SPORT IN RELATION TO DEVELOPMENT

Inspiring excellence, transforming lives through quality, impact, and care

VISION **130**
Renew and Reimagine
for 2034

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Sport & Development in Higher Education

"It has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does."

-NELSON MANDELA-

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Sport, Mental Well-Being & Social Cohesion

Participation in sport is positively linked to

- psychological well-being (reduces anxiety, improved mood and greater self-worth)

- social development (emotional intelligence, empathy, and interpersonal skills)

- peer connection (feeling of belonging, peer encouragement, and support)

Social interaction in sport = better mental health

Study by Li & Huang (2024)

Implications for Higher Education in South Africa

- **Enhancing access to inclusive sports clubs and residence leagues** could support mental well-being on campuses

- **Intentional programming** around team-building, leadership development, and peer mentorship through sport in residence sports and development leagues.

Sport Atmosphere Builds Psychological Resilience

A positive, supportive sport atmosphere is strongly correlated with the development of

- A growth mindset (belief in self-improvement through effort)

- Psychological resilience (ability to recover from setbacks, stay motivated, and cope with stress)

Supportive sport environment ➡ **setbacks allows growth** ➡ **mental toughness**
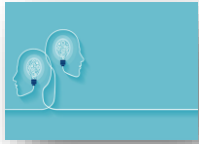
Implications for Higher Education in South Africa

- Creating safe-to-fail environments

- Encouraging peer mentorship

- Providing constructive feedback

- Design inclusive spaces & enhance access to inclusive sports clubs and residence leagues

Make mental health support visible within sports environments

Competitive vs Non-Competitive Impact

Competitive sports participation

- Strengthened mental toughness

- Improved stress management

- Fostered traits like perseverance, goal orientation, and resilience

- Particularly effective for high-achieving or performance-driven students

Non-competitive or recreational sports

- Enhanced general well-being, joy, and emotional stability

- Encouraged informal peer support and social inclusion

- Served as a low-pressure outlet for students with less interest in performance-based sport

Not all students want the same thing from sport and that's okay

Implications for Higher Education in South Africa

Design dual pathways

- Maintain and invest in high-performance sport structures (e.g., Varsity Cup, USSA tournaments)

- Simultaneously offer inclusive, informal sport programs through residences, faculties, and wellness units

Promote intramurals and social sport leagues

- 5-a-side football, campus-wide walking groups, dance sessions, or yoga clubs

Target different goals

- Let students choose the level of engagement that suits their personal and academic journey

- Ensure access for all fitness levels, cultural backgrounds, and time commitment intentionally include both competitive and non-competitive options to meet the diverse needs of the student population.

Implications for Higher Education in South Africa

- Train student leaders as peer ambassadors

- Invest in low-threshold, inclusive events

- Promote participation without performance pressure

- Recognize sport clubs as retention tools

- Support identity formation through sport for
    First-year students
    International students
    Marginalised and at-risk groups

Impact on Academic Success & Time Management

Moderate participation in sport was strongly correlated with

- Improved Grade Point Average (GPA)

- Better time management and scheduling skills

- Reduced academic burnout and improved mental health

- Development of soft skills:
  - Confidence
  - Self-discipline
  - Stress coping strategies
  - Interpersonal communication

(ResearchGate, 2024)

2–4 sessions per week

✗ Not exceeding 8–10 hours *unless* academic supports are in place

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Implications for Higher Education in South Africa

- Develop structured sport timetables that allow for predictable training without academic clashes

- Coach training and academic liaison

  - Educate coaches to recognise academic peaks and accommodate accordingly
  - Encourage dialogue between sport managers and academic advisors

- Create performance-tracking dashboards

- Promote sport as a time management tool

Key Recommendations

🔑 **Emotional Intelligence & Burnout Prevention**

Structured EI development workshops into sport scholarship and high-performance programs to reduce mental fatigue

🔑 **Self-Determination & Intrinsic Motivation**
Encourage co-designed training sessions, goal-setting exercises, and peer feedback
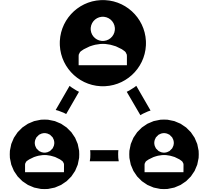
🔑 **Policy & Structural Recommendations**

Develop a university-wide sport and well-being policy that prioritises holistic student development

🔑 **FISU Healthy Campus Program**

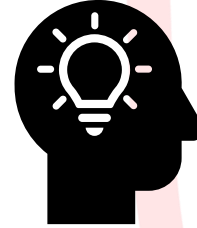# Areas of development through sport
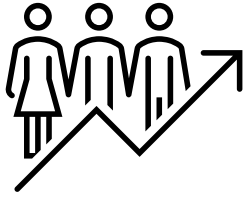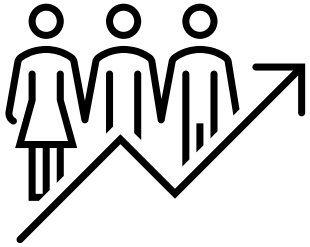

Personal Development
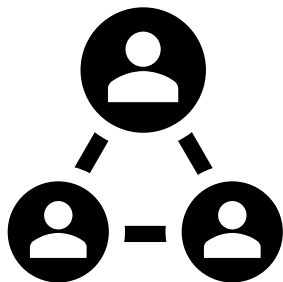
Social Development

Physical Development
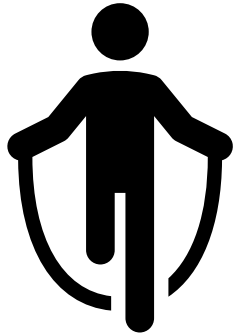
Cognitive Development

Emotional Development

Personal Development

- Time management & discipline

- Perseverance & Resilience

- Self esteem confidence

- Team work & leadership
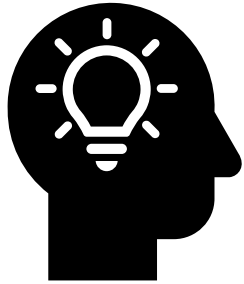
Social Development

- Interpersonal communication skills

- Community Building

- Collaboration & networking

- Sportsmanship & fair play

Physical Development

- Health & physical fitness

- Injury prevention & management

- Coordination & motor skills

Cognitive Development

- Problem solving & strategic thinking

- Decision making & adaptability

- Concentration – improving focus

Emotional Development

- Self-awareness & reflection

- Goal setting & motivation

Sense of Belonging & Identity

Participation in sport leads to

- Increased institutional attachment

- A stronger sense of community membership

- Improved feelings of purpose, belonging, and connection

Critical retention role

- Reduces dropout risk
- Enhances emotional connection to campus life
- Boosts student identity formation, particularly in diverse and transitioning youth populations

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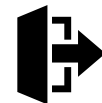STUDENT AFFAIRS
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CONCLUSION

Sport in higher education fosters **holistic development**

Sport boosts health, psychological resilience, social skills, and academic success

For sustainable development, sports programs must be

Socially sustainable

Environmentally sustainable

Economically Sustainable

Governance and Leadership

Strategic

END