

A Comparative Study of Achievement Motivation and Goal Orientation among Male and Female College Athletes

Sridevi C. M.

Ph.D. (Pursuing), M.Sc. Advanced Organisational Behaviour, MBA (HRM), B.Sc. Psychology
Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, St. Thomas College of Arts and Science, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India
University of Madras, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India
Corresponding Author: Email: [sridevicm\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:sridevicm[at]gmail.com), [srdevicm\[at\]saintthomascollege.com](mailto:srdevicm[at]saintthomascollege.com)

Abstract: *Achievement motivation and goal orientation are among the most important psychological factors influencing athletes' performance, persistence, and competitive behaviour. These motivational constructs shape how athletes approach training, perceive success, respond to challenges, and maintain their commitment to achieving sporting excellence. Although several studies have examined achievement motivation and goal orientation independently, findings regarding gender differences among college athletes remain inconclusive, particularly within the Indian collegiate sports context. The present study was undertaken to compare achievement motivation and goal orientation among male and female college athletes. A descriptive comparative research design was employed for the study. The sample consisted of 120 college athletes (60 males and 60 females) aged between 18 and 25 years, selected through purposive sampling from colleges participating in intercollegiate sports competitions. Data were collected using the Sports Achievement Motivation Test (SAMT), developed by M. L. Kamlesh, and the Task and Ego Orientation in Sport Questionnaire (TEOSQ), developed by Duda and Nicholls, along with a demographic information schedule. The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including the mean and standard deviation, and the independent-samples t-test to compare achievement motivation, task orientation, and ego orientation between male and female athletes. The findings indicated that both male and female athletes demonstrated comparable levels of achievement motivation and goal orientation. Male athletes obtained relatively higher scores on ego orientation, whereas female athletes demonstrated comparatively higher task orientation. No statistically significant gender difference was observed in overall achievement motivation. The findings suggest that although athletes may differ in how they define and evaluate success, their motivation to achieve remains comparable across genders. The study concludes that understanding athletes' motivational characteristics is important for coaches, sports psychologists, and physical education professionals in creating supportive motivational environments that encourage sustained participation, enhance athletic performance, and promote holistic athlete development.*

Keywords: Achievement Motivation, Goal Orientation, Task Orientation, Ego Orientation, College Athletes, Sports Psychology

1. Introduction

Sport plays a significant role in promoting physical fitness, psychological well-being, and social development. Beyond improving physical health, participation in competitive sports helps individuals develop important personal qualities such as discipline, resilience, confidence, teamwork, leadership, and emotional control. For college students, sports provide opportunities to enhance athletic abilities while balancing academic responsibilities and personal growth. Although physical fitness and technical skills are essential for success in sports, they alone do not determine athletic performance. Psychological factors have an equally important influence on how athletes prepare for competition, respond to challenges, maintain consistency, and achieve long-term success. Among these psychological factors, achievement motivation and goal orientation have attracted considerable attention because they shape athletes' attitudes towards competition, success, and continuous improvement.

Achievement motivation refers to an individual's inner drive to accomplish challenging tasks, strive for excellence, and attain success through personal effort and competence. Early theories of motivation suggest that individuals differ in their desire to succeed and in their tendency to avoid failure. These differences influence the goals they set, the effort they invest, and the persistence they demonstrate when facing obstacles. Within the sporting context, achievement motivation

encourages athletes to train regularly, overcome setbacks, improve their skills, and remain committed to high levels of performance. Athletes with stronger achievement motivation are generally more willing to accept challenges, display greater perseverance during competition, and view difficulties as opportunities to learn rather than as barriers to success. Consequently, achievement motivation contributes not only to competitive success but also to the development of self-confidence, self-discipline, and long-term participation in sports.

Another important psychological construct in sport is goal orientation, which explains the way athletes define competence and evaluate success. According to the Achievement Goal Theory proposed by Nicholls, athletes generally adopt either task orientation or ego orientation when participating in achievement settings. Task-oriented athletes judge success by personal improvement, skill mastery, effort, and continuous learning. Their satisfaction comes from developing their abilities and achieving progress based on their own performance. In contrast, ego-oriented athletes measure success by comparing themselves with others and demonstrating superior performance. They experience greater satisfaction when they outperform competitors or receive recognition for their achievements. Both orientations can positively influence athletic performance, although their effects often depend on the motivational climate created by coaches, teammates, and sporting institutions.

Achievement motivation and goal orientation are closely connected because both influence athletes' thoughts, emotions, and behaviour during training and competition. Athletes who possess high levels of achievement motivation are more likely to establish meaningful goals, remain focused during practice, and recover effectively from setbacks. Likewise, an athlete's dominant goal orientation affects how success and failure are interpreted, influencing confidence, emotional responses, persistence, and future performance. Previous research has consistently reported that task-oriented athletes generally experience greater intrinsic motivation, enjoyment, persistence, and psychological well-being. In comparison, an excessive emphasis on ego orientation may increase competitive pressure and anxiety, particularly when success is based solely on outperforming others. Nevertheless, both orientations can contribute positively to athletic achievement when supported by appropriate coaching practices and a healthy motivational environment.

Gender is another important factor that has received considerable attention in sports psychology. Male and female athletes often differ in their sporting experiences because of variations in coaching practices, social expectations, competitive opportunities, and patterns of socialisation. Several studies have suggested that male athletes are more likely to exhibit higher levels of ego orientation, placing greater importance on competition and outperforming others. Female athletes, on the other hand, are often reported to display stronger task orientation, with greater emphasis on skill development, learning, and personal improvement. However, research findings have not been entirely consistent across different countries, sports, and competitive levels. These inconsistencies indicate that motivational characteristics may vary across cultural, educational, and sporting contexts, highlighting the importance of conducting further research across diverse athlete populations.

In recent years, collegiate sports in India have expanded considerably due to increased institutional support, university-level competitions, and growing recognition of sports as a professional career option. As more students participate in organised competitive sports, understanding the psychological factors that contribute to athletic performance has become increasingly important. College athletes represent a unique population because they must balance academic responsibilities with intensive training and competition. Although several Indian studies have investigated sports motivation and athletic performance separately, relatively few have examined achievement motivation and goal orientation together while comparing male and female college athletes. Moreover, differences in educational environments, coaching methods, and sociocultural influences suggest that findings reported in other countries may not always be directly applicable to the Indian collegiate setting. This creates a need for research that reflects the realities of Indian college athletes and provides evidence that can support effective coaching and athlete development programmes.

Considering these gaps in the existing literature, the present study compares achievement motivation and goal orientation among male and female college athletes. By examining these two psychological constructs together, the study seeks to better understand how gender may influence athletes'

motivational characteristics. The findings are expected to contribute to the field of sport psychology and offer practical guidance for coaches, sports psychologists, physical education professionals, and educational institutions on creating motivational environments that foster athletic excellence, personal development, and sustained participation in competitive sports.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Studies on Achievement Motivation among Athletes

Achievement motivation has long been recognised as one of the key psychological factors influencing athletic performance and competitive behaviour. Early theoretical work by **McClelland (1961)** established that individuals differ in their needs for achievement, affiliation, and power. According to his theory, people with a strong need for achievement are inclined to select moderately challenging tasks, accept personal responsibility for their performance, and continuously strive for improvement. Although the theory was originally developed to explain achievement behaviour in general settings, it has become an important foundation for understanding motivation in sports. Athletes with a high need for achievement are often characterised by greater determination, persistence, and commitment during both training and competition.

Building upon McClelland's work, **Atkinson (1964)** explained that achievement behaviour is influenced by the interaction between two motivational forces: the desire to achieve success and the tendency to avoid failure. Athletes who are primarily motivated by success are generally more willing to accept challenges, demonstrate confidence in their abilities, and remain persistent when faced with difficult situations. In contrast, athletes strongly influenced by fear of failure may experience greater anxiety and reduced confidence during competition.

Subsequent research has consistently supported the importance of achievement motivation in athletic settings. **Gill (1986)** observed that highly successful athletes typically displayed stronger achievement motivation than less successful competitors. Greater motivation was associated with increased commitment to training, stronger competitive confidence, and a greater willingness to persevere despite setbacks. Similarly, **Roberts (1992)** argued that achievement motivation plays a central role in athletic behaviour by encouraging athletes to invest sustained effort, maintain concentration during practice, and pursue long-term performance goals. Roberts also highlighted that athletes' perceptions of competence influence their motivation and achievement-related behaviour.

Further evidence was provided by **Treasure, Monson, and Lox (1996)**, who reported that athletes with higher levels of achievement motivation demonstrated greater persistence and enjoyment in sports participation. Their findings suggested that motivated athletes were more likely to continue participating despite injuries, failures, or competitive pressures, indicating that achievement motivation contributes not only to performance but also to long-term engagement in sports.

More recent research has continued to emphasise the importance of motivation in competitive sport. In a comprehensive review, **Clancy, Herring, and Campbell (2016)** identified Achievement Goal Theory and Self-Determination Theory as the dominant theoretical frameworks for explaining athletic motivation. Their review concluded that intrinsic motivation consistently promotes greater persistence, enjoyment, and performance across different sporting contexts. Likewise, **Lochbaum and Sisneros (2024)**, in a systematic review and meta-analysis, found that task-oriented achievement goals were positively associated with athletic performance, whereas the influence of ego-oriented goals varied across competitive environments. Their findings reinforce the view that achievement motivation remains a fundamental psychological factor contributing to successful athletic performance.

2.2 Studies on Goal Orientation among Athletes

Goal orientation has become one of the most widely studied concepts in sport psychology because it explains how athletes define success, evaluate competence, and respond to achievement situations. The theoretical foundation of this concept was established by **Nicholls (1984)**, who proposed Achievement Goal Theory, suggesting that individuals primarily adopt either a task orientation or an ego orientation when evaluating their performance. Athletes with a task orientation view success in terms of personal improvement, learning, and skill mastery, whereas those with an ego orientation define success by outperforming others and demonstrating superior ability. This theoretical framework continues to provide the basis for understanding athletes' motivation and behaviour in competitive sport.

Expanding this perspective, **Nicholls (1989)** explained that an athlete's dominant goal orientation influences cognitive, emotional, and behavioural responses during competition. Task-oriented athletes generally display greater persistence, intrinsic motivation, and adaptive coping strategies because they evaluate success in terms of continuous self-improvement. In contrast, athletes who rely predominantly on ego orientation may experience greater performance pressure and anxiety, particularly when they perceive their ability to be lower than that of their competitors. These findings emphasise that the way athletes define success has important implications for both performance and psychological well-being.

Empirical studies have consistently demonstrated the positive outcomes associated with task orientation. **Duda (1992)** found that athletes with stronger task orientation reported higher levels of enjoyment, satisfaction, and intrinsic motivation. Positive outcomes associated with ego orientation were generally observed only when athletes perceived themselves as highly competent. These findings suggest that although both goal orientations may influence performance, task orientation is more consistently associated with adaptive motivational patterns across different sporting environments.

Subsequent reviews have reinforced these observations. **Lochbaum and colleagues (2016)**, after examining findings from numerous countries and sporting disciplines, reported that athletes generally demonstrate higher levels of task

orientation than ego orientation. The review indicated that most athletes place greater importance on personal improvement, effort, and skill development than on social comparison alone. Similarly, **Vandewalle, Nerstad, and Dysvik (2019)** highlighted that goal orientation influences learning, emotional regulation, performance, and decision-making across achievement settings. The authors further noted that motivational orientation is not entirely stable but can be shaped by contextual factors such as coaching practices, feedback, and the overall motivational climate.

Recent evidence has continued to support the importance of mastery-oriented approaches in sport. **Lochbaum and Sisneros (2024)**, through a systematic review and meta-analysis, reported that both dispositional and situational task-oriented goals were positively associated with athletic performance. Their findings suggest that sporting environments which encourage effort, continuous learning, and personal improvement are more likely to promote sustained motivation and long-term performance than environments that emphasise winning and social comparison alone.

2.3 Studies Comparing Male and Female Athletes

Gender differences in achievement motivation and goal orientation have received considerable attention in sport psychology; however, the findings reported across studies are not entirely consistent. While several researchers have identified differences in the motivational patterns of male and female athletes, others have suggested that these differences vary across sporting contexts, competitive levels, and sociocultural environments.

Previous research has consistently shown that male athletes tend to exhibit higher levels of ego orientation, reflecting a stronger emphasis on competition, social comparison, and demonstrating superior performance. Female athletes, in contrast, are often reported to display stronger task orientation, placing greater importance on personal improvement, skill mastery, effort, and continuous learning. These differences are commonly attributed to variations in coaching practices, socialisation, competitive experiences, and expectations within the sporting environment rather than to gender alone.

Despite these general trends, several investigations have reported minimal or no significant gender differences in achievement motivation and goal orientation. Such findings suggest that motivational characteristics are shaped by multiple interacting factors, including the motivational climate created by coaches, the nature of the sport, athletes' competitive experience, and cultural influences. Consequently, gender should be viewed as one of several factors influencing athletes' motivation rather than the sole determinant of achievement-related behaviour.

Recent reviews have further emphasised that supportive coaching practices and mastery-oriented motivational climates play a significant role in shaping athletes' achievement goals regardless of gender. These observations indicate that motivational orientations are dynamic and can be influenced by the sporting environment. The mixed

findings reported in previous studies, therefore, highlight the need for additional research involving diverse athletic populations, particularly across different educational and cultural settings, to better understand gender-related variations in achievement motivation and goal orientation.

2.4 Research Gap

The review of the existing literature demonstrates that achievement motivation and goal orientation are well-established psychological constructs that significantly influence athletes' performance, persistence, and competitive behaviour. Earlier theoretical contributions provided the conceptual basis for understanding these constructs, while subsequent empirical studies confirmed their importance in promoting athletic performance and long-term participation in sports.

Although previous research has extensively examined achievement motivation and goal orientation, several limitations remain. Existing findings regarding gender differences have been inconsistent, with some studies reporting significant differences between male and female athletes and others indicating little or no variation. These inconsistent findings suggest that motivational characteristics may be influenced by factors such as the type of sport, competitive experience, coaching practices, and sociocultural environment.

Another important limitation identified in the literature is the scarcity of studies examining achievement motivation and goal orientation together among college athletes, particularly in the Indian collegiate sports context. Much of the available evidence has been generated in international populations, making it difficult to generalise these findings to Indian athletes due to differences in educational systems, cultural values, training environments, and institutional support for sports.

In view of these gaps, there is a need for empirical research that simultaneously examines achievement motivation and goal orientation among male and female college athletes in India. The present study has therefore been undertaken to compare these psychological constructs across genders and to provide evidence that may inform the development of effective coaching strategies, athlete support programmes, and future research in sport psychology.

2.5 Need and Significance of the Study

Success in competitive sports depends not only on physical fitness and technical ability but also on the psychological qualities that enable athletes to perform consistently under varying competitive conditions. Among the many psychological factors associated with athletic performance, achievement motivation and goal orientation have been widely recognised as important influences on athletes' behaviour, persistence, and overall success. These motivational characteristics shape the way athletes approach challenges, interpret success and failure, and remain committed to achieving their sporting goals. Previous research has consistently shown that athletes with strong achievement motivation and adaptive goal orientations are

more likely to demonstrate confidence, perseverance, enjoyment, and sustained participation in sports.

The rapid development of collegiate sports in India has increased opportunities for students to participate in organised competitions at university, state, and national levels. Alongside these opportunities, college athletes must balance academic responsibilities with intensive training schedules and competitive demands. Managing these multiple responsibilities often requires psychological resilience and effective motivation. Therefore, understanding the motivational characteristics of college athletes has become increasingly important for supporting both their athletic performance and overall psychological well-being.

Achievement motivation encourages athletes to set meaningful goals, invest continuous effort, and remain persistent despite setbacks and failures. Goal orientation, on the other hand, influences how athletes evaluate their competence and define success. Athletes with a task orientation generally emphasise learning, personal improvement, and skill mastery, whereas athletes with a stronger ego orientation are more likely to judge success by competition and comparison with others. Although both orientations may contribute to athletic performance, excessive reliance on external comparisons can heighten competitive pressure and performance anxiety. Understanding these motivational characteristics can therefore assist coaches and sports psychologists in creating supportive training environments that encourage healthy competition, sustained motivation, and long-term athlete development.

Despite considerable research on achievement motivation and goal orientation, relatively little attention has been paid to examining these variables together among Indian college athletes. In addition, previous studies have reported inconsistent findings regarding gender differences in motivational characteristics. While some investigations suggest that male athletes tend to demonstrate higher ego orientation and female athletes show stronger task orientation, others have found little or no significant gender-based differences. These inconsistencies highlight the need for further research in the Indian collegiate sports context, where educational environments, coaching practices, and sociocultural influences may shape athletes' motivational experiences in different ways.

The present study is expected to contribute to the growing body of knowledge in sport psychology by providing empirical evidence on achievement motivation and goal orientation among male and female college athletes. The findings may help coaches, sports psychologists, physical education teachers, athletic trainers, and educational administrators better understand the motivational profiles of student-athletes and develop strategies that strengthen intrinsic motivation, promote mastery-oriented learning, and enhance athletic performance. The study may also support the design of athlete counselling programmes, psychological skills training, and evidence-based coaching practices that contribute to both competitive success and holistic athlete development.

Furthermore, the findings are expected to serve as a useful resource for future researchers interested in achievement motivation, goal orientation, gender differences, and athlete development. By addressing an important gap within the Indian collegiate sports setting, this study provides a foundation for future investigations exploring the psychological factors that contribute to athletic achievement and sustained participation in competitive sports.

3. Objectives of the Study

General Objective

To compare achievement motivation and goal orientation among male and female college athletes.

Specific Objectives

- To assess the level of achievement motivation among male and female college athletes.
- To assess the level of goal orientation (task orientation and ego orientation) among male and female college athletes.
- To compare the achievement motivation of male and female college athletes.
- To compare the task orientation of male and female college athletes.
- To compare the ego orientation of male and female college athletes.

Hypotheses of the Study

Null Hypotheses (H_0)

H_{01} : There is no significant difference in achievement motivation between male and female college athletes.

H_{02} : There is no significant difference in task orientation between male and female college athletes.

H_{03} : There is no significant difference in ego orientation between male and female college athletes.

Alternative (Research) Hypotheses (H_1)

H_{11} : There is a significant difference in achievement motivation between male and female college athletes.

H_{12} : There is a significant difference in task orientation between male and female college athletes.

H_{13} : There is a significant difference in ego orientation between male and female college athletes.

4. Methodology

Research Design

The present study employed a **descriptive-comparative research design to examine differences in achievement motivation and goal orientation between male and female college athletes**. This design was considered appropriate because it facilitates the comparison of two naturally occurring groups without manipulating the independent variable. The study sought to determine whether significant gender differences exist in achievement motivation, task orientation, and ego orientation among college athletes.

Participants

The study was conducted among **120 college athletes, comprising 60 males and 60 females, aged 18 to 25 years**. The participants were selected from colleges actively participating in intercollegiate sports competitions. Athletes representing both individual and team sports were included to

ensure adequate representation of the collegiate athletic population.

Sampling Technique

A **purposive sampling technique** was employed to select the participants. Athletes who met the inclusion criteria and were actively participating in intercollegiate sports competitions during the data collection period were invited to participate in the study. This sampling technique was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to recruit participants with the specific characteristics required to achieve the study's objectives.

Inclusion Criteria

The participants included in the study met the following criteria:

- College students aged between 18 and 25 years.
- Male and female athletes actively participating in intercollegiate sports competitions.
- Athletes with a minimum of one year of competitive sports experience.
- Participants who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study and provided informed consent.

Exclusion Criteria

The following participants were excluded from the study:

- Students who were not actively involved in competitive sports.
- Athletes who were injured or medically unfit during the period of data collection.
- Participants who submitted incomplete questionnaire responses.
- Athletes who declined to participate in the study.

Variables of the Study

Independent Variable

- Gender (Male and Female)

Dependent Variables

- Achievement Motivation
- Task Orientation
- Ego Orientation

5. Research Instruments

Sports Achievement Motivation Test (SAMT)

Achievement motivation was assessed using the **Sports Achievement Motivation Test (SAMT) developed by Dr M. L. Kamlesh (1990)**. The instrument is specifically designed to measure an athlete's motivation to achieve success in sports. It assesses dimensions such as aspiration for excellence, persistence, competitiveness, confidence, and the willingness to overcome challenges encountered during sports participation. Higher scores indicate higher levels of achievement motivation. The SAMT has demonstrated satisfactory reliability and validity and has been widely used in sports psychology research in India.

Task and Ego Orientation in Sport Questionnaire (TEOSQ)

Goal orientation was measured using the **Task and Ego Orientation in Sport Questionnaire (TEOSQ)** developed

by Joan L. Duda and John G. Nicholls (1992). The questionnaire assesses two dimensions of goal orientation:

- **Task Orientation**, which reflects the extent to which athletes define success through learning, skill development, effort, and personal improvement.
- **Ego Orientation**, which reflects the extent to which athletes perceive success by outperforming others and demonstrating superior ability.

The TEOSQ has been extensively validated across different sports and cultural settings and is considered one of the most widely used measures of achievement goal orientation in sport psychology.

Procedure for Data Collection

Prior to data collection, permission was obtained from the respective college authorities and sports departments. The purpose of the study was clearly explained to all participants, and informed consent was obtained before administering the questionnaires. Participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential and would be used solely for academic research purposes. The questionnaires were administered individually or in small groups in a quiet and comfortable environment. Participants were instructed to respond honestly to all items without discussing their answers with others. Completed questionnaires were checked for completeness before being collected for analysis.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical principles governing research involving human participants. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty. The collected data were used exclusively for research purposes and were stored securely to protect participants' privacy.

Statistical Analysis

The collected data were coded and analysed using the **Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 26.0**. Appropriate descriptive and inferential statistical procedures were employed to analyse the data.

The following statistical procedures were used:

- **Descriptive Statistics** (Mean and Standard Deviation) were used to determine the levels of achievement motivation, task orientation, and ego orientation among male and female college athletes.
- **Independent Samples *t*-test** was used to examine the significant differences between male and female college athletes with respect to achievement motivation, task orientation, and ego orientation.

The level of statistical significance was set at **0.05** for all statistical analyses.

6. Results

The present study examined differences in achievement motivation and goal orientation between male and female college athletes. To address the study's objectives, descriptive

statistics, including the mean and standard deviation, were computed for achievement motivation, task orientation, and ego orientation. Gender differences were analysed using the Independent Samples *t*-test. Statistical significance was determined at the 0.05 level.

Table 1: Comparison of Achievement Motivation between Male and Female College Athletes

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	p
Male Athletes	60	28.43	3.56	1.42	0.158
Female Athletes	60	27.51	3.62		

Interpretation

Table 1 presents the comparison of achievement motivation between male and female college athletes. Male athletes obtained a slightly higher mean score ($M = 28.43$, $SD = 3.56$) than female athletes ($M = 27.51$, $SD = 3.62$). However, the Independent Samples *t*-test indicated that this difference was not statistically significant, $t(118) = 1.42$, $p = .158$ ($p > .05$). Accordingly, the null hypothesis was **not rejected**, indicating that achievement motivation did not differ significantly between male and female college athletes in the present study.

Table 2: Comparison of Task Orientation between Male and Female College Athletes

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	p
Male Athletes	60	35.72	4.21	-2.34	.021*
Female Athletes	60	37.81	3.98		

Significant at the 0.05 level.

Interpretation

Table 2 presents the comparison of task orientation between male and female college athletes. The mean score for female athletes ($M = 37.81$, $SD = 3.98$) was higher than that of male athletes ($M = 35.72$, $SD = 4.21$). The Independent Samples *t*-test revealed that this difference was statistically significant, $t(118) = -2.34$, $p = .021$ ($p < .05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis was **rejected**, indicating that female college athletes demonstrated significantly higher task orientation than their male counterparts.

Table 3: Comparison of Ego Orientation between Male and Female College Athletes

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	p
Male Athletes	60	24.86	3.47	2.81	.006**
Female Athletes	60	22.93	3.91		

Significant at the 0.01 level.

Interpretation

Table 3 presents the comparison of ego orientation between male and female college athletes. Male athletes obtained a higher mean score ($M = 24.86$, $SD = 3.47$) than female athletes ($M = 22.93$, $SD = 3.91$). The Independent Samples *t*-test revealed a statistically significant difference, $t(118) = 2.81$, $p = .006$ ($p < .01$). Accordingly, the null hypothesis was rejected, indicating that male college athletes exhibited a significantly higher ego orientation than female college athletes.

Summary of Findings

The major findings of the study are summarised as follows:

- 1) There was no statistically significant difference in achievement motivation between male and female college athletes.

- 2) Female college athletes demonstrated significantly higher task orientation than male college athletes.
- 3) Male college athletes demonstrated significantly higher ego orientation than female college athletes.
- 4) The null hypothesis regarding achievement motivation was not rejected, whereas the null hypotheses regarding task orientation and ego orientation were rejected.

7. Discussion

The present study examined gender differences in achievement motivation and goal orientation among college athletes. The findings showed that achievement motivation did not differ significantly between male and female athletes. In contrast, significant differences were observed in the dimensions of goal orientation, with female athletes demonstrating higher task orientation and male athletes reporting higher ego orientation. These findings provide valuable insight into the motivational characteristics that influence how athletes approach competition and define success.

Achievement Motivation

The analysis revealed no statistically significant difference in achievement motivation between male and female college athletes, although male athletes obtained a marginally higher mean score. This suggests that both groups possess a comparable drive to succeed and are similarly committed to achieving excellence in sport. The findings indicate that achievement motivation among college athletes may be influenced more by their participation in competitive sport than by gender alone.

A possible explanation for this finding is that college athletes, irrespective of gender, are exposed to similar training programmes, coaching methods, competitive opportunities, and performance expectations. Regular participation in organised sport fosters persistence, discipline, confidence, and commitment, all of which contribute to achievement motivation. Consequently, athletes competing under comparable conditions may develop similar motivational characteristics despite gender differences.

The findings are consistent with **McClelland's (1961)** theory of achievement motivation, which emphasises an individual's desire to attain excellence through personal effort and accomplishment. They also support **Atkinson's (1964)** expectancy-value theory, which proposes that achievement behaviour is shaped by the interaction between the motivation to succeed and the tendency to avoid failure. The absence of a significant gender difference in the present study suggests that these motivational processes operate similarly among male and female college athletes. This observation is also in agreement with previous research indicating that continued participation in competitive sports strengthens achievement motivation regardless of gender.

Task Orientation

The results demonstrated that female college athletes scored significantly higher on task orientation than male athletes. This finding indicates that female athletes are more likely to define success in terms of personal improvement, skill development, sustained effort, and mastery of performance

rather than through direct comparison with others. Such an orientation encourages athletes to focus on continuous learning and long-term development while maintaining satisfaction from achieving self-referenced goals.

Several factors may explain this pattern. Female athletes may place greater value on improving personal performance, refining technical skills, and achieving individual progress throughout training and competition. Supportive coaching environments that encourage effort, cooperation, and self-improvement may further strengthen these motivational characteristics.

The present finding is consistent with **Achievement Goal Theory**, proposed by **Nicholls (1984, 1989)**, which holds that task-oriented individuals evaluate competence in terms of personal improvement and mastery rather than external comparison. It is also supported by **Duda (1992)**, who reported that athletes with stronger task orientation generally demonstrate greater intrinsic motivation, persistence, enjoyment, and psychological well-being. The higher task orientation observed among female athletes in the present study, therefore, reflects a motivational pattern commonly associated with adaptive learning behaviours and sustained engagement in sport.

Ego Orientation

Male college athletes demonstrated significantly higher ego orientation than female athletes. This finding suggests that male athletes are more likely to evaluate success through winning competitions, outperforming opponents, and demonstrating superior ability. Such motivational tendencies may reflect the greater emphasis placed on competitive achievement and social comparison within many sporting environments.

The higher ego orientation observed among male athletes may also be influenced by coaching practices, competitive experiences, and social expectations that encourage athletes to demonstrate competence through superior performance. While ego orientation can motivate athletes to strive for success, excessive reliance on external comparison may increase competitive pressure and reduce satisfaction when desired outcomes are not achieved.

These findings are consistent with **Nicholls (1989)**, who proposed that ego-oriented athletes define competence by performing better than others. They also correspond with the observations of **Lochbaum and Sisneros (2024)**, who concluded that although both task and ego orientations contribute to athletic performance, task orientation generally demonstrates stronger and more consistent relationships with long-term motivation and adaptive sporting behaviour. Ego orientation may also facilitate high performance, particularly when athletes possess strong confidence in their abilities and perceive themselves as capable of outperforming their competitors.

Overall Interpretation

Taken together, the findings indicate that male and female college athletes possess comparable levels of achievement motivation but differ in the way they define and pursue success in sport. Female athletes appear to place greater

emphasis on personal improvement, learning, and skill mastery, whereas male athletes are more likely to focus on competition and on demonstrating superior performance. These differences highlight the multidimensional nature of athletic motivation and suggest that achievement motivation and goal orientation represent distinct psychological constructs that contribute to athletic behaviour in different ways.

8. Practical Implications

The findings of the present study have important implications for coaches, sports psychologists, physical education teachers, and educational institutions. Developing a mastery-oriented motivational climate that encourages effort, continuous improvement, and skill development may enhance athletes' intrinsic motivation while maintaining healthy levels of competition. Sports psychologists may utilise these findings to design psychological skills training and counselling programmes that strengthen adaptive motivational patterns and improve athletic performance. Educational institutions can also support athlete development by incorporating psychological guidance into sports training programmes, thereby promoting both competitive excellence and holistic personal growth.

9. Conclusion

This study compared achievement motivation and goal orientation among male and female college athletes to understand how these psychological factors differ across gender. The results demonstrated that male and female athletes possessed comparable levels of achievement motivation. However, significant differences were observed in goal orientation, with female athletes demonstrating higher task orientation and male athletes exhibiting higher ego orientation. These findings indicate that although both groups share a similar desire to succeed, they differ in how they define and pursue success in competitive sports.

The study highlights the importance of recognising individual motivational profiles when planning coaching strategies, training programmes, and psychological interventions. Encouraging a mastery-oriented motivational climate that emphasises skill development, continuous learning, and personal improvement, while maintaining healthy levels of competition, may contribute to improved athletic performance, greater confidence, and sustained participation in sports.

The study also contributes to the growing body of knowledge in sport psychology by providing evidence on achievement motivation and goal orientation among college athletes within the Indian context. The findings may assist coaches, sports psychologists, physical education professionals, and educational institutions in developing evidence-based practices that strengthen athletes' motivation, promote adaptive goal orientations, and support holistic athlete development.

Although the study provides meaningful insights into the motivational characteristics of college athletes, future research involving larger, more diverse samples, athletes from

different sporting disciplines, and additional psychological variables would yield a broader understanding of the factors influencing athletic performance. The present study, therefore, offers a useful foundation for future investigations in the field of sport psychology.

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