



The Relationship Between Team Cohesion Level and Social Skills in Student Athletes

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Abstract

The current study focuses on understanding how cohesion within a sports team relates to social skills among the student-athletes that comprise those teams. Its premise is based on the belief that participating in team-based athletics provides opportunities for not only improved physical fitness but also for developing social and interpersonal competencies. The study was designed to examine whether or not team cohesion and social skills are related, as well as to compare team cohesion and social skills based upon student-athletes' gender, student-athletes' age, and student-athletes' respective sport types. A quantitative research design was utilized, and a social survey was used. Questionnaires were distributed to 250 male and female student-athletes enrolled at Kütahya Dumlupınar University and included demographic information, Team Cohesion Scale and Social Skills Scale. Finally, the data generated were analyzed using the SPSS 26 software. The study utilized several types of data analysis: demographic description (descriptive statistics); comparison of means for independent samples (independent samples t-tests); comparison of means using one factor (one-way ANOVA); correlation of continuous variables (Pearson correlation); and prediction of continuous variables (regression). In addition to the above statistical methods, information regarding the mean, range and standard deviation for all participant demographic characteristics was collected. Student athlete participants demonstrated greater levels of team cohesion as well as improved social skills, relative to those who did not participate in athletics teams. When examining team cohesion and social skills, there were statistically significant differences between teams based on age, gender and type of sport. In addition, a strong positive correlation existed between team cohesion and social skills. Also, based on regression analysis results, team cohesion was found to be a significant predictor of social skills. These findings indicate that by creating a positive team environment, the university sports teams can contribute significantly to student athlete's social skill development.

Keywords: Team cohesion, social skills, student athletes, team sports.

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Introduction

When a student participates in sports during university years, he/she has more opportunities to holistically develop in many ways; therefore, the physical, emotional and social development needs of students are equally important to their success as a whole person. Participation in team sports has the potential to support social interactions and learning through a structured environment, (Jones, 2024) by requiring continued interaction and cooperation, building teamwork skills through ongoing communication, and establishing shared responsibility. Interactions and shared experiences in this setting require the ability of the athlete to emotionally regulate themselves, solve problems and develop interpersonal sensitivity to others. Because of these reasons, the setting of university sports is being developed increasingly as a method to help students socialise and develop their social skills while being an athlete (Eime et al., 2013).

In the context of group dynamics, one of the most significant factors affecting teams in sports is Team Cohesiveness. Many researchers agree on the definition of Team Cohesion as the dynamic process whereby individuals within a team come together to achieve their common goals while also meeting each member's social and emotional needs (Forsyth, 2021). Authors in Sport Psychology discuss two dimensions of Team Cohesion that are strongly interrelated: Task Cohesion is the level of collaboration between teammates towards achieving a performance-related goal, whereas Social Cohesion describes the degree and quality of relationships between team members (McEwan, 2020; Delfgaauw et al., 2022; Worku et al., 2025). Research has consistently demonstrated that increased levels of Team Cohesion are strongly correlated with positive outcomes (Ruan & Liu, 2021; Gu & Xue, 2022), including increased performance, increased motivation, increased perceived collective efficacy, improved psychological well-being, and increased athlete satisfaction.

There is another important area of growth in student athletes - social skills. Social skills are defined as behaviors that are learned through experience that help people engage with their peers in a way that is appropriate for that individual and other people(s) in the environment (Chafaa, 2024; Owiti, 2024). The ability to communicate, work with others, and be empathetic toward other people are a few examples of social skill development. Other examples of social skills development include develop assertiveness, ability to control one's emotions, ability to manage emotions, and ability to resolve conflicts (Patiño-Domínguez, 2024). Social skills have an integral role in the lives of student athletes by helping student athletes establish positive peer relationships, fulfilling team expectations, handling competitive pressure, and balancing school work and athletic obligations. Many studies support the idea that participation in organized sport helps to develop social skills through the creation of a positive, supportive, and cooperative team environment (Jones, 2024; Erdilanita & Ma'mun, 2025).

Recent research has placed an increased emphasis on the psychosocial dimensions of sport. These studies emphasize how the work that athletes do together as a team can provide opportunities for them to develop their individual social skills. Research by Bedir et al., (2023) found that when there is team cohesion, team members develop trust in each other, communicate openly, and support each other, which can provide the ideal setting for athletes to develop their social skills. For example, Gedik, (2024) found that athletes who reported high levels of team cohesion had greater communication and cooperation skills than those who reported low levels of team cohesion. According to Duman, (2023), the effects of team climate on the development of athletes' social competence was negatively correlated with interpersonal



conflict, while it was positively correlated with increased prosocial behaviour. Adolescent athletes and university athletes who developed strong peer relationships within their teams exhibited a significantly higher level of social competence compared to those who did not develop strong peer relationships. (Železnik Mežan et al., 2025).

It is essential to understand how the team cohesion and social ability of student-athletes work in the setting of education. (Wang, 2024). Student-athletes at university face the challenge of striving for success in both their academics and athletics, often under the immense pressure of being pushed for success in both academics as well as athletics due to time constraints and stressors that impact the psychological health of the student-athlete's social adjustment (Hart et al., 2025). Research shows that the pressure level in the university setting has the potential to increase for some student-athletes as they attempt to juggle their academic requirements with their training and competition needs (Thompson et al., 2024). In this type of environment, cohesive teams can provide great opportunities as a source of support both socially and emotionally, resulting in an increase in feelings of being a part of a family, having psychological safety that allows for effective and open communication, encouraging a sense of emotional regulation, and helping to alleviate the daily stressors that student-athletes experience while balancing life as a university student and life as a student-athlete (Muñoz et al., 2023).

Researchers have cited a number of educational benefits associated with social cohesion among groups of students; this includes supporting successful psychological, social, and academic adjustment, decreasing the negative impact on academic stress levels, and encouraging cooperation and mutual respect among students through the development of positive relationships (Orazani et al., 2018; Yu et al., 2023). Therefore, the degree of "team" cohesion that exists within university sport is also an extremely valuable factor for educational purposes, and the benefits of team cohesion reached far beyond just physical performance; team cohesion plays an important role in the development of social skills and mental health for university student athletes. In contrast to how team cohesion and social skills have been studied as separate constructs, there have only been a small number of studies directly examining how these two variables are related to each other for university student athletes. Additionally, demographic factors (e.g., gender, age, type of sport) appear to have inconsistent effects on team cohesion and social skills; thus, there is a need for further research that is contextualized within the environments in which university athletes compete.

The relationship between Social Skill Competencies of student athletes and team cohesion levels will be studied in this project. Team Cohesion is defined as an individual's perception of how cohesive or supportive their team is to them and how they perceive their ability to work together as a cohesive unit (team) and the bond between them (team cohesion). Social Skills are defined as the social interactions and abilities that a person has to effectively communicate and work together to successfully adapt to a social environment within or outside of their sport environment. The results of this project will contribute to the field of Sports Sciences and Sport Education by identifying the relationships between the two constructs. Furthermore, this project has the potential to contribute to creating a more supportive team environment for student athletes engaging in University Sport programs and providing coaches, educators, and Sports Program Designers with tools to support student athlete social development.



Materials and Methods

This methodical framework is utilized to assess how the social skill levels of student-athletes influence their performance on their respective sports teams and how those performance levels impact their team cohesion levels. A standardized methodology was chosen for this study in order to collect, analyze, and interpret data on a systematic basis through the use of quantitative techniques. Discussion of the Research Design, Subject Population and Sample Characteristics, Instruments Used to Collect Data and Procedures Used to Analyze Data have also been included to allow the reader to evaluate the transparency, validity, and replicability of this study. The choices of methodology for this study were based upon established research methodologies as well as the current available literature within the discipline of sports science and the field of social psychology.

Research Design

The research team utilized a quantitative correlational study to determine the potential association between team unity and social abilities in student athletes. Correlational studies are valuable for understanding both how strongly related two variables are, as well as what direction those relationships take (Thomas and Zubkov, 2023). By conducting this research, it was possible to find out if having a greater sense of belonging will enhance an athlete's ability to relate to others, specifically within a collegiate athletic environment.

Besides the correlational studies, the researchers also examined how potential differences between the demographic characteristics of the participants may influence their results. These comparisons are common practice in the field of sports science as researchers continue to investigate how these factors impact the well-being of athletes and other factors that influence athletic performance (Sreeni, 2024). The research adhered to the IMRAD format and complied with the ethical standards for research.

Population and Sample of the Study

For this study, the population consists of student-athletes participating in team sports at the university level for the 2025–2026 academic year. The focus on team sports is due to the fact that they require interaction with teammates, collaboration, and the ability to perform as a unit, all qualities necessary for creating team cohesion and developing social skills.

Students participating in collegiate athletics at intercollegiate levels represented the study's accessible participants through convenience sampling whereby any interested student could be recruited to take part, which allowed for easy recruitment as well as voluntary participation with 250 student athlete subjects participating voluntarily in the research.

The subjects were composed of both men and women aged 18 or older, who were grouped by age into three categories: 18 to 20; 21 to 23; and over 24 years old. This study's age groupings were done to evaluate the developmental differences in social skill development and in team cohesion views previously documented in the literature of social skill development and team cohesion perceptions. Informed consent was acquired before data collection for this study, and participants' anonymity and confidentiality during the data collection process were strongly maintained.



Data Collection Instruments

Researchers collected data with the following three main instruments—Personal Information Form; Team Cohesion Scale; and Social Skills Scale—administered by the researcher's facilitation and control, which allowed for controlled environments as well as the ability to reduce the impact of variables outside the control of the researcher's facilitation. This also delivered consistency in the manner that data was collected.

Personal Information Form

The Personal Information Form prepared by the researchers to obtain demographic information concerning participants such as gender, age, type of sport used for comparison between groups and descriptions of groups, contains multiple choice items that are only considered as a source of descriptive and comparative variables. The significance of collecting these demographic variables provides a basis upon which to identify differences among participants within the context of research conducted in the area of sports science.

Team Cohesion Scale

The Team Cohesion Scale was a standardized measurement of how strongly the members of a team feel connected to one another and how well they work together. The scale included measurements of the degree to which athletes are committed to team goals and the performance objectives of their sport and of the degree to which the individual athletes are connected with each other both personally and socially. Consequently, team cohesion is a multidimensional entity that has a significant impact on either the success of a team or the satisfaction of the individual athlete (Sezer & Durdubaş, 2023). The Team Cohesion Scale has several items that are rated using a Likert-type scale. The higher the score on the scale, the greater the individual's feelings of being part of a cohesive team. Prior research has demonstrated acceptable psychometric properties of the Team Cohesion Scale regarding the reliability and validity of the construct of team cohesion (Sezer & Durdubaş, 2023). In this study, we found the Team Cohesion Scale exhibited satisfactory levels of reliability as determined via an internal consistency analysis.

Social Skills Scale

A validated Social Skills Scale was used to assess the participants' social skills. The scale assesses how well a person can communicate interpersonally, cooperate with others, empathize with others, and interact socially in a successful way. Social skills are very important psychosocial characteristics for all athletes, especially for athletes who participate in team sports, because they promote cooperation, resolve conflict and create a positive group atmosphere (Ataş et al., 2016). The scale has a Likert-type response format in which the greater the score, the more competent the athlete is in their social skills (Ataş et al., 2016).

Statistical Analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 26) was used for the data analyses performed in this study. The first analyses performed were descriptive statistics: frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, which helped in providing a summary of participant demographics and total scale scores. After collecting descriptive statistics, skewness and kurtosis were calculated to evaluate whether the sample was normally distributed; all results

suggested that parametric statistical analyses could be performed. To investigate the possibility of differences in team cohesion and social skills by gender, an Independent Samples t-test was used. To examine differences among age categories and to distinguish between various sports, a one-way ANOVA was performed. When statistically significant differences were observed, post-hoc analyses were used to evaluate where those differences originated. The correlation between team cohesion and social skills was investigated using the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient analysis and its applicability as a means to assess a linearly related continuous variable. Further, simple linear regression analysis was completed to provide insight into the predicted impact of team cohesion on social skills, with an established level of statistical significance of $p < .05$ for each analysis.

Results

In the next section, we will discuss the data collected from the research via Tables. The results have been divided up according to the following five categories: demographic characteristics, descriptive statistics, difference tests, correlation analyses and regression analyses.

Table 1. *Distribution of Participants According to Demographic Characteristics*

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	145	58.0
	Female	105	42.0
Total		250	100
Age	18–20	78	31.2
	23–21	112	44.8
	24 and above	60	24.0
Total		250	100
Type of Sport	Football	72	28.8
	Basketball	55	22.0
	Volleyball	63	25.2
	Other team sports	60	24.0
Total		250	100

Table 1 shows that the research sample was comprised of 250 student-athletes. The majority (58%) of the participants were male. The age distribution was as follows: 44.8% of the participants were in the 21-23 age range. When looking at the number of each type of athlete, the largest subgroup was made up of football players (28.8%), followed by athletes who play volleyball (25.2%), basketball (22.0%) and other team sports (24.0%).

Table 2. *Descriptive Statistics of Team Cohesion and Social Skills Variables*

Variable	n	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	Std. Deviation
Team Cohesion Level	250	6.42	0.84
Social Skills Level	250	6.18	0.79

The descriptive statistics for cohesive teams and social skills of student athletes are reported in Table 2. The results indicate that the level of cohesive teams was very strong ($M =$

6.42). Additionally, students reported a very high level of social skills ($M = 6.18$). In addition to the descriptive means, the standard deviation values indicate that respondents had a moderate amount of variation, or an adequate consistency of perception relative to both cohesive teams and social skills.

Table 3. *Team Cohesion and Social Skills Levels According to Gender*

Variable	Gender	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	Std. Deviation	t	p
Team Cohesion	Male	6.55	0.81	2.48	.014*
	Female	6.24	0.86		
Social Skills	Male	6.30	0.77	2.11	.036*
	Female	6.02	0.80		

$P < .05$

As depicted in Table 3, we analyzed gender differences in regard to team cohesion and social skills using the independent samples t-test method. It has been demonstrated through statistical analysis that there exists a significant difference between males (greater than females) regarding team cohesion and social skills for male student athletes. The male participants recorded a greater mean score than the female participants concerning both team cohesion and social skills. Thus, gender appears to significantly influence the perceived level of team cohesion and social competence among student athletes.

Table 4. *Team Cohesion and Social Skills Levels According to Age*

Variable	Age Group	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	Std. Deviation	F	p
Team Cohesion	18–20	6.21	0.88	4.62	.011*
	23–21	6.48	0.80		
	24 and above	6.63	0.82		
Social Skills	18–20	5.98	0.83	3.98	.020*
	23–21	6.22	0.76		
	24 and above	6.37	0.77		

$P < .05$

Table 4 provides a statistical view of a one-way ANOVA conducted to analyze variances of team cohesion and Social Skills across age brackets. Statistically significant variances existed in Team Cohesion and Social Skill levels with respect to an individual's Age group. The younger adolescent group, individuals between (18-20), were at a disadvantage in developing both Team Cohesion and Social Skills versus adolescents that are older (21-23) and those individuals that are 24 and older. This may suggest that older adolescents and adults may have gained additional experience in Team Cohesion and/or Social Skills based upon the increased Age of the individual.

Table 5. *Team Cohesion and Social Skills Levels According to Type of Sport*

Variable	Type of Sport	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	Std. Deviation	F	p
Team Cohesion	Football	6.58	0.79	5.21	.002*
	Basketball	6.31	0.85		
	Volleyball	6.47	0.81		
	Other team sports	6.18	0.88		
Social Skills	Football	6.35	0.75	4.74	.003*

Basketball	6.10	0.80
Volleyball	6.28	0.77
Other team sports	5.97	0.84

$P < .05$

Table 5 displays the results of the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) of Team Cohesion and Social Skills levels of Student Athletes based on Sport Type. The results show that there was a statistically significant difference in both Team Cohesion and Social Skills levels among the Student Athletes that participated in various types of Team Sports. The Mean scores were reported to be higher for Football and Volleyball than the Mean scores reported by the Basketball players and Student Athletes who participate in other types of Team Sports. Therefore, the results indicate that the Sport Types and associated dynamics of each of the Team Sports may have a considerable impact on an individual's ability to improve Team Cohesion and Social Skills.

Table 6. Results of Pearson Correlation Analysis

Variables	r	p
Team Cohesion – Social Skills	.68	.000**

$P < .01$

The findings in Table 6 show the results of a Pearson correlation analysis that studying the relationship between team cohesion and social skills of student athletes. There was a strong (positive) statistically significant relationship between team cohesion and social skills of student athletes ($r = .68$, $p < .01$). Higher levels of team cohesion correlated with higher levels of social skills for student athletes.

Table 7. Results of Simple Linear Regression Analysis

Variable	B	Std. Error	β	t	p
Constant	1.42	0.38	–	3.73	.000
Team Cohesion	0.74	0.05	.68	14.80	.000**

R: .68, R²: .46, F: 219.2, p: .000.

$P < .01$

The analysis of the effects of team cohesion on the development of social skills in student athletes was completed using simple linear regression. In the results shown in Table 7, team cohesion has a statistically significant correlation with social skills ($\beta = .68$, $p < .01$), indicating that it is a significant predictor of student athletes' social skills. The model also indicates that approximately 46% of the variance ($R^2 = .46$) in social skills is accounted for by team cohesion, showing that increased levels of team cohesive have considerable impact on the development of social skills in student athletes.

Conclusions

In this research, we explored relationships between the amount of team cohesion that an athlete experiences within their sport and how much social skill the athlete demonstrates. We also investigated if there were differences in the amount of team cohesion and social skills demonstrated by athletes based on the athlete's gender, age, and type of sport in which they



participated. The results indicate that student athletes tend to have a high level of team cohesion and social skills, suggesting that participating in a team environment during college is beneficial for development of these skills.

Clearly shown throughout this study is that team cohesion is a vital social-psychological component of the development of social skills in student-athletes. The strong and positive correlation between team cohesion and social skills can be interpreted as meaning that having a greater sense of unity, cooperation, and shared objectives among teammates leads student-athletes to develop better communication skills, ability to work well with others, and ability to adapt socially. It was determined by the results of the regression analyses, which showed that team cohesion is a significant predictor of social skills and accounted for a large percentage of the variance in the dependent variable, that team cohesion not only develops through social interactions, but that it is also a major contributor to the development of students' social skills.

The differences that exist based on one's gender (male vs. female), age (younger vs. older), and type of sport (team vs. individual) reflect how complexly constituted the ways in which individuals become socially competent through their participation in the various types of team sports and, as such, how they develop team cohesiveness through their participation in those sports. The research indicates that male student athletes tend to report higher levels of team cohesion than female student athletes. This is likely a result of differences in their respective competition environments, socialisation patterns, and sport participation. The study also highlights age-based differences in terms of experiencing sport (i.e., older student athletes having greater experience in sport, combined with greater exposure to working with others on a team). Lastly, it identifies that because of the structure and interactional nature of some types of team-based sports, they provide an opportunity for the development of different levels of team cohesion and social competence.

In total, the empirical study supports the findings within the literature and indicates that team cohesion is a key factor in developing social skills in collegiate student-athletes. From a practical standpoint, the study shows the value of developing team environments that foster loyalty, respect, and accountability. The benefits of team cohesion are evidenced by improved athletic performance as well as providing opportunities for holistic development for students through the development of their social and interpersonal skills.

Recommendations

The results and conclusions of this investigation offer several recommendations for practitioners, organisations, and future research.

The first recommendation is to create a training program for sports administrators and coaches that promotes team cohesion. To build relationships between team members and encourage commitment to being part of a group, team-building exercises, cooperative training tasks, and open communication practices need to be incorporated into the team's regular training schedule.

As well, coaches and sport educators should understand the importance of team cohesion in developing social skills. Professional development and workshop training should provide coaches with strategies to encourage an inclusive climate within a team and to foster open communication and conflict resolution amongst team members.

Thirdly, we need to pay special attention to groups who tend to show lower levels of social skills or cohesion within their teams; examples of these groups are younger athletes and



athletes who have just started with university teams. Orientation programs and mentoring systems that target new athletes paired with experienced athletes may lead to better integration between the two groups and increase team cohesion.

Fourthly, since we find that there are differences based on types of sports, we should develop approaches for enhancing team cohesion that are specific to each type of sport. Interventions designed to enhance cohesion should consider the unique interaction patterns and demands of team sport.

There will also be a need for future research that uses longitudinal designs to better understand how team cohesion and social skills develop over time and to provide information on the causal relationships between those two variables. Researchers may wish to use qualitative data collection methods, like interviews or focus groups, to gain an in-depth understanding of how student-athletes perceive and experience their respective sports. Future research should be inclusive of psychological variables, such as motivation, leadership, and self-efficacy when building comprehensive models that explain the social aspect of sport. This information would aid in developing better university sport programs, as well as helping promote the social development of student-athletes.

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