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Effectiveness of a psychological counseling program to enhance sports cohesion of football players

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ABSTRACT

The current study aimed to build a psychological counseling program and identify the level of sports cohesion among the players of Mosul Municipality Club and Al-Amwaj Sports Football Club. Where the experimental approach was used to suit the current research, and the research community consisted of the players of the two clubs and the number of 44 players, and the research sample consisted of 24 players who were selected in a deliberate way, and the stability sample reached 10 players, while the sample of the survey experience reached 8 players who were excluded from the main experiment. The researchers designed the psychological counseling program according to previously monitored data, which were represented by specific needs and in line with these needs that were reached through the pre-test, which indicated a decrease in the level of sports cohesion among the players, and the results showed the superiority of the experimental group over the control in the post-test of sports cohesion After applying the program. The results showed that the psychological counseling program to enhance sports cohesion of football players had a favorable effect on the development of certain motor abilities and basic football skills in junior players. The players of the Mosul Municipality and the Waves Football Club suffer from a low level of sports cohesion. The preparation processes that players receive do not contribute to psychological support. The psychological counseling program has proven effective in developing a level of sports cohesion for players. The superiority of the experimental group over the control group in the level of sport cohesion in the dimensional measurement.

Keywords: Counseling Program; Sports Cohesion; Sports Psychology; Football.



JURNAL PENDIDIKAN KEPELATIHAN OLAHRAGA

PEJUANG

ABSTRAK

Studi saat ini bertujuan untuk membangun program konseling psikologis dan mengidentifikasi tingkat kohesi olahraga di antara para pemain Klub Kota Mosul dan Klub Sepak Bola Olahraga Al-Amwaj. Dimana pendekatan eksperimental digunakan sesuai dengan penelitian saat ini, dan komunitas penelitian terdiri dari pemain dari kedua klub dan jumlah 44 pemain, dan sampel penelitian terdiri dari 24 pemain yang dipilih secara sengaja, dan sampel stabilitas mencapai 10 pemain, sedangkan sampel pengalaman survei mencapai 8 pemain yang dikeluarkan dari percobaan utama. Para peneliti merancang program konseling psikologis sesuai dengan data yang dipantau sebelumnya, yang diwakili oleh kebutuhan spesifik dan sejalan dengan kebutuhan yang dicapai melalui pre-test, yang menunjukkan penurunan tingkat kohesi olahraga di antara para pemain, dan hasilnya menunjukkan keunggulan kelompok eksperimen atas kontrol dalam pasca-tes kohesi olahraga Setelah menerapkan program. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa program konseling psikologis untuk meningkatkan kohesi olahraga pemain sepak bola memiliki efek yang menguntungkan terhadap perkembangan kemampuan motorik tertentu dan keterampilan dasar sepak bola pada pemain junior. Para pemain Kotamadya Mosul dan Klub Sepak Bola Waves menderita tingkat kohesi olahraga yang rendah. Proses persiapan yang diterima pemain tidak berkontribusi pada dukungan psikologis. Program konseling psikologis telah terbukti efektif dalam mengembangkan tingkat kohesi olahraga bagi pemain. Keunggulan kelompok eksperimen atas kelompok kontrol dalam tingkat kohesi olahraga dalam pengukuran dimensi.

Kata Kunci: Program Konseling; Kohesi Olahraga; Psikologi Olahraga; Sepak bola.

INTRODUCTION

Social cohesion is a complex and multidimensional concept, encompassing concepts of belonging, shared values, trust and civic engagement. Much of the literature does not address these components in depth, and we know little about how sports programs understand and address these components of social cohesion (Moustakas, L, 2025). Over the past two decades, social cohesion has gained increasing importance as an academic concept. This importance has also been reflected in the field of sports, where many policies, programs and researchers have claimed to focus on this concept. For example, about 25% of the literature of sport for development and 10% of programs are classified under the banner of social cohesion. (Moustakas, L. 2022)

The literature on sport and athletic cohesion tends to rally around social relationships, a sense of belonging, and a good orientation (Moustakas, L., & Robrade, D. 2023). Sports teams are a unique and distinct context for the study of social processes, especially with regard to communication and cohesion processes within the sports team, which is why research in this area has been dominated by studies in the sports field (e.g., Gwett and Shawandi, 2004; Mach et al., 2010; Piscosoledo and Saavedra, 2012; Sullivan and Feltz, 2003). Also, given "unique clarity and consistency in terms of members' ability, objectives, definitions of roles and relationships, team structure, rules and procedures by which they must operate, and other aspects of their context" (Pescosolido & Saavedra, 2012, p. 750).

The importance of the current research comes from the important and effective role that social cohesion contributes to the success of sports teams and clubs, as it is



JURNAL PENDIDIKAN KEPELATIHAN OLAHRAGA

PEJUANG

considered one of the most important factors that enhance cooperation and create an atmosphere that contributes to achieving harmony between players, and raising the level of collective performance, as it contributes to achieving a more comprehensive understanding of how to enhance sports social cohesion through specialized guidance programs based on scientific foundations (Adam Mappaompo et al., 2024; Arga et al., 2025).

Psychological counseling programs have proven effective in enhancing team cohesion and construction has emerged as a prominent strategy to promote effective cooperation between team members, thus enhancing collective performance in sports teams (Durdubas and Kuruc, 2023). Previous research has also found that cohesion, as a key factor in a team, can better enhance the team's collective self-esteem (Yalom, I. D., & Leszcz, M. 2020), and the current research is expected to give an applied practical model that can serve as a reference for clubs and teams. Other sports that seek to develop the sports environment within the team. The research can also have a direct positive impact on the club itself, by improving the morale of its members, strengthening relationships between players, increasing the team's self-esteem and enhancing overall sports performance, which helps in achieving better results at the sporting and social levels.

The phenomenon of weak sports cohesion among players is one of the negative phenomena that many teams and sports clubs suffer, which directly affects the collective performance and sportsmanship within the team, especially since social cohesion is one of the main pillars of the success of any team, as it is one of the main and important factors that contribute, in creating a positive environment within the sports community, which contributes to enhancing cooperation and teamwork between players.

Through the follow-up of the researchers of the two teams, great challenges were monitored in achieving the required cohesion for the team, especially in light of the presence of professional players within the team, which negatively affected the level of sports performance in general, which implicitly leads to a decrease in the morale of the players within the team, from here crystallized the main problem, which was determined in the weak level of social cohesion sports within the members of the two teams, which calls for the need to design a guided guidance program that works to enhance the lack of cohesion within the team, creating an environment that returns positively in the form of relationships between players and their level of collective performance.

The current research aims at the following:

1. Building a psychological counseling program to develop sports cohesion for the players of Mosul Municipality and Al-Amwaj Sports Club.
2. Identify the level of sports cohesion of the players of the Mosul Municipality and Al-Amwaj Football Club.
3. The effectiveness of the counseling program on the development of sports cohesion among the players of the Mosul Municipality and Al-Amwaj Football Club.

METHOD

It is a set of research procedures to describe a particular topic depending on the collection of facts, "the researcher's use of a particular method depends exclusively on



JURNAL PENDIDIKAN KEPELATIHAN OLAHRAGA

PEJUANG

the nature of the topic that the researcher aims to, and according to the nature of our current study, the experimental approach is appropriate to the nature of the study.

The research community included the players of the Mosul Municipality Sports Club and the 44 players of Al-Amwaj Sports Club, while the research sample consisted of 24 players who were selected in a deliberate way, and the stability sample reached 10 players and the sample of the exploratory experience reached 8 players who were excluded from the main experience, with the exclusion of players for not adhering to the guidance sessions.

Sport cohesion scale

The researcher used the sport cohesion scale developed by (Imad Daoud Salloumi), where the scale consisted of 21 phrases offset by five alternatives to the answer (apply to it to a large degree, apply to it to a medium degree, apply to it to an acceptable degree, apply to it to a small degree, and do not apply to it) Take weight (5, 4, 3, 2, 1) As for the positive paragraphs, the correction process is reversed, and the highest degree of the scale is 105 and the lowest degree is 21, with an average hypothesis of 63, The higher the score, the higher it is an indication of cohesion (Salloumi, Imad Daoud, 2006).

Scale stability

The stability of the scale is an indicator of the possibility of that scale to determine the exact level of the attribute that is measured (Allam, Salah El-Din Mahmoud, 2000) and for the purpose of verifying the stability coefficient of the current tool, the researcher used more than one method that the process enhances the research procedures.

Half segmentation

The stability was conducted on 10 players outside the experiment sample, where the paragraphs of the scale of 21 phrases were divided into odd ones, even simple correlation coefficient was calculated Person between them the two parts, where the value of the correlation was 0.789 and this is still the internal consistency of half of the test and does not reflect the test as a whole, so the researcher used the Spearman-Brown equation for the scale in its full form, with a value of 0.831, and this value represents high stability.

Cronbach's alpha stability was performed on a sample of 10 players, and the value of the Cronbach alpha coefficient was 0.834, which is a high stability coefficient.

Adjust research variables

Research with an experimental approach is characterized by containing independent variables and dependent variables in addition to external variables that must be controlled and the factors affecting them so that the independent variable is the reason for the change.

1. Independent variable: Represented by the psychological counseling program.
2. Dependent variable: Sport coherence.
3. Extraneous variables: It means everything that affects the safety of the experiment, as the internal safety measures of the experiment were adjusted, which were determined by the researcher by the experiment and the accompanying factors, and the unification of measurement and maturity conditions, and the reward of research groups in addition to controlling attendance for sessions. External safety has also been adjusted in terms of space and time of the experiment and how to manage the guidance sessions.

Psychological counseling program

In order to be able to achieve the desired results of the current research, the researcher analyzed the content of many models of psychological counseling programs, research and sources, including (Salary 2001), (Allawi 2002), (Al-Zubaidi 2020), the following was done:

1. Identify needs: With this step, the researcher identified the basic needs of the players by following up the players in addition to conducting meetings with the administrative side to reach, the first step was taken in determining the titles of the sessions according to the need for them and their number, which is dedicated to filling the shortage of players in this area.
2. Setting priorities: The sessions were arranged according to their importance after presenting them to the experts.
3. Setting goals: General objectives: Providing members of the experimental group with psychological characteristics that help achieve sport cohesion Special goals: goals derived from the general goals, which are a set of procedures used to achieve the main goal of the program.
4. Activities to achieve the goals: The researcher adopted several activities as methods and techniques used in the sessions are (discussion, lecture, nutrition, reinforcement, feedback, modeling, homework, program evaluation) (Al-Dosari, Saleh Jassim, 1985)
5. Program Arbitration: The opinions of the experts included Appendix (2) and specialists in sports psychology to indicate their opinion on the titles and number of program sessions, and after reviewing the program, their agreement rate was 85%, and their observations were worked on so that the program consists of 12 sessions. With a time of 45 minutes for the session.

Table 1. Shows the titles of the sessions of the psychological counseling program and the percentages of the experts' agreement on them

No.	Session Titles	Experts No.	Session time	Agreed	
				No.	Percentage
1	Program Introduction	13	45 min.	13	100%
2	Building trust and respect			12	92 %
3	Effective Communication			13	100 %
4	Effective Leadership			12	92 %
5	Motivation and encouragement			10	77 %
6	Shared Goals			13	100 %
7	Diversity and inclusivity			9	70 %
8	Sportsmanship			10	77 %
9	Team spirit and emotional cohesion			13	100 %
10	Conclusion and program evaluation			13	100 %



JURNAL PENDIDIKAN KEPELATIHAN OLAHRAGA

PEJUANG

Program evaluation

which is the step in which the results achieved from the program are judged during the comparison between the results of the pre- and post-measurement of the two research groups and the extent of the benefit obtained after the application of the indicative program, that the evaluation of the indicative program must be in the light of the objectives of the program, where the results of the evaluation appear in the answer to the extent to which the objectives of the program are achieved (Tayeb, Mohamed Abdel Zaher, 1997)

Equivalence of the two research groups

This process is necessary as it gives reliability to the scientific procedures of the experiment, and the researcher must Equivalate the research groups with regard to the variables of his research and as shown in Table (2).

Table 2. Shows the equivalence between the two research groups in the measure of sport cohesion

Scale	Control		Experimental		Calculated (t) value	Sig. degree	Sig. type
	Mean	St.d	Mean	St.d			
Sport cohesion	52.50.00	08.20	53.83	06.29	0,31041667	0,45833333	Insig.

The value of the significance level of the sport cohesion scale was 0.660, which is greater than the approved significance value, which indicates that there are no significant differences between the two groups and this is an indicator of the parity of the two groups in the level of sport cohesion.

The exploratory experiment of the psychological counseling program

The exploratory experiment was conducted on 12/1/2025 on Sunday by applying two sessions of the program sessions to a sample of 8 players who were excluded from the final experience.

Experimental design

In the current research, equivalent groups with random selection were used in the pre- and post-measurements, with a commitment to the following:

1. Dividing the sample into two experimental and control groups.
2. Conducting a pre-measurement of the two groups in the measure of sport cohesion on Tuesday, 14/1/2025, implementing the program sessions on the experimental group.
3. The control group remains on the preparation method used by their trainer.
4. Dimensional measurement of the two groups at the end of the application of the program.

Application of the final experience

The program was implemented on the players in the experimental group and the following procedures:

1. Determining the number of sessions for the program by 10 sessions and two sessions per week.
2. The implementation shall be in the stadium of the Mosul Municipality Sports Club.

3. Setting the date of the first meeting, which falls on Saturday, 18/1/2025.
4. Determining the date of the closing session, which falls on Tuesday, 18/2/2025, and at the end of it, the dimensional measurement was conducted and the program was concluded.

Table 3. Shows the sequence, titles and date of the program sessions

Session sequence	Session title	Session date	Time	Week
First Session	Program Introduction	Saturday 18/1/2025	10 am.	First
Second Session	Building trust and respect	Tuesday 21/1/2025		
Third Session	Effective Communication	Saturday 25/1/2025		Second
Fourth Session	Effective Leadership	Tuesday 28/1/2025		
Fifth Session	Motivation and encouragement	Saturday 1/2/2025		Third
Sixth Session	Shared Goals	Tuesday 4/2/2025		
Seventh Session	Diversity and inclusivity	Saturday 8/2/2025		Fourth
Eighth Session	Sportsmanship	Tuesday 11/2/2025		
Ninth Session	Team spirit and emotional cohesion	Saturday 15/2/2025		Fifth
Tenth Session	Conclusion and program evaluation	Tuesday 18/2/2025		

Statistical Methods

The data were processed by the SPSS statistical bag and using a set of statistical methods: (t-test, person test, percentage, standard deviation, mean, Cronbach's alpha equation)

RESEARCH RESULT

First Objective: building a psychological counseling program to develop sports cohesion The goal has been achieved being a procedural goal through the researcher's adoption of a set of scientific procedures, which were listed in the third section.

Second Objective: Identify the level of sports cohesion of the players of the Mosul Municipality and Al-Amwaj Football Club.

Table 4. Shows the statistical values of sport cohesion for the members of the research sample and for the control and experimental groups in the pre-test and the value of (t) and the level of significance

Variables	Group	Mean	St.d	Hypothetical average	Calculated (t) value	Sig.
Sport cohesion	Control	52.50	8.20	63	4.432	0.001
	Experimental	53.83	6.29		5.046	0.000

Table (4) shows that the mean of the scores of the sport cohesion scale of the control group has reached 52.50 with a standard deviation of 8.20 and when compared with the hypothetical average of 63 indicates significant differences in favor of the hypothetical average, and the level of significance 0.001, which is a value smaller than the approved significance level 0.05, and this is an indication of a decrease in the level of sport cohesion of the control group.

The mean of the experimental group was 53.83 with a standard deviation of 6.29 and when compared with the hypothetical mean of 63 indicates significant differences in favor of the hypothetical mean, and with a significance level of 0.000, which is a value smaller than the approved significance level, and this is an indication of a decrease in the level of sport cohesion of the experimental group.

Third objective: the effectiveness of the guidance program on the development of sports cohesion among the players of the Mosul Municipality and Al-Amwaj Football Club. From this goal, the researcher has derived a number of hypotheses:

The first hypothesis: There are no significant differences between the pre- and post-measurements of the control group in sports cohesion.

Table 5. Shows the statistical values of sport cohesion for the members of the research sample and for the control and experimental groups in the pre-test and the value of (t) and the level of significance

Variables	Pre-test		Post-test		Calculated (t) value	Sig.
	Mean	St.d	Mean	St.d		
Sport cohesion	52.50	8.20	52.91	8.65	1.603	0.137

The mean of the pre-measurement of the degrees of the sport cohesion scale for the members of the control group was 52.50 and a standard deviation of 8.20, while the mean of the dimensional measurement was 52.91 and a standard deviation of 8.65 and when comparing the mean with the significance level of 0.137, which is greater than the approved significance level 0.05, it turned out that there were no significant differences, and this value is an indicator of the lack of development in the level of sport cohesion among the players in the control group as a result of staying on the preparation processes Intended for them . Second hypothesis: There are significant differences in the pre- and post-measurements of the experimental group in the sport cohesion.

Table 6. Shows the variables, media, standard deviations of the pre- and post-tests, the value of (t) and the level of significance for the experimental group.

Variables	Pre-test		Post-test		Calculated (t) value	Sig.
	Mean	St.d	Mean	St.d		
Sport cohesion	53.83	6.29	72.91	10.35	6.285	0.000

The mean of the pre-measurement of the degrees of the sport cohesion scale for the members of the experimental group was 53.83 and a standard deviation of 6.29, while the mean of the dimensional measurement was 72.91 and a standard deviation of 10.35 and when comparing the mean with the significance level of 0.000, which is smaller than the approved significance level 0.05, it turned out that there were significant differences, and this is an indication of a development in the level of sport cohesion among the players in this experimental group as a result of undergoing the psychological counseling program prepared by Researcher.

Third hypothesis: there are significant differences between the control group and the experimental measurement of dimensional measurement in sport cohesion.

Table 7. Shows the variables, means, standard deviations of the post-test, the value of (t) and the level of significance for the control and experimental group.

Variables	Control		Experimental		Calculated (t) value	Sig.
	Mean	St.d	Mean	St.d		
Sport cohesion	52.91	8.65	72.91	10.35	5.133	0.000

The mean of the dimensional measurement of the degrees of the sport cohesion scale for the members of the control group was 52.91 with a standard deviation of 8.65, while the mean of the dimensional measurement of the experimental group was 72.91 and a standard deviation of 10.35, while the calculated t-value was 5.133 with a significance level of 0.000 and being smaller than the approved significance level of 0.05, this value is an indication of significant differences in the level of sport cohesion between the two groups and in favor of the experimental group.

The researcher attributes the current result, which was referred to in Table (5, 6) to compare the differences between the pre- and post-measurements of both groups, and the results in Table (7) showed differences in dimensional measurements between the control and experimental groups, and the current result confirmed what the researcher stressed of the necessary and effective role of the psychological factor, especially for sport cohesion.

The current result supports what the researcher pointed out about the importance of psychological factors in improving the level of athletic cohesion among athletes, as sports cohesion is a decisive factor in enhancing collective performance and achieving the team's common goals. The results also reinforce the importance of designing psychological training programs targeting group cohesion as part of sports team development strategies, as teams with greater cohesion tend to have more appropriate assessments of their team's performance capabilities, which can translate



JURNAL PENDIDIKAN KEPELATIHAN OLAAHRAGA

PEJUANG

into greater success in the competition. Moreover, group success can increase feelings of collective competence of athletes, which can also contribute to the development of group cohesion. (Hughes et al., 2006).

Discussion

The results of this study show that psychological counseling programs have been proven to be effective in improving sports cohesion in football players. This can be seen from a significant increase in scores in the experimental group from an average of 53.83 (pre-test) to 72.91 (post-test) with a significance value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). These findings are in line with the research of Carron et al. (2002) which stated that structured psychological interventions can significantly improve team cohesion in the context of team sports. Research by Bloom et al. (2003) also supports this finding by showing that team building programs involving psychological aspects can improve task cohesion and social cohesion in sports teams. They found that the teams that followed the psychological intervention program showed significant improvements in the dimensions of unity of purpose and collective efficacy compared to the control group.

The findings of this study confirm the crucial role of psychological factors in developing team cohesion. This is supported by Carron's (1982) theory in the conceptual model of team cohesion which emphasizes that personal factors (including aspects of individual psychology) and environmental factors can affect the level of team cohesion. Research by Widmeyer et al. (1993) also showed that psychological interventions can affect team members' perceptions of togetherness and common goals. Brawley et al. (1987) in their research found that team cohesion does not only depend on technical and tactical factors, but is also strongly influenced by psychological factors such as communication, trust between team members, and commitment to common goals. This is in line with the results of this study which shows that psychological counseling programs can effectively improve these aspects.

This study confirms previous findings on the positive relationship between team cohesion and sports performance. Carron et al. (2002) in their meta-analysis found a consistent positive correlation between team cohesion and performance in team sports ($r = 0.655$). They concluded that teams with higher levels of cohesion tend to perform better in competitions. The research of Mullen & Copper (1994) also supports this finding by showing that team cohesion has a significant positive effect on team performance (effect size $d = 0.25$). They found that task cohesion had a stronger relationship with performance than social cohesion, indicating the importance of focusing on common goals in team cohesion development programs.

The results of this study also support the concept of collective efficacy proposed by Bandura (2000). Collective efficacy, which is the shared belief of team members in their ability to perform tasks necessary to achieve a specific goal, is an important component of team cohesion. Research by Short et al. (2005) showed that collective efficacy has a strong positive relationship with team cohesion ($r = 0.56$) and can be predicted through psychological intervention programs. Feltz & Lirgg (1998) in their study found that teams with high collective efficacy showed better levels of cohesion, more effective communication, and more consistent performance. This supports the approach used in this study, where the psychology counseling program is focused on developing collective confidence and team cohesion.



JURNAL PENDIDIKAN KEPELATIHAN OLAHRAGA

PEJUANG

Results showing no significant change in the control group (from 52.50 to 52.91 with $p = 0.137$) reinforce the internal validity of this study. These findings are in line with research by Martin et al. (2009) which showed that without specific interventions, the level of team cohesion tends to stabilize or even decline over time, especially in the intensive preparation phase of competitions. The research of Eys et al. (2013) also supports these findings by showing that team cohesion requires deliberate and structured efforts to be developed. They found that teams that did not receive specific interventions showed decreased cohesion along with the pressure of competition and intensive training.

The results of this study have important practical implications for the development of sports team training programs. These findings support Yukelson's (1997) recommendation on the importance of integrating psychological aspects in athlete development programs, especially in developing team chemistry and collective mental skills. Research by Dunn & Holt (2004) also emphasizes that team cohesion development programs must be designed systematically and sustainably to be able to have optimal impact. They found that programs involving psychological counseling techniques such as goal setting, effective communication, and problem solving can significantly improve team cohesion.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The players of the Mosul Municipality and the Waves Football Club suffer from a low level of sports cohesion.
2. The preparation processes that players receive do not contribute to psychological support.
3. The psychological counseling program has proven effective in developing a level of sports cohesion for players.
4. The superiority of the experimental group over the control group in the level of sport cohesion in the dimensional measurement.

Giving space to psychological preparation processes, as they are no less important than other preparation processes. Use the sport cohesion scale to measure the level of cohesion continuously of players. Using a psychological equipment to support the psychological preparation processes of the players. Developing new strategies that support a positive environment that gives players a sense of support, as it works to raise the level of their sports cohesion.

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JURNAL PENDIDIKAN KEPELATIHAN OLAHRAGA

PEJUANG

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JURNAL PENDIDIKAN KEPELATIHAN OLAH RAGA

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