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A Comparative Study of Positive and Negative Thinking among Students at Al-Nusour University Who Participate and Do Not Participate in Sports Activities

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to identify the levels of positive and negative thinking among students at Al-Nusoor University, and to reveal differences between students who do and do not participate in sporting activities with regard to these two variables. The researcher adopted a descriptive approach using a comparative study design, as this was deemed appropriate for the nature and objectives of the research. The research population consisted of students at Al-Nusoor University, whilst the sample comprised 70 students: 40 who participated in sporting activities and 30 who did not, all of whom were selected using a purposive sampling method. To achieve the research objectives, the researcher utilised the Positive and Negative Thinking Scale developed by Al-Jubouri (2011), after verifying its psychometric properties in terms of validity, reliability and discriminant validity. The data were analysed statistically using the arithmetic mean, standard deviation, Pearson's correlation coefficient, and the t-test for two independent samples. The results showed that the research sample exhibited a high level of positive thinking and a low level of negative thinking compared to the scale's hypothesised mean. They also revealed statistically significant differences in positive thinking in favour of students who participated in sporting activities, as well as statistically significant differences in negative thinking in their favour, as they recorded lower levels of negative thinking compared with non-participants. The researcher concluded that participation in sporting activities is associated with higher levels of positive thinking and lower levels of negative thinking among university students. He recommended encouraging students to take part in sporting activities and developing counselling, psychological and sporting programmes that contribute to fostering positive thinking and reducing negative thinking amongst university students.

Keywords: Positive Thinking; Negative Thinking; Sporting Activities; University Students; Al-Nusoor University.

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ABSTRAK

Tujuan studi ini adalah untuk mengidentifikasi tingkat pemikiran positif dan negatif di antara mahasiswa di Universitas Al-Nusoor, serta mengungkap perbedaan antara mahasiswa yang berpartisipasi dan tidak berpartisipasi dalam aktivitas olahraga terkait kedua variabel tersebut. Peneliti mengadopsi pendekatan deskriptif menggunakan desain studi komparatif, karena dianggap sesuai dengan sifat dan tujuan penelitian. Populasi penelitian terdiri dari mahasiswa di Universitas Al-Nusoor, sementara sampel terdiri dari 70 mahasiswa: 40 yang berpartisipasi dalam kegiatan olahraga dan 30 yang tidak, semuanya dipilih menggunakan metode pengambilan sampel bertujuan. Untuk mencapai tujuan penelitian, peneliti menggunakan Skala Pemikiran Positif dan Negatif yang dikembangkan oleh Al-Jubouri (2011), setelah memverifikasi sifat psikometriknya dalam hal validitas, keandalan, dan validitas diskriminan. Data dianalisis secara statistik menggunakan rata-rata aritmatika, deviasi standar, koefisien korelasi Pearson, dan uji t untuk dua sampel independen. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sampel penelitian menunjukkan tingkat berpikir positif yang tinggi dan tingkat pemikiran negatif yang rendah dibandingkan rata-rata yang dihipotesiskan pada skala. Mereka juga menunjukkan perbedaan yang signifikan secara statistik dalam pemikiran positif yang menguntungkan siswa yang berpartisipasi dalam kegiatan olahraga, serta perbedaan yang signifikan secara statistik dalam pemikiran negatif yang menguntungkan mereka, karena mereka mencatat tingkat pemikiran negatif yang lebih rendah dibandingkan dengan non-peserta. Peneliti menyimpulkan bahwa partisipasi dalam aktivitas olahraga terkait dengan tingkat berpikir positif yang lebih tinggi dan tingkat pemikiran negatif yang lebih rendah di kalangan mahasiswa universitas. Ia merekomendasikan mendorong mahasiswa untuk berpartisipasi dalam kegiatan olahraga dan mengembangkan program konseling, psikologis, dan olahraga yang berkontribusi dalam mendorong pemikiran positif dan mengurangi pemikiran negatif di kalangan mahasiswa universitas.

Kata Kunci: Berpikir Positif; Berpikir Negatif; Kegiatan Olahraga; Mahasiswa Universitas; Universitas Al-Nusoor.

INTRODUCTION

In the present day, people are witnessing rapid changes in various areas of life; indeed, some researchers have dubbed this era the 'Age of Speed', due to the succession of developments that have forced individuals particularly university students to face numerous psychological, academic and social pressures (Païs et al., 2025; Peng et al., 2025; Shan et al., 2026). These pressures may lead to a variety of problems and difficulties in their daily lives; furthermore, if they persist, they may cause physical and psychological exhaustion, influence their attitudes and inclinations, and limit their ability to adapt to the demands of university life (Belmonte Almagro, 2026; Sahão & Kienen, 2020).

Mental abilities and skills play a significant role in how an individual copes with these pressures, foremost among which are positive and negative thinking; thinking is considered one of the fundamental factors contributing to the interpretation of life situations, decision-making and tackling various challenges (Aldbyani et al., 2025; Libin, 2017). From this perspective, the topic of positive thinking has received widespread attention from researchers due to its impact on boosting self-confidence, improving the

ability to cope with stress, and fostering psychological and social well-being, whilst negative thinking has been associated with a focus on aspects of failure and frustration and the accompanying psychological effects that may influence an individual's performance and behaviour (Alkhatib, 2020; Kocyigit et al., 2024). Nevertheless, some researchers argue that negative thinking may serve a protective function when it prompts an individual to anticipate and prepare for difficulties, thereby limiting the effects of frustration when facing various situations and contributing to a degree of balance in one's emotions and sense of self (Humphries, 2002, p. 6).

Conversely, studies in the field of sports psychology confirm that the benefits of participating in sporting activities are not limited to physical development alone, but extend to psychological, mental and social aspects, as they help to reduce levels of stress and anxiety, build self-confidence, and improve social adjustment, as well as playing a role in establishing positive thinking patterns and promoting mental health (Schneider & Diehl, 2014). Consequently, it is expected that there will be differences in levels of positive and negative thinking between students who do and do not participate in sporting activities (Bengtsson et al., 2025; Yuliasrid et al., 2024).

On this basis, the significance of the present study lies in identifying the levels of positive and negative thinking among students at Al-Nusoor University, and comparing students who do and do not participate in sporting activities, with the aim of revealing the nature of the differences between the two groups, and to determine the extent to which participation in sporting activities contributes to promoting positive thinking and reducing negative thinking, thereby having a positive impact on students' mental health and their academic and social adjustment.

The importance of the study is also evident in two respects; the first is the enrichment of scientific knowledge in the fields of psychology and sports psychology, by providing scientific data that helps to clarify the relationship between participation in sporting activities and patterns of thinking amongst university students, particularly as the Arabic literature still lacks sufficient studies addressing this topic. The second aspect is practical in nature, as the study's findings can be utilised in the development of counselling, psychological and sports programmes that contribute to the development of positive thinking, reduce negative thinking and enhance mental health. This will assist those responsible for the educational and sporting processes in providing students with a holistic education that is not limited to physical and skill-based aspects, but also encompasses psychological and mental aspects, as these are an essential part of building a well-balanced personality.

Research Problem

Both positive and negative thinking are important variables that influence the lives of individuals in general, and university students in particular, given their role in guiding behaviour and the ability to cope with psychological and academic pressures (Al-Faki, 2008, p. 12). The literature indicates that engaging in sporting activities contributes to enhancing mental health and fostering positive thinking; however, levels of positive and negative thinking may differ between students who do and do not engage in sporting activities.

Hence, the research problem lies in identifying differences in positive and negative thinking among students at Al-Nusoor University who do and do not participate in sporting activities, in order to answer the following question:

Are there statistically significant differences in positive and negative thinking among students at Al-Nusoor University who do and do not participate in sporting activities?

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Research Objectives

The research aims to:

1. Identify the level of positive thinking amongst Al-Nusoor University students who participate in sporting activities.
2. Identify the level of negative thinking amongst Al-Nusoor University students who do not participate in sporting activities.
3. To identify differences in positive thinking between Al-Nusoor University students who do and do not participate in sporting activities.
4. To identify differences in negative thinking between Al-Nusoor University students who do and do not participate in sporting activities.

Scope of the Research

1. Human scope: Al-Nusoor University students who do and do not participate in sporting activities.
2. Spatial scope: Al-Nusoor University.
3. Temporal scope: From 1 October 2026 to 31 December 2026. For sporting activities.

METHODS

Research Methodology

The researcher adopted a descriptive methodology using a comparative approach, as this is one of the most appropriate methodologies for the nature and objectives of the research; it aims to describe the phenomenon as it actually is, then to analyse, interpret and organise it, thereby contributing to the attainment of accurate scientific findings that can be utilised to explain the relationships and differences between the study variables (Smith, 2003:29).

Research Population and Sample

The research population was defined as students at Al-Nusoor University for the academic year (2022–2023), numbering 196 students. As for the research sample, the researcher selected 35 students from the Department of Physical Education and Sports Science to represent the group of those who practise sporting activities, as well as 35

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students from other departments at the university who do not practise sporting activities to represent the group of non-practitioners. They were selected using a purposive sampling method in line with the nature and objectives of the research.

The researcher excluded students who were not selected, as well as those who were absent or could not be included in the study for various reasons, totalling 89 students, in addition to the stability sample of 20 students. The final research sample thus comprised 70 students, representing 78 per cent of the research population, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Population

Percentage	Excluded	Study Sample	Community	Type of Activity
%41.2	63	40	103	Practitioners of sports activity
%16.8	26	30	56	Non-Sporting Activity
%58.0	89	70	159	Total

Research Tools

Scale of Positive and Negative Thinking (Description of the Scale)

The researcher adopted the Positive and Negative Thinking Scale developed by Al-Jubouri (2011), which was based on a sample of 216 students from the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports Sciences at the University of Mosul. The scale consists of 60 items, of which 24 measure positive thinking and 36 measure negative thinking. Respondents answer the scale items by selecting one of three options: 'Applies to me a lot', 'Applies to me sometimes', or 'Does not apply to me'. Positive items are scored as 3, 2 and 1 respectively, whilst negative items are scored as 1, 2 and 3, in accordance with the scale's instructions; this is a procedure followed in psychological and educational studies.

Psychometric properties of the scale

Apparent Validity

Validity is one of the most important psychometric properties that measurement instruments should possess, as it refers to the extent to which the instrument is able to measure the trait for which it was designed, and to measure only what it is supposed to measure (Melhem, 2000: 273). To verify face validity, the researcher used the scale in its original form and presented it to a group of experts and specialists in the fields of psychology, sports psychology, and measurement and assessment, to seek their opinions (Appendix 1) on the appropriateness of its items and their suitability for achieving the research objectives. After collecting and analysing the expert review forms, it was found that the experts' agreement on the scale's items ranged from 83.33 per cent to 100 per cent, confirming the validity of its items for measuring positive and negative thinking in the research sample (Al-Fartousi, 2015: 218).

Reliability of the Scale

To verify the reliability of the Positive and Negative Thinking Scale, the researcher adopted the test-retest method. The scale was administered to a sample of 20 students from Al-Nusoor University, who were selected at random from outside the main research sample, on 5 October 2026. Two weeks later, the scale was re-administered to the same sample on 19 October 2026. The data were then analysed statistically using Pearson's correlation coefficient, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.83—a good reliability

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coefficient—which indicates that the scale possesses a high degree of stability and reliability, and confirms its suitability for application to the current research sample.

Discriminant Validity of the Scale

To verify the discriminant validity of the items on the Positive and Negative Thinking Scale, the researcher calculated the total score for each questionnaire according to the approved response options. The scores were then ranked in ascending order from the lowest to the highest and divided into two groups: the high-scoring group and the low-scoring group. Following statistical analysis of the data, it was found that all scale items were discriminant at a significance level of 0.05, indicating the ability of the scale items to distinguish between members of the sample and confirming their suitability for use in the present study.

Table 2. Discriminant Validity of the Scale

Significance	Probability Level Sig	Acquired value (v)	Lower Group		Top Group		Paragraphs
			±	Going to	±	Q.	
Moral	0.006	3.652	0.56	4.77	0.00	4.41	1
Moral	0.005	4.206	0.33	3.83	0.00	4.52	2
Moral	0.005	3.135	1.03	3.74	0.62	4.13	3
Moral	0.008	3.255	1.71	3.52	1.22	3.76	4
Moral	0.011	2.484	1.47	4.43	0.61	4.53	5
Moral	0.042	1.196	1.39	3.93	1.27	3.82	6
Moral	0.023	3.588	1.63	3.23	0.97	4.45	7
Moral	0.009	3.219	1.64	3.20	1.15	4.31	8
Moral	0.002	2.781	1.62	3.55	1.55	4.56	9
Moral	0.036	2.165	1.89	3.87	1.22	3.27	10
Moral	0.017	2.574	1.56	3.17	1.63	3.20	11
Moral	0.012	2.484	1.64	2.97	1.23	4.22	12
Moral	0.004	3.232	1.79	3.57	1.19	4.54	13
Moral	0.004	3.003	1.84	4.47	0.00	4.65	14
Moral	0.007	3.233	0.81	4.60	0.90	3.47	15
Moral	0.038	3.221	1.16	3.87	1.02	3.93	16
Moral	0.002	3.248	1.50	3.63	0.89	4.50	17
Moral	0.016	2.484	1.46	3.70	1.20	3.30	18
Moral	0.026	2.283	1.48	2.90	1.34	4.10	19
Moral	0.000	3.963	1.59	2.53	0.72	4.60	20
Moral	0.000	5.699	1.43	3.60	1.75	3.30	21
Moral	0.000	4.963	1.33	3.70	1.44	4.17	22
Moral	0.002	3.295	1.75	3.53	0.00	3.73	23
Moral	0.000	6.625	1.57	3.23	0.90	4.50	24
Moral	0.001	3.710	1.54	3.00	0.55	4.80	25
Moral	0.019	3.235	1.59	3.66	1.22	3.57	26
Moral	0.014	3.203	1.67	4.31	0.00	5.03	27
Moral	0.018	4.371	1.51	3.44	1.41	3.73	28
Moral	0.001	3.739	1.75	2.31	1.29	4.40	29

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Moral	0.013	6.229	1.49	4.80	1.24	4.60	30
Moral	0.016	2.283	1.23	3.43	1.31	5.00	31
Moral	0.004	3.840	1.77	3.39	1.21	4.40	32
Moral	0.002	3.294	1.43	2.31	1.29	3.17	33
Moral	0.023	2.340	1.31	2.31	1.23	4.31	34
Moral	0.026	2.283	1.34	2.30	1.2	4.17	35
Moral	0.124	3.095	1.49	3.17	1.32	3.33	36
Moral	0.014	3.203	1.63	3.13	0.98	4.64	37
Moral	0.000	3.203	1.30	2.10	1.33	4.87	38
Moral	0.004	3.840	1.77	3.39	1.21	4.40	39
Moral	0.002	3.294	1.63	2.31	1.29	3.17	40
Moral	0.023	2.340	1.31	2.31	1.23	4.31	41

Pilot Study

To ensure the success of the main application of the scale, the researcher conducted the pilot study after completing the scientific procedures relating to the scale (validity and reliability), as the pilot study is considered a scaled-down version of the main study, and aims to identify any difficulties the researcher might face whilst conducting the study, and to ensure the clarity of the scale's items and the administration procedures (Al-Khouli, 1999: 34). The pilot study was conducted on 15 October 2026 on a sample of 20 students from Al-Nusoor University who were not part of the main research sample. The time taken to complete the scale ranged from 20 to 25 minutes, with the researcher present to answer the participants' queries and clarify the necessary instructions.

Administration of the Scale

The researcher administered the Positive and Negative Thinking Scale to the research sample on 1 November 2026, after ensuring the appropriate conditions for administration were in place. The researcher explained the instructions to the participants and ensured that all sections of the scale were completed, thereby guaranteeing the collection of accurate data that would fulfil the research objectives.

Statistical Methods

The researcher used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to analyse the research data and employed the following statistical methods:

1. Arithmetic mean.
2. Standard deviation.
3. Percentage.
4. Pearson's correlation coefficient.
5. The t-test for two independent samples (Al-Takriti and Al-Obaidi, 1999: 101-304).

RESEARCH RESULTS

Table 2. Arithmetic means, standard deviations and the calculated t-value between the arithmetic mean and the hypothesised mean for the positive thinking and negative thinking scales among members of the research sample

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Significance	Significance Level	Calculated value (v)	Standard deviation	Hypothetical Average	Arithmetic Average	Unit of Measurement	Variable
Moral	0.000	12.34	8.74	60	72.86	Degree	Positive Thinking
Moral	0.000	-9.76	7.12	54	45.73	Degree	Negative thinking

Table 3. Arithmetic medians, standard deviations, and the value of (v) calculated in positive thinking in students practicing and non-practicing sports activities

Significance	Significance Level	Calculated value (v)	Standard deviation	Arithmetic mean	Iss ue	Collection
Moral	0.000	3.91	7.15	76.28	40	Sports Practioners
			8.02	68.31	30	Non-Sports Practioners

Table 4. Arithmetic medians, standard deviations, and the value of (v) calculated in negative thinking in students practicing and non-practicing sports activities

Variable	Unit of Measurement	Collection	Iss ue	Arit hme tic mean	Stand ard devia tion	Calc ulat ed valu e (v)	Signif icanc e Value (Sig.)	Signif icanc e
Negative thinking	Degree	Students practicing sports activities	40	43.85	6.74	3.18	0.002	Moral
		Students who are not practicing sports activities	30	49.63	5.88			

Statistically significant at a significance level of (0.05) and with (68) degrees of freedom, as the table value was (2.00).

DISCUSSION

Table (2) shows that there are statistically significant differences between the arithmetic mean and the hypothetical mean in the variables of positive thinking and negative thinking. The arithmetic average of positive thinking was higher than the hypothetical average, which indicates that the members of the research sample had a high level of positive thinking, while the arithmetic average of negative thinking was lower than the hypothetical average, which indicates a low level of negative thinking among the sample members. The researcher attributes this result to the fact that the university students enjoy an appropriate amount of Psychological and social compatibility, as well as practicing sports activities, contributes to promoting positive attitudes and the ability to cope with psychological stress.

It is clear from Table (3) that there are statistically significant differences in positive thinking between students practicing and practicing sports activities, as the arithmetic average of practitioners reached (76.28) scores, which is higher than the average of non-practitioners of (68.31) scores, and the calculated value of (t) was (3.91), which is greater than the tabular value at the significance level of (0.05), which indicates that the differences were in favor of students practicing sports activities.

The researcher attributes this result to the fact that practicing sports contributes to the development of self-confidence, enhancing social interaction, and developing the ability to cope with psychological stress, as well as its role in instilling positive attitudes and optimism in students. This result is consistent with what Jaber (2004: 221) pointed out that the activities practiced by an individual affect his personality traits and thinking patterns, and it also agrees with Seligman (1980: 20) who emphasized that positive thinking is the basis for achieving success and psychological compatibility.

Table (4) shows that there are statistically significant differences in negative thinking between students who do and do not participate in sporting activities, as the calculated t -value was 3.18, which is greater than the critical value of 2.00. This indicates that the differences were statistically significant and in favour of students who participate in sporting activities, as they recorded a lower mean score for negative thinking compared with those who do not.

The researcher attributes this result to the fact that participating in sporting activities helps to reduce levels of stress and anxiety and boosts self-confidence and social interaction, which in turn leads to a reduction in negative thoughts and an increased ability to cope with psychological pressures in a positive manner. Furthermore, regular participation in sporting activities provides a supportive social environment that helps improve students' psychological and emotional well-being, thereby reducing the adoption of negative thought patterns compared with those who do not take part in sporting activities

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the research findings, the researcher has reached the following conclusions:

1. Students at Al-Nusoor University generally exhibit a high level of positive thinking and a low level of negative thinking compared with the scale's hypothetical mean.
2. Students who participate in sporting activities exhibit a higher level of positive thinking compared with those who do not.
3. Students who participate in sporting activities exhibit a lower level of negative thinking compared to those who do not, indicating the positive role of sporting activities in reducing patterns of negative thinking.
4. Participation in sporting activities contributes to enhancing positive psychological aspects among university students by developing self-confidence, improving the ability to cope with stress, and promoting psychological and social well-being.
5. Sporting activities are an important means of supporting students' mental health, given their impact on promoting positive thinking and reducing negative thinking.

In light of the research findings, the researcher recommends the following:

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1. Encourage students at Al-Nusoor University to engage in sporting activities on a regular basis, given their positive impact on fostering positive thinking and reducing negative thinking.
2. Consider incorporating sporting activities into university programmes, thereby contributing to the promotion of mental health and psychological and social well-being among students.
3. Develop counselling, psychological and sporting programmes aimed at fostering positive thinking and reducing patterns of negative thinking amongst university students.
4. Raise students' awareness of the importance of positive thinking and its role in improving academic performance and coping with the psychological and social pressures they face during university life.
5. Conducting similar studies on different university samples, or linking positive and negative thinking to other psychological and educational variables, such as quality of life, motivation to achieve, psychological resilience and emotional intelligence, to ascertain the nature of the relationship between them.

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