Unity in Motion: Student-Athletes' Perspectives on Integrating Team Building and Cohesion Prior to Playing Team Sports

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Abstract

The study endeavoured to uncover the perspectives of student-athletes on the integration of team building and cohesion prior to playing team sports at one of the universities in the Davao Region. This qualitative research utilized a phenomenological approach, specifically a descriptive method. Further, this study is anchored on the constructivism theory of *Jean Piaget.* Constructivism has multiple roots in the psychology and philosophy of this century: perceive the world as individuals. In the context of this study, constructivism theory could be utilized for this study by encouraging students to actively engage in activities and to reflect on their individual experiences in playing team sports. The study included twelve participants who were purposely selected for in-depth interviews. Data were collected in an online interview using the Google Meet application and audio recording software. Based on the thematic analysis performed, the following findings were drawn: two emergent themes: enhancing individuals to meaningful experiences and fostering a supportive social environment. Finally, it is highly recommended to integrate team building and cohesion into any institution that plays team sports. This provides opportunities for student-athletes: to foster a strong sense of unity and team chemistry; to give student-athletes the chance to develop self-awareness and comprehend the cultural and behavioural differences among team members; and to help resolve interpersonal and task-related issues that may hinder team performance, ultimately leading to an overall positive team performance.

Keywords: Team building; cohesion; team sports; student-athletes; perspective

1. Introduction

To be successful, team members must recognize and leverage each other's abilities. Sports place a great value on cohesiveness, and the field of chemistry emphasizes the necessity of team development and cohesion. Team building as a process that assists work groups in becoming more effective at completing tasks and meeting the requirements of their members, Cummings, & Worley. (2015), whereas cohesion is the ability to remain together and is a required trait for groups to survive, (Dion, K. L. 2000). I was told that when children played for the local educational institutions and nearby little league teams year after year, they worked hard to establish the chemistry and giving up needed for functioning as an effective team (Lencioni,

2019), which reduced unequal allocation of work and improved the two coach-athlete and athlete-athlete connections throughout the team (Bloom & Stevens, 2002).

In the international environment, team leaders are confused about how they might structure the team so that it is inclusive and fair, such as by allowing each player to engage for an equal period of time or winning the contest (Lorentzen, 2017). The circumstances may cause negative internal conflicts that are unhelpful and hinder educational and competitive performance (Anker, 2010). Sports require interpersonal relationships between individuals, and the content and quality of such engagement develop the worthy framework of the youth who participate. Bailey (2002).

In the Philippines, it has been discovered that the country has had its lowest showing in the biannual international sporting event over the last six years (Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) 2013). In the previous three SEA Games, the country finished fifth or sixth, (International Olympic Committee (IOC) 2013). The recruitment, training, and selection of athletes for international sports contests are the responsibility of the individual National Sport Associations. In support the idea of Hogan and Norton (2000) strategies, that influenced the elite sporting success.

The Davao Region Athletic Association (DAVRAA) meet 2019 begins on January 27 in my hometown; however, the Davao City ladies' futsal team has yet to complete their training session attendance list. This was revealed to Sunstar Davao by head coach Rachelle "ching" Delos Reyes during a Facebook interview on Monday, January 14, 2019, interviewed by journalist reporter Abayan (2019). In support of the idea of Erdoğdu, M., Sirin, F., Ince, and Ocalan, M. (2014), the motivation is a major factor influencing players' engagement with an event in particular.

Given the scarcity of previous research in this field, I see the importance of conducting my own research. My research focuses on student-athletes' perspectives on their game experiences, examining their personal reflections and social viewpoints. Furthermore, I've noted that the team I'm on did not perform well in prior State Colleges and Universities Athletic Association (SCUAA) games in 2023, which was due in part to their unfamiliarity with their teammates' playing styles as a result of the lockdown. The approach that I am now researching entails providing team development and cohesion prior to the game. This strategy tries to help student-athletes develop self-awareness, comprehend cultural and behavioural variations among team members, and promote unity in order to foster great team chemistry. Helps to overcome interpersonal and task-related difficulties that may affect team performance, resulting in overall favourable team performance.

2. Research Objective

The purpose of this study is to distinguish the student-athletes perspective on the integration of team building and cohesion prior to the game of team as experienced in one of the universities in Davao City. The preceding are the inquiries to be embraced regarding the study's conduct:

What are the perspectives of student-athletes in the integration of team-building and cohesion prior in playing team sports?

2.1 Theoretical Lens

In doing this study, I am guided by the Transformational Learning of *Jack Mezirow* in 1970 as my lens posits that meaningful and lasting learning involves a process of critically reflecting on experiences, engaging in dialogue, and ultimately undergoing a profound shift in perspective. The theory recognizes the complex

interplay of cognitive, emotional, and social factors in the transformative learning process. The study is grounded in *Jack Mezirow's* transformational learning theory from the 1970s, initially associated with adult education. This involves critical reflection of student-athletes, adapting strategies, and integrating new perspectives to foster personal and social growth. The theory's focus on critical reflection and exploring new perspectives aligns with the student-athletes perspective in team building and cohesion prior to playing team sports.
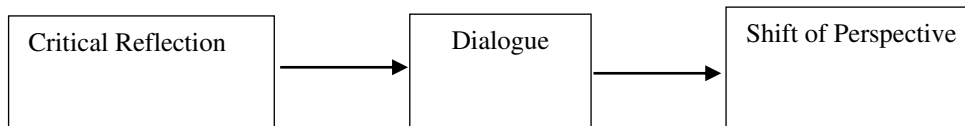
| Critical Reflection | → | Dialogue | → | Shift of Perspective |

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework: *Unity in Motion: Student-Athletes' Perspectives on Integrating Team Building and cohesion Prior to playing Team Sports*

3. Methods

This chapter presents the methods used in this study. These comprise the research design, research participants, research procedure, data collection, data analysis for qualitative data, and research instrument.

3.1 Research Design

This qualitative research used a phenomenological technique, specifically a descriptive one. Creswell (1998) defines qualitative research as an understanding process that draws from various methodological traditions of inquiry while examining a social or human issue. The study was conducted in a natural setting, and the researcher builds a complex, comprehensive picture, analyses language, reports in-depth viewpoints from informants, and attempts to make sense of our phenomena in terms of the interpretations that individuals give them. Various empirical materials are used and collected in qualitative research while being investigated. A qualitative research technique called descriptive phenomenology aims to comprehend the significance and essence of the student-athletes' perspectives on integrating team building and cohesion prior to playing team sports.

This study examined participants' perceptions and aimed to address specific questions. It collected qualitative data to uncover the student-athletes' perspectives on integrating team building and cohesion prior to playing team sports. Using content analysis, the data were transcribed, processed, and integrated into a unified setting for comparison and identification of differences.

3.2 Research Participants

There were five (5) interviewed participants in this research. Participants were chosen to respond to this research for these reasons: they are student-athletes on the volleyball team at a university institution. The study was conducted at one of the universities in the Davao Region.

3.3 Research Procedure

In my research, I employed a method known as purposive sampling to choose participants. Using this approach, participants were selected according to particular criteria relevant to my study issue Creswell et. Al, (2012). My intention was to specifically seek out individuals who could provide insightful feedback on the topic I was studying. I could have chosen individuals to reflect a variety of traits using the greatest variety sampling. As an alternative, I could have used snowball sampling, in which I was directed to other individuals by current participants who could offer pertinent viewpoints for the research. Using this method, I was able to carefully interview people who could add the most to the scope and depth of my study.

3.4 Data Collection

Asking for Permission to Conduct the Study. Asking permission to conduct the study. Before conducting the study and as part of the research ethics, I sent a consent letter to the dean in of student-athletes from one of the universities in the Davao Region, asking for permission and recommendation to conduct a study titled " *Unity in Motion: Student-Athletes' Perspectives on Integrating Team Building and cohesion Prior to playing Team Sports*". Before conducting this study, I formally asked three experts/validators to validate the self-made guide questions.

Administration, Collection, and Transcription of Qualitative Data. Participants in this study underwent a virtual interview via Google Meet after providing informed consent. To facilitate their participation, a budget of 90 pesos for internet connectivity was allocated. Additionally, the necessary tools, such as laptops and software applications, were provided for data storage and safety. The data was collected during the interview, with participants' permission, following the order of the interview questions. Responses were recorded, transcribed, and analysed using thematic analysis. The privacy of participants and the confidentiality of gathered information were assured. The acquired information was tallied based on the received data. The major sources of data for this research are the perspective of the student-athletes on integrating team building and cohesion prior to playing team sports in terms of individual and social environment. Along with the data coming from the interview, the researcher of this study also gathered other forms of data, observations, and documents, rather than relying on a single data source.

3.5 Data Analysis for Qualitative Data

This study employed the Colaizzi Method and thematic analysis as data analysis techniques. I looked over the information obtained from an interview using Colaizzi's seven processes. Colaizzi's data analysis approach is a technique for assessing qualitative research data in order to identify important information and group it into categories or themes (Writer, 2020).

To get a sense of the participants and read the content of the interview, I read each participant's description in the first phase. I tried my best to understand the responses to understand what they were trying to say. Second, I pulled out critical phrases related to the research question. To achieve the study's goal, the statements I pulled out had to address the research objectives. Finally, I developed meanings. Meanings were assigned to those statements. Also, the meanings were based on earlier studies, and an analysis was provided. Fourth, I created clusters of themes out of the meanings that were collected. To develop themes for it, I had to categorize the meanings. Fifth, I combined the theme clusters into an emergent theme. I developed the underlying phenomenon structure and labeled it with a clear-cut statement. Sixth, I combined the findings to explain the subject thoroughly and followed up with each participant to confirm the findings and get more details.

Additionally, I synthesized texture and structure into narratives, incorporating textural and structural details of events. Composite descriptions were formed by combining universally shared meaning units. The essence of the phenomenon was captured by removing individual meaning units from the composite descriptions. The group was represented through third-person composite narratives. The final phase involved synthesizing narratives from all group members.

3.6 Research Instrument

In the context of my study, I used the semi-structured interview guide during the In-Depth Interview with the participants. Probing questions aligned with the research objective to meet the research goal. Probing questions helped the researcher extract all the information needed for the study. The interview guide questions were constructed and validated by the experts in research.

I also asked some experts from the community to validate the questions. In this way, opinions were extracted. In validating, the interview guide questions and the validation sheet were sent to the validators online. The validators' responses were retrieved the same way they were delivered. The questionnaire was validated to ensure the data gathered aligned with the study's research objectives. Likewise, it made the results of this study clear, substantial, and dependable as it achieved the study's primary purpose and to avoid misleading information and poor results. It is always best to ensure that data are attuned to the research objectives to avoid biases. Meanwhile, as a researcher, I also participated in the instrument as an interviewer.
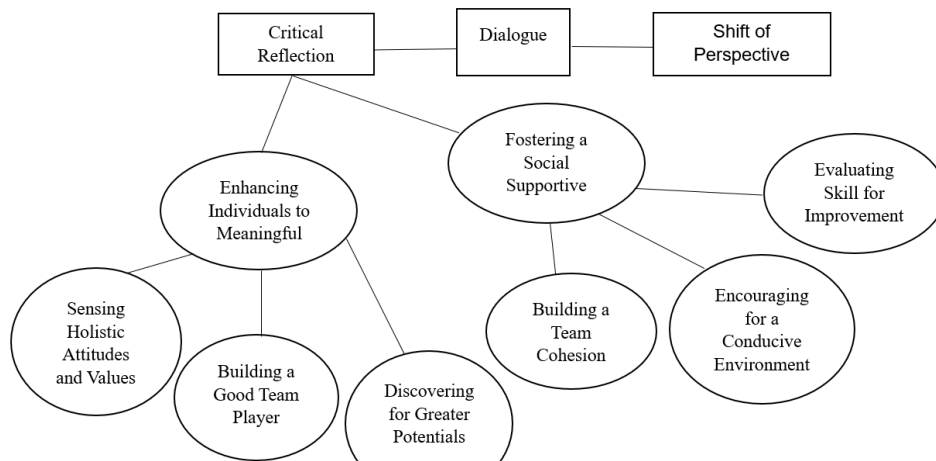
4. Results and Discussion

This chapter summarizes key findings and highlight's themes from interviews offering a narrative to give meaning to participants' perspective.

From the data gathered, there were two significant themes on the student athletes' perspective on integrating team building and cohesion prior to playing team sports. I extracted from the in-depth interview. Both these themes emerged from critical reflection. These are enhancing individuals to meaningful experience and fostering a supportive social environment.

As a researcher, I focused on the student-athletes perspective on integrating team building and cohesion prior to playing team sports. Students shared stories of perspective, experience, and the challenges they faced while participating in team sports. I observed their struggles during the interview as they played team sports without any background on how their teammates played. With the integration of team building and cohesion, they shared their positive perspective, which helped the success of the team. Personally, these insights deepen my understanding of the value of team building and cohesion to integrate as they play team sports. It's an acknowledgment of the holistic impact of the individual and promotes teamwork and positivity within the team.

Figure 2. Emerging themes: Unity in Motion: Student-Athletes' Perspectives on Integrating Team Building and cohesion Prior to playing Team Sports

This research transcends academia, offering a glimpse into the profound experiences and emotions linked to this pursuit.

During interviews, students revealed that enhancing individuals to meaningful experience, emphasizing their perspective on team building, and cohesion in playing team sports. Three sub-themes emerged: sensing holistic attitudes and values, building a good team player and discovering for greater potentials; addressing their individual perspective as they experienced team building and cohesion prior to playing team sports.

Another significant theme encapsulated fostering a supportive social environment, encompassing the essential aspects of student-athletes as they play team sports. This theme underscores: building a team cohesion; encouraging a conducive environment; and evaluating skill for improvement. It emphasizes the social perspective of student-athletes for continuous learning and adapting to the evolving demands of playing team sports.

Enhancing individuals to meaningful experience. As an educator, personal experience in my life is necessary, especially when teaching. Sharing my personal experience helps to elaborate more ideas and give a real-life example. The participants shared their personal experience with integrating team building into team sports, which gives them a positive outcome as they already know their teammates. The individual experience allows the student-athletes to engage in self-reflection, which leads to a more enriching and meaningful experience for each person. In support of the study by Meyer et al. (2008), practitioners and consultants offer a variety of services, such as team building, recognizing issues, connection enhancement, team and individual motivation, resolving disputes, and individual performance enhancement, in order to support athletes in team sports environments. Personal development experiences have been a part of these activities.

Sensing holistic attitudes and values. As derived in the interview conducted online, among the essential themes that emerged was sensing attitudes and values. Attitudes and values develop interdependently as the influence to transfer of knowledge and skills to a new context. The participants realized how important team building and cohesion is in the process of making a big perspective and wider decision for one's success. According to Participant 1 and 3, it developed a sense of camaraderie, harmonious communication and improved decision making for better outcomes.

"These activities help teammates develop trust, communication skills, and a sense of camaraderie. When teammates trust and understand each other, they can work together more effectively on the field or court. This leads to better coordination, improved decision-making, and a higher chance of success." P3, IDI, L16-19

"Building confidence, motivation, resilience, promoting positive communication, fostering collaboration, and nurturing a goal-oriented mindset." P3, IDI, L45-45

"It will build trust and support among the team members to play both off and on the court. So, it has been a huge help. Especially the communication within the team." P1, IDI, L7-10

From the participants' perspective, sensing attitudes and values are their experiences as they integrate team building and cohesion in team sports. Participants emphasized that team building enhances individuals both on and off the court by promoting camaraderie, communication, trust, and support, leading to holistic

development that impacts them in various ways and shows how they value team building. Supported by the research of Alfermann, Stambulova, & Zemaityte (2004) and Stambulova, Stephan, & Järphag (2007), it is also believed that a holistic approach to the study of how athletic potential is nurtured is essential. These studies have identified national culture and national sports systems as significant factors in athletes' transitions.

Building a Good Team Player. The participants have emerged in the second theme which is building a good team player. Every sport requires its participants to be strong team players, yet improving as a team player is a personal journey that cannot be summed up in a single approach. all. A good team player is one who supports and facilitates his teammates aims and values by acting as both an activator and an inhibitor. It's critical to comprehend not only your own interests but also those of your teammates. As a team, you cannot expect to succeed until you function as a cohesive unit. The Participants show pertinent characteristics in supporting and facilitating the teams. The more you can do to the team and make their work easier, the more cohesive the team will be. And that can pay off in terms of productivity and desired results.

"It encourages the player, or the member can collaborate and cooperate for a high chance of winning." - P2, IDI, L32-34

" I need to strengthen the trust of my teammates in me, and I need to trust them for the success of the group." - P2, IDI, L39-41

"Creates a sense of purpose and motivation within the team. This activity is encouraging the teammates to support and push each other to achieve the desired outcomes." - P3, IDI, L112-113

Furthermore, participants mentioned that experiencing team building and cohesion in sports leads to building a good team player, helping them to develop a positive mindset and better understand their teammates' playing styles through gestures. Observing their teammates' play can enhance their overall performance by enabling the development of tactics and strategies, showcasing the positive impact of effective team dynamics on understanding the game. To support the idea of Yukelson (2001), it is advised that sport psychology team-building programs incorporate exercises that foster understanding among team members. The premise behind these events is "mutual sharing," in which people exchange ideas, opinions, and sentiments regarding certain problems or subjects.

Discovering for greater potential. Gaining insight into the viewpoints of student-athletes can help us better understand how relationships among teammates affect their chances of success both on and off the field. building a sense of camaraderie and support among team members in addition to improving athletic performance. To wit, some of the participants had expressed:

"You will know the skills of your teammates, their strengths, weaknesses, and establish open communication to adapt to the way your teammates play and to be able to enjoy the game." P1, IDI, L35-37

"Meet new friends and mingle with other people to get to know their character, understand the way they communicate, and observe their gestures."
-P5, IDI, L24-25

Furthermore, discovering greater potentials is one of the individual experiences of student-athletes when integrating team building and cohesion in team sports. Participants shared that team building facilitates constructive feedback on their performance in team sports, enabling teammates to correct mistakes and provide positive advice for improvement. With that they developed their skills as well though their open

communication and through observation that enhances their mindset in playing team sports. In support of the study by Cannon-Bowers (2001), this kind of intra-team communication is known as "shared cognition" in organizational psychology. It is believed that information sharing and personal disclosure improve mutual understanding and help team members comprehend each other's values, beliefs, attitudes, and motivations.

Fostering a Supportive Social Environment. From my perspective, fostering a supportive social environment has played a significant role in my daily life, as the people around us can help motivate us to achieve our various goals and have a profound impact on individual well-being and collective success. Based on the in-depth interview of the participants, it was revealed that fostering a supportive social environment is the second emergent theme that indicates the integration of team building and cohesion in playing team sports has a significant role in the social environment. In support of the idea of Tremblay, M. A., Blanchard, C. M., Taylor, S., & Pelletier, L. G. (2009) need-supportive coaches engage, demonstrate empathy, and show respect in order to build a friendly rapport with athletes and help them feel valued and connected to one another.

Building a Team Cohesion. The level of familiarity within a particular group may have an impact on the success of the team. A sense of significance or belongingness could help the team reach its objectives and produce the desired results. Effective and efficient work completion is attributed to a group's ability to maintain team cohesion. The participants expressed their dynamic nature and emotional dimensions in engaging team building and cohesive integration in playing team sports.

"They can feel that they are connected within the team and valued; with that, they are motivated to give their best." P1, IDI, L96-97

"To increase performance, improve communication and coordination since team building has already been completed. You are already informed about your strengths and weaknesses. With this knowledge, you can communicate effectively, create open communication, help each other, support your teammates, and identify where you can assist them during the game." P1, IDI, L154-158

The participants highlighted that they felt they were connected with the team as their teammates allow them to participate even if they are not good enough in the game because they just enjoy the game without putting pressure on it. To support the study of Yukelson (2001), sport psychology team-building initiatives ought to incorporate strategies that foster understanding among team members. The underlying notion of these kinds of activities is "mutual sharing," which gives participants the chance to exchange ideas, opinions, and sentiments around certain problems or subjects.

Encouraging for a Conducive Environment. Encouraging a conducive team environment is one of the experiences of the participants that they have encountered during team building and cohesion as it is integrated into team sports. According to the participants, the team-building created a supportive and encouraging environment. To wit, some of the participants had expressed:

"They will create a positive, motivational climate by establishing a supportive and encouraging environment because they feel connected within the team, valued, and more motivated to give their best. For example, during a volleyball game, Ms. Kyecel and Ms. Toralba said, 'I can't do it. As a team, we encouraged them by saying, 'You can do it, trust your skills, trust your instinct." I will tell them to not be under pressure, because it is not important to win the game but, most importantly, to enjoy it. Even though we lost the game. Everything was okay, because we enjoyed it." …"- P1, IDI, L94-104

Participants highlighted that team-building activities in team sports fostered a conducive environment,

emphasizing encouraging their teammates, and with that, their teammates were motivated to play the game because they felt connected within the team and enhanced overall group dynamics. In support of the idea of Yukelson (2001), these were intended to promote a procedure that would develop an atmosphere of understanding between parties. She attested to the intervention's beneficial emotional effects on her team, which included boosted self-esteem and a feeling of unity.

Evaluating skill for improvement. Evaluating skill for improvement is one of the experiences of the participants that they have encountered during team building and cohesion as it is integrated into team sports. According to the participants, they learned the weaknesses and strengths of their teammates, and with that, they were able to adjust and adopt the playing style. Through team building and cohesion in team sports, participants reported a valuable experience of skill development and adaptation, where they gained insight into the strengths and weaknesses of their teammates, enabling them to adjust and adopt playing styles for improved collective performance. To wit, some of the participants had expressed:

"...Each individual has the opportunity to learn about the other player's weaknesses and strengths in their playing style. With that, you can observe that "he/she's weak in this, but he/she has strengths in this skill." "I will assist them because this skill is their weakness." Because of team-building, you can adjust your tolerance. Team building helps a lot to increase tolerance because you have already observed their weaknesses and strengths. In the end, I will adjust or adapt their playing style to improve communication and enjoy the game." -P1, IDI, L124-132

According to the participant interviews, each player has the chance to learn about their teammates' playing styles through team-building. Because they had already seen how their teammates played, they were able to adjust and grow in their tolerance to comprehend one another. In support of the idea of Bloom et al. Stevens & Bloom, Voight & Callaghan (2003) Overall, these findings support earlier studies that found team building to be an important and successful process in a team's development.

In my research, the student-athletes' perspective on integrating team building and cohesion prior to playing team sports highlights the enhancement of individual experience and the fostering of a supportive social environment. By emphasizing the positive perspective of integrating team building and cohesion, student-athletes not only promote personal development but also foster a supportive social environment that aids in their overall performance.

4.1 Implications and Recommendations

This portion presents the conclusions and recommendations of the researcher. The researcher summarized the findings in order to answer the problems regarding the study while recommendations are for the development of the present status about the topic presented by the researcher. The primary data were collected through in-depth interviews. The results of the interview provided answers to problems stated in the previous chapter.

From the view of the participants, the following conclusions were drawn about emergent themes: enhancing individuals to meaningful experiences and fostering a supportive social environment. The first emergent theme is enhancing an individual's meaningful experience, emphasizing their perspective on team building, and cohesion in playing team sports. Another significant theme encapsulated fostering a supportive social environment, encompassing the essential aspects of student-athletes as they play team sports.

Based on the implications of the study, the following are the recommendations based on the two

emergent themes. It is highly recommended to integrate team building and cohesion into any institution prior to playing team sports: first this provides opportunities for student-athletes to develop self-awareness and understand cultural and behavioural differences among team members; help to improve the personal perspective of the student-athletes when playing team sports. Second, it will help to develop their social perspective, as it emphasizes unity and fosters strong chemistry within the team. Moreover, it helps resolve interpersonal and task-related issues that may impair team performance, ultimately leading to an overall positive team performance.

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