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Emotion regulation and sport confidence among student athletes: The moderating role of gender

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ABSTRACT

Background: Academic pressure and competitive demands can cause psychological stress in student-athletes who are still in the stage of social-emotional development. This condition can affect their ability to regulate emotions and maintain sport confidence during competition. However, empirical evidence examining gender as a moderating factor in the relationship between emotion regulation and sport confidence among student-athletes remains limited. **Objectives:** The research goal is to examine the effect of emotion regulation on sport confidence, moderated by gender role among student athletes. **Methods:** A cross-sectional quantitative design was employed involving 113 student athletes. Data analysis used the Moderation Regression Analysis (MRA) technique with gender as a moderating variable. Emotion regulation was measured using instruments from ERQ–Short Form and sport confidence from TRSCI. **Results:** The results indicated that emotion regulation ability is a significant predictor of sport confidence ($p < 0.001$); the better student athletes can regulate their emotions, the higher their level of sport confidence. Additionally, gender was found to significantly moderate this relationship ($p = 0.028$). The combined effects of emotion regulation and gender can explain 20.2% of the variation in sports confidence ($R^2 = 0.202$). **Conclusion:** This study concludes that emotional regulation ability is an important factor in sport confidence among student athletes, with differing effects based on gender. These findings have practical implications for sports mental coaches in designing gender-based emotional regulation training to improve student-athlete sport confidence, such as mindfulness training, and open opportunities for further research with a longitudinal approach and other psychological variables.

Keywords: Emotion regulation; gender, sport confidence; student athletes

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INTRODUCTION

Student athletes are at a stage of social emotional development that is still evolving and directly influences patterns of emotional regulation stability (Kim & Tamminen, 2022). At this stage, athletes not only face the demands of adapting to their psychological development but also have to play a dual role as both athletes and students. This condition puts student athletes in a vulnerable position to experience psychological pressure, which arises from academic demands as well as the demands to achieve optimal athletic performance (Steele et al., 2020).

Student-athletes have many responsibilities that can lead to various pressures, such as competitive training demands, academic workload, and expectations from coaches or parents (Anggara & Laksmiwati, 2022; Sopacua & Novanto, 2023). The diverse demands faced can explain why student-athletes tend to experience higher levels of depression and anxiety compared to non-athlete students (Tamminen et al., 2025). The factual data from the study revealed that nearly 40% of student athletes experienced difficulties managing their emotions during competitions, which negatively impacted their sport confidence and increased the risk of psychological stress (Tamminen et al., 2016). Emotion regulation is one of the psychological factors that student athletes need to possess in order to maintain stable and adaptive sport confidence when competing.

Sport confidence in sports is one of the important psychological aspects that plays a role in supporting optimal athletic performance. Sport confidence serves as a link toward an athlete's optimal performance, which is the athlete's belief in their abilities when exercising or competing (Lochbaum et al., 2022). Student athletes who are still in the training phase sometimes doubt their own abilities when competing against much more experienced athletes, especially if they already feel burdened with having to win before the match even begins. Many factors can maintain student athletes' sport confidence, such as recent competition experience, mental and physical readiness, self-regulation ability, and social support from their surroundings (Thomas et al., 2021; Greenlees et al., 2021). Therefore, the factors that can build sport confidence in student athletes not only come from physical and technical abilities but also from mental and psychological factors, including emotion regulation.

The individual process of evaluating and making changes to emotional reactions with the goal of improving performance and building psychological balance is called emotional regulation (McRae & Gross, 2020). According to Gross (2015) process model of emotion regulation theory, there are 2 ways to regulate emotions, antecedent-focused strategies, which include cognitive reappraisal, and response-focused strategies, which include emotional suppression. In the field of sports, especially for athletes, skills in managing negative emotions such as anxiety, frustration, and social pressure are needed to maintain sport confidence during competition.

This is also supported by Wei et al. (2025), who found that athletes who can manage their emotions have high levels of sport confidence and are more stable. In line with this finding, emotional regulation plays a role in the process of increasing athletes' sport confidence and performance. In reframing stressors into positive emotions, cognitive reappraisal is considered a more adaptive scheme compared to expressive suppression (Khan et al., 2021; Shu et al., 2022). However, there are studies that have found that the effectiveness of these emotion regulation approaches can vary depending on the type of sport and the level of competition.

One of the factors that contributes to influencing emotional regulation and sport confidence is gender. Universal research has found a significant difference between male and female athletes in controlling emotions, which impacts performance and sport confidence (Mladenović et al., 2021; Millán-Sánchez et al., 2023). Based on these differences, the study conducted by Gomez-Baya et al. (2017) revealed that gender differences contribute to influencing self-perception and sports on the ability to regulate emotions. On the other hand, a study by Octavianingrum & Savira (2022) identified that in the face of competitive pressure, the level of sport confidence in female athletes is considered more dynamic compared to male athletes. This statement raises doubts in the context of the influence of emotion regulation on sport confidence in student athletes, where gender may play a role in strengthening or weakening the influence of emotion regulation.

Although previous studies have examined the relationship between emotional regulation and sport confidence in athletes, most have focused on adult or professional athletes. Research focusing on student athletes is still limited, even though they are undergoing a significant period of development that affects their psychological resilience as they juggle the dual roles of student and athlete (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019; Doorley et al., 2022). In addition, research using gender as a moderating variable in psychological relationships among student athletes has not been widely conducted, with most studies only examining the direct relationship between psychological variables (Kim et al., 2025; Kumari & Chauhan, 2025). In fact, several studies show that men and women use different emotional regulation strategies, which affects their psychological responses when competing in sports (Nogueira et al., 2025). Previous studies have tended to focus on a single sport, making it difficult to generalise the findings to athletes from different sports (Aliberti

et al., 2025; Destian et al., 2025). Therefore, research is needed that specifically examines student athletes across different sports, considering the role of gender as a moderating factor.

Based on that description, by examining how emotion regulation affects student-athletes' sport confidence, this study aims to fill the gap, viewed from a gender perspective. The hypotheses to be discussed are: (1) Does emotion regulation influence sport confidence?, and (2) Does gender moderate the relationship between emotion regulation and sport confidence?. The research findings are intended to be useful both theoretically and practically within the field of sports psychology for sports mental coaches and educational institutions in designing interventions that can support the development of adaptive emotion regulation based on gender, thereby optimally supporting the sports confidence of student athletes, which is needed in sports competitions.

METHOD

Design

This study employed a cross-sectional quantitative research design to examine the relationship between emotion regulation and sport confidence, with gender tested as a moderating variable. Non-experimental quantitative research methods are used to describe and determine the presence of an influence or correlation between research variables (Jannah, 2018). The non-experimental quantitative approach was chosen because it aligns with the research objectives of examining the influence of emotion regulation on sport confidence among student athletes, moderated by gender.

Participants

A total of 113 student athletes from a sports-specialised high school participated in this study. Participants were selected using a total sampling approach because the population of eligible student athletes was relatively small and shared similar characteristics. All participants had at least six months of competitive experience and met the inclusion criteria established for the study. Demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in **Table 1**.

Table 1. The Demographic Data Participants

Aspect	Characteristic	N = 113	%
Gender	Male	71	63
	Female	42	37
Age	14 years old	2	2
	15 years old	30	27
	16 years old	52	46
	17 years old	24	21
	18 years old	5	4
Types of Sport	Anggar	6	5.31
	Atletic	9	7.96
	Diving	3	2.65
	Gulat	16	14.16
	Judo	6	5.31
	Karate	13	11.50
	Pencak Silat	8	7.08
	Roller Skating	4	3.54
	Swimming	5	4.42
	Table Tennis	5	4.42
	Taekwondo	5	4.42
	Takraw	20	17.70
	Volly	13	11.50
Highest Competitive Experience	Regency	13	11.50
	Province	36	31.86
	National	53	46.90
	International	11	9.73

As can be seen in **Table 1**, the study participants consisted of 71 males and 42 females. Then, the majority of student athletes were 16 years old (n = 52), followed by 15-year-olds (n = 30) and 17-year-olds (n = 24). Additionally, there are 5 student-athletes who are 18 years old and 14 years old with only 2 students. Looking at the types of sports, the majority of student athletes come from the sport of Takraw, with 20 athletes (17.70%). This is followed by wrestling with 16 student athletes (14.16%) and karate and volleyball, both with 13 student athletes (11.50%). Additionally, some of them are spread across various sports such as fencing, athletics, judo, swimming, diving, and others. Overall, most student athletes have had extensive competitive experience. The majority of participants had competed at the national level, totalling 53 (46.90%). This was followed by experience competing at the provincial level, with 36 (31.86%) participants, the district level with 13 (11.50%) participants, and the international level with 11 student athletes (9.73%).

Instruments

The instruments used are emotion regulation and sport confidence variables. The emotion regulation scale was measured using the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire–Short Form (ERQ-S) developed by Preece et al. (2023), which is a short version of the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) by (Gross & John, 2003). The ERQ-S measurement tool has 6 statement items with two dimensions: reappraisal and suppression. Validity and reliability tests were also conducted to prove the credibility of the measurement tool. Item validity was assessed using item-total correlation analysis, with the coefficient values for all items ranging from 0.51 to 0.77 and all significance values $p < 0.05$. The reliability value of the ERQ-S reached 0.775, which is better than 0.70 and can be categorised as reliable (Kılıç, 2016). Strongly disagree to strongly agree is the 1-7 Likert scale range used in the ERQ original instrument. The following is **Table 2** presenting the categorisation of score ranges on the ERQ-S scale, divided into 3 sections, low, moderate, and high:

Table 2. Categories of ERQ-S

Category Emotion Regulation	Value Range
Low	7-18
Moderate	19-30
High	31 and above

Then, sport confidence was measured using the Trait Robustness of Self-Confidence Inventory (TRSCI) by Beattie et al. (2010), which was adapted from Vealey's Trait Sport Confidence Inventory (TSCI) theory. The TRSCI instrument has 8 statement items regarding an athlete's self-confidence in sports. The construct validity was obtained using the Pearson product-moment correlation, with the coefficient values for all items ranging from 0.41 to 0.69 and a p-value < 0.05. Similarly, the reliability value reached 0.735, which is better than 0.70 and can be categorised as reliable (Kılıç, 2016). Strongly disagree to strongly agree is the 1-9 Likert scale range used in TRSCI original instrument. **Table 3** presents the categorization of score ranges on the Sport Confidence scale, divided into three levels: low, moderate, and high.

Table 3. Categories of Sport Confidence

Category Sport Confidence	Value Range
Low	8-28
Moderate	29-49
High	50 and above

Procedures

The research procedure begins with developing the research design, determining the variables, and constructing the research instruments to be used. After the instrument was established, the researcher requested permission to collect data from one of the special sports high schools for athletes and ensured that all research procedures were conducted in accordance with the principles of ethical research in psychology. Considering the research participants are student athletes under 18 years old, to protect the participants, before completing the questionnaire, they received an explanation of the research, the voluntary nature of participation, and

confidentiality guarantees. Informed consent was obtained to confirm the research subject's right to refuse or discontinue participation at any time without consequence. This procedure is implemented to ensure the rights, well-being, and psychological safety of research subjects are maintained throughout data collection. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the institutional research ethics committee (Approval ID: 11.08.13/UN32.14.2.8/LT/2025). Data was collected through a Google Forms questionnaire that each participant was required to complete. Participants were instructed to answer each question according to their current condition. Then the collected data will be checked for completeness, and data processing will be carried out with the help of JASP 0.95.2.0 software.

Data Analysis

Data analysis begins with a normality test to determine whether the statistical test is parametric or non-parametric. Normality testing uses the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test to check if the data is normally distributed. The results show that both variables, emotional regulation and sport confidence, have a P-value > 0.05, which means the data are normally distributed and validated as an assumption for parametric analysis. Multicollinearity diagnostics were conducted using variance inflation factor (VIF) values, with VIF values < 10 for the predictor variables, meaning that there were no multicollinearity issues in the regression model. Then, the main data analysis used Moderation Regression Analysis (MRA) to test the correlation of emotion regulation and sport confidence, considering gender as a moderating variable. To be processed in a regression model, the gender variable was converted into numerical form, where 0 = male student athletes and 1 = female student athletes. The MRA technique was chosen because this test is able to show whether gender strengthens the correlation of emotion regulation and sport confidence among student athletes. The direction of moderation is determined by whether the interaction coefficient is positive or negative, which indicates the difference in the strength of the relationship between emotion regulation and sport confidence in male and female student athletes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The data analysis results aim to answer the research hypotheses by conducting data analysis in stages to describe the research variable profiles, the relationships between variables, and hypothesis testing.

Table 4. Categories of Emotion Regulation Levels of Athlete Students

Category	Total	%	Male	%	Female	%
Low	2	2%	0	0%	2	5%
Moderate	40	35%	29	41%	11	26%
High	71	63%	42	59%	29	69%
Total	113	100%	71	100%	42	100%

Table 4 presents the categories of emotional regulation in student athletes, the majority of whom are at a high level, totalling 71 with a percentage of 63%. When viewed by gender, both males and females are also predominantly at the high emotional regulation category level, with n = 42 (59%) for males and n = 29 (69%) for females. This is followed by the moderate category, totalling 40, with n = 29 (41%) for males and n = 11 (26%) for females. Additionally, there were only 2 female student athletes at the low regulation category level, representing 5%.

Table 5. Categories of Sport Confidence Levels of Athlete Students

Category	Total	%	Male	%	Female	%
Low	3	3%	2	3%	1	2%
Moderate	63	56%	42	59%	21	50%
High	47	41%	27	38%	20	48%
Total	113	100%	71	100%	42	100%

Meanwhile, in **Table 5**, the sport confidence category for student athletes is predominantly at the moderate level, with 63 athletes representing 56%. Similarly, when viewed by gender, both male and female athletes are also predominantly in the moderate sport confidence category, with n = 42 (59%) for males and n = 21 (50%) for females. This is followed by the 'High' category, with 47 athletes: n = 27 (38%) for males and n = 20 (48%) for females. Additionally, there are only 2 male student athletes and 1 female student athlete in the low sport confidence category.

Table 6. Descriptive Statistic

	N	Mean	SD	Range	Minimum	Maximum
Emotional Regulation	113	32.09	6.092	29	13	42
Sport Confidence	113	48.64	10.687	48	24	72

The statistical analysis of the research variables is explained in **Table 6**. For the emotional regulation variable, the average value of the data appears to be (32.09), and the standard deviation is (6.092), indicating that the variation in emotional regulation levels is quite moderate among student athletes. The minimum value is (13) and the maximum value is (42), indicating a fairly wide range of student-athletes' ability to regulate their emotions, from low to high levels. Then, for the sport confidence variable, the average value is 48.64 with a standard deviation of 10.687, indicating a relatively high data spread. The minimum value of the data is 24 and the maximum value is 72, show that the level of sport confidence among student-athletes also varies.

Table 7. Anova Test

	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
M_1	Regression	2.58	3	860.11	9.181	< .001
	Residual	10.212	109	93.69		
	Total	12.792	112			

Table 7 presents the results of the Anova Test to examine whether emotional regulation and gender can simultaneously predict sport confidence in student athletes. The F-value is 9.181 ($p < 0.001$), demonstrating the significance of the regression model. That is to say, emotional regulation is able to predict sport confidence in student athletes, moderated by gender, simultaneously.

Table 8. Model Summary

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	RMSE
M_0	0.000	0.000	0.000	10.687
M_1	0.449	0.202	0.180	9.679

Then, based on **Table 8**, the regression model shows a coefficient of determination value of $R^2 = 0.202$, which means that emotion regulation and gender simultaneously can predict 20.2% of the variation in sport confidence. This regression model indicates that there are 79.8% of other factors outside the model that play a greater role in sports confidence. Next, a moderation regression analysis was conducted to determine whether gender moderates the correlation between emotion regulation and sport confidence.

Table 9. Moderation Regression Analysis

	Model	Coefficient (B)	Standard Error	Beta (β)	t	p
M_0	(Intercept)	48.637	1.005		48.378	< .001
M_1	(Intercept)	16.874	6.354		2.656	.009
	Total Emotional Regulation	0.960	0.195	0.548	4.931	< .001
	Gender	24.425	9.989	1.109	2.445	.016
	Emotion Regulation ✻ Gender	-0.682	0.306	-1.024	-2.231	.028

Table 9 presents the results of the Moderated Regression Analysis, indicating that gender significantly moderates the relationship between emotion regulation and sport confidence (B = −0.682, p = 0.028), as the p-value is below the conventional significance threshold ($p < 0.05$). The coded gender, where 0 = male and 1

= female, calculation of the conditional effect shows the coefficient of the influence of emotion regulation on sport confidence in female student athletes is 0.278 (0.960-0.682), which is smaller than the coefficient in male student athletes, which is 0.960. This indicates that the influence of emotion regulation on sport confidence is stronger in male student athletes compared to female student athletes. In male athletes, an improvement in emotion regulation skills is followed by a more significant increase in sport confidence. Meanwhile, in female athletes, emotion regulation still contributes to sport confidence, but with a relatively lower level of influence.

Discussion

The findings of this study show that emotion regulation is a significant predictor of sport confidence in student athletes. The relationship between emotion regulation and sport confidence is significantly moderated by gender, with the influence of emotion regulation on sport confidence being stronger in male student athletes than in female student athletes. This study reveals new and important findings about the significance of considering gender-based psychological and social factors in shaping and developing sport confidence in student athletes who are still in the training phase.

Emotion regulation is an important psychological aspect in the formation of student-athlete sport confidence. Student athletes who can manage their emotions adaptively, particularly through cognitive reappraisal strategies, tend to exhibit better sport confidence stability, even in stressful competitive situations (Amaro & Brandão, 2023; Morais et al., 2023; Sammy et al., 2017; Robazza et al., 2023). For example, in the sport of archery, which requires focus and calculation, cognitive reappraisal is essential. As demonstrated in the study by Wang et al. (2022), this study showed that cognitive reappraisal indirectly determines the performance of student athletes by directing attention and boosting sport confidence. This research also contributed to supporting these findings by highlighting that the ability of student athletes to regulate their emotions well can serve as a foundation for mental stability and sport confidence during competition.

The main contribution of this research is that gender as a moderator variable significantly influences the relationship between emotion regulation and student-athlete sport confidence. The analysis results show that the relationship is stronger in male athletes than in female athletes. In male athletes, emotion regulation tends to be associated with self-control and situational mastery, while in female athletes, it focuses more on social acceptance and emotional attachment (Turgeon et al., 2024). This aligns with the research by Millán-Sánchez et al. (2023), which shows that social and emotional differences between male and female athletes influence how they manage pressure and build confidence during competition. Male athletes tend to use more active emotion-focused coping strategies, while female athletes more frequently employ avoidance coping strategies. These patterns can explain why the influence of emotion regulation on sport-confidence appears weaker in female athletes.

However, the results of this study differed from the findings of Wei et al. (2025), which explained the absence of significant moderation by gender on the correlation of emotion regulation and self-efficacy in individual sports. These differences can occur due to differences in sample characteristics and the type of sport. This study involved various sports, both team and individual, allowing for different social interactions and emotional dynamics between male and female athletes. Female athletes in more gender-typed sports experience different psychological challenges, which also affects their varying levels of sport confidence (Morano et al., 2020). Then, the way male and female athletes regulate their emotions can differ during competition due to cultural factors that also influence them, as explained by (Mladenović et al., 2021).

The majority of student athletes in this study have experience competing at the national level and have high emotional regulation skills. This indicates that competition experience contributes to improving student athletes' ability to regulate their emotions. The higher the level of competition an athlete participates in, the more skilled the student athlete becomes at managing emotions, both before and during the match (Millán-Sánchez et al., 2023). Athletes with high levels of competitive experience demonstrate better performance stability and are more flexible in choosing emotion regulation strategies according to situational demands, leading to greater confidence (Boas et al., 2024; Lulu et al., 2025).

Although emotion regulation contributes to the improvement of student-athletes' sport confidence, its contribution is still limited. This situation indicates that emotional regulation is not the sole predictor of sport confidence. As shown in the simultaneous model table, it can only predict 20.2% of sport confidence in sports. This implies that there are still 79.8% of other factors that have a greater influence on sports self-confidence and require further investigation. Factors such as social support from coaches and teammates or the training environment, resilience, and locus of control can further strengthen the correlation between emotional regulation and self-confidence in sports (Oguntuase & Sun, 2022; Ruiz et al., 2019).

The results of this study contribute theoretically by strengthening the understanding of the relationship between emotion regulation and sport confidence in student athletes. This study expands the application of emotion regulation theory in the context of physical education, which has been more extensively studied in professional athletes. Practically, the research results indicate that developing emotional regulation skills can be an effective coaching strategy to boost athletes' sport confidence and performance at the student level.

As a suggestion, coaches could implement an affective coaching approach that emphasises empathy, open communication, and providing emotional support, particularly for female student athletes. This coaching style can increase sport confidence and intrinsic motivation. On the other hand, for male student athletes, a coaching style focused on strengthening self-control, developing cognitive strategies, and providing goal-orientated feedback is needed (Mugford & Cremades, 2018). Furthermore, collaboration is needed between coaches, sports psychologists, and physical education teachers in implementing life skill-based regulation training programmes, such as mindfulness training, and cognitive reappraisal combined with self-talk, which consistently plays a significant role in reducing anxiety, regulating emotions, and increasing sport confidence (Stapleton, 2019).

This study has limitations that must be acknowledged for subsequent research. First, the research design used is cross-sectional, so it only describes the relationship between variables at a certain point in time. Second, research data that only comes from self-report questionnaires can cause response bias from respondents. Third, this research has not yet distinguished between individual and team sports, even though these two types of sports should have different emotional and social dynamics, which need further exploration. Additionally, the incomplete gender distribution and relatively limited sample size restrict the generalisability of the results to a broader population of student athletes. Therefore, future research is suggested to involve a more diverse sample using a longitudinal or experimental design and further compare different types of sports to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the role of gender moderation in emotional regulation and sport confidence.

CONCLUSION

This study extends sport psychology literature by demonstrating the moderating role of gender in the emotion regulation and sport confidence relationship among student-athletes. This study concludes that emotion regulation significantly influences sport confidence among student athletes, with gender as a moderating variable. Male student athletes showed a stronger relationship between emotional regulation ability and sports confidence level compared to female student athletes. This means that improved emotional regulation has a greater impact on sports confidence in male athletes. This difference can be influenced by social and emotional factors, coping strategies, and different psychological conditions between male and female athletes. Practically, this study shows that developing emotional regulation skills needs to be an important part of student-athlete training programmes, with an approach that considers gender differences. It is recommended that coaches or sports psychologists implement training strategies that emphasise strengthening self-control, empathetic communication, and emotional support tailored to the characteristics of each athlete. The limitations of this study lie in the lack of differentiation between types of sports, both team and individual, and the limited sample size. Therefore, future research is suggested to involve a larger and more diverse sample so that understanding of the role of emotion regulation in student-athlete self-confidence can be further deepened.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The researchers claim that this study is not affected by various issues that are currently occurring or may arise in the future.

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