

The Impact of Sports Participation on College Students' Behavioural Patterns: A Study on Employee Well-being and Entrepreneurial Intentions

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Abstract

Sports participation is a significant aspect of college life, contributing to physical health, social interactions, and personal development. While existing research has emphasised the physical benefits of sports, there is a pressing need to explore its broader impact on behavioural patterns, employee well-being, and entrepreneurial intentions among college students. This study aims to investigate the impact of sports participation on

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college students' behavioural patterns, employee well-being, and entrepreneurial intentions. The research seeks to understand how engagement in sports influences students' discipline, time management, teamwork, leadership qualities, job satisfaction, stress levels, and aspirations towards entrepreneurship. A qualitative approach adopted, utilising semi-structured interviews to gather in-depth insights from college students actively involved in sports. Purposive sampling employed to select participants based on age, gender, sports participation, academic field, and year of study. Thematic analysis used to identify key themes and patterns related to the impact of sports participation. The findings reveal that sports participation positively influences college students' behavioural patterns, enhancing discipline, time management, teamwork, leadership, and social interactions. Additionally, involvement in sports linked to higher levels of employee well-being, including job satisfaction and reduced stress. Sports participation also fosters entrepreneurial intentions by developing risk-taking, innovation, leadership, and goal-setting skills. This research contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence of the multifaceted benefits of sports participation. The findings hold practical implications for educational institutions, policymakers, and business sectors, emphasising the importance of promoting sports involvement to enhance student development, well-being, and entrepreneurial aspirations. The originality of the study lies in its comprehensive exploration of the interplay between sports participation and various outcomes, highlighting the value of integrating sports and wellness initiatives within educational settings.

Keywords: Behavioural Patterns, Employee Well-being, Entrepreneurial Intentions, Students Participation

Introduction

Sports participation among college students is a dynamic and integral aspect of campus life, influencing not only physical fitness but also social interactions, personal development, and future career trajectories. Participation in college athletics has steadily increased in recent years, reflecting a growing recognition of its myriad benefits. According to a comprehensive survey by [Pellegrini et al. \(2020\)](#), approximately 58% of college students engage in sports or exercise. The significance of sports extends beyond physical wellness, aiding college students in developing crucial skills such as time management, leadership, teamwork, and discipline ([Kim et al., 2020](#)). Participants in sports adhere to practice schedules, manage their time effectively, collaborate with teammates, and often take on leadership roles within their teams. Therefore, understanding the complex relationship between behavioural patterns and sports engagement is essential for the holistic development of college students.

College athletes also place a high value on employee well-being, which encompasses

mental and physical health, job satisfaction, and work-life balance. [Xu et al. \(2024\)](#) found that employees who engage in sports exhibit higher job satisfaction, lower stress levels, and enhanced overall well-being. These findings highlight the importance of athletic participation for personal growth and job readiness among college students. Moreover, recent trends indicate that university students increasingly focused on entrepreneurial goals, demonstrating a heightened interest in innovation, uniqueness, and career aspirations. Entrepreneurial intentions refer to individuals' aspirations to start their own businesses. [Peschl et al. \(2021\)](#) found that entrepreneurial students actively innovate, take risks, and pursue skill development related to entrepreneurship. Thus, college students can cultivate entrepreneurial skills through their involvement in sports.

The multifaceted aspects of sports participation warrant thorough research, as they significantly affect individuals' attitudes, behaviours, and aspirations. Educators, policymakers, and stakeholders should develop interventions and programmes that promote sports participation among college students, based on the processes and benefits associated with athletic engagement ([Black et al., 2021](#)). It is crucial to explore how sports affects employees, college students, and entrepreneurs. Theoretical frameworks such as social learning theory and self-determination theory provide insights into how intrinsic motivation, extrinsic rewards, and observational learning affect sports performance. Social learning theory suggests that skills acquired through reinforcement, modelling, and observation ([Majumdar, 2023](#)). Through observational learning, students can grasp leadership, teamwork, time management, and conduct. Understanding these dynamics can aid students in applying behavioural patterns learned in sports to other aspects of their lives ([Hjermitslev & Johnston, 2023](#)). Meanwhile, self-determination theory underscores the significance of internal and external factors influencing behaviour and choices. Within this framework, autonomy, mastery, and enjoyment are crucial, as are social recognition and sporting accolades. Investigating intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for sports participation may illuminate the complex reasons students engage in, persist with, and enjoy sports ([Groenewal et al., 2021](#)).

While early research has highlighted the benefits of sports, there remains a gap in understanding. Much of the existing literature focuses primarily on the physical health benefits of athletics, such as weight loss, cardiovascular health, and chronic illness prevention ([Butz & Hancock, 2019](#)). However, there is limited knowledge regarding how college athletics contribute to students' discipline, time management, leadership, teamwork, and social interactions. Understanding these behavioural effects is crucial, as they play a significant role in personal growth and academic and professional achievement. Although studies have explored the psychological benefits of sports, such as reduced anxiety and improved mood, there is insufficient evidence on how sports influence employee well-being ([Foo et al., 2023](#)). Factors such as physical and mental health, job satisfaction, and work-life balance directly affect

employee well-being. College sports can serve as a preparatory ground for students' future careers while also safeguarding their health. Given the increasing stress levels and mental health challenges faced by college students, this gap in the literature is particularly noteworthy. Additionally, few studies have examined the relationship between sports participation and entrepreneurial aspirations. There is limited research on how sports foster traits such as risk-taking, creativity, and leadership, all of which are relevant to entrepreneurship ([González-Serrano et al., 2021](#)).

The aim of this study is to investigate the impact of sports participation on college students' behavioural patterns, employee well-being, and entrepreneurial intentions. The research seeks to elucidate the nuanced relationships between sports involvement and various outcomes, thereby shedding light on the holistic benefits and implications for future entrants to the workforce. To achieve this aim, the study will address the following research questions:

1. How does sports participation affect college students' behavioural patterns?
2. What is the relationship between sports participation and employee well-being among college students?
3. How does sports participation influence entrepreneurial intentions?

This study holds significant importance in unravelling the intricate impacts of sports participation among college students. Primarily, understanding how sports engagement affects students' conduct is essential for their overall development. The study aims to elucidate how sports influence daily routines, time management, teamwork, leadership, and goal setting, which can enhance educational and therapeutic practices. The findings may inform educators in creating environments conducive to academic, personal, and professional growth. Secondly, it is crucial to examine the relationship between employee well-being and athletic activity. College students in preparation for their entry into the workforce. As students transition into professional roles, their well-being, job satisfaction, and work-life balance play a pivotal role in their performance and success. Understanding how sports affects physical health, mental health, stress management, and overall satisfaction can assist businesses and HR professionals in cultivating supportive workplace cultures that enhance employee productivity and well-being.

Moreover, investigating how sports engagement promotes entrepreneurial aspirations has substantial implications for entrepreneurship programmes and career development. Entrepreneurial mind-sets often arise from personal experiences, skills, and perspectives. This study will explore how sports participation nurtures self-efficacy, innovation, goal-oriented behaviour, and risk-taking among college students with entrepreneurial ambitions. Furthermore, this research may influence the health and fitness culture on college campuses. The positive effects of sports participation on physical health indicators, stress management, sleep quality, and overall well-being can inform educational health promotion, fitness, and mental health initiatives. This

would foster an environment conducive to enhancing students' academic performance and well-being. Ultimately, the study may also guide educational policies, curriculum modifications, and extracurricular activities aimed at increasing sports participation among college students. Sports not only improve students' physical health but also equip them with valuable skills that are highly regarded by employers, thereby preparing them for career success.

Literature Review

Sports inherently require observational learning. College athletes learn from their coaches, teammates, and opponents, acquiring knowledge that encompasses physical skills, attitudes, procedures, and social behaviours. For instance, observing a coach navigate challenges can teach athletes resilience and positivity (Quinaud et al., 2023). Sports Social Learning Theory posits that behavioural modelling is central to this learning process; successful athletes' techniques, exercises, and ethical standards often emulated. A capable team captain can instruct younger players on managing stress, while the importance of cooperation and teamwork is emphasised through shared experiences (McEwan & Crawford, 2022). In both academic and professional contexts, witnessing colleagues collaborate to achieve a common goal underscores the value of teamwork. Additionally, the theory asserts that social reinforcement influences behaviour; praise from instructors or peers can motivate athletes, while negative reinforcement serves to discourage undesirable behaviours. Strong and supportive sports teams cultivate physical performance, resilience, dedication, and leadership through teamwork and shared objectives (McEwan & Beauchamp, 2020). Cognitive processes and direct imitation are integral to Social Learning Theory. During competitions, athletes learn decision-making and problem-solving skills from both coaches and peers, which can be beneficial in academic and professional problem-solving contexts.

According to Social Learning Theory, sports enhance various life dimensions, including cognitive processes, reinforcement mechanisms, and observational learning. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) emphasises the interplay of personality with intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. It considers the psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, proposing that satisfying these conditions enhances intrinsic motivation, achievement, and well-being. Sociodynamic therapy aids students in comprehending their motivations for participating in sports and the resultant effects on their behaviours and aspirations (Zhang et al., 2022). Intrinsic motivation arises without external rewards, often manifesting as a passion for a hobby, fitness goal, or personal challenge. Athletes who work diligently often experience a state of flow, which enhances performance and self-esteem by increasing skills and knowledge while also bolstering perseverance (Bentley et al., 2021). Motivated athletes are more inclined to engage in sports, thereby building resilience, which can benefit them in business and entrepreneurial endeavours.

Conversely, extrinsic motivation relies on rewards or penalties; extrinsic incentives in sports may include scholarships, accolades, fame, and employment opportunities. SDT suggests that extrinsic rewards are most effective when they do not undermine intrinsic motivation ([Morela et al., 2019](#)). For instance, sports scholarships that recognise talent rather than exert control can serve as a source of inspiration. Furthermore, extrinsic incentives facilitate skill acquisition. Competitive environments teach strategic thinking, time management, and discipline, skills that are transferable to various contexts. According to SDT, motivation and well-being hinge on fulfilling the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which sports can fulfil in numerous ways ([Zhang et al., 2022](#)). Sports provide athletes with autonomy, while competence developed through agility and practice. Additionally, sports foster connections and teamwork, addressing social needs. When these needs met, athletes tend to flourish academically, professionally, and emotionally. Healthy entrepreneurs can thus become proactive and self-assured.

Employee Well-Being

Workplace dynamics significantly affect employee health, satisfaction, and quality of life, encompassing work-life balance, job satisfaction, and both mental and physical well-being. To assess how exercise and sports influence employee well-being, it is essential to understand each component. Physical health encompasses energy, fitness, and vitality, with regular exercise such as sports enhancing overall health. [Xu et al. \(2024\)](#) discovered that exercise reduces the risk of chronic diseases, improves cardiovascular health, strengthens muscles, and boosts overall well-being. Regular physical activity enhances workplace performance, vitality, and reduces absenteeism, thereby improving employee well-being. Cognitive, psychological, and emotional aspects of mental health are crucial to overall employee well-being. Participation in sports and exercise significantly enhances mental wellness. [Cosh et al. \(2023\)](#) found that exercise improves mood, self-esteem, and mitigates stress, anxiety, and depression. Regular physical activity releases endorphins that elevate mood. Consequently, exercise not only improves mental health but also enhances performance by reducing stress, increasing resilience, and fostering coping strategies ([Zhang et al., 2022](#)). Job satisfaction reflects an individual's feelings and attitudes towards their work, responsibilities, and organisational culture. Various factors including personal beliefs, organisational goals, opportunities for growth and development, relationships with colleagues and supervisors, and the working environment affect job satisfaction.

Research indicates that physical activity and sports enhance job satisfaction. [Kao \(2023\)](#) reported that physical activity contributes to higher job satisfaction by increasing energy levels, reducing stress, and providing a sense of achievement from meeting physical goals. Athletes generally experience greater workplace satisfaction, motivation, and engagement. Work-life balance, which includes self-care, leisure, and

family commitments, is essential, as imbalances can lead to stress, burnout, and job dissatisfaction. Achieving a healthy work-life balance necessitates participation in exercise and sports. [Masoudinejad and Veitch \(2023\)](#) noted that exercise contributes to well-being, relaxation, and stress reduction. Sports and exercise facilitate work-life balance by offering personal satisfaction and alleviating stress. Organisations that encourage fitness and flexibility help employees balance their professional and personal lives, ultimately enhancing productivity and job satisfaction. Numerous studies have established a connection between employee well-being and sports participation. Research shows that physical activity improves health, job satisfaction, and work-life balance, with physical activity-oriented wellness programmes reducing absenteeism, enhancing mood, and increasing productivity ([Malete et al., 2022](#)). Furthermore, sports entrepreneurship promotes employee well-being through social connections, goal achievement, and skill development.

Entrepreneurial Intentions

Entrepreneurial intentions comprising mind-set, goals, and actions are vital for establishing and growing enterprises. Key traits influencing entrepreneurship include leadership, creativity, and risk-taking. Understanding how sports participation affects these entrepreneurial traits can illuminate the relationship between sports and business success. Entrepreneurs must exhibit boldness to navigate uncertainty and undertake calculated risks. Athletic pursuits often encourage risk-taking; athletes frequently confront challenging conditions and competition, which necessitates a willingness to take risks to succeed. [Liu et al. \(2021\)](#) found that athletes develop skills for managing risk, recovering from failure, and making decisions under pressure traits that are essential for entrepreneurs. Sports inherently foster an environment where risk-taking is integral to achieving goals, problem solving, and competition.

Business success requires creativity, problem-solving abilities, and the capacity to identify and capitalise on opportunities ([Escamilla-Fajardo et al., 2021](#)). Athletes are often more creative, utilising strategic thinking, adaptability, and improvisation to achieve victory. According to [Zhou et al. \(2021\)](#), athletic engagement promotes cognitive flexibility, ideation, and creativity, all of which are crucial for entrepreneurial innovation. The process of playing sports developing new skills, experimenting with different approaches, and improvising can stimulate entrepreneurial creativity. Furthermore, entrepreneurs require strong leadership abilities to inspire, educate, and guide others. Athletic experiences enhance these leadership qualities; athletes, particularly captains or team leaders, must inspire and direct their teammates. [Lara-Bocanegra et al. \(2022\)](#) found that sports enhance leadership skills such as communication, teamwork, conflict resolution, and decision-making, which are vital in entrepreneurial settings. The dynamics of team leadership, social interactions, and mentoring younger players foster entrepreneurial leadership qualities. Consequently, individuals who engage in sports are often more inclined

toward entrepreneurial pursuits. Sports participation cultivates essential traits such as risk-taking, creativity, and leadership, all of which are integral to entrepreneurship (Pellegrini et al., 2020).

Entrepreneurship demands resilience, goal-setting, teamwork, and competitiveness qualities that instilled through sports. Athletic competition engenders a passion for achievement, progress, and fulfilment, all of which are vital for entrepreneurial success (Aishvarya et al., 2024). Athletes often set high performance standards, and goal-oriented behaviours promote entrepreneurial growth, innovation, and success. Additionally, sports enhance problem-solving and proactive thinking. Athletes learn to recognise opportunities, adapt to changes, and devise innovative solutions—traits that are essential for success in business. Both entrepreneurs and athletes exhibit adaptability and resourcefulness in navigating uncertain circumstances.

Sports Participation and Behavioural Patterns

College athletics significantly influence essential skills such as discipline, time management, teamwork, leadership, and socialisation, which are crucial for academic, career, and personal success. Participation in sports enhances self-discipline; the commitment to continuous improvement, rigorous training, and adherence to regulations fosters self-discipline among athletes, positively influencing their professional and academic behaviours beyond sports (Shull et al., 2020). Achieving success in life requires goal-setting, motivation, and dedication qualities that athletes develop through their involvement in sports. Athletic engagement also aids in time management, as student-athletes must juggle academic responsibilities, training, competitions, and extracurricular activities. Effective time management enables athletes to balance competing demands, allocate their time efficiently, and maintain focus, ultimately enhancing productivity and reducing stress. Cooperation in team sports nurtures coordination (Yim et al., 2021). Athletes learn to collaborate and work collectively towards shared objectives. Successful teams thrive in environments characterised by support, trust, and accountability, qualities that translate well into academic group projects requiring teamwork. Individuals skilled in collaboration also excel at achieving organisational goals.

Leadership is another crucial outcome of sports participation. Many athletes take on roles as team leaders or spokespersons, necessitating the ability to lead, make strategic decisions, overcome challenges, and inspire others (Dorsch et al., 2022). Sports leaders cultivate adaptability, comprehension, decision-making, and communication skills attributes that are essential in academic settings where students lead groups, projects, and initiatives. Strong leaders contribute positively to workplace environments, enhancing team performance and achieving organisational objectives. Social skills enhanced through sports participation, fostering relationships, communication abilities, and camaraderie among athletes who interact with coaches, teammates, opponents, and spectators. Inclusivity, diversity, and respect in athletics significantly

influence athletes' social behaviours (Yim et al., 2021). These social competencies improve networking, teamwork, and relationship building in academic, professional, and athletic contexts. Individuals with strong social skills can develop lasting relationships, navigate social situations, and achieve success in various domains.

Moreover, sports contribute to holistic growth by enhancing mental and physical well-being. Regular physical activity improves fitness, cardiovascular health, and muscle strength (Chan et al., 2020). Additionally, self-care, recreation, and nutritional education promote healthier lifestyles among athletes. Participation in sports improves mood, alleviates stress, boosts self-esteem, and enhances cognitive function. Exercise releases endorphins, promoting happiness and well-being. Furthermore, sports provide a sense of purpose, accomplishment, and satisfaction. Athletic experiences foster identity, community, and belonging through social interactions (Kim et al., 2021). Athletes develop networks with coaches, teammates, and supporters, sharing both challenges and successes, which creates lasting friendships and social bonds. Ultimately, athletics encourage self-discovery, ethical development, and personal growth, as athletes learn resilience, goal-setting, and appropriate behaviours through their experiences in both victory and defeat.

Methodology

In this qualitative study, semi-structured interviews serve as the primary data collection method. This approach chosen due to its ability to document the lived experiences of college students, offering comprehensive narratives on sports involvement, behavioural patterns, employee well-being, and entrepreneurial intentions. The qualitative technique allows participants to articulate their feelings, intentions, and viewpoints in their own words, making it particularly suited for exploring the complex phenomena associated with the diverse impact of athletics on individuals' lives. Researchers can guide semi-structured interviews as participants discuss key themes, share experiences, and provide nuanced perspectives. For this study, semi-structured interviews conducted with 20 college students (see Table 1). The concept of data saturation employed to determine the sample size, indicating that additional participants should recruit until the interviews yield no new information or themes. This approach ensured that the sample encompassed a wide spectrum of views regarding employee well-being, college student entrepreneurship, and athletic activity. Participants meticulously selected based on inclusion criteria to provide a representative and diverse sample. College students who engaged in sports, regardless of skill level, were encouraged to participate. This criterion aimed to include both competitive team members and casual leisure athletes from varied backgrounds. Participants hailed from a range of academic disciplines and years of study to ensure that the research reflected a multitude of backgrounds, interests, and perspectives.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Participants

Respondent ID	Age	Gender	Sports Participation
R01	20	Male	Soccer (College Team)
R02	22	Female	Basketball (College Team)
R03	19	Male	Tennis (Recreational League)
R04	21	Female	Volleyball (College Team)
R05	23	Male	Running (Club)
R06	18	Female	Swimming (College Team)
R07	21	Male	Rugby (College Team)
R08	20	Female	Field Hockey (College Team)
R09	22	Male	Basketball (Recreational League)
R10	19	Female	Tennis (College Team)
R11	21	Male	Soccer (Recreational League)
R12	22	Female	Track and Field (College Team)
R13	20	Male	Baseball (College Team)
R14	18	Female	Badminton (Club)
R15	23	Male	Rowing (College Team)
R16	19	Female	Lacrosse (College Team)
R17	22	Female	Basketball (College Team)
R18	21	Male	Soccer (Recreational League)
R19	18	Male	Badminton (Club)
R20	23	Female	Rowing (College Team)

Purposive sampling employed to identify key traits relevant to the study. Participants specifically selected from among active sportspeople who possessed first-hand experience and knowledge of sports-related behaviours and outcomes. Recruitment involved contacting college sports organisations, intramural leagues, and athletic departments to encourage participation. Potential participants informed about the study's aims, methods, and confidentiality protocols and they invited to volunteer. All interested and eligible individuals were included in the final sample. The purposive sampling strategy focused on individuals with complex viewpoints regarding sports activity, behavioural patterns, employee well-being, and entrepreneurial aspirations. The study specifically targeted college students with direct sports experience to explore the connections between sports engagement and various aspects of personal and professional development. The selected students exhibited diversity in age, gender, academic major, and year of study. This variance enriched the data, enabling a detailed examination of how different individuals perceive and experience the influence of athletics in their lives. Ethical considerations were paramount during participant selection. Each participant provided informed consent, which included a clear explanation of the study's objectives, methods, confidentiality measures, and participants' rights. All comments from participants kept confidential and

anonymous, and individuals were free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. This study utilised semi-structured interviews with college students to investigate their sports activity and its effects on their behaviour, employee well-being, and entrepreneurial goals. This qualitative approach was selected to allow participants to articulate their thoughts and feelings freely, which could yield rich, nuanced data that quantitative methods might overlook. Prior to the interviews, a guide comprising open-ended questions developed to cover significant themes related to personal sports experiences, observable behavioural changes, well-being, and entrepreneurial ambitions (see [Table 2](#)). This guide facilitated deeper exploration of participants' priorities. Interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes to enable comprehensive discussions while avoiding participant fatigue. Each interview conducted confidentially and in a comfortable environment, either in person or online, depending on participants' preferences and logistical considerations. Data saturation was a critical factor in the data collection process. This phenomenon occurs when interviews yield no new information or themes, indicating that the study's objectives have sufficiently met. After conducting 20 interviews, recurring themes and patterns emerged, confirming that data saturation had achieved. This outcome validated the sample size and demonstrated that the dataset was robust and diverse enough for thorough analysis and accurate findings. With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for data analysis, ensuring the completeness and quality of the data, thereby facilitating a comprehensive evaluation of participants' responses.

Table 2: Interview Protocol

Variable	Interview Protocols
Personal Sports Experiences	1. Can you describe your involvement in sports during your college years?
	2. What motivated you to participate in this particular sport?
	3. How has your participation in sports evolved?
	4. What are some of the most memorable experiences you have had while participating in sports?
Behavioural Changes	1. Have you noticed any changes in your behaviour since you started participating in sports? If so, what changes?
	2. How do you think your sports participation has affected your discipline and time management skills?
	3. Can you give examples of how teamwork and leadership skills learned in sports have translated to other areas of your life?
	4. In what ways has sports participation influenced your social interactions and relationships?

Table 2: Interview Protocol (cont...)

Variable	Interview Protocols
Well-being Perceptions	1. How has regular sports participation affected your physical health?
	2. In what, ways has participating in sports affected your mental health and stress levels.
	3. Do you feel more satisfied with your life because of your involvement in sports? If so, how?
	4. How do you balance sports with other aspects of your life, such as academics and personal time?
Entrepreneurial Aspirations	1. Do you believe that your involvement in sports has influenced your interest in entrepreneurship? If so, how?
	2. How have skills such as risk-taking, innovation, and leadership developed through sports affected your entrepreneurial ambitions?
	3. Can you provide examples of how experiences in sports have prepared you for challenges you might face as an entrepreneur?
	4. What role do you think sports will play in your future career, especially if you decide to pursue entrepreneurship?

This study utilised thematic analysis, a method well suited for identifying, evaluating, and reporting themes within qualitative data. A thorough examination of the interview transcripts unveiled significant themes related to college students' sports activity, behaviour, employee well-being, and entrepreneurial goals. Thematic analysis commenced with an in-depth familiarisation with the data, necessitating multiple reviews of the interview transcripts to fully understand and engage with the material. Initial impressions and potential themes documented in preparation for further exploration. The coding process involved systematically identifying and labelling segments of text pertinent to the study. These segments, or codes, encapsulated important data, including recurring words, phrases, and concepts. An open categorisation approach adopted to analyse the data without imposing predefined groupings. Following the initial coding, the codes evaluated and grouped into broader themes. This stage involved categorising related codes to reflect trends within the dataset; for example, codes related to discipline, teamwork, and time management were organised under the theme "Behavioural Changes through Sports Participation." A thorough examination of the relationship between codes and their meanings was essential. As the analysis progressed, themes adjusted accurately reflect the data. This involved assessing theme coherence, refining themes, and ensuring alignment with the dataset. Concepts either merged or separated for clarity and completeness. The third step of the thematic analysis focused on analysing the themes to extract insights relevant to the research objectives. This process included synthesising the themes and examining their implications to enhance understanding of how sports engagement influences entrepreneurial goals, employee well-being, and

behaviour. Additionally, the interpretation process integrated the findings with existing literature and theoretical frameworks to provide a deeper comprehension of the data. The rigorous documentation and iterative review processes inherent in thematic analysis ensured both validity and reliability. The careful examination of themes illuminated the multifaceted ways in which sports activity affects various aspects of college students' lives, yielding valuable insights for the study.

Results

This study highlights the multifaceted impacts of college athletics on individuals, extending beyond mere physical health. Through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, key themes emerged that illustrate the complex interconnections among students' behaviour, well-being, entrepreneurial aspirations, and sports engagement. One of the primary concerns addressed in the study is how athletics influence students' physical health. Participants reported improvements in body mass index (BMI), cardiovascular health, and overall well-being because of regular exercise. Engaging in physical activity noted to enhance students' stress management by reducing anxiety levels. Furthermore, the study indicated that college athletes develop essential academic and vocational skills. The routines established through sports such as consistency, teamwork, and goal-oriented strategies have positively influenced students' time management, self-discipline, collaboration, leadership, and goal-setting abilities. These skills are transferable to academic and professional contexts, emphasising the broader benefits of sports participation.

Social Integration and Networking through Sports

The study also revealed the role of sports in fostering social integration and networking. Participation in sports teams encouraged diversity and inclusion, enabling students from varied backgrounds to communicate, build social support networks, and network beyond athletic contexts. Participants expressed that these connections provided both support and opportunities for professional networking and mentoring. Research findings indicated that involvement in sports significantly influences students' entrepreneurial and professional aspirations. The experience gained through sports fosters qualities such as risk-taking, creativity, self-confidence, and an understanding of work-life balance, all of which contribute to students' career exploration and success. Thus, sports engagement facilitates personal and professional development, transforming students' goals, skills, and perspectives beyond athletics.

Theme 1: Physical Health and Well-being

The study underscores the significant impact of sports on college students' physical health, encapsulated in three subthemes: fitness and routine, stress reduction and mental wellness, and sleep quality and recovery (see [Figure 1](#)). Participants noted that

regular involvement in sports enhanced their fitness routines and overall health. One participant remarked, "I did not engage in regular physical activity before I joined the soccer team. Now, physical activity three times a week is essential to my daily routine." The regular engagement in exercise positively influenced various health indicators, with many students reporting improvements in their BMI and cardiovascular health. For instance, one individual noted a loss of 10 pounds and increased stamina from frequent swimming, while another highlighted the benefits of basketball for cardiovascular endurance. These findings align with previous research indicating that regular exercise promotes cardiovascular health and effective weight management ([Zhou et al., 2021](#)). Organised sports programmes also play a critical role in enhancing health commitment. A structured approach, such as regular rugby practices and matches, helps participants stay motivated and organised in achieving their fitness goals (R07). This systematic method improves time management and discipline, contributing to overall health benefits. Participants reported that sports participation reduced stress and enhanced mental health. Many expressed that exercise alleviated stress and anxiety, with one student stating, "Tennis relaxes me and reduces test and homework anxiety." Another participant shared a similar sentiment, noting that running serves as a calming mechanism (R05). Exercise has been shown to mitigate stress and anxiety ([McEwan & Crawford, 2022](#)), and interview responses frequently connected physical activity to enhanced mental wellness. Participants expressed that sports activities brought them joy and stability. As one participant put it, "Playing volleyball boosts my mood and promotes a more positive perspective" (R04), while another noted, "After playing a basketball game, I consistently feel a strong sense of mental clarity and achievement" (R09). This supports findings that exercise positively influences mood, self-esteem, and mental health. The study also examined the effects of sports on sleep quality and recovery, which are crucial for overall well-being. Regular physical activity found to improve sleep for many participants. One student remarked, "Ever since I began engaging in regular soccer sessions, I have noticed that I can fall asleep more quickly and experience more restful nights" (R11). Another noted, "Participating in track and field activities positively exhausts me, resulting in deeper and more revitalising sleep" (R19). [Pellegrini et al. \(2020\)](#) found that physical activity accelerates sleep onset and enhances sleep quality. Participants balancing academics with rigorous training confirmed that exercise contributed to better sleep management, allowing them to focus more effectively in class. For example, early morning rowing not only aided their sleep but also set a positive tone for the day. These narratives illustrate how athletes instinctively manage their sleep to bolster both physical and emotional well-being.

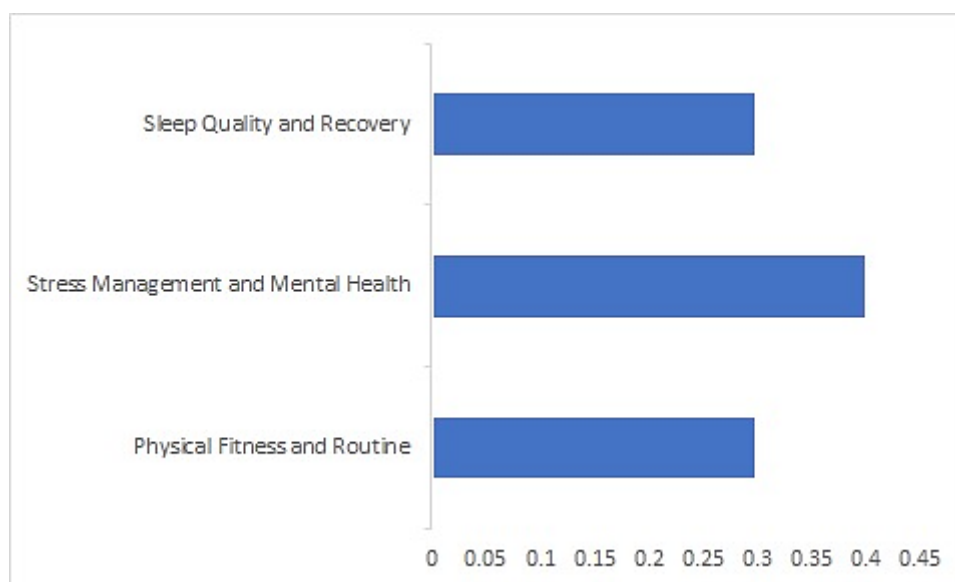


Figure 1: Weightage Analysis for Theme 1

Theme 2: Academic and Professional Skills Development

This study illustrates how sports facilitate the development of academic and professional skills among college students, particularly in the areas of goal setting, teamwork, leadership, and time management. Participants reported that involvement in sports cultivates self-discipline and enhances their ability to manage time effectively. The necessity of balancing academic and athletic commitments prompted students to improve their time management skills (see [Figure 2](#)). One participant noted, "Being a member of the basketball team required me to organise my study sessions based on training schedules, which enhanced my capacity to manage time effectively" (R02). Athletics also teach students the importance of self-discipline, which is vital for academic success. Just as academic deadlines require careful planning and prioritisation, athletic deadlines necessitate similar skills. [Auvinen et al. \(2020\)](#) found that regular exercise positively influences time management abilities. Leadership and teamwork are additional competencies fostered by sports participation. Many students expressed that engaging in team sports promotes leadership skills and collaborative efforts. One participant commented, "Volleyball has taught me the art of collaborating efficiently with others and taking on leadership responsibilities when required" (R04). Another student remarked, "I have refined my leadership abilities, which I now apply in group assignments for my courses, through my role as a rugby team captain" (R07). These skills are transferable across athletic, academic, and professional contexts. Participants acknowledged that athletics improved their communication, engagement, and leadership abilities, aligning with findings from [de Prada Creo et al. \(2021\)](#). Furthermore, sports involvement enhanced students' goal-setting capabilities. Participants reflected on how their athletic aspirations influenced their academic and professional ambitions. One student stated, "Engaging in training for swimming competitions has taught me the valuable skill of setting attainable objectives and diligently striving to accomplish them" (R06). Another noted,

"Achieving personal bests in track and field has enabled me to employ similar goal-setting strategies in my academic endeavours" (R12). Through the process of setting, pursuing, and achieving sports-related goals, students developed a focused and determined mind-set that translated into their academic and career aspirations. Overall, the study highlights how sports participation fosters motivation, performance enhancement, and structured approaches to achieving both athletic and academic goals.

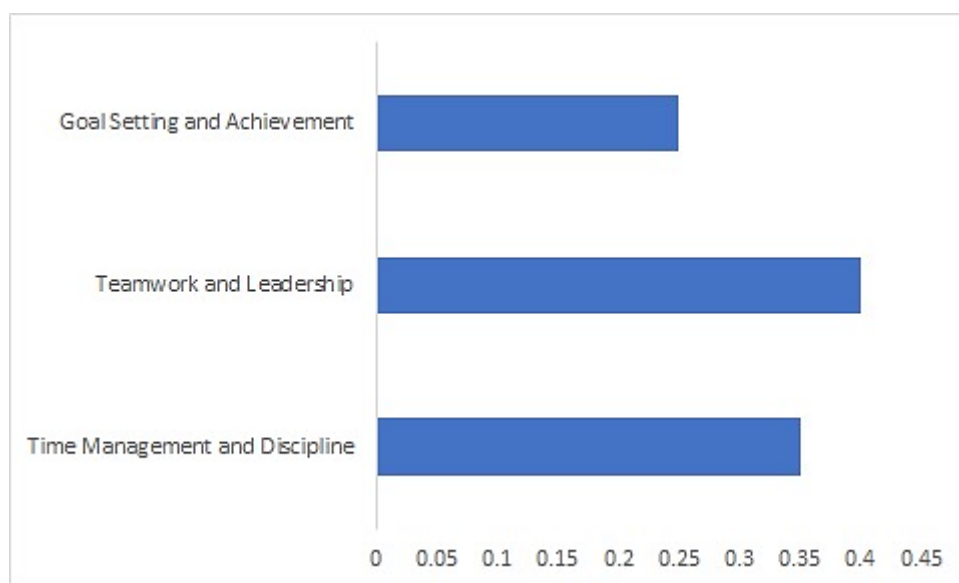


Figure 2: Weightage Analysis for Theme 2

Theme 3: Social Integration and Networking

The study reveals that sports significantly enhance college students' social integration and networking, encompassing themes of diversity, inclusivity, social support, and professional opportunities. Participants emphasised the importance of sports teams in fostering friendships and building support networks. One student remarked, "Enrolling in the soccer team facilitated the establishment of enduring friendships and offered a network of assistance during difficult periods" (R01). Another participant noted that team basketball strengthened bonds among teammates, improving their overall social well-being. These experiences illustrate how sports teams serve as valuable social support networks, enhancing emotional well-being and social connections (Altun et al., 2021). Involvement in team sports also exposes students to diverse cultures and backgrounds, promoting inclusion and understanding. One participant highlighted that being part of a diverse volleyball team helped them appreciate cultural differences and collaborate more effectively (R04). Another student found value in learning about the cultures and perspectives of international track and field athletes. Such connections foster a sense of community and broaden students' horizons, contributing to a more inclusive academic environment. Moreover, athletics play a crucial role in career development and networking opportunities. Participants expressed that sporting events and alumni gatherings offered enjoyable avenues for

professional networking. One teaching assistant shared how basketball events have enabled them to connect with other coaches and players. Another respondent noted that former soccer players often mentor current athletes, providing valuable guidance on professional advancement and networking (R13). These narratives highlight how participation in athletics can facilitate students' professional growth through both informal networking and formal mentorship opportunities.

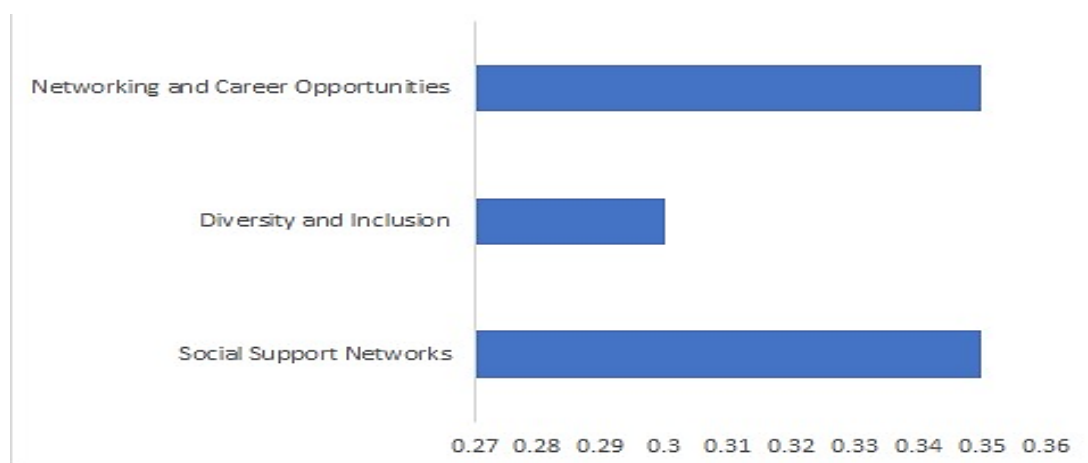


Figure 3: Weightage Analysis for Theme 3

Theme 4: Entrepreneurial Intentions and Career Aspirations

The study illustrates how engagement in sports significantly affects college students' entrepreneurial and professional objectives. This theme encompasses several subthemes, including risk-taking and creativity, self-efficacy, confidence, as well as work-life balance and career choices. Participants reported that sports fostered a sense of risk-taking and creativity. Engaging in athletics often involves making calculated risks and pushing personal limits. One participant noted that being part of the baseball team-taught them resilience and risk-taking, skills they now apply in business contexts (R13). Another stated, "In soccer, we are required to devise inventive tactics during matches, which has enhanced my ability to think creatively in my academic pursuits" (R11). These examples underscore how sports can cultivate risk-taking and innovative thinking—essential traits for entrepreneurs (Escamilla-Fajardo et al., 2021). Moreover, sports participation contributes to students' self-confidence and entrepreneurial mind-set. Achieving athletic successes and overcoming challenges instilled a sense of confidence and fulfilment in many participants. One individual remarked, "Achieving victories and enhancing my proficiency in tennis bolstered my self-assurance, thereby increasing my confidence in pursuing entrepreneurial prospects" (R10). Another noted, "Being the captain of my rugby team enhanced my confidence in my leadership abilities, which I now utilise in pursuing my career goals" (R07). These experiences demonstrate how success in sports can foster the self-efficacy necessary for students to chase their entrepreneurial and professional aspirations. Additionally, the study revealed that sports influence students' work-life balance and career choices. Many participants highlighted the importance of balancing athletics,

academics, and personal life. One respondent indicated that soccer and school taught them essential time management skills and work-life balance, factors they consider when choosing a career path (R01). Another classmate noted that rowing emphasised the significance of self-care and rest for overall job satisfaction. Overall, sports participation equips students with valuable time management, prioritisation, and well-being skills, which play a critical role in shaping their career decisions.

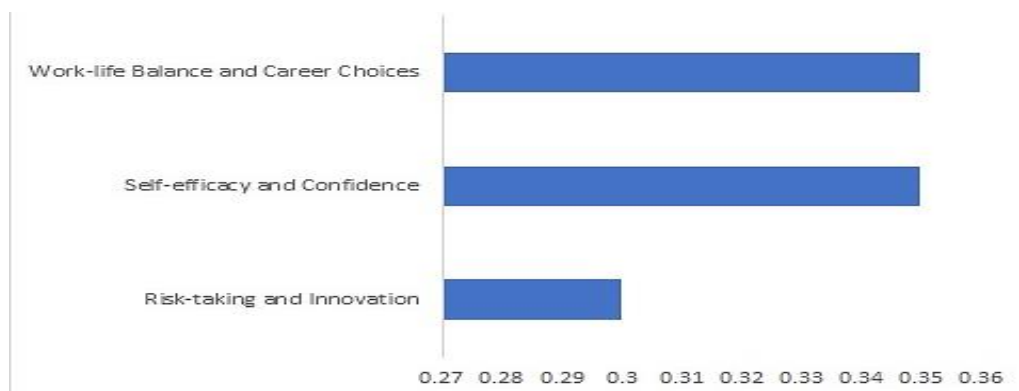


Figure 4: Weightage Analysis for Theme 4

Discussion

This chapter examines the interplay between the literature review and the findings of this study regarding how sports involvement affects college students' entrepreneurial goals, well-being, and behaviour. By integrating the study's findings with contemporary literature, we highlight the multifaceted benefits and challenges associated with student athletics. A foundational understanding of the theoretical frameworks guiding this investigation begins with the literature review. As noted by [Quinaud et al. \(2023\)](#), individuals learn through observation, imitation, and reinforcement, and this study supports that notion by demonstrating how observational learning shapes sports behaviours. Through interactions with coaches, peers, and opponents, students acquire essential skills such as discipline, leadership, and teamwork. This aligns with Social Learning Theory, which posits that these learned behaviours can also influence academic and professional conduct beyond the realm of sports.

Furthermore, the research by [Li et al. \(2023\)](#) illustrates how both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators influence behaviour. The study reveals that sports cultivate autonomy, mastery, and enjoyment, which enhance intrinsic motivation. Additionally, recognition and incentives such as scholarships and awards further motivate students, affirming findings from [Shull et al. \(2020\)](#) that suggest such incentives deepen commitment to sports. The study's key findings indicate significant effects of athletic engagement on college students' physical health and well-being. Participants reported improved stress management, fitness levels, and overall well-being from regular sports participation, corroborating previous research on the mental and physical

health benefits of physical activity. The identified subthemes fitness and regularity, stress management and mental health, and sleep and recovery highlight these benefits. For instance, consistent exercise routines improved participants' cardiovascular health and body mass index (BMI), echoing findings from [Zhou et al. \(2021\)](#) that link regular physical activity with reduced chronic disease risk and enhanced well-being.

Moreover, the study emphasizes the importance of college athletes cultivating healthy habits. Findings indicate that athletic participation significantly alleviates student stress and anxiety, as physical activity has shown to enhance emotional resilience and focus. Several studies support these conclusions, indicating that exercise can decrease symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression ([Hu et al., 2024](#); [McEwan & Beauchamp, 2020](#)). Participants also reported improvements in sleep quality, as regular exercise contributed faster sleep onset and deeper sleep cycles, aligning with ([Pellegrini et al., 2020](#)). The second theme of academic and professional skills development highlights various ways athletics enhance students' capabilities. Key subtopics include goal setting, teamwork, leadership, time management, and discipline. Participants noted that balancing academic and athletic commitments necessitated strong organisational and time management skills. This supports the work of [da Costa and Miragaia \(2024\)](#), who emphasise that these qualities are critical for achieving academic and career success.

Additionally, participants noted that involvement in team sports bolstered their communication, leadership, and collaborative skills, which are essential in both academic and professional settings. Research indicates that team sports promote these interpersonal skills, as evidenced by ([Zhang et al., 2022](#)). The focus on goal setting within sports illustrates how athletes develop a goal-oriented mind-set, enhancing their motivation and satisfaction. Participants expressed that achieving sports performance goals translated into a greater capacity to define and pursue academic and professional objectives, further supported by studies indicating the importance of clear goal setting for success ([Foo et al., 2023](#); [Melman et al., 2022](#)). The study also underscores the importance of social integration and networking through sports. Participants highlighted how sports teams foster social networks, providing emotional support and a sense of belonging during stressful times. This finding aligns with existing literature that demonstrates the role of sports in enhancing mental and emotional health through community building ([Smith & Green, 2020](#); [Zhao et al., 2024](#)).

Moreover, team participation exposed students to diverse cultures and perspectives, fostering inclusivity and understanding. Participants indicated that collaboration with teammates from various backgrounds enriched their experiences and promoted unity. Research supports that sports can enhance diversity and cultural awareness, strengthening community cohesion ([Tsitskari, 2024](#)). The networking opportunities presented by athletics are also noteworthy. Participants reported that involvement in

alumni activities, competitions, and sports events facilitated professional connections and mentorship, which are crucial for career advancement. Prior studies have similarly shown that sports foster professional development through networking and informal relationships. Finally, the fourth theme reveals how athletic participation influences entrepreneurial intentions and career aspirations. Participants identified that sports encourage risk-taking and creativity, traits essential for entrepreneurship. Engaging in athletics requires innovative problem solving and adaptability, reflecting the necessity for resilience and creativity in entrepreneurial ventures ([Lara-Bocanegra et al., 2022](#)). Additionally, the confidence gained through athletic accomplishments translates into increased entrepreneurial self-efficacy, as supported by ([Pellegrini et al., 2020](#)). Overall, the study highlights that athletics significantly shape students' professional choices, work-life balance, and holistic outlook on life. By teaching student's time management and self-care, sports participation informs their career decisions and promotes a balanced lifestyle. Thus, the findings underscore the integral role of sports in fostering both personal and professional development among college students.

Conclusion

The study explored the impact of sports on college students' entrepreneurial aspirations, well-being, and behaviour through qualitative interviews. The findings highlight the multifaceted ways in which athletics influence various aspects of students' lives. Research indicates that sports significantly enhance physical health, contributing to better sleep, increased physical activity, and reduced stress levels. Regular exercise is associated with numerous health benefits, reinforcing the positive implications of athletic participation. Additionally, the study found that sports play a crucial role in developing academic and professional skills. Participants reported improvements in goal setting, leadership, collaboration, discipline, and time management. These competencies are vital for academic success and prepare students for future professional challenges. Sports also facilitate networking and social integration. Students expressed appreciation for the support provided by sports teams and events, as well as the diverse and inclusive environments fostered through athletic participation. These interpersonal relationships enhance feelings of belonging and contribute to professional networking and mentorship opportunities. The research further examined the relationship between sports and entrepreneurial goals. Participants indicated that involvement in athletics enhances risk-taking, creativity, self-confidence, and entrepreneurial skills, while also promoting a healthy work-life balance and informed career choices. This aligns with existing studies that assert sports contribute to the development of entrepreneurial aspirations among college students. The implications of this study are significant for stakeholders in student development, policymakers, and educators. Athletics should promote as a holistic approach to student welfare within universities. Integrating athletics and recreation into the academic curriculum can enhance health, academic achievement, and social

cohesion. Furthermore, sports can equip students with the entrepreneurial values necessary for adapting to an evolving workforce. However, it is important to acknowledge the study's limitations, including the cross-sectional nature of data collection, potential response bias, and the risk of a biased sample. Future research should adopt mixed-method approaches, utilise longitudinal designs, and incorporate contextual analyses to deepen our understanding of how sports influence student development.

Implications

This research contributes to frameworks surrounding student development, well-being, and sports activity. It underscores how observational learning in sports influences college students' behaviour, supporting Social Learning Theory. This theory posits that individuals acquire leadership, teamwork, and behavioural skills through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. The learning environments created by sports teams are essential for social and behavioural development. Additionally, the study explores both internal and external motivations for sports participation through the lens of Self-Determination Theory. Factors such as autonomy, mastery, and enjoyment drive students to engage in sports, thereby enhancing their academic performance and overall well-being. Recognition, accolades, and networking opportunities associated with sports participation further bolster student motivation. Self-Determination Theory highlights the importance of mental health, intrinsic motivation, and the role of external rewards in sustaining engagement. The practical implications of this study are significant for educators, policymakers, and advocates for student welfare. The findings emphasise the critical role of sports and physical activity within both extracurricular programmes and academic curricula. By recognising athletics as essential to student success, institutions can promote healthy lifestyles, enhance academic and professional achievements, and foster social integration. Investment in infrastructure, coaching, and support systems is necessary to engage students effectively in sports. The insights regarding the mental health benefits of sports can inform campus wellness initiatives. Engaging in athletics has the potential to alleviate stress, anxiety, and depression among students. Colleges can create supportive environments by integrating mental health, wellness, and sports initiatives, aligning with contemporary trends in higher education that prioritise campus harmony. Furthermore, this research has implications for entrepreneurship programmes and career development. College athletics can impart crucial skills such as goal setting, leadership, innovation, and risk-taking. By integrating these competencies into athletics programmes, institutions can equip students with the entrepreneurial mind-sets and abilities necessary for future success in the workforce and business ventures. The multidisciplinary approach of this study reflects the demands of a competitive and dynamic job market, which increasingly seeks graduates with diverse skills and experiences. The examination of social integration, networking, and diversity within athletics is vital for fostering

inclusive and supportive campus communities. Intercultural interactions, mentorship opportunities, and participation in sports teams can help institutions promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. Positive social interactions and inclusive sports environments enable college students to feel connected, valued, and at home, ultimately cultivating diverse and inclusive campuses that prepare them for a complex, interconnected world.

Limitations and Future Direction

This study provides valuable insights into how sports influence college students' behaviour, well-being, and entrepreneurial objectives; however, its limitations highlight important considerations for future research. One key issue is the reliance on self-reported interview data, which may introduce response and social desirability biases. Participants might provide socially acceptable or normative answers, potentially compromising the quality and reliability of the findings. To enhance dependability, future studies could employ mixed-method approaches that incorporate physiological assessments, evaluations of academic performance, and longitudinal data alongside self-reported measures. Another limitation is the potential sample bias, as participants exclusively drawn from a single college or sports team. Future research should aim to gather data from a diverse range of students across multiple institutions, capturing demographic information, academic disciplines, and varying athletic experiences. This broader approach would facilitate a deeper understanding of sports' impacts on students in different contexts, cultures, and educational systems, thereby enhancing the applicability and external validity of the findings. Cross-sectional studies, such as the one conducted here, offer only a snapshot of students' experiences and perceptions, limiting our comprehension of the long-term effects of sports engagement. Longitudinal studies that track students' actions and outcomes over time could provide valuable insights into how sports participation influences academic performance, career prospects, and overall well-being. Such an approach would reveal changes, patterns, and developments associated with sports involvement. Additionally, this study primarily focused on students' personal experiences in sports without examining broader institutional influences. Future research should consider the organizational, institutional, and structural factors that affect students' access to sports resources, opportunities, and levels of engagement. Analysing institutional policies, support services, and structural barriers could help identify how inclusive and supportive environments can benefit both student-athletes and sports enthusiasts. While this study touched on the relationship between sports participation and entrepreneurial goals, it did not explore the entrepreneurial behaviours, ventures, or outcomes of students engaged in sports. Future research should investigate how participation in sports influences university students' entrepreneurial efforts and success rates. A comprehensive analysis of the entrepreneurial mind-sets, skill acquisition, business creation, and venture success of student-athletes and sports fans could illuminate the intersection of sports and

entrepreneurship, informing student entrepreneurship education, career paths, and support mechanisms.

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