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Predicting Athletic Success Perception based on Body Image and Self-Efficacy in Physical Education Students: The Mediating Role of Achievement Motivation

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Abstract: The aim of this study was to predict athletic success perception among physical education students by examining the role of body image and self-efficacy, with the mediating effect of achievement motivation. The research method was descriptive and correlational, utilizing path analysis. The statistical population consisted of male and female physical education students at universities in South Khorasan province, Iran in 2022. A cluster sampling technique was employed to select 311 students who completed the research questionnaires. The Perception of Success Questionnaire (POSQ), Body Image Concern Inventory (BICI), General Self-Efficacy Scale, and Sport Orientation Questionnaire (SOQ) were used to collect data. The confirmatory factor analysis and path analysis were conducted using $SPSS_{24}$ and $Amos_{24}$ software. The results revealed that body image and self-efficacy had a positive direct effect on athletic success perception. Moreover, body image and self-efficacy had an indirect effect on athletic success perception through achievement motivation. Therefore, emphasizing these constructs is crucial for athletes' success.

Keywords: Athletic success perception, body image, self-efficacy, achievement motivation, physical education students

Introduction

One of the challenges in understanding skilled behavior in athletes is identifying the components and dimensions that are effective in acquiring and maintaining athletic success. Research on athletic success shows that various factors play a role in athletes' progress, including training, education, internal ability, age, psychological skills, commitment, and enjoyment of sports (Eydi & Aghaie, 2021). Athletic success is an active learning process that results from targeted training and improvement of essential skills to reach a high level of athletic performance. Without a desire for success, other psychological abilities and characteristics have little impact on individuals' successful performance (Ureña-Lopera et al., 2020). Achieving success and desirable performance in sports competitions is one of the primary topics that sports organizations in different countries focus on (Rogowska et al., 2022). According to the theoretical basis of athletic success, progress in sports competitions (sportiness) is dependent on an individual's goal orientation, which is based on task-oriented or ego-oriented. Individuals have different levels of ability in task and ego orientation based on their individual differences. Task-oriented individuals are more self-referential and focus more on performance-based goals, while ego-oriented individuals tend to set norm-referenced goals and focus on performing better than others or with less effort. Ego-oriented

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individuals have a lower perceived competence, show less effort, protect themselves and their values more, and avoid challenging and risky activities (Shayani et al., 2021).

Athletic success has always been the main goal of championship sports, and studying and recognizing important psychological indicators of young athletes and determining their levels of anxiety, depression, personality traits, and success can be a good guide for coaches, families, and parents of athletes, as well as the athletes themselves, to prevent the waste of energy and talent in sports fields where they lack the ability to progress (Mohamadi Torkamani et al., 2017).

Psychological skills play a role in improving athletic performance in different ages and types of sports. Body image is one of these psychological factors, as in today's world, the body and its beauty are considered important parts of human characteristics. Studies on body image have shown significant growth in recent decades (Stagi et al., 2021). The more attractive the body is, the kinder, more intelligent, and physically appealing the person is considered, and they are more likely to have a higher level of job, marriage, happiness, and life (Stein et al., 2021).

Body image is a broad and dynamic concept that encompasses an individual's perception of the size and proportion of their body, including thoughts, feelings, and perspectives of others towards their body (Blashill & Wilhelm, 2014). Body image has a multidimensional structure that includes cognitive (individual's thoughts about their body), perceptual (touch and vision), and emotional (individual's feelings towards themselves) dimensions (Grogan, 2006). An individual's perception of their body may lead to overestimation or underestimation of certain parts of their body, and emotional and cognitive changes resulting from it are related to dissatisfaction and concern about their body shape and appearance. Body image is also a central concept for health psychologists (Neagu, 2015), and some studies have supported the relationship between body image and success in sports (Beckner & Record, 2016; Vani et al., 2021; Varnes et al., 2013).

In addition, specific skills are necessary to maintain the health of athletes, such as self-efficacy. Researchers believe that the self-efficacy structure is one of the most influential psychological structures on sports progress. Individuals with higher self-efficacy set more challenging goals and make more effort to achieve them (Yılmaz et al., 2020), and studies have supported the relationship between self-efficacy and success in some sports (Sivrikaya, 2018). Self-efficacy is a key factor in mental health, introduced by Bandura in psychology. In the self-efficacy theory, individuals with strong beliefs about their abilities perform tasks with more effort and pressure and ultimately perform better (Cartigny et al., 2021). On the other hand, individuals with low self-efficacy feel helpless and unable to control their life events. They believe that any effort they make is futile, and they quickly lose hope when faced with

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obstacles. Those with very little efficacy do not even try to succeed because they are convinced that whatever they do is useless (Akinci, 2020).

Researchers have concluded that to improve the learning process and increase internal satisfaction and motivation in sports, athletes must attain a high level of self-efficacy (Anstiss et al., 2020). However, other factors are also needed for a better perception of sports success. The presence of motivational force leads to better performance and the best possible results for athletes (Biswas et al., 2021). Without motivation for success, athletes' abilities have little impact on their successful performance (Kanfer et al., 2017). Achievement motivation involves the need for mastery of difficult tasks, achieving perfection, and outperforming others. It includes features that enable athletes to achieve excellence, and several factors affect achievement motivation in athletes (Garcia & Subia, 2019).

Research results support the relationship between body image and achievement motivation (Baceviciene et al., 2021; Greenleaf & Rodriguez, 2021; Teixeira et al., 2006) as well as self-efficacy with achievement motivation (Gao et al., 2008; Seyed et al., 2017; Yılmaz et al., 2020). Every individual has two primary motivations for progress: achieving success and avoiding failure. Highly successful individuals show high motivation for achieving success and low motivation for avoiding failure, while less successful individuals show low motivation for achieving success and high motivation for avoiding failure (Sarabandi & Rezaei, 2017).

Although various studies have investigated the factors affecting sports success perception, most of these studies have focused on the effects of variables and neglected the role of mediating factors. However, it is possible to consider a set of factors involved in sports success. Therefore, the present study aimed to investigate the role of mediating factors in the relationship between body image and self-efficacy with sports success perception. The main research question is whether there is a relationship between body image and self-efficacy with sports success perception, considering the mediating role of achievement motivation.

Material and Methods

The research method employed in this study was path analysis. Path analysis was first developed and expanded by Swell Wright (1934) and involves estimating the relationships between variables to obtain information about their direct and indirect relationships. Multiple regression is commonly used in the formulation of causal models. The simplest way to calculate them is through ordinary regression. The relationships between variables are considered as distinct paths that flow in one direction. The major concepts of path analysis are best explained through its major feature, the path diagram, which reveals

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the potential causal links between variables. In this study, path analysis was used to examine the proposed model.

The study population comprised all male and female physical education students in universities in South Khorasan province in 2021, totaling 1600 people. The sample size was calculated to be at least 310 people using the Cochran formula. However, 400 questionnaires were randomly distributed in five local regions of the province, including East, Center, West, South, and North. 340 questionnaires were returned, and ultimately, 311 questionnaires were analyzed due to incomplete or inappropriate responses from some respondents. The inclusion criteria for the study were having a minimum level of reading and writing literacy, willingness to participate in the study, and having no history of psychological disorders. Special ethical considerations were observed in the research, and participants were assured that their questionnaire responses would be kept confidential (while the questionnaires were anonymous). Participants were also free to withdraw from the study at any stage. The questionnaires used in this study were as follows:

Perception of Success Questionnaire (PSQ): PSQ was developed by Roberts et al. (1998). In the initial stage of developing this questionnaire, 48 questions were designed to assess the perception of success. The basis of the questions is the feeling of success in sports. These questions were initially designed to determine the motivation for progress in sports. The questions are designed as a criterion to determine whether the athlete has achieved success or not. The final version of the questionnaire consists of 12 questions, which are scored on a five-point Likert scale (from strongly disagree=1 to strongly agree=5). The highest score a person can obtain on this questionnaire is 60 and the lowest is 12. The higher the score on this questionnaire, the higher the perception of success. Roberts et al. (1998) reported a high internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.82 for this scale, and the reliability of the questionnaire was reported as 0.80 using the test-retest method. The validity of this scale has also been reported to be desirable using the criterion-related validity method with Duda and Nicholls (1992) questionnaire. In Kajbafnejad et al. (2010) study, to assess criterion validity, this questionnaire was administered along with the sport orientation questionnaire (Gill & Deeter, 1988) to 60 athletes from the research community, and a correlation coefficient of 0.40 was obtained. In the study of Kajbafnejad et al. (2010), the reliability of the PSQ was also examined using the Cronbach's alpha and Guttman methods, and the calculated coefficients were 0.79 and 0.81, respectively. Finally, in the present study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was estimated to be 0.87 for this questionnaire.

Body Image Concern Inventory (BICI): Littleton et al. (2005) developed this questionnaire. It comprises 19 questions, each with five options ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). In Iran, Basak Nejad and Ghaffari (2007) reported the internal consistency reliability of this test to be 0.95 based on

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Cronbach's alpha method. To obtain the total score, the scores of all questions are added together, resulting in a score range of 19 to 95. This questionnaire has two dimensions: dissatisfaction and embarrassment about one's appearance, and the tendency to conceal perceived flaws (questions 1, 3, 5, 8, 9, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19), and the degree of interference of concerns about appearance on one's social functioning (questions 2, 4, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, and 13). Littleton et al. (2005) examined the reliability of this questionnaire using internal consistency and obtained a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.93. The correlation coefficient of each question with the total score ranged from 0.32 to 0.72, with a mean of 0.62. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the first and second factors was 0.92 and 0.76, respectively, and the correlation coefficient between the two factors was 0.69. In the present study, the reliability of the BICI and its subscales were calculated using Cronbach's alpha, which was 0.86 for the entire questionnaire, 0.84 for the first subscale (appearance dissatisfaction), and 0.71 for the second subscale (interference in functioning), indicating acceptable reliability of the questionnaire. In the study by Basak Nejad and Ghaffari (2007), the correlation coefficient between the BICI and the Negative Physical Evaluation subscale was 0.55, and the correlation coefficient between the BICI and the Negative Evaluation subscale was 0.43, both of which were significant. Additionally, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this questionnaire was 0.88 in the present study.

General Self-Efficacy Scale: Sherer et al. (1982) developed this questionnaire to measure self-efficacy and confidence in one's abilities. The questionnaire consists of 17 items, which are scored on a 5-point Likert scale. The internal consistency reliability of its items was reported to be 0.79 based on Cronbach's alpha method (Sherer et al., 1982). In the Najafi and Foladjang (2007) study, the reliability coefficient of this test was reported to be 0.80. In the present study, the reliability of this questionnaire was estimated to be 0.89 using Cronbach's alpha.

Gill's Achievement Motivation or Sportsmanship Questionnaire: Bahram and Shafizadeh (2003) standardized this questionnaire designed to measure achievement motivation in sports competitions and obtained an equivalent reliability coefficient of 0.93 using Cronbach's alpha method, which is acceptable. The questionnaire consists of three subscales with titles of competitiveness containing 13 questions, win orientation containing 6 questions, and goal orientation containing 6 questions, for a total of 25 questions. The questions are scored using a 5-point Likert scale, with options ranging from completely disagree to completely agree, and the scoring method corresponds to numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, respectively. In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this questionnaire was estimated to be 0.92.

Data Analysis method: Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were used to describe the study variables. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov test was also used to determine the normality

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of the data distribution. Additionally, to analyze the data, confirmatory factor analysis and path analysis were performed using $SPSS_{24}$ and $Amos_{24}$ software.

Results

The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1. Out of the total respondents, 104 individuals (33.50%) were male and 207 individuals (66.50%) were female. Moreover, 251 individuals (80.70%) were single and 60 individuals (19.30%) were married. The majority of the participants (156 individuals) were under 20 years old, with the highest percentage (50.15%) belonging to the 21-25 age group. Furthermore, the highest frequency of educational level was related to the bachelor's degree, with 92% (286 individuals) of the participants having this level of education.

Table 1. The demographic characteristics of the participants

Demographic characteristics	Gender		Age				Marital status			Educational level	
Value	Male	Female	< 20 years	21-25 years	30-36 years	Above 36 years	Single	Married	Bachelor	Master	PhD
Frequency	104	207	131	156	21	3	251	60	286	17	8
Percentage	33.50	66.50	42.10	50.15	6.75	1	80.70	19.30	92	5.50	2.60

The development of a structural model for the research variables is presented in table 2. The effects of the main variables in the model were examined. Table 2 displays the output results of the final research model.

Table 2. The effects of the main variables in the model

Path			**Estimate**	**S.E.**	**C.R.**	**P**	**Regression weight**
Achievement Motivation	←	Efficacy	.348	.058	5.96	.001	.437
Achievement Motivation	←	Body image	.434	.06	7.23	.001	.530
Perception of sports success	←	Efficacy	.239	.056	4.04	.001	.268
Perception of sports success	←	Achievement Motivation	.743	.12	6.12	.001	.668
Perception of sports success	←	Body image	.140	.069	2.02	.022	.153
Efficacy	←→	Body image	.654	.086	7.57	.001	.664
Hide defects	←	Body image	1.000	-	-	-	.784
Concern about appearance interferes	←	Body image	.920	.067	13.73	.001	.799
The desire to complete the behavior	←	Efficacy	1.000	-	-	-	.784
Tendency to initiate behavior	←	Efficacy	.840	.067	12.51	.001	.696
Insistence in doing homework	←	Efficacy	.956	.072	13.34	.001	.738
Goal-oriented	←	Achievement Motivation	1.000	-	-	-	.786
Success orientation	←	Achievement Motivation	.865	.073	11.77	.001	.624
competitiveness	←	Achievement Motivation	1.072	.065	16.39	.001	.829
Selfishness	←	Perception of sports success	1.000	-	-	-	.827
Task orientation	←	Perception of sports success	.956	.048	19.89	.001	.882

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The confirmatory factor analysis results indicated that, except for the "hiding defects" dimension from the body image component, the "desire to complete behavior" dimension from the self-efficacy component, the "goal orientation" dimension from the motivation to progress component, and the "self-orientation" dimension from the perception of sports success component, all dimensions of this research had acceptable factor loadings and were significant at the 0.05 level. The significance of the regression weights (factor loadings) indicates the convergent validity of the variables in the model (Table 2).

Table 3 shows that the fit indices of the final research model indicate a very good fit for the variables of the current research, confirming the fit indices of the model. The final model is presented in Figure 1 after fitting.

Table 3. Fit indices of the final research model

Indices	CMIN/DF	RFI	TLI	NFI	IFI	CFI	RMSEA
Value	3.342	.930	.950	.968	.977	.977	.083

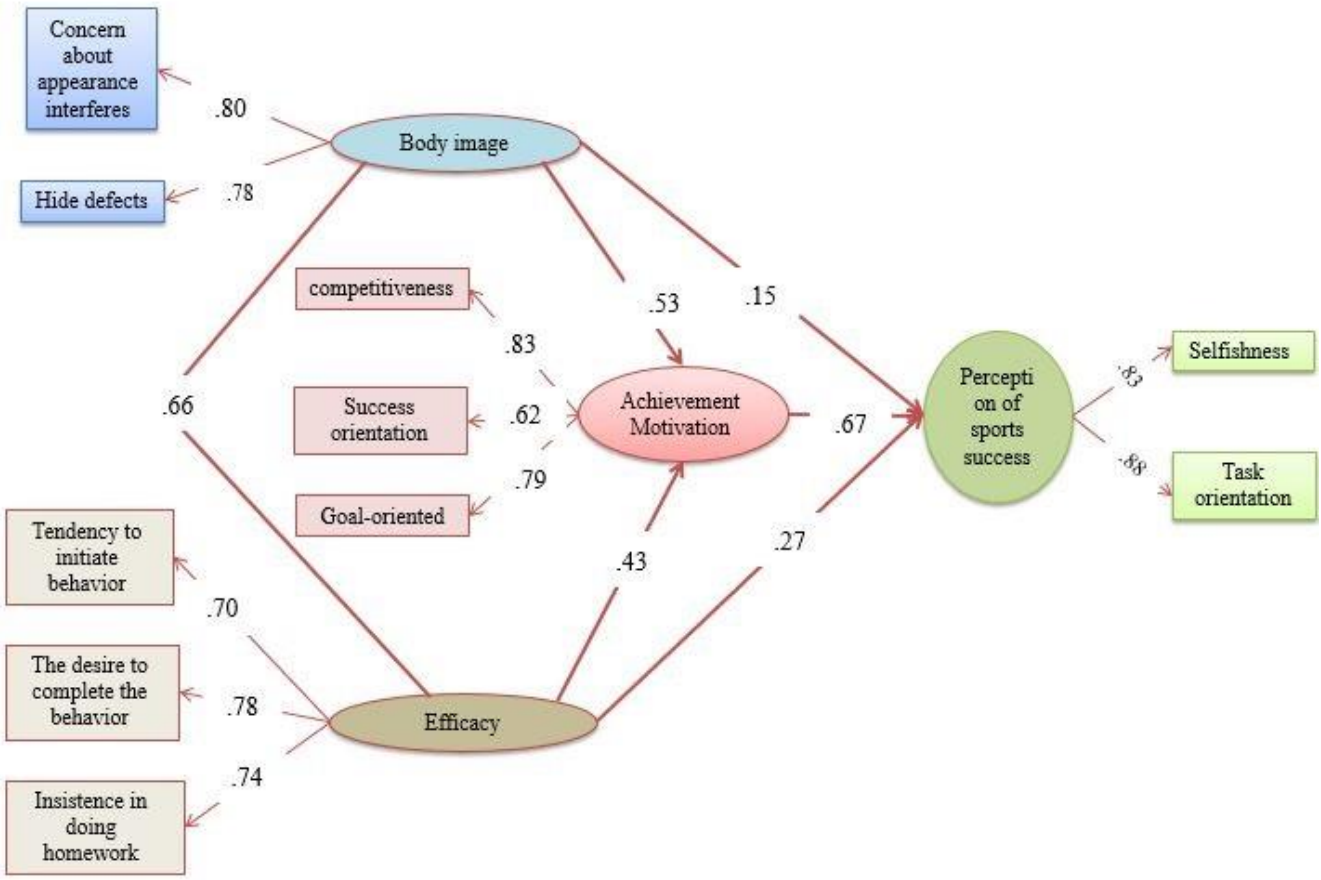

Fig 1. The final model of research

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According to the structural equation model (Figure 1), in the sports success perception component, the dimensions of task orientation and self-orientation had the greatest impact on sports success perception with effect coefficients of 0.88 and 0.83, respectively. In the body image component, the dimensions of appearance concern and hiding defects had the greatest impact on body image with effect coefficients of 0.80 and 0.78, respectively. In the motivation to progress component, the dimensions of competition, goal orientation, and victory orientation had the greatest impact on motivation to progress with effect coefficients of 0.83, 0.79, and 0.62, respectively. Additionally, in the self-efficacy component, the dimensions of desire to complete behavior, task pressure, and behavioral initiation had the greatest impact on self-efficacy with effect coefficients of 0.78, 0.74, and 0.70, respectively.

At the second and main level of the structural model, the body image component had an impact on self-efficacy with a coefficient of 0.66, the body image component had an impact on motivation to progress with a coefficient of 0.53, self-efficacy had an impact on motivation to progress with a coefficient of 0.43, the body image component had an indirect impact on sports success perception with a coefficient of 0.15, self-efficacy had an indirect impact on sports success perception with a coefficient of 0.27, and motivation to progress had an impact on sports success perception with a coefficient of 0.67, according to the respondents' perspective. Furthermore, the results showed that the body image and self-efficacy components had indirect effects on sports success perception with coefficients of 0.354 and 0.290, respectively.

Discussion

The aim of this research was to predict the perception of sports success based on body image and self-efficacy in physical education students while considering the mediating role of motivation to progress. The results from data analysis showed that body image and self-efficacy components were directly and indirectly associated with sports success perception through motivation to progress. Therefore, the main hypothesis of the research was confirmed. The results regarding the relationship between body image and motivation to progress were consistent with the previous studies (Baceviciene et al., 2021; Greenleaf & Rodriguez, 2021; Teixeira et al., 2006). The results regarding the relationship between body image and sports success perception were consistent with the studies by Vani et al. (2021), Beckner and Record (2016), and Varnes et al. (2013).

In today's society, where people place significant importance on body fitness and appearance and are constantly evaluated and valued by others, attention to appearance has become increasingly crucial. Physical attractiveness, especially body fitness, is highly valued among athletes (Varnes et al., 2013). According to Goldsmith (1990), body image is a multidimensional structure that broadly describes the internal and mental representations of physical appearance and bodily experience. Body image reflects

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how we look, how we think others perceive us, and how we feel about our appearance. This is particularly true for athletes, and feedback from others about their physical appearance can improve their motivation for success and progress in their sports career (Greenleaf & Rodriguez, 2021).

Sports has a dual effect on mood and emotion. Firstly, it boosts positive emotions and then improves mood states (defined as long-term psychological feelings that last for several hours or even days). Secondly, negative emotions or temporary states of guilt, irritability, laziness, and tension related to missing sports or training sessions are reduced, and this relief is associated with advanced general mood and emotion (Vani et al., 2021).

The impact of emotional regulation on sports is temporary. The longer the time between two sports sessions, the greater the likelihood of experiencing negative effects. Therefore, based on the results of this research, it appears that having a desirable body image causes athletes to have more interest in participating in sports venues and exercises. This, in turn, increases their motivation and ultimately leads to their success in training and competitions. The results regarding the relationship between self-efficacy and motivation to progress were consistent with previous studies asn well (Seyed et al., 2017; Yılmaz et al., 2020). Moreover, the relationship between self-efficacy and perception of sports success was consistent with studies by Yılmaz et al. (2020) and Sivrikaya (2018).

Individuals with strong self-efficacy believe that they can effectively cope with life events. This state gives them a different perspective than those with weak self-efficacy, and it directly affects their behavior. People with strong self-efficacy are more confident in their abilities and do not drown in doubts. They are more determined in performing their tasks, and their performance is usually at a higher level. They see difficult tasks as challenges rather than threats and actively seek out challenges. As a result, they work hard to overcome them (Seyed et al., 2017). Therefore, they have more motivation for success, which ultimately improves their success. According to research, motivation for progress leads to success. In this regard, the results of this study are consistent with the studies by Kanfer et al. (2017) and Sarabandi and Rezaei (2017).

According to Bandura's theory, individuals are not driven by internal forces or environmental stimuli, but rather by psychological functions, performance, behavior, environment, and stimuli (Yılmaz et al., 2020). Based on the indirect pathways obtained in the analysis of the results of this study, body image and self-efficacy increase motivation to progress, which ultimately acts as a stimulus and leads to the individual's success.

In general, the results of the study showed that athletic success in athletes is predictably mediated through body image and self-efficacy with the motivation of progress, and paying attention to these

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variables is important in relation to athletes. However, like many studies, the present study has been associated with limitations. One of the limitations of the study was the lack of control over interfering variables such as sport type and gender in the study sample, which is suggested to be examined in future studies. Since women consider their appearance more importance, comparing the effect of body image in women and men can provide more reliable results. Additionally, since the present study was only conducted on physical education students in South Khorasan province universities, this matter can make it difficult to generalize the results. Therefore, it is suggested that this study be conducted on other samples in other provinces to have better generalizability. Moreover, since a cross-sectional design was used in this study, the use of longitudinal and long-term designs as well as experimental designs to investigate the effect of predictor variables on the criterion variable is recommended.

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