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Role of Psychological Support in Improving the Performance of Amputee Football Players in the Palestinian Team

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Abstract:

The study aimed to identify the role of psychological support in improving the performance level of amputee football players in the Palestinian national team. The study used a descriptive-analytical approach and collected data via a questionnaire from 30 amputee football players in the Palestinian national team. The study concluded that the psychological support axis scored 84.86%, while the performance improvement axis scored 82.35%. This highlights the role of psychological support in enhancing the performance of amputee football players in the Palestinian team.

The study recommends increasing the level of psychological support follow-up by team management, dedicating sufficient time to listen to players, providing advice and assistance to ease their minds, reassuring their hearts, and motivating them towards training. Furthermore, it encourages coaches to participate in training courses and workshops to improve their coaching skills and experience.

Keywords: Psychological support, performance, amputee football, Palestine.

1. Introduction:

Amputee football is a sport designed for individuals with upper or lower limb amputations. It has gained global popularity, especially in regions with high rates of violence and road accidents.

Unlike traditional football, amputee football requires all defensive, midfield, and attacking players to have lower limb amputations and use crutches for mobility on the field. Goalkeepers must have an upper limb amputation (Dagli, et al., 2024).

Amputee football enhances coordination between prosthetics and other body parts, requiring advanced motor skills, such as ball control, running, and balance, which improves neuromuscular coordination (Sanal, et al., 2023).

In March 2018, the Palestinian Amputee Football Association established the first team with 15 players from Deir Al-Balah. Over time, the sport spread across Palestinian governorates, reaching 85 players by 2019. A partnership agreement with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was signed to support and sponsor the sport.

In 2019, Simon Baker, head of the Irish Amputee Football Association, conducted two training sessions for coaches and referees. Later that year, the first Palestinian league tournament was held, supported by the ICRC. In May 2019, a Palestinian team participated in friendly matches in France. In 2020, Palestine became the first Arab country and the second Asian country to gain international membership recognition. In 2021, Palestine participated in the West Asian Championship, qualifying for the 2022 World Cup in Turkey.

2. Research Problem:

A study by Abdelhadi (2022) highlighted the impact of functional strength training on essential skills among Palestinian amputee football players. The study emphasized the importance of addressing players' psychological needs as a critical factor in achieving success in competitions.

As the head coach of the Palestinian amputee football team and a trainer for the Red Crescent amputee football team since 2018, the researcher observed that the primary reasons for the decline in player performance include:

- Psychological factors
- Lack of motivation
- Absence of preparatory matches (Arab or international)
- Mental fatigue caused by travel restrictions at border crossings

- Insufficient psychological support

Additionally, through the performance results of players in different periods, it became clear that there were clear gaps in this performance, which requires focusing on the causes of shortcomings and weaknesses and addressing them properly.

Amputee football does not receive the same attention or support as mainstream football. These challenges necessitate scientific research to develop effective psychological support strategies for improving players' performance.

Research Question: Does psychological support play a role in improving the performance of amputee football players in the Palestinian national team?

3. Research Questions:

1. What is the level of psychological support among amputee football players?
2. What is the level of performance improvement among amputee football players?
3. Does psychological support contribute to improving the performance of amputee football players?

4. Research Objectives:

1. Identify the level of psychological support among amputee football players.
2. Determine the level of performance improvement among amputee football players.
3. Analyze the role of psychological support in enhancing player performance.

5. Research Significance:

- **Scientific Importance:** Contributes to the academic literature on amputee football, providing a reference for future research.
- **Practical Importance:** Highlights the importance of psychological support and motivation in improving the performance of amputee football players.

6. Research Scope:

- **Topic Scope:** The role of psychological support in improving amputee football player performance.
- **Human Scope:** Palestinian national amputee football players.

- **Time Scope:** 2022–2023.
- **Geographical Scope:** Southern Palestinian governorates.

Section 1: Theoretical Framework and Previous Studies:

A. Psychological Support

1. Concept of Psychological Support:

Psychological support refers to a process aimed at enhancing individuals' mental and emotional health, especially during crises or stressful situations. It seeks to improve their ability to adapt to life pressures and reduce psychological symptoms (Ulyaeva, et.al, 2020).

In the same context, psychological support encompasses a set of interventions and services designed to promote individuals' mental health, particularly in challenging times (Kelly, et.al, 2018).

In light of this, the researcher views psychological support as a systematic process involving precise interventions aimed at enhancing individuals' mental health, improving their adaptability to life requirements, and coping with various circumstances they face, contributing to maintaining their performance level.

2. Objectives of Psychological Support:

The primary objectives of psychological support aim to enhance individuals' mental health and overall well-being. The researcher summarizes these objectives as follows (Othman & Al-Mutawalli, 2020; Nicholls, 2021):

- **Enhancing Psychological Adaptation:** Helping individuals develop skills to cope with life pressures and challenges.
- **Reducing Psychological Symptoms:** Decreasing anxiety, depression, and other psychological symptoms individuals may suffer from.
- **Improving Psychological Well-being:** Promoting happiness, life satisfaction, and a sense of empowerment in facing challenges.
- **Strengthening Social Relationships:** Enhancing communication skills and fostering positive relationships with others.
- **Providing Information and Practical Support:** Offering resources and knowledge to help individuals understand and manage their emotions effectively.

The researcher concludes that psychological support objectives are diverse and tailored to individual needs. Programs focus on improving players' personal, emotional, and health quality of life, fostering personal growth, and enhancing performance in various sports fields.

3. Characteristics of Psychological Support:

Psychological support has several features that contribute to its effectiveness and positive impact on individuals. These include (Bou Kabous, 2017; Hamid, 2022):

- **Customization and Appropriateness:** Psychological support should be tailored to individuals' specific needs and circumstances for maximum effectiveness.
- **Empathy and Understanding:** Service providers must display empathy and understanding, enhancing individuals' sense of safety and acceptance.
- **Guidance and Practical Support:** Psychological support includes guiding individuals toward practical strategies and interventions to address their psychological issues.
- **Continuity and Sustainability:** Psychological support should be ongoing rather than a temporary intervention to ensure long-term positive effects.
- **Activating Personal Resources:** Psychological support enhances individuals' personal resources, such as skills and past experiences, to help them face challenges.

B. Sports Performance

1. Concept of Sports Performance:

Performance improvement refers to processes and activities aimed at enhancing results across different fields. In sports, performance improvement focuses on athletes' development through precise and intensive training, improving physical abilities, maintaining proper nutrition, and providing psychological support (Aykut, et.al, 2024).

Sports performance improvement involves enhancing physical fitness, strength, speed, flexibility, and endurance through structured training programs (Corrado, et.al, 2024).

The researcher views sports performance improvement as a comprehensive process requiring balance across physical, technical, psychological, and health aspects to achieve optimal integrated performance and meet team objectives.

2. Objectives of Sports Performance Improvement:

The goals of improving players' performance focus on enhancing physical and mental skills, refining field tactics, and achieving peak performance during competitions. Key objectives include (Tossici, et.al, 2024; Rupprecht, et.al, 2024):

- **Physical Strength and Flexibility:** Building muscular strength and flexibility reduces injury risks and enhances explosive movements.
- **Performance Analysis:** Digital analysis tools help track player movements, identify strengths and weaknesses, and customize training strategies.
- **Training Load Management and Recovery:** Proper scheduling prevents physical and mental burnout and prepares players for high-stakes matches.
- **Technical and Tactical Skills Development:** Modern analysis tools improve precision in passes, attack, and defense strategies, refining players' quick decision-making abilities.

The researcher emphasizes that these goals rely on modern sports science strategies and technology integration for precise data analysis and effective feedback, enabling players to perform consistently at their best.

3. Characteristics of Sports Performance Improvement:

Key characteristics ensure the holistic development of players' physical and mental capabilities. These include (Al-Ja'al, 2024; Bou Qandil, 2024):

- **Personalization:** Training programs should be tailored to individual players based on their strengths and weaknesses.
- **Continuity and Gradual Progression:** Continuous and structured training over time ensures steady skill improvement without risking injury.
- **Diverse Training Programs:** Integrating technical, tactical, and physical training creates well-rounded athletes.
- **Sports Technology Integration:** Advanced tools provide accurate performance insights, enabling coaches to make data-driven decisions.

The researcher concludes that these characteristics represent the foundational framework for improving players' skills across physical, mental, and tactical dimensions, supported by modern sports technologies.

C. Previous Studies:

1. Abdelhadi (2022):

- Objective: Explore the impact of functional strength training on essential skills among Palestinian amputee football players.
- Methodology: Experimental approach with 24 players divided into control and experimental groups.
- Results: Improvement rates: ball bouncing (42.32%), ball striking (35.16%), running with the ball (31.84%), heading (31.19%), and dribbling/shooting (11.74%).
- Recommendation: Extend training programs to other para-athletes and integrate amputee football under the official umbrella of the Palestinian Paralympic Committee.

2. Al-Barqoni (2022):

- Objective: Build standard fitness levels for Palestinian amputee football players.
- Methodology: Descriptive survey approach with fitness tests conducted on 55 players.
- Results: Significant variance in fitness levels, with no correlation to the type of amputation.

3. Yurdakul & Kizilci (2021):

- Objective: Compare fitness and performance standards between amputee footballers and professional players.
- Methodology: Descriptive analytical approach with 24 players.
- Results: Clear differences in relative strength, favoring professional players, while no significant differences were observed in training frequency.

4. Gunaydin (2021):

- Objective: Examine the relationship between shoulder endurance and core endurance among elite amputee football players.
- Methodology: Descriptive analytical approach using modified bridge and strength assessments.
- Results: Strong positive correlation between shoulder endurance and core endurance.

5. Bou Kabous (2017):

- Objective: Investigate the leadership behavior of coaches and its relationship with players' psychological and social cohesion in football teams.
- Results: Leadership behavior and social-psychological compatibility significantly contribute to team cohesion.

Section 2: Field Study

1. Study Methodology:

To achieve the study's objectives, the researcher employed the descriptive-analytical approach, aiming to describe the phenomenon related to mental alertness, psychological support, and improving player performance levels. This approach involves analysing data, examining the relationships between components, exploring opinions about these aspects, understanding the processes involved, and assessing the effects they produce.

2. Study Population:

The study population consisted of Palestinian national amputee football team players, totalling 32 players. The researcher used a comprehensive survey method due to the relatively small size of the study population. A total of 32 questionnaires were distributed, and 30 valid responses were retrieved for statistical analysis, yielding a response rate of 93.75%.

3. Study Tool:

To address the analytical aspects of the study topic, the researcher collected primary data using a questionnaire specifically designed for this purpose, by using previous studies and published research related to the subject of the study. The data were then analyzed using the SPSS software.

Table (1): Internal Consistency Results of the Study Axes

Axis of Psychological Support (Item)	Pearson Correlation Coefficient (Support)	Axis of Sports Performance (Item)	Pearson Correlation Coefficient (Performance)
1	0.802	1	0.716
2	0.730	2	0.768
3	0.774	3	0.826
4	0.854	4	0.736
5	0.873	5	0.720
6	0.803	6	0.712
7	0.859	7	0.858
8	0.877	8	0.770
9	0.810	9	0.767
10	0.871	10	0.842
11	0.829	11	0.739
12	0.885	12	0.795
13	0.814	13	0.831
14	0.837	14	0.723
15	0.825	15	0.780
16	0.887	16	0.751
17	0.745	17	0.726
18	0.752	18	0.763
19	0.758	19	0.753
20	0.771	20	0.735
21	0.840	21	0.731

Table 1 illustrates the correlation coefficient between each item in the Psychological Support Axis and the overall score of the axis, as well as each item in the Sports Performance Axis and the overall score of the axis. It demonstrates that the displayed correlation coefficients are statistically significant at a significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$). Therefore, the study's axes are considered valid for measuring their intended objectives.

Additionally, the study ensured the reliability of the questionnaire through the Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient and split-half reliability, with the results presented in the corresponding table.

Table (2): Questionnaire Reliability Measurement

Dimension	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Split-Half Reliability
Psychological Support	21	0.886	0.84
Performance Improvement	21	0.857	0.812

The results indicate that the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the Psychological Support Axis is (0.886), with a split-half reliability of (0.840). This suggests a high and statistically significant level of reliability.

Additionally, the table shows that the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the Performance Improvement Axis is (0.857), with a split-half reliability of (0.812). This also reflects a high and statistically significant level of reliability.

Thus, the final version of the questionnaire is ready for distribution. The researcher has ensured the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, giving full confidence in its suitability for analyzing results and testing the study hypotheses.

4. Normality Test:

The researcher used the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S Test) to determine whether the data follow a normal distribution or not.

Table (3): Normality Test (K-S Test)

No.	Axis	Number of Items	Z Value	Sig. (p-value)
2	Psychological Support	21	0.533	0.949
3	Performance Improvement	21	0.871	0.367

Here's the **Table: Psychological Support Items Analysis**, displaying the mean, standard deviation, and rank for each item.

5. Answering the first question: “What is the reality of psychological support for amputee football players?”

Table (4): Analysis of Psychological Support Items

No.	Psychological Support Items	Mean	Relative Weight (%)	Standard Deviation	Approval Level	Rank
1	I feel comfortable when my family helps me overcome challenges.	4.36	87.2	1.066	Very High	4
2	I find care from my family when I share my problems.	4.17	83.4	1.02	High	17
3	My family's feelings for me ease my distress and pain.	4.16	83.2	1.177	High	18
4	I feel shy when I ask my family for what I need.	4.33	86.6	0.959	Very High	6
5	I feel emotional warmth when I'm with my family.	4.34	86.8	1.028	Very High	5
6	My family provides an environment where I feel happy and satisfied.	4.3	86	1.055	Very High	8
7	My family makes me feel optimistic about my future.	4.19	83.8	1.064	High	16
8	My family members help me when I need assistance.	4.28	85.6	1.055	Very High	10
9	I turn to my family members when making an important decision.	4.27	85.4	1.081	Very High	11
10	My family encourages me to achieve.	4.13	82.6	1.074	High	19
11	My friends make me feel valued even if my actions are not correct.	4.29	85.8	1.236	Very High	9
12	My friends communicate with me regularly.	4.4	88	1.037	Very High	1
13	My friends encourage me to achieve.	4.22	84.4	1.135	Very High	14
14	The way my friends treat me makes me feel important.	4.38	87.6	1.066	Very High	2
15	I am satisfied with the support and care I receive from society.	4.23	84.6	1.135	Very High	13
16	The club provides me with work that helps me with life's burdens.	4.26	85.2	1.143	Very High	12
17	Sports authorities regularly communicate with me to understand my needs.	3.83	76.6	1.341	High	21
18	Sports institutions advocate for me and my cause.	4	80	1.05	High	20
19	The services provided by sports institutions meet my needs.	4.37	87.4	0.999	Very High	3
20	I feel psychological security due to the care provided by disability institutions.	4.2	84	1.095	High	15
21	Disability institutions work to develop my skills and talents.	4.32	86.4	1.155	Very High	7

From the previous table, it is evident to the researcher that the Psychological Support Axis achieved an average mean score of (4.24) and a relative weight of (84.86%).

The researcher observes that Item No. (12), which states "My friends communicate with me regularly", achieved the highest rank with a percentage of (88.00%). On the other

hand, Item No. (17), which states "Sports authorities regularly communicate with me to understand my needs", received the lowest rank with a percentage of (76.60%).

The researcher notes that psychological support plays a significant role in enhancing players' confidence and their role in society. Therefore, the psychological aspect is crucial and highly significant for amputee football players, greatly contributing to enhancing their confidence in themselves and their athletic outcomes. Additionally, the psychological aspect enhances the players' abilities and skills in amputee football, creating a positive atmosphere and psychological comfort, which fosters the players' creativity during training sessions and matches in any sporting activity.

Furthermore, psychological support plays a fundamental role in improving the performance of amputee football players, helping them overcome psychological challenges and build confidence in their abilities. When psychological support is provided regularly, players feel that they are not alone on this journey, increasing their motivation and determination to succeed. Observations indicate that players who receive consistent psychological support demonstrate higher performance levels, as they are better equipped to handle psychological challenges both on and off the field.

Additionally, family participation plays a significant role in psychological support. Family involvement and consistent communication are fundamental elements in providing psychological support to amputee football players, serving as the primary source of encouragement and motivation for players to integrate into and engage with their surrounding communities.

6. Answer to the Second Question: "What is the level of performance improvement among amputee football players?"

Table (5): Analysis of Performance Improvement Items

No.	Performance Improvement Items	Mean	Relative Weight (%)	Standard Deviation	Approval Level	Rank
1	I have complete knowledge of the game's rules and characteristics.	4.43	88.6	1.135	Very High	3
2	I possess dribbling skills during play.	4.17	83.4	1.289	High	9
3	I have the ability to shoot at the goal at the right time and place.	4.27	85.4	1.337	Very High	7
4	I try to improve my response to tactical plans.	4	80	0.983	High	15
5	I strive to increase flexibility in sports training.	4.33	86.6	1.093	Very High	5

6	I develop my ball control skills.	4.03	80.6	1.426	High	14
7	I work on increasing ball possession and retention.	4.37	87.4	1.189	Very High	4
8	I elevate my level of ambition during sports training.	4.53	90.6	1.008	Very High	2
9	I improve the accuracy of direct and correct passing.	4.32	86.4	1.093	Very High	6
10	I make the right decision to handle pressure on the opponent.	4.57	91.4	1.006	Very High	1
11	I respond correctly to the coach's instructions.	4.04	80.8	1.189	High	13
12	I try to enhance my sportsmanship at all stages of competitions.	4.12	82.4	1.074	High	11
13	I have the traits of teamwork to achieve common goals.	4.13	82.6	0.9	High	10
14	I develop a spirit of cooperation with team members.	4.1	82	1.029	High	12
15	I reinforce my strengths during sports training.	3.7	74	1.208	High	21
16	I address my weaknesses during sports training.	3.83	76.6	0.874	High	18
17	I effectively respond to changes in game plans during matches.	3.97	79.4	1.098	High	16
18	I maintain consistent performance from the start to the end of a match.	4.18	83.6	0.95	High	8
19	I avoid injuries during sports training.	3.8	76	1.186	High	19
20	I avoid violations during matches.	3.71	74.2	1.264	High	20
21	I use time effectively to achieve victory in sports competitions.	3.87	77.4	1.137	High	17

From the previous table, the researcher found that the performance improvement axis achieved an arithmetic mean of (4.12) with a relative weight of (82.35%). The researcher noted that item number (10), which states (*I make the right decision to handle pressure against the opponent*), received the highest ranking with (91.40%), while item number (15), which states (*I reinforce my strengths during sports training*), received the lowest ranking with (74.00%).

The researcher observed that performance improvement is also linked to the availability of requirements necessary for this improvement. Among the most important requirements are:

- Providing special and safe playgrounds for players.
- Supplying specialized sports equipment to enhance players' capabilities and skills.
- Selecting a technical staff specialized in dealing with players at the desired level.

Additionally, financial support for amputee football players significantly impacts their athletic performance. Financial incentives and essential supplies are critical motivators, enabling players to achieve their full potential and exert maximum effort in sports fields and competitions, both locally and internationally.

International institutions, especially the Red Cross, offer substantial logistical support for the game. On the other hand, the Ministry does not provide sufficient attention, while the Paralympic Committee contributes within its limited financial capabilities. In contrast, the academic and sports communities' involvement remains limited.

The importance of organizing external training camps for the national team is highlighted to increase experience exchange, psychological resilience, and player readiness. Furthermore, there is a need to expand the player base to foster healthy competition and provide coaches with better selection opportunities. Media coverage should also be directed towards promoting amputee football and representing it both as a sport and as an advocacy platform for individuals with special needs.

In the same context, there is a pressing need for participation in regional and international competitions by establishing global partnerships with similar federations. These partnerships would help gain technical support, exchange expertise, and organize awareness-raising events about the significance of amputee football in representing Palestine internationally.

The level of attention given to amputee football players in Palestine remains limited, considering the country's challenging circumstances, resource scarcity, and lack of support from official and private sectors. However, recent improvements have been observed thanks to the efforts of sports organizations and associations, such as the Palestine Amputee Football Association, which work to promote and expand the sport.

There is an urgent need to enhance community awareness about the importance of supporting this group of players, who proudly represent Palestine despite their disabilities and challenges, Therefore, it is crucial to:

- Train experienced coaches capable of effectively managing amputee players.
- Train psychologists who can boost players' confidence and help them cope with both positive and negative outcomes on the field.

This should be done in the context of establishing a comprehensive sports system dedicated to developing the sport with a clear objective: improving players' skills without any personal or individual interests interfering.

7. Answering the third question: Is there a role for psychological support in improving the performance of amputee football players?

To answer this question, the researcher used the Pearson correlation coefficient test to measure the relationship between these variables. The following table illustrates the result:

Table (6): Nature of the Relationship Between Psychological Support and Sports Performance

Variable	Pearson Correlation Coefficient	Sig. (p-value)
Psychological Support	0.567	0

From the previous table, it is clear to the researcher that there is a statistically significant role of psychological support in improving performance, with a correlation coefficient of (0.567) at a significance level of (0.00).

Undoubtedly, the relationship between a player's psychological state and performance is positive and directly proportional. The more psychological comfort a player experiences, the better and more developed their performance becomes, and vice versa. When players' comfort needs are met, it enhances their psychological well-being, which in turn positively reflects on their performance.

Psychological support also instils self-confidence in players, increasing their productivity, effectiveness, and motivation to achieve their goals.

Furthermore, psychological support significantly enhances players' performance through words of praise, compliments, and moral encouragement. Since this category of players often perceives themselves as less capable than other athletes, praise has a profound impact on their psychological state, which is then reflected in their performance.

In conclusion, psychological support is one of the most crucial factors in enhancing player performance, as it serves as the primary foundation for achieving optimal results. When a player feels good psychologically, their performance becomes enjoyable and effective. Conversely, poor psychological well-being prevents players from fulfilling their tasks effectively. Therefore, psychological factors rank among the top influences on player performance.

Section 3: Results and Recommendations

1. Results

- The Psychological Support Axis achieved a relative weight of (84.86%), indicating a very high level of psychological support within the national amputee football team.
- The Performance Improvement Axis achieved a relative weight of (82.35%), indicating a high level of performance improvement within the national amputee football team.
- There is a statistically significant role of psychological support in improving the performance of amputee football players in the national team.

2. Recommendations

- **Enhancing Psychological Support:** Increase the level of psychological follow-up by team officials by allocating sufficient time to listen to players, provide advice, and offer the necessary support to ease their minds, instill reassurance, and motivate them towards training.
- **Coach Training and Motivation:** Encourage and motivate amputee football coaches to participate in training courses and workshops that help improve their coaching skills and increase their expertise.
- **Balanced Focus on Psychological and Material Factors:** Recognize the importance of psychological factors alongside material support in the success and development of the Palestinian amputee football team. Officials should give these factors significant attention, ensuring equality with the support provided to non-disabled players.

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