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A Bibliometric Analysis of Self-Talk Research in Sport: Trends and Impact on Athlete Motivation and Performance

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Abstract

This study employs a bibliometric approach to systematically map the development of self-talk research in sport and examine its relevance to athletes' motivation and performance. Bibliographic data were retrieved from the Scopus database, comprising 176 journal articles published between 1986 and 2025. The findings demonstrate a substantial expansion of scholarly interest in self-talk, particularly from 2010 onward, with publication output reaching its highest level in 2024 with 16 articles. The literature increasingly positions self-talk as an important psychological strategy associated with enhanced motivation, cognitive and self-regulatory processes, and athletic performance. The prominence of keywords such as self-regulation, motivation, and athletes further demonstrates the broadening application of self-talk across different sporting contexts. By consolidating a body of literature that has previously developed across diverse and fragmented research settings, this study provides a systematic overview of the intellectual and thematic evolution of self-talk research in sport. Its primary contribution lies in identifying emerging thematic clusters and demonstrating the increasing integration of self-talk within broader sport psychology interventions. Future research should further investigate the mechanisms underlying self-talk, examine its integration with established motivational frameworks, and develop evidence-based intervention protocols that account for athletes' developmental stages and sport-specific demands.

Keywords: Athletes, Bibliometric Analysis, Motivation, Self-Talk, Sport Performance.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini menggunakan analisis bibliometrik untuk mengkaji tren penelitian mengenai intervensi self-talk serta pengaruhnya terhadap motivasi dan performa atlet. Analisis dilakukan menggunakan data dari basis data Scopus yang mencakup 176 artikel jurnal yang diterbitkan pada periode 1986–2025. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya peningkatan yang signifikan dalam jumlah publikasi setiap tahun, terutama pada periode 2010–2024, dengan puncak publikasi sebanyak 16 artikel pada tahun 2024. Temuan utama menunjukkan bahwa self-talk merupakan salah satu teknik psikologis yang efektif dalam meningkatkan motivasi, pengendalian kognitif, dan performa olahraga. Jurnal-jurnal utama serta kata kunci dominan, seperti self-regulation, motivation, dan athletes, menunjukkan semakin luasnya penerapan self-talk pada olahraga individu maupun olahraga beregu. Penelitian ini mengisi kesenjangan penelitian dengan menyajikan pemetaan bibliometrik yang komprehensif terhadap kajian self-talk yang sebelumnya masih tersebar pada berbagai konteks penelitian. Kontribusi utama penelitian ini terletak pada identifikasi klaster-klaster penelitian yang berkembang serta meningkatnya integrasi self-talk dalam berbagai intervensi psikologi olahraga. Penelitian ini juga merekomendasikan agar penelitian selanjutnya mengintegrasikan self-talk dengan teori-teori motivasi serta mengembangkan protokol intervensi berbasis bukti yang disesuaikan dengan usia dan jenis cabang olahraga atlet.

Kata Kunci: Atlet, Bibliometric, Motivasi, Performa Olahraga, Self-Talk.

Introduction

Achieving optimal performance in competitive sport depends on the combined contribution of physical preparation, technical proficiency, and psychological functioning. Within the psychological domain, self-talk has received increasing attention as a self-regulatory strategy through which athletes can manage their thoughts, emotional responses, and actions across training and competitive settings. Intentional self-directed verbalization may assist athletes in maintaining concentration, regulating emotions, and sustaining effort when confronted with demanding situations, thereby supporting both motivation and performance (Hardy, 2006; Latinjak et al., 2019). Beyond its general regulatory function, self-talk may serve distinct motivational and instructional purposes. Motivational self-talk is commonly associated with the management of competitive anxiety and the strengthening of self-confidence, whereas instructional self-talk can facilitate technical execution and decision-making under performance pressure (Hatzigeorgiadis et al., 2011; Van Raalte et al., 2020). Nevertheless, despite the expanding literature in this area, research examining the motivational and performance-related dimensions of self-talk remains dispersed across different contexts and has yet to be comprehensively integrated. To address this gap, the present study applies a bibliometric approach to systematically examine the evolution of self-talk research and its relationship with athletes' motivation and performance. Drawing on Scopus-indexed literature published between 1986 and 2025, this analysis maps publication patterns, influential contributions, and thematic developments to provide a broader understanding of how self-talk research in sport has evolved over time.

This study applied a bibliometric analysis method to investigate the following research questions:

Q1. How has the number of publications on self-talk in sports evolved from 1986 to 2025?
Q2. What are the publication and citation trends in research examining self-talk's impact on athletes' motivation and performance?
Q3. Who are the most productive authors, articles, publishers, and countries in self-talk research in the field of sports?
Q4. Which journals are the most productive in publishing articles related to self-talk in the context of sports?
Q5. What topics and research directions in self-talk are currently being explored by researchers and have potential for further development in future studies?

Methods

This study adopts a bibliometric analysis to systematically investigate the development of self-talk research in relation to athletes' motivation and performance. Bibliographic records were retrieved from the Scopus database, which was selected because of its broad coverage and the availability of standardized bibliographic metadata suitable for bibliometric research (Donthu et al., 2021).

Search Strategy

The search was conducted using the following Boolean search string: ("self-talk" OR "sports self-talk" OR "motivational self-talk" OR "cognitive self-talk") AND ("sports performance" OR "motivation" OR "athletes" OR "training"). This search yielded 176 journal articles from the Scopus database, published between 1986 and 2025. Only journal articles were included in the analysis, excluding other document types such as books and conference proceedings, in line with the focus on high-quality peer-reviewed publications.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure data quality and relevance, the following criteria were applied:
Inclusion Criteria:

1. Articles published between 1986 - 2025.
2. Documents categorized as journal articles.
3. Publications written in english.

4. Articles indexed in the scopus database.
5. Studies focusing on self-talk, motivation, performance, and athletes within sports contexts.

Exclusion Criteria:

1. Non-article documents (e.g., books, book chapters, conference proceedings, editorials).
2. Articles not directly related to sports or self-talk in performance contexts.
3. Duplicate records.
4. Articles with incomplete bibliographic data.

After applying these criteria, a total of 176 journal articles were included in the final dataset for further examination.

Data Analysis Techniques

The bibliographic records analyzed in this study were retrieved from the Scopus database and comprised publications issued between 1986 and 2025. Scopus was chosen because of its extensive coverage of peer-reviewed scholarly literature and its provision of standardized bibliographic and citation metadata, making it well suited for bibliometric analysis (Donthu et al., 2021). In comparison with alternative databases such as Google Scholar and PsycINFO, Scopus provides more systematic indexing, advanced search and filtering functions, and consistently structured bibliographic information. These features support the consistency, reliability, and precision of bibliometric data analysis and mapping.

The collected data were analyzed using three main tools: Scopus, VOSviewer, and RStudio (Bibliometrix package).

1. Scopus Analysis
   Scopus was used to examine publication trends, including the number of publications per year and citation distribution, to identify the growth of research on self-talk in sports, particularly its effects on motivation and performance.
2. VOSviewer Analysis
   VOSviewer was utilized to construct bibliometric networks, including:
   - Keyword co-occurrence analysis.
   - Cluster identification.
   - Thematic mapping of research topics:
     This analysis helps identify relationships between research themes and the structure of knowledge in the field, enabling a comprehensive overview of emerging trends in self-talk research.
3. Rstudio (Bibliometrix) Analysis
   RStudio was used to perform:
   - Citation analysis
   - Co-authorship analysis
   - Source (journal) productivity analysis
   - Country and institutional contribution analysis

The integration of these complementary analytical approaches enables a more systematic examination of the intellectual structure, publication trends, and developmental patterns characterizing self-talk research in relation to athletes' motivation and performance.

Screening Procedure

The selection of publications was conducted through a systematic screening process adapted from the PRISMA framework, encompassing the stages of identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final inclusion. Records retrieved from the Scopus database were initially evaluated based on their titles and abstracts to determine their relevance to the scope of the study. Publications that passed this preliminary assessment were subsequently subjected to full-text eligibility review using the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Following completion of the screening and eligibility procedures, 176 articles met the established criteria and were retained in the final dataset for bibliometric analysis.

Result

Number of Articles from 1986 to 2025

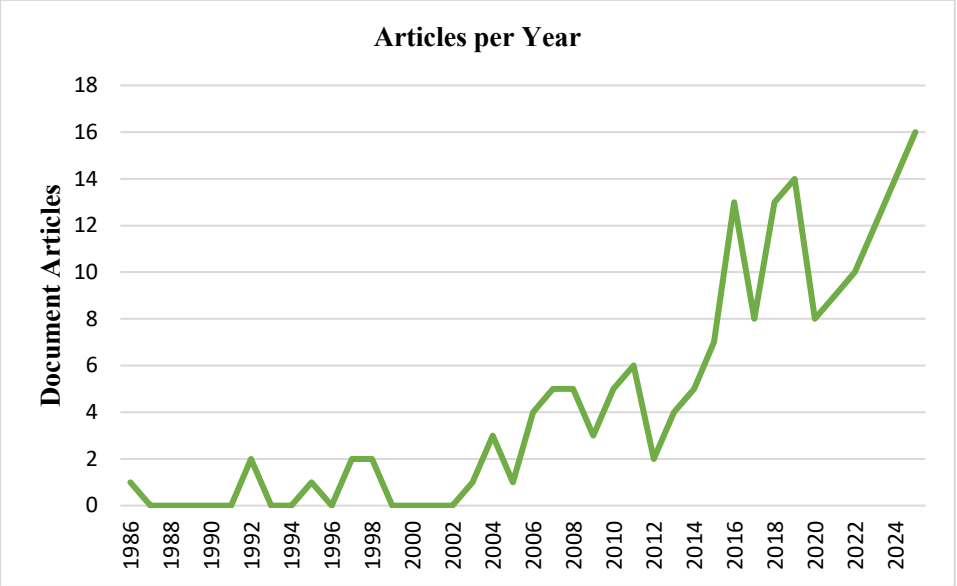


Figure 1. Annual Growth in Publications on Self-Talk Regarding Athletes' Motivation and Sports Performance Source: Scopus Database via Bibliometric.

A total of 176 journal articles related to self-talk, motivation, and sports performance were identified from the Scopus database for the period 1986 - 2025. The annual publication trend is presented in Figure 1. In the early phase (1986 - 2000), publication output remained very low, ranging from 0 to 2 articles per year, representing less than 5% of the total publications. This indicates that research on self-talk in sports was still in an exploratory stage during this period. A gradual increase occurred between 2001 - 2010, with publications rising to approximately 1 - 6 articles per year, contributing around 15 - 20% of the total dataset. This period marks the initial development of self-talk as a research topic in sports psychology. A more substantial growth trend is observed from 2011–2015, with annual publications reaching 5–7 articles, indicating a steady increase in research interest. This phase accounts for approximately 18% of total publications.

The most significant growth occurred in the period 2016 - 2020, where publications increased sharply to 8-14 articles per year, contributing nearly 30% of the total publications. This reflects a rapid expansion of research on self-talk, particularly in relation to performance and psychological interventions. The peak of publication output was recorded in 2024 with 16 articles, representing the highest annual contribution (approximately 9% of total publications in a single year). Overall, more than 60% of the total publications were produced after 2015, indicating a strong upward trend and growing academic attention in recent years.

MOST CITED ARTICLES

Table 1. The Most Cited Top Journal Articles on the Effect of Self-Talk on Motivation and Athletic Performance in Athletes.

No	Author Name	Article Title	Journal	Total Citations	Citations per Year
1	Hatzigeorgiadis, Antonis, Comoutos N, Galanis, Evangelos, Theodoratis &	Self-Talk and Sports Performance: a Meta-Analysis	Perspectives on Psychological Science	263	16.44

	Yannis				
2	Tod, David A, Hardy, James, Oliver, Emily J	Effects of Self-Talk: a Systematic Review	Scandinavian Journal of Medicine and Sciences in Sports	186	11.63
3	Blanchfield, Anthony W, Hardy, James, De Morree, Helma M, Staiano, Walter, Marcora & Samuele Maria	Talking Yourself Out Of Exhaustion: The Effects Of Self-Talk On Endurance Performance	Psychology of Sport and Exercise	148	11.38
4	Van R, Judy L, Vincent, Andrew P, Brewer & Britton W	Self-Talk: Review And Sport- Specific Model	Psychology Of Sport And Exercise	147	13.36
5	Hardy, James, Hall, Craig R, Hardy & Lew	Quantifying Athlete Self-Talk	Journal Of Sports Sciences	92	4.18
6	Hatzigeorgiadis, Antonis, Galanis, Evangelos, Comoutos N, Theodorakis & Yannis	Self-Talk And Competitive Sport Performance	Journal Of Applied Sport Psychology	76	5.85
7	Walter, Nadja, Nikoleizig, Lucie, Alfermann & Dorothee	Effect of Self-Talk Training on Competitive Anxiety, Self- Efficacy, Volitional Skills, and Performance: An Intervention Study With Junior Sub-Elite Athletes	Sports	65	8.13
8	St.Clair G, Allan, Foster & Carl	The Role Of Self-Talk In The Awareness Of Physiological State And Physical- Performance	Psychology of Sport and Exercise	44	2.20
9	Zervas, Yannis M, Stavrou, Nektarios A.m, Psychountaki & Maria	Development And Validation Of The Self-Talk Questionnaire (s-Tq) For Sports	Journal Of Applied Sport Psychology	40	2.00
10	Peters, Heather J, Williams & Jean M	Moving Cultural Background To The Foreground: An Investigation Of Self-Talk, Performance, and Persistence Following Feedback	Journal Of Applied Sport Psychology	40	1.90

The most cited article is Hatzigeorgiadis et al., (2011) with 263 citations, accounting for approximately 14.6% of total citations among the top 10 articles, and an average of 16.44 citations per year. The second-ranked article, Tod et al., (2011), received 186 citations (11.63 citations per year), followed by Blanchfield et al., (2014) with 148 citations (11.38 citations per year). The remaining articles show citation counts ranging from 40 to 147 citations, with an average of approximately 110 citations per article within the top 10 group. In terms of citation intensity, several articles demonstrate high annual citation rates (>10 citations per year), indicating sustained academic relevance over time.

Most of the highly cited publications appeared between 2011 and 2015, suggesting that this period represented an important phase in the advancement of self-talk research. Many of these influential studies were published in well-established journals, including *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, and *Scandinavian Journal of Medicine and Science in Sports*. This publication pattern indicates that highly cited contributions to the field have been predominantly disseminated through major scholarly outlets specializing in sport and exercise psychology.

The Most Productive Journal

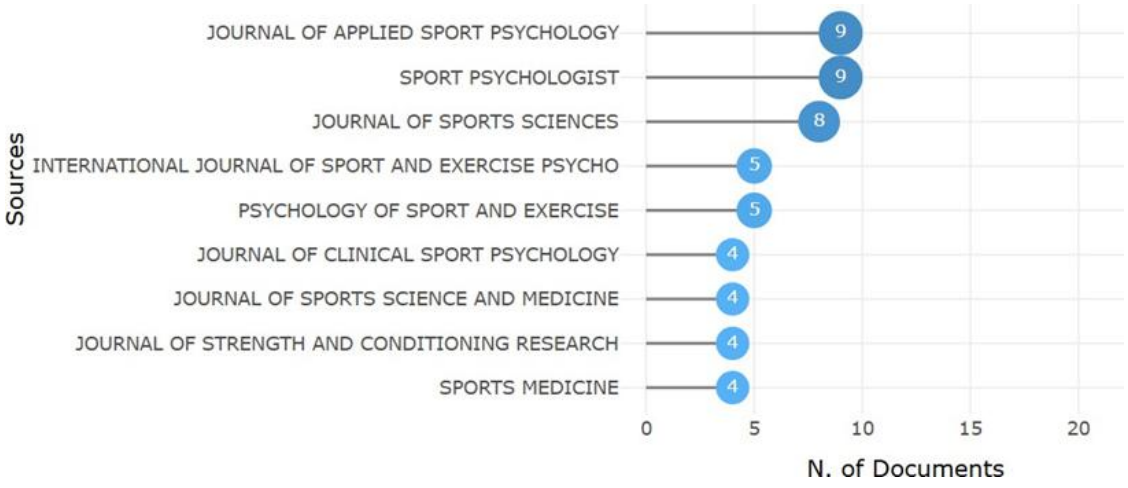


Figure 2. Journals – High-Impact Journals Publishing Research on the Effects of Self-Talk on Motivation and Athletic Performance in Athletes
Source: Scopus Database with Bibliometric Data

A total of 176 articles were published across a wide range of scholarly journals. The *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology* and *The Sport Psychologist* emerged as the most productive sources, each contributing 9 articles, equivalent to approximately 5.1% of the total publications per journal. The *Journal of Sports Sciences* ranked next with 8 articles (4.5%), followed by the *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology* and *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, which each published 5 articles (2.8%). Other notable journals, including *Sports Medicine* and the *Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research*, each contributed 4 articles (2.3%). Collectively, the five most productive journals accounted for approximately 20–25% of the overall publication output. This distribution suggests a moderate concentration of self-talk research within prominent sport psychology journals, while a substantial proportion of the literature remains dispersed across a diverse range of scholarly outlets.

Most Productive Authors, Countries, and Institutions (RQ3)

Table 2. The 10 most productive authors in self-talk research (1986–2025). Source: Scopus database, analysed with Bibliometrix (RStudio).

Rank	Author	Country	Publications (% of total)
1	Hatzigeorgiadis, A.	Greece	11 (6.3%)
2	Hardy, J.	United Kingdom	9 (5.1%)
3	Theodorakis, Y.	Greece	8 (4.5%)
4	Latinjak, A. T.	Spain / United Kingdom	7 (4.0%)
5	Van Raalte, J. L.	United States	7 (4.0%)
6	Galanis, E.	Greece	6 (3.4%)
7	Zourbanos, N.	Greece	6 (3.4%)
8	Tod, D.	United Kingdom	5 (2.8%)
9	Brewer, B. W.	United States	5 (2.8%)
10	Comoutos, N.	Greece	4 (2.3%)

Co-authorship and contribution analyses were performed using the Bibliometrix package in RStudio to identify the most productive authors, countries, and institutions within the 176-article dataset, addressing RQ3. Table 2 presents the ten most productive authors by number of publications. Antonis Hatzigeorgiadis (University of Thessaly, Greece) was the most prolific author with 11 publications (6.3% of the dataset), followed by James Hardy (9; 5.1%) and Yannis Theodorakis (8; 4.5%). The high concentration of publications among a relatively small group of scholars reflects the central role of these research groups in shaping the self-talk literature. Several authors — notably Hatzigeorgiadis, Galanis, Zourbanos, and Theodorakis — frequently co-authored together, indicating dense and enduring collaborative networks that have driven the accumulation of evidence in this field.

Table 3. The 10 most productive countries/territories in self-talk research (1986–2025). Source: Scopus database, analysed with Bibliometrix (RStudio).

Rank	Country	Publications (% of total)
1	United States	38 (21.6%)
2	Greece	29 (16.5%)
3	United Kingdom	26 (14.8%)
4	Australia	14 (8.0%)
5	Spain	12 (6.8%)
6	Germany	10 (5.7%)
7	Canada	9 (5.1%)
8	Italy	7 (4.0%)
9	France	6 (3.4%)
10	Netherlands	5 (2.8%)

At the country level (Table 3), the United States contributed the largest share of publications (38 articles; 21.6%), followed by Greece (29; 16.5%) and the United Kingdom (26; 14.8%). Together these three countries accounted for approximately 53% of total output, indicating a strong concentration of self-talk research in North American and European institutions. Australia (8.0%), Spain (6.8%), and Germany (5.7%) formed a second tier of productive nations. Institutional analysis further revealed that the University of Thessaly (Greece) was the most productive institution with 18 publications, reflecting its position as a central hub for self-talk research (Hatzigeorgiadis, Theodorakis, Galanis, and Zourbanos). Springfield College (USA; 9 publications), Bangor University (UK; 8), and the University of Suffolk / Universitat Ramon Llull (7) followed. The dominance of a small number of institutions underscores the relatively concentrated nature of self-talk scholarship and points to opportunities for broader international and interdisciplinary collaboration in future research.

a. Keywords Identified in Research on Self-Talk and Its Effects on Motivation and Athletic Performance in Athletes

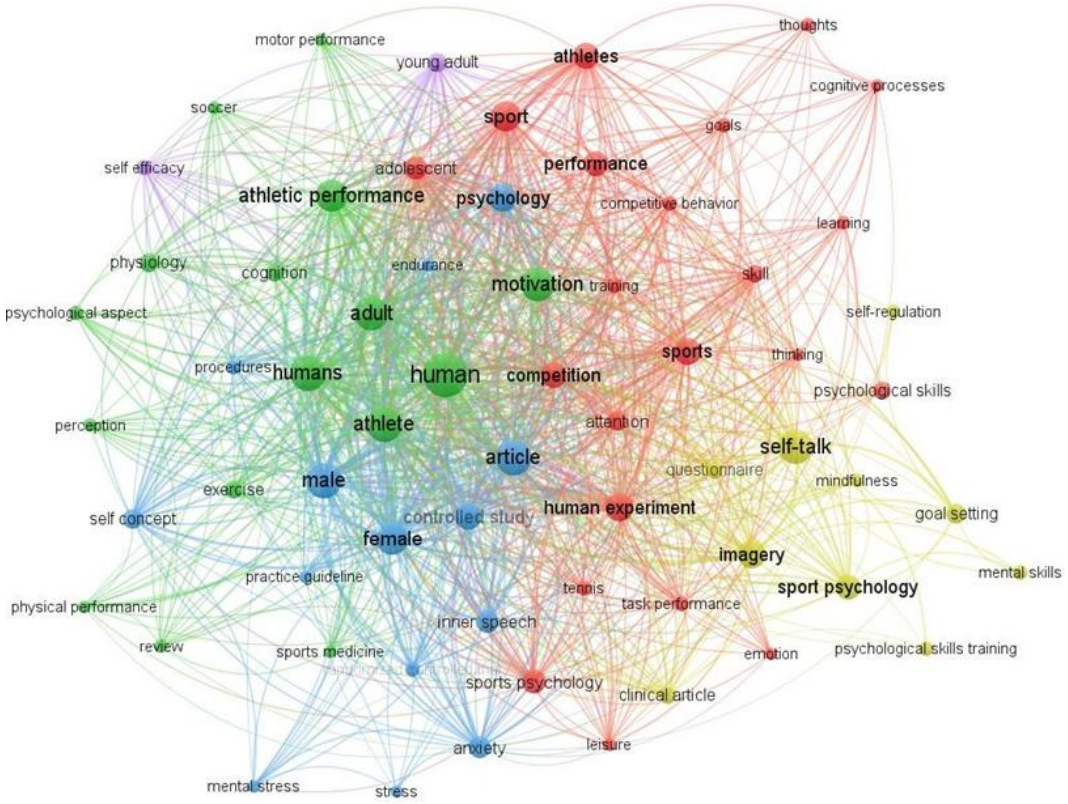


Figure 3. Related Topics: Research on Self-Talk and Its Effects on Motivation and Athletic Performance in Athletes. Source: Scopus Database with Bibliometric Analysis.

Figure 3 presents the bibliometric keyword co-occurrence network generated using VOSviewer, based on frequency and co-occurrence relationships among keywords. The analysis identifies four main clusters, representing dominant research themes:

1. Red Cluster: Core Self-Talk and Performance

   This cluster contains the most frequently occurring keywords, including *self-talk*, *performance*, *athletes*, and *self-regulation*. These keywords show the highest co-occurrence frequency, indicating that research is primarily centered on the role of self-talk in performance enhancement.
2. Green Cluster: Psychological And Physical Performance

   This cluster includes keywords such as *self-efficacy*, *motor performance*, and *cognition*, highlighting the relationship between self-talk and both psychological and physical performance variables.
3. Blue Cluster: Competition and Emotional Regulation

   Keywords such as *stress*, *anxiety*, and *coping* dominate this cluster, representing studies that focus on self-talk in competitive and high-pressure contexts.
4. Yellow Cluster: Psychological Skills and Interventions

   This cluster includes *imagery*, *goal setting*, and *mental skills training*, indicating the integration of self-talk within broader psychological intervention frameworks.

b. Key Findings and Current Research Directions on Self-Talk

Overall, this keyword map indicates that self-talk is a central concept linking aspects of motivation, cognitive regulation, emotional control, and athletes' sports performance. Current research trends point toward understanding self-talk as a psychological strategy, including:

1. It functions as a conscious, goal-oriented self-regulation mechanism.
2. It has direct and indirect effects on motivation, attention focus, and athletic performance.
3. It is used contextually in both training and competition, particularly in high-pressure situations.

Additionally, the mapping results identified several opportunities for further research, including:

1. Integrating self-talk with motivational and goal-setting approaches in the design of sports psychology interventions.
2. Development of experimental and longitudinal studies to test the mediating mechanisms between self-talk, motivation, and performance.
3. Exploration of the use of self-talk across various athlete levels (student, sub-elite, elite) and in both individual and team sports contexts.

Discussion

The findings suggest that self-talk has become an increasingly prominent construct within contemporary sport psychology. The substantial growth in publications observed after 2015 indicates a broader movement toward applied and intervention-oriented research, consistent with literature that conceptualizes self-talk as an evidence-based psychological skill (Hatzigeorgiadis et al., 2011). Whereas earlier studies tended to distinguish self-talk primarily in terms of positive and negative forms, more recent research has placed greater emphasis on its functional contribution to cognitive and motivational self-regulation. The prominence of keywords such as *self-regulation* and *performance* further suggests that self-talk is increasingly viewed as a purposeful psychological strategy associated with the regulation of attention, emotional responses, and goal-directed behavior. Another notable development is the growing integration of self-talk into broader psychological skills training frameworks. Rather than being examined solely as an independent technique, self-talk has increasingly been associated with complementary psychological strategies, particularly imagery and goal setting. This pattern is consistent with the thematic cluster identified in the bibliometric analysis, which demonstrates connections between self-talk and multi-component approaches to mental skills training. Collectively, these findings indicate a shift toward understanding self-talk as one component of a more comprehensive psychological preparation framework for athletes.

Nevertheless, several limitations within the existing literature remain evident. First, the frequent use of short-term experimental designs restricts understanding of whether the benefits associated with self-talk can be maintained over extended periods. Second, potential mechanisms underlying these relationships, including self-efficacy and attentional processes, remain insufficiently explored. Third, the predominance of research conducted under controlled conditions raises concerns regarding the ecological validity and transferability of findings to actual training and competitive environments. From an applied perspective, the findings support the use of self-talk as a systematic and individualized psychological strategy. Coaches may develop task-specific verbal cues that correspond to athletes' performance demands, while athletes may benefit from practicing these strategies consistently during training to facilitate their application in competitive situations. Sport psychologists can further incorporate self-talk into broader mental skills training programs, allowing it to function alongside other psychological techniques rather than as an isolated intervention.

Conclusion

This study presents a comprehensive bibliometric overview of self-talk research in sport, drawing on 176 Scopus-indexed publications published between 1986 and 2025. The findings indicate a substantial expansion of research activity after 2015, accompanied by increasing scholarly attention to the relationships between self-talk, motivation, self-regulation, and athletic performance. This development suggests a growing conceptualization of self-talk as an intentional and trainable psychological skill, rather than simply an internal cognitive activity. The

primary contribution of this study is its integrative bibliometric perspective, which brings together motivational and performance-related dimensions of self-talk that have previously been investigated across relatively fragmented areas of the literature. Through the identification of major thematic clusters and emerging research patterns, the findings further illustrate the multidimensional development of self-talk within contemporary sport psychology. In particular, the increasing connections between self-talk, goal setting, imagery, and mental skills training suggest that self-talk is progressively being incorporated into broader and more comprehensive psychological intervention frameworks.

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