to their burden. One student-athlete explained, “I feel like I’m constantly being compared to other athletes in my team. It adds more pressure to perform at the highest level, even when I’m struggling.” These results align with research highlighting the significant role social pressures play in the lives of student-athletes (Lupo et al., 2017; Wylleman et al., 2013). Addressing these external expectations through strategies that foster resilience and self-confidence is essential to reducing overall stress. Coping mechanisms such as resilience training, mindfulness exercises, and access to sports psychologists or counselors can help student-athletes navigate social pressures. Creating peer support groups where athletes can share experiences and advice can also foster a sense of community and reduce feelings of isolation. As one participant mentioned, “Talking to other athletes who understand what I’m going through has helped me realize I’m not alone.”

In conclusion, the findings of this study highlight the complex challenges faced by student-athletes in balancing academic, athletic, and personal commitments. Time management, academic stress, financial concerns, teacher-related factors, and social expectations all contribute significantly to the pressures they experience. These challenges call for comprehensive interventions, including better time management support, academic counseling, financial assistance programs, and more flexible academic policies to accommodate the unique needs of student-athletes. Additionally, fostering resilience, providing mental health resources, and addressing social pressures can further mitigate stress and promote their overall well-being. By addressing these issues holistically, institutions can help student-athletes thrive both academically and athletically, leading to improved outcomes and a more supportive environment for their dual careers.

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