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Extent of Team Cohesion Affecting the Student Athlete Well-Being in a Technology University in Hubei, China

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Abstract: Team cohesion is a fundamental component of sports success, playing a crucial role in shaping team dynamics, enhancing individual performance, and supporting the overall well-being of athletes. This study explores the extent of team cohesion and its impact on the well-being of student-athletes at Hubei University of Automotive Technology, China. The research investigates how student-athletes perceive team cohesion in terms of task cohesion, social cohesion, and leadership, and evaluates their physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Using a descriptive-correlational design, data were collected from 150 student-athletes through a structured questionnaire. The results indicated high levels of team cohesion, with significant differences in task cohesion based on athletic experience, though no gender differences were observed. Athletes reported strong well-being, particularly in emotional and physical dimensions. The study suggests early team-building activities, leadership development programs, and enhanced mental health support as effective strategies to strengthen team cohesion and well-being. This research highlights the importance of cohesive team dynamics in fostering both athletic performance and holistic well-being among student-athletes.

Keywords: Team cohesion, student-athlete well-being, task cohesion, social cohesion, leadership

Introduction: 1.1 Background of the Study

Team cohesion has long been recognized as a fundamental element in sports success, shaping team dynamics, enhancing individual performance, and contributing to the overall well-being of athletes across the globe. Whether in amateur or professional settings, cohesive teams typically exhibit higher levels of collaboration, effective communication, and shared objectives, which are crucial for achieving collective goals. The universal relevance of team cohesion extends beyond specific sports disciplines and national borders, establishing it as a cornerstone of success in athletic teams worldwide [1]. On a global scale, universities have increasingly come to acknowledge the unique challenges faced by student-athletes, particularly the need to balance their academic responsibilities with the physical and mental demands of their athletic endeavors. In response, institutions like the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) in the United States have initiated numerous programs to promote the holistic development of student-athletes, emphasizing their academic, physical, and mental well-being [2]. Similarly, in Europe, the integration of sports psychology into university athletic programs is becoming more common as a means of strengthening team cohesion and supporting individual well-being [3].

At Hubei University of Automotive Technology, China, student-athletes encounter distinctive challenges as they strive to balance the rigor of a technology-focused academic curriculum with their athletic commitments. Situated in a rapidly evolving educational environment, this institution provides a compelling context for exploring how team cohesion influences the well-being of student-athletes. The university's dual emphasis on engineering excellence and competitive sports creates a unique setting to examine the dynamics of team cohesion [4].

Team cohesion is typically defined as the degree to which team members collaborate effectively toward common goals, a factor that has been shown to influence not only athletic performance but also the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of athletes [5]. In China, where the role of competitive sports in universities is gaining increasing prominence, understanding the impact of team cohesion on student-athletes is critical. As universities globally strive to optimize their athletic programs, this study contributes valuable insights into the role of cohesion in supporting the comprehensive well-being of student-athletes [6].

1.2 Significance of the Study

This study has important implications for stakeholders in sports management, coaching, and education, both locally and globally. By examining the role of team cohesion in shaping the well-being of student-athletes, the research contributes to the development of more supportive and effective athletic programs. The insights gained can help

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student-athletes worldwide recognize how team dynamics foster a supportive environment that enhances their mental, emotional, and physical health. Understanding the importance of team cohesion can encourage athletes to prioritize collaboration, communication, and mutual support, which are essential for both individual well-being and team success.

For coaches, the study provides valuable insights into how fostering team cohesion through leadership, effective communication, and conflict resolution can enhance both team performance and the well-being of individual athletes. By emphasizing the importance of these factors, coaches can develop strategies that build stronger, more cohesive teams, ultimately leading to better results on and off the field. Additionally, the study informs university administrators and athletic departments in China and internationally about the need for policies and programs that not only promote athletic excellence but also ensure the holistic development of student-athletes. This holistic approach supports athletes in balancing their academic, athletic, and personal lives, fostering a healthier and more sustainable athletic culture.

The research offers mental health professionals and sports psychologists a deeper understanding of how team cohesion can be integrated into wellness strategies. This integration can play a crucial role in supporting the mental health of athletes by creating a sense of belonging and reducing stress. Finally, the study serves as a foundation for future researchers exploring the relationship between team cohesion and various aspects of student-athlete well-being in diverse cultural and institutional settings. By providing a clearer understanding of this dynamic, the study opens pathways for further research that could enhance the support systems for student-athletes around the world.

1.3 Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

- (1) How do student-athletes assess their team cohesion in terms of task cohesion, social cohesion, and leadership?
- (2) How do student-athletes assess their well-being in terms of physical health, mental health, and emotional well-being?
- (3) Is there a significant difference in student-athletes' assessment of team cohesion based on their demographic profile?
- (4) What recommendations can be developed to enhance team cohesion and well-being among student-athletes?

1.4 Scope and Delimitations

This study investigates the relationship between team cohesion and student-athlete well-being at Hubei University of Automotive Technology in Hubei, China. It specifically focuses on student-athletes from various sports disciplines and examines their perceptions of team cohesion and its influence on their physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Data collection will be conducted using structured questionnaires, with statistical analysis applied to explore potential differences in responses based on demographic factors. The scope of the study is limited to the student-athletes at this particular university, which may restrict the generalizability of the results to other institutions or regions. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce bias in evaluating team cohesion and well-being, and the study does not account for external factors such as academic pressures, family circumstances, or personal challenges that could affect well-being. Nevertheless, the study seeks to contribute valuable insights into the impact of team cohesion within the unique cultural and educational context of Chinese universities, enriching the broader discussion on the role of team dynamics in athletic performance and well-being.

II. Literature Review

2.1 The Concept of Team Cohesion

Team cohesion represents the degree to which members of a group unite in pursuit of common goals, maintaining a synergy that enhances both performance and relationships. This concept is divided into two primary forms: task cohesion and social cohesion. Task cohesion centers around athletes' commitment to shared objectives and their ability to work together effectively, while social cohesion involves the quality of interpersonal relationships and the sense of belonging within the team. Research consistently supports the notion that high levels of team cohesion contribute to improved performance, heightened motivation, and increased satisfaction among athletes [7]. In essence, task cohesion allows athletes to align their collective efforts toward achieving group goals, while social cohesion promotes trust, communication, and mutual support, crucial for long-term team success [8].

2.2 Student-Athlete Well-being

The well-being of student-athletes is a complex and multifaceted construct encompassing physical, mental, emotional, and social dimensions. From a physical perspective, well-being involves maintaining optimal health and minimizing injuries, essential for consistent athletic performance. Mentally, it includes managing the pressures of both academic and athletic responsibilities, requiring effective stress and anxiety management strategies [9]. Emotionally, well-being encompasses the ability to cope with the successes and setbacks inherent in competitive sports, while socially, it involves a sense of belonging within the team and broader academic community. Balancing

these aspects is critical for student-athletes, who often face the dual demands of excelling both academically and athletically [10].

2.3 The Role of Coaches in Team Cohesion and Well-being

Coaches play an instrumental role in fostering team cohesion and promoting the well-being of their athletes. Effective leadership, characterized by clear communication, encouragement, and positive reinforcement, is essential for creating a cohesive team environment [11]. Coaches who provide structure and support help athletes feel valued and understood, which enhances both task and social cohesion. Furthermore, coaches serve as role models and mentors, guiding athletes in managing not only their physical health but also their emotional resilience and social interactions. This holistic approach extends beyond sports, positively influencing athletes' overall development and well-being [12].

2.4 Factors Affecting Team Cohesion

Numerous factors contribute to the development of team cohesion, with leadership style being one of the most influential. Authoritarian leadership may hinder cohesion, whereas democratic leadership can foster a more cohesive team environment. Effective communication and trust among team members are also critical in promoting cohesion. Teams that share a clear vision and values tend to perform better and maintain higher levels of cohesion [13]. On the other hand, unresolved conflicts, unclear role definitions, and individualistic attitudes can disrupt team dynamics, undermining both cohesion and performance. Addressing these factors is essential for maintaining a supportive and united team environment [14].

2.5 Previous Studies on Team Cohesion and Athlete Well-being

Several studies have established a robust positive correlation between team cohesion and various dimensions of athlete well-being. Teams with high levels of cohesion are generally found to experience lower levels of anxiety, stress, and burnout, while demonstrating higher motivation, satisfaction, and emotional stability [15]. These findings underscore the critical role that cohesion plays in enhancing overall well-being. Moreover, cohesive teams provide a support network that helps athletes navigate external pressures such as academic demands or personal challenges, further promoting mental and emotional well-being [16]. The ability of team cohesion to mitigate stressors emphasizes the importance of fostering strong team bonds in both professional and amateur sports settings.

2.6 Theoretical Framework (Expectancy-Value Theory)

This study utilizes expectancy-value theory as its guiding theoretical framework. According to this theory, an individual's motivation to engage in an activity is shaped by their expectations of success and the value they place on the outcome. In the context of team cohesion and student-athlete well-being, the theory suggests that athletes who perceive high levels of team cohesion are more motivated to contribute to their team's success and maintain their personal well-being [17]. Expectancy-value theory explains how the interplay between cohesion and well-being can influence athletes' commitment, motivation, and performance, offering a comprehensive lens through which to explore these relationships in sports teams.

2.7 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study posits that team cohesion, encompassing both task and social dimensions, directly influences the well-being of student-athletes. The framework hypothesizes that cohesive teams foster physical health, mental resilience, emotional balance, and social integration among their members. By applying quantitative analysis, the study aims to explore how strong cohesion can enhance both well-being and performance. The insights gained will contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamic relationship between team cohesion and well-being in the specific context of student-athletes at Hubei University of Automotive Technology [18].

III. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive-correlational research design to examine the extent of team cohesion and its impact on the well-being of student-athletes at Hubei University of Automotive Technology. The descriptive approach will be used to gather detailed information about team cohesion and well-being, providing a snapshot of the current state within the university's sports teams. Meanwhile, the correlational aspect will explore the relationship between these two variables, determining if and how they interact. Self-reported questionnaires will serve as the primary data collection method, allowing student-athletes to provide insight into their perceptions of team cohesion and their own well-being. This design is well-suited to assess the patterns between these variables, offering a comprehensive view of how team dynamics influence student-athlete well-being.

3.2 Research Locale

The study will be conducted at Hubei University of Automotive Technology, located in Shiyan City, Hubei Province, China. Known for its emphasis on engineering and technology, the university also supports a broad array of sports programs, making it an ideal setting for research on student-athletes. The university's environment, where academic

and athletic excellence coexist, offers a unique opportunity to explore the balance between team cohesion and well-being among student-athletes who must manage the dual demands of academics and competitive sports. The institution's infrastructure and support for both domains provide a rich context for this study.

3.3 Participants of the Study

The participants in this study will be student-athletes from various sports teams at Hubei University of Automotive Technology. Using purposive sampling, the study will focus on athletes who actively participate in team-based sports such as basketball, soccer, and volleyball. Approximately 150 student-athletes will be recruited to ensure a broad and representative sample from different teams and demographic backgrounds. The inclusion criteria require participants to have been part of a sports team for at least one academic year and to have competed in at least one major sports competition during that time. This ensures that all participants have substantial experience with team dynamics and the pressures of competitive sports.

3.4 Research Instrument

Data will be gathered through a structured, researcher-made questionnaire designed to measure the two key variables of team cohesion and student-athlete well-being. The questionnaire will be divided into three sections: the first section will collect demographic information such as age, gender, year level, and years of athletic experience. The second section will focus on team cohesion, using a Likert scale to assess aspects such as task cohesion, social cohesion, communication, leadership, and conflict resolution. The final section will measure well-being, also using a Likert scale, covering physical health, mental resilience, emotional balance, social well-being, and recovery practices. Both sections will employ a 1 to 4 Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," to gauge respondents' perceptions accurately.

3.5 Statistical Treatment of Data

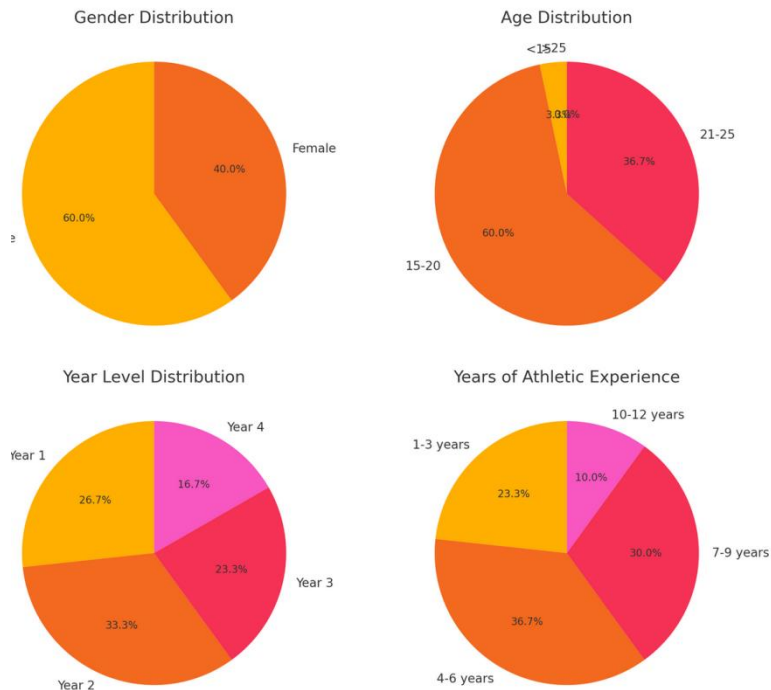
The statistical analysis for this study will involve several key methods. Descriptive statistics, such as frequency and percentage, will be used to outline the demographic profile of the student-athletes, while mean and standard deviation will summarize the levels of team cohesion and well-being. To identify significant differences in these variables based on demographic factors like age, gender, and athletic experience, T-tests and ANOVA will be applied. Additionally, Pearson's correlation coefficient will be used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between team cohesion and student-athlete well-being, indicating whether this relationship is positive, negative, or non-existent. Finally, the results will be interpreted in the context of existing literature, highlighting areas of consistency or deviation from previous studies.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The study will adhere to strict ethical considerations to protect the participants' rights and well-being. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants, ensuring they are fully aware of the study's purpose and procedures. Confidentiality will be maintained, with no personal identifiers used in the analysis or reporting of data. Participation will be entirely voluntary, and individuals will have the right to withdraw at any time without facing any negative consequences. The principle of non-maleficence will be observed, ensuring that no harm, either physical or emotional, will come to the participants during the study. Additionally, data security will be prioritized, with all collected information stored securely and only accessible to the researcher. Once the study is completed, all identifiable data will be disposed of to safeguard the participants' privacy.

IV. Results and Analysis

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Student-Athletes



The majority of the respondents in this study are male (60%), and a large proportion of the participants fall within the age group of 15-20 years old (60%). Only a small fraction of respondents are younger than 15 years old, and none are above 25 years old. Regarding their academic year, most student-athletes are in Year 2 (33.3%) and Year 1 (26.7%), while fewer athletes are in their third and fourth years. In terms of athletic experience, 36.7% of the respondents have 4-6 years of experience, followed by 30% with 7-9 years, and 23.3% with 1-3 years.

The demographic profile shows that a significant portion of the respondents are in their early stages of university life (Years 1 and 2) and have considerable athletic experience, with 67% having more than 4 years of experience. This suggests that the majority of student-athletes are still building both their academic and athletic careers. The predominance of younger athletes (15-20 years old) reflects the typical age distribution in university sports teams. The balanced representation of genders ensures that the findings can offer insights across both male and female athletes, though slightly more input comes from male respondents.

Table 2: Assessment of Team Cohesion (Task Cohesion, Social Cohesion, Leadership)

Team Cohesion Variables	Mean	Interpretation
Task Cohesion		
Our team works well together to achieve goals	3.5	Cohesive Team
Team members help each other improve	3.6	Very Cohesive Team
High coordination during matches	3.4	Cohesive Team
Social Cohesion		
Team members genuinely care about each other	3.7	Very Cohesive Team
Strong sense of camaraderie	3.5	Cohesive Team
Support on and off the field	3.4	Cohesive Team
Leadership		
Strong leadership and direction	3.6	Very Cohesive Team
Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined	3.5	Cohesive Team

Student-athletes generally rated their teams highly in terms of cohesion, particularly in areas related to task cohesion, social cohesion, and leadership. The mean scores for task cohesion (3.4 to 3.6) indicate that most student-athletes believe their teams work well together and are committed to each other's improvement. Similarly, social cohesion,

particularly the sense of camaraderie and emotional support within the team, received a mean score ranging from 3.4 to 3.7. Leadership also scored highly, with an average of 3.5 to 3.6, indicating that student-athletes perceive their team leaders as effective and motivating.

These results suggest that student-athletes at Hubei University of Automotive Technology experience a high level of team cohesion. The high ratings across task and social cohesion, as well as leadership, reflect strong team dynamics, which are crucial for both athletic performance and individual well-being. Task cohesion is particularly important as it indicates that the athletes are goal-oriented and focused on collaborative success. The strong sense of leadership suggests that team leaders play an integral role in fostering this cohesion. Teams with such cohesive dynamics are likely to perform better both on and off the field, as these factors contribute to trust, effective communication, and shared goals.

Table 3: Self-Assessment of Well-being (Physical, Mental, and Emotional)

Well-being Variables	Mean	Interpretation
Physical Health		
I maintain good physical health	3.4	Strong Well-being
My physical condition supports my performance	3.5	Strong Well-being
Mental Health		
I have strategies to manage stress	3.3	Strong Well-being
I maintain a positive mindset	3.4	Strong Well-being
Emotional Well-being		
I feel emotionally balanced	3.6	Very Strong Well-being
I find joy and satisfaction in my athletic pursuits	3.7	Very Strong Well-being

Table 3: Self-Assessment of Well-being (Physical, Mental, and Emotional)

Student-athletes rated their overall well-being positively, with the highest scores given to emotional well-being (mean: 3.6-3.7), followed by physical and mental well-being (mean: 3.3-3.5). Respondents reported feeling emotionally balanced and satisfied with their athletic pursuits, indicating a strong emotional connection to their sport. Physical well-being scores suggest that most athletes maintain good health, with adequate sleep and a focus on nutrition, while mental health scores show that most athletes are able to manage stress and maintain a positive mindset.

The high scores in emotional well-being indicate that athletes feel emotionally supported, which is essential for coping with the pressures of both academics and competitive sports. Physical well-being is also rated positively, suggesting that the athletes take care of their bodies and prioritize health. However, mental health scores, while still strong, suggest there may be room for improvement in helping athletes develop more effective stress-management strategies. Emotional stability is closely tied to a sense of belonging and purpose within a team, which, combined with good physical health, enables athletes to maintain high levels of performance and well-being.

Table 4: Differences in Team Cohesion by Demographic Profile

Demographic Profile	Task Cohesion (Mean)	Social Cohesion (Mean)	Leadership (Mean)	p-value
Gender				
Male	3.6	3.5	3.6	0.056
Female	3.5	3.4	3.5	
Years of Experience				
1-3 years	3.4	3.3	3.4	0.032*
4-6 years	3.6	3.5	3.6	
7-9 years	3.5	3.4	3.5	

Note: The p-value indicates that years of experience have a statistically significant difference in task cohesion

($p < 0.05$).

Table 4: Differences in Team Cohesion by Demographic Profile

The analysis of team cohesion based on demographic profiles reveals that there are no significant gender-based differences in task, social, or leadership cohesion ($p\text{-value} > 0.05$). However, the data shows a significant difference in task cohesion when years of athletic experience are considered, with athletes who have 4-6 years of experience reporting higher levels of task cohesion ($p\text{-value} = 0.032$). This suggests that the more experienced athletes tend to feel more connected and coordinated within their teams.

The lack of significant gender differences in team cohesion suggests that both male and female athletes experience similar levels of team support and connection, which is a positive indicator of inclusivity within the teams. The significant difference in task cohesion based on years of experience, however, highlights that team dynamics may improve as athletes spend more time working and competing together. More experienced athletes likely have stronger connections and a better understanding of team goals and strategies, which contributes to higher task cohesion. This finding implies that team-building and cohesion programs should consider tailoring interventions for less experienced athletes to boost cohesion early in their athletic careers.

V. Recommendations

- **Foster Early Team-Building Activities for New Athletes:** Given that task cohesion is significantly stronger among athletes with more experience, it is important to initiate structured team-building activities early in the careers of student-athletes. These activities could include group training sessions, workshops on teamwork, and social events aimed at strengthening bonds among newer athletes. By emphasizing cohesion from the outset, teams can develop stronger connections and work more effectively together.
- **Promote Leadership Development Programs:** Since leadership and role clarity were rated highly, it is recommended that leadership development programs be implemented to further enhance these qualities among team leaders and captains. Training sessions on leadership, conflict resolution, and communication can help captains and coaches inspire their teammates and manage team dynamics more effectively, improving overall cohesion.
- **Implement Mental Health and Stress Management Workshops:** While physical and emotional well-being are rated positively, mental health scores indicate a need for further support in managing stress. Universities should provide regular mental health workshops, focusing on techniques such as mindfulness, stress management, and positive mindset training. Access to sports psychologists or counselors should also be increased to ensure that student-athletes have the necessary resources to manage the pressures of competitive sports and academics.
- **Enhance Peer Support Systems:** As social cohesion plays a vital role in overall well-being, creating peer mentoring programs where experienced athletes support newer team members could further enhance team dynamics. Regular team meetings focused on open communication and peer feedback could also foster trust, enhance emotional well-being, and ensure that every athlete feels connected and valued within the team.
- **Balanced Work-Life-Athletics Programs:** To help athletes manage the demands of both their academic and athletic commitments, universities should consider implementing balanced work-life-athletics programs. Time management workshops and academic support tailored for student-athletes can help them better balance their responsibilities, reduce burnout, and maintain strong well-being in all aspects of their lives.

VI. Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that team cohesion plays a crucial role in enhancing the well-being of student-athletes at Hubei University of Automotive Technology. The study revealed high levels of both task and social cohesion, with leadership being a strong component of team dynamics. These factors contributed positively to the overall well-being of student-athletes, particularly in terms of their emotional stability and physical health. The analysis also indicated that athletes with more years of experience exhibited stronger task cohesion, underscoring the importance of long-term involvement in building effective team dynamics. While gender differences in cohesion were not significant, the study highlights the need for targeted interventions, such as team-building activities and leadership training, to further improve cohesion among less experienced athletes. Additionally, mental health support systems should be enhanced to address stress and maintain positive well-being outcomes.

Fostering a cohesive team environment not only enhances athletic performance but also significantly contributes to the holistic well-being of student-athletes, reinforcing the need for programs and strategies that prioritize both team dynamics and individual support. By implementing the recommendations provided, universities can create

more supportive environments for student-athletes, helping them succeed both academically and athletically.

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