

The importance of psychological guidance in overcoming fear and failure in early childhood sports

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Abstract:

Fear of failure can negatively affect young children's participation in sports by increasing anxiety, avoidance, withdrawal, and loss of motivation. Psychological guidance may help children manage these experiences and develop greater confidence, resilience, and willingness to participate in physical activities. This study examined early childhood educators' perceptions of the importance of psychological guidance in helping children overcome fear and failure in sports. It investigated whether these perceptions differed by educators' demographic and professional characteristics. A cross-sectional study was conducted among 371 early childhood educators working in public schools in Amman, Jordan. Data were collected using a 15-item self-administered questionnaire covering three domains: awareness of psychological guidance, observed impact of fear and failure, and perceived effectiveness of psychological guidance strategies. Responses were rated on a five-point Likert scale, and data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, one-way analysis of variance, post hoc comparisons, and multiple linear regression. The mean total perception score was 56.27 ± 8.44 out of 75, indicating generally favorable perceptions, with 58.5% of participants classified as having a high level of perception. The perceived effectiveness of psychological guidance strategies had the highest domain score (19.16 ± 3.07). Teachers particularly supported teamwork, positive reinforcement, relaxation techniques, and goal-setting as approaches for reducing anxiety and strengthening children's resilience. Significant differences in overall perception scores were observed across age, teaching experience, and educational qualifications. In multivariable analysis, educators with 5–10 years and 11–15 years of teaching experience, as well as those holding postgraduate degrees, had significantly higher perception scores than their respective reference groups. The findings indicate that early childhood educators recognize the value of psychological guidance in creating supportive sports environments and helping children cope with fear and failure. Schools should strengthen professional development and provide practical guidance to support the consistent integration of psychological strategies into early childhood sports programs.

Keywords: early childhood sports, psychological guidance, fear of failure, teacher perceptions, psychological support, Jordan

Introduction

Participation in physical activity and sport during childhood contributes to physical, psychological, social, and developmental well-being. Beyond improving fitness and motor competence, appropriately structured physical activity can provide children with opportunities to develop confidence, social interaction, emotional regulation, and positive attitudes toward movement. Contemporary approaches to physical literacy increasingly recognize that children's engagement in physical activity involves not only physical competence but also affective, cognitive, and social dimensions, including motivation, confidence, knowledge, and interpersonal experiences (Barnett et al., 2023). Evidence from early childhood education and care settings also indicates that well-designed interventions can improve children's physical activity and fundamental movement skills. However, evidence regarding broader social-emotional outcomes remains less conclusive (Grady et al., 2025). Accordingly, the quality of children's experiences during sport and physical activity is likely to be as important as participation itself.

Organized sport can provide a supportive developmental environment, but participation does not automatically result in positive psychological outcomes. An umbrella review found evidence of a small positive association between participation in organized sports and the mental health of children and adolescents, while also emphasizing considerable heterogeneity across studies and sport settings (Boelens et al., 2022). Similarly, greater sport participation has recently been associated with higher resilience among school-aged children and adolescents, suggesting that sport may provide opportunities for coping, persistence, social connection, and adaptation to challenges (Sheng et al., 2024). These benefits, however, depend substantially on the interpersonal and motivational climate in which participation occurs. When sporting experiences become overly focused on

evaluation, comparison, criticism, or winning, children may experience anxiety and perceive mistakes as threats rather than as learning opportunities.

Fear of failure is therefore an important psychological issue within sport and physical activity. It broadly refers to negative emotional and motivational responses that arise when individuals anticipate they may not meet a valued performance standard or when they attach undesirable consequences to unsuccessful performance. A comprehensive scoping review demonstrated that fear of failure in sport is associated with a range of antecedents and outcomes and may influence motivation, avoidance behavior, emotional responses, and continued participation (Taylor et al., 2023). In young participants, repeated experiences of perceived failure may be particularly influential because self-perceptions of competence and confidence are still developing. A child who repeatedly interprets unsuccessful performance as evidence of low ability may become reluctant to attempt new activities, withdraw from participation, or experience anxiety when facing similar tasks. Research on adolescent sport participation supports this concern, as motivational factors, satisfaction of basic psychological needs, social support, and the quality of the sporting experience are associated with whether young people continue or discontinue organized sport (Back et al., 2022).

The behavior of adults surrounding children plays an important role in shaping these experiences. Teachers, coaches, and parents communicate expectations regarding success, failure, effort, ability, and mistakes, and these messages can influence children's emotional reactions to sporting challenges. Controlling coaching behavior has been associated with greater fear of failure through its relationship with the satisfaction of athletes' basic psychological needs and sport commitment (Hu et al., 2023). Likewise, parental motivational climates can contribute to young athletes' perceptions of failure and performance pressure (Coutinho et al., 2024). In contrast, interpersonal development programs that improve the behaviors of coaches and parents have demonstrated beneficial effects on several youth sport outcomes, supporting the value of constructive adult-athlete interactions (Bengtsson et al., 2024). Positive coach-athlete relationships and perceived support have also been associated with self-confidence and psychological well-being (Coussens et al., 2025). These findings reinforce the principle that psychologically supportive sporting environments should emphasize effort, learning, realistic progress, belonging, and emotional safety rather than exclusively focusing on outcomes and comparisons.

Within early childhood settings, psychological guidance should not necessarily be understood as formal clinical psychotherapy delivered by teachers. Rather, it may involve developmentally appropriate supportive practices that educators can incorporate into everyday activities, including positive reinforcement, realistic goal-setting, encouragement after mistakes, relaxation or emotional-regulation strategies, cooperative activities, recognition of fear or avoidance, and referral to qualified professionals when more specialized support is required. Such approaches are consistent with the broader understanding that youth athletes have distinctive psychological needs and that awareness, appropriate support, mental health literacy, and help-seeking pathways are important components of healthy sporting environments (Daley & Reardon, 2024). For young children in particular, the educator may influence how sporting success and failure are interpreted and whether participation becomes associated with enjoyment, competence, or anxiety.

The role of educators is especially important because early childhood educational institutions provide repeated opportunities to shape children's physical activity experiences. A systematic review of educator-led physical literacy and physical activity interventions concluded that early childhood educators can play an important role in improving physical activity-related outcomes when they receive appropriate training and intervention support (Buckler et al., 2023). Effective guidance, therefore, requires more than recognizing that physical activity is beneficial; educators also need sufficient knowledge, confidence, and practical strategies to respond to emotional difficulties that arise during participation. Training teachers to recognize fear, normalize mistakes, provide constructive feedback, promote cooperation, and establish attainable goals may create environments in which children feel psychologically secure enough to continue attempting challenging physical tasks.

This issue is particularly relevant within the Jordanian context. Recent national evidence indicates substantial physical and psychological challenges among school-aged children and adolescents in Jordan. In a national school-based survey of 8,000 participants, Khader et al. (2024) reported considerable levels of anxiety, emotional and behavioral difficulties, poor health-related quality of life, and low intention to seek mental health support. The same study documented low levels of physical activity among substantial proportions of children and adolescents. In another Jordanian study, a lack of self-confidence was identified as one of the most important internal barriers to physical activity among adolescent students. In contrast, a lack of resources was a prominent external barrier (Alhroub et al., 2024). Although these studies involved older children than those examined in the present research, they highlight the broader importance of psychological, motivational, and environmental factors in children's engagement with physical activity in Jordan. Schools represent a potentially important setting for responding to these challenges because they provide access to large numbers of children and enable the incorporation of psychological and behavioral principles into routine educational activities. A systematic review of school-based physical activity interventions in Middle Eastern and Arabic-speaking countries found that evidence remains comparatively limited across the region and emphasized the need for theoretically informed and rigorously evaluated interventions (Alalawi et al., 2023). This regional evidence suggests that

increasing opportunities for activity alone may be insufficient unless schools also consider the motivational and psychosocial factors influencing children's willingness to participate. In early childhood, when attitudes toward ability, mistakes, competition, and physical competence are developing, teachers may therefore occupy an important position in preventing avoidant responses and supporting more positive experiences of sport.

Despite increasing attention to psychological well-being in youth sport, several important knowledge gaps remain. Much of the available literature on fear of failure has focused on adolescents, competitive athletes, organized clubs, coaches, or parents rather than younger children in school-based settings (Taylor et al., 2023; Hu et al., 2023; Coutinho et al., 2024). Furthermore, evidence concerning psychological guidance in early childhood sport within Jordan is limited. It is therefore unclear how early childhood educators perceive the importance of psychological support, whether they recognize manifestations of fear and failure during sporting activities, and how effective they consider specific psychological guidance strategies to be. Understanding educators' perspectives is an important preliminary step because teachers' awareness and beliefs can affect their willingness and confidence to implement supportive approaches in practice.

Accordingly, the present study aimed to examine early childhood educators' perceptions of the importance of psychological guidance in helping children overcome fear and failure in sports within public schools in Amman, Jordan. Specifically, the study assessed educators' awareness of psychological guidance, their observations of the effects of fear and failure on children's participation in sport, and their perceptions of the effectiveness of strategies such as positive reinforcement, relaxation, teamwork, goal-setting, and structured psychological support. The study also examined whether these perceptions differed by educators' age, teaching experience, and educational qualifications. Using a cross-sectional survey of early childhood educators, the study seeks to provide evidence that may inform teacher professional development and the integration of developmentally appropriate psychological support into school-based early childhood sports activities.

Material & methods

Research Design

To better understand how psychological treatment helps Jordanian public school students in Amman overcome their worries and setbacks in early childhood sports, this study will employ a cross-sectional research design. This approach is useful for assessing the perspectives of early childhood educators at a particular moment in time, providing insights into their experiences, observations, and challenges when employing psychological strategies in sports.

Research Population

Less than 1% of preschool instructors in Jordan are men, and women make up the bulk of early childhood educators. There are over 12,000 students registered in KG1 and 30,000 in KG2 in the capital city of Amman, indicating a sizable number of early childhood teachers to serve these pupils. The currently available data does not specify the exact number of early childhood instructors in Amman because public kindergartens were only recently established. Nonetheless, the city's public schools employ a sizable number of early childhood educators, according to enrollment statistics.

Research Sample Size and Sampling Strategy

371 early childhood educators are the necessary sample size for this study, according to G*Power statistical analysis. This computation ensures a reliable and representative dataset for analysis by using an effect size of 0.5 (medium effect), a significance threshold of 0.05, and a power of 0.80.

Participants will be chosen from Amman's public schools using a convenience sampling technique. Teachers who are available and willing to participate in the study can be easily reached using this strategy. To capture a variety of perspectives on the role of psychological counseling in helping young athletes overcome fear and failure, teachers from various school districts will be included in the sample. This approach provides important insights into the research topic and ensures practical viability.

Data Collection Instrument

A self-administered questionnaire will be developed to collect data from early childhood educators in Amman's public schools. Perceptions of psychological guidance in early childhood sports and sociodemographic characteristics will be the two main components of the questionnaire. The tool will assess teachers' perspectives, experiences, and expertise on how psychological support could help children overcome their sports-related anxieties and setbacks.

The first section of the questionnaire will collect sociodemographic data, including the respondent's age, gender, years of experience in early childhood education, and educational background. These elements will provide essential background for analyzing any differences in instructors' perspectives based on their personal and professional characteristics.

The initial part of the questionnaire will collect sociodemographic data, including the respondent's age, gender, years of experience in early childhood education, and educational background. These elements will provide essential background for analyzing any differences in instructors' perspectives based on personal and professional characteristics. In the first domain, teachers' understanding of psychological counseling in sports will be assessed. It will evaluate teachers' understanding of the need for emotional support in sports as well as their familiarity with psychological strategies to help children cope with fear and disappointment. The primary

focus of the discussion will be teachers' assessments of their own preparedness to use psychological techniques in sports education. One question is whether the instructor believes psychological support is just as important in early-childhood sports as physical training.

Teachers will examine the influence of fear and failure in sports on young children in the second domain. It will focus on whether students in their schools exhibit avoidance tendencies, nervousness, or a lack of drive due to fear of making mistakes when playing sports. Teachers will be asked to assess whether encouragement increases children's resilience and how frequently kids stop participating after failing. A remark in this area could ask whether educators have observed kids avoiding sports due to fear of failure.

The usefulness of psychological guidance techniques in assisting kids in overcoming anxiety and failure associated with sports will be investigated in the third domain. It will evaluate whether strategies such as encouraging teamwork, relaxation techniques, and positive reinforcement boost self-esteem and sports involvement. Instructors will express how much they believe systematic psychological interventions lessen anxiety associated with sports. For instance, one statement will ask whether psychological therapies can help kids become resilient in the face of sporting setbacks.

Scoring System

A total score between 15 and 75 is obtained by adding the answers to all 15 items on the questionnaire. The relevance of psychological assistance in early childhood sports is then divided into three categories based on scores: low (15–34), moderate (35–54), and high (55–75).

Validity and Reliability

The content of the questionnaire was evaluated by a panel of five experts in sports psychology, early childhood education, and educational psychology. These experts assessed the items' comprehensiveness, relevance, and clarity to ensure they aligned with the study's objectives. A few minor adjustments were made to increase the instrument's appropriateness and comprehensibility in response to their feedback. In a pilot study to evaluate reliability, 30 early childhood educators from Amman's public schools participated. Internal consistency was measured using Cronbach's alpha; the result was 0.83, indicating outstanding internal consistency and dependability. The questionnaire's ability to collect data on instructors' opinions of psychological support in early childhood sports is validated by this reliability score.

Data Analysis

The survey data were analyzed using IBM Corp.'s Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 27. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages, will be used to characterize participant responses to the Likert-scale statements and sociodemographic characteristics. To examine differences in opinions based on demographic factors, independent-samples t-tests will be used to compare two groups, such as by gender. Additionally, group differences on variables such as years of experience and educational background will be assessed using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). A significance level (p-value) of 0.05 will be used as the threshold for statistical significance to guarantee that any differences found are meaningful and not the product of chance.

Results

Participants' Socio-Demographic Characteristics

A total of 371 early childhood instructors were included in the analysis. Table 1 illustrates the prevalence of women in early childhood education, with 99.2% of participants being female. The largest age group in the sample was those aged 30–39 (40.7%), with 25.9% of participants under 30. 41.0% had more than 15 years of teaching experience, compared with 22.9% who had 5 to 10 years. The majority of participants (77.9%) held a bachelor's degree, while 12.4% held a diploma and 9.7% held a postgraduate degree.

Table 1

Socio-demographic characteristics of participating early childhood teachers (N = 371)

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Female	368	99.2
	Male	3	0.8
Age group	<30 years	96	25.9
	30–39 years	151	40.7
	40–49 years	88	23.7
	≥50 years	36	9.7
Years of experience	<5 years	59	15.9
	5–10 years	85	22.9
	11–15 years	75	20.2
	>15 years	152	41.0
Educational qualification	Diploma	46	12.4
	Bachelor's degree	289	77.9
	Postgraduate degree	36	9.7

Gender-based inferential comparisons were not made because only three male teachers were involved, and estimates from such a small subgroup would be unreliable.

Awareness of Psychological Guidance

Teachers' answers to the questions measuring awareness of psychological assistance in early childhood sports are shown in Table 2. With item means ranging from 3.71 to 3.83, participants showed favorable awareness overall. With a mean score of 3.83 ± 0.89 , the statement that teachers should identify symptoms of dread associated with sports received the highest rating. This statement was agreed with or strongly agreed with by about 68.2% of participants. With a mean of 3.75 ± 0.83 , familiarity with techniques for controlling fear of failure came in second.

Despite a satisfactory mean score of 3.71 ± 0.87 , the statement about incorporating emotional guidance into sports activities received the lowest rating. Taken as a whole, these results show that the majority of educators understood the need for psychological assistance and believed that early childhood sports training should include emotional coaching.

Table 2
Teachers' responses to the awareness of psychological guidance items (N = 371)

Item	Statement	Strongly disagree n (%)	Disagree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Agree n (%)	Strongly agree n (%)	Mean	SD	Rank
1	Psychological support is as important as physical training	1 (0.3)	19 (5.1)	126 (34.0)	162 (43.7)	63 (17.0)	3.72	± 0.81	3
2	Emotional guidance should be integrated into sports activities	4 (1.1)	23 (6.2)	116 (31.3)	162 (43.7)	66 (17.8)	3.71	± 0.87	5
3	Teachers should recognize signs of sports-related fear	3 (0.8)	26 (7.0)	89 (24.0)	166 (44.7)	87 (23.5)	3.83	± 0.89	1
4	I am familiar with strategies for managing children's fear of failure	1 (0.3)	24 (6.5)	108 (29.1)	173 (46.6)	65 (17.5)	3.75	± 0.83	2
5	I feel prepared to provide psychological support during sports	3 (0.8)	22 (5.9)	126 (34.0)	148 (39.9)	72 (19.4)	3.71	± 0.87	4

Note. Responses were measured on a five-point scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

Observed Impact of Fear and Failure

Teachers largely acknowledged that children's participation in sports was negatively impacted by fear and failure, as Table 3 illustrates. With a mean score of 3.74 ± 0.87 , the statement that kids avoid sports because they are afraid of making mistakes received the highest rating. This remark was agreed with or strongly agreed with by nearly three-fifths of participants.

With a mean score of 3.69 ± 0.94 , teachers concurred that children's motivation to participate was diminished by their fear of failing. Although both statements were above the scale midpoint at 3.65, the statements about anxiety brought on by repeated failure and the importance of encouragement in rehabilitation had the lowest averages in this category. These results imply that teachers frequently saw students who were afraid of failing exhibit avoidance, decreased motivation, anxiety, and withdrawal.

Table 3
Teachers' observations of the impact of fear and failure in early childhood sports (N = 371)

Item	Statement	Strongly disagree n (%)	Disagree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Agree n (%)	Strongly agree n (%)	Mean	SD	Rank
6	Children avoid sports activities because they fear making mistakes	1 (0.3)	24 (6.5)	124 (33.4)	144 (38.8)	78 (21.0)	3.74	± 0.87	1
7	Fear of failure reduces children's motivation to participate	4 (1.1)	29 (7.8)	128 (34.5)	128 (34.5)	82 (22.1)	3.69	± 0.94	2
8	Repeated failure can cause anxiety during sports activities	1 (0.3)	26 (7.0)	132 (35.6)	156 (42.0)	56 (15.1)	3.65	± 0.83	4
9	Children may withdraw after negative sports experiences	4 (1.1)	22 (5.9)	124 (33.4)	162 (43.7)	59 (15.9)	3.67	± 0.85	3
10	Encouragement helps children recover after failure	3 (0.8)	31 (8.4)	123 (33.2)	151 (40.7)	63 (17.0)	3.65	± 0.89	4

Perceived Effectiveness of Psychological Guidance Strategies

Teachers' opinions about the efficacy of psychological guiding techniques are displayed in Table 4. The mean scores for each of the five items were comparatively high, ranging from 3.81 to 3.86. With a mean score of 3.86 ± 0.81 , the use of cooperative activities to help youngsters feel psychologically safe was the highest-rated method. 67.3% of educators agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

With a mean score of 3.86 ± 0.85 , positive reinforcement came in second, followed by goal-setting at 3.81 ± 0.86 . About two-thirds of participants concurred that goal-setting, cooperation, relaxation techniques, and formal psychological counseling might lower anxiety and increase resilience. These results show that teachers strongly approve the use of psychological techniques in early childhood sports programs.

Table 4
Teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of psychological guidance strategies (N = 371)

Item	Statement	Strongly disagree n (%)	Disagree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Agree n (%)	Strongly agree n (%)	Mean ± SD	Rank
11	Positive reinforcement increases children's confidence	1 (0.3)	20 (5.4)	98 (26.4)	164 (44.2)	88 (23.7)	3.86 ± 0.85	2
12	Relaxation exercises can reduce sports-related anxiety	0 (0.0)	21 (5.7)	107 (28.8)	164 (44.2)	79 (21.3)	3.81 ± 0.83	4
13	Teamwork activities help children feel psychologically secure	1 (0.3)	12 (3.2)	108 (29.1)	166 (44.7)	84 (22.6)	3.86 ± 0.81	1
14	Goal-setting helps children cope with difficult sports tasks	1 (0.3)	20 (5.4)	113 (30.5)	150 (40.4)	87 (23.5)	3.81 ± 0.86	3
15	Structured psychological guidance promotes resilience after failure	1 (0.3)	18 (4.9)	109 (29.4)	165 (44.5)	78 (21.0)	3.81 ± 0.83	4

Psychological Guidance Domain Scores and Reliability

Table 5 displays the internal consistency estimates and descriptive data for the three questionnaire domains. The domain with the highest mean score was the efficiency of psychological guidance strategies (19.16 ± 3.07), which was followed by awareness of psychological guidance (18.72 ± 3.10). The measured impact of the fear and failure domain was 18.39 ± 3.25 .

The total score on the questionnaire was 56.27 ± 8.44 , with a range of 27 to 75. There was broad consensus regarding the significance of psychological counseling, as indicated by the mean item score of 3.75 out of 5. Every domain showed adequate levels of internal consistency. The awareness, seen impact, and efficacy Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .77, .80, and .79, respectively. With Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$, the entire questionnaire showed outstanding internal consistency.

Table 5
Descriptive statistics and internal consistency of the psychological guidance questionnaire

Domain or scale	Number of items	Possible range	Observed range	Mean ± SD	Mean item score	Cronbach's α
Awareness of psychological guidance	5	5–25	9–25	18.72 ± 3.10	3.74	.77
Observed impact of fear and failure	5	5–25	9–25	18.39 ± 3.25	3.68	.80
Effectiveness of psychological strategies	5	5–25	8–25	19.16 ± 3.07	3.83	.79
Total questionnaire	15	15–75	27–75	56.27 ± 8.44	3.75	.91

Overall Perception Levels

Every domain showed adequate levels of internal consistency. The awareness, seen impact, and efficacy Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .77, .80, and .79, respectively. With Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$, the entire questionnaire showed outstanding internal consistency.

These results demonstrate that most participating teachers recognized the importance of psychological support and the effectiveness of psychological guidance strategies in helping children overcome sports-related fear and failure.

Table 6
Distribution of teachers according to overall psychological guidance perception level (N = 371)

Perception level	Score range	n	%
Low	15–34	4	1.1
Moderate	35–54	150	40.4
High	55–75	217	58.5
Total	15–75	371	100.0

Differences According to Age Group

Differences in psychological guidance scores by teachers' age group are shown in Table 7. Age-group variations in awareness were found to be statistically significant ($F(3, 367) = 3.88, p = .009$); total perception score, $F(3, 367) = 6.20, p < .001$; effectiveness of psychological tactics, $F(3, 367) = 6.02, p = .001$; and observed impact of fear and failure, $F(3, 367) = 5.13, p = .002$.

At 58.47 ± 8.30 , teachers aged 30–39 had the highest mean total score. This group's total scores were considerably higher than those of teachers under 30, between 40 and 49, and over 50, according to Tukey's post hoc comparisons. The η^2 values ranged from 0.031 to 0.048, indicating small effect sizes.

Table 7
Comparison of psychological guidance scores according to age group

Outcome	<30 years (n = 96) Mean ± SD	30–39 years (n = 151) Mean ± SD	40–49 years (n = 88) Mean ± SD	≥50 years (n = 36) Mean ± SD	F(3, 367)	p	η ²
Awareness	18.30 ± 3.24	19.37 ± 3.06	18.27 ± 2.95	18.17 ± 2.89	3.88	.009	.031
Observed impact of fear and failure	17.93 ± 3.08	19.17 ± 3.18	17.90 ± 3.41	17.58 ± 3.07	5.13	.002	.040
Effectiveness of strategies	18.79 ± 2.91	19.93 ± 3.04	18.66 ± 3.27	18.11 ± 2.42	6.02	.001	.047
Total perception score	55.02 ± 8.19	58.47 ± 8.30	54.83 ± 8.61	53.86 ± 7.43	6.20	<.001	.048

Note. Tukey's post hoc analysis of the total score showed that teachers aged 30–39 years scored significantly higher than those in the other three age groups.

Differences According to Teaching Experience

Table 8 illustrates the statistically significant changes in awareness between experience groups ($F(3, 367) = 3.33, p = .020$; observed impact, $F(3, 367) = 3.89, p = .009$; strategy effectiveness, $F(3, 367) = 7.03, p < .001$; and overall perception score, $F(3, 367) = 5.73, p = .001$).

The highest total perception score was 58.60 ± 8.38 for teachers with five to ten years of experience, and 57.91 ± 8.63 for those with eleven to fifteen years of experience. Those with five to ten years of experience scored significantly higher overall than those with less than five years or more than fifteen years of experience, according to post hoc comparisons. Additionally, teachers with 11–15 years of experience rated far higher than those with fewer than 5 years.

Table 8
Comparison of psychological guidance scores according to years of teaching experience

Outcome	<5 years (n = 59) Mean ± SD	5–10 years (n = 85) Mean ± SD	11–15 years (n = 75) Mean ± SD	>15 years (n = 152) Mean ± SD	F(3, 367)	p	η ²
Awareness	18.02 ± 3.20	19.38 ± 3.27	19.15 ± 3.07	18.41 ± 2.91	3.33	.020	.026
Observed impact of fear and failure	17.80 ± 3.20	19.12 ± 3.02	18.96 ± 3.49	17.94 ± 3.19	3.89	.009	.031
Effectiveness of strategies	18.36 ± 2.75	20.11 ± 3.01	19.80 ± 3.08	18.62 ± 3.04	7.03	<.001	.054
Total perception score	54.17 ± 8.00	58.60 ± 8.38	57.91 ± 8.63	54.97 ± 8.17	5.73	.001	.045

Note. Tukey post hoc comparisons showed significant total-score differences between 5–10 years and <5 years, 5–10 years and >15 years, and 11–15 years and <5 years.

Differences According to Educational Qualification

Psychological guidance scores are shown by educational qualification in Table 9. Awareness ($F(2, 368) = 5.54, p = .004$), seen impact ($F(2, 368) = 4.89, p = .008$), and overall perception score ($F(2, 368) = 4.91, p = .008$) all showed significant differences. The efficiency of the psychological tactics domain did not differ significantly ($F(2, 368) = 2.34, p = .098$).

Postgraduate degree holders had the greatest total perception score (59.31 ± 7.91), while certificate holders had the lowest (53.50 ± 8.46). Postgraduate-qualified teachers scored considerably higher overall than diploma-qualified teachers, according to Tukey post hoc analysis. There were no statistically significant pairwise differences left.

Table 9
Comparison of psychological guidance scores according to educational qualification

Outcome	Diploma (n = 46) Mean ± SD	Bachelor's degree (n = 289) Mean ± SD	Postgraduate degree (n = 36) Mean ± SD	F(2, 368)	p	η ²
Awareness	17.76 ± 3.14	18.71 ± 3.07	20.03 ± 2.91	5.54	.004	.029
Observed impact of fear and failure	17.46 ± 3.16	18.38 ± 3.27	19.69 ± 2.86	4.89	.008	.026
Effectiveness of strategies	18.28 ± 3.19	19.24 ± 3.03	19.58 ± 3.15	2.34	.098	.013
Total perception score	53.50 ± 8.46	56.33 ± 8.39	59.31 ± 7.91	4.91	.008	.026

Note. Tukey's post hoc analysis showed a significant difference in total score between postgraduate- and diploma-qualified teachers.

Factors Associated With Psychological Guidance Perceptions

To identify variables independently associated with instructors' overall perception scores, a multiple linear regression analysis was performed. Predictors included educational background and teaching experience. Due to the anticipated overlap between teachers' ages and years of professional experience, age and experience were not submitted simultaneously.

The total regression model was statistically significant ($F(5, 365) = 4.72, p < .001$), as shown in Table 10. With an adjusted R^2 of .048, the model accounted for 6.1% of the variation in teachers' overall psychological guidance perception scores.

Teachers with five to ten years of experience scored an average of 4.28 points higher than those with less than five years of experience ($B = 4.28, p = .002$). Additionally, teachers with 11–15 years of experience scored considerably higher ($B = 3.37, p = .020$). The overall score was not independently correlated with having more than 15 years of experience.

Teachers with postgraduate degrees outperformed those with diplomas by an average of 4.69 points ($p = .013$). After adjusting for teaching experience, the difference between those with bachelor's degrees and those with diplomas was not statistically significant.

Table 10

Multiple linear regression analysis of factors associated with total psychological guidance perception score

Predictor	B	SE	Standardized β	t	p	95% CI for B
5–10 years of experience	4.28	1.40	.214	3.07	.002	1.54, 7.03
11–15 years of experience	3.37	1.44	.160	2.33	.020	0.53, 6.21
>15 years of experience	1.08	1.28	.063	0.85	.397	–1.43, 3.59
Bachelor's degree	2.12	1.34	.104	1.58	.116	–0.53, 4.76
Postgraduate degree	4.69	1.89	.165	2.49	.013	0.98, 8.39

Note. Reference categories were less than five years of teaching experience and a diploma qualification. Model summary: $R^2 = .061$; adjusted $R^2 = .048$; $F(5, 365) = 4.72, p < .001$.

Discussion

The results imply that early childhood educators were typically aware of the importance of psychological support in athletics. Few participants were categorized as having a low degree of perception, but over half were identified as having a high level. The perceived efficacy of psychological guiding techniques ranked highest among the three domains. This may suggest that educators see children's involvement in athletics as more than just physical; rather, they understand the importance of emotional stability, confidence, and support. This is especially important in the early years, when kids are still learning about success, failure, and their own potential. Playing sports can foster resilience and social-emotional development, according to recent studies (Sheng et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2024), although the benefits vary widely depending on the context.

Teachers have seen that youngsters may completely avoid sports, lose interest in them, feel uneasy, or retreat out of fear of failure following a bad experience. This makes sense because young children might not be able to distinguish between a poor attempt and their overall sense of competence. A child may believe they are "not good" at sports if they drop a ball, lose a race, or have trouble with a new movement. The perspectives of adults at the time may confirm or contradict this perception. Reassurance and constructive criticism could make the next try feel safer, while an emphasis on winning, criticism, or comparison with classmates could build fear. Coutinho et al. (2024) found a link between young athletes' fear of failure and the motivational environments adults create, emphasizing the importance of adults' responses in shaping children's understanding of errors and performance.

Strategies such as goal-setting, teamwork, positive reinforcement, relaxation techniques, and structured psychological support were widely accepted by educators. Because group activities allow kids to share accomplishments and divert attention from individual comparison, teamwork received particularly high ratings. Children who receive positive reinforcement are better able to focus on effort and progress rather than merely on results. Encouragement ought to be reasonable and targeted. While compliments like "you kept trying," "your balance improved," or "you helped your team" offer more specific reasons to feel successful, general praise may have little impact. According to a systematic review, interventions that enhance the interpersonal skills of coaches and parents can positively affect youth sport outcomes, including motivation, enjoyment, and anxiety (Bengtsson et al., 2024).

Differences in age and teaching experience were also noted. Differences between teachers between the ages of 30 and 39 and those with roughly five to fifteen years of experience were noted. Compared with younger and more experienced groups, teachers aged 30 to 39 and those with 5 to 15 years of experience expressed more positive opinions. Teachers in the middle of their careers may have sufficient expertise to identify children's emotional challenges while remaining conversant with more recent teaching strategies. Although they may have a theoretical understanding of psychological principles, early-career instructors may be less comfortable putting them into practice. Exposure to modern psychological guiding techniques is not guaranteed by years of experience. These variations were negligible and should not imply that one age group is more capable than

another. Rather, they emphasize the importance of teachers continuing their professional growth throughout their careers. In the regression analysis, higher overall perception scores than those of people with diplomas and postgraduate degrees remained significant. Teachers may have more exposure to child psychology, behavior management, research findings, and reflective teaching through advanced study. However, only a small percentage of the variations in overall perception ratings could be explained by education and experience. This implies that additional variables, such as earlier psychological training, self-assurance, school resources, workload, administrative support, counselor access, and the value placed on athletics within the school, are at play. Because it demonstrates that demographic traits alone are insufficient to explain instructors' perceptions, the model's weak explanatory ability is significant. After graduation, professional skills could also be enhanced. For instance, Bourke et al. (2024) found that early childhood educators' knowledge, self-efficacy, intentions, and perceived behavioral control regarding physical activity practices were enhanced by a structured online course.

Teachers' positive impressions are a good place to start, but positive attitudes do not ensure that psychological techniques are applied consistently. Schools should provide teachers with useful advice for sports classes in addition to general awareness. Recognizing fear and avoidance, accepting responsibility for mistakes, establishing realistic goals, utilizing cooperative games, and providing constructive criticism that highlights effort and progress could all be covered in training. Guidance on when a child's fear necessitates a referral to a counselor or psychologist would also be beneficial to teachers. Children hear messages from teachers, parents, peers, coaches, and administrators; therefore, a whole-school approach is better. While more comprehensive interpersonal development programs enhance youth sport experiences, research indicates that supportive adult connections are associated with athletes' confidence and psychological well-being (Bengtsson et al., 2024; Coussens et al., 2025).

When evaluating these results, several restrictions should be taken into account. Teachers' perceptions were recorded at a single point in time using a cross-sectional design, making it impossible to determine whether differences were attributable to age, experience, or qualifications. Generalization to private schools, rural areas, or other parts of Jordan may be limited by convenience sampling and the inclusion of just public school instructors in Amman. Gender comparisons were impossible because almost all of the participants were female. Teachers may have selected responses that reflected acceptable educational values rather than actual practices because the study depended on self-reported responses. Instead of being verified by direct observation, child reports, or data from parents and physical education specialists, the assessment of children's anxiety and failure was done indirectly through teacher observations. Construct validity would be strengthened by additional testing using exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, even though the questionnaire demonstrated acceptable internal consistency. Lastly, significant factors, including prior psychological training, the presence of school counselors, class size, sports facilities, and administrative support, were not assessed. To determine whether teacher training enhances children's engagement, self-assurance, and ability to deal with failure, future research should incorporate larger sample sizes, direct observations, and longitudinal or intervention approaches.

Conclusions

This study demonstrates that early childhood educators in public schools in Amman generally recognize psychological guidance as an important component of children's participation in sports. More than half of the participating educators were classified as having a high overall perception of psychological guidance, and the highest domain scores were observed for the perceived effectiveness of psychological guidance strategies. In particular, educators expressed strong support for positive reinforcement, teamwork, relaxation techniques, goal-setting, and structured psychological support to help children manage fear, anxiety, and disappointment associated with sports participation. These findings indicate that teachers broadly acknowledge that children's sporting experiences are influenced not only by physical ability but also by emotional security, confidence, motivation, and adults' responses to mistakes and unsuccessful performance.

The study also showed that educators' perceptions varied by age, teaching experience, and educational qualifications. Teachers aged 30–39 years and those with 5–15 years of teaching experience generally reported higher perception scores, while educators with postgraduate qualifications demonstrated more favorable overall perceptions than those with diploma-level qualifications. In the multivariable analysis, 5–10 years and 11–15 years of teaching experience, as well as postgraduate education, remained significantly associated with higher total perception scores. However, the regression model explained only a relatively small proportion of the variance in perceptions. This suggests that educators' views are likely influenced by additional factors not assessed in the present study, such as prior training in child psychology, access to school counselors, administrative support, class size, available sports facilities, workload, and exposure to contemporary approaches to early childhood physical education.

From a practical perspective, the findings support incorporating psychological guidance principles into early childhood sports programs and teacher professional development. Training should move beyond general awareness and provide educators with practical skills for recognizing fear and avoidance, responding constructively to mistakes, setting realistic and developmentally appropriate goals, using cooperative activities, reinforcing effort and progress, and applying simple relaxation or emotional-regulation techniques. Teachers

should also be provided with clear guidance on when a child's level of fear, anxiety, or withdrawal requires referral to a school counselor, psychologist, or other qualified professional.

The findings also have broader educational implications. Early childhood sports settings can provide opportunities to teach children that mistakes and temporary failure are normal parts of learning and skill development. When teachers create psychologically supportive environments that emphasize effort, participation, cooperation, and gradual improvement rather than excessive comparison and competition, children may be more likely to maintain confidence and remain engaged in physical activity. Such practices may contribute not only to better sporting experiences but also to the development of resilience, emotional regulation, persistence, and adaptive coping skills that can be transferred to other areas of learning and social development.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the limited body of evidence on psychological guidance in early childhood sports within the Jordanian educational context. Much of the existing literature on fear of failure has focused on adolescents, competitive athletes, coaches, and parents. In contrast, the present study highlights the perceptions of early childhood educators working in school-based settings. The findings therefore provide an initial foundation for understanding how psychological support is perceived at an educational stage in which attitudes toward competence, mistakes, success, and failure are still developing.

Future research should extend these findings by including educators from private schools, rural areas, and other regions of Jordan and by examining additional organizational and psychological factors that may influence the use of psychological guidance in practice. Longitudinal and intervention studies are particularly needed to determine whether structured teacher training leads to measurable improvements in children's confidence, participation, enjoyment, resilience, and ability to cope with sporting failure. Direct observations and reports from children, parents, physical education teachers, and school counselors would also provide a more comprehensive understanding of how psychological guidance is implemented and experienced. Overall, integrating developmentally appropriate psychological support into early childhood sports programs may be a practical, achievable strategy for creating safer, more inclusive, and more supportive environments in which children can develop both physically and psychologically.

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Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used generative AI tools to improve the text's readability, clarity, grammar, and overall linguistic quality. The tools were also used to assist with language refinement and the organization of selected sections of the manuscript. The authors critically reviewed, verified, and edited all AI-assisted content and take full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, interpretation, and final content of the publication.

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