

CLAIMED SELF-DISABILITY AND SPORTS PERFORMANCE OF DISABLED ATHLETES IN CAMEROON

NNOKE SENGOR

Faculty of Education Sciences
Department of Special Education
University of Yaoundé I, Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to find out the link between claimed self-handicap and the sports performances of disabled athletes in Cameroon in order to better understand the behavior of athletes with disabilities, during training sessions and even in competition. To do this, three (03) data collection tools were used including observation, interview, and questionnaire.

Through an observation grid designed on the basis of the model for developing a training session preparation sheet on the one hand, and the criteria for evaluating sports performances defined by Magill (1988) on the other hand, we were able to observe the 46 athletes who agreed by informed consent to participate in our study. The same athletes were subjected to a questionnaire consisting of 15 items grouped around the indicators and indices of different variables in our study. Similarly, 10 supervisors each had a 40-minute semi-structured interview to provide us with more information about participants. This interview also allowed us to understand the attitudes of the coaches, to gather up-to-date information on the quality of supervision that athletes with disabilities receive, and to understand the pedagogical triangle and the atmosphere that reigns in the group before, during, and after a sports competition.

After analysis and interpretation of the results, it appears that: the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_a) is accepted, which means that the claimed self-handicap influences sports performances of disabled athletes. In other words, the more strongly disabled athletes develop claimed self-handicap, the less their sports performances decrease. So claimed self-handicap is a predictor of sports performances of athletes with disabilities.

Keywords: Self-handicapped; self-handicapped claimed; sports performances; Disabled.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The practice of competitive sports by people with disabilities for some time has been a universal concern. This universality of sport aims to banish conceptions and perceptions that determine disability as a disadvantageous social situation, a fatality plunging the person with a disability into a state of precariousness or begging. Sport appears as a remedy for the injury of disability and as having a "restorative" action on bodily integrity, opening the possibility of being part of a life project (Labridy, 1991).

The disabled sportsman is in a position of ambivalence between the materiality of the deficiency shown by the gaze of others and the requirements of sports performance. His investment in sports practice and the achievement of peak performance encourage encounters with other disabled people and contribute to revocation or even forgetting of his disability. Indeed, the bodily commitment of athletes in a socially significant practice allows them to forge an exceptional identity in the sports space. Merleau-Ponty (1945).

Thus, sports competitions are usually organized for special people in Europe, Africa, and even Cameroon. In the case of Cameroon, the said competitions organized by governmental and non-governmental structures are grouped around four sports federations of the Cameroonian Paralympic Movement, in particular: FECASDEP: Cameroonian Federation of Sports for the Physically Deficient; FECASDEV: Cameroonian Federation of Sports for the visually impaired, FECASDI: Cameroonian Federation of Sports for the intellectually impaired and FECASSO: Cameroonian Federation of Sports for the Deaf. These athletes also participate in competitions of international scope, such as the Paralympic Games or the Francophone Games, and are fully supported financially and materially by the State budget.

Unfortunately, the performance did not live up to expectations. These athletes develop self-initiated blocking mechanisms in order to justify their poor athletic performance as something other than a lack of skill. However, the achievement of performance in the presence of a handicap makes it possible, on the one hand, to maximize the implications of success for the image of competence because this will have been obtained despite this handicap, and, on the other hand, on the other hand, to minimize those of failure. It is on these attributional benefits of augmentation and subtraction (Kelley, 1972) that a way of acting frequently encountered in the field of sport for the disabled rests. This is what Leary & Shepperd (1986, p. 1267) have termed claimed self-disability, which is the tendency to “verbally declare having disabilities that interfere with one's own performance”.

2.0 METHOD

During an investigation within the Cameroonian National Paralympic Committee on the prize list of athletes with disabilities, we collected data showing that disabled athletes in Cameroon generally perform poorly during sports competitions organized to their intention. We then looked at the mobiles that contributed to the achievement of these poor performances. Thus, the work in the field allowed us to observe that some athletes with disabilities report injuries and even imaginary illnesses that are not often diagnosed by the team doctor.

From these observations, we have drawn the conclusion that, despite the financial and material resources made available to them by the State for the preparation and participation in national and international sports competitions, these athletes generally achieve poor sports performances. This poor service, not only constitutes an obstacle to the promotion and popularization of sports for the disabled, but also it is able to demotivate investors who are quick to finance sports competitions for the said people in Cameroon or even to encourage their disengagement.

However, the postulate of Locke and Latham (1990) teaches us that sports performance is strongly correlated with the level of physical and psychological training of the athlete. In other words, the time allowed for training is strongly correlated with the level of performance

achieved during the subsequent evaluation. It is when an athlete trains by respecting the instructions of the coach as well as the pre-established program, that he can hope to obtain a good sports performance.

Paradoxically, some athletes with disabilities in Cameroon refrain from training, so do not put all the chances on their side to succeed. They are characterized by behaviors and statements that constitute biases in the achievement of results. (Famous, 2001). Indeed, by intentionally reducing their efforts, they limit their possible possibilities of obtaining good results. They create a real obstacle to their sports performance. For the specialist in physical disability, this behavior is due to the lack of construction of a performing mental state. It goes without saying that athletes with disabilities in Cameroon fail to build a cognitive, affective, and emotional state capable of boosting their morale during the preparation and participation in sports competitions. Taking into account this incapacity and the uncertainty of the results of sports competitions, these athletes will therefore develop behaviors that Rhodewalt (1990, p.75) has conceptualized under the name of "claimed self-disability". It is the tendency to "verbally declare having handicaps that interfere with one's own performance". Thus, when self-disability refers to its asserted expression, the SHS scale of Jones and Rhodewalt, (1982), indicates that it measures "disease and emotional upheaval".

This relevant problem led us to ask ourselves questions that we have grouped around a main question and two (02) secondary questions.

2.1 Main Question

What is the link between claimed self-disability and the sports performance of disabled athletes in Cameroon?

2.2 Secondary Issues

- ✓ Does the declaration of the disease by an athlete influence the sports performance of Cameroonian disabled athletes?
- ✓ Does emotional upheaval determine the sports performance of disabled athletes in Cameroon?

In order to respect the existing parallelism between the research questions and the anticipated answers that may result from them, we have issued a general hypothesis and two (02) secondary hypotheses.

2.3 General Hypothesis (H.G)

The claimed self-disability has a significant connection with the athletic performance of disabled athletes from Cameroon.

2.4 Secondary Assumptions (H.S)

- ✓ The declaration of the disease by an athlete influences the sports performance of disabled athletes in Cameroon.

- ✓ Emotional upheaval determines the sports performance of disabled athletes in Cameroon.

The objective of research being what it tends towards, our general objective is to verify whether the claimed self-disability has a link with the sports performance of athletes with disabilities. In other words, this study aims to measure the correlation between claimed self-disability and the sports performances recorded by disabled athletes during their participation in national and international sports competitions.

2.5 Specific Objectives

Specifically, this study aims to:

- Check whether the declaration of the disease by an athlete generates the sports performance of athletes with disabilities in Cameroon;
- verify if the emotional upheaval influences the sports performance of athletes with disabilities in Cameroon.

The choice of Rhodewalt's postulate (1990, p.75) is justified by the fact that it allowed us to understand that, when self-disability refers to its claimed expression, the SHS scale of Jones and Rhodewalt, (1982), indicates that it measures "disease and emotional upheaval", as mentioned above. This also allowed us to operationalize the Independent Variable (IV) so as to have a synoptic table of hypotheses, variables, modalities, indicators, and indices.

2.6 Data Collection Instruments

As part of this study, we used both qualitative and quantitative methods to study the link between claimed self-disability and the sports performance of athletes with disabilities. A total of 46 athletes completed the questionnaires after being observed in training sessions and sports competitions. Similarly, 10 supervisors in a situation of transmission of motor skills agreed to take part in a 40-minute interview each for the same objective.

2.7 Data Analysis Procedure

After data collection, we used SPSS version 23 software for statistical processing. We chose the correlations and the regressions in order to verify the linear link between two quantitative variables which are here the self-disability claimed (X) and the sports performances of the disabled athletes of Cameroon (Y). The correlation coefficient noted r_{xy} , was developed by Pearson and its value oscillates between -1 and $+1$. It is calculated from the following mathematical expression:

$$r_{xy} = \frac{n \sum XY - (\sum X)(\sum Y)}{\sqrt{\left[n \sum X^2 - (\sum X)^2 \right] \left[n \sum Y^2 - (\sum Y)^2 \right]}}$$

3.0 THE RESULTS OBTAINED

At the outset, we set ourselves the objective of verifying whether the claimed self-disability has a link with the sports performance of athletes with disabilities in Cameroon.

Table 1: Distribution of participants according to VI: claimed self-disability and sports performance of disabled athletes in Cameroon

Items	M	AN D
some athletes avoid investing fully in competitive activities so as not to be psychologically harmed if they fail	2.60	.98
Emotional problems always infer in sports activities	3.71	1.47
When an athlete does not live up to the expectations of his coach, he tends to justify himself by illness.	3.93	1.23
The athlete stops training when he feels tired	3.50	1.42
I always tend to want to compete with higher/lower level athletes	4.13	1.06
Athlete makes no effort in competition when stressed	4.39	.82
I'd do much better if I didn't let my emotions take over	4.04	1.22
Some substances taken by athletes could prevent them from being lucid and efficient	4.36	.99
He refuses to do violence to himself by refusing to carry out the instructions of the supervisor during the competition	4.22	1.06
The athlete is sometimes very depressed that even easy tasks become difficult to achieve	3.58	1.37
He generally underestimates himself in front of his opponent because of his handicap	3.93	1.35
The lack of self-determination is one of the causes of my multiple failures in sports competitions	3.45	1.50
I have knowledge about self-handicap in sport	3.98	1.25
Your teammates usually create self-handicap strategies during sports competitions	3.22	1.53
Overall grade point average	3.78	1.23

The results in the table above show that the participants unanimously agreed on the questionnaire sent to them. The overall weighted mean of all participants is 3.78/5, the overall standard deviation is 1.23. This proves that the athletes actually manifest the claimed self-disability.

The inferential analysis meanwhile, allowed us to measure the correlation between the independent variable, in particular: The correlation between the claimed self-disability and the sports performance of disabled athletes.

Table 2: Correlation between claimed self-disability and sports performance of disabled athletes

	disabled sports performance
Pearson correlation	.466 *

claimed self-disability	P (significance level)	.05
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Table N°2 presents the correlation matrix between claimed self-disability and sports performance of disabled athletes. We observe that the correlation is negative and significant ($r = -0.466$; $P = 0.05$). This result implies that participants who have the propensity to use the claimed self-impairment also have relatively poor athletic performance. Because, the increase in self-disability claimed in athletes with disabilities implies a decline in sports performance during competitions.

Table 3: Regression on claimed self-disability and athletic performance of disabled athletes

$R = .466^a$; $R\text{-two} = .373$; Adjusted $R\text{-square} = .42$; Standard error of estimate = $.58565$; $F = 9.530$; $P = .000^b$

Model	Non-standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	T	sig.
	HAS	standard error	Beta		
(Constant)	3,803	.415		9,168	.000
VI2	.398	.061	.525	6,507	.000

Table N°3 presents the regressions between claimed self-disability and the sports performance of disabled athletes. It allows us to observe that the model of this scale is significant ($F = 9.530$; $P = .000$ b) and explains 42% of the variance of the claimed self-disability. To this end, it appears that the claimed self-disability is a significant predictor of the sports performance of disabled athletes ($P = 000$). Our hypothesis is therefore validated.

In view of the results obtained following the investigations carried out in the field and by analysis, we can affirm that this objective has been achieved.

4.0 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Concerning the observations of the athletes in training sessions, some, in spite of the presence of the observers, did not modify their behaviors. This allowed us to have more authentic information that effectively represents the teaching practices observed. The neutrality and non-interference of these observers was a guarantee to limit their influence on the athletes observed. In addition, observations of the athletes were made during three training sessions. The number of observations seems sufficient to obtain the desired information. However, the good control of the athletes by the observers chosen among the supervisors allowed us to quickly understand the behavior of the said athletes. This behavior differed from one session to another and according to the attitudes of the athletes towards the supervisors.

Speaking of the interview with the supervisors, it should be recalled that the supervisors who were recruited within the framework of the observation as observers did not participate in the interview. In view of their seniority, some supervisors were more experienced than others and usually answered questions using concrete examples.

Finally, the questionnaire was made up of 15 items to which the responses were mostly favorable to the research hypothesis.

This is the example of the item on “Emotional problems always infer in sports activities”, the participants mostly agree (M: 3.71; SD: 1.47). In reality, people with disabilities are emotionally fragile. This fragility is due to the fact that they face a double suffering: on the one hand, the suffering of being diminished in one's body and of feeling lessened by one's body and, on the other hand, the suffering relating to the need to adapt to the limitations and conditions of rejection generated by an imperfect body. This physical difference generates negative emotions that will have an impact on the practice of sports activities.

On the subject of “When an athlete does not live up to the expectations of his supervisor, he tends to justify himself by illness”, the respondents are perfectly unanimous (M: 3.93; SD: 1.23). The Achievement Goal theory of Murray and McClelland taken up by NTSA (2018, p. 105) takes into account two goals in particular: the approach and avoidance goals of normative performance. In the context of our study, the athletes face much more the goal of avoidance of competence directed towards the avoidance of the demonstration of normative incompetence. It is at this level that we see the various self-handicapping strategies that allow the athlete to avoid appearing incompetent in front of his peers.

“The performance-avoidance goal characterizes an aversive attitude and accounts for a negative motivational dynamic. This psychological underpinning leads the individual to experience a high sense of threat and anxiety. The implementation of self-protection strategies pushes him to emotionally disengage from a threatening situation and to exhibit non-adaptive behaviors with respect to learning. (Cury and Da Fonseca, taken up by Schiano-Lomoriello, 2005, p. 59).

For the item: “The athlete stops training when he feels tired”, the athletes completely agree that they stop training when they feel tired. This behavior is not likely to enhance the work of the coach who should judge the amount of effort provided by an athlete before asking him to rest. The supervisor works according to a program and a well-defined plan respecting the degree of disability of each athlete. Under these conditions, regularly declaring fatigue by an athlete would be a sign of psychological disengagement, in order to have a pretext to justify himself in the event of poor performance. It is also an aversive motivational tendency characterized by the goal of avoidance of performance which allows the athlete, from the feeling of threat and anxiety felt, to put in place self-protection strategies, allowing him to present non-adaptive attitudes towards learning (Cury, 2000).

Speaking of the item “The athlete makes no effort in competition when he is stressed”, the respondents all agree (M: 4.39; SD: 0.82). Stress appears when the emotional involvement is great and the individual doubts his ability to produce a good performance. Under these conditions, the body will bring into play a response system. In particular, the production of stress hormones such as adrenaline and noradrenaline. These hormones have repercussions in the production of cold sweats, digestive pains, stomach pains, and cardiac accelerations...all these manifestations contribute to the decline in the athletic performance of athletes.

The item: “I would do much better if I didn't let my emotions take over” confirms the agreement of the athletes interested in this study (M: 4.04; SD: 1.22). Athletes highlight their specific

choices to express the reality of the experience of disability, as well as its perception in the sporting space. Also, harmony refers to the proportionality of different parts of the body and their ideal fit in relation to each other. It highlights a self-image where the remarkable opposition between the shapes of the different body segments is completely blurred. Thus, the opposition between the uprightness and the deformity of the body recalls the meaning of the ideal of the verticality of the body and its straightening for the subjects interviewed. This question concerns the perception that the athlete has of himself, as well as the mental representation of his personality on his position in the disabled sports space. M. Lachheb and N. Moualla (2009).

Concerning the fact that: "Certain substances taken by athletes could prevent them from being lucid and efficient", the participants agree (M: 4.36; SD: 0.99). Sports practices should simply contribute to the emergence, and to the improvement of the health status of people with disabilities. However, the frantic search for gain and well-being pushes certain top athletes to consume psychoactive substances to alter mental processes. This way of thinking about the practice of sport by people with disabilities facilitates the development of tendencies towards self-disability. These tendencies negatively correlated with health, well-being, satisfaction with one's own skills and sporting success will force the athlete to resort to harmful substances (alcohol, drugs) and the use of coping strategies such as avoidance or self-blame (Eronen et al., 1998; AJ Martin et al., 2001; McCrea & Hirt, 2001; Midgley et al., 1996; Zuckerman et al., 1998; Zuckerman & Tsai, 2005).

According to Levesque et al. (2001), self-protection or self-enhancement depends on the outcome of subsequent performance. The use of self-handicap will make it possible to artificially reduce the responsibility of one's personal competence in the event of poor performance (i.e., self-protection) or to increase the implication of this competence in the event of good performance (i.e., valorization of self). Otherwise, the self-disability is also beneficial for the athlete in that it allows him to justify his poor athletic performance. The user of this strategy will thus be able to justify a possible bad result or make a possible good result even more gratifying thanks to the presence of the handicap. But it must be said that this benefit is very less compared to the good sports performance achieved during a competition.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The practice of competitive sport by people with disabilities in Cameroon is a universal concern through Law No. 2010/002 of April 13, 2010, on the promotion and protection of people with disabilities, which stipulates that the State, local authorities, and society take all necessary measures to promote sport and leisure for people with disabilities and organize their participation in national and international competitions. This universality of sport aims to banish conceptions and perceptions that determine disability as a disadvantageous social situation, a fatality plunging the person with a disability into a state of precariousness or begging. Sport therefore appears as a remedy for the injury of disability and as having a "restorative" effect on bodily integrity, opening up the possibility of being part of a life project (Labridy, 1991).

The majority of the studies mentioned to justify the poor performance of athletes in sports competitions have been carried out within the framework of the theories of motivation. Athletes' performances are thus justified by the feeling of self-efficacy, self-determination,

self-esteem, accomplishment, perceived value of the task, acquired resignation, representations, causal attributions, etc. However, they do not give an important place to the claimed self-disability which determines the behavior of athletes in a situation of sports competition. Athletes, faced with the demands of a threatening situation, faced with a normative training system provided for by international institutions and embodied by the coach, develop easier means of circumvention through other implicit rules such as the declaration of illnesses and emotional upheaval. The action of the trainer as a detector of severe handicaps could constitute a first step in anticipating the handicapping behavior of athletes (Rhodewalt et al., 1984) which thus opposes that of the athlete. Any action that would allow the supervisor to develop a training program based on GPP (Generalized Psychological Preparation), instead of the GPP (Generalized Physical Preparation), which is most often encountered. This handling of athletes with disabilities will enhance their minds and put them in a predisposition to accept the stressful conditions of sports competition.

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