

Exploring the Lived Experiences of Para-athletes in Cebu: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored the lived experiences of para-athletes in Cebu, Philippines, emphasizing how they navigated personal and structural challenges, sustained motivation, and constructed perceptions of their performance. Grounded by Grit Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Achievement Goal Theory, the study employed in-depth semi-structured interviews with eight para-athletes across diverse sports disciplines. Through Braun and Clarke's Thematic Analysis, seven core themes emerged: Personal Journey of Growth and Identity, Social Relationships and Emotional Anchors, Challenging Barriers and Advocating for Change, Personal Fulfillment, Continuous Development, Mentorship and Mindset, and Systemic Barriers. Findings reveal that Cebuano para-athletes demonstrated exceptional grit, intrinsic motivation, and self-determination despite encountering discrimination, resource limitations, and inconsistent institutional support. Faith, family, and coaching relationships served as vital sources of encouragement that reinforced their psychological resilience and sense of purpose. The study revealed that parasport served as a transformative avenue for empowerment and inclusion, emphasizing the necessity of sustained governmental and organizational efforts to enhance accessibility, recognition, and equitable opportunities for para-athletes.

Keywords: para-athletes, lived experiences, grit, motivation, Cebu

INTRODUCTION

Sport is widely recognized as a vehicle for inclusion, identity formation, and empowerment among persons with disabilities (PWDs). The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2006, A/RES/61/106) conceptualizes disability as arising from the interaction between long-term impairments and societal barriers, emphasizing structural rather than purely individual limitations. Within elite sport, individuals with physical disabilities compete as Paralympic or para-athletes (Gorges et al., 2018). In the Philippines, Republic Act No. 7277 (Magna Carta for Disabled Persons) classifies Paralympic athletes as PWDs under national law. Despite systemic and material constraints, Filipino para-athletes demonstrate sustained commitment to performance excellence and international qualification (Sumabat, 2017).

Globally, parasport offers physical and psychosocial benefits while challenging ableist norms and fostering social belonging (Allan et al., 2017). Qualitative research highlights both structural barriers and the personal and communal resources sustaining participation. Kenyan para-athletes, for example, rely on community support and intrinsic motivation to navigate stigma and scarcity (Ojwang et al., 2025). In the Philippine context, studies document themes of resilience, identity reconstruction, national pride, and institutional development (Antolin, 2024; Lagundino et al., 2024; Sumabat, 2017).

However, scholarship remains largely Western or capital-centric. In the Philippines, research primarily focuses on national-level athletes or policy analyses, leaving regional contexts underexamined. Cebu—a major socio-economic center and key site for grassroots sport development—remains particularly underrepresented. This reflects both a coverage gap (Milles, 2017) and a methodological gap, as few studies employ in-depth qualitative approaches that foreground regional para-athletes' voices.

Addressing these gaps, the present study investigates the lived experiences of para-athletes in Cebu through qualitative inquiry. By centering their narratives, this research illuminates the challenges, supports, and meaning-making processes shaping their athletic trajectories, contributing to a more regionally inclusive understanding of parasport in the Philippines.

METHODS

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative case study design to examine the lived experiences of para-athletes in Cebu, Philippines. Case study research is appropriate for investigating contemporary phenomena within their real-life contexts, particularly when contextual conditions are integral to understanding the phenomenon (Yin, 2018). It enables an in-depth, holistic exploration of a bounded system—in this case, para-athletes situated within a specific geographic and socio-cultural environment (Stake, 1995).

Given that para-athletes' experiences are shaped by intersecting structural, institutional, and personal factors, a case study approach allowed for contextualized analysis of how these dynamics operate within Cebu. Consistent with qualitative inquiry, the study emphasized depth, meaning-making, and contextual richness rather than statistical generalization (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This design was therefore well-suited to capturing the complexity of participants' narratives and the socio-environmental conditions influencing their sporting trajectories.

Participants and Sampling

Participants were para-athletes based in Cebu, Philippines. A total of 7–10 individuals representing diverse sports disciplines, disability classifications, and competitive levels were recruited. In qualitative research, smaller, purposively selected samples are appropriate when the objective is to generate rich, in-depth accounts of a phenomenon rather than achieve representativeness (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Purposive sampling was employed to identify information-rich participants capable of providing detailed insights into their lived experiences in organized para-sport (Patton, 2015). Snowball sampling was subsequently used to recruit additional participants through peer referrals, a technique commonly utilized when accessing specialized or relatively underrepresented populations (Noy, 2008).

To be included, participants were required to: (a) be officially recognized as persons with disabilities under Republic Act No. 7277 (Magna Carta for Disabled Persons), (b) actively participate in organized para-sports at the local, regional, or national level, (c) be at least 18 years old, and (d) have a minimum of six months of continuous sports participation. Sampling remained flexible and iterative, consistent with qualitative principles, and continued until thematic saturation was achieved—defined as the point at which no new substantive insights emerged from the data (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

Research Setting

The study was conducted in Cebu, Philippines, a major socio-economic and cultural hub in the Visayas region. Although Cebu hosts various sports organizations and inclusive initiatives, para-athletes often face uneven resource distribution, limited access to specialized facilities, and institutional constraints, particularly outside metropolitan centers. Cebu was selected to capture the realities of para-sport development in a semi-urban regional context and to examine how local policy, community support, and socio-cultural factors shape athletic experiences.

Research Instrument

The study utilized a semi-structured interview guide developed by the researchers to explore the lived experiences of para-athletes in Cebu. The guide contained open-ended questions addressing participants' sports involvement, challenges, motivation, coping strategies, and reflections on their athletic journeys. To ensure

clarity and cultural relevance, the instrument was validated by experts in sports psychology, disability studies, and qualitative research.

Data Gathering

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews designed to elicit detailed narratives of participants' sports involvement, challenges, motivations, coping strategies, and reflections on performance and perseverance. The interview guide was developed by the researchers and reviewed by subject matter experts in sports psychology, disability studies, and qualitative research to ensure clarity, cultural appropriateness, and content relevance.

Interviews lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and were conducted either in person or online, depending on participant preference and accessibility. Interviews were carried out in English, Cebuano, or a combination of both. With informed consent, sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Field notes were maintained to document contextual observations and non-verbal cues. Data collection proceeded iteratively and ceased upon reaching thematic saturation.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis. This method was selected for its flexibility and suitability in identifying patterns of meaning within qualitative data while remaining grounded in participants' narratives.

The analysis followed six phases: (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading of transcripts; (2) generation of initial inductive codes; (3) searching for candidate themes by clustering related codes; (4) reviewing and refining themes for coherence and distinctiveness; (5) defining and naming themes to capture their central organizing concepts; and (6) producing a narrative account supported by illustrative participant quotations.

An inductive approach was employed to ensure that themes emerged from the data rather than being imposed a priori. Throughout the analytic process, reflexive memoing was used to enhance transparency and analytic rigor.

Data Management

All data were handled in accordance with institutional ethical standards and data protection guidelines. Audio recordings and transcripts were stored in password-protected, encrypted digital files accessible only to the research team. Participants were assigned pseudonyms, and identifying information was removed from transcripts to ensure confidentiality. Data will be retained securely for the duration of the study and for two years following publication, after which electronic files will be permanently deleted.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with the primary ethical principles outlined by Bacus and Alda (2022), namely: informed consent, beneficence, confidentiality, respect for privacy, and the right to withdraw. These ethical standards guided the entire research process to ensure the protection and well-being of all participants.

Informed Consent. Prior to data collection, participants were fully informed about the purpose, procedures, and essential aspects of the study. Voluntary participation was emphasized, and written informed consent was obtained from each participant. A formal letter detailing the nature and scope of the research was also provided.

Beneficence. The researchers prioritized the welfare of the participants by minimizing potential risks and maximizing possible benefits. The study was carefully designed and implemented in a manner that upheld the highest ethical standards and promoted the overall well-being of those involved.

Confidentiality. Strict measures were implemented to safeguard participants’ information. All collected data were treated as confidential and were accessible only to the research team. Identifiable information was protected to ensure privacy and data security.

Respect for Privacy. Only questions relevant to the objectives of the study were included. Participants’ responses were anonymized, and research materials were properly disposed of after validation and completion of the study.

Right to Withdraw. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty or negative consequences.

Overall, adherence to these ethical principles ensured that participants’ rights, dignity, and well-being were protected throughout the research process.

Trustworthiness of Data

To ensure methodological rigor, the study adhered to the trustworthiness criteria established by Lincoln and Guba. These criteria—credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability—serve as foundational standards for evaluating qualitative research quality.

Credibility was established through prolonged engagement, persistent observation, member checking, and triangulation of interviews, field notes, and supporting documents. Transferability was enhanced through thick description of participants’ backgrounds and the socio-cultural context of Cebu’s parasport landscape. Dependability was ensured through a detailed audit trail documenting each step of the research process. Confirmability was maintained through reflexive journaling and audit logs to minimize researcher bias and ensure findings were grounded in participants’ narratives.

Adherence to these principles strengthened the credibility and integrity of the study’s findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the key findings from the qualitative exploration of Cebuano para-athletes’ lived experiences. Through in-depth interviews and Braun and Clarke’s thematic analysis, the results outline the participants’ demographic profiles and patterns of meaning that shape how participants navigate challenges, sustain motivation, and describe their performance within the context of disability and sport.

Table 1. Demographic Profile

Participant No.	Age	Gender	Type of Sport/s	Type of Disability
1	29 years old	Male	Obstacle Course Racing, Dragon Boat	Physical Disability
2	19 years old	Male	Sitting Volleyball	Orthopedic Amputee
3	28 years old	Male	Sitting Volleyball	Right Amputee above the knee
4	25 years old	Male	Tennis, Bicycle Race	Amputee
5	29 years old	Female	Chess	Orthopedic Amputee
6	33 years old	Female	Para Swimming	Achondroplasia
7	45 years old	Male	Dragon Boat	Amputee
8	19 years old	Female	Shotput, 100 meter run, Standing long jump	Visual Disability

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the eight para-athletes from Cebu who participated in the study. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 45 years, representing various stages of adulthood. The sample included five males and three females, indicating higher male representation alongside emerging female participation in adaptive sports. Athletes competed across diverse individual and team disciplines, including Obstacle Course Racing, Dragon Boat, Sitting Volleyball, Tennis, Chess, Para Swimming, and Athletics. Most participants had amputations or orthopedic impairments, while others had achondroplasia or visual impairment. Overall, the demographic composition reflects diversity in age, gender, sport type, and disability classification, providing a comprehensive contextual foundation for examining their lived experiences and performance perceptions.

Table 2. Lived Experiences of Para-Athletes

Themes	Subthemes
Personal Journey of Growth and Identity	Physical adaptation and Self-Acceptance Recognition and Confidence
Social Relationships and Emotional Anchors	Faith and Family Support Love for Sport
Challenging Barriers and Advocating for Change	Discrimination and Misconceptions Advocacy for Inclusion

Theme 1. Personal Journey of Growth and Identity

Physical adaptation and self-acceptance. Participants described disability as an embodied rupture that destabilized confidence, identity, and daily functioning. The onset of amputation or physical limitation disrupted previously active lifestyles, creating emotional distress and uncertainty about self-worth.

(P3) “Akong journey sa para athlete kay dili jud sayon... murag kog nawalaan ug paglaom.” (“My journey as a para-athlete was not easy... I felt like I lost hope.”)

(P7) “Sa sinugdanan, lisod gyud... I struggled with acceptance ug self-confidence.” (“At the beginning, it was very hard... I struggled with acceptance and self-confidence.”)

Over time, engagement in sport facilitated identity reconstruction. Through adaptive training and competition, participants gradually restored a sense of competence and agency. This transition reflects the fulfillment of competence needs central to Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and demonstrates perseverance consistent with Grit Theory (Duckworth, 2007).

Recognition and confidence. External validation further reinforced identity rebuilding. Representation and belonging strengthened self-worth and counteracted earlier feelings of inadequacy.

(P1) “Naka boost ang akong confidence... nindot sad e present ang atong country.” (“It boosted my confidence... it feels good to represent the country.”)

(P7) “Ang sense of belongingness ug family nga akong nakuha sa akong team.” (“I gained a sense of belongingness and family from my team.”)

These experiences underscore the importance of relatedness and social affirmation in sustaining motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000), suggesting that identity reconstruction is relational as much as individual.

Theme 2. Social Relationships and Emotional Anchors

Faith and family support. Emotional resilience was consistently grounded in relational networks. Participants emphasized spiritual grounding, familial encouragement, and coach mentorship as stabilizing forces during vulnerability.

(P1) “Thankful gihapon ko ni Lord... Thankful pod ko sa akong family kay ni-support sila.”
 (“I am thankful to God... and to my family for their support.”)

(P5) “My coach is our second father... naa koy emotional support from him.”
 (“My coach is like a second father who gives emotional support.”)

These relational supports reflect the centrality of relatedness in sustaining intrinsic motivation and psychological well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The coach–athlete bond, in particular, functioned as both emotional and performance scaffolding.

Love for sport. Intrinsic enjoyment emerged as a primary driver of persistence. Athletes prioritized fulfillment and passion over outcome-based validation.

(P4) “Bahalag win or lose, bonus nana ug makadaug.”
 (“Win or lose, winning is just a bonus.”)

(P8) “Love kaayu nako siya bisag kapoy siya.”
 (“I really love it even when it is tiring.”)

Such statements reflect a mastery-oriented framework of achievement, where effort and growth are prioritized over external comparison (Nicholls, 1984). This mastery orientation likely buffered discouragement within structurally constrained environments.

Theme 3. Challenging Barriers and Advocating for Change

Discrimination and misconceptions. Participants reported persistent social stigma and doubts about their capabilities.

(P1) “Unsaon daw nako pag-run nga one-legged man ko?”
 (“They asked how I could run when I only have one leg.”)

(P1) “Daghan ko madunggan nga ‘sayang kaayo.’”
 (“I often hear people say ‘what a waste.’”)

These narratives reflect broader societal misconceptions surrounding disability and athletic competence, positioning para-athletes within contexts of marginalization.

Advocacy and empowerment. Rather than internalizing stigma, athletes reframed discrimination as motivational fuel and embraced advocacy roles.

(P1) “Ganahan ko nga ma known as PWD nga daghan ug na achieve para ma inspire ang uban.”
 (“I want to be known as a PWD who has achieved a lot so others can be inspired.”)

(P7) “I am proud nga nakatabang ko in showing that persons with disabilities are capable.”
 (“I am proud to help show that persons with disabilities are capable.”)

This reframing illustrates adaptive resilience and sustained perseverance toward long-term goals (Duckworth, 2007), while also reflecting empowerment processes documented in disability and sport literature. Advocacy thus becomes both a psychological strategy and a social response to structural inequality.

Table 3. Satisfaction with Performance (Competitions and Training)

Themes	Subthemes
Personal Fulfillment	Sense of Achievement and High Satisfaction Ratings Effort and Discipline as Sources of Satisfaction

Continuous Development	Continuous Improvement and Self-Evaluation Motivation and Constructive Improvement Through Feedback
Mentorship and Mindset	Strong Coach–Athlete Relationship Growth-Oriented Perspective
Systemic Barriers	Inconsistent & Selective Institutional Support Lack of Resources & Facilities for Para-Athletes

Theme 1. Personal Fulfillment

Sense of achievement and high satisfaction ratings. Participants reported high satisfaction with their training and competition experiences, grounding fulfillment in personal progress and competitive milestones rather than rankings alone.

(P1) “Right now satisfied kaayo ko... I was 7th overall PWDs’ all over the world.”

(P6) “7 or 8 because I want to do my very best and more in every competition.”

(P8) “On a scale of 10, it’s a 9.”

These accounts suggest that satisfaction is anchored in perceived competence and self-referenced achievement, consistent with the competence dimension of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Performance evaluation was internally regulated rather than dependent solely on external validation.

Effort and discipline as foundations of success. Athletes emphasized discipline and rigorous preparation as central to their performance outcomes.

(P1) “Grabe kayko mo train mao tong nakadaug ko ug duha silver sa Belgium.”
 (“I trained really hard; that’s why I won two silver medals.”)

(P4) “Maka practice ug tarong aron maka perform ug tarong.”
 (“If I practice well, I can perform well.”)

Such narratives reflect a process-oriented orientation toward performance, where effort is perceived as the primary determinant of success. This aligns with a mastery-focused framework of achievement (Nicholls, 1984).

Theme 2. Continuous Development

Commitment to self-improvement. Even when expressing satisfaction, participants articulated a desire for ongoing refinement and growth.

(P1) “Di pa gihapon kayko kuntento... gusto ko nga naa pa jud koy e angat.”
 (“I’m still not fully satisfied; I want to keep improving.”)

(P7) “Naa gihapon koy mga areas nga gusto nako i-improve.”
 (“I still have areas I want to improve.”)

This reflects a mastery goal orientation in which athletes define success through personal improvement rather than comparison with others (Nicholls, 1984). Performance is viewed as developmental and iterative.

Motivation through feedback. Feedback from coaches and peers enhanced motivation and performance awareness.

(P2) “Their feedback motivates me to improve and gives me more confidence.”
(P7) “Positive feedback boosts my confidence, while constructive criticism helps me identify what to work on.”

These experiences underscore the role of supportive social environments in reinforcing competence and sustaining intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Theme 3. Mentorship and Mindset

Strong coach–athlete relationship. Coaches were described as central to both technical development and emotional stability.

(P5) “My coach is like our second father... I talk to him for emotional support.”
(P1) “Even when you think you can’t do it, your coach will push you.”

The coach–athlete bond reinforced both relatedness and competence, two fundamental psychological needs essential for sustained engagement (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Growth-oriented perspective. Athletes framed satisfaction beyond medals, emphasizing learning and progress.

(P7) “Satisfaction is not just about winning medals, but seeing my own growth.”
(P5) “Even if I don’t win, it’s okay because I still learn.”

These reflections further illustrate a mastery orientation, where development and effort outweigh outcome-based validation (Nicholls, 1984).

Theme 4. Systemic Barriers

Inconsistent and Selective Institutional Support. Athletes described institutional assistance as irregular and often dependent on the sport’s visibility or competition level.

(P7) “Now kay weather-weather gihapon ilang support, di siya consistent even though kana ang achievements nimo. Kuang gihapon sila kay ang ilang gina support kay ang mga popular sports.”
(“Their support is still inconsistent even with our achievements. They usually prioritize popular sports.”)

(P2) “Di man mo support ang Team Philippines if local ra.”
(“Team Philippines doesn’t provide support if it’s only a local competition.”)

(P7) “Honestly, dili pa gyud siya enough. Para ma-sustain ang career sa mga para-athletes, kinahanglan ug consistent ug long-term support, dili lang once in a while.”
(“Honestly, it’s really not enough. To sustain para-athletes’ careers, there needs to be consistent and long-term support, not just once in a while.”)

These accounts highlight structural instability in funding and program continuity, suggesting that institutional recognition remains conditional rather than sustained.

Lack of Resources and Facilities for Para-Athletes. Material limitations further constrained training preparation and performance quality.

(P7) “Ang dili maayo mao gyud ang kakulang sa resources, facilities, ug usahay ang financial struggles.”
(“The difficult part is the lack of resources, facilities, and financial struggles.”)

(P8) “Kung mag practice kay walay igo na materials, amo-amoa ra sa gawas.”
(“When we practice, we don’t have enough materials, so we just use what’s available outside.”)

(P2) “Lisod pa jud kaayo among ge stayhan... layo pami sa training area. Maglakaw pami padung sa training.”
(“It’s really difficult because our dorm is under renovation, and we have to walk far to the training area.”)

These narratives reveal how inadequate facilities, limited equipment, and logistical challenges directly affect preparation and recovery. Athletes often compensate through heightened personal effort, demonstrating resilience within structurally constrained conditions.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings demonstrate that resilience, identity reconstruction, and performance satisfaction among Cebuano para-athletes are shaped by personal determination, relational support, and structural conditions. These insights generate implications across multiple sectors.

Para-Athlete Community

For the para-athlete community, this study provides a platform for articulating experiences of struggle, adaptation, and empowerment. Participation in adaptive sport fosters confidence, belongingness, and identity formation. It is recommended that para-athletes be provided with consistent psychosocial support, mentorship programs, and peer networks. Establishing local para-athlete associations and community-based groups may further strengthen representation and sustained motivation.

Coaches, Family, and Support Systems

The findings emphasize the critical role of coaches and families in holistic athlete development. Coaches function not only as technical trainers but as emotional anchors. Thus, adaptive and inclusive coaching programs integrating sports psychology, empathetic communication, and mastery-oriented goal setting are recommended. Families and support systems should actively provide continuous moral and emotional reinforcement. Structured mentorship programs linking experienced and emerging para-athletes may further enhance identity development and resilience.

Sports Institutions and Organizations

Institutional inconsistencies in funding, facilities, and recognition hinder long-term athlete development. National bodies such as the Philippine Paralympic Committee (PPC), Philippine Sports Commission (PSC), and local government units should establish inclusive, long-term support frameworks. Recommendations include adaptive training facilities, parasport coaching certification, equitable funding mechanisms, and strengthened grassroots recruitment. Regular monitoring of policies under Republic Act 7277 is essential to ensure consistent implementation. The creation of regional para-sport development offices, particularly outside Metro Manila, may decentralize access and improve sustainability.

Policymakers

For policymakers, the findings highlight the need for a comprehensive and sustainable national framework for para-athlete development. This includes consistent funding, infrastructure investment, medical and rehabilitation support, career transition programs, and inclusive education pathways. Stronger enforcement of anti-discrimination and inclusion laws is necessary to ensure equal recognition and representation of para-athletes in national and international platforms.

Psychologists and Mental Health Practitioners

The study underscores the importance of psychological adjustment, resilience, and motivation in parasport participation. Mental health professionals are encouraged to design sport-specific intervention programs focusing on stress management, confidence-building, and sustained intrinsic motivation. Integrating sports psychology services within para-sport organizations is strongly recommended.

Community

Communities play a central role in reshaping social perceptions of disability. Public awareness initiatives, inclusive competitions, and community-based training centers may promote visibility and normalize

participation of athletes with disabilities. Collaborative efforts between para-sport associations, schools, civic organizations, and local councils can foster inclusive participation and reduce stigma.

Future Studies

Future research should expand participant diversity across regions, disability classifications, and sport disciplines. Longitudinal and mixed-method designs are recommended to examine changes in motivation, mastery orientation, and performance satisfaction over time. Interdisciplinary approaches integrating sport psychology, disability studies, sociology, and public policy may further illuminate systemic influences on parasport development.

Future Researchers

Future researchers are encouraged to examine institutional and policy-level factors shaping para-athlete experiences. Comparative studies between para-athletes and able-bodied athletes may identify systemic inequities and best practices. Evaluations of existing government programs and documentation of local success narratives can contribute to evidence-based reforms and strengthen national advocacy efforts.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study explored the lived experiences of Cebuano para-athletes; however, several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings.

Geographical scope. The study focused solely on para-athletes in Cebu, making the findings context-specific. Differences in institutional support, accessibility, and sports culture across other regions of the Philippines may shape para-athletes' experiences differently. Future studies may expand to other provinces to enable broader comparisons and insights.

Data reliability and participant responses. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which rely on self-reported narratives. Participants' responses may have been influenced by recall limitations or social desirability. Although rapport and confidentiality were ensured, future research may incorporate multiple data sources—such as observations or document analysis—to strengthen data reliability.

Sampling and representation. The small sample size and focus on accessible and active para-athletes limit the diversity of representation in terms of disability type, sport discipline, and competition level. Future studies are encouraged to include a larger and more varied sample, encompassing both grassroots and elite para-athletes.

Subjectivity in qualitative analysis. As with most qualitative research, interpretation of narratives may involve researcher subjectivity. While reflexivity, peer review, and member checking were applied to enhance credibility, interpretive bias may still exist. Subsequent studies may benefit from collaborative or interdisciplinary analytical approaches.

Temporal limitation. Data were collected within a specific time period, providing only a snapshot of participants' experiences. Since athletes' motivations, performance, and support systems may evolve, longitudinal research is recommended to capture changes across different stages of the para-athletic journey.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the lived experiences and performance satisfaction of Cebuano para-athletes, highlighting the transformative role of sport in shaping identity, motivation, and personal growth. Despite challenges such as discrimination, limited resources, and inconsistent institutional support, participants demonstrated strong resilience and perseverance, sustained by personal determination, passion for sport, and the support of coaches, teammates, and family. The findings indicate that performance satisfaction among para-athletes is rooted not only in competitive outcomes but also in disciplined training, personal progress, and mastery-oriented

development. Grit, intrinsic motivation, and continuous self-improvement emerged as key factors shaping their sense of achievement and fulfillment in both training and competition.

At the same time, structural barriers—particularly inconsistent institutional support and limited access to resources and facilities—continue to affect their athletic development. These results highlight the need for more inclusive and sustained support systems to promote equitable opportunities for para-athletes. Overall, the experiences of Cebuano para-athletes demonstrate that sport serves as a powerful platform for empowerment, resilience, and social inclusion. Strengthening institutional and community support is therefore essential to advancing the development of parasport in the Philippines and enabling para-athletes to fully realize their potential.

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