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Factors affecting a successful coordination of sports and academic careers

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Abstract

The career of a top athlete is relatively short and few athletes can secure financial resources during their active sports career, which is why it is imperative to think about how they will manage to do that. They have a much better starting point for competing in the labour market with a successfully completed education and vocation. We conducted a survey among 112 Slovenian athletes. Based on the research, we found that an athlete's academic performance is influenced by the characteristics of the study programme, such as the difficulty of the study programme, the volume of all study burden, the possibility of adjusting study obligations and the flexibility of the higher education institution.

Keywords: athlete's career, sports career, student athlete, academic performance, student status, distance learning

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, requirements in sport are higher than they used to be, which is mainly due to the greater involvement of the media and sponsors in sporting events. Early on, young athletes are under a lot of pressure from parents and coaches to achieve top results, which seems to be the only thing that matters today. Soon enough, the "innocent" action of doing sports becomes more serious and the number of trainings and matches, which now take more and more time, increases. In general, it is nowadays very difficult to combine school and sport, as the demands of modern professionalism are increasingly rigid (Mikolavčič, 2010).

The state also has interests to have as many top (recognizable) athletes as possible for the citizens to identify with, as this enhances national awareness, state visibility (promotion), while successful athletes also result in the greater involvement of young people and adults in sports activities. This in turn enhances citizens' health and brings other social, cultural and infrastructural benefits. The question, however, is what the country is prepared to do to help educate active athletes..

PROBLEM DEFINITION

Italy and Slovenia do not have structured measures for educational services for top athletes in higher education. Corrado, Tessitore, Capranica, Rauter, and Topic (2012) sought to examine the motivation

for dual careers of Italian and Slovenian student-athletes by gender, age (<= 24,> 24) and type of sport (individual or team sport). 98 Italian and 216 Slovenian higher education students were interviewed. In Italy, 23 women with the average age of 22 years and 75 men with the average age of 24 were surveyed. In Slovenia, 103 women were interviewed, with the average age of 21.5 years and 113 men with the average age of 21 years. They used the MANOVA analysis to examine the differences ($p < 0.05$) between the groups. They obtained a 3-factor model with variable Cronbach alpha coefficients. No gender differences were observed. However, differences were identified in the type of sport. Despite the lack of institutional support, Italian and Slovenian student athletes are highly motivated for a dual career, regardless of gender. The findings suggest that the questionnaire could be a valuable tool in promoting the development of sport and education policy measures at both national and European levels (Corrado, Tessitore, Capranica, Rauter and Topic, 2012).

Atypical students (e.g. employees, athletes, artists and participants in Erasmus) may have difficulty coordinating their educational path. Guidotti, Lupo, Cortis, Baldassorre and Capranica (2014) examined the actual academic support and potential approach of educators to atypical students in Italy. They prepared a 12-item questionnaire to identify the differences ($p < 0.05$) between university educators regarding their attitudes toward students, who are also artists, athletes, Erasmus participants, and employees. They found that artists were given the least flexibility regarding their attendance at lectures ($p < 0.00001$) and passing exams compared to other student typologies. In contrast, educators reported that flexibility is especially provided to employees and athletes ($p < 0.01$). In addition, respondents stated that they were available for additional work in cases when students were absent from lectures, citing online admission, mentoring support and e-learning services, especially for workers and athletes ($p < 0.05$). Finally, educators stated that artists and athletes should be valued ($p < 0.01$), although they are not aware of this in the learning process ($p < 0.01$). In general, artists are the least recognized atypical category of students, while the educators' affection for student athletes is noticeable. These preliminary findings dictate the need to improve the dual career paths in Italy (Guidotti, Lupo, Cortis, Baldassorre and Capranica, 2014).

Top athletes undergo a tremendous amount of training, which is often difficult to reconcile with educational obligations. A dual career (successful combination of a top sport and education) is a multidimensional process influenced by the individual (talent and psychological characteristics), interpersonal relationships (social support and cultural customs), the environment (access and availability of services), and politics (national and international norms). Different approaches to dual careers of athletes in different European countries are leading to different careers for athletes. In order to protect the rights of athletes to engage in sports and education concurrently, European policymakers have begun to encourage EU Member States to support student-athletes at local level by following the EU dual-career athlete guidelines and key actions. Within this framework, since 2004, the European Network for Student Athletes has actively been supporting the EU's efforts to promote a dual career by providing a platform for a better dialogue between educational institutions (universities, colleges, sports schools) and sports organizations (clubs and sports federations). By promoting networking of institutions, the European Network for Student Athletes aims to unify partners involved in top sports and education, promote the exchange of best practices in the field of dual-career athletes, strengthen links between education and sport organizations, and support and participate in projects and research on dual careers (Capranica et al., 2015).

EU dual career guidelines (i.e. Sport and Education) encourage Member States to provide adequate services to support the dual careers of top student athletes. The aim of the study was to examine: a) student athletes' views on their sports and academic careers, and b) existing and possible service delivery in support of dual careers. A 25-question semi-structured questionnaire was sent to 221 top European athletes involved in individual and team sports at national and international levels. They found differences ($p <= 0.05$) regarding nationality, type of sport and level of competition. Female athletes put more effort into their academic careers, and athletes involved in individual sports also spoke about insufficient support from academic staff. In addition, athletes competing internationally have perceived that giving priority to sport has a greater impact on their academic careers in comparison with other peers from their home country. Low results have been found in considering dual careers in academic and sporting settings, support of the faculty staff, and coordinating schedules at academic and athletic levels. In general, student athletes required the provision of services at an academic level (i.e., flexibility, online education) and the level of support. National academic and sports systems influence the opinion of student athletes about their dual careers, especially at the top level of sports. Flexibility, distance learning and coaching should be improved in the EU Member States (Fuchs et al, 2016).

The concern of the state for the education of athletes in our school system is reflected in the adaptation of school work and the organization of sports departments in elementary schools and gymnasiums and in the granting of the status of athlete to students and pupils. At the level of primary and secondary education, adapting to the obligations of the programme is systemically well resolved (Kovač et al., 1998; Sivec, 2005), which is also reflected in the successful adaptation of the school and sport obligations for athlete pupils and students. The authors of the study (Jurak, Kovač and Strel, 2005) have found that students with the status of athletes mainly use the previously announced oral examinations, greater absenteeism from classes, and the possibility of examinations and assessment by taking exams. Compared to sports classes in gymnasiums, there is no additional individual help, or agreements on how to test knowledge and online education. Some guidelines for a better adaptation of sports and school contents are mentioned. In secondary school programmes (within the framework of funding scholarships) they offer cheaper computers and Internet access, preparation of materials for individual educational programmes (within them for individual subjects), cheaper (free) school books, and individual learning aid outside the organization of school and mobile learning assistance, whereby a student- or teacher-guided assistance is provided for a group of athletes during preparations carried out outside school.

The worst in the educational system is the provision for athletes at higher educational institutions (colleges, faculties, universities). The Higher Education Act (2012 with amendments) defines that higher educational institutions themselves determine the study regime, forms and periods of examination. The adjustment of sports obligations of student athletes depends on the individual higher education institutions. In order to guarantee equal opportunities for athletes, the fulfilment of the obligations within an educational programme has to be adapted (Sivec, 2005). The research (Jurak, Kovač and Strel, 2005) found that a large proportion of top athletes studying have a status of student athlete, but the benefits offered by higher education institutions are very different. Athletes with the status of student athletes distinguish themselves from other students in the fact that they have the possibility of reduced compulsory attendance at lectures, classes and other study obligations, the possibility of enrolling in the next study year after meeting at least half of the compulsory conditions therefor, and the possibility of passing exams outside regular deadlines. Schools provide their athletes with little help related to the

coordination of students' study obligations (preparation of additional study materials, organized additional study assistance, possibility of distant performance of study obligations, etc.).

In order to help young athletes improve their chances of successfully coordinating their studies and sports, we examined the factors that influence athlete's academic performance. The research question reads as follows:

An athlete's academic performance is influenced by personality factors, study programme characteristics, and sports career characteristics.

Based on the research question, we have formulated three hypotheses:

H1: An athlete's academic performance is influenced by personality factors (abilities, interests, prior school achievement, motivation).

H2: An athlete's academic performance is influenced by the characteristics of the study programme (difficulty, extent of study load, possible adjustments).

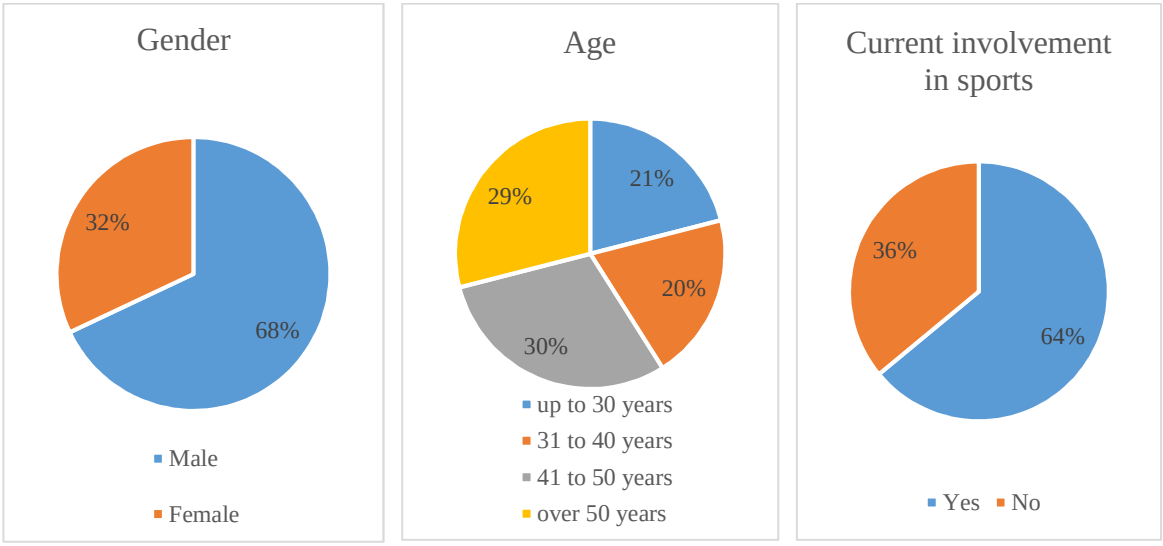
H3: An athlete's academic performance is also influenced by the characteristics of the sport activity (the extent of training, competitions, absences, physical difficulty of the sport, distance to the training facilities, level of competition, motivation for sport, success in sport).

THE STUDENT ATHLETE'S ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE – AN EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

A quantitative method was used to collect the data. We prepared and conducted an online survey in 2018, and it lasted until 2019, since all the relevant information support had to be provided for its implementation. The questionnaire was sent to over 400 athletes in Slovenia. We selected the segment of respondents in the Club of Olympians, who in their active years had a career of top athletes, during which they did or did not decide on an academic career. The online survey was conducted from 5 April 2018 to 23 October 2019. The survey was successfully carried out and completed on 23 October 2019.

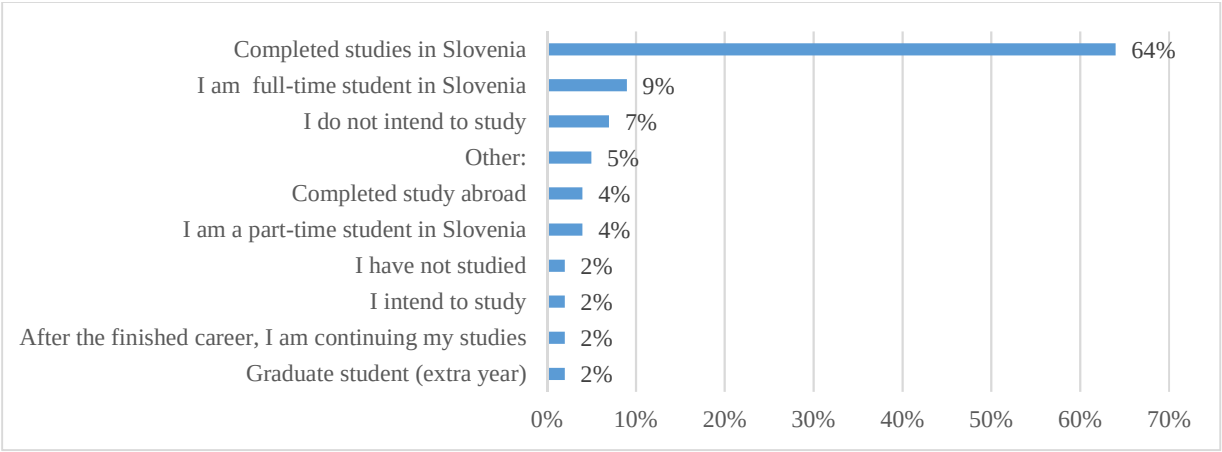
A total of 396 respondents participated in the quantitative survey, of which 165 agreed to complete the survey, of which 112 produced valid questionnaires. We eliminated 53 questionnaires as they were not completely filled in. The sample of quantitative research is N = 112, represented by athletes in the Republic of Slovenia, aged 19 to 76 years. Figure 1 shows the demographic data of the respondents.

Picture 1: Demographics



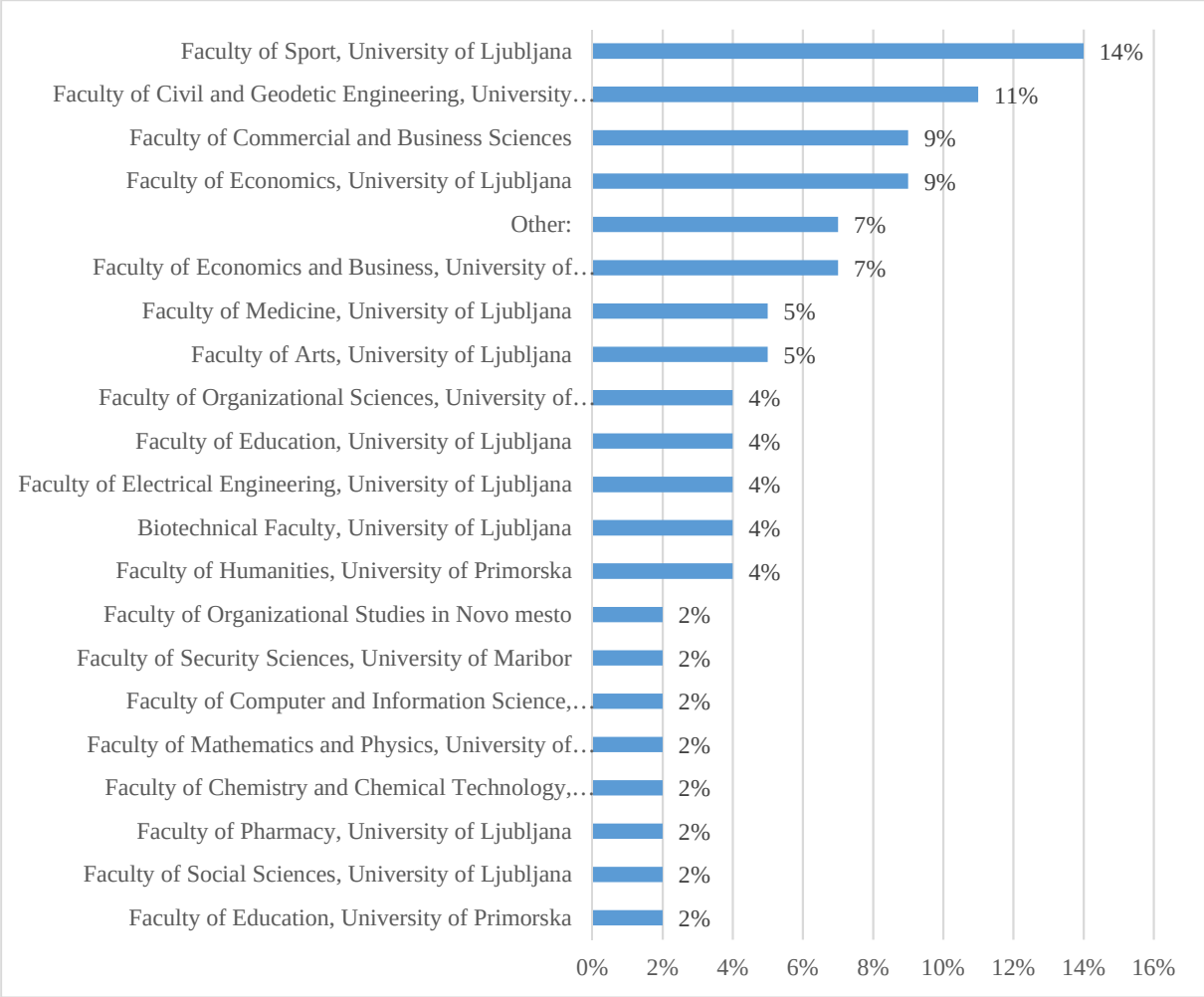
Source: Author's own source

Picture 2: Current involvement in the study



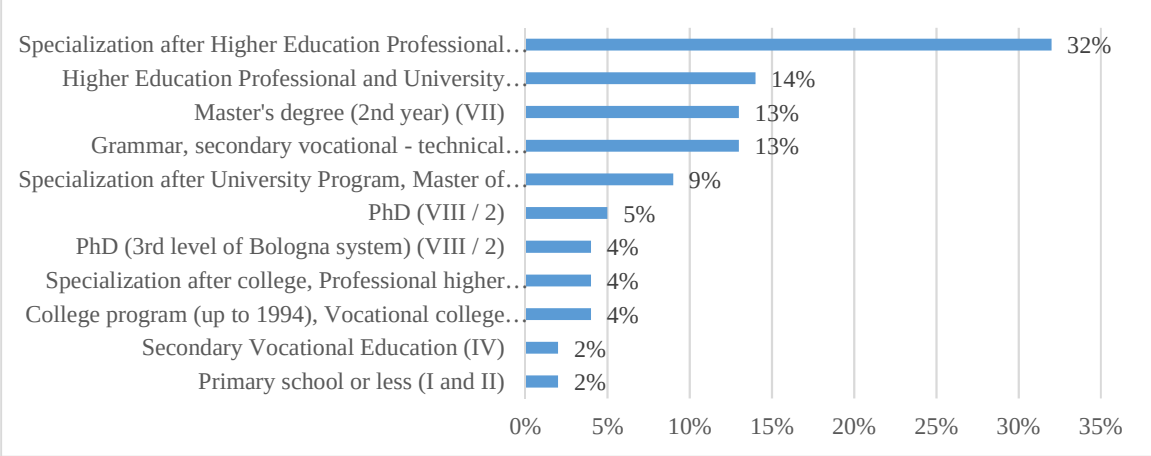
Source: Author's own source

Picture 3: Name of the educational institution where you studied (or are studying)



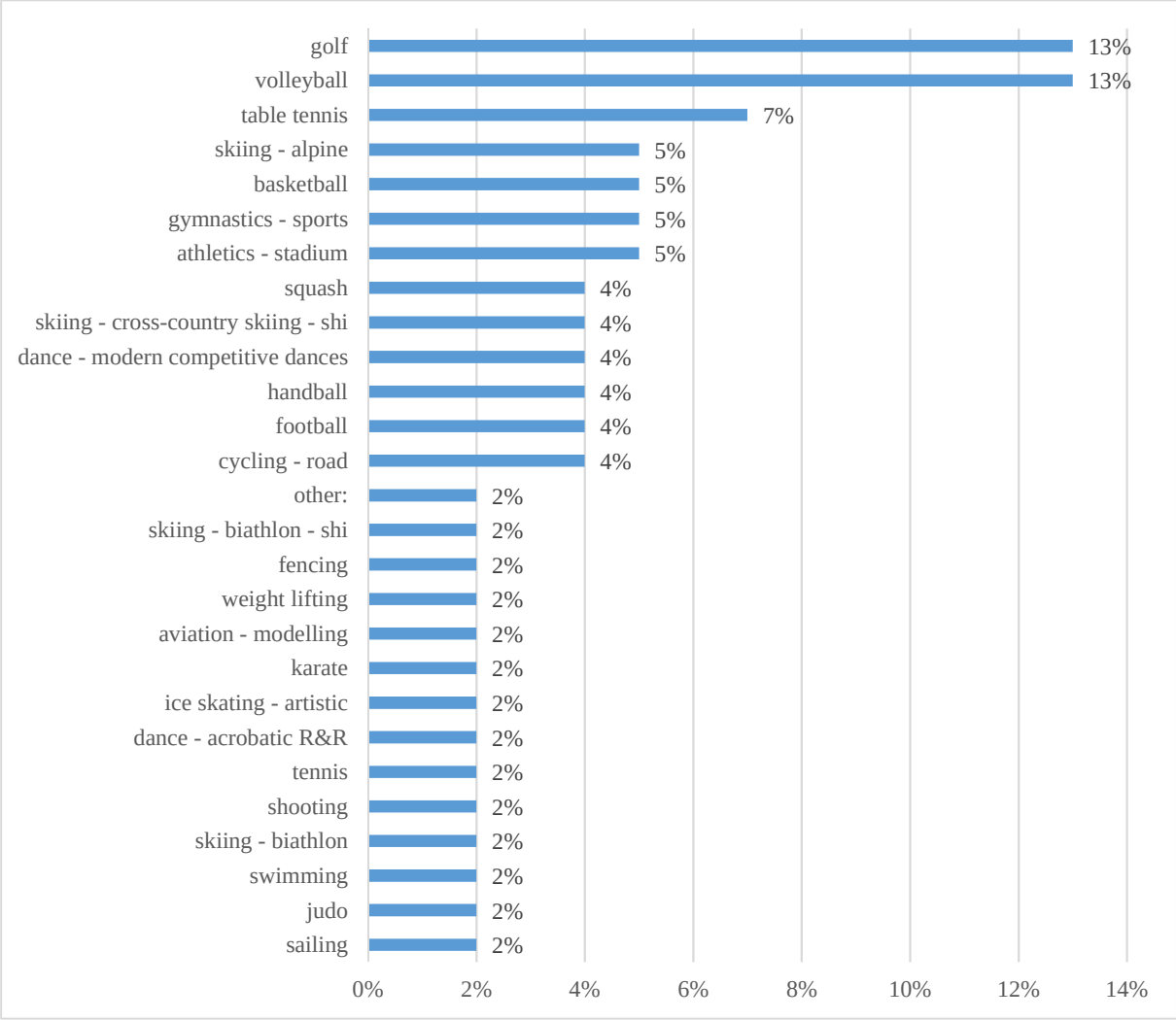
Source: Author's own source

Picture 4: Completed level of education



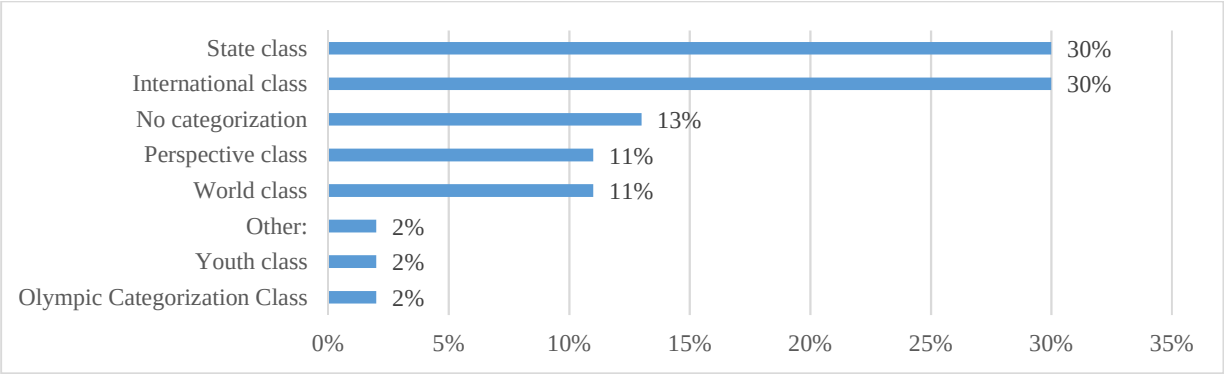
Source: Author's own source

Picture 5: Sports discipline



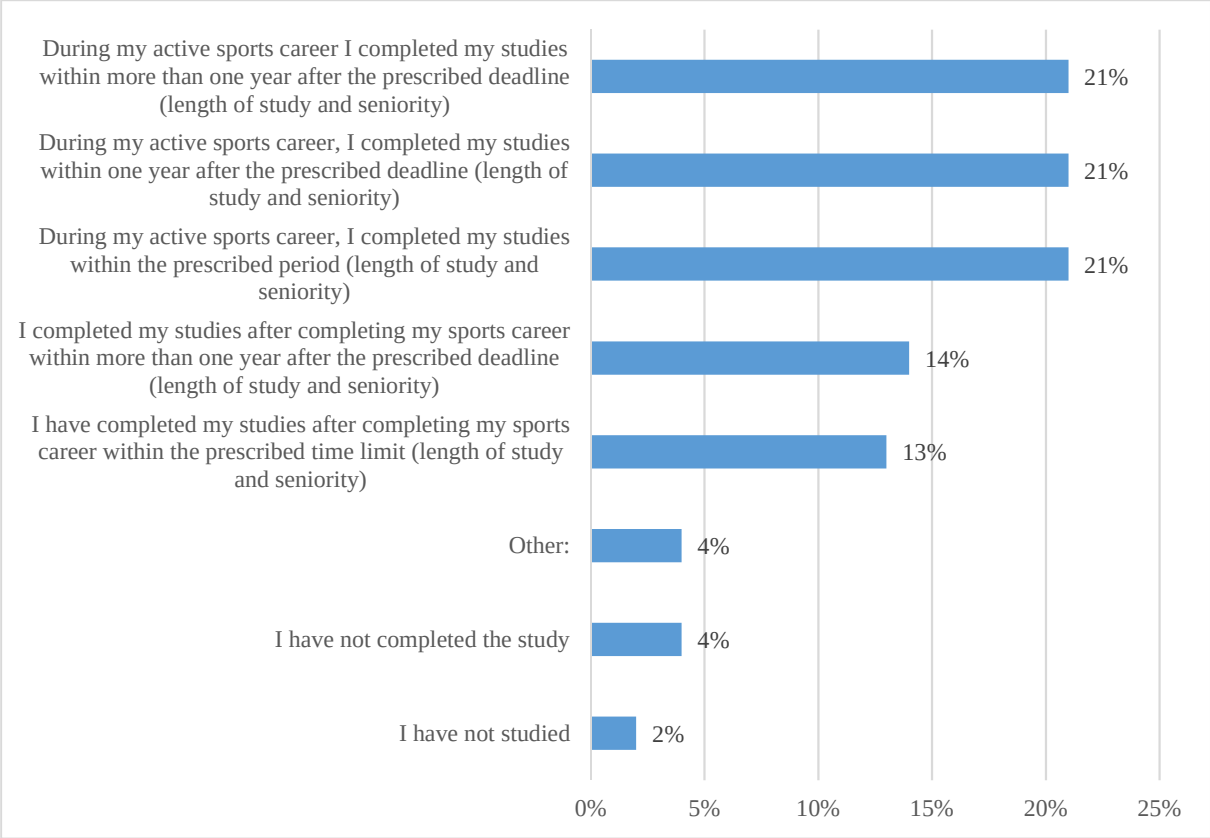
Source: Author's own source

Picture 6: Slovenian Olympic Committee categorization



Source: Author's own source

Picture 7: Coordination of sport and study



Source: Author's own source

Key characteristics of the data are expressed using descriptive statistics methods. The standard deviation tells how the data is scattered around the arithmetic mean. A high standard deviation value means that the values are more dispersed and a low standard deviation that they are more concentrated around the arithmetic mean. The statements describing the variables are presented in Tables 1 to 4. We created a five-point Likert scale for the statements, whereby the numbers signify as follows: 1 – Not important at all, 2 – Not important, 3 – Neither important nor unimportant, 4 – Important, and 5 – Very important. For each element in the model, we will develop a set of statements.

Table 1: Factors of study choice

FACTORS OF STUDY CHOICE	N	Minimum	Maximum	Average	Standard deviation
Proximity of trainings to the place of study	112	1	5	3.89	1.118
Anticipated possibilities for adapting your studies to sports activities	110	2	5	4.24	0.856
Interest or pleasure in an individual study programme	112	2	5	4.55	0.682
Opportunity for training at the place of study	110	1	5	3.96	0.976
Educational institution scholarship	110	1	5	3.53	1.147
Good conditions for doing sports at faculty or college	110	1	5	3.56	1.208
Understanding of the educational organization for my sporting activities and provision of support in my education	110	2	5	4.35	0.771
Other:	2	5	5	5.00	0.000

Source: Author's own source

Table 2: Personality factors

PERSONALITY FACTORS	N	Minimum	Maximum	Average	Standard deviation
Intellectual abilities	110	1	5	4.65	0.696
Sports skills	108	1	5	2.80	1.134
Emotional intelligence	110	1	5	3.73	0.947
Interpersonal or social intelligence	108	1	5	3.67	0.907
Interest in sports	110	1	5	2.93	1.115
Interest in studying	112	2	5	4.71	0.621
Interest in a successful professional career	112	3	5	4.27	0.747
Previous academic performance	112	1	5	3.68	0.951
Motivation for sports	110	1	5	2.95	1.057
Motivation to study	112	2	5	4.71	0.560
Motivation for professional success	112	1	5	4.11	0.904
Organizational skills	112	3	5	4.39	0.702
Intrapersonal intelligence	112	2	5	4.05	0.769
Diligence	112	3	5	4.68	0.633
Persistence	112	1	5	4.63	0.749
Extraversion (taking interest in social events, being active and energetic)	112	1	5	3.02	0.816
Introversion (self-directed)	112	1	5	3.02	0.977
Emotional stability	112	1	5	4.00	0.849
Tendency to express one's own opinion	112	1	5	3.18	0.951
Acceptability (maintaining positive relationships with others; ability to understand others, overcoming the frustrations associated with life in a group)	112	1	5	3.70	0.966
Openness – cultural sophistication and openness to new experiences	112	2	5	3.70	0.804
Knowledge (related to study contents)	112	2	5	4.36	0.815
Use of prohibited accessories	112	1	5	1.95	1.236
Good luck	112	1	5	3.27	1.280
Examination skills	112	1	5	4.00	0.870
Exam fear, stress	112	1	5	3.30	1.214
Teamwork, successful collaboration with colleagues	112	1	5	4.05	0.938
Well-organized time	112	3	5	4.70	0.598
Organized learning, adherence to the right methods and proper preparation for exams	112	2	5	4.45	0.826
Good study habits	112	2	5	4.46	0.709
Good work habits	112	2	5	4.50	0.805
Other:	4	3	5	4.00	1.155

Source: Author’s own source

Table 3: Characteristics of the study programme

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE STUDY PROGRAMME	N	Minimum	Maximum	Average	Standard deviation
Difficulty of the study programme	112	2	5	4.45	0.733
Extent of the study load	112	3	5	4.27	0.723
Extent of compulsory study contents	112	2	5	4.36	0.746
Options for adjusting study obligations	112	2	5	4.57	0.707
Flexibility of higher education institution	112	3	5	4.59	0.651
Other:	4	3	5	4.00	1.155

Source: Author's own source

Table 4: Characteristics of the sport activity

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SPORT ACTIVITY	N	Minimum	Maximum	Average	Standard deviation
Scope of trainings	110	2	5	3.85	0.966
Number of competitions (competition days per year)	110	2	5	3.95	0.927
Number of days absent from the study obligations	110	2	5	4.29	0.871
Physical difficulty of the sport	110	2	5	3.51	1.011
Distance to the training facilities	110	1	5	3.73	1.057
Level of the competitions	110	1	5	3,33	1.050
Number of preparation days per year	110	2	5	3.76	0.877
Time spent on physiotherapy	110	1	5	2.84	1.162
Time spent regenerating (in addition to night rest)	110	1	5	3.53	1.098
Time spent on individual psychological preparation	110	2	5	3.36	0.926
Time spent working with a sports psychologist	110	1	5	2.96	1.013

Source: Author's own source

Below, we present a multivariate analysis of the correlations among the studied variables. The basis for the understanding of mutual interactions between the variables and the first key condition for performing the linear regression analysis is the determination of the intercorrelations between pairs of independent variables and between independent and dependent variables. Table 1 shows a summary of the regression analysis (values of correlation coefficients, values of deterministic or adjusted determinant coefficients), the F-tests (ANOVA) by which we tested the hypotheses. Based on the obtained results, the hypotheses were either confirmed or rejected.

The first hypothesis is as follows:

H1: An athlete's academic performance is influenced by personality factors (abilities, interests, prior school achievement, motivation).

Table 5: Linear regression - H1

Model summary

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.088 [a]	0.008	-0.001	0.53735

a. Independent variables: Personality factors

ANOVA [a]

Model		Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	0.247	1	0.247	0.854	0.358 [b]
	Residual	31.762	110	0.289		
	Total	32.009	111			

a. Dependent variable: Choice of study

b. Independent variables: Personality factors

Coefficients [a]

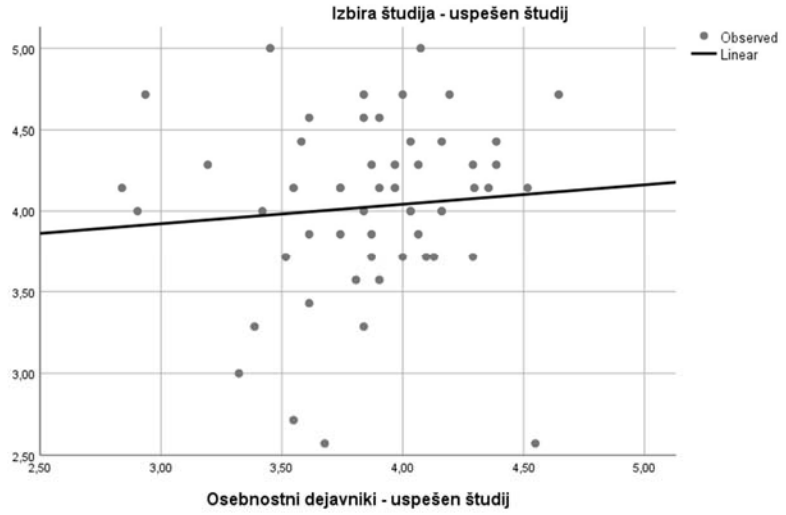
Model		Unstand. coefficients		Stand. coefficients		
		β	St. error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	3.563	0.503		7.078	0.000
	Personality factors	0.120	0.130	0.088	0.924	0.358

a. Dependent variable: Study choice

Source: Author's own source

In Table 5, the multiple correlation coefficient R is 0.088, indicating a slight correlation. The coefficient of multiple determination shows that 0.1% of the total variance was explained by the influence of the independent variable, representing 99.9% of the unexplained influence. On the basis of the obtained results and the values of the β regression coefficients, we **do not confirm the H1 hypothesis** and conclude that the dependent variable *Choice of study* is not influenced by *Personality factors*.

Picture 8: Linear relationship of the dependent variable *Choice of study* and the independent variable *Personality factors*



Source: Author's own source

The second hypothesis is as follows:

H2: An athlete's academic performance is influenced by the characteristics of the study programme (difficulty, extent of study load, possible adjustments).

Table 6: Linear regression - H2

Model summary

Model	**R**	**R ^{2}**	**Adjusted R ^{2}**	**Std. Error of the Estimate**
1	0.267 [a]	0.072	0.063	0.51979

a. Independent variables: Characteristics of the study program

ANOVA [a]

Model		**Sum of squares**	**df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**
1	Regression	2.289	1	2.289	8.471	0.004 [b]
	Residual	29.720	110	0.270		
	Total	32.009	111			

a. Dependent variable: Study choice

b. Independent variables: Characteristics of the study program - academic performance

Coefficients [a]

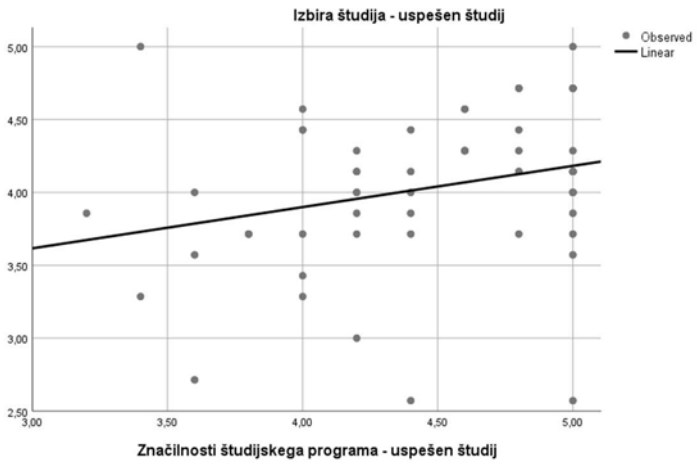
		Unstand. coefficients		**Stand. coefficients**		
Model		**β**	**St. error**	**Beta**	**t**	**Sig.**
1	(Constant)	2.769	0.435		6.369	0.000
	Characteristics of the study program	0.283	0.097	0.267	2.910	0.004

a. Dependent variable: Choice of study

Source: Author's own source

In Table 6, the multiple correlation coefficient R is 0.267, indicating a low correlation. The coefficient of multiple determination shows that 6.3% of the total variance was explained by the influence of the independent variable, representing 93.7% of the unexplained influence. Based on the results obtained and the values of the β regression coefficients, we can confirm the H2 hypothesis and conclude that the dependent variable *Choice of study* is influenced by the *Study programme characteristics*.

Picture 9: Linear relationship of the dependent variable *Choice of study* and the independent variable *Study programme characteristics*



Source: Author's own source

The third hypothesis is as follows:

H3: An athlete's academic performance is also influenced by the characteristics of the sport activity (the extent of training, competitions, absences, physical difficulty of the sport, distance to the training facilities, level of competition, motivation for sport, success in sport).

Table 7: Linear regression - H3

Model summary

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.097 [a]	0.009	0.000	0.52523

a. Independent variables: Characteristics of the sport activity

ANOVA [a]

Model	Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	0.282	1	0.282	1.021	0.314 [b]
Residual	29,793	108	0.276		
Total	30,075	109			

a. Dependent variable: Choice of study

b. Predictors (Constant): Characteristics of the sport activity

Coefficients [a]

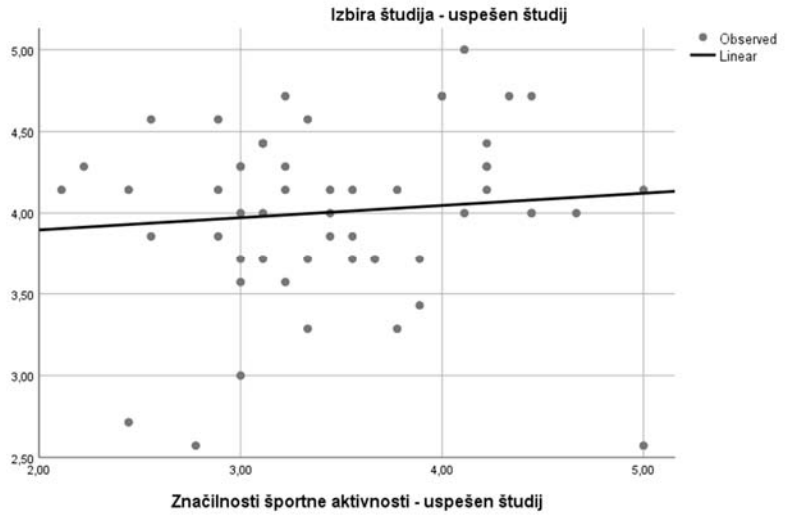
Model	Unstand. coefficients		Stand. coefficients	t	Sig.
	β	Std. error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	3.746	0.264		14.216	0.000
Characteristics of sports activity	0.075	0,074	0.097	1.011	0.314

a. Dependent variable: Choice of study

Source: Author's own source

In Table 7, the multiple correlation coefficient R is 0.097, indicating a slight correlation. The coefficient of multiple determination shows that 0% of the total variance was explained by the influence of the independent variable, representing 100% of the unexplained influence. Based on the results obtained and the value of the β regression coefficient, the **H3 hypothesis is not confirmed** and we conclude that the dependent variable *Choice of study* is not influenced by the *Characteristics of sports activity*.

Picture 10: Linear relationship of the dependent variable *Choice of study* and the independent variable *Characteristics of sports activity.*



Source: Author's own source

The research hypothesis is:

An athlete's academic performance is influenced by personality factors, study programme characteristics, and sports career characteristics.

Table 8: Linear regression

Model summary

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.364[a]	0.133	0.108	0.49611

a. Independent Variables: Characteristics of the sports activity, Characteristics of the study program, Personality factors

ANOVA [a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3.986	3	1.329	5.399	0.002[b]
	Residual	26.089	106	0.246		
	Total	30.075	109			

a. Dependent Variable: Choice of study – successful study

b. Inependent Variables: Characteristics of the sports activity, Characteristics of the study program, Personality factors

Coefficients [a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		β	**Std. Error**	**Beta**		
1	(Constant)	2.466	0.555		4.444	0.000
	Personality factors	-0.074	0.143	-0.056	-0.517	0.606
	Characteristics of the study program	0.399	0.103	0.374	3.869	0.000
	Characteristics of the sports activity	0.013	0.083	0.017	0.162	0.871

a. Dependent Variable: Choice of study

Source: Author's own source

In Table 8, the multiple correlation coefficient R is 0.364, indicating a low correlation. The coefficient of multiple determination shows that 10.8% of the total variance was explained by the influence of independent variables, representing 89.2% of the unexplained influence. Based on the results obtained and the values of the β regression coefficients, we can partially **confirm the H3 hypothesis** and conclude that the dependent variable *Choice of study* is influenced by *Characteristics of the study programme*. However, the dependent variable *Choice of Study* is not influenced by *Personality factors* and *Characteristics of sports career*.

Table 9 presents multivariate analyses of the correlations between the studied variables; it presents the Pearson correlations between the following variables: *Choice of study*, *Personality factors*, *Characteristics of the study programme* and *Characteristics of sports activities*.

Table 9: Correlation matrix

		Choice of study	Personality factors	Study program characteristics	Characteristics of the sports activity
Choice of study	Pearson correlation	1	0.088	**0.267** **	0.097
	Sig.		0.358	0.004	0.314
	N	112	112	112	110
Personality factors	Pearson correlation		1	**0.285** **	**0.516** **
	Sig.			0.002	0.000
	N		112	112	110
Characteristics of the study program	Pearson correlation			1	**0.290** **
	Sig.				0.002
	N			112	110
Characteristics of the sports activity	Pearson correlation				1
	Sig.				
	N				110

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Author's own source

The results of the Academic Performance correlation matrix (Table 9) show that it has a low impact (linear, positive and low correlation) on *Characteristics of the study programme*. The latter also has a positive influence on *Personality factors* (linear, positive and low correlation). *Characteristics of sports activity* also have a positive influence on *Personality factors* (linear, positive, and medium correlation). *Characteristics of the study* programme influence *Characteristics of sports activity* (linear, positive and low correlation).

The correlation matrix (Table 9) shows that the independent variable *Characteristics of the study programme* is correlated with the dependent variable *Choice of study*. The independent variables *Personality factors* and *Characteristics of the study programme*, *Personality factors* and *Characteristics of sports activity*, and *Characteristics of the study programme* and *Characteristics of sports activity* are correlated with each other.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the study was to determine what factors influence an athlete's academic performance. We carried out a survey which included 112 Slovenian athletes. The survey examined top athletes engaged in reconciling their sports and academic careers. Based on the research question ("*An athlete's academic performance is influenced by personality factors, study programme characteristics, and sports career characteristics.*"), we have concluded that an athlete's academic performance is influenced by the characteristics of the study programme (difficulty, extent of study load, possible adjustments). However, a student's academic performance is not influenced by personality factors (abilities, interests, previous academic performance, motivation). An athlete's academic performance is also not affected by the characteristics of the sport activity (the extent of training, competitions, absences, physical difficulty of the sport, distance to the training facilities, level of competition, motivation for sport, success in sport).

The correlation matrix shows that *Choice of study* has a low impact (linear, positive and low correlation) on *Characteristics of the study programme*. *Characteristics of the study programme* (linear, positive and low correlation) has a positive influence on *Personality factors in sports performance*. Similarly, *Characteristics of the sports activity* (linear, positive and medium correlation) also have a positive influence on *Personality factors in sports performance. Characteristics of the study programme* influence *Characteristics of the sports activity* (linear, positive and low correlation).

The research shows that the respondents were satisfied with the factors of study choice. They were most satisfied with the interest or pleasure related with a particular study programme. They were also satisfied with the understanding shown for taking part in sports by educational organizations as well as with the support provided by them in the education of athletes. Moreover, they expressed satisfaction with the anticipated possibilities for adapting the studies to athletes. Academic performance was also aided by personality factors such as interest in studying, motivation to study, perseverance, well-organized time, organized studying, teamwork, and successful collaboration with classmates. Respondents confirmed that the characteristics of the study programme which influenced the successful completion of their studies the most were as follows: flexibility of the higher education institution, possibilities of adjusting study obligations, difficulty of the study programme and the volume of all the study load.

The research question was partially confirmed. This means that we have partially confirmed the correlation between the athlete's academic performance, personality factors, study programme characteristics and the characteristics of the sports activity. H1 hypothesis has not been confirmed as there is no correlation between *Academic performance* and *Personality factors*. H1 hypothesis has been confirmed because there is a correlation between *Academic performance* and *Study programme characteristics*. H3 hypotheses has not been confirmed, since there is no correlation between *Academic performance* and *Sports activity characteristics*.

I suggest that higher education institutions develop and adapt their curricula to the needs of top athletes, since adaptation of studies to athletes is essential. Higher education institutions can attain this by respecting the rights to adapt studies to student athletes. Professors at higher education institutions should respect the rights of student athletes for the adjustment of studies to them. They should specify and publicize the rules for the adjustment of studies to student athletes. Also, they should offer a number of different options for the adjustment of studies to student athletes. They should offer tuition provided by a higher education institution professor, assistant or lecturer. Moreover, they should provide information on the course of study from senior year representatives. They should also offer the option of occasional collaboration with students from previous generations. Furthermore, they should adjust the quantity of study load and the extent of compulsory attendance at lectures and classes. They should adjust the difficulty of the study programme for student athletes. Top athletes should be able to enrol in the next year programme with a lower credit score than stipulated for the study programme. Study duration should be prolonged (student athletes may finish 1 year in 2 years). In general, studies should be adapted to the needs of student athletes. Support should be offered to students (e-lectures, e-materials). Students should be offered individual tuition and their schedules adjusted. Finally, additional study assistance and the option of watching videos of the lectures should be organized.

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