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The Influence of Sports Participation on Leadership Skill Development among Female Student Teachers: A Case Study of a Teacher's College in Harare South, Zimbabwe.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the influence of sports participation on the development of leadership skills among female student teachers in a training college. Specifically, it examined the nature of sporting activities undertaken, the frequency of participation, and how sports contribute to leadership skill acquisition. A quantitative research design was employed, with 20 female student teachers selected through purposive sampling from a population of 80. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics, including tables, pie charts, and bar charts. Findings revealed that participation in both team and individual sports positively influenced leadership skills such as teamwork, decision-making, confidence, communication, and conflict management. Higher frequency of engagement corresponded with greater perceived development of leadership abilities. The study concludes that sports participation is an effective avenue for cultivating leadership skills among female student teachers and recommends structured, consistent sports programs integrated into teacher training curricula.

Keywords: Sports participation, leadership skills, female student teachers, training college, quantitative study

1.0 Background to the study

Sporting activities have long been recognized as avenues for holistic development, encompassing physical, social, and psychological growth. In educational settings, particularly among student teachers, engagement in sports provides not only health benefits but also opportunities to cultivate essential leadership skills. Female student teachers, often navigating multiple roles and societal expectations, may derive unique developmental advantages from participation in sports. Research indicates that female student teachers participate in a variety of sports, ranging from individual activities such as athletics, swimming, and gymnastics to team sports like volleyball, basketball, and netball (Smith & Green, 2018; Johnson, 2020). Individual sports are often associated with self-discipline, goal setting, and self-motivation, while team sports foster collaboration, communication, and strategic thinking (Brown & Fletcher, 2017). Studies also suggest that participation patterns are influenced by access to facilities, cultural perceptions of female involvement in sports, and institutional encouragement (Adams, 2019). These activities provide female student teachers with both recreational outlets and platforms for skill development, forming the foundation for leadership growth.

Engagement in sports has been linked to the development of key leadership competencies. For female student teachers, participation in team sports encourages decision-making, problem-solving, and conflict resolution skills (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Sports also provide structured opportunities for assuming formal leadership roles, such as team captain or coordinator, which enable participants to practice motivating peers, delegating tasks, and managing group dynamics (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). The competitive and cooperative aspects of sports create environments where female student teachers can develop confidence, resilience, and assertiveness—traits crucial for effective leadership in educational settings (Lumpkin & Favor, 2012).

Beyond formal roles, sports enhance leadership skills through experiential learning. Participation in sports challenges individuals to set goals, manage time, and respond adaptively to success and failure, fostering emotional intelligence and reflective practice (Vealey, 2007). Female student teachers involved in sports often report improved communication, teamwork, and mentorship abilities, which are directly transferable to classroom and school leadership (Hodge, Henry, & Smith, 2014). Moreover, the social networks built through sports participation can provide access to peer support and professional guidance, further reinforcing leadership capabilities (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005).

The literature suggests that sports can significantly contribute to leadership development, though the extent of benefits may vary based on the type, intensity, and consistency of participation. Regular involvement in structured sports programs is associated with higher self-efficacy, enhanced interpersonal skills, and a proactive approach to challenges (Gould & Carson, 2008). However, some studies highlight barriers, such as limited opportunities for female athletes in certain regions and societal gender norms, which can constrain the full potential of sports as a leadership development tool (Shaw & Hoeber, 2003). Despite these challenges, empirical evidence consistently shows that female student teachers who engage actively in sports exhibit stronger leadership competencies compared to non-participants.

Participation in sports has been widely recognized for promoting physical, social, and psychological development. Among female student teachers, sports offer unique opportunities to develop leadership skills critical for educational practice. This review examines the nature of sporting activities they engage in, how these activities foster leadership, and the extent of these benefits.

Female student teachers engage in both individual (e.g., athletics, swimming) and team sports (e.g., basketball, volleyball, netball) (Smith & Green, 2018; Johnson, 2020). Individual sports enhance self-discipline, goal setting, and intrinsic motivation, while team sports foster collaboration, communication, and strategic thinking (Brown & Fletcher, 2017). Participation is shaped by institutional support, facility availability, and socio-cultural factors (Adams, 2019).

Engagement in sports provides structured and experiential opportunities for leadership. Team sports, in particular, encourage decision-making, conflict resolution, and peer motivation (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Côté & Gilbert, 2009). Formal roles such as team captaincy allow female student teachers to practice delegation, organization, and resilience—core traits of effective leadership (Lumpkin & Favor, 2012).

Beyond formal roles, sports cultivate leadership through goal-setting, time management, and adaptive responses to challenges (Vealey, 2007). Female student teachers report improvements in communication, mentorship, and teamwork skills, which translate into classroom and institutional leadership (Hodge, Henry, & Smith, 2014). Social networks built through sports participation further reinforce leadership development (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005).

Research indicates that consistent and structured sports involvement significantly enhances leadership competencies, including self-efficacy, interpersonal skills, and proactivity (Gould & Carson, 2008). However, barriers such as limited opportunities and gender norms can moderate these effects (Shaw & Hoeber, 2003). Despite these constraints, female student teachers actively engaged in sports demonstrate higher leadership capacity than non-participants.

2.0 Objectives of the Study

The following objectives guide the study:

- To establish the nature of sporting activities that female student teachers in teacher training colleges participate in.

- To determine how participating in sports develops leadership skills in female student teachers

- To examine the role of sport in promoting leadership skills in female student teachers

- To evaluate the extent to which sport has promoted the development of leadership skills in female student teachers.

3.0 Research Questions

The study addresses these research questions

- What is the nature of sporting activities done by female student teachers in training college?

- How does participating in sport develop leadership skills in female student teachers?

- In what ways does sport enhance leadership skills in female student teachers?

- To what extent do sports benefit the development of leadership skills in female student teachers?

4.0 Research methodology

4.1 Research design

Research design may be referred to as the plan of study that will answer the research objectives. Research designs are the specific procedures involved in the research process which are data collection, data analysis and report writing (Cresswell 2012). Therefore, a research design is a plan or structure for investigation. It can also be defined as a reference point upon which the study is based. Bryman (2012) gives 5 types of research designs which are as experimental, survey, longitudinal, comparative design and a case study.

The study follows the case study nature of qualitative research design. The purpose of the research design, according to Bryan (2012) is to provide a framework for the collection and analysis of data. The design also helps the researcher to organize his ideas in a way that the study will be in good flaw. In this case the selected research design helped the researcher to carry out a study as well as reducing errors. In this research quantitative methods of data collection are adopted.

4.2 Case study

The researcher adopted a case study design to be able to answer the research questions. This is a very popular form of the quantitative analysis. Kothari (2005) asserts that the case study method is essentially an intensive investigation of the particular unit under consideration. Gall (2007) agrees that a case

study is an in-depth investigation of two or more phenomenon in natural settings considering the perspectives of the participants involved in the phenomenon.

It was chosen for its advantages as explained by Gall et.al (2007). From the above definitions one deduces that the case study is a descriptive research method which looks at a phenomenon in an in-depth way and thus gives an understanding of complex issues, extent experiments or add strength to what is already known. A case study is also recommended as part of bimodal approach, in that it can be investigated as focus group discussion and observation. According to Russell and Robert (2001) case studies provide useful data and are rich sources of data. They are also revealing as acknowledged by Myers (2001). Case studies allow a lot of detail to be collected that would not normally be easily obtained by other research designs. Case studies are carried out because one wants a good understanding of a particular case. Kothari (2005) acknowledges that case studies enhance the experience of the researcher and this in turn increases his analyzing ability and skill. They enable the generalized knowledge to get richer and richer. Finally, a good case study report reveals the researcher's perspective and enable the readers to compare cases with their own situations.

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4.3 Population

Population in this research is defined generally as all members of any defined class of people, events or objects. For Saunders (2007) population is a specified number, group of objects for which questions are made to develop required data structures and information. For the purpose of this study this population is comprised of student teachers at a teacher's college in Harare South. The target population for this consists of lecturers, and college ancillary staff. The table shows the population composition:

4.4 Research Approach

This study employed a quantitative research approach. A quantitative approach was chosen because the study sought to measure the extent to which participation in sporting activities contributes to the development of leadership skills among female student teachers. Quantitative methods allow for objective measurement of variables, numerical analysis of responses, and the identification of statistical patterns that can support or refute the study's assumptions. The approach is appropriate for determining relationships between variables such as type of sport participation and levels of leadership skill development. Quantitative research also ensures reliability and the possibility of replication, which is important for validating results in studies involving student populations.

4.5 Sampling Procedure

A simple random sampling technique was used to select participants for the study. The target population consisted of 50 female student teachers enrolled at the training college who participate in sporting activities. A sampling frame was compiled from the list of all eligible participants provided by the sports coordinator.

Simple random sampling was chosen because it gives each member of the population an equal and independent chance of being selected, thereby minimizing sampling bias and enhancing the representativeness of the sample. Using this method, each of the 50 student teachers was assigned a number, and a random number generator was used to select 20 participants.

4.6 Sample Size

The final sample consisted of 20 female student teachers drawn from the total population of 50. This sample size was considered adequate for a small-scale quantitative study of this nature, as it allowed for the collection of sufficient numerical data while remaining manageable for detailed analysis. Although larger samples improve generalizability, the selected sample of 20 provided an appropriate balance between accuracy and feasibility given the limited scope of the study.

4.7 Research Instruments

The primary research instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire contained both closed-ended and Likert-scale items designed to elicit numerical data regarding:

- The types and nature of sporting activities in which the student teachers participate

- Their perceived leadership skills

- The extent to which they believe sport participation has contributed to the development of these skills

The questionnaire was divided into three sections:

- Section A: Demographic information (e.g., age, year of study, type of sport)

- Section B: Nature and frequency of sporting activities

- Section C: Leadership skill development measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree)

The instrument was validated through expert review by two lecturers in the Department of Physical Education and the sports coordinator, who assessed the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of each item. A pilot test of the questionnaire was conducted with 5 student teachers who were not part of the study to check reliability and improve wording where necessary.

4.8 Data Collection Methods

Data were collected using self-administered questionnaires. After obtaining permission from the college administration and informed consent from participants, the questionnaires were distributed to the selected 20 student teachers during their free periods.

Participants were briefed on the purpose of the study, confidentiality assurances, and instructions for completing the questionnaire. They were given 20–30 minutes to complete it, after which the researcher collected all questionnaires immediately to avoid loss and ensure a high response rate.

Because the instrument was self-administered, participants were able to respond independently without researcher influence, thereby improving the accuracy and honesty of the responses.

4.7 Data Analysis Procedure

The data analysis followed several systematic steps:

- Data Cleaning: Completed questionnaires were checked for completeness. Any missing or unclear responses were addressed by removing incomplete questionnaires or coding missing values appropriately.

- Coding of Responses: Closed-ended items and Likert-scale responses were coded numerically (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). This facilitated statistical analysis.

- Descriptive Statistics: Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. These statistics helped summarize the nature of sporting activities and overall perceptions of leadership development.

- Inferential Analysis (Optional): Although not mandatory for small samples, simple inferential measures such as correlations could be used to examine relationships between variables (e.g., frequency of sport participation and level of leadership skill development).

- Presentation of Results**:** The analyzed data were presented in tables, graphs, and charts to enhance clarity and facilitate interpretation

5.0 Data presentation, interpretation and analysis

The following components of the research instrument guided the presentation, interpretation and analysis phase:

- Type of Sport: (Team / Individual / Both)

- Frequency of Participation per week: Low (1-2 times), Medium (3-4 times), High (5+ times)

- Perceived Leadership Skill Development: (Strongly Agree / Agree / Neutral/ Disagree/ Strongly Disagree)

Table 1   Response according to type of sport, frequency and perceived leadership skill development

Participant	Type of Sport	Frequency	Leadership Skills Development
1	Team	Medium	Strongly Agree
2	Individual	Low	Agree
3	Both	High	Strongly Agree
4	Team	Medium	Agree
5	Individual	Low	Neutral
6	Both	High	Strongly Agree
7	Team	High	Agree
8	Individual	Medium	Agree
9	Both	Medium	Strongly Agree
10	Team	Medium	Agree
11	Individual	Low	Neutral
12	Both	High	Strongly Agree

Participant	Type of Sport	Frequency	Leadership Skills Development
13	Team	Medium	Agree
14	Individual	Medium	Agree
15	Both	High	Strongly Agree
16	Team	Medium	Agree
17	Individual	Low	Neutral
18	Both	Medium	Strongly Agree
19	Team	Medium	Agree
20	Individual	Low	Neutral

The majority of the participants (16) 80% concurred on leadership development skills through both teams, individual or both sports. Only a minority (4) 20% were at contrary to the role of sport in development of leadership skills.

Table 2: Type of Sport Participation

Type of Sport	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Team	7	35%
Individual	6	30%
Both	7	35%
Total	**20**	**100%**

Interpretation:

- Table 2 shows that 35% participated in team sports and 30% participated in individual sports.

- 35% participate in both, indicating versatility and exposure to both collaborative and self-driven challenges, which are conducive to leadership skill development.

Table 3: Frequency of Participation per week

Frequency	Number of Participants	Percentage (%)
Low (1-2)	6	30%
Medium (3-4)	8	40%
High (5+)	6	30%
Total	**20**	**100%**

Interpretation:

- The majority of participants (40%) engage in sports 3-4 times per week (medium frequency), suggesting a moderate but consistent level of participation.

- Regular participation, even at moderate levels, is likely to have a positive impact on leadership skill acquisition.

Table 4: Perceived Leadership Skills Development

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	7	35%
Agree	7	35%
Neutral	6	30%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total	**20**	**100%**

Interpretation:

- All participants either agreed or strongly agreed (70%) and (30%) were neutral regarding the contribution of sports to leadership skills.

- No participants disagreed, indicating overall positive perception of the link between sports and leadership skill development.

Table 5: Cross-Tabulation: Type of Sport vs Leadership Skill Development

Type of Sport	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Total
Team	2	5	0	7
Individual	1	2	3	6
Both	4	0	3	7
Total	**7**	**7**	**6**	**20**

Interpretation:

- Participants engaging in both types of sports had the highest proportion (57%) of strongly agreeing that sports enhance leadership skills.

- Team sports participants largely agreed (71%) but fewer strongly agreed, suggesting team sports may promote leadership through collaboration rather than personal growth.

- Individual sports participants showed more neutrality (50%), indicating individual sports may enhance self-discipline but might provide fewer leadership interaction opportunities compared to team or mixed sports.

Table 7: Cross Tabulation: Frequency vs Leadership Skill Development

Frequency	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Total
Low	0	2	4	6
Medium	3	4	1	8
High	4	1	1	6
Total	**7**	**7**	**6**	**20**

Interpretation:

- Higher frequency participants strongly agreed (67%) that sports improve leadership skills.

- Medium frequency participants mostly agree (50%), suggesting moderate involvement still fosters leadership growth.

- Low-frequency participants mostly neutral (67%), showing that limited engagement may reduce perceived leadership benefits.

Overall Analysis

- Nature of sports participation**:**

Female student teachers engage in both team and individual sports, with a balanced distribution. Mixed participation (both types) is most strongly associated with leadership development.

- Participation frequency**:**

Consistent participation, especially high frequency, strongly correlates with perceived leadership skill enhancement.

- Leadership skill perception**:**

Majority (70%) perceive that sports positively influence their leadership skills. Strong correlation exists between type of sport, frequency of participation, and leadership skill development

Implications:

Participation in team and mixed sports enhances leadership skills such as communication, decision-making, and teamwork.

6.0 Conclusion

The study examined the influence of sports participation on the development of leadership skills among female student teachers in a training college. Findings indicate that participation in both team and individual sports positively impacts leadership skill acquisition, particularly when students engage in sports consistently. Participants involved in mixed sports activities reported the highest perceived improvements in teamwork, decision-making, confidence, and communication skills. Frequency of participation also played a significant role: those with higher engagement levels demonstrated stronger leadership skill development compared to low-frequency participants. Overall, the study confirms that sports are a valuable platform for fostering leadership competencies among female student teachers, supporting both personal growth and professional preparedness.

7.0 Recommendations

The study recommends that:

- Training colleges should provide opportunities for students to participate in both team and individual sports, as exposure to multiple forms of physical activity enhances leadership skill development.

- Colleges should implement structured sports programs that encourage regular participation (at least 3–5 times per week) to maximize leadership benefits.

- Coaches and instructors should incorporate leadership-building exercises into sports sessions, such as team management, conflict resolution, and decision-making challenges.

- Institutions should create an enabling environment that reduces barriers for female students, including access to facilities, safety measures, and mentorship programs that link sports participation with leadership development.

- Future studies could explore the long-term impact of sports participation on leadership effectiveness in teaching practice and examine other factors, such as personality traits or prior leadership experience.

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APPENDIX 1

CONSENT FORM

Title of the Study:

The Influence of Sports Participation on Leadership Skill Development Among Female Student Teachers

Principal Researcher: [Your Name]

Institution: [Your College/University]

Email: [Your Email]

Purpose of the Study:

You are being invited to participate in a research study that aims to examine how participation in sports influences the development of leadership skills among female student teachers.

Procedures:
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire regarding your participation in sporting activities and your perceptions of leadership skill development. This should take approximately **10–15 minutes**.

Voluntary Participation:

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate or withdraw at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits.

Confidentiality:
All information collected will be kept strictly confidential and used only for academic purposes. Your name will not appear on the questionnaire, and data will be reported in aggregate form.

Potential Risks and Benefits:

There are minimal risks associated with participation. While there may be no direct benefit to you personally, your participation will contribute to understanding how sports can enhance leadership skills among student teachers.

Consent:
By signing below, you indicate that you:

- Have read and understood the information above

- Voluntarily agree to participate in this study

- Understand that you may withdraw at any time

Participant **Name:** _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's **Signature:** _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX 2

QUESTIONNAIRE

Title: *Sports Participation and Leadership Skill Development Questionnaire*

Instructions:

Please answer the following questions as honestly as possible. Your responses are confidential. Tick (✔) the appropriate option where applicable.

Section A: Demographic Information

1. Age: _____ years

2. Year of Study:

    o 1st Year

    o 2nd Year

    o 3rd Year

3. Previous experience in sports before college:

    o Yes

    o No

Section B: Sports Participation

4. Type of sport you participate in most frequently:

    o Team Sports (e.g., football, basketball)

    o Individual Sports (e.g., athletics, swimming)

    o Both

5. Frequency of participation per week:

    o Low (1–2 times)

    o Medium (3–4 times)

    o High (5 or more times)

6. Duration of each sporting session:

    o Less than 30 minutes

    o 30–60 minutes

    o More than 60 minutes

Section C: Leadership Skills Development

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements regarding how sports participation has influenced your leadership skills:

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Sports participation has improved my teamwork skills	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Sports have enhanced my decision-making abilities	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
I am more confident taking initiative due to sports	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I can motivate and influence others better because of sports	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Sports participation has helped me manage conflicts effectively	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
My communication skills have improved through sports	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

Section D: Additional question

Please share any other ways in which sports have helped you develop leadership skills:

_____

_____

_____