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Dual Career Support For University Student-Athletes: A Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to identify and synthesise forms of support for university student-athletes and examine their implications for ASEAN higher education. A qualitative systematic review was conducted in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. Literature searches were performed in the SCOPUS database on October 6, 2026, using keywords related to student-athletes, dual careers, and support. Following the screening process, 19 relevant articles were selected from 130 identified documents and analysed descriptively to synthesise the reported support systems. The findings revealed that dual-career support encompasses several interconnected dimensions, including academic flexibility, tutoring and mentoring, financial assistance, access to sports facilities, logistical arrangements, digital learning, and social and psychological support. Financial assistance was the most frequently expected support in one included study (66.1%), followed by access to sports facilities at or near universities (48.8%), educational flexibility (26.4%), and university tutoring (25.6%). The findings also indicated that the availability of support does not necessarily ensure accessibility or effective implementation, highlighting the importance of institutional coordination, clear stakeholder responsibilities, and individualised services. For ASEAN higher education, these findings provide a basis for developing context-sensitive support systems that accommodate academic and sporting commitments. Further empirical research in ASEAN countries is needed to evaluate the implementation, accessibility, and effectiveness of dual-career support.

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INTRODUCTION

The development of competitive sport at university level places student-athletes in a situation that requires them to fulfil two roles simultaneously: that of a student with academic obligations, and that of an athlete expected to achieve optimal sporting performance. This situation is known as a 'dual career', which refers to an individual's ability to develop and pursue an educational or professional career alongside a sporting career (European Commission, 2012). Balancing these two paths is by no means a simple process, as the demands of education and sport can require different levels of time, energy and commitment. High-performance athletes, for example, must cope with intensive training, competitions, travel and physical recovery, whilst at the same time meeting the demands of their studies and academic obligations. European guidelines on dual careers also emphasise that successfully combining education and sport requires special arrangements so that athletes are not forced to choose between their education and sporting achievements (European Commission, 2012).

These dual demands demonstrate that success in a dual career is not determined solely by an individual's ability to manage their time and responsibilities. The educational and sporting environments also play a vital role in providing the conditions that enable student-athletes to pursue both paths sustainably (Henriksen et al., 2020). Forms of support may include academic flexibility, adjustments to lecture and examination timetables, academic mentoring, financial support, sports facilities, counselling services, career guidance, and coordination between educational institutions and the sporting community (Id et al., 2022; Brustio., 2020). Research on international student-athletes participating in the Universiade indicates that the support received covers educational, sporting and personal aspects, with academic flexibility, financial support and the availability of sports facilities being among the most frequently reported forms of support. However, some athletes still report that support in the form of tutoring or mentoring at university and within the sporting environment remains limited (Fahrner et al., 2025).

The importance of institutional support is also evident from a study involving more than 1,000 international student-athletes. Fahrner et al., (2025) This study showed that dual-career support services can be categorised into several factors and that student-athletes' perceptions of the relevance of these services are linked to their academic and sporting characteristics. These findings suggest that student-athletes' needs for support are not always uniform; therefore, support systems must take into account the individual circumstances and demands faced by each athlete. Consequently, dual-career support should be understood not merely as the provision of facilities, but as a system that integrates the academic, sporting, personal and career development needs of student-athletes (Henriksen et al., 2020; Izzicupo et al., 2025).

Although research on dual careers has expanded, the scientific evidence regarding support for student-athletes remains scattered across various contexts, countries, sports and research approaches. Previous systematic reviews, for example, have addressed aspects of student-athletes' academic and sporting identities, including identity development, role conflict, career development and motivation. Meanwhile, a more recent scoping review of 25 studies

from 2014–2024 indicates that research on dual-career policies and support encompasses logistical, social, financial, tutoring, curricular and policy aspects. The review also shows that the majority of studies originate from European contexts 88.5 per cent of the research meaning that the representation of non-European contexts remains relatively limited (Maio et al., 2025).

These findings highlight the need for a more targeted synthesis of the forms of support that can facilitate the dual career development of student-athletes, particularly by placing institutional support at the centre. A systematic review is necessary because individual studies may provide a limited picture based on specific contexts, whereas a synthesis of various studies can help identify patterns of support, similarities and differences in findings, and research gaps (Page et al., 2021). Through a systematic review approach, the available evidence can be mapped out more systematically to provide an understanding of the types of support that have been studied and how such support contributes to student-athletes' ability to pursue their education and sport simultaneously.

In the context of higher education, this issue is becoming increasingly important because student-athletes form part of the university sports ecosystem, which is focused not only on achieving sporting success but also on the continuity of education and individual development. This context is of particular relevance to the ASEAN region, which has seen the development of university sports and regional competitions, including the ASEAN University Games (AUG). Student-athletes participating in regional-level competitions must still meet the academic demands of higher education; therefore, a support system capable of integrating the academic calendar, training, travel and competitions is essential. Consequently, the findings of international research on dual-career support can serve as a basis for considering the development of a support system for student-athletes within the context of ASEAN higher education (Id et al., 2022; Maio et al., 2025).

In the Indonesian context, this need is also relevant as student-athletes must undertake their higher education alongside the demands of training and competition. Research on student-athletes in Indonesia indicates that academic and training processes need to be adapted to the needs of dual-career athletes, whilst there is concern regarding situations where student-athletes' academic achievements do not align with their sporting achievements (Surotoa et al., 2024). These findings reinforce the importance of educational support designed with the characteristics and needs of student-athletes in mind, rather than simply treating athletes as ordinary students who happen to participate in sporting activities.

Based on this background, this study aims to identify and synthesise the forms of dual-career support for student-athletes reported in the scientific literature, with a particular focus on institutional support in helping student-athletes manage the demands of education and sport simultaneously. This study employs a systematic review approach, reported in accordance with the 2020 Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. PRISMA 2020 provides a transparent reporting framework regarding the rationale for the review, the process of identifying and selecting studies, and the synthesis of research findings (Page et al., 2021). Furthermore, the findings will be used to formulate implications for the development of dual-career support for student-athletes

within the context of ASEAN higher education institutions, including its relevance to the development of athletes participating in regional university competitions.

METHODS

Study Design

This study identifies and synthesizes various forms of support that assist student athletes in pursuing dual careers using a qualitative approach and a systematic review design. To ensure systematic, transparent, and reliable procedures throughout each phase of identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion, the review was conducted in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. The SCOPUS database was used as the primary data source because it contains credible, peer-reviewed scientific publications related to the research topic. The selected articles were then analyzed using descriptive qualitative analysis to identify, compare, and synthesize key findings related to the forms of support that assist student athletes in pursuing dual careers.

Study Procedures

Data were collected on October 6, 2026, from previous research publications using the keywords "Student-Athlete" OR "Student Athlete" OR "University Athlete" OR "College Athlete" OR "Elite Student-Athlete" AND "Dual Career" OR "Dual-Career" AND Support OR "Institutional Support" OR "Academic Support" OR "Dual Career Program" OR "Dual Career Policy." A literature search was conducted using the SCOPUS database. The inclusion criteria for this study were documents written in English as articles. The use of English was necessary to avoid misunderstandings during the review process. This analysis excluded documents not written in English as articles. Selecting publications relevant to the keywords was also crucial to ensure that the literature review findings were consistent with the research objectives. The screening process involved identification, abstract and title screening, full-text eligibility testing, and final inclusion in accordance with PRISMA guidelines. Key findings related to the types of support that help student athletes pursue dual careers were identified through a qualitative analysis of eligible articles, which were then identified by author, year, purpose, methods, and research findings.

RESULTS

Results of the PRISMA screening process.

The screening process, carried out using the PRISMA flowchart, resulted in 130 documents being identified in the database based on the keywords used (Figure 1). These results were screened again to exclude articles not published in English. An eligibility assessment was then carried out to select the articles to be included in the literature review. The final selection comprised the 20 most frequently cited and relevant articles.

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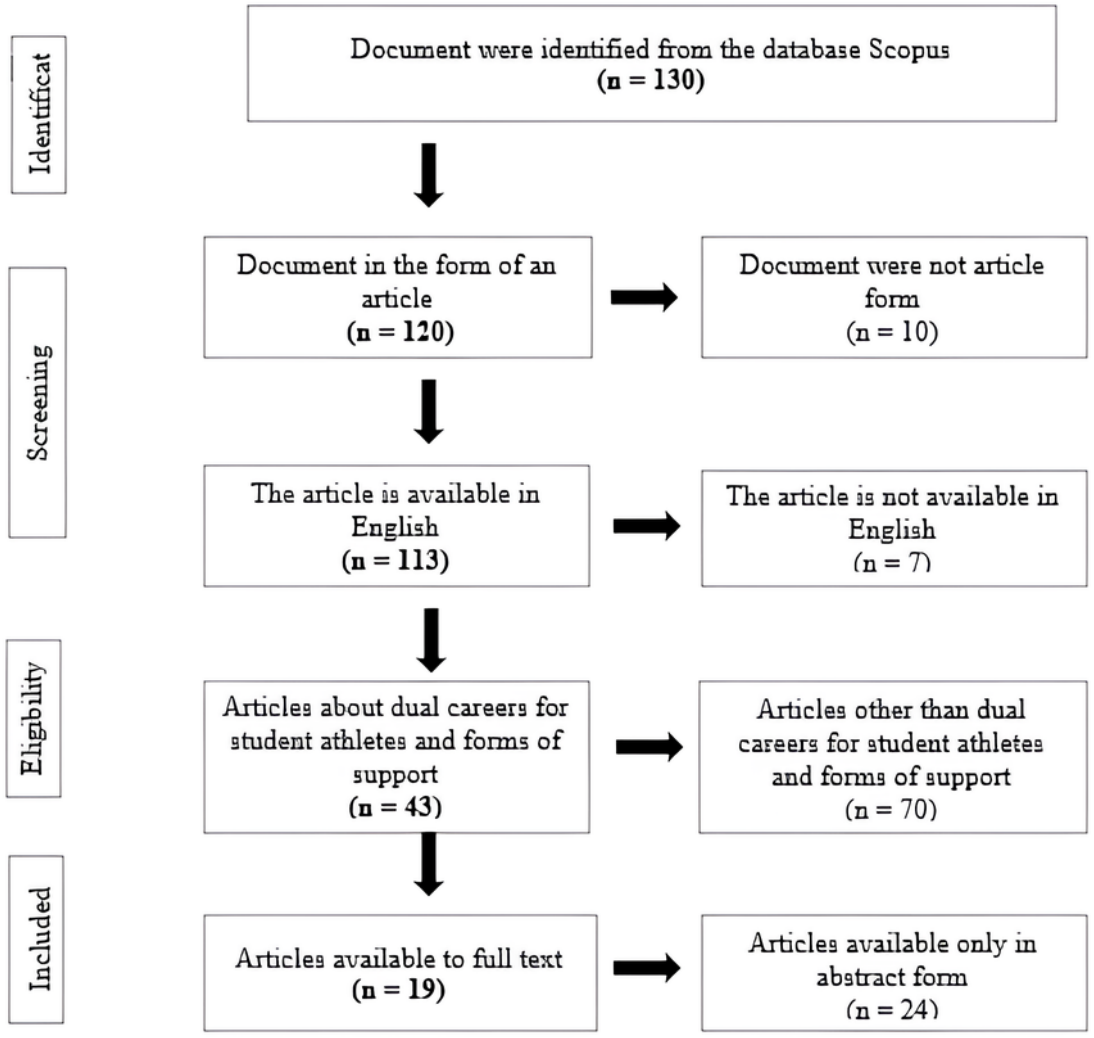


Figure 1. PRISMA Flowchart of The Article Selection Process

Literature Review

In this section, a literature review was conducted using relevant articles (Table 1). Based on the results of a screening process using pre-determined keywords, 20 articles were selected for inclusion in this literature review. This literature review serves as a foundation for researchers to obtain findings consistent with the objectives of this study.

Table 1. Literature Review

Author	Purpose	Sample	Method	Support	Result
(Henriksen et al., 2020)	Describing the dual-career development environment at an athlete-friendly university in Denmark, and identifying the	8 informants from the following groups: student-athletes, coaches, instructors, support providers,	Case Study Qualitatif	Dual-career support team, cross-domain coordination, individualized solutions, and development of	An effective support environment is characterized by a centralized support team, individualized solutions, the development of athletes' planning and

	environmental factors that support athletes in successfully balancing their sports and studies.	and university leaders		role-management competencies	communication skills, and a shared philosophy that views the athlete as a whole person. Coordination between the sporting and academic environments is essential.
(Ryan et al., 2017)	Exploring the experiences of high-achieving athletes who pursue university education while competing, and evaluating the implementation of the Athlete Friendly Tertiary Network (AFTN) support system.	9 student-athletes	Case Study Qualitatif	Scholarships, university support, implementation of AFTN policy	Athletes receive some support from university staff, but this support is not yet optimal. Absences due to competitions, a lack of flexibility in the learning system, and a limited understanding among instructors regarding the AFTN policy serve as the primary obstacles.
(Id et al., 2022)	Identifying the perspectives of university athletes regarding the needs, challenges, and support required to combine higher education with high-performance sports.	77 university athletes	Qualitative FGD; inductive thematic analysis	Tutors, curriculum, financial, logistics, social, and policy	Athletes highlight the need for financial support, tutoring, curriculum adjustments, logistical assistance, social support, and dual-career policies. Such support must take into account the comprehensive needs of athletes, rather than focusing solely on academic flexibility.
(Fuchs et al., 2021)	Analyzing student-athletes' perceptions of the challenges, opportunities, and support structures encountered when migrating to pursue a dual career, including the effectiveness of the forms of support available.	245 student-athletes; migration analysis of 140 athletes	Quantitative Survey	Tutoring, counseling, financial support, online services, social integration	The challenges of migration encompass academic, athletic, financial, and social aspects. Tutoring, academic counseling, and online services are considered effective forms of support. The need for support also varies depending on the country and the characteristics of the athlete.

(Brustio et al., 2020)	To investigate dual-career issues among Italian student-athletes and identify major problems and potential solutions related to combining academic and sport demands.	711 Italian university student-athletes, mean age 23 ± 4 years, University of Torino	Quantitative survey	Academic scheduling flexibility, exam flexibility, e-learning, tutoring, scholarships, flexible sport training, institutional–sport federation communication, sports facilities and transportation	The analysis in Part A yielded two factors related to sports participation and education for future employment. Both factors showed variations based on the year of study; students who were behind in their academic progress ("out of course") had lower scores. Regarding the factor concerning education for future employment, differences were also observed based on age and field of study. In Part B, the majority of athletes expressed a desire for class and examination schedules that are better suited to balancing the demands of sports and academics. Additionally, 65 participants (9.1% of the sample) provided open-ended responses regarding program improvements, including greater flexibility in training and enhanced dialogue between the sports and academic sectors.
(Abenza-cano et al., 2020)	Comparing the perceptions of elite student-athletes regarding their dual careers during the COVID-19-related restrictions with their perceptions under normal conditions prior to the Rio 2016 Olympics.	150 elite athletes who are also undergraduate or postgraduate students. A total of 78 individuals are in the COVID-19 group, and 72 individuals are in the control group.	Cross- Sectional Study	Curriculum flexibility, monitoring of dual careers by universities, the role of sports tutors, distance learning support, online assignments, and video conferencing.	The COVID-19 group reported a significantly higher number of study hours per week, with no significant difference in the time spent on training. They also demonstrated more favorable perceptions regarding distance learning and the use of assignments and video

					conferencing. Conversely, the proportion of athletes intending to pursue a sports career after completing their education was lower in the COVID-19 group. Overall, perceptions toward a "dual career" remained positive.
(Brustio et al., 2020)	To investigate actual and wished supports for promoting a successful dual career among Italian university student-athletes.	711 Italian university student-athletes, mean age 23 ± 4 years, University of Torino	Quantitative survey	Individual tutoring, e-learning, flexibility in lessons/examinations, extra-academic merits/credits, scholarships, and sport-related remuneration	The article reports that tutoring, e-learning, and the recognition of additional achievements are areas of support deemed unsatisfactory by certain groups. The findings indicate that the services expected by athletes are not always available or do not align with their specific needs. Such support must take into account an athlete's age, type of sport, level of competition, and educational pathway.
(Fahrner et al., 2025)	Analyzing how student-athletes assess the relevance of various dual-career support services in higher education.	1,055 international student-athletes participating in the 2019 Winter and Summer Universiades.	Online Survey	University support services that assist student-athletes in balancing their education and sports commitments. The article categorizes these services into three support factors; the specific names and detailed components of each factor can be found by referring to the results table in the article.	The assessment of service relevance is significantly associated with socio-demographic factors, educational level, and the specific characteristics of a sport. The research recommends providing support tailored to the needs of athletes, particularly based on gender, university level, and type of sport.
(Rossi & Hallma	Identifying the barriers and facilitators encountered by elite	The research consisted of two stages: qualitative interviews with	Mixed methods.	Structural support from education and vocational training institutions,	Athletes pursuing a university education encounter the greatest number of intrapersonal

nn, 2022)	athletes at various stages of their dual careers, and examining their impact on their career trajectories.	11 German athletes and a quantitative survey involving 200 elite German athletes.		psychological and financial support, as well as the availability of a contact person to assist athletes.	barriers and possess relatively low levels of intrapersonal support factors. Structural support from educational and vocational training institutions is positively associated with a "dual career," whereas barriers most notably feelings of pressure are negatively associated with it. The research underscores the importance of tangible institutional support.
(Gjaka et al., 2024)	Exploring the experiences of student-athletes in navigating a dual career, including their academic and athletic involvement, understanding of support programs, challenges, and support networks.	121 student-athletes, representing 13 sports, consisting of 102 athletes in team sports and 19 athletes in individual sports.	Online Survey	Support from family, coaches, and peers; university and sports policies; financial assistance; sports facilities; educational flexibility; tutoring services; sports clubs; and communication regarding available programs.	A total of 89.3% of participants are unaware of dual-career programs. Key challenges include a lack of free time (62.8%), an excessive academic workload (60.3%), frequent absences from class (59.6%), and financial uncertainty (35.5%). The most sought-after forms of support include financial assistance (66.1%), sports facilities at or near the university (48.8%), educational flexibility (26.4%), and university tutoring services (25.6%). Parents (98.3%), coaches (86%), and siblings (60.3%) are also identified as important sources of support.
(Conde et al., 2023)	Evaluating the impact of the European Sport Tutorship Model (ESTPORT) on	109 student-athletes.	Quantitative	Sports tutor: listening to athletes, providing personal/academic support, assisting with academic	On average, athletes complete 1.8 ± 0.8 academic years of study per calendar year. Male athletes experience a

	dual-career student-athletes at UCAM, based on their perceptions of their athletic and academic careers.			administration, managing time, communicating with lecturers, and helping with exam scheduling.	greater disruption to their study rhythm than female athletes. Sports tutors are considered highly valuable, especially by national-level athletes, as they provide guidance, academic assistance, personal support, and help with time management.
(Roberts et al., 2025)	Identifying system components considered helpful for New Zealand student-athletes in navigating the demands of elite sports and university studies, both in New Zealand and the United States.	18 former student-athletes:	Qualitative semi-structured interviews	Three key structural supports: academic support staff, knowledgeable insiders (lecturers and students), and study halls and tutoring services. Positive relationships with academic staff are also important.	Academic support is a key factor in success. Such support structures are more commonly found in U.S. universities. Studies conclude that these systems do not necessarily require entirely new structures; rather, they can be improved through the reconfiguration of existing components and a clear delineation of stakeholder roles.
(Izzicupo et al., 2025)	Evaluating the perspectives of student-athletes and university experts regarding the availability, implementation, and quality of dual-career support.	321 student-athletes and 46 university experts.	Online survey	Logistical, financial, and policy support, as well as other services related to the implementation of dual careers in higher education institutions.	There are differences in how various countries rate logistical, financial, and policy support. Student-athletes from Romania and Serbia tend to provide higher ratings, whereas respondents from Italy and Spain tend to give lower ratings across several aspects. In general, university experts rate dual-career services more positively than student-athletes do. This suggests a potential gap between the assessments made by service providers and

					the experiences of those receiving the services.
(Linnér et al., 2026)	Identifying factors associated with the satisfaction of student-athletes as they navigate both their sports careers and education, while also evaluating the university sports system in Sweden.	561 student-athletes	Online survey	Dual-career support, an athlete's ability to manage the demands of sports, education, and personal life, flexibility in balancing studies and athletics, social relationship support, and the fulfillment of psychological needs.	Satisfaction with a dual career is primarily linked to an athlete's ability to manage various demands, the availability of relevant support, and positive social relationships. Athletes with strong coping skills and robust social support networks report the highest levels of satisfaction. Research underscores the importance of individualized support that empowers athletes, as well as the value of a supportive community of fellow athletes.
(Marsh et al., 2026)	Exploring the perceptions of Irish dual-career athletes regarding their transition into the U.S. collegiate sports system, as well as changes in their support systems across three phases of the transition.	11 Irish DC athletes, 4 women and 7 men from 8 sports. 36 individual interviews were conducted at 3 time points over 12 months.	Longitudinal qualitative design	Pre-transition preparation, liaison between home coaches and US coaches, transition literacy, mental-health support, sports psychology professional support, and social support.	Three main themes: scholarship dreams versus reality; coping with the demands placed on student-athletes; and learning how to move forward. The study recommends preparation prior to the transition, coordination with coaches, the development of "transition literacy," and access to mental health and sports psychology support.
(Belluzzi et al., 2025)	Exploring the dual-career experiences of student-athletes in the context of graduate employability, and how a dual career serves as a resource during career transitions.	21 student-athletes.	Phenomenological-interpretive qualitative approach;	Support from DC tutors, organizational guidance, emotional/psychological support, networking, university services, and peer/team support.	There are four key dimensions of employability: Human Capital, Social Capital, Individual Behaviors, and Individual Attributes. A dual-career approach helps develop self-organization, coping mechanisms, problem-solving, teamwork,

					networking, and career-management skills. Support from a dual-career (DC) tutor is considered essential for providing both organizational and emotional/psychological assistance.
(Wang, 2026)	Analyzing the multi-level social factors that cause anxiety, hinder decision-making, and influence recovery and role exit following a sport-related concussion (SRC) among Chinese student-athletes.	1 student-athlete/writer as an autoethnographic case.	Autoethnography	Instrumental/esteem support from teammates, non-judgmental support from teachers/supervisors, companionship from family, and academic capital—these represent forms of support. Conversely, weaknesses in medical communication, return-to-learn/play procedures, and policy coordination constitute a lack of support.	Scarce resources and the marginalization of non-mainstream sports reinforce athlete identity and overinvestment. Academic demands increase the strain of pursuing a dual path. Conversely, academic capital, support from teammates, teachers/supervisors, and family serve as vital buffers for recovery and role reconstruction.
(Mabala et al., 2026)	Exploring how the experiences of dual-career student-athletes differ across two South African public universities situated in different geographical contexts.	22 student-athletes.	Exploratory qualitative design.	Peer/team support, coach–academic liaison, peer mentoring, facilitated study groups, academic flexibility, coping/self-regulation programs, and institutional support.	Academic demands are the most persistent source of stress. Motivation, resilience, goal orientation, and peer/team support serve as vital resources. Injuries, transitions, and cumulative fatigue can hinder coping mechanisms. Since the experiences at both universities are relatively similar, the "dual career" path is shaped by the interaction between the individual and their environment.
(Ruiz-alias, 2025)	Analyzing the perceptions of athletes, coaches, and sport tutors regarding the	30 athletes, 10 coaches, 5 sports tutors.	Cross-sectional descriptive study	Digital/e-learning support, sports tutors, coaches, academic tutors, and virtual advisors. A Moodle-	Perception of the platform is highly positive. Athletes gave maximum scores for user-friendliness

EduSport e-learning platform developed to support dual careers.		based platform facilitates communication, flexibility, access to learning materials, and stakeholder interaction.	(90%), attractiveness (80%), clarity (83.3%), utility (90%), encouragement (83.3%), and satisfaction (90%). All sport tutors assigned a score of 5 to every item. All participants preferred the digital system over the traditional one.

DISCUSSION

Multidimensional Dual-Career Support for Student-Athletes

The findings of this systematic review indicate that dual-career support should be understood as a multidimensional system rather than a collection of separate services. Across the included studies, support encompasses academic flexibility, tutoring and mentoring, financial assistance, logistical arrangements, social relationships, psychological support, and coordination between educational institutions and sporting organisations. Although these forms of support address different needs, their contributions are interconnected because student-athletes must manage academic, sporting, and personal responsibilities simultaneously. Consequently, the availability of one form of support does not necessarily compensate for the absence of others.

This interpretation is consistent with Henriksen et al., (2020), who emphasised the importance of a coordinated dual-career environment involving athletes, coaches, academic staff, support providers, and university management. Their findings suggest that an effective environment depends not only on the presence of individual services but also on collaboration among stakeholders, individualised solutions, and a shared understanding of athletes as whole persons. Similarly, Rossi & Hallmann, (2022) identified structural support from educational and training institutions as an important factor associated with dual-career development. Taken together, these studies suggest that the effectiveness of support may depend on how institutional arrangements connect different aspects of an athlete's life, rather than simply on the number of services available.

However, the evidence also indicates that the existence of support structures does not guarantee that student-athletes experience them as adequate. Ryan et al., (2017), for example, reported that student-athletes received support from university staff, yet implementation problems involving the Athlete Friendly Tertiary Network (AFTN), inflexible learning arrangements, competition-related absences, and limited staff understanding continued to create difficulties. A similar distinction can be observed in Gjaka et al., (2024), where student-athletes reported substantial challenges and limited awareness of available dual-career programmes. These findings contrast with the coordinated support environment described by Henriksen et al., (2020), highlighting a difference between

support as an institutional intention and support as an accessible, consistently implemented experience.

The comparison suggests that dual-career support should be evaluated at several levels: whether a service formally exists, whether student-athletes know about it, whether they can access it when needed, and whether it responds to their actual circumstances. These dimensions should not be treated as interchangeable. A university may have formal policies but still provide insufficient practical assistance if lecturers are unaware of the policies or if procedures are difficult to implement. Conversely, informal support from lecturers, coaches, and peers may help athletes navigate immediate difficulties but may not provide the consistency or protection associated with institutional arrangements.

Overall, the reviewed evidence supports an integrated understanding of dual-career support in which institutional structures, practical services, and interpersonal relationships reinforce one another. Nevertheless, because the included studies use different designs and examine different contexts, the findings do not establish that one particular support model is universally superior. Rather, they indicate that the organisation, accessibility, and responsiveness of support are important considerations when developing systems for student-athletes.

Academic Flexibility, Tutoring, and Institutional Support

Academic flexibility emerges as a recurring concern across the reviewed studies, particularly in relation to class attendance, examination schedules, training commitments, competition travel, and the completion of academic requirements. Brustio et al., (2020) identified scheduling and examination flexibility, e-learning, tutoring, scholarships, and communication between educational institutions and sporting organisations among the support arrangements relevant to Italian university student-athletes. Their findings also indicated that many athletes wanted academic schedules and examinations to be better aligned with sporting demands. These results suggest that academic flexibility is not merelyan optional benefit; it is an important mechanism through which universities can accommodate the competing time demands of education and sport.

The findings of Ryan et al., (2017) help explain why flexibility may remain inadequate even when a formal support framework is available. Their study identified inflexible learning arrangements, competition-related absences, and limited staff understanding of institutional policies as continuing barriers. In comparison with Brustio et al., (2020), which identified both existing support arrangements and areas for improvement, Ryan et al., (2017) highlight the implementation gap between policy and everyday academic practice. The two studies therefore point to complementary dimensions of the same problem: support policies need to establish appropriate arrangements, but their practical value depends on whether academic staff understand and apply them consistently.

The importance of personalised academic assistance is further demonstrated by (Conde et al., 2023), who examined the European Sport Tutorship Model. Sports tutors were perceived as important because they helped student-athletes manage academic administration, organise their time, communicate with lecturers, and arrange examinations.

These findings extend the discussion beyond flexibility as a policy provision by illustrating how a designated support person can help athletes navigate institutional procedures. Whereas scheduling adjustments modify the academic environment, tutoring provides guidance that enables student-athletes to make effective use of those arrangements.

Similarly, the findings reported by Roberts et al., (2025) identify knowledgeable academic staff, positive relationships with university personnel, study halls, and tutoring services as important structural components of support. Their comparison of experiences in New Zealand and United States university settings also suggests that improving support does not necessarily require creating an entirely new system. Existing resources may be reorganised through clearer stakeholder responsibilities and stronger academic relationships. Compared with the tutor-centred approach discussed by Conde et al., (2023), Roberts et al., (2025) place greater emphasis on the broader configuration of institutional resources. Together, the studies suggest that effective academic support may require both individual guidance and an institutional environment that makes such guidance possible.

Digital learning provides another means of addressing academic and sporting demands. Abenza-cano et al., (2020) found that athletes in the COVID-19 group reported more weekly study hours and more positive perceptions of distance learning, online assignments, and videoconferencing than the comparison group, while training time did not differ significantly. These findings indicate that digital learning can offer flexibility in how academic activities are completed. Ruiz-alias, (2025) likewise reported positive perceptions of the EduSport e-learning platform, including its usability, clarity, utility, and overall satisfaction. The platform was designed to facilitate communication, learning materials, and interaction among stakeholders involved in dual-career support.

Nevertheless, these digital findings should not be interpreted as evidence that technology can replace academic flexibility or personal tutoring. Abenza-cano et al., (2020) examined perceptions during an exceptional educational context, whereas Ruiz-alias, (2025) evaluated a specific platform. Neither finding alone establishes that digital learning improves long-term academic completion or sporting performance. Digital tools are better understood as complementary mechanisms that may increase access to learning and communication, provided that institutions also address the academic and administrative barriers faced by student-athletes.

Taken together, the studies indicate that academic support operates through at least three connected mechanisms: flexible academic arrangements, individualised guidance, and accessible learning systems. A weakness in one mechanism may reduce the usefulness of the others. Flexible schedules, for example, may be insufficient when lecturers do not implement agreed arrangements, while tutoring may have limited impact if institutional rules remain inflexible. Universities should therefore consider academic flexibility, tutoring, digital learning, and staff coordination as mutually reinforcing components of a coherent support system.

Financial, Social, and Psychological Support

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The reviewed literature demonstrates that the challenges of dual careers extend beyond academic scheduling. Financial resources, logistical arrangements, social relationships, and psychological well-being also influence how student-athletes experience the combination of education and sport. Id et al., (2022) identified financial assistance, tutoring, curricular adjustments, logistical support, social support, and dual-career policies among the needs expressed by university athletes from several European countries. Their findings indicate that athletes' support requirements cannot be adequately addressed through academic flexibility alone. This broad perspective is consistent with Gjaka et al., (2024), whose participants identified financial assistance as the most frequently expected form of support, followed by sports facilities, educational flexibility, and university tutoring services.

The comparison between these studies is important because it demonstrates both common priorities and differences in emphasis. Id et al., (2022) foregrounded a broad set of interconnected support needs, while Gjaka et al., (2024) provided a clearer indication of which services participants most frequently expected. In the latter study, financial assistance was expected by 66.1% of participants, followed by access to sports facilities at or near the university (48.8%), educational flexibility (26.4%), and university tutoring (25.6%). These figures indicate the relative priorities reported by that particular sample; they should not be generalised to all student-athletes or interpreted as direct measures of programme effectiveness.

Financial support may be especially important when educational participation and sporting development involve expenses or logistical demands that are difficult to reconcile with limited resources. However, financial assistance alone cannot resolve scheduling conflicts, academic communication problems, or psychological strain. The findings of Id et al., (2022) are relevant here because they frame financial support alongside curricular, logistical, tutoring, and social needs. This suggests that financial provision should be incorporated into a broader support strategy rather than treated as a stand-alone solution. Social relationships constitute another recurring dimension. Gjaka et al., (2024) identified parents, coaches, and siblings as important sources of support, while Linnér et al., (2026) found that dual-career satisfaction was associated with athletes' coping capacities, relevant support, and positive social relationships. These findings complement each other but address different aspects of support. Gjaka et al., (2024) highlight the people whom student-athletes identify as important sources of assistance, whereas Linnér et al., (2026) connect social relationships and coping with satisfaction in managing dual careers. Together, they suggest that support is not limited to services formally provided by universities; family members, coaches, teammates, and other significant relationships can also contribute to athletes' ability to manage competing demands.

At the same time, informal social support should not be regarded as a substitute for institutional responsibility. Families and coaches may provide encouragement, practical assistance, or advice, but their capacity to resolve academic scheduling conflicts or institutional administrative barriers may be limited. The findings therefore point to the need for universities and sporting organisations to recognise and coordinate with athletes' support

networks while retaining responsibility for the academic and organisational conditions within their control.

Psychological support becomes particularly relevant when athletes encounter major transitions or sustained demands. Marsh et al., (2026) examined Irish dual-career athletes transitioning into the United States collegiate sporting system and identified the importance of preparation before transition, coordination between coaches, transition literacy, social support, mental-health support, and sport psychology professionals. Compared with the broader emphasis on social relationships and coping in Linnér et al., (2026), Marsh et al., (2026) draw attention to the specific vulnerabilities that may arise during transitions between sporting and educational environments. The two studies suggest that support needs may change over time: general social and coping resources may be important throughout a dual career, while more targeted psychological and coordination support may become particularly relevant during periods of change.

The collective evidence indicates that financial, social, logistical, and psychological support should be considered alongside academic services. However, the studies differ in their populations, settings, and research approaches, and they do not provide a common basis for ranking all support types according to effectiveness. The more defensible conclusion is that student-athletes face interconnected challenges and may require combinations of support that reflect their circumstances. Future support systems should therefore assess financial and practical barriers, social resources, psychological needs, and academic demands together rather than addressing each in isolation.

Individualised Support and Institutional Coordination

Although several support needs recur across the reviewed studies, the evidence does not suggest that all student-athletes require the same services to the same extent. Fahrner et al., (2025), based on a survey of 1,055 international student-athletes participating in the 2019 Winter and Summer Universiades, found that perceptions of the relevance of dual-career support services were associated with sociodemographic characteristics, educational level, and sporting characteristics. This finding challenges the assumption that a uniform package of services will be equally relevant to every athlete. Differences in sporting demands, educational circumstances, and individual characteristics may shape which forms of support athletes consider most useful.

A related issue emerges in Izzicupo et al., (2025), who examined the views of student-athletes and higher-education experts regarding the availability, implementation, and quality of dual-career support. Their findings indicated differences in assessments across countries and a tendency for university experts to evaluate services more positively than student-athletes. These results add an important evaluative dimension to the individualisation argument. It is not enough for institutions to design support according to assumed needs; they also need to examine how recipients experience the services in practice.

The contrast between Fahrner et al., (2025) and Izzicupo et al., (2025) suggests two related challenges. First, support needs may differ among athletes, meaning that service relevance cannot be assumed to be uniform. Second, the perspectives of service providers

and recipients may not always align, meaning that institutional assessments alone may not provide a complete picture of support quality. Together, these findings support the use of regular feedback from student-athletes, differentiated needs assessments, and evaluation procedures that examine both service provision and actual access.

Institutional coordination is central to translating individual needs into appropriate arrangements. Henriksen et al., (2020), emphasised collaboration across the academic and sporting environment, while Roberts et al., (2025) highlighted the value of clearly defined stakeholder roles and the reorganisation of existing support components. Ryan et al., (2017), in contrast, demonstrated how implementation problems and limited staff understanding can undermine formal support arrangements. These studies collectively indicate that coordination is not simply an additional service; it is an organisational process that connects policies, personnel, and individual support.

The evidence also cautions against assuming that institutional complexity automatically produces better support. Roberts et al., (2025) suggest that existing components may be improved through clearer responsibilities and better relationships rather than through the establishment of entirely new structures. This is relevant to universities with limited resources, where the creation of a separate dual-career office may not always be immediately feasible. Existing academic advisers, lecturers, coaches, student-affairs staff, and sports administrators may contribute to a coordinated system if their responsibilities and communication procedures are clearly established.

An individualised approach should therefore not be confused with providing a completely separate programme for every athlete. Rather, it involves establishing a reliable institutional framework while allowing its services to respond to differences in academic progress, competition schedules, financial circumstances, transition experiences, and personal needs. Such an approach combines consistency at the institutional level with flexibility at the individual level. It also requires evaluation mechanisms that capture student-athletes' experiences, rather than relying exclusively on the existence of policies or the perceptions of service providers.

Overall, the reviewed studies suggest that individualisation and coordination are complementary. Individualisation helps institutions identify what athletes need, while coordination helps ensure that the relevant support can be delivered across academic and sporting environments. Without individual assessment, services may be poorly matched to athletes' circumstances; without coordination, even appropriate services may remain fragmented or inconsistently implemented.

Implications for ASEAN Higher Education and Future Research

The findings of this review provide a basis for considering dual-career support in ASEAN higher education, particularly where university athletes must combine academic requirements with training, competition, and travel. However, the implications should be interpreted cautiously. Much of the evidence discussed in the included literature comes from European settings or from comparisons involving countries outside ASEAN. Institutional arrangements, sporting systems, educational policies, and available resources may differ

across regions. Therefore, the findings should inform the development of context-sensitive approaches rather than be treated as evidence that a model established elsewhere can be transferred directly to ASEAN universities.

A first implication is the importance of developing clear and practical academic arrangements for student-athletes. Findings from Brustio et al., (2020) and Ryan et al. (2017) indicate that scheduling flexibility needs to be accompanied by consistent implementation and staff understanding. For ASEAN universities, this may involve transparent procedures for managing competition-related absences, communicating with lecturers, arranging assessments where appropriate, and accessing learning materials during periods of travel. These are potential policy directions derived from the reviewed evidence, not interventions whose effectiveness has already been established across ASEAN institutions.

A second implication concerns the organisation of tutoring and coordination. The findings of Conde et al., (2023), Henriksen et al. (2020), and Roberts et al., (2025) suggest the value of identifiable support personnel, constructive relationships with academic staff, and clear stakeholder responsibilities. Universities could consider assigning an academic adviser or designated dual-career contact to help athletes navigate administrative requirements and communicate with relevant departments. Coordination with coaches and sporting organisations may also help align academic calendars with training and competition schedules. The precise organisational model should depend on institutional capacity and the needs of the athletes served.

A third implication is the need to consider financial, logistical, social, and psychological support alongside academic provision. Id et al., (2022) and et Gjaka et al., (2024) demonstrate that athletes identify needs extending beyond classroom flexibility, while Linnér et al., (2026) and Marsh et al., (2026) highlight the relevance of social relationships, coping, and transition support. For ASEAN higher education, this suggests that a comprehensive approach should assess barriers such as travel demands, access to training facilities, financial pressures, and difficulties adapting to new academic or sporting environments. Available resources may differ among universities, so implementation may require prioritising the most pressing needs and coordinating existing services rather than assuming that every institution can immediately provide the same range of programmes.

A fourth implication is that support systems should be evaluated from the perspective of student-athletes themselves. Fahrner et al., (2025) show that service relevance varies with athlete characteristics, while Izzicupo et al., (2025) identify differences between expert and athlete assessments. Consequently, universities should not evaluate their programmes solely by counting services or documenting formal policies. They should also examine whether athletes know about the services, can access them when needed, consider them relevant, and experience them as helpful in managing academic and sporting responsibilities. Such evaluation can help identify gaps between institutional intentions and athletes' everyday experiences.

The review also identifies several priorities for future research. First, empirical studies in ASEAN countries are needed to establish how dual-career demands and support arrangements operate within different higher-education and sporting systems. Research

should examine student-athletes' experiences across institutions and countries, while recognising that national and institutional contexts may differ. Second, future studies should investigate not only which forms of support are available but also how they are implemented, who can access them, and how athletes evaluate their usefulness. This would help distinguish the presence of support from its practical accessibility and perceived relevance.

Third, longitudinal and comparative research could examine how support needs change across educational stages, sporting levels, and transition periods. The findings of Marsh et al., (2026) indicate the relevance of transition-specific support, while Fahrner et al., (2025) and Linnér et al., (2026) suggest the importance of individual characteristics and the factors associated with dual-career satisfaction. Future research could build on these findings by examining changes in academic progress, perceived support, well-being, and dual-career experiences over time. Where feasible, evaluations of specific support programmes would also help establish whether particular arrangements contribute to improved outcomes rather than merely being perceived as useful.

Finally, future systematic reviews should continue to distinguish between evidence describing the availability of support, evidence examining athletes' perceptions, and evidence evaluating outcomes associated with support interventions. The studies included in the present review differ in their methods and research objectives, which limits direct comparison and prevents a single ranking of support types by effectiveness. A clearer distinction between these forms of evidence would strengthen future synthesis and help policymakers identify which conclusions are well established and which require further investigation.

In summary, the reviewed literature suggests that effective dual-career support is best approached as an integrated, coordinated, and individualised system. Academic flexibility remains important, but its contribution depends on implementation, tutoring, communication, and the availability of wider financial, social, logistical, and psychological support. For ASEAN higher education, the central challenge is not simply to reproduce support models from other regions, but to develop arrangements that are accessible, relevant, and responsive to local institutional conditions and student-athletes' needs. Strengthening the empirical evidence from ASEAN will be essential for determining how such systems can be implemented and evaluated effectively.

CONCLUSION

This systematic review highlights that dual-career support for university student-athletes encompasses multiple interconnected dimensions, including academic flexibility, tutoring and academic guidance, financial assistance, access to sports facilities, and social and psychological support. These forms of support play complementary roles in helping student-athletes manage the competing demands of higher education and athletic participation. The findings further emphasise that effective dual-career support should extend beyond the provision of individual services to establish an integrated, accessible, and individualised support system that considers student-athletes' academic responsibilities, sporting commitments, and personal circumstances.

For higher education institutions in ASEAN, strengthening dual-career support requires the implementation of flexible academic policies, clear communication and coordination among academic staff, sports administrators, coaches, and student-athletes, as well as closer collaboration with sporting organisations. Such efforts may contribute to a more supportive educational environment in which student-athletes can pursue academic progress and athletic development simultaneously. Nevertheless, further empirical research is needed to examine the availability, implementation, and effectiveness of dual-career support within ASEAN higher education contexts. Future studies should investigate student-athletes' experiences, institutional practices, and contextual challenges to identify evidence-based strategies that are responsive to regional needs. Ultimately, a coordinated and sustainable approach to dual-career support is essential to promoting the academic and athletic development of university student-athletes while supporting their long-term educational and sporting pathways.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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