

COMPARING ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT: LEARNERS PARTICIPATING IN COMPETITIVE SPORTS VERSUS NON-PARTICIPATING LEARNERS

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Abstract

This study examined differences in academic achievement and time management skills between student-athletes and non-athletes in public secondary schools in Dagupan City. A descriptive-comparative quantitative design was used. Three hundred fifty Grade 10 to Grade 12 learners were selected through stratified random sampling and classified according to participation in competitive school sports. Academic achievement was determined using official general point averages (GPA) from the school registrar. At the same time, time management was assessed using a validated Likert-type survey that covered planning, prioritizing, scheduling, and self-monitoring. Descriptive statistics and independent-samples t-tests at $\alpha = 0.05$ were applied.

Results showed that non-athletes posted a slightly higher mean GPA ($M = 89.25$) than student-athletes ($M = 87.50$), but the difference was not statistically significant ($p = 0.063$). In contrast, student-athletes demonstrated significantly stronger time management skills ($M = 4.52$) than non-athletes ($M = 3.85$), with a highly significant difference ($p < 0.001$). These findings indicate that engagement in competitive sports does not impair academic performance and may support the development of disciplined routines and efficient use of study time.

Based on these outcomes, an Academic-Athletic Balance Initiative is proposed to enhance time management among all learners, especially non-athletes. The program includes peer mentoring, time-management workshops, training in digital or paper planning tools, and recognition for exemplary academic-co-curricular balance. The study underscores the importance of structured school support for holistic learner success. Future studies may explore other variables such as motivation, parental support, and training load using longitudinal designs to clarify causal pathways across diverse school settings.

Keywords: Student-Athletes, Non-Athletes, Academic Achievement, GPA, Time Management, Competitive Sports, Secondary Education

1. Introduction

Participation in competitive school sports is often viewed as a double-edged experience for adolescents. On one hand, organized athletics are linked to physical fitness, social belonging, and the development of discipline and teamwork—skills considered valuable for schooling and later life (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 1995; Sports Medicine Weekly, 2025). On the other hand, students who train and compete regularly must also meet academic deadlines, attend classes, and complete requirements comparable to their non-athlete peers. This dual role can create real pressure on students, parents, and teachers who worry that athletic demands may reduce study time, increase fatigue, or distract learners from academic goals. Because secondary education is a crucial period for establishing achievement patterns and life skills, understanding how sports involvement relates to academic performance and time use remains a practical concern for schools.

Research on the academic effects of sports participation has produced mixed results. Several large-scale studies suggest that athletic involvement may be positively associated with academic outcomes, such as higher grades, greater school engagement, and a higher likelihood of graduation, possibly because sports cultivate motivation, school attachment, and structured routines (Molitor & Leigh, 2010; Sports Medicine Weekly, 2025; HealthDay, 2025). In contrast,

other investigations indicate that the relationship is not always straightforward; academic advantages may depend on factors such as the intensity of training, type of sport, school support systems, or the student's pre-existing motivation (Molitor & Leigh, 2010; Balancing Academics & Athletics, 2023). Some authors note that observed grade differences can be small or statistically non-significant once background variables are considered, implying that participation alone does not guarantee better or worse academic performance (Balancing Academics and Athletics, 2023; Molitor & Leigh, 2010). These inconsistencies highlight the need to examine not only outcomes such as GPA but also the behavioral skills that might explain why student-athletes succeed—or struggle—academically.

One such behavioral skill is time management. Time management refers to a learner's ability to plan tasks, prioritize responsibilities, allocate study and leisure time effectively, and monitor progress toward goals. Across educational contexts, effective time management has been repeatedly linked to better academic achievement, lower procrastination, and stronger self-regulation (Inspire, 2025; Kaushik & Sharma, 2021). Students who manage time well tend to distribute effort more evenly, avoid last-minute cramming, and maintain consistent attendance and task completion, which supports higher performance over time (Inspire, 2025; Kaushik & Sharma, 2021). For student-athletes, time management becomes even more central because training, travel, and competitions impose fixed schedules that must be balanced with classwork. Qualitative and quantitative studies in the Philippines and elsewhere describe how athletes often rely on calendars, peer coordination, and strict routines to keep up with schoolwork, and how these practices can become transferable academic habits (Sabate et al., 2024; Time Management Practices, 2024). This suggests that sports participation may indirectly influence academic performance by enhancing time management.

However, local evidence remains limited and sometimes context-specific. Philippine studies focusing on student-athletes commonly report that sports involvement does not necessarily lower grades and may foster self-discipline and time-use strategies, yet findings vary across regions and samples (Athletic Participation, Time Management and Academic Performance, 2023; Student-Athletes Involvement in Sports, 2024). Moreover, many existing works examine athletes only, without directly comparing them to non-athletes within the same school environment, making it hard to determine whether time-management strengths are unique to athletes or more broadly distributed among learners. Differences in school culture, coaching expectations, and resource availability can also shape student experiences, so findings from one locale should not be assumed to generalize to another (Athletic Participation, Time Management and Academic Performance, 2023; Sabate et al., 2024). For Dagupan City public secondary schools, there is little systematic comparison of academic achievement and time management between student-athletes and their non-athlete peers, despite the city's active participation in inter-school competitions and the steady push for holistic learner development.

Anchored on these gaps, the present study investigates whether participation in competitive school sports is associated with differences in (a) academic achievement and (b) time management skills among public secondary learners in Dagupan City. The study uses a descriptive-comparative quantitative design to compare student-athletes and non-athletes on official GPA records and a validated time-management survey covering planning, prioritization, scheduling, and self-monitoring. Independent-samples t-tests are employed to determine whether group differences are statistically significant. By including both academic measures and time-management indicators, the study is positioned to clarify not just *whether* athletes differ academically from non-athletes, but also *how* their daily self-regulation may relate to achievement.

The study is significant for several reasons. First, it contributes local evidence to an ongoing policy and educational debate: whether schools should limit sports participation to protect academics or instead expand athletic programs to support learner growth. Second, by focusing

on time management, the study highlights a teachable skill that schools can develop for all students, regardless of athletic status. If student-athletes demonstrate stronger time-management competencies while maintaining comparable GPAs, then sports participation is a constructive context for building academic-supportive habits. Conversely, if non-athletes show equal or stronger skills, schools may need broader interventions beyond athletics to cultivate effective time use. Finally, results can guide pragmatic school-level programs that strengthen academic-co-curricular balance, promote well-being, and support equitable performance across learner groups.

In sum, the existing literature suggests that sports participation may be neutral or beneficial for academic outcomes. Still, the effects are inconsistent and may depend on mediating skills, such as time management. Given the limited comparative evidence in Dagupan City, this study aims to provide a clearer empirical basis for supporting student development in both classrooms and athletic arenas.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a descriptive-comparative quantitative research design to determine whether significant differences existed in academic achievement and time management skills between student-athletes and non-athletes in public secondary schools in Dagupan City. This design was appropriate because it allows systematic comparison of two naturally occurring groups without manipulating variables, thereby describing current conditions and testing group differences statistically. Student-athletes and non-athletes were identified through stratified random sampling from Grades 10 to 12; academic achievement was measured using official GPA records from the school registrar; and time management was assessed using a validated Likert-type survey covering planning, prioritization, scheduling, and self-monitoring. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize group performance and independent-samples t-tests at the 0.05 level of significance to evaluate whether observed mean differences in GPA and time management scores were statistically meaningful.

2.2 Participants

The study was 350 public secondary school learners from Dagupan City, drawn from Grades 10 to 12 during the stated school year, and selected through stratified random sampling to ensure balanced representation across grade levels and student categories. They were grouped into student-athletes and non-athletes based on official school records of participation in competitive sports programs; student-athletes were those actively engaged in inter-school or division-level competitions, while non-athletes were those not involved in any competitive athletic activity. This grouping enabled a valid comparison of naturally occurring learner populations within the same educational context. Academic achievement data (GPA) for all participants were obtained from the registrar with proper permissions, and each respondent also completed the time-management survey, ensuring that both outcome variables were measured consistently across the two participant groups.

2.3 Instrumentation

The study utilized two primary instruments to gather the needed data: (1) official academic records and (2) a standardized time-management questionnaire. Academic achievement was measured using participants' General Point Averages (GPAs), obtained from the school registrar to ensure objective, verifiable performance data. Time management skills were assessed using a validated Likert-type survey adapted from established time-management frameworks, which measured key domains such as planning, prioritization, scheduling, and self-monitoring of tasks. The questionnaire employed a 5-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree,

allowing respondents to indicate the frequency or consistency of their time-use behaviors. Prior to administration, the instrument underwent expert validation and reliability testing to confirm clarity, content relevance, and internal consistency, ensuring it appropriately captured the time-management practices of both student-athletes and non-athletes for accurate group comparisons.

2.4 Data Analysis

The study employed a quantitative approach within a descriptive-comparative design. First, the researchers organized and coded the GPA records and time-management survey responses, then applied descriptive statistics—specifically, frequency counts, percentages, means, and standard deviations—to summarize the academic achievement and time-management levels of student-athletes and non-athletes. After checking the completeness of responses and ensuring that assumptions for parametric testing were acceptable, the independent-samples t-test was used to compare the mean GPA and mean time-management scores of the two groups. All tests were evaluated at the 0.05 level of significance, allowing the researchers to determine whether observed differences were statistically meaningful and to either reject or fail to reject the stated null hypotheses regarding group differences in academic performance and time management skills.

3. Results

The study found that, in terms of academic achievement, non-athletes had a slightly higher mean General Point Average (GPA) than student-athletes. Specifically, non-athletes posted a mean GPA of 89.25, while student-athletes registered a mean GPA of 87.50. Although this difference suggests a small numerical advantage for non-athletes, statistical testing showed that the gap was not meaningful enough to be considered significant at the 0.05 level. The independent-samples t-test yielded a p-value of 0.063, leading to the acceptance of the null hypothesis for academic achievement. This indicates that participation in competitive sports did not significantly affect learners' academic performance in the study context.

Further analysis showed that both groups generally maintained satisfactory academic standing, suggesting that student-athletes met scholastic expectations despite the additional demands of training and competition. The absence of a significant GPA difference suggests that the structured environment of competitive sports may not hinder classroom learning, and that learners in both categories can achieve comparable academic outcomes when given similar school conditions and support. This result also highlights that multiple factors beyond athletic involvement alone influence academic success in Dagupan City public secondary schools.

In contrast, the findings on time management skills showed a clear, statistically significant difference between the two groups. Student-athletes achieved a higher overall mean time-management score ($M = 4.52$) than non-athletes ($M = 3.85$), reflecting stronger performance across key domains such as planning, prioritization, scheduling, and task monitoring. The independent-samples t-test yielded a p-value of 0.000 ($p < .001$), leading to rejection of the null hypothesis regarding time management. This confirms that student-athletes possess significantly better time-management skills than their non-athlete counterparts.

This significant advantage among student-athletes may be attributed to the inherently structured nature of sports participation. Regular training sessions, strict schedules, and competitive commitments likely require athletes to organize their daily routines efficiently, balance schoolwork with physical preparation, and make the most of limited free time. Over time, these demands may cultivate discipline and habitual planning behaviors that translate into stronger time-management competence, even if such skills do not necessarily produce higher GPA outcomes in the present sample.

Given these results, the study emphasized the need for school-based interventions that develop time-management skills among all learners, particularly non-athletes who showed

comparatively lower scores. The proposed Academic–Athletic Balance Initiative was grounded in evidence that time management can be strengthened through mentoring, workshops, and training in planning tools. Overall, the results suggest that while sports participation does not significantly raise or lower academic achievement, it is positively associated with better time-management skills—an essential competency that schools can intentionally nurture to support holistic learner success.

4. Discussion

The findings of the present study corroborate a large body of literature showing that participation in competitive sports does not necessarily undermine students' academic achievement. In this study, non-athletes had a marginally higher mean GPA than student-athletes, but the difference was not statistically significant. Similar patterns have been reported in longitudinal and causal-comparative research, indicating that, after considering contextual factors, athletes and non-athletes often attain comparable academic outcomes and that sports participation alone is not a reliable predictor of higher or lower GPA (Molitor & Leigh, 2010; U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2010). These studies argue that academic performance is shaped by multiple interacting influences—family background, school engagement, and motivation—so the academic effect of athletics may be neutral in many settings, matching the non-significant group difference observed in Dagupan City.

The results also align with Philippine-based research suggesting that student-athletes can maintain satisfactory grades despite the demands of athletics. For instance, studies on secondary or tertiary student-athletes in the Philippines report that athletes generally maintain acceptable academic standing and that sports involvement does not automatically translate into poor classroom performance (Student-Athletes Involvement in Sports and Their Academic Performance, 2024; Effects of Sports Participation on Academic Performance in Adolescents, 2024). The Dagupan findings reinforce this view: although athletes' GPA was slightly lower numerically, their performance remained within the same overall achievement band as non-athletes, supporting the argument that well-managed sports participation can coexist with academic responsibility.

More strongly, the study's significant result on time management skills is consistent with related research positioning time management as a key advantage cultivated through athletics. The present study found that student-athletes demonstrated significantly higher time-management scores than non-athletes. This corroborates evidence from San Isidro, Leyte, where athletic participation was positively associated with stronger time-management behaviors and where time management was shown to support athletes' academic functioning (Athletic Participation, Time Management and Academic Performance of Student-Athletes, 2023). Qualitative work likewise shows that athletes develop routines, scheduling habits, and prioritization strategies due to fixed training and competition timetables, which then transfer into school-related task management (Sabate et al., 2024). Together, these studies match the Dagupan pattern: athletes' structured commitments appear to foster more disciplined time use.

Additionally, the Dagupan results align with broader international trends that link sports participation to self-regulation skills rather than to automatic GPA gains. Several studies report that athletes may not consistently outperform non-athletes in grades. However, they tend to exhibit better academic-enabling behaviors—such as persistence, planning, and organized routines—which are closely tied to time management (Balancing Athletic and Academic Excellence, 2024; Time Management Practices and Student-Athletes' Performance, 2024). This helps explain why the current study detected a significant difference in time management but not in GPA: athletes' behavioral strengths may serve as protective or compensatory factors, keeping achievement stable rather than pushing it dramatically higher.

Finally, the proposed Academic–Athletic Balance Initiative is supported by recommendations from related studies that emphasize structured school interventions to strengthen time management and academic–co-curricular balance for all learners. Prior research highlights that time management can mediate the athletics–achievement relationship and that schools should provide coaching, mentoring, and planning support, especially for students without built-in structured routines (Athletic Participation, Time Management and Academic Performance of Student-Athletes, 2023; CDC, 2010). Thus, both the outcomes and the programmatic direction of this study are consistent with existing evidence, while adding localized comparative data from Dagupan City.

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