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EFFECT OF MENTAL PREPARATION AND FOCUS TECHNIQUES ON COMPETITIVE ANXIETY AMONG AMATURE ATHLETES

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ABSTRACT

Mindfulness has emerged as an important psychological skill in sports, contributing significantly to athletes' mental well-being and performance. The purpose of this article is to examine the role of mindfulness in sports and its influence on concentration, emotional regulation, and competitive anxiety among amateur athletes. Mindfulness refers to the ability to remain fully present and aware of thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations without judgment during training and competition. Through mindfulness practices such as focused breathing, body awareness, and attention control, athletes can enhance mental clarity and cope effectively with competitive pressure. This article highlights the importance of mindfulness in reducing cognitive and somatic anxiety, improving focus, and promoting consistent performance. The findings discussed suggest that mindfulness serves as an effective mental training strategy that complements physical preparation. Incorporating mindfulness techniques into regular sports training programs can help amateur athletes build psychological resilience, boost self-confidence, and achieve optimal performance.

KEYWORDS: *Competitive sports, Athletes, Cognitive anxiety, Mindfulness training, Somatic anxiety.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Competitive sports place substantial psychological demands on athletes, requiring not only physical fitness and technical proficiency but also strong mental control and emotional stability. Athletes frequently experience pressure arising from competition, performance expectations, and fear of failure, which can negatively affect concentration and overall performance if not managed effectively. As a result, psychological training has become an essential component of modern sports preparation alongside physical conditioning (Weinberg & Gould, 2019).

One such contemporary and effective psychological approach is **mindfulness training**, which focuses on cultivating present-moment awareness and non-judgmental acceptance of thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations during training and competition. Mindfulness enables athletes to remain focused on the task at hand rather than being distracted by past mistakes or future outcomes (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). This approach enhances attentional control, emotional regulation, and stress management, which are crucial for consistent athletic performance.

Research evidence suggests that mindfulness-based interventions are effective in reducing cognitive and somatic anxiety while improving focus, self-confidence, and performance consistency among athletes (Gardner & Moore, 2007; Baltzell & Summers, 2018). Unlike traditional psychological techniques that emphasize motivation or goal setting alone, mindfulness integrates awareness and acceptance strategies that allow athletes to cope more effectively with competitive stress. Therefore, incorporating mindfulness training into regular sports programs can play a vital role in improving psychological readiness and overall performance, particularly among amateur athletes.

2. METHODS

a. Experimental Design

The present study adopted a **quantitative experimental research design** with a **pre-test and post-test control group design** to examine the effect of mindfulness training on competitive anxiety and related psychological variables among amateur athletes. This design was chosen to determine the effectiveness of the intervention by comparing changes between the experimental and control groups.

A total of selected athletes were randomly assigned into two equal groups: the **Experimental Group** and the **Control Group**. The Experimental Group underwent a structured mindfulness training program, while the Control Group continued with their regular physical training without any psychological intervention. Randomization was used to ensure homogeneity between the groups and to minimize selection bias.

Both groups were assessed using standardized psychological measurement tools before the commencement of the training program (pre-test) and after the completion of the intervention

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period (post-test). The pre-test and post-test scores were compared within and between groups to evaluate the effectiveness of mindfulness training. This experimental design enabled the researcher to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between mindfulness training and changes in competitive anxiety, focus, and self-confidence among the athletes.

b. Training Program

The training programme for the experimental group consisted of a **structured mindfulness training protocol** designed to enhance focus, emotional regulation, and anxiety management among athletes. The programme was conducted over a period of **six weeks** and was integrated alongside the athletes' regular physical training schedule. The mindfulness sessions were brief, systematic, and progressive in nature to ensure effective psychological adaptation without causing mental fatigue.The mindfulness training was administered **six days per week**, with each session lasting **15 minutes**. The programme included a combination of **focused breathing exercises, body awareness techniques, attention control drills, and mindfulness-based self-awareness practices**.

These techniques were selected to help athletes remain present, manage competitive pressure, and reduce cognitive and somatic anxiety during training and competition.The training sessions were conducted under the supervision of the investigator, and athletes were guided to practice mindfulness in a calm and distraction-free environment. Instructions were clearly explained to ensure proper understanding and consistent practice. The control group did not participate in any form of psychological training and continued with their routine physical training alone.

Table 1: Mindfulness training programme (6 weeks)

Day	Mindfulness Component	Training Description	Duration
Monday	Focused Breathing	Athletes practiced slow, controlled breathing to develop present-moment awareness and relaxation	15 Minutes
Tuesday	Body Scan Awareness	Awareness of bodily sensations from head to toe to reduce muscular tension and stress	15 Minutes
Wednesday	Attention Control	Exercises to maintain focus on task-relevant cues and ignore distractions	15 Minutes
Thursday	Mindfulness of Thoughts	Observing thoughts and emotions without judgment to reduce negative thinking	15 Minutes
Friday	Mindful Visualization	Mental rehearsal of performance while maintaining awareness of breathing and sensations	15 Minutes
Saturday	Integrated Mindfulness Practice	A combination of breathing, focus, awareness, and emotional regulation techniques	15 Minutes
Sunday	Rest	No psychological training	—

c. Statistical Technique

The data collected from the experimental and control groups before and after the training programme were statistically analyzed to determine the effect of mindfulness training on selected psychological variables. The **mean** and **standard deviation** were calculated to describe the performance of the subjects. To examine the significance of differences between the pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental and control groups, the **dependent (paired) t-test** was employed.

The level of significance was set at **0.05**. If the calculated 't' value was greater than the table value at the 0.05 level of confidence, the difference was considered statistically significant. If the calculated 't' value was less than the table value, the difference was considered not significant. This statistical technique was considered appropriate for the present study to assess the effectiveness of the mindfulness training programme.

Table 2: Showing experimental group and control group pre- and post-test of cognitive anxiety

GROUP	Test	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean difference	SEM	't' ratio	Table value
EXPERIMENTAL GROUP	Pre test	26.00	2.02	1.40	0.24	5.71*	2.09
	Post test	24.60	1.95				
CONTROL GROUP	Pre test	21.00	3.04	0.25	0.17	1.4	
	Post test	21.25	2.98				

**Significant at 0.05level for the degree of freedom 19*

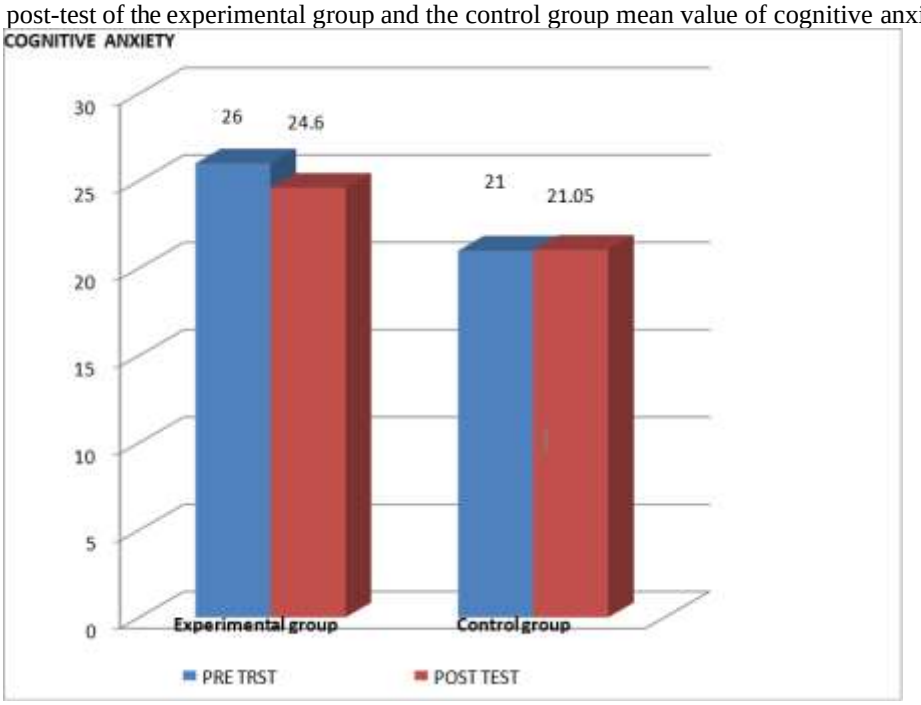
Table 2 presents the mean values of the pre-test and post-test, with the recoded pre-test average at 26.00 and the post-test average at 24.60. The standard deviation for the pre-test was 1.40; for the post-test, it was 0.24. Moreover, the obtained t-ratio was 5.71 with a significance level of 0.05 in the experimental group. Since the obtained t ratio was 5.71, which is higher than the 2.09 of the required table value, it is inferred that a significant difference exists between the pre and post-test scores. For the control group, it's exactly the opposite of the experimental group. The t-value was 1.4, which is less than the 2.09 required table value.

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GROUP	test	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean difference	SEM	't' ratio	Table value
EXPERIMENTAL GROUP	Pre test	20.40	3.34	1.55	0.18	8.39*	2.09
	Post test	18.85	3.39				
CONTROL GROUP	Pre test	20.90	2.57	0.15	0.36	0.41	

**Significant at 0.05level for the degree of freedom 19*

Figure-I
Bar diagram of pre and post-test of the experimental group and the control group mean value of cognitive anxiety



3. DISCUSSION ON FINDINGS

The results of the present study indicated that the selected psychological variables, namely competitive anxiety, focus, and self-confidence, were significantly improved after undergoing the mindfulness training programme. The observed improvements in these psychological variables may be attributed to the systematic planning, proper preparation, and effective execution of the mindfulness training package provided to the athletes. The effectiveness of mindfulness training on selected psychological variables among college-level athletes was examined by comparing the experimental group with the control group.

The mindfulness training programme consisted of structured practices such as focused breathing, body awareness, attention regulation, and non-judgmental observation of thoughts and emotions. These techniques promote present-moment awareness and emotional regulation, thereby reducing cognitive and somatic anxiety while enhancing attentional focus and psychological stability. In addition to anxiety reduction, mindfulness training also contributes to improved self-confidence and mental clarity, which are essential for consistent athletic performance. The obtained results clearly proved that the experimental group, which underwent mindfulness training, showed significant improvement compared to the control group.

The findings of the present study are supported by recent research in sports psychology. Noetel et al. (2021) reported that mindfulness-based interventions significantly reduced competitive anxiety and improved attentional control among athletes. Sappington and Longshore (2021) observed that athletes who engaged in mindfulness training demonstrated enhanced emotional regulation and performance consistency. Reinebo et al. (2023) found that mindfulness practices positively influenced focus, stress management, and mental readiness in competitive athletes. Similarly, Li et al. (2022) confirmed that mindfulness training improves self-confidence and reduces performance-related stress among college-level athletes.

In contrast, the control group did not show any significant improvement in competitive anxiety, focus, or self-confidence, indicating that regular physical training alone was insufficient to produce psychological changes. The results of the present study support recent findings and extend their applicability to college-level athletes. These findings had not been previously replicated for this specific sample, thereby contributing new evidence to the existing body of knowledge. Hence, the present study confirms that mindfulness training is an effective psychological intervention for enhancing mental preparedness and reducing competitive anxiety among athletes.

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CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and within the limitations of the present study, it was observed that the practice of mindfulness training helped to improve the selected psychological variables, such as mindfulness level, focus, and self-confidence, and also reduced competitive anxiety among college-level athletes. It was further noticed that there was a progressive improvement in the selected criterion variables of the mindfulness training group after the completion of the training period.

1. It was concluded that the individualized mindfulness training group showed a statistically significant improvement over the course of the treatment period on the selected psychological variables of college-level athletes.
2. It was concluded that the individualized effect of the control group showed statistically insignificant changes over the course of the study period on the selected psychological variables of college-level athletes.
3. The results of the comparative effects led to the conclusion that the mindfulness training group demonstrated significantly better improvement in selected psychological variables, such as competitive anxiety, focus, and self-confidence, when compared to the control group of college-level athletes.

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