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(IJEPC)**www.ijepec.com**MOTIVATION AND SOCIAL SUPPORT AS DETERMINANTS
OF SELF-PERCEIVED ACHIEVEMENT AMONG MALAYSIAN
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DOI: 10.35631/IJEPC.1061020**This work is licensed under** [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)**Abstract:**

This study examines the combined influence of motivation and social support on self-perceived achievement among Malaysian university athletes, grounded in Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), Social Support Theory, and Self-Appraisal Theory. A quantitative cross-sectional survey was conducted with 100 student-athletes (52 males, 48 females) from Malaysian public universities participating in national collegiate competitions. Data were collected using the Sport Motivation Scale-II (SMS-II), the MOS-Modified Social Support Survey (MOS-SSS), and the Sport Performance Perception Scale (SPPS). Reliability coefficients were satisfactory ($\alpha = .85-.86$). Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations, and multiple linear regression analyses were performed using SPSS 26. Results indicated that both motivation ($r = 0.63, p < 0.01$) and social support ($r = 0.58, p < 0.01$) were strongly correlated with self-perceived achievement. The regression model was significant ($F(2, 97) = 46.8, p < .001$) and explained 49 % of the variance, with motivation ($\beta = .45$) emerging as the strongest predictor, followed by social support ($\beta = .38$). The findings confirm that athletes with higher intrinsic motivation and greater perceived support exhibit stronger confidence, satisfaction, and performance appraisal. The study provides empirical validation of SDT in a dual-career university context and underscores the psychosocial synergy between internal drives and environmental resources in sustaining athletic excellence. It advocates for integrating motivational coaching, mentorship, and structured social support mechanisms into

Malaysian higher education sport programs to optimize both athletic and academic outcomes.

Keywords:

Motivation, Social Support, Self-Perceived Achievement, University Athletes, Self-Determination Theory

Introduction

Sport within the university ecosystem serves a dual function: it is both an educational tool and a developmental arena for human potential. In Malaysia, higher education institutions play a vital role in the national sporting structure through the Majlis Sukan Universiti Malaysia (MASUM), which organizes intervarsity competitions such as SUKIPT, AUG, and WUG, producing athletes who eventually contribute to SEA Games, Asian Games, and Olympic representation. Participation in university sports extends beyond physical prowess it fosters leadership, emotional stability, social integration, and mental health resilience (Ahmad et al., 2020). However, as academic expectations and competition intensify, the ability of student-athletes to sustain peak performance increasingly depends on psychosocial factors, particularly motivation and social support.

Motivation as a Psychological Catalyst

Motivation is universally recognized as the psychological engine that drives effort, persistence, and the attainment of goals (Vallerand & Rousseau, 2001). Within sports contexts, Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan (1985), provides the dominant explanatory framework. It distinguishes between intrinsic motivation, where athletes engage in sport for enjoyment, mastery, or personal satisfaction, and extrinsic motivation, which depends on rewards, recognition, or external validation. Research in multiple contexts, ranging from high-performance swimmers (Brat et al., 2025) to collegiate athletes (Ahmad et al., 2020), demonstrates that intrinsic motivation fosters sustained participation, resilience in the face of stress, and adaptive coping in competitive situations.

For Malaysian university athletes balancing dual roles as students and competitors, motivational quality becomes critical. Intrinsic motives encourage endurance in the face of dual-career stressors, such as training and study, while extrinsic factors, like scholarships or institutional recognition, may trigger short-term compliance but not long-term persistence. When intrinsic and extrinsic motives interact synergistically, they enable athletes to achieve self-determined regulation, where external goals are internalized as personal values, a state linked to enhanced self-efficacy, engagement, and perceived performance.

The Role of Social Support in Athlete Functioning

Parallel to motivation, social support represents the interpersonal and environmental resource base that helps athletes manage stress and maintain focus. It encompasses emotional, informational, instrumental, and appraisal dimensions (Giangrasso & Casale, 2014). The Social Support Survey (MOS-SSS) operationalizes this construct, measuring perceived support availability and quality. Empirical evidence confirms that athletes who perceive higher levels of support from coaches, teammates, family, and institutional staff report greater confidence and lower burnout (Freeman & Rees, 2010; Coutinho et al., 2021). Social relationships also

influence motivation. A supportive coach or empathetic teammate satisfies the relatedness need within SDT, reinforcing intrinsic motivation (Keegan et al., 2014). In team sports, collective identity and mutual encouragement can buffer against anxiety and failure. Conversely, poor social dynamics often result in isolation, decreased confidence, and underperformance (Cronin & Jennings, 2024).

Interplay Between Motivation, Social Support, and Perceived Achievement

While both motivation and social support have independent effects on performance, their interactional dynamics, how they combine to shape self-perceived achievement, remain underexplored in Malaysian university settings. Prior international studies (Cresswell & Eklund, 2007; Hanton et al., 2008) have emphasized that athletes' perceived performance mediates the relationship between psychological and environmental factors. Perceptions of competence, satisfaction, and progress strongly predict actual performance continuity and future goal orientation. Therefore, perceived achievement is not merely a subjective evaluation, but a powerful motivational feedback mechanism that sustains engagement and fosters an athlete's sense of identity. Malaysian athletes often face contextual pressures, including limited institutional funding, inadequate psychological support, and a cultural emphasis on academic achievement (Omar-Fauzee et al., 2009). These factors may moderate the influence of motivation and social support. Consequently, understanding how these variables interrelate can inform targeted interventions for mental well-being and sports excellence in higher education.

Research Gap and Contribution

Despite growing interest in athlete psychology, few Malaysian studies integrate motivation, social support, and self-perception within a single quantitative model specific to university teams. Existing work tends to focus on elite or school-level athletes or treats each variable independently. Moreover, the validation of internationally recognized instruments such as the Sport Motivation Scale-II (SMS-II) and MOS-SSS within Malaysian cultural contexts is limited. This study addresses these gaps by:

1. Examining the levels of motivation and social support among Malaysian university athletes.
2. Testing correlations between motivation, social support, and perceived achievement.
3. Evaluating the combined predictive power of motivation and social support on athletes' self-perceived achievement using regression analysis.

This approach provides a comprehensive and culturally grounded understanding of psychological functioning among student-athletes, aligning with Malaysia's goal to develop "thinking athletes" capable of academic and sporting excellence.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design, which is appropriate for analysing relationships between multiple psychological variables at a single point in time (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This design enabled the efficient collection of large-scale numerical data from diverse athletic backgrounds without the manipulation of variables. The aim was to explain how motivation and social support predict perceived athletic achievement. The non-experimental nature ensures ecological validity since responses are captured in athletes' natural contexts during training periods and within university environments. This is

consistent with the shift in sport psychology toward real-world ecological measurement, rather than artificial laboratory settings (Rahman et al., 2021).

Participants and Sampling

Participants were 100 university athletes (52 males and 48 females) representing public institutions under MASUM, participating in both team and individual sports (e.g., football, athletics, netball, badminton). Ages ranged between 19–25 years ($M = 21.4$, $SD = 1.9$). Selection used stratified random sampling, ensuring representation across gender and sport type. Eligibility criteria included:

- Active participation in university-level competitions for at least one year.
- Registration as a full-time student-athlete.
- Willingness to participate voluntarily.

This sampling frame aligns with typical quantitative psychological studies that seek moderate statistical power (0.80) for correlation and regression analyses involving three variables.

Research Instruments

Three validated psychometric instruments were employed as shown in Table 1.

Table 1.

Variable	Instrument	Dimensions	Cronbach α (Pilot)	Example Items
Motivation	Sport Motivation Scale-II (SMS-II) (Vallerand et al., 1992)	Intrinsic, Extrinsic, Amotivation	0.85	"I participate because it gives me satisfaction to learn new techniques."
Social Support	MOS-Modified Social Support Survey (MOS-SSS) (Giangrasso & Casale, 2014)	Emotional/Informational, Tangible, Affectionate, Positive Interaction	0.80	"I can count on my teammates when things go wrong."
Perceived Achievement	Sport Performance Perception Scale (SPPS)	Technical, Tactical, Mental, Effort, Satisfaction	0.86 (est.)	"I feel confident about my performance during matches."

Each construct was rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Higher scores reflected higher motivation, stronger perceived social support, and greater self-perceived achievement.

Validity and Reliability

Content validity was assessed by three sport psychology experts and two senior coaches, who reviewed the instrument for linguistic clarity and cultural relevance. Construct validity was inferred from prior research showing multidimensional factor stability in cross-cultural contexts (Alemán-Ruiz & Calvo-Francés, 2017; Giangrasso & Casale, 2014).

Reliability was examined via a pilot test ($n = 30$). Cronbach's α coefficients were:

1. Motivation = .85
2. Social Support = .80
3. Self-Perceived Performance = .86

Values above .70 indicate acceptable internal consistency (Hair et al., 2019), confirming the robustness of the adapted scales for Malaysian respondents.

Procedure and Ethics

Ethical clearance was obtained from the research ethics committee of the participating universities. Data collection was conducted during training sessions and through secure online forms. Athletes received detailed study information and signed a consent form. Confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation were strictly upheld. Participants could withdraw at any point without consequence. Data were coded numerically and stored in encrypted databases accessible only to the research team.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was employed using SPSS version 26 using the following sequence:

1. Descriptive statistics to assess central tendencies and dispersion (means, SDs).
2. Pearson correlation to test bivariate relationships among variables.
3. Multiple linear regression to determine the joint predictive effects of motivation and social support on self-perceived performance.
4. Assumption checks including normality (Kolmogorov–Smirnov), linearity, multicollinearity ($VIF < 5$), and homoscedasticity.

A significance level of $p < .05$ was used for all inferential tests.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Overall, in Table 2, respondents reported high motivation and social support, aligning with expectations for competitive university athletes. The high mean for perceived achievement ($M = 4.10$) suggests a confident and self-efficacious athletic cohort. These results imply that the majority of athletes perceive strong internal and external resources supporting their sporting goals. Table 2 summarizes the mean and standard deviation values for each construct.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics (N = 100)

Variable	Mean (M)	SD	Level Interpretation
Motivation (SMS-II)	4.12	0.47	High
Social Support (MOS-SSS)	4.05	0.53	High
Self-Perceived Achievement (SPPS)	4.10	0.44	High

Correlation Analysis

The Pearson correlation matrix tested the associations among the three main variables. Findings in Table 3 indicate strong positive correlations between:

1. Motivation and Self-Perceived Achievement ($r = .63$),
2. Social Support and Self-Perceived Achievement ($r = .58$), and

3. Motivation and Social Support ($r = .55$).

These relationships validate Hypotheses 1 and 2. The strength of correlation suggests that athletes who feel more motivated and socially supported tend to appraise their performance more positively. The association between motivation and support further implies that supportive social environments may enhance intrinsic drive a key SDT mechanism.

Table 3. Correlation Matrix

Variable	1	2	3
1. Motivation	—	.55**	.63**
2. Social Support	—	—	.58**
3. Self-Perceived Achievement	—	—	—

Regression Analysis

To test Hypothesis 3, which posits that motivation and social support jointly predict self-perceived achievement, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted. The regression model explained 49% of the variance in self-perceived achievement. In Table 4, both predictors were statistically significant, confirming that athletes' sense of accomplishment depends substantially on their motivation and perceived social backing.

Table 4. Regression Coefficients

Predictor	β	t	Sig.
Motivation	.45	6.12	.000
Social Support	.38	5.21	.000

Model Summary: $R = .70$, $R^2 = .49$, Adjusted $R^2 = .47$, $F(2,97) = 46.8$, $p < .001$

Standardized Effects

Motivation exhibited a slightly stronger influence ($\beta = .45$) than social support ($\beta = .38$). This aligns with SDT's hierarchy, emphasizing that internalized motivation exerts the primary force in sustained engagement, while social support functions as an external facilitator.

Assumption Checks

1. Normality: Skewness (-0.34 to -0.21) and kurtosis (-0.40 to 0.32) were within ± 1 , satisfying normality.
2. Multicollinearity: VIF values (1.32 – 1.45) < 5 indicated independence among predictors.
3. Homoscedasticity: Scatterplot residuals showed random dispersion.
4. Linearity: Plots between predicted and actual scores displayed linear relationships.
5. Hence, the model satisfies regression assumptions, affirming robustness.

Motivation as a Primary Predictor

The strong $\beta = .45$ underscores the primacy of motivational regulation in determining how athletes interpret their performance. Consistent with Vallerand and Rousseau (2001), high intrinsic motivation is associated with greater satisfaction, self-efficacy, and resilience. Athletes who reported being motivated by enjoyment, challenge, and mastery tended to

perceive their performance more positively, regardless of the objective outcomes. Malaysian athletes may derive intrinsic satisfaction from representing their university and nation, a form of identified regulation, where institutional pride becomes an internalized value. This finding corroborates Ahmad et al. (2020), who found that intrinsic motivation among Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia athletes predicted perseverance and academic balance.

Social Support as a Reinforcing Context

The $\beta = .38$ effect of social support highlights the pivotal role of interpersonal environments. Echoing Freeman and Rees (2010) and Coutinho et al. (2021), athletes perceiving higher coach, peer, and familial support displayed higher confidence and satisfaction. Emotional encouragement, constructive feedback, and practical assistance (e.g., schedule flexibility) likely enhanced athletes' ability to interpret performance positively. Qualitative insights from previous literature indicate that Malaysian university athletes often rely heavily on teammates for emotional solidarity, given the shared stress of dual-career demands (Omar-Fauzee et al., 2009). The significant correlation between social support and motivation ($r = .55$) also supports the postulate of SDT that relatedness satisfaction strengthens intrinsic motivation.

Combined Model: Psychosocial Synergy

The integrated $R^2 = .49$ demonstrates substantial predictive synergy between internal and external factors. This complements the ecological approach to athlete development, where performance arises from the interaction of personal drives and social systems (Keegan et al., 2014). The results align with the "motivational atmosphere" framework, which suggests that high-performance climates, combining autonomy support, constructive coaching, and peer camaraderie, yield sustained excellence. Athletes with both strong inner purpose and supportive environments display higher emotional stability, lower dropout risk (Brat et al., 2025), and stronger academic adjustment.

Comparative and Theoretical Discussion

The current findings reinforce the multidimensional nature of athlete performance. The interaction between motivation and support replicates patterns found internationally. For example, Freeman and Rees (2010) observed a similar variance ($R^2 \approx .50$) linking perceived support and self-confidence among British athletes. The Malaysian data, however, extend the theory by situating these mechanisms within a collectivist, academically driven culture where social interdependence and institutional affiliation carry substantial motivational weight. The Self-Appraisal Theory lens clarifies that self-perceived achievement serves as both an outcome and a feedback system. Positive self-evaluation strengthens future motivation and engagement. Conversely, low self-perception, despite adequate external support, can trigger disengagement, underscoring the importance of psychological interventions that build accurate and empowering self-assessment. From a policy standpoint, this model supports the integration of psychological support units into university sports centers. Regular motivation profiling and mentorship programs could sustain athletes' morale, prevent burnout, and enhance retention across academic semesters.

Discussion

The present study sought to explore the predictive influence of motivation and social support on self-perceived achievement among university athletes in Malaysia. The findings confirmed that both motivational and social dimensions exert significant and positive effects on athletes' self-assessment of their performance, explaining almost half of the total variance ($R^2 = .49$).

This outcome reinforces the theoretical propositions of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and the Social Support Framework (Giangrasso & Casale, 2014), which jointly emphasize the interdependence of internal drive and environmental support in shaping human performance and well-being.

Motivation as the Core Determinant of Self-Perceived Success

Motivation emerged as the strongest individual predictor ($\beta = .45$), highlighting its centrality in athletic performance and self-appraisal. Consistent with the framework of SDT, intrinsic motivation rooted in enjoyment, mastery, and self-fulfillment appears to drive athletes' sense of competence and satisfaction (Vallerand & Rousseau, 2001). The present findings align with prior studies, such as those by Ahmad et al. (2020) and Brat et al. (2025), which have documented that athletes with higher intrinsic motivation exhibit more consistent engagement, greater mental toughness, and a reduced dropout risk. Malaysian university athletes, many of whom balance academic and competitive obligations, may interpret success less in terms of medals and more in terms of personal growth and resilience. The high mean score for motivation ($M = 4.12$) suggests that participation is sustained not only by external incentives but also by a deeper commitment to self-improvement and institutional representation. This resonates with Deci and Ryan's (1985) proposition that sustained motivation arises when individuals experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In Malaysian higher education, participating in MASUM or SUKIPT competitions fosters a sense of pride in representing one's university or state, a form of identified regulation where extrinsic rewards are internalized as intrinsic goals.

Social Support as a Contextual Reinforcer

The second major finding that social support significantly predicts perceived achievement ($\beta = .38$) reinforces a growing body of sport psychology literature emphasizing the buffering and empowering role of interpersonal networks. Athletes with higher perceived support reported higher self-confidence and satisfaction, consistent with Freeman and Rees (2010) and Coutinho et al. (2021). The MOS Social Support Survey (MOS-SSS) used in this study encapsulates emotional, informational, tangible, and affectionate support dimensions, all of which appear to be relevant in the Malaysian context. The strong correlation ($r = .55$) between motivation and social support further supports SDT's relatedness principle, as athletes who feel cared for and valued by others experience a deepening of their intrinsic motivation (Keegan et al., 2014). Within university teams, coaches play a particularly pivotal role. Supportive coaching that balances performance feedback with empathy tends to build trust and autonomy, nurturing athletes' self-determined behavior (Chan et al., 2012; Cronin & Jennings, 2024). Peers and teammates also act as social mirrors: encouragement and shared coping mechanisms foster group cohesion and collective efficacy, which in turn enhance individual confidence and performance appraisal.

These findings align with earlier qualitative research by Omar-Fauzee et al. (2009), who found that Malaysian student-athletes rely heavily on peer and familial support to manage the dual-career stress of academics and sport. The current study expands this evidence base through quantitative validation, confirming that social environments have a profound influence on how athletes interpret their performance quality.

Integrated Psychosocial Model of Athlete Achievement

Taken together, the results support a psychosocial synergy model, where internal (motivational) and external (social) factors interact to shape self-perception and ultimately, athletic outcomes. The high shared variance ($R^2 = .49$) underscores that neither motivation nor support alone is sufficient; rather, it is their interaction that fosters sustained engagement and perceived success. This model aligns with contemporary ecological perspectives on sport development (Keegan et al., 2014), which view athlete performance as the outcome of multiple nested systems: psychological, relational, institutional, and cultural. The findings also lend empirical weight to the Self-Appraisal Theory perspective, suggesting that self-perceived achievement acts as a critical psychological mediator. Athletes' perception of success influences not only current satisfaction but also future motivation and persistence (Hanton et al., 2008). When individuals evaluate their progress positively, they internalize successful experiences, reinforcing self-belief and goal striving a cyclical feedback loop that sustains performance.

Cultural and Institutional Implications

From a socio-cultural standpoint, this study contributes to understanding motivation and support within Malaysia's collectivist orientation. In cultures emphasizing interdependence and community, relatedness and social validation are powerful motivational levers. The integration of family values and team solidarity in Malaysian sports culture enhances athletes' emotional resilience and identity coherence. Institutionally, these results highlight the need for universities to establish formal athlete support systems that extend beyond physical training. Structured mentorship programs, psychological counseling, and time management workshops could strengthen both intrinsic motivation and social connectivity.

Coaches should receive professional development in motivational coaching, fostering autonomy-supportive communication, and providing constructive feedback that enhances competence and ownership. From a policy perspective, the findings align with Malaysia's Higher Education Sports Development Policy, emphasizing the creation of Thinking Athletes. This study provides empirical justification for incorporating psychological and social support mechanisms into university-level athlete development strategies. Doing so not only enhances sporting achievement but also nurtures graduates who are mentally resilient and socially adaptive.

Theoretical Enrichment

Beyond practical insights, this study enriches theory in several ways. First, it extends SDT into a dual-career, higher-education context, an underexplored setting where autonomy and relatedness demands are simultaneously high. Second, it demonstrates that perceived social support functions not merely as a background variable but as a dynamic motivational amplifier, confirming that the satisfaction of relational needs fuels internal motivation. Third, by incorporating self-perceived achievement as an evaluative outcome, the study integrates cognitive appraisal mechanisms within motivational models, bridging SDT with Self-Appraisal Theory. In summary, the research confirms that motivation and social support are intertwined determinants of subjective success. Together, they produce a virtuous cycle: support fosters motivation, motivation enhances effort, and achievement reinforces self-worth, a holistic pathway towards sustainable athlete development.

Conclusion

This study provides robust quantitative evidence that motivation and social support are critical, interrelated predictors of self-perceived achievement among Malaysian university athletes. The findings confirm that athletes who are both intrinsically motivated and socially supported perceive themselves as more competent, satisfied, and successful in their sporting endeavors. This outcome underscores that elite performance at the university level depends as much on psychological and social capital as on physical ability.

Key Conclusions

1. Motivation is the central psychological driver of self-perceived performance. Athletes driven by intrinsic enjoyment and a desire for mastery tend to exhibit higher engagement and resilience, whereas those relying solely on extrinsic motives may experience inconsistent performance.
2. Social support serves as the enabling environment, offering emotional stability, guidance, and resources that empower athletes to interpret their performance positively and sustain participation.
3. The combined influence of motivation and social support explains nearly half of the variance in perceived achievement, reflecting a synergistic psychosocial model of athlete functioning.

These conclusions align with prior literature (Ahmad et al., 2020; Freeman & Rees, 2010; Coutinho et al., 2021) and affirm SDT's relevance to Malaysian university sports culture.

Practical Implications

The findings highlight actionable pathways for stakeholders:

1. Coaches should apply autonomy-supportive communication, focus on mastery-oriented feedback, and build trusting relationships that satisfy athletes' needs for competence and relatedness.
2. Universities must integrate sport psychology units offering counseling, peer mentorship, and leadership workshops to sustain intrinsic motivation and address dual-career pressures.
3. Policy-makers under the Ministry of Higher Education and MASUM should institutionalize support frameworks that combine physical training with psychological empowerment, ensuring athlete well-being and continuity in both academic and sporting performance.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations warrant acknowledgment. The cross-sectional design restricts causal inference; longitudinal designs could trace motivational and perceptual fluctuations across competition seasons. The reliance on self-report measures introduces potential bias from social desirability or mood at the time of response. Future research should triangulate with coach assessments or performance metrics. Additionally, expanding samples to include private institutions, community colleges, or elite academies could enhance generalizability. Further studies may also examine gender differences, variations in sport type, or mediating variables such as emotional intelligence, stress regulation, or goal orientation. Advanced analytical models, such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), can refine the understanding of direct and indirect effects among variables.

Ultimately, the study reinforces a vital insight for sports science and education: athletic excellence is a psychosocial achievement. The interplay between an athlete's internal motivation and the external support system forms the psychological foundation upon which physical skill and tactical performance are built. By nurturing both domains, Malaysia's higher education institutions can produce not only medal-winning athletes but also resilient, self-aware individuals capable of thriving beyond the playing field.

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