

Strengthening the Mental Readiness of Petanque Athletes through Experiential Learning-Based Self-Talk Training at FIKK UNM

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Received: 30-12-2025; Revised: 14-01-2026; Accepted: 26-01-2026

Abstrak

Olahraga petanque merupakan cabang olahraga presisi yang menuntut konsentrasi tinggi, kestabilan emosi, dan kesiapan mental dalam menghadapi tekanan kompetitif. Mahasiswa-atlet Petanque Fakultas Ilmu Keolahragaan dan Kesehatan (FIKK) Universitas Negeri Makassar secara umum telah memiliki kemampuan teknik dan fisik yang memadai, namun aspek mental, khususnya keterampilan self-talk, belum mendapatkan pelatihan yang terstruktur. Kegiatan Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat ini bertujuan untuk memperkuat kesiapan mental atlet petanque melalui pelatihan keterampilan self-talk berbasis experiential learning. Metode pelaksanaan kegiatan menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif-partisipatif dengan melibatkan 28 mahasiswa-atlet Petanque FIKK UNM. Pelatihan dilaksanakan melalui tahapan sosialisasi, experiential game, dan refleksi terstruktur. Teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan secara kualitatif melalui observasi langsung dan refleksi peserta. Hasil kegiatan menunjukkan bahwa pelatihan self-talk berbasis experiential learning mampu meningkatkan kesadaran atlet terhadap dialog internal yang muncul selama aktivitas olahraga. Atlet mulai memahami peran self-talk dalam menjaga fokus, mengendalikan emosi, serta membangun komunikasi positif dalam tim. Pendekatan berbasis pengalaman membantu atlet mengaitkan konsep self-talk dengan situasi latihan dan pertandingan yang nyata. Kegiatan ini menunjukkan bahwa pelatihan self-talk dapat menjadi strategi pembinaan mental yang aplikatif dan relevan bagi mahasiswa-atlet, khususnya dalam olahraga presisi seperti petanque. Model pelatihan ini berpotensi dikembangkan dan direplikasi sebagai bagian dari pembinaan atlet yang holistik dan berkelanjutan di lingkungan perguruan tinggi.

Kata Kunci: self-talk; pelatihan mental; petanque; experiential learning; psikologi olahraga

Abstract

Petanque is a precision sport that requires high levels of concentration, emotional stability, and mental readiness to cope with competitive pressure. Student-athletes of Petanque at the Faculty of Sports Science and Health, Universitas Negeri Makassar, generally demonstrate adequate technical and physical abilities; however, mental skills training, particularly self-talk, has not been systematically integrated into their training programs. This community service activity aimed to strengthen athletes' mental readiness through self-talk training based on experiential learning. The program employed a descriptive-participatory approach involving 28 student-athletes of Petanque at FIKK UNM. The training was conducted through three main stages: socialization, experiential games, and structured reflection. Data were collected qualitatively through direct observation and participants' reflections. The results indicated that experiential learning-based self-talk training enhanced athletes' awareness of their internal dialogue during sport activities. Athletes began to recognize the role of self-talk in maintaining focus, regulating emotions, and fostering positive team communication. Experiential activities enabled athletes to meaningfully connect self-talk concepts with real training and competition situations. This community service program demonstrates that self-talk training can serve as an applicable and relevant mental coaching strategy for student-athletes, particularly in precision sports such as petanque. The training model has the potential to be further developed and replicated as part of a holistic and sustainable athlete development program in higher education settings.

Keywords: self-talk; mental training; petanque; experiential learning; sport psychology

INTRODUCTION

The sport of petanque is a sport that requires a combination of technical skills, quick decision-making, high concentration, and strong mental stability in each phase of the competition (Badaru et al., 2021; Rijal et al., 2025). The success of a petanque athlete in achieving optimal performance is not only determined by physical skills and basic techniques of the game, but also by the quality of emotional regulation and psychological readiness when facing competitive pressure (Benny Badaru et al., 2022). This is in line with the study of sports psychology which states that an athlete's mind that is effectively directed can influence behavior, focus, and performance in the context of competitive sports (Hatzigeorgiadis et al., 2011; Vealey. Robin S, 2007).

Petanque students of the Faculty of Sports and Health Sciences (FIKK) State University of Makassar are a group that actively participates in coaching programs and various sports competitions. Based on observations and the results of initial coordination with coaches and team coaches, petanque athletes in the FIKK UNM environment in general have shown adequate mastery of techniques and physical conditions. However, the mental aspects of the ability to manage internal dialogue, psychological distress, and emotional

stability have not received structured training attention (Suwardi et al., 2023). This imbalance between physical/technical training and mental training causes some athletes to show concentration fluctuations, difficulty controlling performance anxiety, and reduced decision-making effectiveness in competitive situations (Schampheleer & Roelands, 2024; Sun et al., 2021).

One of the mental skills that has proven important in the context of sports is self-talk, which is an internal dialogue that individuals must direct their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors in the face of the demands of a task (Osman et al., 2022). Self-talk can be technical or motivational instruction, each of which has a strategic function to help athletes improve focus, confidence, and emotional control while competing (Hatzigeorgiadis et al., 2011; Vealey. Robin S, 2007). Research on emotion regulation shows that there is a positive relationship between self-talk and emotion regulation ability in student-athletes, indicating that the use of positive self-talk correlates with better emotion regulation (Hamid et al., 2023). The findings support the premise that self-talk strategies are not just an internal cognitive phenomenon, but also a skill that can have an impact on athletes' psychological adaptation in the context of sports coaching.

Although self-talk has great potential in supporting athletes' mental readiness, in the practice of sports coaching in a college environment these skills often develop unstructured and have little place in training programs. This causes athletes to tend to use spontaneous and undirected self-talk, which sometimes reinforces negative responses such as self-doubt or excessive anxiety, which can reduce performance and consistency of the game. This phenomenon has been recorded in various research studies that state that self-talk that is not properly directed can have unfavorable effects in competitive situations (Alecu & Onea, 2025).

Responding to these needs, this Community Service activity is designed to implement experiential learning-based mental skills training for FIKK UNM petanque students-athletes. The experiential learning approach was chosen because it emphasizes learning through hands-on experience, reflection on the experience, and a deep understanding of the dynamics of thoughts and emotions that arise during game activities. Through socialization, experiential games, and structured reflection sessions, athletes not only understand the concept of self-talk theoretically but also experience it in a context that mimics the real situation of a match. This training model is expected to strengthen the mental readiness of athletes holistically and applicatively to support more stable sports performance, as well as become a mental coaching practice that can be replicated in the campus sports environment and similar communities.

METHOD OF IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTIVITIES

This Community Service activity is carried out using a descriptive-participatory approach, which emphasizes the active involvement of participants in the entire series of training activities. This approach was chosen because the main purpose of the activity was not to test the effectiveness of the

intervention experimentally, but to provide mental skills that are applicable and relevant to the needs of athletes in the context of sports coaching (Badwi et al., 2025; Rerung et al., 2025). The service model used is oriented towards capacity building, especially on the aspect of mental readiness of petanque athletes through direct experience-based self-talk training.

Design and Approach to Activities

The design of this service activity refers to the principle of experiential learning, which is learning that takes place through direct experience, reflection, and interpretation of the experience. The experiential learning approach is considered appropriate for mental skills training because it allows participants to experience firsthand the psychological dynamics that arise in situations that resemble match conditions. In the context of sports, experiential learning has been shown to be effective in improving athletes' self-awareness, emotion regulation, and reflective abilities (Kolb, 1984; Vealey, Robin S, 2007).

Self-talk training in this activity is not delivered in the form of one-way lectures alone but is packaged in interactive activities in the form of group games and simulations of competitive situations. Through this approach, athletes are expected to be able to identify internal dialogues that arise during activities, understand their impact on focus and emotions, and learn to direct self-talk in a more adaptive and constructive direction. This approach is in line with the view that mental skills will be easier to understand and apply when athletes are actively involved in the learning process (Hatzigeorgiadis et al., 2011).

Subject and Location of the Activity

The subjects in this service activity were 28 Petanque student-athletes of the Faculty of Sports and Health Sciences, State University of Makassar. All participants are active athletes who are members of the coaching program and routinely participate in training activities and petanque competitions. The selection of student-athletes as targets is based on the consideration that this group is at an important phase in the development of sports performance, where academic and competitive demands often give rise to high psychological pressure.

The training activities were carried out at the FIKK UNM Petanque Field, which is the main training location for athletes. The selection of this location aims to create a contextual and familiar atmosphere for participants, so that the learning process can take place naturally and relevant to the training and match situations they usually face. An authentic training environment also makes it easy for athletes to relate the training experience to real conditions on the field.

Stages of Implementation of Activities

The implementation of this service activity is carried out through several stages that are mutually sustainable, namely socialization, experiential game implementation, and reflection.

The first stage is socialization, which aims to provide participants with an initial understanding of the importance of mental skills in sports, specifically the role of self-talk in managing thoughts and emotions. At this stage, the facilitator

delivers an introduction to the concept of self-talk, the types of self-talk (motivational and instructional), and its relationship to the athlete's focus, confidence, and emotional regulation. Socialization was carried out interactively by involving a brief discussion about athletes' experiences in dealing with the pressure of training and matches.

The second stage is the implementation of experiential games, which is the core of the training activities. In this stage, athletes engage in group games designed to bring out psychological pressure, the need for concentration, as well as the dynamics of communication between team members. The game is played in a controlled competitive atmosphere, so athletes can experience firsthand how internal dialogue arises and affects performance. During the activity, the facilitator observed the athlete's emotional response, focus, and communication patterns, without providing a quantitative assessment.

The third stage is reflection and meaning, which is carried out after the game activity is completed. At this stage, athletes are invited to reflect on their experiences, identify self-talk that arises, and discuss their impact on emotions and performance. Reflection is done openly and guided by a lighter-in-depth question, so that athletes can draw meaning from the experience and relate it to the actual training and match situation. This reflection stage is an important part of experiential learning because it helps participants internalize the learning gained (Kolb, 1984).

Data Collection Techniques

The data collection technique in this service activity is carried out qualitatively, through direct observation and reflection of participants. Observations were carried out by the service team during the activity to record athletes' responses, group dynamics, and behavior patterns that appeared in training activities. Participant reflections were obtained through group discussions and verbal statements of athletes after participating in activities. The qualitative approach was chosen because the purpose of the activity was to describe the process and experience of participants in depth, not to measure change statistically.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data from observation and reflection were analyzed in a descriptive-thematic manner, by grouping findings based on the main themes that emerged, such as attention focus, emotional control, and positive communication. This analysis aims to illustrate how experiential learning-based self-talk training affects the psychological awareness of athletes during activities. The results of the analysis were then used as a basis for the discussion to relate the field findings to the concept and theory of self-talk in sports psychology.

IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSIONS

Implementation of Self-Talk Training Activities

The implementation of this Community Service activity is carried out through a series of activities that are designed in a participatory and contextual manner, adjusting to the characteristics of the sport of petanque and the needs

of FIKK UNM students-athletes. The activity began with a socialization session that aimed to build an initial understanding of the importance of psychological aspects in sports, especially mental self-talk skills. At this stage, the facilitator conveys the basic concepts of self-talk, the types of self-talk (motivational and instructional), and its role in helping athletes manage focus, emotions, and competitive pressure. Socialization is carried out in a dialogical manner so that athletes can relate the material to personal experiences that have been experienced in training and matches.

The next stage is the experiential implementation of the game, which is the core of the learning process. Games are designed to create competitive situations that demand concentration, composure, and the ability to manage distractions. In the context of petanque, game activities put athletes in conditions that resemble the pressure of the game, including verbal disturbances and the dynamics of competition between groups. Through these activities, athletes directly experience how internal dialogue arises and affects the quality of focus and execution of techniques. This approach is in line with the principle of experiential learning which emphasizes that learning will be more meaningful when participants experience situations that are relevant to the context of performance (Kolb, 1984).

After the game activity is over, the activity continues with a structured reflection session. At this stage, athletes are invited to express their experiences, feelings, and thoughts that arise during the game. Reflection is facilitated with triggering questions that encourage athletes to recognize emerging self-talk, both positive and negative, as well as their impact on emotions and performance. This reflection process aims to help athletes build self-awareness of the mindset that has often appeared automatically but is rarely explicitly realized.

Results of Participant's Observations and Reflections

Based on the results of observations during the activities and the reflections of the participants, several main themes were found that described the psychological response of athletes to experiential learning-based self-talk training. The first theme is to focus attention on oneself and the task, not on opponents or external distractions. At the beginning of the game, some athletes seem to be easily distracted by the opponent's words or the surrounding situation, so that the concentration on boules and the target of the throw becomes disturbed. However, through reflection, athletes realize that excessive focus on external factors often triggers the appearance of negative self-talk and lowers the quality of performance. This awareness encourages athletes to start internalizing instructional self-talk such as "focus on my throw" or "pay attention to the target", which serves to direct attention back to the main task.

The second theme that emerged was emotional control and calmness in stressful situations. Observations show that in competitive conditions, some athletes tend to rush or show signs of tension when faced with mistakes or score pressure. Through reflection sessions, athletes relate the experience to real-life match situations, where impatience and anxiety often lead to follow-up

mistakes. Athletes then realize that positive self-talk can be used as a tool for emotion regulation, for example with the phrase "calm down, one throw at a time" or "stay in rhythm". These findings are in line with research showing that self-talk plays an important role in helping athletes stabilize emotional responses under competitive pressure (Hatzigeorgiadis et al., 2011).

The third theme is related to positive communication and team dynamics. In group games, athletes are instructed to use positive language in communication. However, in practice, some athletes still spontaneously make negative statements when under pressure. Through reflection, athletes and coaches realize that negative communication not only affects individuals but also impacts the overall psychological atmosphere of the team. This awareness reinforces the understanding that self-talk is not only individual but can also develop in the form of collective communication that supports a positive psychological climate within the team.

Discussion

The findings of this activity show that experiential learning-based self-talk training can increase athletes' psychological awareness of the role of internal dialogue in sports performance. This is in line with the framework of self-talk theory which states that internal dialogue functions as a cognitive mechanism to direct attention, regulate emotions, and influence behavior (Hardy, 2006). When athletes can consciously recognize and direct self-talk, they have a greater chance of maintaining focus and emotional stability in competitive situations.

Other studies have shown a positive relationship between self-talk and emotion regulation in student-athletes, indicating that the use of adaptive self-talk is related to the ability to manage emotions more effectively. The findings in this service activity corroborate these results, where athletes who began to realize and direct positive self-talk showed more controlled emotional responses during game activities. Thus, self-talk training not only serves as a motivational technique, but also as a relevant emotion regulation strategy in the context of coaching student athletes.

In addition, the use of an experiential learning approach strengthens the effectiveness of self-talk training because it provides a meaningful hands-on experience for athletes. Through these experiences, athletes not only understand concepts cognitively, but also relate them to real sensations, emotions, and performance dynamics. This approach supports the view that mental skills training is more effective when integrated into activities that resemble actual competition conditions, thus facilitating the transfer of learning to real match situations.



Figure 1. Group photo with FIKK UNM Petanque Athletes

CONCLUSION

Community Service activities in the form of experiential learning-based mental self-talk skills training for Petanque students-athletes of the Faculty of Sports and Health Sciences, State University of Makassar have been carried out well and in accordance with the planned goals. This training is designed as an effort to strengthen the mental readiness of athletes through an applicative and contextual approach, by emphasizing learning based on direct experience, reflection, and meaning of psychological dynamics that arise during sports activities.

Based on the results of the participants' observations and reflections, this activity has a positive impact on increasing athletes' awareness of the role of internal dialogue in managing focus, emotions, and competitive pressure. Athletes begin to be able to recognize negative self-talk patterns that previously appeared automatically, as well as understand the importance of directing self-talk to a more positive and instructional form. This awareness contributes to better emotional control, increased calmness in stressful situations, and improved quality of positive communication in the context of teamwork.

The experiential learning approach has proven to be effective in helping athletes internalize the concept of self-talk, as it provides a real experience that resembles the conditions of the match. Through direct experience and structured reflection, athletes not only understand the concept of self-talk theoretically but are also able to relate it to the training and competition situations they face. These findings reinforce the view that mental skills training will be more meaningful when integrated into activities relevant to the context of sports performance.

Overall, this service activity shows that experiential learning-based self-talk training can be an effective alternative to mental coaching strategies for student-athletes, especially in precision sports such as petanque. The training model applied in this activity has the potential to be developed and replicated in

other sports in the college environment, as part of a more holistic and sustainable athlete development effort.

THANKS

The author expressed his gratitude to the Faculty of Sports and Health Sciences, State University of Makassar for the support and facilitation provided so that this Community Service activity could be carried out properly. Gratitude was also expressed to the coaches and students of Petanque FIKK UNM who have participated actively and cooperatively during the entire series of training activities. In addition, the author appreciates the support from various parties who have helped the smooth implementation of the activity, both technically and administratively. The contribution and involvement of all parties is very meaningful in supporting the achievement of the goals of service activities, especially in efforts to strengthen the mental readiness of athletes through experiential learning-based mental self-talk skills training.

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