

## The struggles behind success: a case study on athletic identity and burnout among university student-athletes in taekwondo

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### ABSTRACT

**Problems:** Student taekwondo athletes often face challenges balancing academic and sporting roles. The pressure of these two aspects can lead to physical and mental exhaustion or burnout. Burnout that is not properly addressed can impact athletes' performance, motivation, and commitment to sport.

**Purpose:** This study examined the relationship between burnout and athletic identity in taekwondo student-athletes. **Methods:** A Descriptive method with a quantitative approach was used in this study involving 21 Taekwondo athletes of Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia. The instruments used in the study were Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) and an Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) which were given once to the sample. After the data was obtained, data analysis was carried out using the SPSS Version 27. **Results:** The results showed that there was a significant relationship between athletic identity and burnout among university student-athletes in taekwondo, confirming that athlete identity affects mental and emotional exhaustion. This suggests that athletes who better recognize their role tend to be better able to manage pressure and maintain performance. **Conclusion:** This study concludes that taekwondo student-athletes have a story of struggle that is not easy behind their success. The relationship between athletic identity and burnout proves the story of struggle.

**Keywords:** Burnout, Athletic identity, Taekwondo, Student-athletes

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### Introduction

Taekwondo student-athletes often face great challenges in balancing academic demands and sporting obligations (Prakasha & Joseph, 2025). Not only are they required to achieve optimal academic performance, but they must also undergo intensive training and face the pressure of competition (Rankin et al., 2016). The imbalance in managing these two demands has the potential to cause prolonged stress that can lead to burnout (Privitera et al., 2015). This situation can negatively affect both their mental well-being and athletic performance. Therefore, effective coping strategies and support systems are essential to help them maintain a healthy balance (Nuetzel, 2023).

Burnout in the context of sports is defined as a condition of physical and mental exhaustion due to constant pressure without adequate recovery (Brenner et al., 2024). Burnout in Taekwondo student-athletes is generally caused by a busy training schedule, high expectations from coaches and the environment, and academic demands that must still be met (O'Rourke, 2024). This multifactorial pressure often leaves little room for rest or personal time, which further exacerbates stress levels. If not managed properly, burnout can have a negative impact on athletes' motivation, commitment, and performance, both in the competition arena and in academic achievement (Sarmidi et al., 2024). One aspect affected by burnout is athletic identity, which is the extent to which an athlete identifies with the world of sports (Grebner et al., 2024). Athletes with a strong athletic identity tend to be highly dedicated to training and competition, but when experiencing burnout, this identity can weaken, ultimately affecting their engagement in sports. (Peter & Jule, 2023). The lack of effective

recovery strategies further exacerbates this condition, making athletes more vulnerable to mental and physical stress. (Hassmén et al., 2019). A number of studies have shown that positive relationships between athletes and coaches can increase motivation and reduce the risk of burnout (Barcza-Renner et al., 2016).

Previous research shows that the relationship between coaches and athletes (the relationship between coach leadership style and taekwondo athlete achievement) has a significant influence on athlete achievement motivation. In addition, social support from family, friends, and coaches also plays an important role in reducing the risk of burnout. Other research shows that low social support often correlates with increased levels of burnout in athletes, which can affect their mental well-being (Komarudin et al., 2024). On the other hand, athletes' ability to apply effective coping strategies is an important factor in dealing with the pressures of a busy training schedule and high expectations (Cosh & Tully, 2015). This is in line with the finding that mental resilience helps athletes stay focused and motivated despite being under pressure. These factors suggest not only that athletic identity is influenced by performance in the competitive arena, but also by the mental balance and social support received by athletes (M. P. Komarudin et al., 2024). By understanding the relationship between burnout, motivation, and social support, this study is expected to help student-athletes maintain a balance between academic and sporting roles (Gabana et al., 2017).

Although various studies have addressed factors such as motivation, social support, and coach-athlete relationships (Purnamasari & Novian, 2021), there is still a gap in research that specifically examines the relationship between burnout and athletic identity in Taekwondo student-athletes. Most studies have only examined these factors in isolation or focused on athletes in general without considering the unique challenges student-athletes face. In fact, they face more complex dynamics than athletes who do not have academic obligations. Therefore, further studies are needed that can reveal how these psychological and social factors interact and influence the athletic identity of Taekwondo student-athletes amid simultaneous academic and sporting demands. This research has urgency in understanding the relationship between burnout, athletic identity, motivation, and social support in the context of Taekwondo student-athletes (Novian & Noors, 2020). By understanding the relationship between these variables, more effective strategies can be developed to help student-athletes maintain a balance between academics and sports and prevent the negative effects of burnout (Liu & Taresh, 2024). If this issue is not researched further, student-athletes are at risk of experiencing prolonged burnout that can hinder their performance in both fields (Rubin & Moreno-Pardo, 2018). This study offers novelty by specifically analysing the interrelationship of burnout and athletic identity in a Taekwondo student population, taking into account various psychological and social factors that have not previously been comprehensively examined.

## Method

This research uses a descriptive method with a quantitative approach. The descriptive method was chosen to describe in detail the facts and characteristics of the population that have been determined precisely and factually. The quantitative approach is used to obtain data in the form of numbers that can be analyzed statistically, so that researchers can understand the relationships and patterns between the variables studied (Mohajan, 2020). This descriptive analysis was chosen to investigate and examine which provide an overview of the impact of burnout on athletic identity in taekwondo student-athletes. The subjects of this study were taekwondo athletes who were members of the taekwondo student-athletes at the Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia. The number of subjects in this study was 21 athletes. The study includes students who are active as taekwondo athletes and are undergoing dual roles as students and athletes. In the age range of students, which is around 18-25 years. Other characteristics that can be influential in this study include the level of experience in taekwondo, the level of competition they participate in, and the academic load they undergo.

This research instrument consists of two measuring instruments, namely the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) and the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) (Yulianto, 2020). The AIMS, developed by (Choudhury et al., 2024) was used to measure athletes' level of identification with their athletic role through 7 items with a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree). This scale has been validated and demonstrated adequate reliability (Cronbach's alpha > 0.70). Meanwhile, the MBI was used to measure burnout through three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and decreased personal accomplishment. The MBI questionnaire consists of 28 items with a 4-point Likert scale of 1- 4 and is valid and reliable in various athlete populations (Cronbach's alpha > 0.70). Before use, both instruments were expert-validated and pilot-tested to ensure the appropriateness and clarity of the items for taekwondo student-athletes.

In this study, the authors used quantitative data analysis techniques with a descriptive approach to describe the characteristics and relationship between athletic identity and burnout among taekwondo student-athletes (Ellul, 2024). The research subjects comprised 21 athletes who were members of the Taekwondo

Student Activity Unit at the Indonesian Education University. Data were collected using two instruments that have been tested for validity and reliability, namely the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) and the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) (Louwagie, 2024). The AIMS was used to measure athletes' level of identification with their role in sport. In contrast, the MBI was used to assess the level of burnout through three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and decreased personal achievement.

After data collection, analysis was conducted using SPSS version 27. The author first conducted a normality test to ensure the result of the analysis data was normally distributed. Next, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis regarding the relationship between athletic identity and burnout. Thus, the data analysis techniques applied in this study provided deep insight into the interaction between athletic identity and burnout and confirmed the importance of understanding the psychological factors that influence student-athletes well-being in the face of academic and sporting pressures (Thompson et al., 2024).

## Results

Results of statistical description can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Statistical Description

| Variable          | N  | Minimum | Maximum | Sum  | Mean  | Std. Deviation |
|-------------------|----|---------|---------|------|-------|----------------|
| Athletic Identity | 20 | 26      | 49      | 780  | 39.00 | 6.545          |
| Burnout           | 20 | 52      | 92      | 1473 | 73.65 | 10.874         |

Based on Table 1, it can be seen that the athletic identity variable obtained an average value of 39.00, a standard deviation of 6,545, the lowest value of 26, the highest value of 49 and a total value of 780. Meanwhile, Burnout obtained an average value of 73.65, a standard deviation of 10,874, the lowest value of 52, the highest value of 92, and a total value of 1473. Furthermore, the authors conducted a normality test which can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Normality Test

| Variable          | Statistic | df | Sig. |
|-------------------|-----------|----|------|
| Athletic Identity | .913      | 20 | .074 |
| Burnout           | .951      | 20 | .381 |

Based on Table 2. It is obtained that the significance value on athletic identity (.074) and burnout (.381) > .05, then  $H_0$  is accepted, so it can be concluded that both data are normally distributed. Furthermore, the authors conducted hypothesis testing, which can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Hypothesis Test

| Variable                    | N  | Pearson Correlation | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|-----------------------------|----|---------------------|-----------------|
| Athletic Identity – Burnout | 20 | .465                | .039            |

Table 3 shows the results of hypothesis testing using Pearson correlation. Based on Table 3, it can be seen that the Pearson correlation value is .465 with a Sig value. (2-tailed) of .039. Based on the test results, the Sig. (2-tailed) < .05 so that  $H_0$  is rejected. So it can be stated that there is a significant relationship between athletic identity and burnout among university student-athletes in taekwondo.

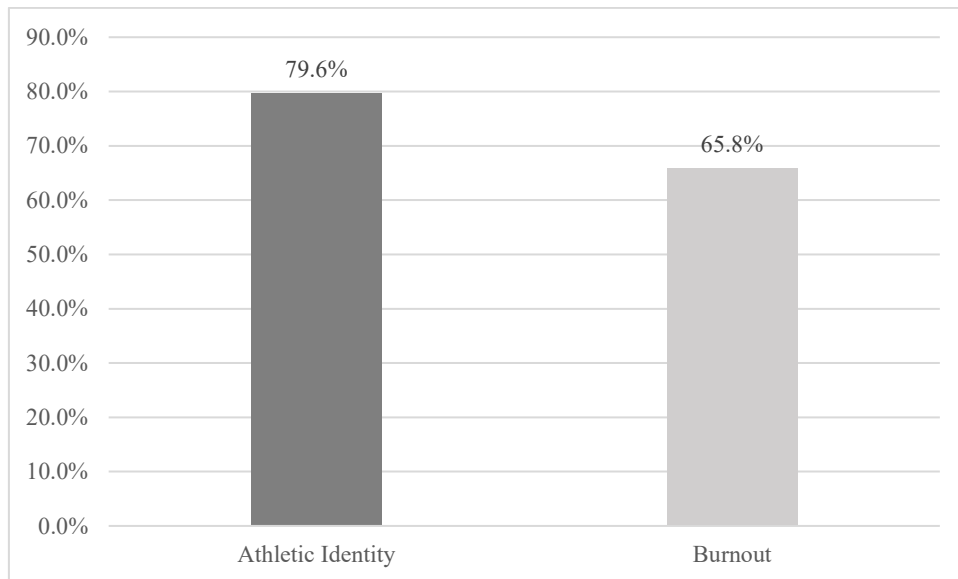


Figure 1. Percentage of Athletic Identity and Burnout among University Student-Athletes in Taekwondo

Figure 1 shows that university student-athletes in taekwondo have an athletic identity level of 79.6% and burnout of 65.8%. This indicates that if an athlete's athletic identity is higher, their level of burnout will be lower. Athletes who can identify their athletic abilities better will not easily experience burnout in taekwondo.

### Discussion

The results of the descriptive analysis showed significant differences between the mean athletic identity and burnout. A stable athletic identity mean indicates a good level of motivation among taekwondo athletes, while a higher burnout mean indicates a considerable level of emotional exhaustion. This difference reflects that high motivation does not always guarantee an optimal psychological state, especially when athletes face excessive burdens and expectations (Simandjuntak et al., 2024). The normality test showed that the data were normally distributed, so the correlation analysis performed met the necessary statistical assumptions (Reeve, 2024).

Correlation tests showed a significant positive relationship between athletic identity and burnout. This indicates that the higher an athlete's intrinsic motivation, the higher the level of emotional exhaustion they may experience. This positive correlation may be due to high personal demands and expectations that often trigger psychological distress, which in turn contributes to burnout. Highly motivated athletes may tend to neglect the need for adequate rest, thus increasing the risk of burnout (Irwanto & Romas, 2019). This is in line with (van Hooff & Geurts, 2015) who assert that high motivation can lead to an imbalance between effort and recovery, thus increasing the likelihood of burnout.

In the face of these challenges, the role of the coach becomes a key factor in preventing and managing burnout in taekwondo student-athletes. Supportive and empathic leadership styles from coaches can increase athletes' motivation and help them cope better with pressure (Tareq et al., 2024). Coaches who pay attention to the balance between training and rest and encourage open communication can create an environment that supports athletes' mental well-being (Breslin et al., 2017). Previous research has shown that positive relationships between coaches and athletes have been shown to increase achievement motivation and decrease the risk of burnout (Gustafsson et al., 2018).

In addition to the role of the coach, athletes' ability to apply effective coping strategies is also a key factor in dealing with the pressures they face. Adaptive coping strategies, such as good time management and relaxation techniques, allow athletes to manage stress without compromising performance (Komarudin et al., 2023). Research shows that athletes who have good coping skills are better able to maintain motivation and concentration, even under high pressure conditions (Hassmén et al., 2019). Therefore, it is important for student-athletes to be equipped with coping skills training as part of a comprehensive training program.

Another psychological factor that contributes to burnout is excessive personal and external expectations. Student-athletes often feel pressured to achieve high results in both academics and sports, which can drain their emotional and physical energy (Hadian et al., 2024). Support from the surrounding environment that helps in managing these expectations can prevent the emergence of more severe burnout. Mentoring programs that focus

on mental health and expectation management can help student-athletes maintain a healthy balance between achievement and personal well-being (Maharani et al., 2024).

Excessive personal and external expectations also contribute to burnout. Student-athletes often feel pressured to achieve high results in both academics and sport, which can drain their emotional and physical energy. Support from the surrounding environment in managing these expectations can prevent the emergence of more severe burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). In addition, collaboration between academic institutions, coaches and families is essential in creating an environment that supports student-athletes' overall well-being (Simons & Bird, 2023).

## Conclusion

This study concludes that taekwondo student-athletes have a story of struggle that is not easy behind their success. The relationship between athletic identity and burnout proves the story of struggle. Taekwondo student-athletes have a reasonably high level of athlete identity and relatively high fatigue during training. This study provides important insights into how intrinsic motivation in sports can contribute to fatigue in Taekwondo student-athletes.

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