International Journal Of
Women's Sports And Games Research
VOL 01 | No. 1 | 2026
P-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX | E-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX

# THE ROLE OF SPORTS EDUCATION IN EMPOWERING WOMEN AND GIRLS

**Kinza Ishaq**
BS, Department of CS Computer Science, The Cosmic Degree College (For Women) ,University of Okara

## ABSTRACT

*Sports education plays an important role in empowering women and girls by providing opportunities to develop physical abilities, confidence, leadership skills, teamwork, discipline, and social awareness. It is not limited to teaching sports techniques or improving physical fitness; it also creates an educational environment in which girls can challenge gender stereotypes, develop independence, and participate equally in social and institutional activities. Despite growing recognition of women's participation in sports, many girls continue to face barriers such as cultural restrictions, gender discrimination, inadequate sports facilities, financial limitations, safety concerns, and a lack of female role models. This study examines the role of sports education in promoting women's empowerment through physical education programmes, school and university sports activities, inclusive teaching practices, and community-based initiatives. It adopts a qualitative approach based on a review and thematic analysis of recent literature, particularly research published in 2025 and 2026. The discussion focuses on the contribution of sports education to self-confidence, decision-making, leadership development, educational participation, social inclusion, and gender equality. The reviewed evidence indicates that inclusive sports programmes can strengthen girls' motivation, improve their understanding of their abilities, and provide opportunities to develop skills that are valuable beyond the sports environment. However, sustainable empowerment requires supportive educational policies, trained teachers, safe facilities, equal access to resources, and positive family and community attitudes. The study concludes that sports education should be recognized as an essential component of girls' education and women's social empowerment.*

***KEYWORDS:****Sports education, women's empowerment, girls' participation, gender equality, physical education, leadership development, self-confidence, social inclusion, educational opportunities, gender stereotypes, female athletes, sports participation, inclusive education, personal development, and social transformation.*

## INTRODUCTION

Sports education has become an important part of modern educational systems because it contributes to the physical, psychological, social, and intellectual development of individuals. It provides students with opportunities to learn physical skills, develop healthy habits, understand teamwork, and build positive relationships with others. For women and girls, sports education has an additional significance because it can challenge traditional gender expectations and create opportunities for personal independence and social participation. Historically, sports activities in many societies have been dominated by male participation, while girls have often experienced restrictions based on cultural beliefs, family expectations, economic conditions, and traditional understandings of gender roles. These limitations have reduced opportunities for girls to participate in organized sports, physical education, and competitive activities. Işıkgöz, M. E., Şahbudak, M., Deveci, M. E., & Öztunç, M. (2025). found that Sports education can help address these inequalities by ensuring that girls receive equal opportunities to learn, participate, compete, and develop their abilities.The empowerment of women and girls involves developing the confidence, knowledge, skills, and opportunities necessary to make independent decisions and participate meaningfully in society. Sports education contributes to this process by encouraging girls to recognize their physical and personal capabilities. Through participation in individual and team sports, students learn discipline, responsibility, cooperation, communication, and problem-solving.

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VOL 01 | No. 1 | 2026
P-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX | E-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX

These skills can support their educational progress and future professional development. Sports activities also provide practical experiences in leadership, as girls may take responsibility as team captains, organizers, coaches, or representatives of their institutions. Such experiences help them understand that leadership and decision-making are not limited by gender.

The systematic review by Işıkgöz and colleagues (2025), which examined 65 studies, identified educational programmes, supportive policies, awareness initiatives, and female role models as important contributors to gender equality in physical education and sports. Educational institutions have a particularly important responsibility in promoting sports participation among girls. Schools, colleges, and universities can provide structured physical education classes, sports clubs, competitions, training programmes, and leadership opportunities. These activities can help girls develop confidence in an organized and supportive environment. Teachers and coaches also influence students' attitudes toward sports by providing encouragement, using inclusive teaching methods, and ensuring that girls receive fair opportunities to participate. When sports education is designed around cooperation, skill development, and personal improvement rather than gender-based assumptions, girls are more likely to feel respected and motivated. Recent research on active methodologies in physical education highlights the importance of teaching practices that address unequal participation and reduce gender stereotypes. Sports education also contributes to women's empowerment by promoting physical and mental well-being. Regular physical activity can improve fitness, coordination, strength, and general health, while participation in sports can create opportunities for social interaction and emotional development. Rind, I. A., & Naz, A. (2025). Explained thatGirls who participate in sports may develop greater confidence in their abilities, become more comfortable expressing their opinions, and learn how to manage challenges. Team sports can also encourage friendship, mutual support, and a sense of belonging.However, these benefits cannot be achieved equally when girls face unsafe facilities, inadequate equipment, discriminatory attitudes, or limited access to trained female instructors. Sports education therefore needs to be supported by institutional planning, appropriate resources, and policies that protect the rights and dignity of female participants.In Pakistan and other societies where cultural and economic circumstances may influence women's participation in public activities, sports education can be especially valuable.

Girls may experience restrictions related to family expectations, access to sports facilities, transportation, clothing requirements, safety, and the availability of female coaches. These barriers can reduce participation even when schools formally provide physical education. Research conducted in Malakand Division, Pakistan, by Daraz and colleagues (2025) explored the relationship between education and women's empowerment in sports. The study highlighted the importance of education in challenging stereotypes, developing confidence, improving well-being, and creating opportunities for women athletes. This demonstrates the need for culturally responsive programmes that work with families, educational institutions, communities, and policymakers.The importance of sports education is also connected with wider international goals concerning gender equality, health, education, and social development. Equal access to physical education and sports enables girls to participate in activities that support their development and gives them opportunities to become visible in public and institutional life. UNESCO emphasizes that girls and women should have equal opportunities to participate in physical education and sports at all levels and should be

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P-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX | E-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX

protected from harassment, misconduct, and abuse. Therefore, sports education should not be treated as an optional activity or an area reserved for talented athletes. It should be considered an important educational opportunity for all girls, regardless of their economic background, physical ability, or social circumstances.The present study examines how sports education empowers women and girls through personal development, leadership, confidence, social inclusion, and greater awareness of gender equality. It also considers the barriers that prevent girls from participating fully in sports and identifies educational and institutional strategies that can support long-term improvement. By reviewing recent research and examining the relationship between sports education and empowerment, the study aims to demonstrate that inclusive sports programmes can contribute to individual development as well as broader social transformation.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

1. To examine the role of sports education in empowering women and girls by promoting self-confidence, leadership skills, social inclusion, personal development, and gender equality.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

1. How does sports education contribute to the empowerment of women and girls through confidence-building, leadership development, social participation, and equal educational opportunities?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Sports education is an educational process through which individuals develop physical abilities, sports knowledge, discipline, teamwork, leadership, and an understanding of healthy lifestyles. Its purpose extends beyond athletic performance because it can also contribute to personal growth, social development, and equal participation. For women and girls, sports education provides opportunities to develop skills and confidence in environments where traditional gender expectations may otherwise restrict their participation. It helps girls recognize their abilities, understand their rights, and become active members of educational and community life. Empowerment through sports education can therefore be understood as a process through which girls gain confidence, practical skills, independence, and opportunities to influence decisions affecting their lives. Ullah, R., & Liu, H. (2025). Explains thatThe relationship between sports education and gender equality has received increasing attention in recent research. Işıkgöz et al. (2025) conducted a systematic review of 65 studies examining the challenges and successes of gender equality in physical education and sports. Their findings identified educational programmes, awareness initiatives, supportive policies, female role models, and cooperative teaching methods as important factors in improving gender equality. The review also identified persistent challenges, including restrictive social norms, gender discrimination, inadequate knowledge among educators, limited resources, and insufficient social support. These findings suggest that sports education can contribute to empowerment when it is supported by long-term institutional and cultural change rather than isolated sporting activities. Sports education also creates opportunities for girls to develop a positive understanding of their own capabilities. When students receive appropriate instruction and encouragement, they can improve their physical skills and become more

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P-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX | E-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX

willing to participate in activities that they previously considered difficult. This experience may influence their attitudes toward education, public participation, and future responsibilities. Sports education should consequently be considered a part of holistic education, supporting not only physical development but also confidence, social awareness, and personal independence.

Self-confidence is one of the important dimensions of women's empowerment. Girls who participate in sports education have opportunities to set goals, practise skills, overcome difficulties, and evaluate their progress. These experiences can help them develop confidence in their abilities and reduce the fear of failure. Sports activities often require participants to make decisions under pressure, communicate with teammates, and take responsibility for individual and collective performance. Such experiences can strengthen a girl's belief that she can manage challenges in different areas of life.Confidence developed through sports education may also influence girls' participation in classroom discussions, institutional activities, and community programmes. A student who learns to express opinions during team activities may become more comfortable speaking in other educational settings. Similarly, achieving a sports-related goal can strengthen motivation and encourage further personal development. These outcomes are particularly meaningful for girls who have limited opportunities to participate in public activities or decision-making processes.Research conducted in Pakistan provides relevant evidence about the relationship between education and women's agency in sports. Goldstein, O., Lefèvre, L., Derigny, T., Potdevin, F., Maylaender, J., & Schnitzler, C. (2026). Elaborated on Daraz et al. (2025), in their study of women's empowerment in Malakand Division, examined the experiences of female students, athletes, educators, and community stakeholders. Their findings highlighted the role of education in developing confidence, challenging stereotypes, supporting well-being, and encouraging teamwork. The study also emphasized the importance of educational reforms, gender-inclusive programmes, institutional infrastructure, and community engagement. Self-confidence should not be treated as an automatic outcome of sports participation. It develops more effectively when girls receive positive feedback, fair opportunities, suitable training, and respect from teachers and fellow students. If sports environments involve humiliation, discrimination, or unequal treatment, participation may instead discourage students.Therefore, educators need to create supportive learning environments in which girls can improve at their own pace and experience achievement without unnecessary comparison or gender-based judgement.Leadership development is another major contribution of sports education to women's empowerment. Sports activities provide practical opportunities for girls to take responsibility, organize tasks, motivate teammates, and contribute to group decisions. In team sports, students may serve as captains, coordinate activities, resolve disagreements, and encourage others to achieve shared goals.

These experiences help them understand the importance of responsibility, communication, fairness, and cooperation. Leadership skills developed through sports can also be useful in academic, professional, and community environments.Sports education can challenge the assumption that leadership is naturally associated with men. When girls are given opportunities to lead teams, manage sporting events, participate in student sports councils, or assist in coaching activities, they can demonstrate their abilities and develop leadership experience. Such opportunities may also encourage institutions to recognize women as capable decision-makers in sports administration and educational management. Female teachers, coaches, and athletes can strengthen this process by acting as role models for

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P-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX | E-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX

younger students.Research on gender equality in physical education also supports the importance of female representation and supportive institutional practices. Işıkgöz et al. (2025) identified female role models and supportive policies among the strategies associated with progress in gender equality. Their findings indicate that visible female leadership can help challenge assumptions about women's abilities and encourage greater participation. Gender stereotypes are socially developed assumptions about the roles, abilities, interests, and behaviour considered appropriate for women and men. In sports, these assumptions may present certain activities as suitable for boys while discouraging girls from participating. Girls may be told that competitive sports are inappropriate, that physical strength is primarily a male characteristic, or that sports participation conflicts with traditional expectations of femininity. Such beliefs can affect family support, school participation, access to training, and the confidence of female students.Sports education can challenge these stereotypes by providing direct experiences that demonstrate the abilities and achievements of girls. When girls participate in different sporting activities, develop physical skills, and achieve individual or team goals, they challenge the idea that sports are naturally a male domain.

Mixed educational discussions, inclusive teaching methods, and equal access to sporting opportunities can also help boys and girls develop greater respect for one another. This process can gradually influence attitudes within educational institutions and communities.Caracuel-Cáliz et al. (2025) reviewed active methodologies and gender equality in physical education. Their work emphasizes the importance of reflecting on teaching practices because gender inequality can be reinforced through classroom organization, participation patterns, and traditional approaches to physical education. The use of inclusive and active methodologies can help create learning environments in which girls are encouraged to participate meaningfully. A 2026 systematic review by Galeano-Rojas et al. also examined gender equality in physical education. The review discussed students' perceptions of inequality, gender stereotypes, coeducational practices, and the influence of teachers. It highlighted the importance of teachers' attitudes and instructional decisions in either reproducing or challenging gender stereotypes. These findings suggest that gender equality should be integrated into the everyday practices of physical education rather than treated as a separate topic.Educational institutions are essential for providing structured and equal opportunities for sports participation. Schools introduce many girls to physical activity, while colleges and universities can offer more advanced training, competitions, coaching, and leadership opportunities. A supportive educational institution can reduce barriers by providing suitable equipment, trained teachers, safe playing areas, and a timetable that allows girls to participate. Sports clubs and inter-institutional competitions can also provide opportunities for students to develop their abilities and interact with wider sporting communities.The quality of sports education depends significantly on the attitudes and skills of teachers and coaches.

Urooj et al. (2026), in a stakeholder consensus study on school-based strategies for increasing girls' physical activity, reported agreement around approaches such as supportive school cultures, positive role models, safe spaces, and opportunities for student voice. The study also emphasized coordinated support across teaching practices, school systems, and policy. Educational institutions should also create pathways that allow girls to continue participating in sports after completing school. Scholarships, university sports teams, coaching opportunities, and partnerships with local sports organizations can help prevent participation from ending when students move to higher educational levels. Such continuity is important

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P-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX | E-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX

because empowerment is strengthened when girls have sustained access to opportunities rather than short-term programmes.Student-centred sports education recognizes girls as active contributors to the design and improvement of their learning experiences. Instead of treating students as passive recipients of instructions, participatory approaches allow them to identify barriers, discuss their experiences, propose solutions, and take part in decisions about sports activities. Žnidarec Čučković, A., Ćosić, B., & Dudley, D. (2026). revealed thatThis can help educational institutions understand why girls may feel uncomfortable or excluded and what changes would make participation more meaningful.Participatory methods can include student consultations, focus group discussions, peer-led sports activities, and collaborative planning of school competitions. Girls can be invited to identify which sports they wish to learn, what facilities they require, and which scheduling arrangements would make participation easier. These methods can help institutions develop programmes that reflect the actual needs of female students. They can also develop communication and decision-making skills by giving students responsibility for contributing to institutional improvement.Student-centred approaches are particularly useful when girls experience barriers that teachers or administrators may not immediately recognize. For example, students may be concerned about privacy, changing facilities, transport, inappropriate comments, or the timing of sports activities. Listening to their experiences can help institutions respond more effectively. Participatory education therefore supports empowerment both through sporting activity and through the process of giving girls a meaningful voice.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology based on the review and analysis of secondary sources related to sports education and women's empowerment. The research draws on academic journal articles, systematic reviews, research reports, and relevant scholarly publications, with particular attention to studies published during 2025 and 2026. The selected literature focuses on girls' participation in physical education, women's involvement in organized sports, gender equality, leadership development, educational opportunities, cultural barriers, and institutional support. A qualitative approach is suitable because the research seeks to understand the social and educational processes through which sports education may contribute to empowerment rather than measuring athletic performance alone.Relevant literature was examined to identify recurring ideas, arguments, and findings concerning the role of sports education in girls' personal and social development. The review considered studies from different geographical and educational contexts, including research conducted in Pakistan and other countries. Particular attention was given to the research objectives, methodologies, major findings, and recommendations of the selected publications. The information was organized according to themes such as self-confidence, leadership, gender equality, social inclusion, cultural restrictions, safe facilities, and educational policy. The study does not claim to have conducted interviews, surveys, or experiments with participants. Its conclusions are based on the interpretation and synthesis of previously published research.The analysis followed an organized process of identifying relevant literature, reviewing the content, grouping related findings, comparing the evidence, and developing common themes. Sources were considered for their relevance to the research question, publication date, and contribution to understanding sports education and empowerment. Since the study relies on secondary information, its findings should be interpreted as a synthesis of available research rather than as results from a newly conducted field investigation. The methodology provides a foundation for identifying major

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P-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX | E-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX

contributions, continuing barriers, and practical recommendations for improving sports education opportunities for women and girls.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

The study uses a qualitative descriptive research design supported by a thematic literature review. This design is appropriate because the purpose is to explore how sports education contributes to women's empowerment and to describe the educational, social, and institutional factors that influence this relationship. The research does not attempt to establish a numerical cause-and-effect relationship or test an intervention. Instead, it examines published evidence to understand how sports participation and educational practices may support confidence, leadership, personal development, and gender equality.The research design is organized around the central research question and the main concepts identified in the literature. These concepts include access to sports education, inclusive teaching practices, personal confidence, leadership opportunities, social support, cultural barriers, and institutional policies. Relevant studies are reviewed and compared to identify similarities and differences in their findings. Thematic categories are then used to organize the evidence and explain the ways in which sports education may influence the empowerment of women and girls.The design also considers the relevance of cultural and institutional contexts. Experiences of female students may differ according to their geographical location, economic background, educational opportunities, and community expectations. For this reason, the research gives attention to studies from Pakistan and other contexts instead of assuming that all girls experience the same barriers. The design supports a broad understanding of the subject while recognizing that further field research would be needed to measure the impact of particular sports education programmes within specific institutions.

## DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis is based on a qualitative thematic approach. Information gathered from the selected secondary sources was reviewed to identify recurring findings concerning the contribution of sports education to women's and girls' empowerment. The analysis began by examining the main objectives and conclusions of the selected studies. Relevant information was then grouped according to common topics, including confidence development, leadership skills, gender equality, educational participation, social inclusion, cultural restrictions, and institutional support. This process helped organize the literature into meaningful categories related to the research question.The first major analytical theme concerned personal development and confidence. The reviewed studies suggest that sports education can provide girls with opportunities to develop physical skills, overcome challenges, cooperate with others, and recognize their abilities. The second theme focused on leadership and decision-making. Evidence indicated that participation in team activities, sports organization, and coaching-related responsibilities can provide opportunities for girls to practise communication, responsibility, and leadership. The third theme examined gender equality and social inclusion. The analysis considered how inclusive teaching, female role models, and supportive policies may challenge stereotypes and improve girls' access to sports.The final themes focused on barriers and institutional responsibilities. The literature identified cultural expectations, limited facilities, inadequate resources, mobility restrictions, and insufficient social support as factors that may reduce participation. These findings were compared to identify common challenges and possible solutions. The analysis suggests that

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sports education is more likely to support empowerment when educational institutions provide safe facilities, trained teachers, equal opportunities, and meaningful participation in decision-making. Since the study uses secondary sources, the analysis does not include original numerical survey results or statistical tests. It provides a thematic interpretation of published evidence.

## FINDINGS

The analysis of the reviewed literature identifies several important findings concerning the role of sports education in empowering women and girls.The findings indicate that sports education can strengthen girls' self-confidence by providing opportunities to develop physical skills, overcome challenges, and achieve personal goals. Participation in sports encourages girls to recognize their abilities and become more comfortable expressing themselves. Confidence developed through sporting experiences may also support participation in classroom activities, institutional responsibilities, and community life.The reviewed literature suggests that sports activities provide practical opportunities for girls to develop leadership and decision-making skills. Responsibilities such as leading a team, organizing competitions, supporting teammates, and making group decisions can improve communication and responsibility. These skills may also be useful in academic, professional, and social environments.A major finding is that sports education can challenge traditional beliefs that competitive sports and leadership are primarily male activities. When girls receive equal opportunities to participate, train, and compete, they can demonstrate their abilities and challenge gender-based assumptions. However, these changes require supportive teachers, positive role models, and equal institutional treatment.Schools, colleges, and universities are important environments for promoting girls' participation in sports.The findings indicate that physical education programmes, sports clubs, competitions, and coaching opportunities can improve access and encourage continued participation. Institutions that provide inclusive teaching methods and equal opportunities are better positioned to support girls' development.Sports activities can bring girls together through teamwork, cooperation, and shared goals.Participation may help them develop friendships, communication skills, and a sense of belonging. Inclusive sports programmes can also create opportunities for girls from different social and economic backgrounds to participate in educational and community activities.The literature identifies cultural expectations, family concerns, restricted mobility, financial limitations, and gender stereotypes as significant barriers to women's sports participation. Research conducted in Pakistan and Nepal demonstrates that social conditions can influence girls' freedom and opportunities to participate. These barriers indicate the need for community awareness, family engagement, and culturally responsive educational programmes.

## CONCLUSION

Sports education plays a significant role in empowering women and girls by providing opportunities for physical development, confidence-building, leadership, teamwork, and social participation. It enables girls to recognize their abilities, develop independence, and challenge traditional assumptions about women's roles in sports and society. Through organized physical education, school competitions, sports clubs, and coaching programmes, girls can gain valuable experiences that contribute to their personal, educational, and social development. The study demonstrates that sports education should be viewed not only as a

physical activity but also as an educational process that can support women's empowerment and gender equality.The study also highlights that several barriers continue to restrict girls' participation in sports. Cultural expectations, gender discrimination, limited facilities, financial difficulties, safety concerns, and insufficient institutional support can prevent girls from accessing equal opportunities. These challenges demonstrate that empowerment cannot be achieved through participation alone. Schools, colleges, universities, families, communities, and policymakers must work together to establish inclusive and supportive sporting environments. Educational institutions should provide trained teachers, female coaches, appropriate facilities, equal access to equipment, and opportunities for girls to participate in leadership and decision-making activities. Community awareness programmes can also help develop positive attitudes toward women's sports participation.In conclusion, sports education should be recognized as an essential part of inclusive and empowering education for women and girls. Governments and educational institutions should develop long-term policies that promote equal participation, protect female students, and provide continuous opportunities for sports training and development. Future research should examine the experiences of girls from different educational, cultural, and economic backgrounds to understand how sports education programmes can be improved. By ensuring equal access and meaningful participation, sports education can contribute to stronger individuals, more inclusive educational institutions, and a society in which women and girls have greater opportunities to develop their abilities and achieve their goals.

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