



Psychological skills of Iraq fencing clubs' players aged 17 and above for the central and southern regions

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Abstract

The aim of the research is to study the reality of psychological skills among fencing players aged 17 and above for the central and southern regions for the 2022-2023 season. The researchers used the descriptive method (survey method) to suit the nature of the research problem, and the community is represented by the players of Iraq clubs to duel for the central and southern regions for the 2022-2023 season, which number (111) players. The researchers used the questionnaire to collect the necessary data to achieve the research goal by building and applying a psychological skills scale aimed at identifying the reality of psychological skills among fencing players, and the most important findings of the researchers were that the reality of psychological skills among fencing players came statistically significant in general, which indicates that fencing players possess some psychological skills (self-confidence, motivation for achievement, concentration of attention) while some skills were not at the required level and did not achieve statistical significance (mental perception, relaxation, coping with anxiety, managing psychological stress). It turns out that fencing players have a weakness in these skills. The researchers recommend preparing special training programs for training in psychological skills by specialists in psychological counseling and guidance or subjecting trainers to courses to train psychological skills.

Key words: mental visualization, relaxation, coping with anxiety, stress management, self-confidence, achievement motivation, concentration of attention.

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Introduction

Sports psychology is linked to other sciences and has gained great importance in studying the psychological and mental aspects related to athlete behavior, as it goes hand in hand with other theoretical and applied sciences in ascending the sports games to the forefront of progress in all sports fields. It works to create a suitable environment for players to achieve their psychological balance, maintain their psychological health, increase their level of abilities and improve their athletic performance, by preparing and preparing players mentally and psychologically to participate in sports activities. Preparing athletes includes physical, cognitive, skill, tactical, and finally psychological preparation. Therefore, psychological preparation is an integral part of the process of training players and preparing them to enter into sports competition. This is confirmed by (Arab and Kazem, 2001, p. 35)“ Psychological preparation is one of the pillars upon which the training process is based, in addition to other training elements ”.It is done in many ways, including developing and enhancing psychological skills, as it is one of the important pillars of psychological preparation. Psychological skills are one of the fundamental pillars of the study of sports psychology because they represent an important dimension in preparing players. They play a fundamental role in developing performance and are now viewed as one of the variables that must be taken into account when trying to prepare players to achieve the required performance. Their importance increases significantly as the challenge intensifies in games that require individual competition between players due to the changing situations during competitions, including fencing. The better prepared psychological skills are, the more capable the player is of continuing to perform well throughout the fight and achieving athletic excellence. Through the above, the researchers noticed that players are affected by some symptoms represented by psychological problems, whether before their actual participation in the sports competition, during or after the sports competition, which can clearly affect the level of performance. Therefore, the researchers believe that the reason for this is due to the lack of interest in developing psychological skills by coaches, which leads to the emergence of psychological problems that produce undesirable behaviors that affect the level of performance. Therefore, the researchers believe it is necessary to know the impact of psychological skills on fencing players and work on developing and improving them to limit and reduce the psychological pressures that players face in training or competition as a result of negative thoughts that come to the minds of players as they approach participation in the competitive situation. As a result of the above, the researchers reviewed some studies that have a relationship with the studied variable. Among these related studies are: A study on the effect of psychological preparation on combating sports competition anxiety and developing some psychological skills during the competition phase among senior football players).Bashir, Saadneh, and Nawasriya, 2019(This research aims to identify the effect of psychological preparation in dealing with sports competition anxiety and developing some psychological skills during the competition phase among senior football players. The researchers used the experimental method with a single-sample design through pre- and post-measurement of a group of 16 football players in the Annaba Regional League. After applying statistical treatments to determine the significance of the difference between the pre- and post-measurements, the results were analyzed, which supported the hypotheses. The researcher concluded the following: The results showed an improvement in the players' psychological skills in favor of the post-measurement after applying the psychological preparation program. The



results showed a decrease in the level of sports competition anxiety. From the above, we conclude that psychological preparation has a positive impact in dealing with sports competition anxiety and developing some psychological skills during the competition phase among football players. A study on (psychological skills and their relationship to the level of shooting skill performance among handball juniors))Al-Shaalan, 2023(This study aims to identify psychological skills and their relationship to the level of performance related to shooting skills among young handball players in Jordan. The study used the descriptive approach, and the study population consisted of Jordanian handball juniors participating in the Junior League for the 2021/2022 season and born between 2006 and 2007. The study sample consisted of (122) juniors who were randomly selected. The psychological skills scale developed by Bullet al (1996) was used, which measures six skills and consists of (24) items. The following classification was used as a criterion to judge psychological skills: (1-1.83) not having (4.35), skill (1.84-2.66) very, very low score, (2.67-3.50) low score, (3.51-4.34) medium score, (5.17) high score, (5.18-6) very high score. The split goal test was used to measure shooting accuracy.

Results: The study concluded that the psychological skills of handball juniors in Jordan came in the following order: first place was the skill of sports achievement motivation to a high degree, second place was the skill of self-confidence to a medium degree, third place was the skill of visualization to a medium degree, fourth place was the skill of focusing attention to a small degree, fifth place was the skill of dealing with anxiety to a very small degree, sixth and last place was the skill of relaxation to a degree that represents the lack of this skill. It also showed the existence of a direct correlation between all psychological skills: sports achievement motivation, self-confidence, visualization, focusing attention, dealing with anxiety, relaxation, and the level of performance of the shooting skill in handball. A study on the predictive value of skill self-esteem in relation to psychological skills among volleyball players in the 17-18 year old category).Ayesh wa Baoush, 2017)

The study aimed to identify the predictive value of skill self-esteem in terms of psychological skills among volleyball players in the junior category of 17-18 years. The study was conducted on a sample of 20 players who were selected randomly from the original community of 120 players, i.e. 20% of the players active in the clubs of the second national division of the central region of volleyball in Algeria. The descriptive approach was followed by distributing two scales of psychological skills and skill self-esteem to the players. The SPSS 23 program was used to analyze the results of the study. A statistically significant correlation was found between the psychological skills and skill self-esteem of the players. A predictive equation was also extracted to predict the level of skill self-esteem in terms of psychological skills. Accordingly, the researchers recommended the need to pay attention to the psychological preparation of athletes in a manner that is compatible with their psychological needs, relying on the predictive equation that resulted from this study. A study on (psychological skills and their relationship to competitive anxiety among football players))Umar, 2016)

This study aims to highlight the relationship between psychological skills and competitive anxiety among Algerian football players. We adopted a descriptive approach appropriate for such studies, using a psychological skills scale and a competitive anxiety scale, both of which were intentionally distributed to a sample of 40 players active in the Mouloudia Club of Algiers and Nasr Hussein Dey. Both players are playing in the bottom two this season, and we therefore assume an increase in their anxiety levels. Study (constructing a scale of psychological skills for gymnasts))Zaki, 2010)

This study aimed to identify the construction of a scale of psychological skills for gymnasts to identify the most important psychological skills that distinguish gymnasts. The researcher used the descriptive approach on a sample of (221) gymnasts representing gymnasts in the Arab Republic of Egypt for the age group (159) years, where they were chosen intentionally. The results of the study showed that the psychological skills were ranked highest in the field of sports achievement motivation and lowest in the field of anxiety. The ranking of psychological skills was as follows: sports achievement motivation, self-confidence, relaxation, mental imagery, focus of attention, and anxiety.

Method and tools:

The researchers used the descriptive approach with the survey method due to its suitability to the research problem. The researchers contacted the Iraqi Fencing and Modern Pentathlon Federation to identify fencing players for the 2022-2023 sports season in order to identify the size of the total research community, which amounted to (111) players from the youth and advanced categories for the central and southern regions. The research sample was selected, consisting of (111) players, representing (100%) of the research community, as shown in Table.(1)

Table(1)

Shows the number of players within the governorates

Governorates	Original population (total number)	Category		pilot study sample		Building sample	Main experiment sample
		youth	Applic	Firs	Seco		
Baghdad	44	2	24	4	—	40	
Karbala	6	4	2	—	-	6	
Al-Muthana	5	3	2	—	-	5	
Najaf	6	3	3	—	-	6	
Diyala	28	1	12	—	—	28	
Basra	8	5	3	—	4	8	
Maysan	14	8	6	—	—	—	14
Total	111	5	52	8		93	14
percentag	%100	%5	%46.	%7.20		%83.78	%12.61

The research tools used were references and sources that were employed from books, studies, articles, university theses and the Internet. As for the field application aspect, the researchers relied on field visits that they conducted to the fencing halls of Iraqi clubs in the central and southern regions for the 2022-2023 season. The main tool consisted of a psychological skills scale form that the researchers



relied on in collecting data, which consisted of seven areas: (mental visualization, relaxation, coping with anxiety, managing psychological stress, self-confidence, achievement motivation, and focusing attention). The researchers counted and applied the scale to the research sample. After analyzing the responses of the research sample, the data was collected in a special form, so that each player had his own score.

Scientific transactions of psychological skills:

First: Validity of the scale: Validity is considered one of the basic conditions that must be available in scales, as it indicates the extent to which the scale items converge or diverge from the trait it aims to measure. The researchers arrived at indicators of apparent validity, as they tested the validity of the scale by presenting it with its items and domains to specialized experts who arbitrated its suitability for application, and thus the scale recorded apparent validity. The discriminatory power was also calculated, as the arithmetic mean and standard deviation were calculated for the scores of the upper and lower groups for each domain of the scale, and then the (t-test) for independent samples was applied to identify the statistical significance of the differences between the upper and lower groups. After statistically processing the data, it was found that the scale had a discriminatory ability between the upper and lower groups, as the significance values were smaller than the significance level.(0.05)

Second: Scale stability: Stability is an important condition for good performance. This means that if the measurement processes of the same individual are repeated, their score will appear somewhat stable. The stability coefficient is the correlation coefficient between individuals' scores on the test over the number of different procedures. To find the stability coefficient for the psychological skills scale, the researchers used the split-half method and the Cronbach's coefficient to extract stability. After statistical treatments, it became clear that the scale has a high and reliable stability value.

Results:

Presentation and analysis of the results of the psychological skills scale for Iraqi fencing club players in the central and southern regions. The arithmetic means and standard deviations of the research sample's responses to all the statements of the psychological skills scale for fencing players were calculated according to the seven areas (mental visualization, relaxation, coping with anxiety, managing psychological stress, self-confidence, achievement motivation, and focusing attention). Table (2) shows this.

Table (No. 2)

Display the results of arithmetic means, standard deviations, hypothetical mean, t-value, and significance level.

Variables	Paragra	Hypothetic mean	arithmeti mean	Coefficient of skewness	devia Stand	Calculated valu (t)	va sa	funct
mental imagery	8	24	24.35	0.27	1.2	1.04	0	Nor mor
Relaxation	8	24	24.85	0.11	1.9	1.60	0	Nor mor
focus of attentio	9	27	30.35	0.02	2.2	5.69	0	spirit

Facing anxiety	8	24	23.85	0.35	1.7	0.30	0	Normal
self-confidence	7	21	26.71	0.21	1.7	12.06	0	spirit
Achievement motivation	7	21	27.00	0.38	1.6	13.88	0	spirit
Stress management	6	18	17.42	0.72	1.5	1.37	0	Normal
Psychological skills	53	159	174.57	0.10	3.7	15.68	0	spirit
The tabular value (2.16) at a degree of freedom (13) and a significance level of (0.05)								

The table above shows that the number of paragraphs of the scale as a whole (psychological skills) is (53) paragraphs, with a hypothetical average of (159), while the arithmetic average of the research sample in the scale was (174.57) with a standard deviation of (3.71), as the (t-value) between the hypothetical average and the arithmetic average of the research sample was (15.68) with a significance level of (0.00), which indicates its significance at a significance level of (0.05) and a skewness coefficient of (0.10), which means that the sample is normally distributed. It was found that the arithmetic average is greater than the hypothetical average, i.e. there are significant differences in favor of the arithmetic average, and this indicates that fencing players have an acceptable level in the (psychological skills) scale during their athletic performance.

As shown in the table above, there is a difference in the dimensions of psychological skills. Some of them obtained a score within the hypothetical average, which is a case that may fall under the heading of a decline in the reality of psychological skills and needs improvement. Therefore, we must verify the reality of each skill among the fencers in order to reveal to us the strengths and weaknesses of each dimension of psychological skills. (Salih et al., 2024)

The researcher attributes the reason for the discrepancy in the dimensions of psychological skills and obtaining scores within the hypothetical mean to the fact that psychological training by coaches does not lead players to master all psychological skills, and this is specific to each sport, whether individual or team, due to the emotions accompanying each activity, as emotions in group activities differ from emotions in individual activities. (Jawad Kadhim, M., & Salman Ahmed, 2016) Therefore, a player in group activities may differ from a player in individual activities in a number of psychological characteristics that enable him to adapt to playing situations and impose on him to possess high capabilities in psychological skills. The researcher agrees with a study conducted by (Abu Talib, 2003) studying the psychological characteristics and athletic orientation of 440 young athletes, and the most important conclusion he reached was “the distinction of players in group activities with a higher degree of some psychological characteristics compared to players in individual activities” (Abu Talib, 2003). Khoja, 2017, p. 202, also confirms, quoting (Rateb, 2007) “the difference in some personal characteristics among athletes according to the type or style of sport practiced”. Examples of this are “the studies conducted by each of (Kroll) and (Crenshaw) in 1970 on high-level athletes in football, gymnastics, wrestling and karate, and showed that there are psychological characteristics that distinguish football and wrestling athletes compared to other



psychological characteristics that distinguish gymnastics and karate athletes (Khoja, 2017, p. 202). We note that these psychological characteristics are acquired as a result of training and practice. There is a focus by coaches on some psychological skills without others. The reason for the decline in the psychological aspect among players may be due to their lack of comprehensive psychological preparation and the coaches' focus on the physical, skill and tactical aspect, although most studies emphasize the importance of psychological training and that preparation must be comprehensive in all physical, skill, tactical, psychological and mental aspects, and no aspect of these can be separated. Aspects from each other to ensure that the training process reaches the best results and the highest levels. However, coaches neglect the psychological aspect for several reasons, among which (Alawi, 2002) states: "Because of the lack of knowledge and information about psychological skills training, the lack of sufficient time to train psychological skills, and some misconceptions associated with psychological skills training. Psychological skills training is only suitable for players with psychological problems, and psychological skills training can be innate" Alawi, "The Psychology of Training and Satisfied Competition, 2002", pp. 206-207). However, what they do not realize is that psychological training has a significant impact on developing competencies and improving players' performance. This is done by identifying the psychological and personal factors of each athlete, conducting psychological and emotional tests, and creating a physical program linked to a psychological training plan by the coach based on psychological requirements. Fawzi, 2003, states: "One of the goals of psychological preparation is to guide the athlete psychologically to help him psychologically adapt between the physical and psychological loads in training and competitions with his work and social life to avoid the psychological pressures associated with competitive sports practice" (Fawzi, 2003, p. 162). Although there are some Psychological skills that a coach can develop by providing encouragement, reinforcement, raising the morale of players, raising and developing self-confidence, and contributing to focusing attention, such as saying (Trust in yourself and have faith in your abilities) or saying (Focus your attention on the exposed area of the goal or focus your attention on the movement of the armed hand) or providing moral support to increase the motivation of players to achieve the best possible achievement. It may help to overcome the difficult circumstances that players go through during the competition phase by allowing players to adapt to the conditions of the competition environment as a result of continuous training on the conditions of the competition environment. Players acquire some psychological skills, but they remain not at the required level because each skill has its own specificity in training on it, and most psychological skills require a specialist to develop and train on them according to scientific foundations. Training psychological skills should be planned, supervised, and evaluated by a sports psychologist, and this is noticeably reflected in the player's personality and performance. Bahi and Jad (1999) explain that "psychological skills are important in performing sports skills, as they enable the athlete to reach a mental state that prevents the entry of negative and distracting thoughts". To his athletic activity, if the athlete is able to successfully perform a psychological skill, this means that he has the physical ability to achieve it whenever he tries). Bahi and Jad, 1999, p. 10 (In addition to the above, the researcher attributes the reason for some dimensions achieving an acceptable level and others achieving an unacceptable level to the experience factor, which plays a role in providing players with psychological skills such as self-confidence, focus, and attention, as well as to individual differences among players with long



experience. Despite players having a low score in some dimensions such as visualization, relaxation, coping with anxiety, and managing pressure, experience helps players acquire the ability to adapt to high concentration, self-confidence, and motivation to achieve accomplishments. The reason for this is due to the role of the coach in training players in the training environment and the competition environment, which has become something natural for them. As a result of their exposure to different playing situations, this has resulted in the ability to overcome difficult situations and focus on performance, as experienced players have the ability to withstand pressure and emotions, control their behavior, and reduce tension, which is confirmed by (Badr Al-Din, 2014)“ Psychological skills are the athlete’s skill in properly employing and investing his psychological skills to achieve motor and tactical goals during training and competition situations ”(Badr Al-Din, (2014), p. 38). This, in turn, helps them focus their attention on the desired goal. Since fencing has its own peculiarity in terms of stopping after each touch achieved by one of the competitors and then preparing and starting again, this helps to make room for focusing attention, while we find the opposite in other skills, as it is difficult to use the skill of mental visualization, relaxation, confronting anxiety, and managing psychological pressures during the fight, because fencing is an individual sport with a charged nature that is characterized by high anxiety and is characterized by speed in performance for a short period and the absence of a long pause during the fight to practice relaxation and calming down. Therefore, we find players find it difficult to practice some skills such as relaxation, as this requires appropriate training and the use of training strategies and techniques, and requires special programs to prepare the appropriate environment and isolate thoughts, which is what coaches lack. The researcher may attribute the reason to the fact that players do not use the skill of relaxation during the fight, because relaxation in This time requires withdrawal from the fighting situation. It is difficult for players to isolate thoughts and emotions because the fight is tense and charged. There is not enough time to relax due to the few breaks during the fight. (Kazim et al., 2019)

Through the results of the study conducted by the researchers, they reached a set of conclusions as follows:

The reality of psychological skills among fencers was statistically significant, indicating that fencers possess a certain degree of psychological skills in general.

The effectiveness of psychological skills among fencers according to the scale magazines was for the dimension of self-confidence, focus of attention, and achievement motivation, while there was weakness in other dimensions such as mental imagery, relaxation, dealing with anxiety, and managing psychological pressures.

In light of the findings, the researchers propose the following recommendations:

-Developing programs to develop and train psychological skills through specialists in the field of sports psychological counseling.

-Conducting psychological skills tests and measurements throughout the sports season to determine the players' psychological skills and identify any psychological problems they may be facing.

-Involving coaches in development courses to train them on psychological skills, as coaches are closer to players.



Appendix No. (1) Psychological Skills Scale

T	Paragraphs	alwa	mos	Som	rare	neve
				mes		
.1	I have the ability to visualize some of the opponent's offensive skills.					
.2	I can visualize how to perform defensive moves before executing them.					
.3	I can prepare a preliminary idea of the movement stages before performing the offensive skills.					
.4	I have difficulty visualizing when an opponent is performing trick moves.					
.5	The opposing player's arm movements allow me to visualize how to defend against him.					
.6	Through the opposing player's advance and retreat movements, I visualize what he intends to do.					
.7	When the fight is over I can picture everything I did while playing.					
.8	I have the ability to visualize the remaining distance around the perimeter of the field while I am retreating due to the opposing attack.					
.9	I have the ability to relax in between touches.					
.10	I have a high ability to relax before I enter the fight.					
.11	I stay calm and relaxed no matter the outcome of the fight.					
.12	I am good at relaxing under intense competitive conditions.					
.13	I relax as much as possible between fights.					
.14	I'm nervous and tense before I get into a fight.					
.15	My intense desire to win makes me more hesitant and anxious.					
.16	Relax so I can review the mistakes I made during the fight.					
.17	During the fight, many thoughts come to my mind that affect concentration.					
.18	I suffer from loss of focus when I lose some points					
.19	During the fight, my attention is focused on the movement of the opponent's armed arm.					



.20	When the opponent changes his attacking move, I focus my attention choosing the appropriate defensive position.					
.21	I make fake movements to deceive the opponent in order to focus attention on a specific area of the target.					
.22	I can isolate what's happening outside the fight and focus my attention on opponent.					
.23	I focus my attention on the opponent's blade during a fight.					
.24	Provocative moves and deception by the opponent make me lose the ability to focus attention.					
.25	My constant thinking about the outcome causes me to lose focus.					
.26	I try as much as possible to get rid of anxiety while participating in fights.					
.27	When I make some mistakes during a fight, I feel anxious.					
.28	I feel more likely to be defeated by my opponent when I show excessive anxiety.					
.29	Dedication to playing enables me to overcome the anxiety I face.					
.30	I seem to get very anxious when there is a big gap between me and opponent.					
.31	I get anxious when I'm not fully prepared for a fight.					
.32	The coach's advice helps me get rid of anxiety.					
.33	When the club's expectations of me achieving something rise, it makes me feel more anxious and stressed.					
.34	My high self-confidence enables me to keep up with my competitor despite his high skills.					
.35	My self-confidence enables me to achieve decisive touches in the final moments of the fight.					
.36	I have the confidence to make crucial decisions at critical times.					
.37	I trust myself when I retreat or retreat to respond to an opponent's attack.					
.38	My confidence drops when my opponent gets too many touches.					
.39	Making repeated mistakes when performing some offensive skills weakens my self-confidence.					
.40	My self-confidence gradually fades away whenever the coach criticizes me.					



	performance.						
.41	I feel excited most of the time during the fight.						
.42	I have a drive that makes me want to participate in all tournaments.						
.43	The lack of rewards and material incentives weakens my motivation to achieve accomplishments.						
.44	My desire to win drives me to play aggressively in the crucial moments of the fight.						
.45	I am motivated to achieve success despite my lack of commitment to training sessions.						
.46	Be motivated to follow the coach's instructions even if they are difficult.						
.47	My frequent mistakes during fights lead to frustration and reduce my motivation to win.						
.48	The pressure from the club's management makes it difficult for me to achieve victory.						
.49	I have the ability to keep up with my competitors despite the psychological pressures I face.						
.50	Respond calmly to provocative movements made by your opponent during the fight.						
.51	I try to accept the fans' criticism of my performance so that it does not put pressure on me.						
.52	I try my best to perform well despite the constant cheering from the fans of my opponent.						
.53	The financial rewards offered by the club increase my determination and resolve to face pressures and difficulties.						



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