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## Focus Group Discussion On Psycho-Physical Training, Physical Training And Psychological Training Among Malaysia University Students' Athlete

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# FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION ON PSYCHO- PHYSICAL TRAINING, PHYSICAL TRAINING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAINING AMONG MALAYSIA UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' ATHLETE.

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## ABSTRACT

The impact of psycho-physical training, physical training, and psychological training is crucial in developing professional athletes, but the perception and understanding of these trainings in particular has been relatively ignored. For example, prior to this research the understanding of these trainings was more on instructions and paper-pencil test. Thus, the aim of this research was to explore the experiences of young university student-athletes towards the psycho-physical training, physical training and psychological training throughout their athlete's career. The idea, factors and components of each training should not be overlooked especially in the populations of young university athletes, as they are exposed to more psychological risks associated with the nature of their career such as stressful and tensed competitive circumstances, monotonous training, academic works and interpersonal conflict factors. There are three (3) themes concluded from each training in exploring the ideas, components they found and factors in improving for each training. This research on young university athletes enables future research to develop module in creating new insight and awareness in contribute practical strategies and techniques to be implemented for sports psychologists, counsellors, and educational authorities. Such efforts definitely assist more young university athlete by inventing early prevention strategies to improve the educational environment and contribute towards the athletes' performance.

**Keywords:** Mental Health, Training, Psychological, Physical, Young University Athletes

## **1. Introduction**

Universities or any tertiary education institutions aim to excel their students' potential. Certainly, not only should academic performance be emphasized but also students' potential, talent and capability which enable them to contribute significant development to the nation, such as sports performance (Yusof et al., 2013).

In Malaysia, mental health issues have begun to attract attention as statistics show that individuals aged 16 years and older are experiencing mental health related problems, from 10.6% in 1996 to 29.2% in 2015 (NHMS, 2015; Shukurov, 2021). Thus, well-planned strategies to maintain and improve wellbeing are needed as primary prevention (Lovell et al., 2014). In general, student-athletes face barriers in dealing with academics compared to non-student-athletes (Yusof, Chuan, & Shah, 2013; Gomez et al., 2018). Additionally, curriculums for university student-athletes overseas are different from those in Malaysia, in which the selection process is very stringent, but provide numerous benefits to athletes. Examples of these programs include the Elite Athlete Program by Western Sydney University and Western Carolina University and Athletic Training, and Athletic Training Fieldwork I-IV by Western Michigan University. On the other hand, there are few manuals, programs and trainings in Malaysia, therefore, this study expects to investigate the effects of psycho-physical training, physical training and mental training on young student-athletes so that mental health program, promotion and guidelines can also be implemented for academic and educational situations.

The latest technology implementation has been providing a better learning experience in higher education institutions. Unfortunately, young university students-athletes are still interpreted as more vulnerable to adjustment issues in university, they are vulnerable to mental health issues as other students (Razali, Sulaiman, Ayub & Majid, 2022; Sasso, et.al., 2022; Grubic, et. al., 2021; Neal, et. al., 2013; Thompson & Sherman, 2007). Young university student-athletes are the talented minority group whom have different roles from other university students as they need to fulfil a role as a university student as well as the role of an athlete in representing the university or country in sports. Indeed, both roles are equally important (Chuan, et. al., 2013). These young university student-athletes are having dual responsibilities, it could be challenging to them in terms on balancing their time between academic and training sessions. This is not the only mental health pressure to young university student-athlete. They also experience stress in inadequate control of their performance during the competition, which caused them more mental health risks experience. However, young university student-athletes are discouraged from seeking help or even acknowledging that they have any sort of psychological risks and mental health issues due to social stigma.

As a result, athletic performance and academic obligations against their own private

experiences, will increase the risk of student-athletes developing a range of mental health issues and poor well-being (Sasso, et. al., 2022). Despite the mental health risks associated with their academic and competitive circumstances, several psychological and physical training had been performed towards young athletes in playing indoors and outdoors games (Teodor & Claudiu, 2013; Miçooğullari & Ekmekçi, 2017). Limited attention has been given to identify how the training experience from psycho-physical contributed to young university student-athletes'. The integration of psycho-physical training may be an effective technique for increasing the well-being and performance of young university student-athletes'.

Therefore, the current research is conducted to investigate the experiences of young university student-athletes towards the psycho-physical training, physical training and psychological training throughout their athlete's career through a qualitative approach. Athletes who satisfy the inclusion criteria of this study participated in the focus group discussion to investigate the student-athletes' experiences pertaining on their perception on the idea, factors and components towards the trainings. Hence, the focus group member's idea, factor and important components in the training will be derived in the focus group discussion. The focus group discussion was carefully planned and executed according to Van Eeuwijk and Angehrn (2017) to explore the elements related to the psycho-physical training, physical training and psychological training to enable future directions in composing good internal and external environment leading to a beneficial influence on their extreme situation in sport performance.

## **2. Literature Review**

Mental health is increasingly recognized as a serious, worldwide public health concern. It includes our psychological, emotional, and social well-being that affect the way we think, behave, and feel. National Health and Morbidity Survey 2017 reported a total of 29 percent of Malaysians had depression and anxiety disorders compared to 12 percent in 2011 due to environmental and individual-related stress (Berita Harian, 2018). According to the National Health Morbidity Survey 2015, there has been an increase in mental health problems from 10.6 percent in 1996 to 29,2 percent in 2015.

Sports activity and physical activities related to psycho-physical training will improve an individual's mental health (Abdluaziz et.al., 2020). "Yes" or "no" for student-athletes depends on balance of responsibilities between a student also an athlete in attending classes, training, and competitions (Daniel, 2018). Young university student-athletes schedule will prioritise training rather than academic. This forces them to be absent to class, submit their assignments late, and face difficulties in committing to classroom discussion, eventually making these athletes

as “anti-intellectual” subculture (Adler & Adler, 1985). Student-athlete are exposed to elevated rates of stress and low control of their performance during the competition, which can put them at increased risk for a range of mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, and poor well-being, indirectly affecting their athletic performance (Motevalli, et.al., 2013). Thus, psycho-physical training may become an important element to them. In order to be effective, their perception and understanding are equally important in order to tailor up the training module in assisting them in their future training.

Interestingly, professional athletes have positive characteristics such as higher athletic identity, self-esteem, positive expectation than those who do not compete at a professional level. Sport exercise also bring impact to the raising of the hormones that significantly affect mental health such as hormones endorphins and serotonin in the blood (Abdulrasool et al., 2020; Chang, et.al., 2020; Samadzadeh et al., 2011). Physical activity or sport activities bring health benefits namely positive mental health to the youth student-athletes, such as reduced stress, depression, anxiety and others, which indirectly improve academic and athletic performance (Abdulaziz Muhsen & Abdulaziz Muhsen, 2020; Motevalli, et.al., 2022). Despite these benefits brought from sports, limited attention has been given in identifying how these positive characteristics are derived from physical and psychological training and act as a critical individual factor that contribute to Malaysian student-athletes' mental health (Foong & Kwan, 2021). Therefore, this research serves as preliminary research to determine the perceptions of the idea, factors and components of psycho-physical training, physical training, and psychological training among young university student-athletes based on their experiences from the trainings.

Warburton and his colleagues confirmed that there is undisputable evidence of the effectiveness of regular physical activity in the primary and secondary prevention of several chronic diseases and premature death. Moreover, there is a linear relation between physical activity and health status, such that a further increase in physical activity and fitness will lead to additional improvements in health and sport performance status (Warburton, et al., 2006). Therefore, this current research serves as an in-depth understanding of the psycho-physical training, physical training and psychological training in exploring the young university student-athletes' experiences from the trainings. This attention is necessary because university student-athletes are likely to constitute as significant role-models for the future elite athletes, thus, their habits and behaviours towards the training is utmost important to study (Telleria-Aramburu et al., 2019). After all, it is considered significant among Malaysian young athletes in order to gain adequate knowledge to design a reliable framework and module that target increasing sustainable adaptive behaviours and well-being among young athletes.

The significant of the psychological training is to be guided and understand to young

university student-athletes as well as to athlete in all level so that they are aware to the process of significant changes eventually strengthens their psycho-physical health. Hence, it is imperative to investigate the idea, factors and components of each training among Malaysian young university student-athletes' perceptions and experience towards psycho-physical training as an initiation before developing appropriate modules (e.g., psycho-physical modules) to assist them to enhance their mental health as well as trainings in their daily life.

### **2.1. Theoretical Framework**

There are some prominent theories related to athletes' psycho-physical training and cognitive restructuring in which every one of them looks at this process from different perspectives. For instance, Sport Confidence Theory (Short & Short, 2005) concentrate on athletes' beliefs and degree of certainty, Deficit Skills Theory (Lustig et al., 2007) pay attention to the lack of information and knowledge to cause psychological problems, and Biopsychosocial (BPS) Model (Engel, 1977) attempts to explain mental health and well-being on the basis of various and vital factors.

Based to the above theories, psychosocial training can be influence athletes' mental health and well-being in different ways. Physical education of students emphasizes psychological and psycho-physical training (Hutsol & Pylypei, 2020). Studies indicated that basic systematic usage of programmed training in the training process of athletics, that could assist the training process to be more rational and effective and promote better recovery of athletes after significant training and competition (Hucol & Pylypej, 2019).

Psychological training is considered as one kind of athletes' training in which has the same significance for athletes' perfection as other components. It can be classified into two kinds of athletes' psychological training such as general and special psychological training. Stable psycho-physical readiness is built up of two mutually beneficial states - mental and physical, therefore, exercise such as running, cycling, and swimming have been well documented (Azman et al., 2018; Garber et al., 2011). Moreover, the mental training of each athlete is directly related to his physical training, based on sports training, physical endurance, physical exercise, and more (Valev et al., 2019).

The term psycho-physical training refers to training learners on the basis of two psychological and physical domains. It is notable to say that the mental training of each athlete is directly related to his physical training, based on sports training, physical endurance, physical exercise, and more. Sports training can be considered as a system involving the following physical, tactical, technical, and psychological components. These aspects of preparation are associated in unity - the psycho-physical of the athlete and the results of sports show the effect of these two components on athletes' performance (Iancheva T., 2006). Mental training is a

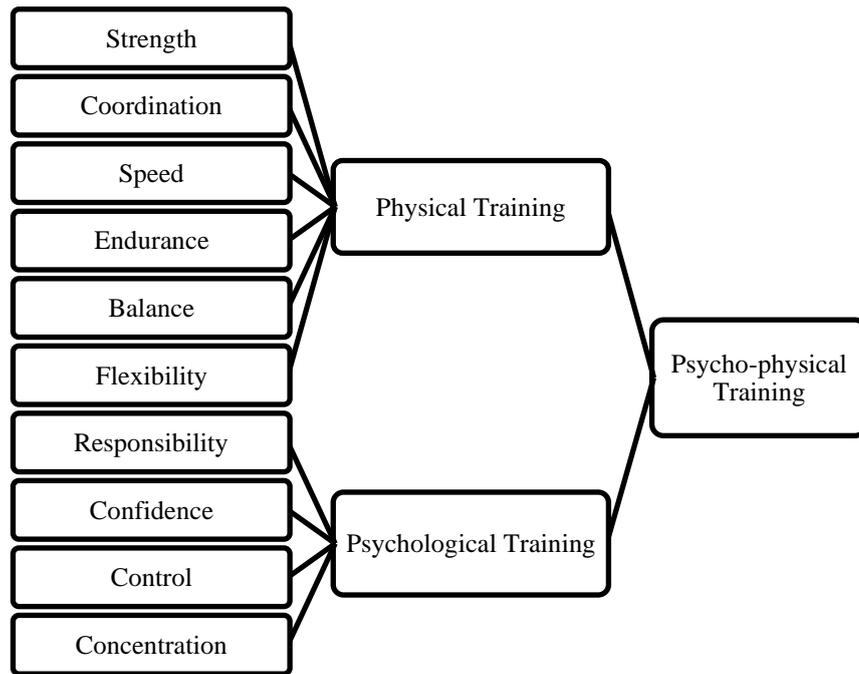
pedagogical process for improving mental processes, qualities, and personality traits in order to increase efficiency and improve health. That is, mental training is a pedagogical process to form mental readiness. The goal of psychic training is to form a mental preparedness for actions in extreme situations (Tishinov, Khadziev, Ivanov, Yordanov, 1987). The expression of individuality, creativity, and uniqueness of using high cognitive skills is essential for high sporting skills to achieve the top sporting achievements. According to Iancheva (2004):

"there may be different types of external factors - uncontrollable natural phenomena, pavement, unforeseen dangers, audience behavior, judges, coaches, unusual lighting and many others. These factors cause individual, subjective, ambiguous experiences in the athlete and have a different impact on competitive behavior and realization. It is safe to say that the influence of the environment is objectively subjective in nature, emphasizing the role of mental or cognitive factors in managing sports training."

Kaikov (1998) divides the mental readiness into "general" and "specialized". The general readiness is engaged with athletes' performance once mental training is applied in the process of sporting activity systematically and for a long period, while the psychological training is performed to the formation of mental phenomena essential for a certain activity and specific type of sport. Stable psycho-physical readiness consists of mental and physical states that assist athletes in coping with various sports circumstances.

## **2.2. Conceptual Framework**

In relation to the theories above, physical education of students emphasizes psychological and psycho-physical training (Hutsol & Pylypei, 2020). Studies show that the systematic usage of programmed training basic in the athletic training process, which can help the training process to be more rational and effective and promote better recovery of athletes after significant training and competition (Hucol & Pylypej, 2020). In addition, psychological training is considered one of the types of athlete training that has the same importance for the athletes' perfection as other components. It can be classified into two types of athlete psychological training such as general and special psychological training. Moreover, according to Trendafilov and Dimitrova, (2013), the quality of physical training includes strength, coordination, endurance, balance, speed, and flexibility. Meanwhile, Fisher and his colleagues showed different important factors in psycho-physical training such as responsibility, confidence, control, and concentration (Fisher et al., 2016).



**Figure 1: The Framework of Psycho-Physical Training**

Based on this framework, all psycho-physical qualities for athletes' training further build positive self-esteem, confidence, expectations, and good performance and also enhance monitoring and control over the internal and external environment leading to having a positive influence on anxiety, stress or tension that may be experienced in extreme situation such as a sport competition (Fisher et al., 2016).

### **3. Research Methodology**

This paper aims to discuss the idea, factors, and components of psycho-physical training, physical training and psychological training among young university student-athletes. This section describes the study participant, research instrument, data analysis as well as the validity and reliability of the current study. In order to gauge the young university student-athletes' experiences in psycho-physical training, physical training, and psychological training, a qualitative research methodology using the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) has been employed.

Focused group discussion was conducted with Malaysian young university student-athletes' to clarify, assure or challenge finding of the emerged themes. New themes are also allowed to emerge as the individual responses as well as the interactions between participants, can be analysed to identify other areas of agreement about psycho-physical training, physical training and psychological training experiences among young athletes in Malaysia. The focus groups consist of seven (7) respondents in two (2) focus groups in the West and East Malaysian public universities located in *Perak* and *Sabah*. There are also inclusion criteria: (i) Students must be registered as a full-time student in the selected public universities and (ii) Students must be

diagnosed as university student-athletes by the university authoritarians. The exclusion criteria are: (i) University student-athletes with mental or chronic illness, (ii) University student-athletes with mental retardation and (iii) University student-athletes with learning disabilities (LD). The rationale is due to the idea, factors and components of psycho-physical training, physical training, and psychological training is important to gain adequate knowledge to design a reliable module that target increasing sustainable adaptive behaviours and well-being among young athletes. After the participant is identified, the FGD is transcribed into words, furthermore, with triangulation strategy employed to reach data confirmation (Guest et al., 2017).

Interview protocol was developed through the reading and analysis of the literature studies in the interview of psycho-physical training, physical training and psychological training. Moreover, the interview protocol in the current FGD was also an outcomes derived from expert interviews to formation the series of interview protocol for the FGD to formulate themes pertaining the idea, factors and components of psycho-physical training, physical training, and psychological training allowed to emerge as the individual responses as well as the interactions between participants, can be analyzed to identify other areas of agreement about psycho-physical training, physical training and psychological training among young university student-athletes in Malaysia. There are total of 14 respondents and 2 focus groups conducted in two public universities as well as three (3) experts invited in the related to the research field as for reviewed the interview protocol and the established themes during the data analysis process.

The data confirmation employed triangulation strategy to increase the trustworthiness of the analysis. To avoid bias, triangulation is one of the strategies in qualitative research to strengthen and enhance the internal validity of the study (Carter, et.al., 2014). Additionally, triangulation refers to the use of more than one approach when investigating a research problem, in order to maximize confidence in the findings (Bryman, 2006).

### **3.1. Sampling Method**

The sample techniques were intended to selected participants based on the inclusion criteria: (i) Students must be registered as a full time student in the selected public universities and (ii) Students must be diagnosed as university student-athletes by the university authoritarians, whereby the exclusion criteria are (i) University student-athletes with mental or chronic illness, (ii) University student-athletes with mental retardation and (iii) University student-athletes with learning disabilities (LD). Besides, as mentioned by Tuckett (2004), qualitative study is emphasizing the richness and essence of the information collected rather than the number of study participant. Therefore, a total of fourteen (14) university student-athletes gave their

consent and agreed to participate in this research. However, both universities were selected as they provide good student-athletes as recommended. The student-athletes were chosen by the university authorities based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria mentioned. The demographic background of the participants is shown in Table 1 and Table 2.

**Table 1: Participants Background Information FGD 1**

<b>CODE</b>	<b>INSTITUTION</b>	<b>GENDER</b>	<b>ACADEMIC LEVEL</b>	<b>EDUCATION BACKGROUND</b>
<b>A01</b>	Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris	Male	Undergraduate	Bachelor Degree in Sports Science
<b>A02</b>	Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris	Female	Undergraduate	Bachelor Degree in Sports Science
<b>A03</b>	Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris	Male	Undergraduate	Bachelor Degree in Sports Science
<b>A04</b>	Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris	Female	Undergraduate	Bachelor Degree in Sports Science
<b>A05</b>	Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris	Male	Undergraduate	Bachelor Degree in Sports Science
<b>A06</b>	Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris	Male	Undergraduate	Bachelor Degree in Sports Science
<b>A07</b>	Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris	Female	Undergraduate	Bachelor Degree in Sports Science

**Table 2: Participants Background Information FGD 2**

<b>CODE</b>	<b>INSTITUTION</b>	<b>GENDER</b>	<b>ACADEMIC LEVEL</b>	<b>EDUCATION BACKGROUND</b>
<b>B01</b>	Universiti Malaysia Sabah	Male	Undergraduate	Bachelor Degree in Sports Science
<b>B02</b>	Universiti Malaysia Sabah	Female	Undergraduate	Bachelor Degree in Sports Science
<b>B03</b>	Universiti Malaysia Sabah	Male	Undergraduate	Bachelor Degree in Sports Science
<b>B04</b>	Universiti Malaysia Sabah	Male	Undergraduate	Bachelor Degree in Sports Science
<b>B05</b>	Universiti Malaysia Sabah	Female	Undergraduate	Bachelor Degree in Sports Science
<b>B06</b>	Universiti Malaysia Sabah	Female	Undergraduate	Bachelor of Finance with Honours
<b>B07</b>	Universiti Malaysia Sabah	Female	Undergraduate	Bachelor of Science (Business Mathematics)

### **3.2. Data Collection & Data Analysis**

The FGD was conducted to explore unknown information to answer the research objective. The data collection process begins by building an initial relationship by making an appointment through phone calls. After the participants agreed to be part of the study, the group discussion session was conducted face-to-face. The group discussion was recorded using a voice recorder for the purpose of data management of the study. The data collection from the focus groups consists of shared understanding, views, and opinions of the participants. Additionally, the moderator needs to be capable of managing and ensuring that each individual in the group can take turns in sharing their understanding, views, and opinions so that the time limit set could be utilized fully and smoothly to save time for data analysis (Creswell, 2002).

The study has two focus groups, each with seven students from Malaysia public universities. This range of focus group size is to create an environment where participants can safely and comfortably share their thoughts, ideas, and opinions (Onwuegnuzie, et.al, 2009). The current focus group data would be included in the analysis to further refine and improve the understanding in psycho-physical training, physical training, psychological training and cognitive restructuring.

The data of this qualitative study appeared in the form of focus group discussion interviews and transcript documents. However, the entire data analysis process begins with data collection. An experienced moderator presides over the sharing sessions and takes notes on the information shared and exchanged. After all groups had carried out their discussions, the data from the notes taken during the observation of the two (2) focus groups were analysed and categorized. The participation of the groups also assists researchers to achieve data saturation, which is a crucial component in the qualitative study (Doody, et.al., 2013).

The discussion data collected from students were transformed into tables. Students' insights pertaining to the psycho-physical training, physical training and psychological training are obtained through notes, categories and themes. A total of nine (9) open-ended questions were included in the focus group discussion.

Data saturation is essential in qualitative research, as through data saturation, the qualitative researchers can fulfil or gain the research needs (Bernard, 2012). Researchers in qualitative research would like to obtain as much information as possible, therefore the interview questions should be well prepared to allow rich information to be gathered from the research participants (Ness, 2015). Another important aspect of qualitative research is data triangulation. This research used data triangulation, as the focus group discussion questions were uniformly conducted to obtain data from Malaysian young university student-athletes', who are full-time students in public universities and acknowledged as university student-athletes by

the university authoritarians. The rationale is due to the idea, factors and components of psycho-physical training, physical training, and psychological training is important to gain adequate knowledge to design a reliable module that target increasing sustainable adaptive behaviours and well-being among young athletes. After the participant is identified, the FGD is transcribed into words and the triangulation strategy was employed to reach data confirmation (Guest et al., 2017). In the process, the analyzing of the interview data, all young researchers were gathered for discussion to form a preliminary theme. Senior researchers met for the preliminary theme discussion, which ensures the investigator’s triangulation is implied (Rugg, 2010). Therefore, data validity is verified. Furthermore, research reliability was tested through the inter-rater reliability (IRR) test, IRR is a coding technique that involves multiple researchers in the coding process (McAlister et al.,2017). Research questions are provided to the two experts in sport psychology as they were invited to go through the data to complete the IRR process. With the completion of the analysis process, the interviews were converted into written form, grouped, and concluded with a theme to answer the research question. These themes were narrowed into three main themes for each training. All the data were analysed to identify themes that emerged. In short, the theme that emerged from the focus group discussion indicating participants’ experiences in psycho-physical training, physical training and psychological training are as Table 3.

**Table 3: Theme that emerged from the Focus Group Discussion (FGD)**

<i>Psycho-Physical Training</i>	<i>4.1.1 - Tweak and strengthen athlete mental health</i>
	<i>4.1.2 - Benefits to trainee in prepare match/competition</i>
	<i>4.1.3 - Booster athletes’ professional development</i>
<i>Physical Training</i>	<i>4.2.1 - Fitness, skills and interest</i>
	<i>4.2.2 - Healthy body healthy mind</i>
	<i>4.2.3 - Practice fundamental sport skills</i>
<i>Psychological Training</i>	<i>4.3.1 - Methodological system</i>
	<i>4.3.2 - Manage athletes’ emotion for their performance</i>
	<i>4.3.3 - Assist athletes to have better self-control</i>

#### **4. Findings & Discussion**

The findings of the study are based on the focus group discussion. The purpose of the current research is conducted to investigate the experiences of young university student-athletes towards the psycho-physical training, physical training and psychological training throughout their athlete's career. Therefore, focus group discussion interview questions including the meaning, experiences and important of

the skills in the training. Eventually, there are total of three (3) parts in answering the experience pertaining to psycho-physical training, physical training, and psychological training among young university student-athlete. Each section analysed three (3) themes namely psycho-physical training, physical training and psychological training.

#### **4.1. Psycho-Physical Training**

##### **4.1.1. Tweak And Strengthen Athlete Mental Health**

The first objective is to explore the meaning of the psycho-physical training to the members in the focus group discussion. This is intended to understand the student-athletes' opinions toward the psycho-physical training experience during their professional life as an athlete. It can be a thought-provoking physical and mental training method for the students. While they knew about psycho-physical training, their meaning in training is limited, however, studying the term in physical education or sports education courses made the FGD members' experience with the training content more interesting (Prots et al., 2021; Pichurin, 2014). In overall, the term psycho physical training is interpreted directly by the student-athletes as training related to a person's psychology and physical activities.

A03: *"...focusing on training a person's psychology and physicality..."*

A06: *"...psychology combined with physical matters..."*

B02: *"...exercises that involve the athlete's psychology and physique..."*

B03: *"...involves two things namely mental and physical in a training..."*

Sasso, et.al., (2022) reported student-athletes bear dual responsibilities between the responsibilities in athletic performance and responsibilities to strike in their academic obligations, these raising the risk of student-athletes developing a range of mental health issues and poor well-being. However, several members in the focus group discussion provided another deepen acknowledgment to the term's psycho-physical training, that is a training related to improving an athlete mental health to deal with their problems as seen from the following:

A04: *"...mental strength...dealing with environmental problems as well as personal problems (family/friends) ..."*

A05: *"... improve mental health..."*

B01: *"...training in improving the psychological state of the*

*mental health condition of the individual/athlete in dealing with stress in sports..."*

B04: *"... a form of training to improve the mentality view towards the level of intensity of physical activity..."*

B05: *"...specific training for innovative solutions and increased mutual assistance and support within the team and improve mental health..."*

B06: *"...exercise that provides many benefits to mental health..."*

B07: *"...training to test a person's ability, mentality in sport..."*

These results of the focus group discussion also revealed the psycho-physical training is not only helping to improve the mental healthiness of an athlete, the training also involve some elements that related to the cognitive development As stated by A01, it "...directs towards the cognitive development of an individual...". In addition, the members also include the idea pertaining to psycho physical training are related to the inner and outer world of an athlete as to see from A02 and A07:

A02: *"...psychophysical relates to the relationship between the inner (psychic) and outer (physical) worlds of a person..."*

A07: *"...psychophysical relates to the relationship between the inner (psychic) and outer (physical) worlds of a person...the relationship between physical stimuli and their subjective relevance..."*

#### **4.1.2. Benefits to Trainee in Prepare Competitions**

In conjunction with the meaning of psycho-physical training, hence, the discussion leads to link the meaning to experiences. The purpose of this discussion question is aimed to link both the athletes' personal and professional life towards psycho-physical training. Notwithstanding anything contained to the contrary, some of the members are yet to have a complete experience for the psycho-physical training, such as participants A06, B01, B06, B07. Participants from the FGD 2 agreed with *"...psycho-physical training is a very challenging exercise...playing mind testing games"* as mentioned by B02 and B5, as well as B4: *"... psycho-physical training can gain improvement in terms of physical and mental..."*. Furthermore, the athletes in the focus group discussion points out that their psycho-physical training involves a variety of exercises that is beneficial to the young athletes to adjust themselves before competitions.

A01: *"...variety of exercises or activities that involve interacting with external relationships to open social space in life for the*

*sake of a person's emotional, physical and spiritual health...take time to understand the purposes..."*

A03: *"...the training that is engaged in firmly and continuously until there is a feeling to stop practicing because you feel too tired*

*and unable, but the psychological training is given as revealed more by the achievements and awards received than the hard training which every done makes wanting to give up will bear fruit in the future with a strong self-confidence in going through all the hard training..."*

A04: *"... run really hard when the coach makes a test 2.4 km a week 3 times it really tests me mentally ...after all, I become more confidence after the training hardship..."*

Sports activities improve individual's mental health (Abdluaziz Muhsen & Abdulaziz Muhsen, 2020). However, in terms of mental health, focus group discussion members perceived that psycho-physical training are also bettering their performance in sport. As the below excerpts.

B03: *"... was able to improve my performance in sports. In addition, this training is able to change my way of thinking when facing a competitive situation..."*

A02: *"...helps improve mental health by reducing anxiety, depression, and negative moods as well as by improving self-esteem and cognitive function..."*

A05: *"...ensure a good performance during a match...even in a critical situation..."*

A07: *"... training help to control/lesser pressure... able to control my stress and compete in a healthy manner without aggressiveness in competition..."*

#### **4.1.3. Booster Athletes' Professional Development**

Discussion in knowing the athletes' personal and professional life towards psycho-physical training meaning and experience, the next question is to approach a self-reflection pertaining to the importance of psycho-physical training for them also for the others student-athletes. Based on the discussion, participants are agreeing with A05: *"... to improve performance..."* in FGD 1 and B6 *"...increase sportsmanship..."* in FGD 2. Besides, the participants' opinion that psycho-physical training is helping athlete in their sports performance.

A07: *"...helping athletes in balancing mentally and physically..."*

- B01: *"...increasing the level of psychology and psychological skills in overcoming and adapting during the competition..."*
- B03: *"...in my opinion, the importance of this training to young athletes is able to help them in facing different situations and be able to find a better way when in sports. In addition, this exercise is able to improve their physical performance much better..."*
- B04: *"...can help improve the performance and potential of young athletes in facing a new sport or sports norm..."*
- B05: *"... helps the athletes to increase their metallicity in any situation they face either during competition or in training..."*

Among the quality developed as professional athletes include higher athletic identity, self-esteem, and positive expectation (Abdulrasool, EmadOdaJoda & Abdulrasool, 2020; Chang, et.al., 2011; Samadzadeh et al., 2011). The psycho-physical training is considered crucial in assisting student-athletes' professional development for an athlete in an explanation of chemical reactions from the psycho-physical training, enhancing their self-confidence:

- A01: *"...release of endorphins, suitable for reduction of emotional stress, increase social relationships, protection against cognitive decline..."*
- A02: *"...reduces stress and depression...stimulates the production of endorphins...prevents stress and depression. Endorphins can also make you feel more relaxed and optimistic after a hard workout in the field..."*
- A03: *"... train their perception in facing all challenges with calmness and strong self-confidence..."*
- A04: *"... the training involve situation that challenge mental strength...release endorphins booster self-confident during the test as they realize their weaknesses and able to overcome... then improve to be strong in the competition..."*
- A06: *"...train better psychology in athletes...brains release chemical and increase confidence..."*
- B07: *"...recognize the ability, with the psycho-physical training...brain release some types of chemicals to make sure they know their ability and have enough confidence..."*
- B02: *"...helps improve athlete performance...build self-confidence*

*in athletes... be able to know the strengths and weaknesses of athletes..."*

## **4.2. Physical Training**

### **4.2.1. Fitness, Skills and Interest**

Psycho-physical training has two (2) parts, physical training and psychological training both are playing important role in developing of an athlete. Thus, by gathering the psychological training in-deep discussions would be seeming incomplete to understanding the training. Therefore, the researchers again lead the FGD to have an in-depth discussion so that people can have a deepen knowledge in discussion and understand from general to specific. There are fitness and skills most discussed to be consider into account in physical training.

- A02: *"...physical skills that involve combining components such as balance, flexibility, speed, strength and stamina with skills that will then push them towards..."*
- A03: *"... muscle endurance and also cardiovascular ...to stay playing at maximum performance longer and better..."*
- A04: *"...appropriateness of training...level of physical fitness...training area...training goals... athlete commitment..."*
- A05: *"... physical activities that must involve endurance.... improve mental health ..."*
- A06: *"...includes all fitness activities such as speed, agility, power and others..."*
- A07: *"...fitness...this is said to be so because it helps athletes compete in a healthy way..."*
- B01: *"... fitness... skills training"*
- B04: *"...athlete's skills and fitness to perform exercises ... different levels of training intensity..."*
- B05: *"...basic sports skills..."*
- B06: *"...fitness... very crucial to athlete..."*
- B07: *"...strength training..."*

Lastly, in other respects, interest is important for an athlete in physical training. This is because training is repetitive behaviours requiring high interest as they would often lead to boredom and an eventual drop out.

- A01: *“...their interest in the type of training...”*
- B02: *“...training that can attract attention and not be boring...”*
- B03: *“...interest...what purpose they want to achieve ... what the young athlete wants to improve...”*

#### **4.2.2. Healthy Body Healthy Mind**

The input of the FGD pertains to physical training is fitness, skills and interest. The discussion lead to a more specific question, which is the types of physical factors or components are more important to consider for physical training. Based on the focus group discussion member, physical component is crucial in physical training, as mentioned by B3, *“...the physical requirements they want to carry out the exercise...”*. Based on A07 and B07, *“...healthy lifestyle and a fit body...”* and *“...healthy lifestyle and with good attitude...”* respectively. According to Abou Elmagd, (2016), regular exercise can maintain a person healthiness, energy and independency as they get older. This is a great motivation to promote people to not only succeed but also maintain participation in sport in one’s life. In addition, based on A01, A04, A05 and B06 discussion, the lower body is important to physical training, *“...an important physical component is the lower body ...”*, *“...lower body is a component that is often involved in human daily activities...”*, *“...quality training period needed in focusing on lower body during training...”* and *“...more skills need more course focusing on lower body...”*. However, beside of the lower body component in training, some specific skills mention by the participant such as strength, speed, conditioning and so on are in line in mentioned by Trendafilov & Dimitrova, (2013), that these skills are important in physical training.

- A02: *“...in any movement or sport, there are basically 4 physical attributes that need to be exhibited or used by an athlete, strength, speed, conditioning, and position...”*
- A03: *“...strength, in terms of strength young athletes are better than older athletes so young athletes can make better achievements .... agility, speed training can help young athletes to train themselves and the working muscles to adapt to different conditions with the same or better performance level...”*
- A06: *“...in terms of health is cardiovascular endurance...”*
- B01: *“...body composition...cardio endurance...”*
- B02: *“...cardiovascular flexibility and endurance...”*

B04: “... *physical component to consider for young athletes is cardiovascular endurance...*”

B05: “...*physical fitness in terms of body composition endurance...*”

#### **4.2.3. Practice Fundamental Sport Skills**

After exploring the important and the crucial factors for physical training, the discussion opened an opportunity to explore some more physical skills that young athletes need to learn about them in order to booster these important components in physical training. Interestingly, to booster the physical skills, the training will be needed for fundamental sport skills. This is important to athletes, as athletes tend to practice the skills in the context of their game or sport, for instance, baseball athlete would be practicing hitting as this has been taught to them as meaningful skills. They included that the public has forgotten fundamental sport skills such as warm up activities, which has been purported as contributing to children's as well as adolescent's physical, cognitive and social development and is thought to provide the foundation for an active lifestyle Pot & Van Hilvoorde, (2014); Lubans, et.al., (2010). Therefore, in line with the current study, the FGD discussed the fundamental sport skills is crucial to booster the physical skills among athletes.

A01: “...*fundamental...jump force expansion ...*”

A02: “...*fundamental skills that are manifested outside with sports skills...it includes strength, speed, endurance, coordination and flexibility...*”

A04: “...*dynamic workout...warm up... basic skills*”

A05: “...*focus on the basic (fundamental) skills...*”

A06: “...*fundamental skills that can increase the performance in agility and reaction time...*”

A07: “...*training basic skills that can help endurance, strength, flexibility, coordination, speed, agility, reaction time and balance...*”

A03: “...*the fundamental skills and basic skills such as kicking correctly using the correct technique... these are very important in an effort to get scoring opportunities...*”

B01: “...*skill-based fitness ...*”

B02: “...*fundamental skills, so body can be more flexibility, agility, muscular endurance...*”

- B03: *“...such as in my sport, the basic pass, header, shoot must presence...”*
- B04: *“...among the physical skills that young athletes need to learn are important fundamental skills ...”*
- B05: *“...fundamental skills especially in running, jumping, swimming...”*
- B07: *“...basic (fundamental) skills to improve/increase stamina, balance, agility...”*

### **4.3. Psychological Training**

#### **4.3.1. Methodological System**

The term psycho-physical training refers to the mind and body training of learners based on both psychological and physical domains. Since the body and the mind of the human cannot be assumed as two separate elements, they are considered jointly (Samadzadeh, et.al., 2011). Thus, in the current study, a deepen exploration about their experience in psychological training is explored. Unfortunately, most of the member in the group merely have the experiences in answering the psychometric test and have some psychological learning as part of their psychological training such as for participant A01, A03, A05, A06, A07, B01, B02, B04, B05, B06 and B07. Nonetheless, few feedbacks received as followed:

- A02: *“...psychological skills training is a methodological system that performers use to manage and control their psychological state. It is effective in and out of performance...”*
- A04: *“... a methodological system that strengthen someone who has a weak mentality, for me, they should not engage in sports because sports require people who are patient, disciplined and steadfast. For example, running 25 round tracks*
- B03: *“...Psychological training helps the athlete mentally to be much better in facing the surrounding situation...”*

#### **4.3.2. Manage Athletes' Emotion for Their Performance**

Next, the athletes' idea about mental training/ rehearsal training and psychological training in sport were explored. Sports offer various of benefits to those who are capable to repeat and perform it every day and eventually generate healthy body and strength to prevent health diseases and stroke (Abou Elmagd, 2016). In addition, physical activity contributes to the mental health and well-being of the general

public, primarily by improving mood and self-perception (Ali, 2018). During the FGD sessions, most participants discussed the psychological training as taking care and managing athletes' emotions.

- A01: "... *take care of the athlete's emotions...*"
- A06: "...always give motivation to athletes in training... assist them overcoming the negative emotions from the past..."
- A07: "...mental training is the idea of overcoming past failures by staying positive and improve negative emotions..."
- B01: "...important to expanding mental training methods to athletes across the country...help them improves emotion and performance"
- B02: "...give training that are suitable but leave a big impact on the athlete's emotions..."
- B03: "...this training is an exercise that helps athletes to improve their emotions..."
- B04: "...doing exercises that help in improving the psychological, emotions and mental level of the individual..."
- B06: "...an exercise that improves emotion and performance..."
- B07: "...training that sooth an athlete's mind, eliminate previous failure emotions ...

Other than emotions, the FGD members discuss other factors related to the psychological skills. In sport culture, technical skills, tactical strategies and physical training are used to be the focus, until recent years some focus shifting to the psychological factors (Miçoogullari & Ekmekçi, 2017), therefore besides of managing emotions, others' ideas towards psychological factor from the FGD are:

- A03: "...*important training is given before the competition to calm someone down so that they are not anxious so that their level of readiness remains and does not disappear...*"
- A04: "... mental training needs to mix with the positive community and repetition training, it has to improve athletic ability..."
- A02: "...*mental rehearsal is where the performer visualizes themselves performing a skill and practices that skill in their mind...*"
- A05: "...experience more situation...visualizes the past experience and improve..."

B05: “...doing chasing activities, playing traditional games, playing mind-testing games such as hajj checkers, soduku *to calm down athlete after a stressful competition ...*”

#### **4.3.3. Assist Athletes to Have Better Self-Control**

Training is non-separated to athletes at all levels, Psychological training provided to athletes intend on preparing the athletes to face all the possibility of scenario that might lead to mental discomfort resulted from stressful and tensed competitive circumstances, monotonous training, academic works, and interpersonal conflict factors (Teodor & Claudiu, 2013). The psychological training can be more meaningful if the training inserts the important, vital, meaningful or useful elements in the psychological training such as the techniques the athletic skills, the respond to contextual cues and the focus on the required aspects of competition or training. Thus, the effect of the psychological training towards our young university athlete are enabled to assist them in:

A01: “...helping athletes in terms of mental control from stress...”

A06: “...very important in the development of sports, as athletes faces a lot of stress, they have to use the learned knowledge and control ...”

A05: “...improve performance in terms of control stress, anxiety...”

A07: “...can reduce the stress faced by athletes...”

B01: “...able to help athletes in improving mental health such as lesser stress and anxious...”

A02: “...in the context of competition, knowledge and manipulation of psychological variables such as attention, self-confidence, stress control, anxiety, motivation, unity, self-control or emotional self-regulation, mood and interpersonal skills can influence athlete performance...”

A03: “...make athletes more confident and not easily feel anxious (self-control) even when facing something unexpected...”

A04: “... the effect is important in performance improvement, the quality of training increases, be more open minded and positive and high self-motivation...”

- B04: “...helps in creating motivation to strengthen mental...”
- B02: “...can improve the athlete's focus...”
- B06: “...helping athletes focus on the necessary aspects of competition or training...”
- B03: “...good effect can be achieved for young athletes, especially in their performance...”
- B05: “...improve the quality of national sports in terms of the mental strengths...”
- B07: “...increase the confidence in an athlete...”

## **5. Implications**

This study is expected to have great impacts on society, economy and the nation by focusing on examining the status, level and characteristics of mental health among young Malaysian athletes. Athlete students will be able to understand their mental health or well-being capacity and be able to seek help once needed before leading to severe mental disorders, for example, chronic depression, anxiety, and test anxiety from experiencing academic situations that are intolerant. Since the current study relates closely to psychological and physical aspects, cognitive approach, such as Rational Emotive and Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (RE&CBT) is recommended to be imply for the module or related training session as the theory emphasizes on the student’s responsibility for creating their behaviours and dysfunctional emotions, such as depression, anxiety, and stress that affect their well-being. Consequently, Rational Emotive and Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (RE&CBT) advises to change such irrational beliefs and substitute more rational ones (Ellis, 1999). Moreover, it addresses the aim of the Eleventh Malaysian Plan in promoting the wellness of the society to ensure balanced development in tandem with economic growth. With the expected enhanced module on psychophysical and cognitive restructuring, the introduction of guidelines for mental health promotion and programs for academic and educational situations can also be implemented. Comprehensive mental health strategies and direction in psychological health will help in improving the quality of educational performance for young athletes.

## **6. Conclusions**

This study discusses and advocates a comprehensive consideration of qualitative-interpretive methodology in thematic analysis for the evaluation of the framework of survey questionnaires on athletes’ psycho-physical and cognitive components intertwined with athletes’ performance. In conducting this research, the goal is to

give recommendations, so that the university can improve the practices, resources, and procedures as it relates to young student-athletes. The identification of these factors is an important contribution to the understanding of athletic performance and athletes' well-being. The results of this study may be used by athletes, coaches, and sports psychologists to improve the physical and psychological well-being of athletes.

## **7. Limitations of Study and Recommendations**

Several limitations were present in this intervention such as interviewing the coach and student-athletes in an individual session, or making sessions interesting for university athletes so that they feel more comfortable with physical activities, presenting the contents in simple, scientific, and sporty forms, and applying a complementary or integrative training involving different methods and skills such as psychological, physical, and cognitive restructuring techniques.

Based on the findings, the university athletes will be able to clarify the positive effects of psycho-physical training. Correspondingly, the psycho-physical training could be a reliable intervention to assist university athletes in combating properly common negative emotional problems related to their competitive circumstances that impact their sports performance and well-being. Athlete's psycho-physical training will be used for athletes and may be applied to other emotional disorders such as depression, phobia, anger, and so on in order to enhance mental health.

Working with young athletes requires the knowledge in comprehending the inherent variability in their training development that will impact the implementation of a psycho-physical training program (Visek et al., 2013). At the same time, complex of questions about using of physical culture in formation of psychological and psycho-physical readiness for professional function has still remained insufficiently solved. In this direction the highest progress was achieved by scientists, who studied application of physical exercises for psychological training of military or home affairs officers (Pichurin, 2014). Moreover, high quality survey-based research is dependent on effective standardized tests to ask the right questions.

The application of the study provide recommendation for (1) young athletes to aware of and to identify and increase their mental health capacity, (2) the management of the educational authorities for prevention, promotion and educational programme to alleviate mental health problems, and (3) policymakers as a structured mental health guideline to add into their safety protocol for young athletes in promoting their academic achievement. This study aligned with the National Mental Health Policy, and the Ministry of Education Malaysia in urging young athletes to create mental health awareness and early prevention strategies to improve the educational environment and is able to contribute to the community.

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