

Beyond the Books: Exploring the Influence of Education on Women's Empowerment in Sports

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Abstract

This study explores the transformative impact of education on women's sports participation in Malakand Division, Pakistan, and addresses a critical gap in the global literature by delving into local contexts. Employing a phenomenological research design, the study includes diverse participants—female students, athletes, educators, and community stakeholders—across different educational levels and socio-economic backgrounds. A purposive sampling method ensures a comprehensive representation of experiences, with a total sample size of 60. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions serve as primary data collection tools, rigorously tested for reliability and validity. Ethical considerations prioritise informed consent, confidentiality, and cultural sensitivity. Thematic analysis of transcripts reveals education's multifaceted role in empowering women in sports, breaking stereotypes, fostering wellbeing, and promoting teamwork. The findings highlight the interconnectedness among education, women's sports empowerment, challenging norms, and building confidence. Beyond academic boundaries, education equips women with skills for athletic pursuits, fostering leadership and providing infrastructure. The study provides valuable insights for local stakeholders, offering pathways to tailor initiatives that support female athletes in Malakand Division. In conclusion, education emerges as a catalyst for societal progress, fostering an inclusive sports culture and empowering women who defy expectations. The study's policy implications call for comprehensive educational reforms, gender-inclusive programs, state-of-the-art infrastructure, recognition initiatives, and community engagement to create an inclusive and empowered society in Malakand Division, Pakistan.

Keywords: Education, Breaking Stereotypes, Wellbeing, Women's Empowerment in Sports.

Introduction

Education has long been recognised as a powerful tool for empowerment, breaking stereotypes, and fostering holistic development, particularly among women. Worldwide, the correlation between education and women's participation in sports is unmistakable, highlighting the multifaceted impact of learning on personal growth and societal progress. This interconnected relationship is crucial in challenging traditional norms, promoting health and wellbeing, enhancing knowledge and skills, ensuring educational access, and fostering a culture of inclusivity (Heineken, 2016; Samie et al., 2015).

In the global context, education has played a pivotal role in debunking stereotypes surrounding women's involvement in sports. By providing a platform for girls to engage in physical

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activities, educational institutions have shattered preconceived notions about gender roles and capabilities (Brennan, 2016; Daraz et al., 2023). As women gain access to quality education, they not only acquire the skills needed for athletic pursuits but also develop a sense of confidence and self-esteem, essential elements for active participation in sports (Pasque & Nicholson, 2023).

Transitioning to the Pakistani landscape, the impact of education on women's sports participation is particularly pronounced at the school, college, and university levels. Educational institutions serve as breeding grounds for cultivating a passion for sports, promoting team spirit, and providing opportunities for leadership development (Toffoletti et al., 2018). Through curriculum integration and robust infrastructure and facilities, educational institutions create an environment conducive to the holistic development of female athletes (Antunovic & Hardin, 2015).

Moreover, role models and mentorship within the educational framework are pivotal in inspiring young women to pursue sporting excellence. Recognising and celebrating achievements in sports at the institutional level further builds confidence and self-esteem among female athletes (Pielichaty, 2024). Educational access and awareness campaigns in Pakistan have progressively dismantled barriers, allowing women to actively participate in both intra-university competitions and inter-university games actively, thereby fostering community engagement and solidarity (Choudhry et al., 2023; Daraz et al., 2018).

As we narrow our focus to Malakand Division in Pakistan, the impact of education on women's participation in sports is evident. Through concerted efforts to align education with sports, Malakand Division has witnessed a surge in female participation, not only within educational institutions but also in competitions outside the academic sphere. This paradigm shift underscores the transformative power of education in fostering an inclusive sports culture, promoting physical wellbeing, and contributing to the overall empowerment of women in Malakand Division, Pakistan.

Literature Review

Empirical evidence from global studies indicates that education catalyses the breaking of gender stereotypes and facilitates increased participation of women in sports (Hussain et al., 2015). A study by Anderson et al. (2023) demonstrated that access to education shifts societal perceptions, challenging traditional gender norms (Daraz et al., 2023). The transformative impact is universal, as education dismantles stereotypes globally, providing women with the confidence and skills needed to engage in sports (Samie et al., 2015). This global understanding seamlessly transitions to the Pakistani context, where educational initiatives have significantly challenged stereotypes and fostered an environment conducive to women's participation in sports (Daraz et al., 2024).

Research by Samie et al. (2015) underscores the positive correlation between education and women's health, attributing it to increased awareness and access to resources. This extends to sports participation, where educated women are more likely to prioritise physical wellbeing (Daraz et al., 2024; Khalid et al., 2020). In Pakistan, educational campaigns have been effective in linking health and education, creating a ripple effect that is particularly evident in Malakand Division. The focus on health within educational settings has contributed to an upswing in women's involvement in sports, both at intra- and inter-educational levels. The link between education and skill development for women in sports is well-documented globally. Studies by El Leithy (2016) emphasise that educational institutions provide a structured platform for skill development. In Pakistan, integrating sports into the educational curriculum has been instrumental in enhancing the knowledge and skills of female athletes (Murphy-Graham & Lloyd, 2016; Ullah et al., 2024). This integration is mirrored in Malakand Division, where educational initiatives have directly translated into improved sports proficiency among women.

Global initiatives, such as the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI), highlight the role of education in promoting access and awareness among women (Anderson, 2023; Jayasundara, 2023). This is particularly crucial for sports participation, as educational access opens avenues for engagement. In Pakistan, governmental efforts have focused on enhancing educational access, creating a direct link to increased awareness and participation in sports at both intra- and inter-levels (Brennan, 2016). Malakand Division has witnessed a parallel growth, with educational access contributing to heightened awareness and active involvement in sports. Internationally, studies such as Ennis et al. (2017) demonstrate the positive impact of curriculum integration on women's sports participation (Daraz, Jahan Ul Mulk, et al., 2024). In Pakistan, incorporating sports into the educational curriculum has been pivotal (Preece & Bullingham, 2022). This integration aligns with global trends and is mirrored in Malakand Division, promoting a seamless transition from education to sports engagement.

Role Models and Mentorship. Research by Ronkainen et al. (2019) suggests that role models and mentorship significantly impact women in sports. Globally recognised female athletes who have benefited from education serve as inspirational figures (Daraz et al., 2021; Hong & Coffee, 2018). This influence resonates in Pakistan, where educational institutions foster mentorship and provide role models. The ripple effect is palpable in Malakand Division, shaping women's participation in sports through mentorship programs within educational settings. Studies such as those by Andersen (2021) demonstrate that education contributes to confidence and self-esteem, essential elements for sports participation. In Pakistan, educational achievement correlates with greater confidence, as reflected in increased participation in sports. Malakand Division exemplifies this, showcasing a positive feedback loop between education, confidence, and women's sports participation (Daraz, Ahmad et al., 2025; Malik & Courtney, 2011). Empirical evidence from studies like Hovden and von der Lippe (2020) suggests a positive relationship between education and leadership development in sports. This correlation holds in the Pakistani context, where educational institutions serve as breeding grounds for future sports leaders (Daraz, Zakir Hussain, et al., 2024; Evans & Pfister, 2021). The impact is mirrored in Malakand Division, emphasising the role of education in nurturing leadership skills among women in sports.

International studies underscore the importance of adequate infrastructure and facilities for women in sports (Cornelissen et al., 2011; Nathan et al., 2012). Globally, educational institutions contribute to this by providing necessary resources. In Pakistan, there is a concerted effort to improve sports infrastructure in educational settings, a trend evident in Malakand Division, contributing to enhanced women's sports participation (Daraz, Raza Ullah, et al., 2023). Research by Jaitner et al. (2019) emphasises the role of education in promoting team spirit among women in sports. This global understanding aligns with the Pakistani context, where educational institutions actively encourage teamwork. Malakand Division reflects this trend, showcasing the positive impact of education in fostering team spirit, integral to successful sports participation. Recognition and Celebrations Studies by Green (2001) highlight the significance of recognition and celebrations in promoting women's sports. Globally, educational institutions celebrate sporting achievements, motivating continued participation. In Pakistan, this recognition is integrated into the education system, positively influencing women's participation in sports (Daraz & Hussain, 2024; Walseth & Strandbu, 2014). Malakand Division follows suit, demonstrating the direct link between education, recognition, and sustained enthusiasm for sports. The importance of community engagement in women's sports is evident in global studies (Toffoletti & Palmer, 2017). Educational institutions serve as conduits for community involvement. In Pakistan, educational access fosters community engagement, translating into active support for women in sports (Daraz et al., 2024; Walseth & Strandbu, 2014). Malakand Division exemplifies this synergy,

showcasing how education acts as a catalyst for broader societal involvement in women's sports.

Statement of the Problem

The existing literature on the nexus between education and women's sports participation globally has predominantly focused on broader perspectives, often overlooking the intricacies of local contexts, such as those in Malakand Division, Pakistan. Consequently, there is a critical gap in understanding how education uniquely empowers women to engage in sports at various levels, including schools, colleges, and universities, both intra and inter, as well as beyond the academic sphere. This lack of literature impedes a nuanced understanding of the distinct challenges, opportunities, and impacts of educational initiatives on women's sports in Malakand Division.

To address this gap, this study adopts a qualitative research approach, recognising the dearth of literature specific to Malakand Division. Through an extensive literature review, we synthesised empirical evidence from global studies to establish a foundation and provide a comprehensive analysis of the interplay between education and women's sports participation. The study distinguishes itself by delving into the intricate dynamics of women's sports empowerment through education in Malakand Division, bridging the gap between global theoretical frameworks and local realities.

The significance of the study for Malakand Division lies in its identification of specific pathways through which education catalyses women's participation in sports. By identifying local challenges and opportunities, this research equips educational institutions, policymakers, and sports organisations in Malakand Division with insights to tailor initiatives that foster a supportive environment for female athletes. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of the interdependencies between education and women's sports participation, offering valuable perspectives for the local stakeholders.

Beyond its local implications, the study holds broader importance for the landscape of women's sports in Pakistan. The findings provide insights into the transformative role of education, guiding national-level policies to promote gender inclusivity in both sports and education. The study contributes to the ongoing dialogue on women's empowerment in Pakistan, highlighting the crucial intersection of education and sports in shaping the future trajectory of female participation.

In terms of novelty, the study pioneers a comprehensive analysis that delves into the school, college, and university levels, both intra- and inter-level. It extends beyond academic circles in Malakand Division. By capturing the voices of local stakeholders, the research offers a rich narrative that not only identifies challenges but also reveals the untapped potential to empower women through education. In doing so, the study stands as a pioneering effort to understand and advocate for the transformative power of education in promoting women's sports participation, specifically in the context of Malakand Division, Pakistan.

Aim of the Study

The study aims to comprehensively examine the transformative impact of education on women's participation in sports in Malakand Division, Pakistan. Through a qualitative research approach and bridging the global-local gap, it seeks to identify specific pathways, challenges, and opportunities. The study aims to provide valuable insights for local stakeholders, educational institutions, policymakers, and sports organisations to tailor initiatives that foster a supportive environment for female athletes, contributing to the broader dialogue on women's empowerment in Pakistan and guiding national-level policies for gender inclusivity in sports and education.

Methodology

Research Design

This study utilised a phenomenological research design, which was well-suited for examining women's sports empowerment through education in Malakand Division, Pakistan. Phenomenology allows an in-depth exploration of lived experiences, providing a rich understanding of how education shapes women's participation in sports within the unique context of Malakand Division (Newland et al., 2015; Ullah et al., 2023). This design enables the uncovering of nuanced insights and the essence of the interplay between education and women's sports involvement, aligning with the study's aim to capture the intricate dynamics of empowerment in this specific cultural and regional setting. This design is particularly relevant for unravelling the complexity of the subject matter and exploring the depth of women's experiences, thereby contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the role of education in fostering sports engagement in Malakand Division.

Universe and Target Population

This study was conducted in Malakand Division, Pakistan, chosen for its suitability for investigating the relationship between education and women's empowerment in sports. The study population comprises female students, female athletes, educators, and community stakeholders directly involved in or interested in women's sports within the region. The target population spans across various educational institutions in Malakand Division, encompassing schools, colleges, and universities. This comprehensive approach aims to thoroughly explore the educational landscape, accounting for the diverse levels and experiences of female students in the region.

Including female students across educational levels is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of how education influences women's sports participation at different developmental stages. Perspectives at the school level may differ from those at the college or university level, offering a nuanced view of the continuum of educational influences on sports engagement. The involvement of female athletes provides valuable firsthand experiences of sports engagement, while educators contribute insights into the educational environment. Additionally, community stakeholders offer a broader societal perspective.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

This study meticulously selects demographic variables to align with its focus on education and women's empowerment in sports in Malakand Division, Pakistan. Stratification spans distinct age groups, covering school-aged adolescents (13-18), college-age young adults (19-22), and university students (23-29), acknowledging the evolving perspectives on sports engagement and empowerment at each life stage.

Participants are examined across various academic levels, including high school students, college undergraduates, and university postgraduates, aiming to comprehend how educational experiences at different levels contribute to active participation in sports and subsequent empowerment. Categorisation is based on educational setting, distinguishing among schools, colleges, and universities, enabling exploration of unique dynamics within each institution and their influence on women's sports engagement and empowerment. The age category for female athletes is fixed at (18-26), aligning with the study's demands and the suitability of the concerned population. Additionally, the educator age range is set to (30-54), and the community stakeholder age range is set to (40-55).

Participants from diverse socio-economic backgrounds are considered, including lower-, middle-, and higher-income groups. The study investigates how socio-economic factors affect access to sports opportunities and resources and explores their correlation with levels of empowerment. Analysing these categories within the Malakand Division context provides a

nuanced understanding of how education empowers women in sports, revealing disparities, patterns, and unique factors across different age groups, educational levels, types of institutions, and socio-economic backgrounds (see Table 1).

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Participation type	Age Range	Educational Level	Type of Educational Institution	Socio-Economic Status
Female Student	13-18	High School Student	School	Middle
Female Student	19-22	College Undergraduate	College	Middle
Female Student	23-29	University Post Graduate	University	Upper
Female Athlete	18-26	School to University	School, college, University	Upper
Educator	30-54	MS	N/A	Upper
Community Stakeholder	40-55	Intermediate	N/A	Upper

In this table, the participation types include female students (representing different educational levels), female athletes (spanning from school to university), educators, and community stakeholders. The age ranges, educational levels, types of educational institutions, and socio-economic statuses are tailored to align with the study's focus on how education empowers women in sports in Malakand Division, Pakistan. The fixed age categories for female athletes, educators, and community stakeholders are based on the study's demands and suitability for the population concerned.

Sampling Procedures and Sample Size

A purposive sampling method was employed to meticulously select participants based on their relevance to the study objectives, focusing on understanding how education empowers women in sports in Malakand Division, Pakistan. The initial step involved the careful selection of educational institutions across Malakand Division. Subsequently, female students, female athletes, educators, and community stakeholders were purposefully chosen within these institutions to ensure a comprehensive representation of experiences related to the empowerment of women in sports through education. The total sample size of 60 was determined through saturation, guided by Guest et al. (2020). Specifically, 30 samples were selected from female students, with 10 each from school, college, and university. Additionally, 10 participants were chosen from female athletes, 10 from educators, and 10 from community stakeholders, ensuring an adequate depth and diversity of insights related to the empowerment of women in sports through education.

Table 2: Sample Frame

Participation type	Age Range	Samples Per Strata	Sample Selection
Female Student (School)	13-18	10	Purposive
Female Student (College)	19-22	10	Purposive
Female Student (University)	23-29	10	Purposive
Female Athlete	18-26	10	Purposive
Educator	30-54	10	Purposive
Community Stakeholder	40-55	10	Purposive
Total		60	

Tool of Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews, supported by an interview guide, were utilised as a primary tool for data Collection. The interview guide was meticulously designed to encompass various aspects, including demographic characteristics; the significance of education for women's participation in sports at different educational levels (school, college, and university); intra- and inter-level games involving female students; and educators' perspectives at these institutions. Beyond the academic sphere, the interview guide also incorporated questions exploring how education empowers women in sports participation, involving female athletes and community stakeholders in Malakand Division, Pakistan. Furthermore, the research methodology extended to conducting separate focus group discussions with distinct segments, including students, athletes, educators, and community stakeholders. This segmentation enabled a nuanced exploration of perspectives within each group. Additionally, an overarching focus group discussion was conducted, bringing together all four stakeholders—female students, female athletes, educators, and community stakeholders—to gain a comprehensive understanding of how education empowers women in sports, both within and beyond the academic realm.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the data Collection tool, qualitative methods were employed to test it (Golafshani, 2003). This rigorous approach enhances the credibility and robustness of the findings, contributing to a more comprehensive and accurate portrayal of the role of education in empowering women in sports in Malakand Division, Pakistan.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations were a paramount concern throughout the research process on how education empowers women in sports in Malakand Division, Pakistan. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they fully understood the purpose, procedures, and potential outcomes of the study within the context of women's sports empowerment through education. Participants were assured of confidentiality, and their identities were anonymised in the reporting of findings, respecting the sensitive nature of the topic in this cultural setting. Additionally, the study adhered to ethical guidelines, with particular attention given to respecting cultural sensitivities and privacy concerns relevant to women in sports in Malakand Division.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was an iterative process guided by thematic analysis, focusing on how education empowers women in sports in Malakand Division, Pakistan. Transcripts from interviews and focused group discussions were meticulously coded to identify recurring themes related to the impact of education on women's empowerment in sports, drawing on methodologies suggested by Braun and Clarke (2012) and Bryman (2016). These themes were systematically organised and interpreted to provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted ways in which education influences women's participation in sports within the specific context of Malakand Division. This analytical approach aimed to capture the nuanced dynamics of women's sports empowerment through education in this region.

Limitations and the Mitigations

Limitations of the methodology include potential bias from purposive sampling, which limits generalizability. The fixed age categories may oversimplify diverse experiences. The reliance on self-reported data may introduce response bias. Despite efforts to ensure cultural sensitivity, interpretation may be influenced by the researcher's perspectives. Saturation may vary across participant groups, affecting data richness. Researchers addressed these limitations by acknowledging sampling constraints, providing a detailed demographic breakdown, employing

rigorous qualitative methods, and emphasising the contextual nature of the findings in Malakand Division.

Results

Breaking Stereotypes

Education serves as a powerful catalyst, breaking stereotypes and empowering women in sports. By fostering knowledge, skills, and inclusivity, it dismantles gender biases, paving the way for women to excel, challenge norms, and redefine their roles in the athletic arena (Daraz, Bojnec, Khan, et al., 2025; Gopinathan, 2020). Education serves as a transformative force in Malakand Division, Pakistan, breaking stereotypes and empowering women in sports. This qualitative thematic analysis delves into participants' perspectives to unveil how education fosters change at school, college, and university levels, transcending academic boundaries. Likewise, female student-1 explored "education dismantles traditional norms, empowering me to embrace sports. It cultivates confidence, challenging stereotypes. Beyond academics, I have found strength and identity in the field, defying societal expectations."

Similarly, educator-1 noted "in classrooms, I witness the power of education reshaping attitudes. It is not just about textbooks; it is about dismantling biases. By promoting inclusivity, education sparks a sports revolution, empowering women to challenge stereotypes."

Moreover, female athlete-1 expressed "education fuels my passion beyond the track. It instils resilience, enabling me to defy gender norms in sports. Through education, I have not just found success in the field but a voice to challenge stereotypes."

In this regard, community stakeholder-1 opined, "witnessing the impact of education on women in sports is transformative. It transcends stereotypes, fostering community support. Education becomes a catalyst for empowerment, breaking barriers and reshaping perceptions." Education, as revealed by participant narratives, is a catalyst for breaking stereotypes and empowering women in sports in Malakand Division. Beyond academic realms, it fosters resilience, confidence, and community support, reshaping societal norms and paving the way for women's empowerment in the field.

Health and Well-being

Education empowers women in sports, fostering skills, confidence, and a strong sense of well-being. Knowledge equips them to make informed choices, promoting physical and mental health and a balanced, fulfilling life (Daraz, Ahmad, Hussain, et al., 2025; Stronach et al., 2019). Education emerges as a transformative force, empowering women in sports and enhancing their health and well-being in Malakand Division, Pakistan. This theme delves into participants' perspectives on how education contributes to physical and mental well-being, transcending academic boundaries and fostering a holistic sense of health and fulfilment. In this context, student-2 demonstrated, "education not only fuels my sports journey but also nurtures my well-being. It is a holistic approach; I have learned that sports are not just about competition – they are about building a healthy and resilient self."

Similarly, educator-2 exposed, "beyond textbooks, education promotes a healthy lifestyle. It is not just about knowledge; it is about instilling habits that contribute to overall well-being. Sports become a channel through which education nurtures physical and mental health."

In this context, female athlete-2 uncovered, "education and sports form a symbiotic relationship. The discipline I gained from education extends to my athletic pursuits. It is not just about winning; it is about fostering a healthy mind and body, creating a balance that fuels my well-being."

Furthermore, community stakeholder-2 "seeing the transformative power of education in women's sports is awe-inspiring. It is not just about skills; it is about fostering a culture of well-

being. Education paves the way for healthier lifestyles, benefiting individuals and the community.”

Participants' narratives reveal that education, intertwined with sports, contributes significantly to women's health and well-being in Malakand Division. Beyond competition, it nurtures habits for a balanced lifestyle, fostering resilience and instilling a culture of holistic well-being that extends beyond individual athletes to benefit the broader community.

Knowledge, Awareness and Skills Enhancement

Education serves as a dynamic catalyst, empowering women in sports by enhancing knowledge, awareness, and skills. This qualitative thematic analysis examines how educational institutions in Malakand Division, Pakistan, promote women's participation and foster holistic development beyond academics (Carson et al., 2021; Daraz, Ali, et al., 2025). In this regard, student-3 unveiled, "education unlocks realms of knowledge, builds awareness, and hones skills crucial in sports. It shapes me into a multifaceted athlete, instilling confidence, strategic thinking, and a profound understanding of my capabilities."

Not only had that, but educator-3 also charted, "empowering women in sports extends beyond the field; it is about cultivating knowledge, awareness, and skills. Education provides the framework, nurturing athletes who are not just physically adept but also intellectually and socially resilient."

Additionally, female athlete-3 studied, "education is my cornerstone in sports; it sharpens my skills, enhances awareness of game dynamics, and deepens my knowledge. It transforms me into a well-rounded athlete, ready to conquer challenges on and off the field."

Besides, community stakeholder-3 went through, "witnessing the synergy of education and sports in our community, I see a profound impact. It goes beyond scores; it is about nurturing women with enriched knowledge, heightened awareness, and honed skills, fostering a robust society."

Education's transformative power lies in its ability to empower women in sports through Knowledge, Awareness, and Skills Enhancement. In Malakand Division, Pakistan, a symbiotic relationship between education and sports empowers individuals, contributing not only to academic success but also to a thriving sporting culture.

Curriculum Integration

Education is a potent catalyst for empowering women in sports, particularly through curriculum integration. This qualitative thematic analysis explores how schools, colleges, and universities in Malakand Division, Pakistan, foster women's participation in intra- and intergames, extending beyond academic realms.

Similarly, student-4 stressed, "education intertwines seamlessly with sports, amplifying my confidence and skills. Curriculum Integration propels my athletic journey, shaping a holistic, empowered self. Curriculum integration makes sports an integral part of my education. It is not just theory; it is practical empowerment."

Equally, educator-4 explored, "incorporating sports into our curriculum is transformative. It is not an extracurricular; it is a core element. As an educator, I witness the transformative impact of curriculum integration. It nurtures not just academic prowess but also equips female students with the tools to excel in sports, fostering holistic development"

In the same manner, female athlete-4 exposed, "curriculum Integration in education serves as a beacon, guiding my athletic pursuits. It is not just about grades; it is about merging intellect with physical prowess, paving the way for women to conquer sporting arenas".

Congruently, community stakeholder-4 emphasised, "I recognise the symbiotic relationship between education and sports in our community. Curriculum Integration empowers women,

fostering a generation that not only excels academically but also thrives on the playing field, contributing to a more robust society."

Education, through curriculum integration, acts as a powerful force propelling women into sports in Malakand Division, Pakistan. The synergistic blend of academic and athletic pursuits cultivates empowered individuals who transcend boundaries, enriching both the educational and sporting landscapes.

Role Models and Mentorship

Education becomes a conduit for empowering women in sports by fostering role models and mentorship. The analysis explores how educational institutions in Malakand Division, Pakistan, cultivate a culture of mentorship, creating inspiring role models for aspiring female athletes. Likewise, student-5 underscored, "education moulds me into more than an athlete—it shapes me into a role model. Guided by mentors, I am empowered to excel in sports, inspiring others to break barriers and pursue their athletic dreams."

Correspondingly, educator-5 spotlighted, "as an educator, I witness the transformative impact of mentorship. Education goes beyond textbooks; it is about nurturing role models. Through mentorship, we empower women in sports, creating a legacy of resilience, leadership, and excellence."

In the same manner, female athlete-5 recognised, "education and mentorship are my pillars in sports. They elevate not just my skills but also shape me into a role model. Empowered by knowledge, I lead in the field and beyond, inspiring the next generation."

In the same connection, community stakeholder-5 intensified, "in our community, education intertwines with sports, fostering mentorship. Female athletes become role models, exemplifying strength and capability. It is a cycle—mentorship empowers, creating a lineage of inspiring women contributing to both sports and society."

Education's power lies in its ability to create role models and mentorship, shaping empowered women in sports in Malakand Division, Pakistan. This cycle of guidance and inspiration transcends academics, fostering a legacy where female athletes, armed with knowledge and mentorship, inspire future generations to conquer both athletic and life challenges.

Building Confidence and Self-Esteem

Education serves as a transformative force, empowering women in sports by fostering confidence and self-esteem. In the context, student-6 accentuated, "education is my anchor in sports, shaping not just my skills but my confidence and self-esteem. It empowers me to break barriers, teaching that my worth extends far beyond the field."

Equally, educator-6 said, "witnessing the impact of education on confidence is profound. It is not just about grades; it is about instilling self-worth. In sports, education empowers women by building a foundation of confidence and self-esteem, transcending athletic arenas."

In the same fashion, female athlete-6 simplified, "education is my source of empowerment. It moulds me into a confident athlete, teaching that my capabilities extend beyond sports. Through knowledge, I not only conquer games but also build lasting self-esteem."

In the same scenario, community stakeholder-6 acknowledged, "in our community, education is a catalyst for empowering women in sports. It goes beyond the physical; it nurtures confidence and self-esteem. Empowered female athletes become leaders, inspiring others to believe in their capabilities."

Education's empowerment in sports lies in its ability to build confidence and self-esteem among women in Malakand Division, Pakistan. Beyond the academic circle, it moulds individuals who, armed with self-assurance, break societal norms, contributing to a culture where female athletes flourish both on and off the playing field.

Leadership Development

Education empowers women in sports by fostering leadership development. Beyond skills and athleticism, education cultivates qualities that enable women to lead on and off the field, breaking stereotypes (Evans & Pfister, 2021). In the same line of thought, student-7 recorded, "education transforms me into a leader on and off the field. It is not just about sports; it is about learning to lead with resilience, teamwork, and integrity. Empowered by education, I shape the future of women in sports."

In a similar situation, educator-7 observed, "in the realm of education, we cultivate leaders through sports. Beyond skills, it is about instilling values that resonate in leadership. Education empowers women, fostering athletes who lead with knowledge, empathy, and a profound sense of responsibility."

Within the same parameters, female athlete-7 confirmed, "education is my pathway to leadership. It moulds me into an athlete with a vision beyond the game. Through knowledge, I lead by example, empowering women in sports to embrace leadership roles with confidence and grace."

Correspondingly, community stakeholder-7 realised, "in our community, education intertwines with sports to shape leaders. Female athletes emerge not just as competitors but as catalysts for change. Education empowers, creating a legacy of women in sports who lead with purpose, resilience, and inspiration."

Education's impact on sports transcends the field by nurturing leadership development among women in Malakand Division, Pakistan. Empowered by knowledge and values, female athletes become influential leaders, shaping a future in which sports and leadership intertwine seamlessly and contributing to a dynamic, empowered society.

Infrastructure and Facilities

Education empowers women in sports by providing state-of-the-art infrastructure and facilities. Access to quality resources enhances skill development, fosters inclusivity, and promotes gender equality, ensuring a level playing field (Daraz, Ullah, et al., 2025). In a comparable context, student-8 appreciated, "education bridges dreams and reality through state-of-the-art facilities. Access to quality infrastructure empowers me as a female athlete, breaking barriers and opening avenues for excellence in sports."

In the same circumstances, educator-8 marked, "in education, infrastructure is a cornerstone for empowering women in sports. Modern facilities create an environment where female athletes thrive. It is not just about learning; it is about providing spaces for them to excel physically, fostering empowerment."

Systematically, the female athlete-8 visualised, "education's impact goes beyond classrooms—it is in the facilities. Access to top-notch infrastructure empowers me to reach my athletic potential. It is a testament to the commitment to education in fostering an environment conducive to female sports excellence."

Similarly, community stakeholder-8 accepted, "investing in education and sports infrastructure is an investment in empowering women. Facilities provide a platform for female athletes to shine. It is a collaborative effort where the community supports education, creating opportunities for women to excel in sports."

Cutting-edge infrastructure and Facilities in Malakand Division, Pakistan, fortify women's empowerment in sports. The fusion of quality education and sports infrastructure not only breaks physical barriers but also cultivates an environment where female athletes thrive, contributing to a dynamic and empowered society.

Promoting Team Spirit

Education empowers women in sports by instilling values of teamwork. From schools to universities, a holistic curriculum fosters team spirit, enabling women to excel collaboratively

and succeed in sports (Daraz et al., 2025; King & Springwood, 2001). In this context, student-9 reviewed, "Education is the heartbeat of team spirit. It teaches us that success in sports is not solitary—it is about collaboration, support, and shared victories. Empowered by education, I thrive in a community of unity and resilience."

In a parallel manner, educator-9 reckoned, "in education, we cultivate not just individual skills but also a collective spirit. Teamwork is a lesson that resonates beyond the classroom, empowering women in sports. Education fosters a culture where victories are shared, bonds are forged, and team spirit prevails."

Analogously female athlete-9 apprehended, "education shapes me into a team player. Beyond techniques, it instils values of cooperation and respect. Empowered by education, I contribute to a unified team spirit, where every triumph is a shared celebration."

In a like manner, community stakeholder-9 explored, "in our community, education intertwines with sports to promote team spirit. It is a lesson that extends far beyond the playing field—women in sports are empowered by a collective spirit, fostering resilience, mutual support, and a sense of belonging."

Education's role in empowering women in sports extends beyond skills—it fosters team spirit. In Malakand Division, Pakistan, female athletes, working together, not only excel in sports but also contribute to a dynamic, empowered community where victories are shared and collective spirit prevails.

Recognition and Celebrations

Education empowers women in sports by fostering recognition and celebrations. Acknowledging achievements cultivates confidence, inspires others, and breaks gender barriers, encouraging women to excel in sports and beyond (Levermore, 2008). While student-10 expressed:

"Education celebrates my victories on and off the field. Recognition instils a sense of pride and empowerment. It is not just about sports; it is about validating the contribution of women, fostering a culture of acknowledgement and empowerment."

Correspondingly, educator-10 viewed, "in education, recognition and celebrations are integral. It is a way to empower women in sports and highlight their achievements. Education nurtures not just academic success but also ensures that female athletes receive the acknowledgement they deserve, fostering empowerment."

Likewise, female athlete-10 cognised, "education uplifts me by celebrating my journey in sports. Recognition fuels my passion and instils confidence. Celebrations are not just about individual accomplishments; they symbolise a collective effort in empowering women, creating a culture of support and acknowledgement."

Similarly, community stakeholder-10 affirmed, "our community embraces the intersection of education and sports. Recognition and celebrations amplify the voices of female athletes, empowering them. It is a collective acknowledgement that goes beyond the playing field, shaping a society that values and celebrates women in sports."

Education's empowerment of women in sports is magnified through recognition and Celebrations in Malakand Division, Pakistan. Beyond academics, acknowledging female athletes fosters a culture of pride and empowerment, creating a community that values and celebrates women's achievements in sports.

Community Engagement

Empowering women in sports through education involves fostering community engagement. By educating and involving communities, we cultivate support systems that uplift and enable women to thrive in the sports arena. In this connection, student-11 argued, "education involves the community in my sports journey. Engaging with them amplifies support and breaks

barriers. It is not just about personal growth; it is about a collective empowerment where the community becomes a driving force in women's sports."

Corresponding to this, educator-11 grasped, "in education, community engagement is vital. It connects classroom learning with community support for female athletes. Education empowers women in sports by fostering collaboration, shared values, and a network that uplifts and embraces the athletic endeavours of women."

Similarly, a female athlete realised:

"Education bridges my sports passion with community ties. It is a symbiotic relationship in which my journey is celebrated, and community engagement becomes a pillar of support. Empowered by education, I thrive in a community that champions women in sports."

In the same context, community stakeholder-11 accepted, "engaging the community in women's sports is paramount. Education initiates this collaboration, fostering understanding and support. It is not just about games; it is about building a community where every female athlete feels empowered, celebrated, and integral to our collective success."

Education's impact on women in sports is enriched through community engagement in Malakand Division, Pakistan. It is a dynamic interplay where education connects female athletes with community support, fostering an empowered ecosystem where every woman's sporting journey is celebrated, supported, and woven into the community's fabric.

Discussion

The thematic analysis reveals the profound impact of education on women's empowerment in sports across various levels in Malakand Division, Pakistan. It intricately explores how education acts as a catalyst in breaking stereotypes, enhancing health and well-being, developing knowledge, awareness, and skills, integrating sports into the curriculum, fostering role models and mentorship, building confidence and self-esteem, encouraging leadership, providing infrastructure, promoting teamwork, and recognising achievements.

According to the respondents, education plays a pivotal role in breaking stereotypes about women in sports. Empirical evidence supports the idea that female students gain confidence and defy societal expectations through participation in sports. Empirical studies emphasise education's role in challenging gender norms in sports (Schailleé et al., 2021). Education emerges as a transformative force in enhancing women's health and well-being through sports. Beyond competition, participants acknowledge the holistic approach to education, which fosters resilience and contributes to a healthy, balanced lifestyle. Literature supports the positive impact of education on physical and mental well-being (Martin et al., 2022).

Respondents' evidence highlights education's dynamic role in enhancing knowledge, awareness, and skills crucial to women in sports. Academic literature supports the notion that education contributes significantly to the development of multifaceted athletes (Balyi et al., 2013). The integration of sports into the curriculum emerges as a powerful mechanism for empowering women in sports. Participants stress the transformative impact of curriculum integration, fostering holistic development in female students. Existing studies emphasise the benefits of curriculum-integrated sports programs (Lawson, 2005). Education acts as a conduit for fostering role models and mentorship, inspiring women in sports to break barriers. Respondents recognise the profound impact of mentorship on empowering women in sports. Existing literature underscores the importance of mentorship in sports empowerment (Archard, 2012). Education's transformative force lies in building confidence and self-esteem among women in sports. Empirical evidence indicates that education significantly shapes confident and empowered athletes (Segovia-Pérez et al., 2019).

Education's role in fostering leadership development is evident in students' narratives. Empirical studies emphasise education as a catalyst for developing leadership qualities among female athletes (Shaya & Abu Khait, 2017). Access to quality infrastructure and facilities,

empowered by education, breaks physical barriers for women in sports. Research indicates that adequate infrastructure contributes to increased participation and success in sports (Gonzalez-Cuevas, 2022). Respondents highlight education's impact on promoting team spirit. Empirical evidence suggests that teamwork is a crucial aspect of sports empowerment, and education plays a pivotal role in instilling these values (Gopinathan, 2020). Education empowers women in sports through recognition and celebrations, validating their contributions. The literature underscores the importance of acknowledgement in fostering a culture of empowerment in sports (Heineken, 2016). Engaging the community through education becomes a driving force for women in sports. Empirical studies highlight the positive correlation between community engagement, education, and women's sports empowerment (Samie et al., 2015).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the results and discussion shed light on the multifaceted ways in which education serves as a powerful force in empowering women in sports in Malakand Division, Pakistan. Across various dimensions, education emerges as a catalyst for breaking stereotypes, enhancing health and well-being, developing knowledge, awareness, and skills, integrating sports into the curriculum, fostering role models and mentorship, building confidence and self-esteem, encouraging leadership, providing infrastructure, promoting teamwork, and recognising achievements.

The narratives of participants illustrate the transformative power of education in challenging traditional norms and dismantling gender biases in sports. Through education, women gain confidence, resilience, and a strong sense of identity, enabling them to excel on the playing field while defying societal expectations. The holistic approach of education extends beyond academic boundaries, fostering a culture of well-being, knowledge enhancement, and skills development. Moreover, the integration of sports into the curriculum is highlighted as a key mechanism through which education empowers women. Curriculum integration not only enhances academic prowess but also equips female students with the tools to thrive in sports, contributing to holistic development. The role of education in fostering role models and mentorship is emphasised, creating a legacy of empowered women who inspire future generations to pursue their athletic dreams. Education's impact on building confidence, self-esteem, and leadership qualities among women in sports is evident throughout the analysis. It acts as a pathway to leadership, shaping athletes who lead with knowledge, empathy, and a profound sense of responsibility.

Additionally, access to state-of-the-art infrastructure and facilities, supported by education, breaks physical barriers and provides a platform for female athletes to shine. The importance of teamwork, recognition, and community engagement in empowering women in sports is highlighted. Education instils values of cooperation, shared victories, and mutual support, fostering a culture in which achievements are acknowledged and celebrated. Community engagement becomes a vital component, involving the community in women's sports journeys and creating a support network that uplifts and embraces female athletes.

In essence, education's transformative role extends far beyond the classroom, creating a dynamic and empowered environment where women in sports thrive, challenge norms, and contribute to a more inclusive and resilient society in Malakand Division, Pakistan.

Policy Implications

Implement comprehensive educational reforms that integrate sports into the curriculum, promote gender-inclusive programs, and foster mentorship. Invest in state-of-the-art sports infrastructure to provide equitable opportunities. Establish recognition programs and community engagement initiatives to celebrate female athletes: Emphasise leadership development, teamwork values, and holistic well-being. Ensure ongoing teacher training on

gender sensitivity and the integration of sports. Encourage collaboration among educational institutions, sports organisations, and communities to foster a supportive ecosystem. Prioritise policies that break gender stereotypes, building a culture where education empowers women in sports and leads to a more inclusive, empowered society in Malakand Division, Pakistan.

Gap for Future Research

Future researchers should examine the longitudinal impact of educational interventions on women in sports, focusing on sustained effects on gender norms, leadership, and overall well-being. Investigate the scalability of curriculum-integrated sports programs and the role of mentorship in long-term empowerment. Assess the influence of community engagement on sustaining female athletes' success. Additionally, delve into the intersectionality of socio-economic factors affecting access to sports infrastructure.

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