

# The relationship between sportsmanship and unconditional self-acceptance in university student-athletes

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#### ABSTRACT

Someone who is highly sportive tends to have lower self-acceptance as they are more respectful of the rules and referee decisions, even if they are detrimental. They focus more on fairness and integrity compared to personal satisfaction. Conversely, if someone has high self-acceptance, they tend to care less about sportsmanship. This is because they tend to focus more on personal satisfaction and accept themselves whatever the outcome, without the need to question the rules or fairness in competition. This study aims to examine whether there is a relationship between sportsmanship and self-acceptance. Quantitative correlational method was used in this study involving student-athletes in higher education with N=61. Purposive sampling was used in this study. The instruments used in this study were the Construction of Sportsmanship Attitude Scale (CSAC) and the Unconditional Self-Acceptance Questionnaire (USAQ). Since the data were non-normally distributed, data analysis was conducted using a nonparametric correlation test with IBM SPSS Statistics 25. The results showed a moderate and statistically significant correlation between self-acceptance and sportsmanship (r = .426, p = .001). This study showed a statistically significant relationship between self-acceptance and sportsmanship of student-athletes in higher education. This correlation value indicates a moderate relationship according to the interpretation category. This study concluded that student-athletes who have high self-acceptance will have low sportsmanship and vice versa. So the researcher suggested that athletes and students create a balance between sportsmanship and positive self-acceptance. With the right strategies, student-athletes can still have a high sense of sportsmanship without losing self-acceptance. It is suggested that athlete development programs incorporate strategies to balance strong sportsmanship values with positive self-acceptance to support ethical behavior and psychological well-being.

Keywords: sportsmanship, unconditional self-acceptance, student-athletes, university

ARTICLE INFO		
Article History:	Correspondence Address:	
Accepted : 24th April 2025	Mochamad Yamin Saputra	
Approved : 29 May 2025	Study Program of Sport Coaching Education, Faculty of Sport and	
Available Online May 2025	Health Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Dr. Setiabudi	
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# **INTRODUCTION**

Sports is one of the activities that is often done in every circle. Sports not only aim to win, but also as a means of character building such as discipline, not giving up easily, the spirit of cooperation, and a sporty spirit that is actualized in sportsmanship, meanwhile, Sportsmanship itself is teaching players to respect opponents, referees, and teammates, and accept defeat and victory with a good attitude (Candra et al., 2024). Because the goal is fun which is directly obtained from the activity itself (Keating, 2025). Without distinguishing gender whether it is female or male (Berliana et al., 2024). Sport plays an important role in improving health and psychological conditions (Febrianty et al., 2024; Sofyan et al., 2024).

And the achievement of sports achievements is closely related to the embodiment of character values (Mayangsari et al., 2024). Sport is very synonymous with tolerance and respect (Berliana et al., 2021).

The development of sports competitions every day makes athletes' enthusiasm even higher (Rahman et al., 2019). In recent years, there have been many cases that show the phenomenon of violence both at the amateur and professional competition levels (Munandar, 2025). This is because athletes cannot control their emotions and tend to become angry, violate, mock, and fight (Komarudin, 2016). This happens because it is based on an attitude that cannot accept defeat or dissatisfaction with the performance of the referee or provocation from the opponent. In fact, the attitude generated by an athlete or coach can trigger the same attitude that will result in a riot (Raharja, 2019). It is necessary to change our minds and learn to love ourselves in any condition (Neff & Germer, 2018), self-acceptance is essential in the ability to engage openly and empathically with others. People who have self-acceptance report that they are less depressed, anxious, angry, perfectionistic, or irrational

There are studies that analyze sportsmanship values to athletes, namely (Özsari & Pepe, 2021) to hockey athletes, (Ginting et al., 2018) to volleyball athletes, and (Subekhi & Kusuma, 2021) to soccer athletes, and to sports students (Cosma et al., 2021). Research in Serbia examined the psychometric characteristics of the translated Unconditional Self-Acceptance Questionnaire (USAQ) and developed a short version (Popov & Sokić, 2021). Then research on mindfulness on unconditional self-acceptance, however, previous research has not examined the relationship between sportsmanship and unconditional self-acceptance as two interrelated psychological constructs, especially among student-athletes.

Most of the existing literature tends to investigate sportsmanship and unconditional self acceptance separately or in conjunction with other psychological factors. Such as research unconditional self acceptance and self compassion can be an effective approach in dealing with anorexia nervosa (Muroni & Sudres, 2023). Then Sportsmanship research is linked in the context of physical education by applying the sport education model to high school students (Burgueño & Medina-casaubón, 2020). This research aims to fill the gap by providing novelty specifically exploring the correlation or relationship between sportsmanship and unconditional self acceptance, offering a new perspective on athletes' mental health and character development.s

## **METHODS**

The method used in this research is a correlational quantitative method. Correlational

research is a study to determine the relationship and level of relationship between two or more variables without any attempt to influence these variables so that there is no manipulation of variables.

## **Research Subject**

The sample of this study were student-athletes at the Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia. The characteristics of the sample are 61 UPI sports students and athletes at least have competed locally or regional, and at most have participated in international matches. The resarch subjects were selected using simple random sampling as the sampling technique.

## **Research Instruments**

The Construction of Sportsmanship Attitude Scale (CSAC) totaling 50 items was used in this study with validity ranging from 6.14 - 12.46 where the significance level at 95% and reliability of 70 is statistically significant indicating that the scale is acceptable for use (Omran, 2010). And the Unconditional Self Acceptance Questionnaire (USAQ) which consists of 20 items has good construct validity and high reliability, with a Cronbach's Alpha value of .90 (Chamberlain & Haaga, 2001). The instrument is given once to the sample subject who will fill out a questionnaire containing several questions and answers that have several choices.

# Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics 25 by performing demographics of research subjects, statistical descriptions, normality tests using the Shapiro-Wilk Test, non-parametric correlation tests using the Spearman Rank Test, and percentage results.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

# Results

The author presents the demographics of research subjects in Table 1.

Indicator		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	41	67%
	Female	20	33%
Sport Category	Archery	2	3%
	Badminton	3	5%
	Basketball	3	5%
	BMX Croos	1	2%
	Cricket	1	2%
	Diving	1	2%
	Fencing	3	5%
	Football	12	20%
	Futsal	7	11%
	Handball	3	5%
	Hockey	3	5%

## Table 1. Demographics of Research Subjects

Sportsmanship and Unconditional Self Acceptance: A Case Study Of Student-Athletes in University Rayen Redly Dinata<sup>1</sup>, Mochamad Yamin Saputra<sup>1</sup>, Komarudin Komarudin<sup>1</sup>, Geraldi Novian<sup>2</sup>

	Karate	2	3%
	Pencak Silat	6	10%
	Rowing	1	2%
	Rugby	2	3%
	Finswimming	2	3%
	Taekwondo	5	8%
	Volley	3	5%
	Water Polo	1	2%
The highest level of competition ever	Regional	22	36%
participated in	National	32	52%
	International	7	11%

N=61

Table 1 shows a demographic comparison of the study subjects by gender, where the majority of participants were male (67%), while females made up 33%. The study sample covered a variety of sports, with Football having the highest percentage (20%), followed by Futsal (11%), Pencak Silat (10%), and Taekwondo (8%). Several other sports had similar percentages of 5%, such as Fencing, Basketball, Badminton, Handball, Volleyball, and Hockey. Meanwhile, Karate, Archery, Rugby, and Diving each had a percentage of 3%. The sports with the least number of participants, at 2%, include Cycling, Cricket, Rowing, Scenic Jumping, and Water Polo. In terms of the highest level of competition they have participated in, most of the research subjects competed at the National level (52%), followed by the Regional level (36%), and the international level which has a smaller percentage.

 Table 2. Statistics Description

N	Min.	Max.	Total	Average	Std. Deviation
61	40	140	5940	97.38	17.036
61	54	200	6939	113.75	20.574
	61 61		61 40 140	61 40 140 5940	61 40 140 5940 97.38

Table 2 presents a statistical description of the two variables studied, namely selfacceptance and sportsmanship, based on 61 respondents. The self-acceptance variable has a Min. 40 and Max. 140, with a total overall score of 5.940. The average score obtained is 97.38 with a standard deviation of 17.036, which indicates a variation in the level of self-acceptance among respondents. Then the level of unconditional self-acceptance was categorized using a descriptive statistical approach based on the mean and standard deviation. In this study, the mean score was 97.38 with a standard deviation of 17.036. Scores < 80.34 (mean - 1 SD) are categorized as low, scores between 80.34-114.42 (mean  $\pm$  1 SD) are categorized as moderate, and scores > 114.42 (mean + 1 SD) are categorized as high. So the score of 97.38 is included in the medium category. Meanwhile, the sportsmanship variable has a value range of Min. 54 and Max. 200, with a total overall score of 6.939. The average score for this variable is 113.75 with a standard deviation of 20.574. The sportsmanship scale has three levels, scores of 50-99 are categorized as low, scores of 100-149 are categorized as medium, and scores of 150-200 are categorized as high (Omran, 2010). The higher standard deviation score compared to self-acceptance indicates that there is more variation in the level of sportsmanship among the respondents. Overall, this data provides an overview of the distribution of both variables scores as well as the spread of scores within the research sample.

 Table 3. Normality Test

Variable	Statistic	df	Sig.
Self-Acceptance	.936	58	.004
Sportsmanship	.912	61	.000

Table 3 presents the results of the normality test for self-acceptance and sportsmanship variables. This normality test aims to determine whether the data in this study are normally distributed or not. Based on the test results, the significance value (Sig.) for the self-acceptance variable is .004 and for the sportsmanship variable is .000. In the normality test, if the significance value is less than .05, the data is considered not normally distributed. Since both variables have a Sig. value below .05, it can be concluded that the data in this study are not normally distributed. Therefore, this study uses a non-parametric correlation approach for data analysis, which is more appropriate when the normal distribution assumption is not met.

Table 4. Correlation Test

Variable	<b>Correlation Coefficient</b>	Ν	Sig. (2-tailed)		
Self-Acceptance - Sportsmanship	.426	61	.001		
Table 4 presents the results of the	e non-parametric approach co	orrelatio	on test between the		
variables Self-acceptance and Sportsmanship. This non-parametric approach correlation test					
aims to see whether there is a relationship between the two variables. The results of the analysis					
show that the Correlation Coefficient value is .426, which indicates a correlation with a					
moderate level of strength between Self-	acceptance and Sportsmansh	nip. Thi	s correlation value		
shows a moderate relationship according to the interpretation category proposed by (Pallant,					
2020). In addition, the significance value Sig. (2-tailed) of .001 indicates that this relationship					
is statistically significant, as the value is smaller than .05. This means that the relationship					
found in this study does not occur by	chance but has statistical i	meanin	g. Thus, it can be		
concluded that there is a significant rela	tionship between self-accep	stance a	nd sportsmanship,		
where an increase in self-acceptance is r	elated to a level in sportsma	nship.			

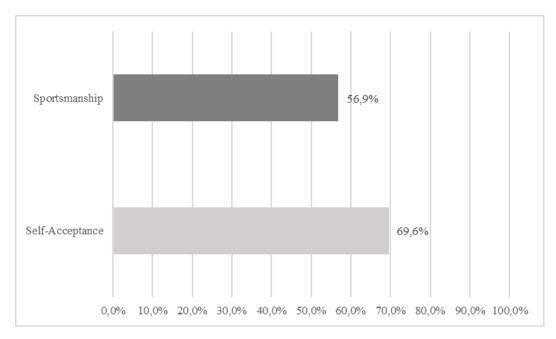


Figure 1. Percentase of Sportsmanship and Self-Acceptance of Student-Athletes in University

Based on the Figure 1, it can be seen that the level of self-acceptance in the research sample has a percentage of 69.6%, while sportsmanship has a lower percentage, namely 56.9%. This may indicate that when a person's self-acceptance increases, the level of sportsmanship tends to be lower. In other words, individuals who show high sportsmanship in sports do not necessarily have a high level of self-acceptance. These findings can provide important insights, especially in the world of sports, that increasing sportsmanship is not always in line with increasing self-acceptance and vice versa. Therefore, in coaching athletes or individuals involved in sports, there needs to be a balance between building good sportsmanship and maintaining self-acceptance so that it does not decrease. This can be taken into consideration for coaches, sports psychologists, and related parties in designing a more comprehensive athlete mental development strategy.

## Discussion

This study reveals that there is a statistically significant relationship between selfacceptance and sportsmanship. The results of the analysis show that the value of the correlation coefficient shows a correlation with a moderate level of strength between self-acceptance and sportsmanship. This means that the higher a person's level of self-acceptance, the higher the level of sportsmanship they tend to have. This classification allows researchers to interpret scores relative to the distribution of scores in the sample.

Based on the graph in Figure 1 displayed above, the percentage of self-acceptance is greater than the level of sportsmanship in the research sample. This difference could indicate

that the value of self-acceptance in this study is higher than the value of sportsmanship. This means that individuals who appear to be very sportsmanlike in sporting activities do not necessarily have strong self-acceptance. It could be that they are more focused on meeting the rules or social expectations of the sporting environment, but are not yet fully comfortable or accepting of themselves personally.

Identity conflict and constant pressure to perform can lead to reduced self-acceptance (Pelz, 2024). Low unconditional self-acceptance can be detrimental to well-being and, in some cases, can lead to mental health problems and mental disorders (Pramanik & Khuntia, 2023). Self-acceptance needs to be accompanied by an individual's determination to improve themselves from negative behaviors that hinder the achievement of individual goals (Sansinenea et al., 2020). Accepting experiences and oneself becomes an important part of the self-actualization process (Rusu, 2019). Self-acceptance is a solution to the negative impact in the form of prevention by knowing yourself so that you can accept yourself both shortcomings and strengths (Ernest & Monika, 2023). This causes athletes to be unsportsmanlike during the match as long as they can win the match they will accept themselves.

Athletes who have a high ego orientation tend to compete to prove that they are superior to others, even if they have to sacrifice moral values to win (Cosma et al., 2021). There is a common view that it is difficult to win without occasionally deviating from the rules, that talent and hard work are not enough, almost everyone has cheated even a little (Kamis et al., 2016). Having or not having sportsmanship behavior has a positive or negative impact on all segments of the field and competition environment, the circle of friends, especially family and coaches, are relevant stakeholders that affect sportsmanship (Görgüt et al., 2023).

This situation not only reflects a violation of the principle of fair play, but can also have serious consequences for the mental and physical health of athletes (Munandar, 2025). Sportsmanship teaches to respect opponents, referees, and fellow teammates. They also learn to accept defeat gracefully and victory humbly (Anatasya et al., 2023). The value of sportsmanship is important to build honest, fair and dignified characters (Candra et al., 2024). There are four elements of sportsmanship: fairness, equality, good competition, and the will to win. These four elements are equally important and cannot be reduced to one another. However, the will to win systematically conflicts with the other three elements. Therefore, sportsmanship not only consists of these four elements, but also requires a balance between them.

This study showed a significant relationship between sportsmanship and unconditional self-acceptance in student athletes. However, it needs to be critically observed that this correlation does not necessarily describe a cause-and-effect relationship. One possibility why the level of self-acceptance is higher than sportsmanship is the competitive pressure or social expectations in the university environment that encourage athletes to display sportsmanlike behavior without actually internalizing the value. Other external factors such as coaching style, team culture, or previous competitive experiences could also be confounding variables that have not been measured in this study. In addition, the limitation of this study lies in the scope of subjects which is still limited to student athletes at one university, so the generalization of results to a wide population of students or professional athletes is less valid. Therefore, future research is recommended to explore the dynamics between sportsmanship and self-acceptance in broader contexts such as school students or professional athletes, as well as with longitudinal approaches or interventional studies to understand how these two variables develop over time and experience.

## CONCLUSION

This study concluded that there is a statistically significant relationship between sportsmanship and unconditional self-acceptance in student athletes, with the strength of the relationship being in the moderate category. This means that the higher the level of selfacceptance a person has, the tendency to show sportsmanship also increases, and vice versa. However, this relationship needs to be understood in a broader context and not simplified as direct causality. As a practical implication, it is important for coaches and educational institutions to start considering the integration of psychological training for example through mindfulness sessions, self-reflection, or Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)-based counseling as part of athlete development programs. The goal is that the formation of sportsmanship is not only superficial or normative, but also aligned with healthy and sustainable self-acceptance. For future research directions, it is suggested that the study be conducted on a wider population such as high school students or professional athletes, in order to see differences in relationship patterns that may arise due to different social and psychological backgrounds. In addition, a longitudinal or interventional approach could be used to observe the long-term dynamics between sportsmanship and self-acceptance, as well as the effectiveness of psychological interventions in shaping both simultaneously.

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