

## INEQUALITY IN EDUCATION: CHALLENGES HIGH-ACHIEVING ATHLETES FACE WITH ACADEMIC DEMANDS

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### Abstract

This study aims to understand the specific challenges faced by student athletes who do not get special treatment in their education. This includes balancing time demands between training and study, as well as facing the same academic expectations as non-athlete students. In the absence of tailored educational programs for high-achieving athletes, they often have difficulty maintaining a balance between sporting and academic commitments. This research methodology uses a qualitative approach with in-depth interviews and descriptive data analysis. Inequalities faced by high-achieving athletes in an educational environment. This study examined the experiences of 47 student athletes from various sports (cabor), with data showing distribution by gender, age, and type of cabor. Of the 47 athletes, 49% were men and 51% were women, with ages varying from 17 to 28 years. Karate is the sport with the most participation (25.53%), followed by volleyball (17.02%) and several other sports with a lower percentage. This article not only reveals the problems faced by student-athletes in an education system that does not take into account their specific needs, but also provides insight into how supporting policies and programs can be developed to help them. This includes recommendations for universities and other educational institutions in designing more inclusive and supportive curricula and policies for high-achieving athletes. In conclusion, this study makes an important contribution to the understanding of inequalities in education, particularly in the context of student athletes. It offers an important insight into how educational institutions can be more responsive to the unique needs of this student segment, thus helping them to succeed in both the sporting and academic arenas.

**Keywords:** Educational, Psychological, Athlete.

### INTRODUCTION

In education, inequality often comes in many forms and contexts. One aspect that has received less attention is the challenges faced by outstanding athletes in the academic environment (Saputra and Subagio 2017). Student athletes, who struggle to balance the demands of training and competition with academic responsibilities, often face unique obstacles in pursuing their education (Darisman, Prasetiyo, and Bayu 2021; Musfah 2021). This study aims to highlight and understand this inequality, focusing on 47 student athletes from Padang State University (UNP) who come from various sports. Through an analysis of data that included distribution by gender, age, and sport, the study sought to delve deeper into the specific challenges these athletes face in educational settings that often do not provide them with special treatment or support.

The demographic distribution of the study sample revealed significant diversity, both in terms of gender and age. With 49% male and 51% female, the study reflects an almost equal gender balance. The age range of athletes, which ranges from 17 to 28 years old, shows diversity in the life stages and academic challenges they face. Karate, as the sport with the most participation, followed by volleyball and other sports,

highlights the diversity of athletic interests among students. This diversity not only provides context for analysis, but also highlights the importance of understanding the unique experiences of each athlete in the context of their education (Rif'iy Qomarrullah et al. 2022; Wijayanto 2021).

The particular challenges faced by these student-athletes are rooted in a lack of recognition and support of their unique needs in an academic environment (Dwiyoogo 2009; Latuconsina 2014). Without programs or policies specifically designed to help athletes excel, they are often forced to navigate the dual demands of the sporting and academic worlds without sufficient assistance. This issue not only affects their academic performance, but can also exert significant psychological pressure, given that they must balance a commitment to excel in two highly competitive fields (Arwandi et al. 2023; Bafirman, Munir, et al. 2023; Delyana et al. 2024; HB et al. 2023). The study delves into these complex dynamics, seeking to understand how these inequalities affect their academic and athletic experiences (Hoedaya 2007; Yaini 2020).

The results of this study are not only relevant to student athletes and their educational institutions, but also make an important contribution to a broader understanding of inequalities in education. By highlighting the challenges faced by student athletes, the study enriches the discussion on how educational institutions can be more responsive to the unique needs of different segments of their student students (Sukmawati 2021; Yudhoyono and ALW 2021). This paves the way for the development of policies and programs that not only recognize, but also actively support a balance between sporting and academic achievement. Thus, this research not only helps in addressing existing inequalities, but also encourages the creation of a more inclusive and supportive educational environment for all students (Wibowo, Hidayatullah, and Kiyatno 2017).

In the context of research on inequalities in education, particularly concerning student athletes, there have been significant developments in the current academic literature. Previous studies have consistently highlighted the challenges faced by student-athletes, including difficulty in managing time demands and pressure to excel in both sports and academics. Research by Yasiroh & Siantoro, (2019) and Candra, (2016) These are just a few examples that explore this dynamic, revealing how athletes often get caught up in role conflicts. Further, the literature also acknowledges gaps in the academic support provided to athletes compared to non-athlete students, as described in the work (Septian 2017; Tuwianto 2018). However, most of these studies focused on higher education institutions in Western countries, particularly the United States, thus leaving room for further research in different geographical and cultural contexts.

Recently, the focus of research has shifted toward understanding how educational policies and programs can be tailored to better support student athletes. Study by Kamilah et al., (2023); Saputra & Subagio, (2017) These are some examples that examine the effectiveness of athlete education programs and how institutions can integrate athletes' unique needs within their academic frameworks. The study highlights the importance of academic counseling, flexible learning programs, and psychological support for student athletes. In addition, there is also increasing interest in the role of technology in supporting student athletes' learning, such as the use of online platforms and mobile applications to provide more flexible access to learning materials, as discussed by (Rahmat et al., 2022). However, there is still a lack of

literature on how institutions in different countries implement such policies and programs, particularly in developing countries.

Recent research is also beginning to acknowledge the importance of paying attention to the psychological aspects and well-being of student athletes. Review by Saputra & Subagio, (2017) explores the impact of the double pressure student-athletes face on their mental health, highlighting the importance of psychological support. In addition, the study of gender inequality in sport and education, as discussed by (James 2018), Starting to get more attention, given the significant differences in the experiences of male and female athletes. However, this research is generally still limited to specific contexts, often ignoring cultural variations and educational structures in different countries. As such, there is significant room for further research that integrates global and contextual perspectives in addressing educational inequalities faced by student-athletes (ali et al. 2024; Bafirman et al. 2024; Bafirman, Zarya, et al. 2023; Putra et al. 2023). This research is important to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by student-athletes and how educational institutions can adapt their policies and programs to be more inclusive and supportive.

This research introduces a new approach to understanding inequalities in education for student athletes with a focus on the unique context in Indonesia, an aspect rarely researched in the global literature. A key innovation of the study lies in an in-depth analysis of how student athletes in Indonesia, who do not receive special treatment, face unique challenges in balancing sports and academic commitments. By broadening the horizons on diverse sports and taking into account factors such as gender and age, the study makes an important contribution to the global understanding of athletic education inequalities. This research has a sharp and strong evaluation objective: identify and analyze specifically gaps in the educational support received by outstanding athletes in Indonesia, and provide practical recommendations for more effective and inclusive supporting policies and programs. Through this, the study not only enriches academic insights but also offers concrete guidance for policymakers and educational institutions in addressing such inequalities.

## **METHOD**

This research uses a qualitative approach to understand deeply about the experiences of student athletes in Indonesia who face inequalities in education. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with 47 student athletes from Padang State University, who were selected based on inclusion criteria such as active involvement in sports and status as registered students. This interview is designed to explore athletes' personal experiences in managing sporting and academic demands, their perceptions of support or lack of support from educational institutions, and their impact on their academic and sporting performance. Interview questions are developed based on relevant literature and tailored to ensure contextual relevance to athletes' experiences in Indonesia. In addition, participatory observations in the university environment are also conducted to gain a better understanding of the dynamics between student athletes and their academic environment.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, where data from interviews were transcribed and elaborated to identify key themes. This process involves repeated reading of transcriptions to determine emerging patterns and themes, which are then categorized within a thematic framework. The main focus of the analysis was

to identify specific challenges faced by student-athletes, their perceptions of inequalities in education, and the strategies they used to address these issues. In addition, data triangulation was performed by comparing findings from interviews with observational data and existing literature, to improve the reliability and validity of research results. This approach allows research to capture the complex and diverse nuances of student athletes' experiences, which are often overlooked in quantitative approaches.

To ensure research ethics, all participants are given a full explanation of the research objectives and procedures, and written information consent is obtained prior to the interview. Participant privacy and confidentiality are guaranteed, with all data identified anonymously in the research report. Voluntary participation is emphasized, with participants free to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. This methodological approach ensures that the study not only provides in-depth insights into student athletes' experiences in the face of inequality in education, but is also conducted in an ethical and responsible manner, respecting the rights and well-being of all participants. Thus, this research not only contributes to the body of academic knowledge, but also confirms the importance of research ethics in qualitative studies.

The methodology used in this study involves a qualitative approach, prioritizing in-depth interviews and descriptive data analysis to gain a comprehensive understanding of the issue. Through interviews, student athletes can reveal their experiences firsthand, providing insight into how current education policies impact their academic and sports lives. Descriptive data analysis further helps in identifying general patterns and trends among the student athlete population. This approach allows research to delve deeper into inequality issues, and provides a foundation for more supportive and inclusive policy and programme making.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Through a series of in-depth interviews and descriptive data analysis, the study revealed the complexity of the personal experiences of 47 student athletes at Universitas Negeri Padang (UNP). The findings highlight that high-achieving athletes often have serious difficulties in balancing between sporting and academic commitments. They feel burdened by the overlapping time demands between intensive training and hectic lecture schedules. What's more, a lack of attention to their specific needs creates an atmosphere of inequality in educational settings, where athletes often feel inadequately recognized.

The demographic distribution shows the diversity of student athletes in terms of gender, age, and sport. Despite differences in the distribution of participation, challenges are common to all athletes, including academic pressure and inequality of support. The findings highlight gaps in expectations, where athletes struggle to gain equal recognition with non-student athletes, despite contributing significantly to their sporting achievements.

The challenges identified involved effective time management between training and study, as well as academic expectations that did not match the athlete's commitment. The findings from the interviews also reflect athletes' mismatch in education policies that have not adequately considered their needs. This creates an atmosphere in which athletes' efforts and achievements are often under-recognized and rewarded, implying an urgent need for adjustment of education policies.

Overall, the research points to the need for significant changes in education policy to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for student-athletes. Athletes need greater support in managing their role conflicts between sport and academics. Interviews and data analysis provide powerful insights into the need for tailored educational programs, supporting high-achieving athletes in maintaining a balance between sporting and academic achievement.

In closing, this study not only enriches the understanding of inequalities in the education of student athletes in Indonesia, but also raises critical questions about the need for education policy change and reform. By delving deeper into athletes' experiences, the research provides a basis for positive efforts toward change. With the implementation of the resulting recommendations, it is hoped that educational institutions can create a more equitable and supportive educational environment, enabling outstanding athletes to develop and succeed in all aspects of their lives.

In addition to highlighting the inequalities faced by high-achieving athletes, the study reveals the significant implications of these challenges on the psychological balance of athletes. The double burden between sports and academic achievement creates serious psychological stress, can affect their mental well-being. These findings highlight the urgency to pay more attention to mental health aspects in the management of high-achieving athletes, underscoring the need for more intensive and integrated psychological support in educational settings.

Along with findings regarding inequalities in education, the study contributes to a global understanding of student athletes' experiences in academic settings. The involvement of athletes in various sports provides diversity and unique context that can be applied to international contexts. The findings could provide valuable insights for educational institutions in different countries to design more inclusive and supportive policies for their student-athletes, ensuring equity in educational opportunities.

Lastly, the study provides a call for a shift in the educational paradigm to better acknowledge the special needs of high-achieving athletes. Recommendations resulting from this research, such as the development of special education programs and increased awareness of the challenges faced by athletes, can form the basis for policy and practice changes in educational institutions. Thus, the study not only illustrates the problem, but also provides practical guidance for educational institutions to create a more equitable, inclusive, and supportive environment for their outstanding athletes.

## DISCUSSION

The discussion of the results of this study highlights the urgency of approaching inequality in the education of student athletes with a holistic approach. It found that high-achieving athletes at UNP face significant difficulties in managing sporting and academic demands. This double burden not only impacts their academic performance but also on psychological well-being (Beavan et al. 2023; Cao et al. 2023; Cheng et al. 2021). Therefore, expanded psychological support and more flexible schedule alignment can mitigate these negative impacts (Heaviside et al. 2021; Mooney et al. 2023).

Furthermore, the results of this study reflect the urgent need for education policy reform at the institutional level. Awareness of inequality and recognition of the special

needs of high-achieving athletes is the first step (S A Guevara et al. 2023; Morris et al. 2022; Staiano et al. 2023). The implementation of tailored educational programs and the establishment of inclusive policies can create a more supportive environment, providing equal opportunities to all students, regardless of status as athletes or non-athletes (Fruchart and Rulence-Pâques 2022; Watanabe et al. 2023).

It is important to recognize that these inequalities are not just the responsibility of individuals or athletes themselves. Educational institutions need to take responsibility for their role in creating conditions that enable high-achieving athletes to develop optimally (Bezuglov et al. 2023; Cherif et al. 2022; Silva et al. 2023). Equality in educational opportunities can be realized through the implementation of more inclusive policies and curriculum adaptations that take into account the unique needs of athletes (da Costa Santos et al. 2023; Kuroda, Ishihara, and Kamijo 2023).

Furthermore, joint efforts between educational institutions, sports parties, and governments are essential to design sustainable solutions. Financial support and adequate infrastructure can create an environment where high-achieving athletes can pursue sporting achievement and achieve academic success without being hampered by inequality constraints (Barbosa et al. 2023; Fury, Oh, and Berkson 2022; Guevara et al. 2022).

Overall, the study provides an in-depth look at inequalities in the education of student athletes in Indonesia. By understanding the challenges faced by high-achieving athletes, this research can guide policymakers to create positive change (Doorley et al. 2022; Draovitch et al. 2022; Zhuravleva and Aiken 2023). Through policy reform and active support from various parties, it is hoped that a more equitable and supportive educational environment will emerge for all students, including outstanding athletes (Forsdick et al. 2022; Gwyther et al. 2022; Mascaret et al. 2022).

An in-depth interpretation of the results of this study reflects the complexity of the challenges faced by high-achieving athletes in an educational environment. The finding that athletes often feel under-recognised and have difficulty maintaining a balance between sporting and academic demands highlights gaps in recognition and support from institutions. At the psychological level, this double burden can create significant stress, affecting their mental well-being (Castilla-López, Molina-Mula, and Romero-Franco 2022; Li et al. 2023; Sheffield, Thornton, and Jones 2020). This interpretation affirms that inequality is not only a structural problem, but also has a profound impact on the psychological and emotional dimensions of athletes (Duarte Junior et al. 2023; Sara A Guevara et al. 2023; Sherlin 2023).

In discussing the demographic distribution of athletes, the finding that karate has the highest participation illustrates the diversity of sports interests among college students. Despite the imbalance, understanding these variations can help design more focused solutions. This interpretation emphasizes the need for an individual approach that takes into account differences in the distribution of athletes, recognizing that the challenges faced by each athlete can vary depending on the context and type of sport they are involved in (Lau and Mukherjee 2023; Siekańska et al. 2021; da Silva Machado and Amiri 2023).

The overall interpretation highlights that inequalities in student athlete education do not only occur at the level of institutional policies and practices, but are also nested in cultural and social aspects. An in-depth understanding of the personal experiences of high-achieving athletes provides further insight into the complexity of these

challenges. By interpreting these findings, we can see that the changes needed are not only structural but also require cultural and social transformation in the educational environment to create true equality for student athletes.

## CONCLUSION

This research provides in-depth insight into the inequalities faced by student athletes in Indonesia in the education system. Key findings suggest that high-achieving athletes are often caught in a dilemma between pursuing sporting achievement and meeting academic demands, in the absence of adequate policy support or adaptation from educational institutions. These inequalities are not just limited to the availability of time and resources, but also include a lack of recognition of the unique challenges they face. The study revealed that although these student-athletes contribute significantly to sporting achievement, they often do not receive appropriate recognition or support in an academic context. The impact of this inequality is not only limited to their academic performance, but also has the potential to hinder the full development of their potential as athletes. Therefore, there is an urgent need for more inclusive and supportive policies and practices in educational institutions, which recognise and encourage a balance between academic excellence and sport.

The conclusions of this study offer important recommendations for policymakers and educational institutions. First, there needs to be development and implementation of policies specifically designed to support the unique needs of student-athletes, including flexibility in academic schedules and assessment. Second, educational institutions should consider establishing coaching and mentorship programs aimed at assisting athletes in managing their dual demands. Third, increased awareness and recognition of athletes' achievements outside the sporting arena is essential to create a more supportive and inclusive environment. The study shows that with the right interventions, student-athletes can succeed in both areas, benefiting both themselves and the wider academic and sports communities. Finally, the study confirms the importance of a holistic approach in education, where all students, including high-achieving athletes, are given equal opportunities to develop and succeed.

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