






# The Mediating Role of Emotional States in the Relationship Between Self-Efficacy and Athletic Performance of Young Female Athletes

Genç Kadın Sporcular Arasında Öz Yeterlilik ile Atletik Performans Arasındaki İlişkide Duygusal Durumların Aracı Rolü

Research Article / Araştırma Makalesi

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## Abstract

This study examines the mediating role of emotional states in the relationship between self-efficacy and athletic performance among young female athletes. Self-efficacy, defined as the belief in one's ability to succeed in specific situations, has been shown to influence athletic performance. Emotional states, both positive and negative, can significantly impact athletes' cognitive and physical functioning, thus affecting performance outcomes. The research sample consisted of 339 young female athletes from various university teams in Turkey. Data were collected using validated scales for self-efficacy, emotional states, and individual performance assessment. Path analysis revealed that self-efficacy positively influences athletic performance directly and indirectly through positive emotional states. Specifically, higher self-efficacy was associated with increased positive emotions, which in turn improved performance. Negative emotions, however, did not mediate the relationship between self-efficacy and performance. These findings suggest that fostering self-efficacy and positive emotional experiences can enhance athletic performance in young female athletes. Future studies should explore the role of emotion regulation strategies in mitigating the effects of negative emotions on performance.

**Keywords:** Self-efficacy, Athletic performance, Emotional states, Young female athletes

## Öz

Bu çalışma, genç kadın sporcular arasında öz yeterlilik ile atletik performans arasındaki ilişkide duygusal durumların aracı rolünü incelemektedir. Öz yeterlilik, kişinin belirli durumlarda başarılı olabileceğine dair inancı olarak tanımlanır ve bu çalışmada atletik performansı hem doğrudan hem de olumlu duygu durumları aracılığıyla dolaylı olarak olumlu yönde etkilediği bulunmuştur. Olumlu ve olumsuz duygusal durumlar, sporcuların bilişsel ve fiziksel işlevlerini önemli ölçüde etkileyebilir ve bu durum performans sonuçlarında belirgin farklılıklara yol açabilir. Araştırma örneklemini, Türkiye'deki çeşitli üniversite takımlarından 339 genç kadın sporcudan oluşmaktadır. Araştırma verileri, öz yeterlilik, duygu durumları ve bireysel performans değerlendirmesini ölçmek için onaylanmış ölçekler kullanılarak elde edilmiştir. Yapılan yol analizi, öz yeterliliğin atletik performansı hem doğrudan hem de olumlu duygu durumları aracılığıyla dolaylı olarak olumlu yönde etkilediğini ortaya koymuştur. Spesifik olarak, daha yüksek öz yeterlilik, artan olumlu duygularla ilişkilendirilmiş ve bu da performansı artırmıştır. Öte yandan, olumsuz duyguların öz yeterlilik ve performans arasındaki ilişkiye aracılık etmediği görülmüştür. Bu bulgular, öz yeterliliğin ve olumlu duygusal deneyimlerin teşvik edilmesinin genç kadın sporcularda atletik performansı artırabileceğini göstermektedir. Gelecekteki çalışmalar, olumsuz duyguların performans üzerindeki etkilerini azaltmada duygu düzenleme stratejilerinin rolünü araştırmalıdır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Öz yeterlilik, Atletik performans, Duygu durumları, Genç kadın sporcular

## Introduction

In this study, the potential mediating role of emotional states in the relationship between self-efficacy and athletic performance among young female athletes will be examined. Because of positive and negative experiences in the sports environment on athletic performance, self-efficacy is one of the key variables that must be analyzed from a psychological perspective (Molina et al., 2018). In his study, Bandura, (1997) emphasized that the concept of self-efficacy has a profound impact on an individual's learning, motivation, and performance. Self-efficacy is defined as an individual's perception, belief, and judgment regarding their ability and capacity to cope with different situations and to succeed in specific activities (Senemoğlu, 2003). A high level of self-efficacy is crucial for individuals as it enables them to adopt a more courageous attitude in analyzing situations and to confront challenges with stronger conviction (Kocaekşi & Yıldırım, 2020). Individuals with low self-efficacy typically exhibit hesitant behaviors when faced with challenging tasks, perceiving them as threats. Due to a loss of belief in their own abilities, they are unable to demonstrate the required performance (Ritter et al., 2001). It has been observed that individuals with high self-efficacy have a lower likelihood of experiencing failure in sports and, even if they do encounter failure, they persist without giving up (Güvendi & Demir, 2019).

Emotion is identified as an important concept that aids an athlete in focusing and striving for success in the face of competition (Posner & Eiler, 2013; Vallerand et al., 2003). Since emotions also affect athletes' cognitive, physical, and motivational states, emotional states become even more prominent in sports (Jones, 2003; 2012). Both in scientific research and within socio-cultural contexts, women are often observed to approach situations with more emotionality than men (Chapman et al., 2007; DePretis et al., 2021; Knights & Surman, 2008). When reviewing the literature, it is found that women exhibit a lower emotional balance (Chapman et al., 2007; Schmitt et al., 2008), with a higher prevalence of depression and a greater likelihood of experiencing lifetime stress disorders compared to men. Furthermore, anxiety disorders are 2.25 times more common in female than in male (Bekker & Van Mens-Verhulst, 2007). Various studies have shown that mood disorders in women occur at least twice as frequently as in men (Kessler, 2003; Lewinsohn et al., 1998; Steiner et al., 2003; Wittchen & Jacobi, 2005). Considering that the athletes in our sample consist of young women and that their emotional states may remain unstable after adolescence (Dilip et al., 2010), conducting such studies will contribute to the field of sports psychology and fill an important gap in the literature.

The importance of athletic performance is indispensable for athletes in achieving success in their careers and reaching their long-term goals. Athletic performance is defined as the

entirety of efforts made to successfully complete an athletic task (Bayraktar & Kurtoğlu, 2004). To accurately assess athletes' performance, it is crucial to consider all factors that affect performance (Bayraktar & Kurtoğlu, 2009). Athletes' performance is shaped by their technical, tactical, psychological, and physical attributes (Michalsik et al., 2013). The most significant factor in achieving long-term performance and ensuring its sustainability is the psychological competencies of the athletes (Cerit et al., 2013; Konter, 1998). Performance is one of the most extensively studied topics regarding athletes at both national and international levels (Çiftçi et al., 2021; Taylor & Wilson, 2005; Yarayan & İlhan, 2018). Therefore, it is essential to investigate the variables that will enhance athletic performance, especially among young female athletes.

Self-efficacy is an individual's self-assessment or judgment regarding their capacity to successfully perform a specific task (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy is an indicator of athletes' success and performance levels, facilitating the realization of desired thoughts and behaviors. Therefore, it is extremely important for athletes in the domains where they demonstrate performance and in relation to their competitors (Mutlu & Yıldızhan, 2023; Türedi, 2015). According to the results of studies in the literature, individuals with a high perception of self-efficacy tend to exert great effort to achieve a task, are less likely to give up when facing adverse situations and demonstrate persistence and patience in their endeavors (Aşkar & Umay, 2001; Hevedanlı & Ekici, 2009). A high level of self-efficacy in athletes is associated with a positive influence on athletic performance. It encourages the formation of confidence in the athlete and the projection and dissemination of that confidence to others, significantly impacting the enhancement of athletes' performance levels (Holzberger et al., 2013; Valiante & Morris, 2013). The scenarios created by individuals with high self-efficacy perceptions will guide them positively and affect their performance favorably. In other words, as individuals' perceptions of self-efficacy increase, so does the effort they put forth to achieve their goals (Bandura, 1994; Kartal, 2021).

The literature includes studies examining the relationship between self-efficacy and performance (Bouffard-Bouchard, 1990; Cherian, 2013; Schunk, 1995; Vancouver, 2002; Wright, 2016). This study anticipates that self-efficacy will positively influence the athletic performance of young female athletes.

The perception of self-efficacy plays an important role in defining emotions, thoughts, motivations, and behaviors in individuals (Bandura, 1994). Bandura describes low self-efficacy as associated with depression, anxiety, and helplessness (Bandura, 1977; Toklu, 2010). In the face of these undesirable outcomes, individuals may experience increased anxiety levels and a higher risk of making mistakes (Özkan, 2019). In the study by Mutlu & Yıldızhan, (2023) it was noted that as

anxiety increases, self-efficacy decreases. High self-efficacy in athletes helps to eliminate anxiety and enhance effort, thereby indirectly affecting the athlete's performance (Koçak, 2019). The perception of self-efficacy increases an individual's motivation, fosters happiness, and facilitates personal achievements (Toklu, 2010). Individuals with high self-efficacy can also experience positive emotions in challenging tasks and activities (Bandura, 1994). Koçak & Çolak (2024), stated that as women's self-efficacy increases, their ability to cope with stress also shows a positive trend. A review of the literature reveals that studies related to self-efficacy have observed that high self-efficacy generates positive emotions, while low self-efficacy leads to negative emotional states (Koçak, 2019; Koçak & Çolak, 2024; Mutlu & Yıldızhan, 2023). Therefore, it is anticipated that young female athletes with high self-efficacy will have positive emotional states, while those with low self-efficacy will experience negative emotional states.

One of the important concepts that plays a significant role in athletes achieving high performance is optimal performance emotional state (Yanar et al., 2017). Athletes with a high optimal performance emotional state experience an increase in positive emotions compared to those with a low optimal performance emotional state, which demonstrates the importance of optimal performance emotional state in sports (Rogatko, 2009). In their study, Yanar et al., (2017) addressed the optimal performance emotional state as having an indirect effect on athletes' performance in terms of being willing and engaged during competitions, noting that young athletes' experiences of different emotional states during training or competition positively influenced their performance and success. Swann et al., (2012) indicated that factors such as sustainable focus, physical preparation, teamwork, positive mental attitude, and positive outcomes experienced before and during competition positively impact optimal performance emotional state, while factors such as physical problems, errors, inability to maintain focus, and negative mental attitudes have a negative effect. As studies have increased understanding of the impact of emotional states in the sports environment on athletic performance, there is a wealth of research related to the concept of optimal performance emotional state (Fournier et al., 2007; Jackson & Marsh, 1996; Kawabata, et al., 2008; Keller & Bless, 2008; Moneta, 2004a; Moneta, 2004; Yanar et al., 2017). Based on the literature, it is anticipated that the positive and negative emotional states of young female athletes will mediate the relationship between self-efficacy and athletic performance.

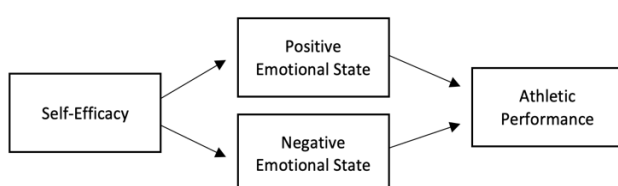


Figure 1. Research Model

## Method

### Study Group and Process

The sample group of the study consists of young female athletes from various university teams in Turkey. After obtaining ethical approval for the study, data were collected online. Data from a total of 25 female athletes were excluded from the analysis: 12 athletes were identified as providing false information, and 13 athletes reported having physical or mental issues. The total sample for the study comprises 339 female athletes. All analyses were conducted on the 339 young female athletes. The average age of the participants was 21.04 (Sd.=2.25). The average years of experience in their current disciplines was calculated to be 6.77 (Sd.=2.65). The calculation of sample size was based on the reference data reported in Lochbaum et al., (2023) systematic review. In the calculations, the number of independent variables ( $u=3$ ), an anticipated effect size ( $f^2=0.096$ ), a statistical power level of 95%, and an alpha of 0.05 were taken into consideration, resulting in a required sample size of 194 participants.

### Data Collection Tools

The data for the study were collected using the "Personal Information Form," the "Athlete Self-Efficacy Scale," the "Sport Emotion Scale," and the "Individual Performance Assessment."

**Athlete Self-Efficacy Scale:** The scale developed by Koçak, (2020) was used to measure athletes' self-efficacy. This scale, designed to assess athletes' personal competencies, consists of a total of 16 questions (e.g., "I can cope with difficulties that put pressure on me") and four sub-dimensions. A 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Disagree) to 5 (Completely Agree) was used. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient calculated for the internal consistency of the scale was  $\alpha = .91$ .

**Sport Emotion Scale:** The original Sport Emotion Scale was developed by Jones et al., (2005) and was adapted into Turkish by Urfa & Aşçı, (2019). This scale, designed to assess athletes' emotional states, consists of a total of 22 questions and five sub-dimensions. It includes three negative emotions (anxiety, discomfort, anger) and two positive emotions (enthusiasm, happiness). The Cronbach's alpha coefficients calculated for the internal consistency of the scale were  $\alpha = .94$  for negative emotions and  $\alpha = .92$  for positive emotions.

**Individual Performance Assessment:** The assessment of perceived performance by athletes using a single question rather than multiple questions is considered more reliable by some researchers (Josefsson et al., 2019). Participants in the study were asked to respond to the question, "How would you evaluate your training in the last week?" using a 10-point Likert scale (1 = very poor, 10 = very good).

## Data Analysis

In the study, the skewness and kurtosis values of the data were calculated to check whether the data met the assumption of univariate normality. A reference range of  $\pm 2.00$  was used for skewness and kurtosis values across all data (George & Mallery, 2019). Factor scores and their z-values were used to determine the significance values of the variables in the research. The bootstrap technique was employed to verify whether the relationships between variables were statistically significant (Preacher & Selig, 2012). In this study, 5,000 resampling options were chosen and calculated at a 95% confidence interval (MacKinnon et al., 2004). Statistical analyses of the data obtained for the study were performed using SPSS and R software packages. Additionally, in the multiple regression analysis conducted using the R program, the "lavaan," "semTools," and "pwr" packages were utilized.

## Ethical Approval

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Batman University on 09.07.2024 with the decision number 167570.

## Results

When examining Table 1, there are positive and significant relationships between self-efficacy and positive emotion ( $r = .16$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and performance ( $r = .14$ ,  $p < .01$ ). It was observed that positive emotions have a negative and significant relationship with negative emotions ( $r = -.50$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and a positive and significant relationship with performance ( $r = .37$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Negative emotions were found to have a negative and significant relationship with performance ( $r = -.43$ ,  $p < .01$ ), while no significant relationship was detected with self-efficacy ( $r = -.04$ ,  $p > .01$ ). Furthermore, when examining the kurtosis and skewness values of the data, it was determined that all variables were within normal ranges.

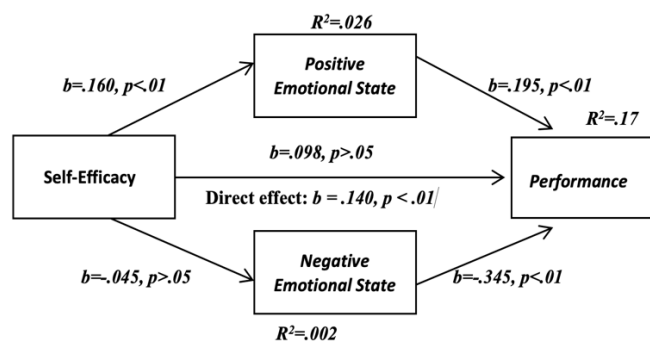
## Findings

The descriptive statistics (skewness, kurtosis, mean, and standard deviation) and Pearson correlation coefficients among the study variables (self-efficacy, positive emotional state, negative emotional state, and individual performance assessment) presents in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics and correlation values

Variables	Skewness	Kurtosis	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
(1) Self-Efficacy	-1.01	0.54	3.51	0.62	1			
(2) Positive Emotional State	-0.37	-0.41	2.53	0.92	0.16**	1		
(3) Negative Emotional State	0.69	-0.35	1.34	0.86	-0.04	-0.50**	1	
(4) Individual Performance Assessment	-0.54	0.13	6.22	1.97	0.14**	0.37**	-0.43**	1

In the conducted study, self-efficacy is modeled as the input variable in the path analysis, while performance is modeled as the output variable. Positive and negative emotions are considered as the mediating variables in this relationship (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** The Mediating Role of Negative and Positive Emotions in the Relationship Between Self-Efficacy and Performance

In the study, it was found that self-efficacy has a direct positive and significant effect on performance ( $b = .140$ ,  $p < .01$ ). As a result of the path model created, it was determined that self-efficacy has a positive and significant effect on positive emotions ( $b = .160$ ,  $p < .01$ ), while it has no effect on negative emotions ( $b = -.045$ ,  $p > .05$ ). The effect of positive emotions on performance is positive and significant ( $b = .195$ ,  $p < .01$ ), while negative emotions have a negative and significant effect on performance ( $b = -.345$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The indirect effect of self-efficacy on performance through negative and positive emotions was assessed using the Bootstrap technique with 5,000 resampling options. As a result of the bootstrap analyses, it was found that self-efficacy has an indirect effect on performance through positive emotions ( $b = .031$ ,  $p < .05$ ). However, no indirect effect was found through negative emotions ( $b = .016$ ,  $p > .05$ ).

**Table 2.** Findings Related to the Path Model

			% 95 CI			Sd	z-value	p (> z )
			B	LL	UL			
Direct Effect								
Self-Efficacy	→	Positive Emotion	0.16**	0.089	0.385	0.075	3.14	0.00
Self-Efficacy	→	Negative Emotion	-0.04	-0.210	0.085	0.075	-0.83	0.40
Self-Efficacy	→	Performance	0.09	0.616	0.300	0.161	1.86	0.06
Positive Emotion	→	Performance	0.19**	0.142	0.667	0.134	3.01	0.00
Negative Emotion	→	Performance	-0.34**	-1.016	-0.515	0.128	-5.99	0.00
Indirect Effect								
Self-Efficacy	→	Positive Emotion → Performance	0.31*	0.008	0.184	0.045	2.14	0.03
Self-Efficacy	→	Negative Emotion → Performance	0.01	-0.066	0.161	0.058	0.82	0.40

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$

## Discussion

The aim of this study is to investigate the role of emotions in the relationship between self-efficacy (belief in oneself, the conviction of being able to achieve success) and performance among young female athletes. A cross-sectional study has been designed to test the formulated research hypotheses, focusing on the mediating role of both positive and negative emotions.

In our study, the findings indicate a reciprocal relationship between the self-efficacy of young female athletes and their positive emotional states. These results are consistent with previous research (Burić & Macuka, 2018; Zhen et al., 2017). Self-efficacy has been identified as a significant factor influencing emotion regulation in various studies (Alessandri et al., 2014). Young female athletes with high levels of self-efficacy tend to provide positive feedback to their surroundings. When evaluated within the framework of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2008), this finding suggests that the belief in their ability to complete a task or achieve success with the necessary performance can enhance their intrinsic motivation. Increased intrinsic motivation may trigger the formation of positive emotional experiences (such as happiness or excitement) among young female athletes. According to Self-Determination Theory, competence is a crucial factor in enhancing motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Karakuş & Başer, (2022) noted that self-efficacy might vary by gender due to obstacles in different social environments. In particular, young female athletes may have a greater need to demonstrate this competence and prove themselves compared to their male counterparts. Indeed, a study conducted by Demirtaş, (2018) found a significant difference in the self-efficacy levels of males compared to females.

Our research has found a significant and positive relationship between positive emotions and performance. This finding is consistent with numerous theoretical studies and research in the literature (Kavanagh & Hausfeld, 1986; Rathschlag & Memmert, 2015). Various theoretical approaches exist regarding how positive emotions can influence performance. According to Carver & Scheier, (1998)'s self-regulation theory, individuals utilize their positive emotions as a motiva-

tional force to achieve their goals. Thus, positive emotions can enable athletes to be willing and determined in achieving their performance. On the other hand, Isen ve Reeve, (2005) stated that positive emotions assist individuals in attaining higher success during the problem-solving process. In this context, young female athletes experiencing positive emotions may create favorable effects on their performance based on their problem-solving and creative thinking abilities. Lazarus, (2000) posited that when the necessary skills are present in an individual, happiness can enhance performance. When evaluated from the perspective of young female athletes, it is observed that women have a higher capacity for emotion regulation compared to men (Gross & John, 2003; McNulty & Fincham, 2012; Tamres et al., 2002). This situation may stem from women's more active engagement in seeking emotional support and regulating their emotions (Tamres et al., 2002). Of course, the outcomes of this study may vary based on regional and cultural contexts.

In the study, no significant relationship was found between self-efficacy and negative emotions among young female athletes. This result differs from some studies in the literature (Burić & Macuka, 2018; Zhen et al., 2017). While it has been noted that women experience emotional disorders more frequently than men (Kuehner, 2017), it can be argued that this may differ specifically for young female athletes. This finding may suggest that the emotional responses of young female athletes could be more balanced. In their studies on emotion regulation processes that shape individuals' emotions, Gross & John, (2003), revealed that different appraisal styles are effective in suppressing emotions. Women's more active use of emotional support and reappraisal strategies (Gross & John, 2003; Tamres et al., 2002) may have enabled young women with high self-efficacy to better manage negative emotions such as stress or anxiety, thereby distancing themselves from negative emotions. In this context, it is believed that the emotion regulation strategies used by women can enhance the positive effects of self-efficacy on positive emotions while facilitating avoidance of negative emotions.



In the study, when examining the relationship between negative emotions and performance, it was concluded that negative emotions adversely affect performance. This finding supports several meta-analyses in the literature (Craft et al., 2003; Woodman & Hardy, 2003). Particularly in instances of experiencing negative emotions such as stress and anxiety, individuals may struggle to focus on their tasks, leading to a decline in performance. According to Eysenck et al., (2007) in their theory of attentional control, when anxiety levels rise, cognitive resources may become depleted, causing individuals to struggle in directing their attention toward performance. This situation can result in a decrease in performance. Additionally, negative emotions can lead to a lack of motivation in individuals, which may also contribute to a decline in performance (Carver & Scheier, 1998). When evaluated from the perspective of young female athletes, it should be considered that women may experience more intense emotional responses than men and may be more prone to emotional disorders (Kuehner, 2017). They may carry a heavier emotional burden due to hormonal changes and social environmental pressures. This situation could result in the effects of negative emotions on performance being more pronounced than those of positive emotions among young female athletes.

## Conclusions

In this study, while the effect of self-efficacy on performance through positive emotions was found to be significant, it was concluded that self-efficacy did not influence performance through negative emotions. High levels of self-efficacy may enable individuals to develop positive emotions and utilize these feelings to enhance their performance. Individuals with high self-efficacy can manage stress and anxiety more effectively due to their confidence, thereby experiencing the performance-enhancing effects of positive emotions more distinctly. However, the study found that self-efficacy did not impact performance through negative emotions. This finding suggests that the effect of negative emotions on performance may not be direct and that self-efficacy's ability to manage these emotions may be associated with different variables. It can be asserted that self-efficacy does not predict negative emotions as strongly as it does positive emotions, or at least that this prediction is not sufficiently evident in the current sample group.

Future research could conduct more detailed investigations into how self-efficacy manages negative emotions. The effects of emotional regulation strategies associated with self-efficacy (Gross & John, 2003), on both positive and negative emotions could be examined. Such studies could enhance our understanding of the role of self-efficacy in emotional management and clarify its effects on performance in greater detail. Additionally, comparative studies examining differences between males and females could more clearly elucidate the effects of gender on self-efficacy and emotional regulation.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors of the article declare that there are no personal or financial conflicts of interest related to the study.

## Author Contributions

**Research Idea:** SS; **Research Design:** SS, BŞ; **Data Analysis:** YY; **Manuscript Writing:** BŞ, SS, YEY, AE; **Critical Review:** SB

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