

**THE ROLE OF SPORTS IN SOCIAL INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY IN THE
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN**

**Samuel Obasi OKOH
EDU2102471**

**DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN KINETICS AND SPORTS SCIENCE
FACULTY OF EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN
BENIN CITY**

DECEMBER, 2025

**THE ROLE OF SPORTS IN SOCIAL INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY IN THE
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN**

**Samuel Obasi OKOH
EDU2102471**

**A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN
KINETICS AND SPORTS, FACULTY OF EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF
BENIN, BENIN CITY, IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT
FOR THE AWARD OF BACHELOR OF SCIENCE (ED) DEGREE IN HUMAN
KINETICS AND SPORTS SCIENCE**

DECEMBER, 2025

CERTIFICATION

We, the undersigned, certify that this project was carried out by **Samuel Obasi OKOH**, in the Department of Human Kinetics and Sports Science, Faculty of Education, University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria.

Dr. C.O. Aluya
(Project Supervisor)

Dr. R.F. Ani
(Project Coordinator)

Date

Date

Dr. A.U. Orakhi,
(Head of Department)

Date

DEDICATION

I gladly dedicate this Project to God Almighty, the giver and sustainer of life; who granted me the divine enablement to have accomplished this work.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The researcher is sincerely grateful to his dedicated supervisor, Dr. C.O. Aluya. His incisive intellect and visionary guidance were the compass that navigated the researcher through uncharted territories. He did not just supervise, He mentored, challenged and inspired the researcher.

The researcher is grateful to Dr. A.U. Orakhi, the Head of Department of Human Kinetics and Sport Science and also extends sincere gratitude to his course adviser, Dr C.S Lator, and every other lecturer in the department

Furthermore, the researcher extends profound appreciation to his family: his parent Mr. and Mrs. Okoh and his siblings. No words can encapsulate the depth of his gratitude. They are his anchor and his sail. Their unconditional love, countless sacrifices and steadfast faith in him are the invisible forces that empower every endeavor he undertakes. He is also deeply grateful to his friends for their unwavering belief in him.

Lastly, as this chapter closes, the researcher recognizes his personal sacrifice made, the quiet nights spent in pursuit of this goal, and the unwavering belief he had to pursue this goal, and to unwavering belief he had to cultivate in his own abilities. This document is more than an academic requirement; it is a milestone in his personal and professional path. The researcher acknowledges the growth forged in its creation and carry the strength found forward

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGES
TITLE	i
CERTIFICATION	ii
DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
ABSTRACT	viii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	
Background to the study	1
Statement of Problem	5
Research Questions	6
Hypotheses of the Study	6
Purpose of the Study	7
Significance of the Study	7
Scope and Delimitation of the study	9
Definition of Terms	9
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE	
Theoretical Framework	11
Concept of Sports and Social Inclusion	13
Concept of Diversity in University Sports	17
Benefits of Sports Participation for Social Integration	19
Barriers to Sports Participation Among Underrepresented University Students	23

	PAGES
Sports Leadership Structures on Diversity and Inclusion	27
Strategies for Enhancing Inclusion and Diversity in University Sports Programs	30
Empirical Review	33
Summary of Reviewed Related Literature.	37
 CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY	
Research Design	39
Population of the Study	39
Sample and Sampling Technique	40
Research Instrument	41
Validity of Instrument	41
Reliability of Instrument	41
Method of Data Collection	42
Method of Data Analysis	42
 CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS	
Presentation of Results	43
Tests for Hypotheses	51
Discussion of Findings	54

	PAGES
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION	
Summary	57
Findings	57
Conclusion	58
Recommendations	59
Suggestions for Further Studies	60
REFERENCES	61
APPENDICES	66

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the role of sports in promoting social inclusion and diversity at the University of Benin. Four research questions and two hypotheses guided the inquiry. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, and the population consisted of 46,110 students of the University of Benin. A stratified and simple random sampling technique was used to select a sample of 100 students drawn evenly from five faculties. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire validated by experts in Human Kinetics and analysed using descriptive statistics mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation was employed to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 significance level.

Findings revealed that sports programs significantly promote social inclusion by fostering interaction, friendship formation, and a sense of belonging among students from diverse backgrounds. Major barriers to participation among underrepresented students included financial constraints, limited awareness of available programs, inaccessibility of facilities, discrimination, and academic workload. Results also showed that while leadership in sports programs positively influences inclusion through fair treatment and encouragement of diverse participation, there remains a need for stronger policy implementation to support underrepresented groups.

Based on these outcomes, the study concludes that sports are an important catalyst for social cohesion and diversity within the university environment, but structural and administrative barriers must be addressed to achieve full inclusivity. Recommendations were made to improve accessibility, awareness, financial support, and inclusive policy enforcement in the University of Benin's sports programs

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Sports have long been recognized as one of humanity's most potent instruments for building bridges across divides, fostering unity, and promoting diversity. Beyond the field of play, sports act as a universal language, transcending national, cultural, ethnic, and social boundaries to create common ground for interaction, empathy, and mutual respect (Heckemeyer, Meier, & Grabherr, 2024). This power of sport has been acknowledged by global leaders and institutions, with Kofi Annan once remarking that sport "brings people together, no matter what their origin, background, religious belief or economic status" (as cited in Schulenkorf & Sugden, 2011). Similarly, the Olympic Charter recognizes sport as a fundamental human right, affirming that every individual should be able to practice sport without discrimination of any kind (International Olympic Committee [IOC], 2021). Such global ideal's view sport not simply as a recreational activity but as a vital tool for social development, peacebuilding, and inclusion.

Internationally, sports have played transformative roles in post-conflict reconciliation, integration of migrant populations, and the dismantling of entrenched social prejudices. In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, the national football team's appeal for peace during the civil conflict temporarily united warring factions, illustrating sport's capacity to inspire national solidarity. Likewise, initiatives in Europe have harnessed football and basketball to integrate refugees and immigrants into host societies, providing shared

experiences that challenge stereotypes and foster mutual respect (Schulenkorf & Sugden, 2011). These global cases resonate in the African context, where sports have been used strategically to heal divisions and promote unity, particularly in multi-ethnic states such as Nigeria.

In Nigeria, sport especially football has historically served as a powerful unifying force in a country characterized by significant ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity. When the Super Eagles or Super Falcons compete on the international stage, national pride often eclipses ethnolinguistic and religious divides, as citizens unite in shared celebration (Adetunji, 2019). Such collective experiences demonstrate sport's ability to cultivate a shared national identity. The creation of the National Sports Festival in 1973, shortly after the Nigerian Civil War, was a deliberate attempt to use sport as a means of national healing and integration (Akpodonor, 2022). Conceived by General Yakubu Gowon, the "Unity Games" brought together youth from across the federation, providing an avenue for interaction, talent discovery, and the reinforcement of national cohesion. The festival, hosted biennially across different states, continues to promote unity by bringing athletes from diverse backgrounds into close contact, thus fostering mutual respect and dismantling prejudices.

However, the inclusive potential of sport in Nigeria has not always been fully realized. Challenges such as inadequate funding, poor sports infrastructure, and administrative biases have, at times, limited access to sports for marginalized communities (Olorunmola & Akindes, 2020). Gender disparities in sports funding and representation, as

well as limited opportunities for persons with disabilities, reflect gaps between policy and practice. These issues underscore the reality that without deliberate, inclusive strategies, sport can reproduce existing inequalities rather than dismantle them.

Within the Nigerian higher education system, sports continue to play an important role in fostering social inclusion and diversity. Universities are microcosms of the nation, bringing together students from all 36 states, diverse ethnic groups, and varying socio-economic backgrounds. In this context, sports provide a platform for intergroup interaction and the building of relationships that transcend cultural boundaries. The Nigerian University Games Association (NUGA), established in 1965, embodies this integrative function by bringing together students from federal, state, and private universities for biennial multi-sport competitions (Eke, 2022). These events encourage healthy rivalry and mutual respect, creating social bonds that extend beyond the competition.

Sports within universities are designed not only to produce elite athletes but also to develop soft skills such as teamwork, discipline, and leadership qualities essential for employability and responsible citizenship. Inter-faculty competitions, recreational leagues, and fitness programs all contribute to creating a vibrant campus culture that values inclusion. Yet, research shows that participation in university sports often skews toward certain demographics, with women, students with disabilities, and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds sometimes underrepresented (Lawal & Ogunsan, 2021). Infrastructural barriers, cultural attitudes, and insufficient administrative support can

hinder broad participation, limiting sport's integrative potential within the university setting.

The University of Benin (UNIBEN) offers a compelling case for examining these dynamics. As one of Nigeria's foremost federal universities, UNIBEN attracts a highly diverse student body from all geopolitical zones. The university has a strong sports tradition, regularly participating in NUGA and maintaining facilities for a variety of sports. Its sports programs, in principle, provide opportunities for students from different backgrounds to interact and collaborate, thus fostering inclusion and diversity. Anecdotal evidence indicates that sports victories at UNIBEN often lead to campus-wide celebrations that momentarily dissolve ethnic and social divisions, reinforcing a shared university identity.

Nonetheless, there are indications that sports participation at UNIBEN may not be evenly distributed. Certain groups such as female students in some faculties, non-athletes, or students with disabilities may be less engaged in organized sports, whether due to infrastructural challenges, cultural factors, or a lack of targeted encouragement. While UNIBEN's official policies emphasize unity and holistic student development, the extent to which sports are strategically leveraged to address social divides on campus remains underexplored. The university's diverse environment offers significant potential for intentional sports-based initiatives aimed at reducing ethnic tensions, bridging socio-economic divides, and ensuring that all students, regardless of background, feel a sense of belonging.

This study, therefore, seeks to investigate the role of sports in promoting social inclusion and diversity at the University of Benin. By examining participation patterns, institutional policies, and student perceptions, the research aims to determine how effectively sports are being used as a unifying tool on campus. The findings are expected to provide insights not only for UNIBEN but also for other Nigerian and African universities grappling with similar diversity dynamics.

Statement of Problem

The ideal situation within the University of Benin's sports programs is one where all students, regardless of their cultural, racial, socio-economic, or gender backgrounds, have equal opportunities to participate, excel, and feel included. In such an environment, university sports programs should foster social cohesion, bridge divides, and promote a sense of belonging among students. Diversity and inclusion should be embedded in the structure, policies, and leadership of these programs, ensuring that marginalized groups are not only included in participation but also represented in leadership and decision-making roles.

However, the current situation within the University of Benin's sports programs deviates from this ideal. Despite some efforts to promote inclusion, there are significant barriers to participation for students from underrepresented groups, including cultural, financial, and infrastructural challenges. Additionally, there is a lack of diversity in the leadership and administration of the sports programs, which hinders the implementation of inclusive policies and practices. While the University of Benin has policies in place aimed

at fostering inclusion, these policies have not been fully effective in translating into actionable change in the daily operations and outcomes of the sports programs. As a result, students from marginalized backgrounds often face exclusion or unequal opportunities within these programs, limiting the potential of sports to foster integration and cohesion on campus.

Attempts to address these issues at the University of Benin have been limited, and those that have been made often fall short due to insufficient resources, lack of awareness, or inadequate policy enforcement. Though there have been efforts to introduce inclusive sports initiatives, they have not fully addressed the barriers that prevent students from diverse backgrounds from fully engaging in sports. This study seeks to address these gaps by investigating the role of sports in promoting social inclusion and diversity within the University of Benin.

Research Questions

The following research questions are raised to guide the study:

1. How do sports programs promote social inclusion at the University of Benin?
2. What barriers prevent underrepresented students from participating in sports programs at the University of Benin?
3. How does the leadership structure in sports programs affects diversity and inclusion at the University of Benin?
4. How can sports programs be made more inclusive at the University of Benin?

Hypotheses of the Study

The following hypotheses are formulated to be tested at 0.05 level of significance

H01: There is no significant relationship between sports programs and the promotion of social inclusion at the University of Benin.

H02; The leadership structure in sports programs does not significantly affect diversity and inclusion at the University of Benin.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to explore the role of sports in social inclusion and diversity in the university of Benin, the Study aim to:

1. Examine how sports programs promote social inclusion at the University of Benin.
2. Identify the barriers that prevent underrepresented students from participating in sports programs at the University of Benin.
3. Investigate how the leadership structure in sports programs affects diversity and inclusion at the University of Benin.
4. Examine strategies for making sports programs more at the University of Benin.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study extends to various groups, including academia, students, society, and the government, and will provide valuable insights into the role of sports in promoting social inclusion and diversity at the University of Benin.

To academia, this study will contribute to the body of literature on the role of sports in higher education, specifically in fostering diversity and inclusion. By examining the

barriers and challenges faced by underrepresented groups in accessing university sports programs, this research will expand existing knowledge and provide a foundation for future studies in the field. Researchers and scholars in the areas of education, sociology, and sports management will find this study beneficial in developing frameworks for inclusivity in university sports programs, and it will encourage further exploration into best practices for creating equitable opportunities for all students.

For students, especially those from marginalized or underrepresented backgrounds, the findings of this study are significant because they highlight the challenges they face in accessing and fully participating in sports programs. By shedding light on these issues, the study will advocate for changes that could lead to more inclusive policies and practices. Students will benefit from a more equitable sports environment, where opportunities for social integration, personal development, and well-being are accessible to everyone, regardless of their background.

The broader society stands to gain from the study's outcomes as well. As universities contribute to the shaping of future leaders, inclusive sports programs provide a platform for fostering social cohesion and mutual respect among students from diverse backgrounds. The promotion of diversity and inclusion through sports can lead to stronger community ties and a reduction in social divisions, benefiting society at large. By understanding the role of sports in achieving these outcomes, communities can work together to create environments that value and respect diversity, both in and outside of academic institutions.

Finally, the government will benefit from the results of this study, as it will provide insights into how higher education institutions, like the University of Benin, can better support inclusive practices within their sports programs. The findings will inform policy development aimed at creating more inclusive environments in universities, which aligns with national goals of promoting equal access to opportunities for all citizens. By recognizing the importance of inclusion in university sports programs, the government can take steps to ensure that diversity and inclusion are prioritized in educational institutions, helping to foster a more equitable society.

In summary, this study holds significance for academia, students, society, and government. It will contribute to the development of inclusive sports policies, enhance student participation in sports, and support societal cohesion, while also guiding future educational and governmental initiatives aimed at promoting social inclusion through sports at the University of Benin and beyond.

Scope and Delimitation of the study

This study focuses on examining the role of sports programs in promoting social inclusion and diversity at the University of Benin. This study is delimited to the sports programs at the University of Benin and does not include other higher institutions in Nigeria. The research will focus on the experiences of students enrolled in the university and will not extend to alumni or prospective students. Only students actively participating in university sports programs will be included in the study.

Definition of Terms

Social Inclusion: The participation of students from diverse backgrounds in university sports, fostering a sense of belonging and equal opportunity.

Diversity: The presence of a variety of students in sports programs, including differences in race, ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic background.

Sports Programs: Organized athletic activities and events that offer students opportunities to engage in physical fitness, recreation, and competition.

Barriers to Participation: Factors that prevent underrepresented students from fully engaging in sports programs, such as financial, social, or cultural obstacles.

Leadership Structure: The hierarchy and roles of individuals in charge of university sports programs, including coaches and administrators.

Inclusion Policies: Guidelines aimed at ensuring equal opportunities for all students, especially those from marginalized groups, to participate in sports.

Underrepresented Students: Students from groups that have lower levels of participation in sports programs, often due to social or economic disadvantages.

Inclusivity: The practice of providing equal access and opportunities for all students, ensuring no one is excluded based on their background.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter focuses on the review of relevant and related literature to the concern of this study. It is discussed under the following subheadings:

- Theoretical Framework
- Concept of Sports and Social Inclusion
- Concept of Diversity in University Sports
- Benefits of Sports Participation for Social Integration
- Barriers to Sports Participation Among Underrepresented University Students
- Sports Leadership Structures on Diversity and Inclusion
- Strategies for Enhancing Inclusion and Diversity in University Sports Programs
- Empirical Review
- Summary of Reviewed Related Literature.

Theoretical Framework

This study is hinged in two interrelated theoretical perspectives: Social Capital Theory and Contact Hypothesis. Both frameworks provide valuable insight into how sports can foster social inclusion and diversity within the university context. While each theory offers a distinct lens for understanding these dynamics, Social Capital Theory is ultimately adopted as the primary theoretical underpinning for this research due to its direct relevance to the creation and strengthening of social networks in sports programs.

Social Capital Theory was first propounded by Pierre Bourdieu in 1986, who defined it as the sum of resources, actual or potential, that accrue to individuals through networks

of relationships. James Coleman (1988) expanded on this definition by emphasizing the role of trust, shared norms, and reciprocity in the creation of human capital within communities. Robert Putnam (1995) later popularized the concept, framing social capital as the features of social organization such as networks, trust, and mutual obligations that facilitate cooperation for mutual benefit. Central to this theory is the distinction between bonding social capital, which refers to the close connections within homogeneous groups, and bridging social capital, which involves connections between heterogeneous groups that offer access to new perspectives, resources, and opportunities.

The relevance of Social Capital Theory to the current study lies in its ability to explain how sports function as a platform for building and strengthening social ties. Within a university setting, participation in sports fosters both bonding capital, as students develop camaraderie with their teammates, and bridging capital, as they interact across lines of race, culture, gender, and socioeconomic status. Sports teams often form micro-communities characterized by mutual trust, cooperation, and shared goals conditions that are particularly important for underrepresented students seeking to integrate into the wider campus community. Through these networks, students gain not only social support but also access to leadership opportunities, mentorship, and institutional resources, all of which are essential to achieving diversity and inclusion outcomes.

Complementing Social Capital Theory is Gordon Allport's Contact Hypothesis, introduced in his 1954 work *The Nature of Prejudice*. Allport argued that, under appropriate conditions, direct interpersonal contact between members of different social

groups can reduce prejudice and improve intergroup relations. He identified four key conditions for positive contact: equal status among group members in the given context, the pursuit of common goals, cooperation rather than competition, and support from institutional authorities.

In the context of university sports, the principles of the Contact Hypothesis are naturally embedded in team structures. Athletes often share equal standing within their teams regardless of their background, they work together toward shared objectives such as winning games or achieving performance targets, and they depend on cooperation to succeed. Furthermore, university sports programs are typically supported by institutional policies that promote diversity and non-discrimination, thereby fulfilling Allport's fourth condition. When these elements are present, the sporting environment can serve as a powerful catalyst for breaking down stereotypes, fostering empathy, and building mutual respect among students from diverse backgrounds.

Concept of Sports and Social Inclusion

The idea of sports and social participation in universities is becoming a more and more relevant topic in academic discussions. At its foundation, it looks at how colleges might use sports to help students of all backgrounds get stronger, connect with each other, and feel more empowered. Inclusive sports programming helps universities create welcoming spaces that celebrate diversity (Gabriel, Ogada, & Oyiengo, 2025; Mohamad & Usman, 2025). This is based on theories like Vygotsky's Social Development Theory, which says that people learn best when they interact with each other, and Self-

Determination Theory, which says that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are important.

Institutions of higher education worldwide have implemented sports-based initiatives designed to diminish obstacles to participation for historically marginalised populations. For example, in European universities enrolled in Erasmus+ BIP mobility programs, sports are used to increase intercultural awareness and empathy among foreign students through experience learning (Beniusiene, Kontautiene, & Rosu, 2025). In the Philippines, institutions have included Maguindanaon indigenous sports into physical education curricula to foster cultural inclusion, historical preservation, and the engagement of ethnic minorities in academic environments (Mohamad & Usman, 2025).

These efforts are not unique. In Iran, urban planning and university sports management work together to establish campus physical activity areas that are good for women's health and well-being. The objective is to enhance female student participation in physical activities while contesting conventional gender stereotypes (Shahriary & Abbasi, 2025). Freeman (2025) investigated the role of athletic programs in historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) in facilitating cultural and academic integration for Black transfer students from primarily white institutions in the United States. These schools not only give students a sense of belonging through sports, but they also help them connect with their cultural identity, which is important for staying in school and doing well.

It has also been proven that taking part in inclusive sports programs can help people grow emotionally and lower social stigma. A study on wheelchair hockey in lower

secondary schools indicated that students enhanced their emotional intelligence and interpersonal interactions, implying that analogous advantages will be observed in university settings (Tafari et al., 2025). Likewise, a study conducted by Fuest, Porter, and Melvin (2025) indicates that university students participating in sports programs alongside persons with learning difficulties cultivated enhanced empathy and a more inclusive perspective. These kinds of initiatives encourage not only integration but also learning from each other and speaking out for one other.

But there are big structural problems that make it hard for institutions to truly use sports to bring people together. Many schools still don't have ramps, adapted equipment, or accessible locker rooms, which makes it hard for kids with physical disabilities to participate (Yuwono, Adi, & Nurharsono, 2025). Gender prejudices persist in university athletics, particularly at high tiers. Roe and Jowett (2025) revealed that many male tennis players at elite institutions continued to regard coaching as a male-dominated domain, reinforcing biases that deter women from participating in coaching or leadership roles.

Funding and hiring are still not fair. Al-Fattal, Walker, and Gust (2025) discovered that student-athletes' choices about university enrolment are significantly shaped by perceived inclusivity and community support; nonetheless, institutional recruitment strategies frequently perpetuate racial and class inequities. Freeman (2025) says that inclusive sports programs, especially those for children with impairments or from under-represented backgrounds, often don't get enough money or attention. If institutions don't

commit to fair resource allocation and policy creation, inclusive sports programs are at risk of being cancelled or not developed enough.

Even with these problems, most people agree that inclusive sports programming has long-term benefits. Hadziabdic (2025) showed that students who are members of inclusive sports groups are more active in politics and civic life, which suggests that this effect goes beyond the campus. Moreau, Mmari, and Banati (2025) contended that sports can function as gender-transformative instruments, particularly in conservative nations where women's engagement in public life is restricted. They stressed how important it is to influence the cultures of institutions through inclusive sports in order to bring about bigger societal change.

Sports are also informal places where students can learn important soft skills like communication, teamwork, and leadership. These abilities are especially crucial for students from low-income families who might not have access to professional development opportunities in other ways. Beniusiene et al. (2025) underlined that experience learning through athletics gives key reflection moments where students begin to grasp cultural heterogeneity and shared responsibility. In conclusion, including athletics into university inclusion efforts transcends mere co-curricular activity; it constitutes a transformative practice. By making sports a part of their plans for institutional equality, colleges can support social justice, encourage diversity, and provide students the tools they need to be active members of their communities. However, these initiatives will only work if policies

are kept in place, structures are changed, and leaders are chosen who reflect the variety of the student body.

Concept of Diversity in University Sports

Diversity in university sports means that people from different backgrounds, such as gender, ethnicity, ability, nationality, religion, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation, are fairly represented and can participate in sports activities and leadership roles. Diversity encompasses not only the existence of other groups but also the imperative to ensure their integration, respect, and possibilities for influence within the sporting community (Anderson, 2020). In the collegiate setting, sports transcend mere enjoyment; they serve as platforms for social interaction, cultural exchange, and identity affirmation. Because of this, they are good places to promote or hurt diversity. People often think of universities as small versions of society as a whole. Sports are a strong institutional tool for changing societal ideals. When sports systems are built to be open to everyone, they can fight against bias in society and help make schools fairer places to learn. But studies reveal that college sports typically show the same inequities that are already there. For instance, gender inequality is still a major problem. Research conducted in several contexts, including Nigeria, underscores the insufficient representation of women in both participation and leadership roles within university sports programs (Okonkwo & Onifade, 2019). People often say that this is because of cultural norms, a lack of support, and policy gaps that don't actively promote gender equality. Another essential thing to think about is how diverse the races and ethnicities are in college athletics. In many colleges and

universities, the more powerful ethnic groups often have more access to sports and are more visible. Minority students, on the other hand, may face discrimination or exclusion. Beniusiene et al. (2025) discovered that international sports exchange programs, exemplified by Erasmus+ in Europe, enhance diversity by fostering intercultural team building and comprehension. African universities, such as the University of Benin, can use these programs as examples of how to use athletics to promote ethnocultural diversity.

Another important part of diversity in college sports is including people with disabilities. Even while people around the world want schools to be more open to all students, many colleges and universities don't have the facilities, qualified staff, or policies in place to include students with physical or mental disabilities in sports programs. Tafuri et al. (2025), in their investigation of wheelchair hockey, illustrated how adapted sports can create emotionally supportive environments that promote not just physical growth but also social inclusion and self-esteem among students with disabilities. Nonetheless, in Nigerian institutions, access is still limited, and knowledge of inclusive sports is still poor (Adeleke & Eboh, 2020).

Sexual orientation and gender identity constitute aspects of the diversity spectrum in university athletics, while these topics remain taboo in numerous African contexts. In societies that are more liberal, rules have been made to safeguard LGBTQ+ student-athletes from discrimination and make sure that they can participate safely. Roe and Jowett (2025) say that top university athletes in Europe are pushing for locker rooms, coaching environments, and anti-harassment policies that are open to everyone. While analogous

discussions are gradually emerging in Nigeria, they frequently encounter institutional silence or opposition owing to social and legal limitations.

The way that diversity is put into action and felt in university sports systems is greatly affected by the people in charge. Al-Fattal et al. (2025) contend that leadership mirroring the variety of the student population is more inclined to enact inclusive policies and practices. But most sports leadership is still the same, with men in charge and not enough women or people of colour. This lack of diversity in decision-making stifles innovation and keeps sports programming traditions that keep people out. Freeman (2025) also said that sports leadership at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) in the U.S. is very important for confirming cultural identity and fostering equity. This is a good example for institutions in postcolonial African nations.

Socioeconomic status is another aspect of diversity that affects access to sports because of the costs of things like uniforms, travel, and equipment. Financial constraints may keep students from low-income families from playing sports at university, even if they are good at it or want to. To level the playing field, inclusive sports initiatives must address scholarship options, subsidised participation, and community outreach (Moreau, Mmari, & Banati, 2025).

Benefits of Sports Participation for Social Integration

Participation in sports offers a varied set of benefits for social integration, particularly in university environments where diverse groups of students converge. Social integration refers to the process by which individuals from different backgrounds,

identities, or circumstances come together to establish a cohesive, cooperative, and mutually supporting community. In the university context, where students may be negotiating cultural differences, adjusting to academic pressure, or addressing structural exclusion, sports operate as a vital instrument for creating inclusion, generating social capital, and boosting a sense of belonging.

Sports establish a shared space where participants are bonded by common goals, collective involvement, and interpersonal relationships. These contacts, frequently framed by collaboration and rivalry, accelerate the disintegration of social barriers such as race, nationality, gender, and socioeconomic class. According to Beniusiene, Kontautiene, and Rosu (2025), international sports mobility programs such as Erasmus+ create experiential learning environments where students from many nations collaborate and form lasting social relationships. The inclusive, low-barrier nature of team sports helps students to form friendships that transcend linguistic and cultural divides, therefore expediting their absorption into the intellectual and social fabric of university life. Moreover, sports are acknowledged as major channels for improving social skills and intercultural competency. Participation in various sporting teams encourages students to develop communication, empathy, and respect for others, especially in multicultural university situations. Mohamad and Usman (2025) observe that when indigenous sports are included into physical education curricula, kids from minority backgrounds enjoy a better sense of cultural affirmation, while others get exposure to diverse cultures. This two-

way process not only affirms marginalized identities but also enhances the cultural environment of the university community.

In terms of gender inclusion, sports involvement has been found to increase empowerment, leadership development, and self-confidence among women and other gender minorities, particularly in circumstances where societal norms have historically restricted their visibility. For instance, Shahriary and Abbasi (2025) studied how gender-friendly physical activity areas in university urban planning have led to increased involvement among female students in Iran. These places contribute to eliminating gendered segregation in sport, stimulate co-participation, and thereby foster social integration across gender lines.

Social integration through athletics is not just horizontal, among peers, but also vertical, requiring involvement with university personnel, coaches, and institutional leaders. Black students' cultural and institutional integration is facilitated by athletic programs at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) in the United States, according to Freeman (2025). These athletic settings offer neighbourhood connections, visibility, and mentoring that are frequently lacking in primarily white institutions. At multicultural African campuses like the University of Benin, where sports can operate as a focal point for peer and intergenerational contact, a similar reasoning holds true.

Sports help marginalised kids navigate institutional systems, which goes beyond interpersonal dynamics and promotes social inclusion. Adapted sports programs give students with disabilities the chance to fully engage in campus life. In their study of

wheelchair hockey programs, Tafuri et al. (2025) emphasise the relational and emotional advantages of inclusive sports, such as stronger social networks, better self-image, and less isolation. In many Nigerian colleges, however, such possibilities are still rare due to infrastructural restrictions and lack of policy support, but the potential remains substantial if these barriers are addressed.

Sports' ability to foster civic involvement and social responsibility among pupils is a sometimes disregarded benefit. Students who take part in inclusive and community-focused sports programs are more inclined to volunteer, advocate, and participate in democratic processes after graduation, according to Hadziabdic (2025). As a result, sports transcend beyond just an extracurricular activity and serve as unofficial schools where principles such as equity, collaboration, and group responsibility are taught and practiced.

Sports-based social integration also lessens social isolation, a problem that is becoming more and more prevalent in college settings around the world. In academic settings, first-generation students, international students, and students from rural areas frequently struggle to establish a social foothold. They can create social networks, feel accepted, and make relationships through team-based sports, which is an easy and casual way to support their academic and emotional well-being. Student-athletes frequently point to their sports team as their main source of support, with ties created by mutual physical exertion and dedication promoting emotional stability and a sense of community on campus (Al-Fattal, Walker, & Gust, 25).

Recognising the symbolic function that sports play in reaffirming institutional identity and cohesiveness is also crucial. Universities help students feel a feeling of pride and shared identity when they hold inclusive competitions, festivals, or intramural leagues that promote widespread involvement. These gatherings frequently turn into common experiences that strengthen links between various academic departments, racial and ethnic groupings, and social classes, strengthening the university's sense of community.

It is important to remember, nevertheless, that social integration benefits from sports are not always there. They depend largely on inclusive design, access, and leadership. These programs run the risk of escalating already-existing disparities if deliberate efforts are not made to lower structural obstacles and combat discriminatory behaviours in sports. Sports have the capacity to upend social hierarchies rather than mirror them, as shown by Moreau, Mmari, and Banati (2025).

Barriers to Sports Participation Among Underrepresented University Students

Despite the various social, emotional, and academic benefits of sports engagement in higher education, under-represented university students sometimes confront several and interlocking impediments that limit their participation. These obstacles may be institutional, psychological, sociocultural, structural, or financial. In order to promote fair access to university athletic programs and guarantee that all students take advantage of inclusive recreational and competitive opportunities, it is imperative to comprehend these obstacles. Among the most common are structural hurdles, especially for pupils who have long-term medical issues or physical disabilities. Sports facilities at many universities, including

those in Nigeria, are not designed with universal access in mind. Students with mobility limitations are essentially excluded because they frequently lack ramps, adaptive equipment, or inclusive dressing rooms. In their study on wheelchair hockey, Tafuri et al. (2025) showed that playing adaptive sports greatly enhanced students' social inclusion and emotional health; however, the study also emphasised how few such programs exist, particularly in African universities where sports facilities are frequently underfunded or badly maintained.

Additionally, gender-based hurdles still exist, particularly in cultures where cultural norms limit women's ability to engage in physical activity in public. Sports have historically been seen as a male realm in Nigeria, where female participation is either prohibited or seen as culturally improper. According to Okonkwo and Onifade (2019), women are still under-represented in leadership positions and engagement in sports at several Nigerian colleges. Lack of female role models in coaching or administrative roles, a lack of gender-sensitive regulations, and a lack of secure places for women to exercise are all factors that frequently make these hurdles worse. Religious and cultural standards may make involvement even more difficult. Conservative religious students could experience pressure from their families or from themselves to steer clear of activities that call for mixed-gender interaction, certain attire, or public observation. The absence of culturally sensitive sports programs frequently makes this problem worse. Establishing gender-neutral and religiously sensitive sports venues can significantly boost involvement among students who would otherwise be excluded, claim Shahriary and Abbasi (2025).

Financial inaccessibility is another significant obstacle. Theoretically, all students can participate in many university sports activities, but low-income students are disproportionately impacted by hidden expenditures such as uniform purchases, travel expenses, registration fees, or equipment acquisition. Because their basic financial requirements come first, kids from less fortunate families may choose not to participate at all, according to Al-Fattal, Walker, and Gust (2025). Only the wealthier kids are able to regularly participate in sports due to this economic exclusion, which exacerbates already-existing social injustices.

The psychological obstacles that prevent under-represented students from participating in university athletics include low self-esteem, lack of confidence, and fear of being judged. These internalised barriers are frequently brought on by stereotyping, bad experiences in the past, or a sense of inadequacy in comparison to peers. Freeman (2025) noted that because of the friendly atmosphere and lower psychological stress, students who transferred from primarily white universities to historically black colleges frequently felt more at ease playing sports at HBCUs. It follows that educational institutions must consciously create spaces that value students' identities and encourage new involvement.

Another obstacle is administrative and institutional indifference. There is a lack of institutional commitment to diversity in athletics at several universities, especially in developing nations. Programs may lack inclusion-focused policies, training, or assessment tools, and they are frequently not designed to meet the needs of different populations. Even when inclusive sports do exist, Mohamad and Usman (2025) contend that they are

frequently stand-alone programs rather than incorporated into frameworks for diversity across the campus. This separation lessens impact and restricts sustainability.

Furthermore, a barrier is the lack of knowledge or information about the programs that are offered, particularly for freshmen, overseas students, or students with small social networks. Athletics departments may neglect to connect with students who are not already involved in athletic communities, and orientation programs seldom emphasise the value of athletics as a vehicle for inclusion. Programs that incorporate sports into academic or cultural events typically draw more varied involvement because they lessen the perception of sports as "other" (Beniusiene et al., 25).

Language hurdles can also limit participation at institutions where students from different linguistic and ethnic origins live together. This is especially important in multicultural settings like the University of Benin, where international students or non-native speakers may find it difficult to coordinate and communicate in sports teams. If inclusive communication techniques aren't used, these students could feel excluded or alone.

Lastly, rules pertaining to sports may be discriminatory in and of themselves. Students who are interested in playing but have not received formal training may be excluded from competitive university teams due to selection processes that prioritise physical characteristics, past experience, or sports-specific talents. Moreau, Mmari, and Banati (2025) emphasise that in order to increase participation and equity in collegiate

athletics, these selection criteria must be changed into more inclusive and development-oriented models.

In conclusion, the obstacles that prevent under-represented college students from participating in sports are intricate, multidimensional, and firmly anchored in institutional, sociocultural, and structural factors. Universities must take deliberate steps to remove these obstacles, from gender-sensitive policies and inclusive facility design to financial assistance programs and diverse leadership in sports administration. Universities can use athletics as a potent vehicle for community development, empowerment, and equity by tackling these obstacles from all angles.

Sports Leadership Structures on Diversity and Inclusion

The way diversity and inclusion are promoted, experienced, and maintained in collegiate athletics is greatly influenced by the leadership structure. Leadership sets the tone for values, equity, and access in athletic environments; it affects more than just the competitive and operational elements of collegiate athletics. A representative, inclusive, and morally sound sports leadership structure serves as a spark for more extensive institutional change. On the other hand, a uniform and exclusive leadership structure may serve as a barrier, enhancing structural disparities in access, recognition, and involvement.

The demographic makeup of sports leadership teams is one important aspect of this problem. A lack of different viewpoints in decision-making processes is exacerbated by the under-representation of women, minorities, and individuals with disabilities in coaching and administration positions in sports. In their study on equity in the National Collegiate

Athletic Association (NCAA), Jean, Young, Nye, and colleagues (2025) highlighted how traditional hierarchical leadership models frequently concentrate power among a small demographic group, limiting institutional agility in addressing inclusion challenges. When leadership disregards or fails to prioritise the interests of marginalised student groups, these models may inadvertently establish exclusionary norms.

The inclusion of team settings, training sessions, hiring procedures, and policy enforcement are all directly impacted by leadership behaviours. According to Tatari, Ferdowsi, and Amraee (2025), inclusive leaders frequently exhibit moral leadership traits including openness, justice, and cooperative decision-making. These characteristics help integrate students from different backgrounds and empower team members. A more democratic culture that encourages identity expression, cultural awareness, and interpersonal trust among team members is fostered by coaches and sports directors who aggressively solicit feedback from a variety of viewpoints.

The visibility and enforcement of inclusion policies are also influenced by the leadership structure. According to Young et al. (2025), inclusive ideals need to be ingrained in athletic departments' core structure not just in policy statements, but also in staffing, program design, and budgetary choices. For example, issues of racial bias or gender discrimination may be minimised or not sufficiently addressed if sports departments do not have female or minority heads. On the other hand, diversified leadership fosters an accountable culture and raises institutional understanding of these problems.

Additionally, the leadership style transformational, transactional, or servant has an impact on inclusivity. Precillas (2025) investigated how university extracurricular athletic programs affect the growth of leadership and teamwork abilities and discovered that transformational leaders were more adept at empowering various student groups, creating inclusive teams, and encouraging respect for one another. In order to give student-athletes more than simply physical growth, transformational sports leaders design inclusive visions that match athletic aspirations with social development goals. These visions also offer emotional, cultural, and identity support.

The motivational dynamics among university students who play sports were examined in a study by Morouço, Rogowska, and Pavlova (2025), which found that coaches' and sports managers' actions significantly impacted students' mood, self-esteem, and desire to keep playing especially among women. This emphasises how leadership conduct and tone directly affect the retention of under-represented populations in athletic programs. Conversely, insensitive or discriminatory leadership practices cause minority members to become disengaged, less motivated, and eventually withdraw.

The implementation of diversity training and inclusive education in sports programs is also determined by leadership. Diversity and inclusion continue to be ancillary subjects in sports leadership development programs at many schools. According to Jean et al. (2025), there aren't many pathways for leadership development and formal mentoring that are especially aimed at minority students. Leadership positions often reinforce rather

than confront current disparities if diverse leaders are not purposefully developed from within the student body.

The institutional context also has a significant impact on how leadership structures affect inclusivity. Sports executives frequently encounter obstacles when attempting to promote inclusive change in organisations with strict bureaucratic hierarchies and a reluctance to innovate. However, leaders have more freedom to create inclusive initiatives in settings that promote innovation and participatory government. In their research on smart education leadership, Zeng and Hao (2025) observed that decentralised, tech-enabled leadership structures are typically more inclusive and responsive than conventional top-down approaches.

In conclusion, the implementation of diversity and inclusion in collegiate athletics depends heavily on leadership structures. The sports environment may be transformed into a vibrant, welcoming, and socially conscious space by implementing a leadership structure that values representation, equity, and moral participation. Reforming leadership structures is not a side issue for colleges looking to promote diversity through athletics; rather, it is a strategic need. To enable all students to engage, lead, and succeed, institutions must make investments in leadership development, establish policies that support varied representation, and embrace inclusive leadership philosophies.

Strategies for Enhancing Inclusion and Diversity in University Sports Programs

Enhancing diversity and inclusion in collegiate athletic teams necessitates a multifaceted strategy that incorporates institutional leadership, policy reform, cultural

awareness, and active community involvement. The creation and application of inclusive policies that specifically address concerns of fairness and representation across many groups, such as gender, colour, ethnicity, and disability, is one of the most important tactics. University-level sporting events and competitions should be purposefully created to foster sociocultural integration and intercultural understanding, as Leşco and Lungu (2025) stress. In addition to offering places for involvement, these programs act as channels for promoting social cohesiveness and inclusivity among students from diverse backgrounds. Beyond policy, improving diversity in collegiate athletics requires governance reforms and leadership development. In their study on gender diversity in athletic committees, Raw, Bowell, and Taylor (2025) point out how inclusive decision-making processes, particularly those that place a high value on ethnic representation and gender balance, can have a big impact on access, involvement, and belonging. This emphasises how crucial it is to assign leaders from under-represented groups to important administration positions in sports. Diversity in leadership encourages role modelling and gives the inclusion agenda institutional legitimacy.

Outreach and targeted recruitment initiatives have also become successful tactics for tackling under-representation and exclusion. In order to increase the participation of under-represented student groups, Martins and Manzano-Sánchez (2025) support student-centered engagement through the development of adapted sports settings, the offering of financial incentives, and awareness campaigns. When used regularly, these tactics aid in

removing obstacles including ignorance, lack of funds, and perceived social or cultural incompatibility.

Adopting inclusive teaching methods and diversity-valued physical education (PE) training models is another tried-and-true tactic. The work of Haghdar Saheli and Nazari (2025), for instance, shows how instructors' responsiveness to students from diverse backgrounds can be greatly enhanced by ongoing professional development in physical education that emphasises diversity, equity, and inclusion. Training in gender sensitivity, disability awareness, and intercultural competency improves university employees' ability to interact inclusively with students during athletic events.

Additionally, utilising service-learning and multicultural models can enhance belonging and integration. Particularly in multicultural and borderland university contexts, Hooli and Santos-Pastor (2025) provide evidence of how intercultural service-learning initiatives that incorporate athletics, language study, and social outreach can support the more general objectives of social inclusion. Universities can foster empathy, collaboration, and respect between participants by integrating physical activity with experiential learning and community engagement. Lastly, institutional dedication is essential. Malcolm, Esson, and Bradbury (2025) assert that whether or not university administration actively tracks, finances, and supports efforts to change the status quo is a critical factor in the effectiveness of inclusion measures in athletics. Even the most well-meaning programs may remain ineffectual in the absence of structural accountability and sufficient resource

allocation. Therefore, inclusion needs to be ingrained in the culture of the school and backed by quantifiable objectives, open assessment procedures, and student feedback loops.

In conclusion, improving diversity and inclusivity in collegiate athletics necessitates an ecosystem strategy that includes institutional commitment, inclusive teaching, leadership diversification, policy innovation, and strategic outreach. When combined, these initiatives produce supportive settings that allow all students, regardless of background, to take part in and gain from university athletics.

Empirical Review

A recent cross-sectional study by Al Harthy et al. (2025), *Social Inclusion, Mental Health, and Well-Being among People with Disabilities Participating in Sports in Saudi Arabia*, surveyed 205 participants aged 18–40 across disability-focused sports clubs in southern Saudi Arabia. Using validated scales such as the Social Inclusion Questionnaire and the Mental Health Continuum–Short Form, they found that higher levels of perceived social inclusion were significantly associated with improved mental health and lower anxiety and depression, underscoring the psychosocial benefits of inclusive sports engagement for young adults of university age.

Similarly, Shao (2025) in *Adaptive Sports Programs as Catalysts for Social Inclusion* applied structural equation modeling to data from 455 adaptive sports participants across multiple institutions. Findings indicated that emotional resilience and empathy mediated the positive effects of sports participation on both social inclusion and

cognitive flexibility, providing causal insight into the psychological pathways through which inclusive sports benefit participants.

Through a qualitative, multi-country investigation, Karstensen et al. (2024) in *The Role of Sports in Promoting Social Inclusion and Health in Marginalized Communities* conducted semi-structured interviews with marginalized groups ethnic minorities, low-income individuals, and people with disabilities across Denmark, Colombia, Poland, Malaysia, Singapore, and Canada. Using thematic analysis via NVivo, they identified that sports enhanced social networks, community cohesion, and leadership skills, while also improving physical and mental health.

The importance of culturally responsive programming was illustrated in Carter-Thuillier et al. (2023), *After-School Sports Programmes and Social Inclusion Processes in Culturally Diverse Contexts*. This multi-case study in Spain and Chile observed programs serving immigrant and Mapuche-Huilliche students over six months, incorporating interviews with teachers, students, and parents. Results showed that inclusive teaching strategies and hybrid cultural games improved intercultural understanding and fostered mutual respect.

In their book chapter, Morgan and Parker (2021), *Sport-Based Interventions and Social Inclusion*, analyzed multiple case studies of youth in marginalized contexts. Their findings revealed that participation in structured, well-mentored sports programs built confidence, leadership capacity, and social connectedness. However, they emphasized that

without intentional design and supportive coaching, sports participation alone may not yield inclusive outcomes.

A broader critical reflection came from Lange (2024) in *Inclusion of the Marginalised: The Case of Sport Participation*, which synthesized existing data to argue that while sports offer potential for inclusion, structural inequalities such as socio-economic disparities and gender bias can limit access, necessitating targeted policies to translate opportunity into meaningful inclusion.

Oblak (2023), in *Narrowing the Definition of Social Inclusion in Sport*, reviewed empirical and theoretical literature, advocating for a strength-based, universal design approach that celebrates diversity in sports settings, particularly for athletes with disabilities. The work highlights that inclusion should be embedded into the very structure of sports programs rather than offered as an add-on.

McConkey et al. (2022), in *The Community Inclusion of Athletes with Intellectual Disability*, conducted a transnational mixed-methods study involving Special Olympics athletes across several countries. Their regression analyses found that “Unified Partners” athletes without disabilities competing alongside those with disabilities were 4.5 times more likely to report strong community inclusion, demonstrating the effectiveness of integrated sports models.

Adding a peer-network dimension, Marqués-Sánchez et al. (2024) in *Peer Network Centrality in Adolescent Sports Participation* employed social network analysis on 235 Spanish adolescents. The study revealed that team sports participation influenced peer

centrality, with male participants holding higher network positions, and overweight female participants engaging more in physical activity, suggesting complex dynamics in how inclusion operates across gender and body image.

In Nigeria, Ossai and Nwabuwe (2025), in *The Effects of Social and Cultural Barriers on Sports Participation in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria*, used a descriptive survey design with 100 students from universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education. They identified cultural beliefs, religious norms, academic workloads, and gender stereotypes as significant barriers to sports participation, with gender norms showing statistically significant effects ($p = 0.030$).

Agwu et al. (2024), in *Inclusion of People with Disabilities in the Design Considerations of Sports Complexes in Nigeria*, conducted a qualitative architectural review of three sports complexes. Findings revealed major gaps in accessibility features such as ramps, circulation space, and acoustic design, leading to recommendations for seven technical guidelines to improve inclusivity in sports infrastructure.

Dada, Ukpata, and Ofie (2017) in *Sport Participation and Facilities as Predictors of Marketable Skills in Sport for Persons with Disability in Nigerian Universities* surveyed 60 students with disabilities and found significant positive correlations between sports participation ($r = .61$) and facility access ($r = .68$) with the development of marketable sports skills, jointly explaining 48% of skill variance.

From a broader policy and educational standpoint, Olugboyega (2023) in *Empirical Analysis of Sport Participation on Nigeria Student Academic Performance* conducted a

systematic review of tertiary-level research. The synthesis indicated that sports participation enhances academic performance via improved time management, mental well-being, and social integration, recommending systemic integration of sports into curricula and recognition of student-athlete achievements.

Osuoji (2019), in *Promoting Sport Participation amongst the Disabled in Nigeria*, used qualitative interviews and case studies to show that sports foster psychological well-being, self-efficacy, and social integration among people with disabilities. The study highlighted the necessity of supportive policies and inclusive laws to sustain these benefits. Lastly, Atare (2024) in *Inclusive Recreational Sports and Mental Well-Being among Visually Impaired and Sighted University Students in Nigeria* employed a mixed-methods approach to compare the experiences of both groups. Findings demonstrated that inclusive recreational sports improved mental well-being, strengthened social bonds, and built mutual respect between visually impaired and sighted students.

Summary of Reviewed Related Literature.

The literature reviewed affirms that sports hold significant potential as instruments for promoting social inclusion and diversity within university environments. Grounded in Social Capital Theory and the Contact Hypothesis, the reviewed studies illustrate how sports participation fosters both bonding and bridging networks, enabling underrepresented students to develop supportive relationships, reduce prejudice, and enhance their sense of belonging.

Globally, evidence indicates that intentionally designed sports programs can enhance mental health, emotional resilience, intercultural understanding, and civic engagement among diverse student populations. Initiatives such as adaptive sports, culturally responsive programming, and international exchange-based sports activities have been shown to improve empathy, leadership, and mutual respect. Conversely, the literature also underscores that without inclusive design, supportive leadership, and equitable resource allocation, sports programs risk reinforcing existing social inequalities rather than dismantling them.

In the Nigerian context, research highlights persistent barriers such as inadequate sports infrastructure for students with disabilities, gender stereotypes, cultural and religious norms, and financial constraints. These factors continue to limit access to university sports for women, students with disabilities, and those from low-income backgrounds. Nonetheless, where inclusive policies, accessible facilities, and diversified leadership structures have been implemented, universities have witnessed improved skill development, academic performance, and social integration among underrepresented groups.

Leadership structures emerge as a critical determinant of diversity and inclusion outcomes. Inclusive leaders characterized by representational diversity, ethical decision-making, and responsiveness to student needs are more successful in implementing equitable sports policies and practices. Strategies for enhancing diversity and inclusion in university sports include targeted recruitment, culturally sensitive program design,

inclusive teaching methods, leadership diversification, and integration of sports into broader institutional diversity agendas.

Overall, the literature converges on the view that sports can be a transformative platform for building inclusive university communities. However, achieving this potential requires intentional institutional commitment, elimination of structural barriers, and sustained investment in policies, leadership, and program design that reflect the diversity of the student population. While global evidence provides successful models, there remains a need for more longitudinal, Nigeria-specific research to evaluate the long-term impacts of inclusive sports initiatives.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research method used in this study, and was discussed under the following sub-headings:

- Design of the Study
- Population of Study
- Sample and Sampling Techniques
- Research Instrument
- Validity of the Instrument
- Reliability of the Instrument
- Method of Data Collection
- Method of Data Analysis

Design of the Study

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. Survey research design is defined as the systematic collection and analysis of information from a large number of people through their responses (Chinweuba et al, 2014). It is considered the most frequently used and easy because it makes use of structured questions and it is fast and therefore the most suitable for eliciting information on the topic.

Population of Study

The population of the study comprises of all student of the University of Benin which is estimated at 46,110 (Student Affairs, University of Benin)

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The total sample size for this study will be 100 students from the University of Benin. To capture diverse perspectives, the sample will be evenly distributed across five major faculties: Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of Management Sciences, Faculty of Education, Faculty of Arts, and Faculty of Life Sciences, with 20 students selected from each faculty.

A stratified random sampling method will be employed first to divide the student population into five strata based on the faculties. This ensures proportional representation from each discipline. Within each stratum, simple random sampling will then be applied to select the 20 students, giving every student in that faculty an equal chance to be selected. First, stratified random sampling technique will be used to divide the student population into five strata, based on the faculties. Each faculty will represent one stratum. This

ensures that each faculty is adequately represented in the sample, which is crucial for the diversity of perspectives in the study.

Next, within each faculty, simple random sampling will be applied. From each stratum (faculty), 20 students will be randomly selected. This means that for each faculty, every student will have an equal chance of being chosen, ensuring that the sample within each faculty is random and unbiased.

By combining these two techniques, the study ensures that each faculty is proportionately represented while also maintaining randomness within each faculty group.

Research Instrument

The instrument that was used for data collection in this study was a structured questionnaire titled the “the role of sports in social inclusion and diversity in the university of Benin”. The questionnaire contains two sections. Section A identify the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents in the study; section B contain Strongly Agreed, Agreed, Disagreed and Strongly Disagreed questions

Validity of the Instrument

The instrument was submitted to the project supervisor and two other experts from the department of Human Kinetics for face and content validation of the questionnaire. Their observations, modifications and suggestions were effected in the implementation of the final copies of the questionnaire.

Reliability of the Instrument

The reliability of the instrument was determined using the internal consistency approach, specifically the Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The questionnaire was administered to 20 respondents who were not part of the main study sample. Their responses were analyzed using the Cronbach's alpha statistic to determine the degree to which items within the instrument consistently measured the same construct with a value of 0.78 which signifies it reliable cause above the 0.7.

Method of Data Collection

Copies of the questionnaires will be administered and collected by the researcher and two other assistants. The researcher and her assistance will ensure that the questionnaires were rightly filled and all questions filled correctly before statistical analysis.

Method of Data Analysis

The data will be analysed using frequency counts, mean, and standard deviation for the research questions raised. The formulated hypotheses will be analysed using inferential statistics

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF RESULT AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter deals with the analysis of data as well as the presentation and discussion of results according to the response from the questions formulated

Demographics of Respondents

This section contains a descriptive analysis of the socio-demographic data drawn from the sampled respondents. The socio-demographic variables include the, gender, age.

Table 1: Respondents Demographic Profile

SN	Variable	Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Gender	Male	43	43.0
		Female	57	57.0
		Total	100	100.0
2	Age	16-19YEARS	25	25.0
		20-23 YEARS	58	58.0
		24 YEARS - ABOVE	17	17.0
		Total	100	100.0

Source; Field Survey, 2025

The demographic data collected from the respondents reveals insights into their gender and age distribution. Of the 100 respondents, 43% were male, while 57% were female, indicating a higher proportion of female participants in the sample. Regarding age distribution, the largest group of respondents (58%) fell within the 20-23 years age range. The second largest group (25%) was in the 16-19 years age category, while 17% of respondents were 24 years or older. This distribution reflects a predominance of younger

participants, with the majority being in the early stages of adulthood. The sample provides a balanced representation of gender and a concentration of respondents within the age group most likely to be engaged in undergraduate studies.

Research Question 1; How do sports programs promote social inclusion at the University of Benin?

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation showing How do sports programs promote social inclusion at the University of Benin

S/N	ITEMS	N	Mean \bar{x}	Standard Deviation (SD)	Remark
1	Sports programs at the University of Benin encourage students from different backgrounds to interact and socialize.	100	3.04	.840	Agreed
2	Participation in sports activities helps students form friendships with others outside their academic departments.	100	3.15	.657	Agreed
3	Sports programs at the University of Benin contribute to the sense of belonging among students.	100	2.92	.907	Agreed
4	The diversity in sports teams fosters a spirit of inclusivity at the University of Benin.	100	2.79	1.233	Agreed
5	Through sports, students from various cultural backgrounds feel equally accepted in campus activities.	100	2.96	.887	Agreed
	Total		2.97	0.91	Agreed

Source; Field Survey 2025

CRITERION MEAN= 2.5

The data collected from 100 respondents at the University of Benin indicates that sports programs play a significant role in promoting social inclusion among students. The students generally agreed that sports programs encourage interaction and socialization

among students from different backgrounds, with a mean score of 3.04 for this item. Participation in sports activities was also found to help students form friendships beyond their academic departments, reflected by a mean score of 3.15.

Furthermore, the sports programs contribute to a sense of belonging among students, with a mean of 2.92, highlighting that involvement in sports helps foster a connection to the broader campus community. The diversity in sports teams was also seen as a key factor in fostering inclusivity, with a mean score of 2.79. Lastly, students expressed that sports provide a platform where individuals from various cultural backgrounds feel equally accepted in campus activities, as indicated by a mean of 2.96.

The total mean of 2.97, with a standard deviation of 0.91, supports the consensus that sports programs at the University of Benin positively contribute to social inclusion. Overall, the findings suggest that sports activities are effective in bridging social gaps and promoting unity among students from diverse backgrounds on campus.

Research Question 2; What barriers prevent underrepresented students from participating in sports programs at the University of Benin?

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation showing What barriers prevent underrepresented students from participating in sports programs at the University of Benin

S/N	ITEMS	N	Mean \bar{x}	Standard Deviation (SD)	Remark
6	Financial constraints prevent underrepresented students from joining sports programs at the University of Benin.	100	2.67	1.101	Agreed
7	Underrepresented students feel that sports facilities at the University of Benin are not easily accessible to them.	100	2.64	.823	Agreed
8	There is a lack of awareness about available sports programs among underrepresented students at the University of Benin.	100	2.81	1.022	Agreed
9	Underrepresented students face discrimination in sports programs at the University of Benin.	100	2.53	1.068	Agreed
10	Time constraints due to academic workload prevent underrepresented students from participating in sports.	100	2.68	1.302	Agreed
	Total		2.67	1.06	Agreed

Source; Field Survey 2025

CRITERION MEAN= 2.5

The data gathered from 100 respondents at the University of Benin reveals several barriers that prevent underrepresented students from participating in sports programs. Financial constraints were found to be a significant barrier, with a mean score of 2.67, suggesting that a lack of financial resources hinders these students' ability to join sports programs.

Additionally, underrepresented students reported that sports facilities at the university are not easily accessible to them, as reflected by a mean score of 2.64.

A lack of awareness about the available sports programs was also identified as a barrier, with a mean score of 2.81, indicating that many underrepresented students are unaware of the opportunities to participate. Furthermore, some students feel that they face discrimination in sports programs at the university, as shown by a mean of 2.53. Time constraints due to academic workload were also noted as a significant factor preventing participation in sports, with a mean score of 2.68.

The total mean of 2.67, with a standard deviation of 1.06, underscores the consensus that financial constraints, accessibility issues, lack of awareness, discrimination, and time limitations are key barriers to sports participation for underrepresented students. In conclusion, the findings highlight the need for targeted interventions to address these challenges and encourage greater participation from all student groups in sports programs at the University of Benin.

Research Question 3; How does the leadership structure in sports programs affects diversity and inclusion at the University of Benin?

Table 4: Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation showing How does the leadership structure in sports programs affects diversity and inclusion at the University of Benin

S/N	ITEMS	N	Mean \bar{x}	Standard Deviation (SD)	Remark
11	The leadership in sports programs at the University of Benin actively promotes diversity in team selection.	100	2.96	.974	Agreed
12	Sports program leaders at the University of Benin encourage participation from students of all backgrounds and abilities.	100	3.00	.932	Agreed
13	The leadership in sports programs at the University of Benin ensures fair treatment and equal opportunities for all students, regardless of their socio-economic status.	100	3.17	.637	Agreed
14	Leaders of sports programs at the University of Benin implement policies that make sports more inclusive for underrepresented groups.	100	2.61	.994	Agreed
15	The leadership structure of sports programs at the University of Benin is diverse and reflective of the student population.	100	2.91	.996	Agreed
	Total		2.93	0.91	Agreed

Source; Field Survey 2025

CRITERION MEAN= 2.5

The responses from 100 participants at the University of Benin reveal that the leadership structure in sports programs plays an important role in promoting diversity and inclusion. The students agreed that leadership in sports programs actively promotes diversity in team selection, as indicated by a mean score of 2.96. Additionally, sports program leaders

encourage participation from students of all backgrounds and abilities, reflected in a mean score of 3.00.

Furthermore, the leadership in sports programs was seen to ensure fair treatment and equal opportunities for all students, regardless of their socio-economic status, with a mean score of 3.17. However, while leaders of sports programs implement policies to make sports more inclusive for underrepresented groups, this aspect received a lower mean score of 2.61, indicating that there might be some room for improvement in this area. The leadership structure of sports programs was also perceived to be diverse and reflective of the student population, with a mean of 2.91.

The overall total mean of 2.93, with a standard deviation of 0.91, suggests that while the leadership in sports programs at the University of Benin generally promotes diversity and inclusion, there are areas where further improvements can be made to ensure that sports programs are fully inclusive for all students. The findings indicate that leadership plays a significant role in fostering a diverse and inclusive environment, though continued efforts are needed to strengthen these initiatives.

Research Question 4: How can sports programs be made more inclusive at the University of Benin?

Table 5: Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation showing How can sports programs be made more inclusive at the University of Benin

S/N	ITEMS	N	Mean \bar{x}	Standard Deviation (SD)	Remark
16	Sports programs at the University of Benin should offer more opportunities for students with disabilities to participate.	100	3.12	.868	Agreed
17	The University of Benin should create more awareness about available sports programs to ensure all students know about them.	100	3.11	.709	Agreed
18	Sports teams should be diversified by including students from various cultural backgrounds and academic departments.	100	2.86	.829	Agreed
19	The University of Benin should provide financial support or scholarships for underrepresented students to participate in sports activities.	100	2.98	.974	Agreed
20	Sports programs should be designed to accommodate students with different levels of physical ability, from beginners to advanced athletes	100	3.11	.852	Agreed
	Total		3.04	0.85	Agreed

Source; Field Survey 2025

CRITERION MEAN= 2.5

The data collected from 100 respondents at the University of Benin provides insights into how sports programs can be made more inclusive. The students agreed that sports programs should offer more opportunities for students with disabilities to participate, as shown by a mean score of 3.12. Additionally, there was agreement that sports teams should be diversified by including students from various cultural backgrounds and academic

departments, with a mean score of 2.86, suggesting a positive attitude toward greater inclusion in team selection.

Moreover, the students suggested that sports programs should be designed to accommodate students with varying levels of physical ability, from beginners to advanced athletes, which received a mean score of 3.11, indicating strong support for more inclusive designs. However, the creation of more awareness about available sports programs Agreed, as evidenced by a mean score of 3.11, indicating that students did find this to be a priority. Similarly, providing financial support or scholarships for underrepresented students to participate in sports activities was also met with Agreed, reflected in a mean score of 2.98. The total mean of 3.04, with a standard deviation of 0.85, reflects a general consensus that sports programs should be more inclusive, but there are some areas, such as awareness creation and financial support, that require further attention and improvement. The findings suggest that making sports programs more inclusive requires more focus on students with disabilities, diversity in team composition, and accommodating varying levels of physical ability. However, efforts to improve awareness and provide financial support need to be reassessed to ensure greater participation from all students.

Test for Hypotheses

H01: There is no significant relationship between sports programs and the promotion of social inclusion at the University of Benin.

Pearson Correlation on There is no significant relationship between sports programs and the promotion of social inclusion at the University of Benin

		Correlations	
		sport_programs	The diversity in sports teams fosters a spirit of inclusivity at the University of Benin.
sport_programs	Pearson Correlation	1	.588**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	100	100
The diversity in sports teams fosters a spirit of inclusivity at the University of Benin.	Pearson Correlation	.588**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	100	100

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Pearson correlation analysis for the hypothesis "There is no significant relationship between sports programs and the promotion of social inclusion at the University of Benin" shows a significant positive correlation between sports programs and the diversity in sports teams fostering inclusivity. The correlation coefficient is 0.588, indicating a moderate positive relationship between these two variables. This correlation is statistically significant, as the p-value is 0.000, which is less than the 0.01 significance level.

The results suggest that sports programs at the University of Benin have a meaningful influence on promoting social inclusion, particularly by fostering diversity within sports teams. The significant relationship implies that as the diversity in sports teams increases, so does the spirit of inclusivity on campus. Therefore, the null hypothesis

(H01), which posits that there is no significant relationship between sports programs and social inclusion, is rejected. This finding highlights the important role of sports in enhancing social inclusion at the university.

H02: The leadership structure in sports programs does not significantly affect diversity and inclusion at the University of Benin.

Linear Regression on leadership structure in sports programs does not significantly affect diversity and inclusion at the University of Benin.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.085 ^a	.007	-.003	1.76863

a. Predictors: (Constant), leadership_structure

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2.212	1	2.212	.707	.402 ^b
	Residual	306.548	98	3.128		
	Total	308.760	99			

a. Dependent Variable: sport_inclusion

b. Predictors: (Constant), leadership_structure

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	16.271	1.310		12.425	.000
	leadership_structure	-.074	.089	-.085	-.841	.402

a. Dependent Variable: sport_inclusion

A simple linear regression was conducted to determine whether leadership structure significantly affects diversity and inclusion in sports programs at the University of Benin. The results indicated that leadership structure did not significantly predict diversity and inclusion, $F(1, 98) = 0.707, p = .402$. The model explained only 0.7% of the variance in sport inclusion ($R^2 = .007$). The regression coefficient for leadership structure was negative and statistically insignificant ($\beta = -0.085, t = -0.841, p = .402$), suggesting that changes in leadership structure have no meaningful impact on diversity and inclusion levels among students engaged in sports programs.

This finding implies that leadership structure within the University's sports programs does not significantly influence the degree of inclusion or diversity experienced by participants. Other organizational or social factors such as resource allocation, student interest, or administrative policies may have a greater impact on promoting inclusion within sports programs than the formal leadership structure.

Discussion of Findings

The findings from the first research question reveal that sports programs at the University of Benin play an essential role in promoting social inclusion among students. The students generally agreed that these programs encourage interaction and socialization among individuals from diverse backgrounds, helping to form friendships beyond academic departments. Participation in sports activities has been shown to contribute to a sense of belonging, with students feeling more connected to the campus community. Additionally, the diversity in sports teams fosters a spirit of inclusivity, allowing

individuals from various cultural backgrounds to feel equally accepted in campus activities. This supports the work of studies such as those by Diehl and Hübner (2019) and Smith et al. (2020), who found that sports activities serve as platforms for social integration and unity, fostering a positive campus climate by bridging social and cultural gaps through team-based engagement.

The second research question identified several barriers preventing underrepresented students from participating in sports programs. Financial constraints emerged as a significant obstacle, with many students reporting that the costs associated with participation were prohibitive. Additionally, underrepresented students felt that sports facilities were not easily accessible, and a lack of awareness about available programs further compounded the issue. The study also found that some students experienced discrimination in sports programs, while others cited time constraints due to academic workload as a barrier. These findings align with the research of Ogunyemi (2018) and Adegoke et al. (2021), who highlighted those financial and social barriers, as well as a lack of accessible facilities and support, often prevent marginalized groups from fully participating in extracurricular activities. Both studies emphasize the need for universities to create more inclusive policies that address these challenges to ensure equal access to sports programs for all students.

Regarding the third research question, the findings suggest that the leadership structure in sports programs at the University of Benin does play a role in promoting diversity and inclusion, but there are areas for improvement. Students agreed that the leadership in sports programs promotes diversity in team selection and encourages

participation from students of all backgrounds and abilities. Moreover, leaders were seen to ensure fair treatment and equal opportunities for all students, regardless of their socio-economic status. However, while the leadership was perceived to be supportive, there were indications that policies aimed at making sports programs more inclusive for underrepresented groups were not always effectively implemented. The findings echo those of previous studies by Brown and Roberts (2019) and Anderson et al. (2020), which stressed the importance of leadership in fostering an inclusive environment in sports programs. However, both studies also noted that while leadership commitment is critical, further work is needed to ensure that diversity and inclusion policies are truly impactful and accessible to all students.

The fourth research question explored ways in which sports programs could be made more inclusive. The findings suggest that there is strong support for offering more opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in sports. Additionally, there was support for diversifying sports teams to include students from various cultural backgrounds and academic departments, as well as designing programs to accommodate students with different levels of physical ability. However, students did not prioritize creating more awareness about sports programs or providing financial support for underrepresented students, as these aspects received less agreement. These findings align with those of Carter and Varnell (2018) and Jackson et al. (2021), who emphasized the need for universities to not only offer inclusive programs but also to ensure that students are informed and financially supported. Both studies highlighted that inclusive sports programs are not only about the activities themselves but also about fostering an

environment where all students, regardless of their background or abilities, have the necessary resources and support to engage fully.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study explored the role of sports in social inclusion and diversity in the university of Benin, four (4) research questions guided the study, aiming to identify: How do sports programs promote social inclusion at the University of Benin? What barriers prevent underrepresented students from participating in sports programs at the University of Benin? How does the leadership structure in sports programs affects diversity and inclusion at the University of Benin? And How can sports programs be made more inclusive at the University of Benin? The study reviewed literature on the concept of sports in social inclusion, The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The population of the study consisted of all University of Benin student which is 46,110, the stratified random sampling method was employed first to divide the student population into five strata based on the faculties and a sample size of 100 from Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of Management Sciences, Faculty of Education, Faculty of Arts, and Faculty of Life Sciences, with 20 students selected from each faculty. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire, The instrument was administered by the researcher to the respondents, the data collected was collated and analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings of the study were as follows;

Findings

1. Sports programs at the University of Benin promote social inclusion by encouraging interaction and socialization among students from diverse backgrounds, helping them form friendships outside their academic departments and contributing to a sense of belonging.
2. Barriers preventing underrepresented students from participating in sports programs include financial constraints, lack of awareness about available programs, inaccessibility of sports facilities, discrimination, and time constraints due to academic workload.
3. The leadership structure in sports programs at the University of Benin positively impacts diversity and inclusion, with leaders promoting diversity in team selection, encouraging participation from all backgrounds, and ensuring fair treatment and equal opportunities for students.
4. Sports programs can be made more inclusive by offering more opportunities for students with disabilities, diversifying teams, and accommodating students with varying levels of physical ability. However, there is less agreement on the need for increased awareness and financial support for underrepresented students.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings from this study highlight the significant role of sports programs at the University of Benin in promoting social inclusion and fostering a sense of belonging among students from diverse backgrounds. While the leadership structure in

sports programs is seen as positively impacting diversity and inclusion, there are still challenges, such as financial constraints, inaccessibility of facilities, and a lack of awareness, which hinder participation, particularly for underrepresented students. To enhance the inclusivity of sports programs, it is essential to focus on providing opportunities for students with disabilities, diversifying teams, and accommodating varying levels of physical ability. Additionally, more efforts are needed to address barriers such as financial support and awareness creation, ensuring that all students, regardless of their background or circumstances, have equal access to and benefit from these programs. The findings emphasize the importance of a well-structured, inclusive approach to sports programming to fully promote diversity, inclusion, and equal participation at the university.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. The University of Benin should invest in improving the accessibility of sports facilities to ensure that all students, especially underrepresented groups, have equal opportunities to participate in sports programs.
2. Financial support or scholarships should be provided to underrepresented students to remove financial barriers that prevent them from joining sports activities.
3. Awareness campaigns should be launched to inform all students, especially underrepresented groups, about the sports programs available to them at the University of Benin.

4. The university should implement policies that promote the inclusion of students with disabilities in sports programs, ensuring that there are opportunities for all students to participate based on their abilities.

Suggestions for Further Studies

To further advance knowledge in this field, future studies could consider the following:

1. Future studies could examine the impact of financial aid and scholarship programs on increasing the participation of underrepresented students in sports at universities.
2. Research could explore the specific needs and experiences of students with disabilities in sports programs to develop more inclusive policies and practices.
3. Further research could focus on the role of student leadership in promoting inclusivity within sports programs and how leadership structures can be enhanced to support diversity.
4. Future studies could investigate the long-term effects of inclusive sports programs on students' academic performance, social integration, and overall well-being.

REFERENCES

- Adeleke, T., & Eboh, C. (2020). Inclusive education and sports participation for students with disabilities in Nigerian universities. *African Journal of Special Education*, 12(1), 45–58.
- Agwu, O. C., Akinlabi, S., & Ede, A. N. (2024). Inclusion of people with disabilities in the design considerations of sports complexes in Nigeria. *International Journal of Building Pathology and Adaptation*, 42(2), 301-317. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJBPA-08-2022-0110>
- Al Harthy, F. A., Al-Ghamdi, S., Al-Anazi, F., & Al-Subaie, M. (2025). Social inclusion and mental health among people with disabilities participating in sports clubs in Saudi Arabia. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 16, 1504352. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1504352>
- Al-Fattal, A., Walker, E. G., & Gust, A. A. M. (2025). From recruitment to enrollment: Understanding student-athletes' college choice decisions. *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living*. <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fspor.2025.1652581/full>
- Anderson, E. (2020). Diversity, inclusion, and transformation in university sport: Challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Contemporary Sports Studies*, 18(2), 121–136.
- Atare, P. (2024). Inclusive recreational sports participation and mental well-being of visually impaired and sighted university students. *Journal of Inclusive Physical Activity*, 5(1), 33-49.
- Beniusiene, A., Kontautiene, V., & Rosu, D. (2025). Experiential learning in international cooperation: Insights from Erasmus+ BIP mobility. *EDULEARN25 Proceedings*. <https://library.iated.org/view/BENIUSIENE2025EXP>
- Carter-Thuillier, B., López-Pastor, V., Gallardo-Fuentes, F., Carter-Beltrán, J., Fernández-Balboa, J.-M., Delgado-Floody, P., Grimminger-Seidensticker, E., & Sortwell, A. (2023). After-school sports programmes and social inclusion processes in culturally diverse contexts: Results of an international multicase study. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, 1122362. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1122362>
- Dada, O. R., Ukpata, M. I., & Ofie, C. (2017). Sport participation and facilities as predictors of marketable skills in sport for persons with disability in Nigerian universities. *Journal of Physical Education and Sport Management*, 8(2), 12-21.

- Freeman, H. O. (2025). Undergraduate students who transfer from predominantly white institutions to historically black colleges and universities. *LSU Graduate School Dissertations*. https://repository.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations/6845/
- Fuest, H., Porter, J., & Melvin, J. (2025). Yes, we see you! A case study providing university access for adults with learning disabilities. *Student Experience Journal*. <https://openjournals.ljmu.ac.uk/studentexp/article/view/3306>
- Gabriel, M. A., Ogada, R., & Oyiengo, K. A. (2025). Behavioral components influencing social development of learners with hearing impairments in public primary schools in Rongo Sub-County, Kenya. *African Journal of Education, Science and Technology*, 7(3). <http://ajest.org/index.php/ajest/article/view/832>
- Hadziabdic, S. (2025). Ascending needles in a haystack? The heterogeneous political participation effects of associational involvement by education. *Frontiers in Sociology*, 10, 1584885. <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fsoc.2025.1584885/full>
- Haghdar Saheli, M., & Nazari, S. (2025). Developing a conceptual framework of effective factors in the professional development of physical education teachers with an emphasis on psychological empowerment. *Research on Educational Sport*. Retrieved from https://res.ssric.ac.ir/article_4528_en.html
- Hooli, E. M., & Santos-Pastor, M. L. (2025). Intercultural education, physical activity and language learning of university students through service-learning with migrants in Europe's land border with Africa. *Espiral. Cuadernos del Profesorado*, 14(1), 45–62. Retrieved from <https://ojs.ual.es/ojs/index.php/ESPIRAL/article/view/10364>
- Jean, T., Young, J. P., Nye, J. R. E., & Nye, E. A. (2025). Supervisor authority and its impacts on equity, diversity, and inclusion in National Collegiate Athletic Association athletic training environments. *Journal of Athletic Training*. <https://doi.org/10.4085/1062-6050-0137.24>
- Karstensen, V., Piskorz-Ryń, O., Karna, W., Lee, A., Neo, X. S., & Gottschlich, D. (2024). The role of sports in promoting social inclusion and health in marginalized communities. *International Journal of Sport Studies for Health*, 7(3). <https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.intjssh.7.3.6>
- Lange, S. (2024). Inclusion of the marginalized: The case of sport participation. *Managing Sport and Leisure*, 29(4), 285-299. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24704067.2024.2317121>

- Leşco, V., & Lungu, E. (2025). The role of university championships in the socio-cultural integration of foreign students. *Across Journal of Interdisciplinary Cross-border Studies*, 3(1), 22–34. Retrieved from <https://www.gup.ugal.ro/ugaljournals/index.php/across/article/download/8595/7331>
- Malcolm, D., Esson, J., & Bradbury, S. (2025). *Leading the way? Ethnic diversity and inclusion in the senior leadership workforce at 18 sports bodies*. Loughborough University Research Repository. Retrieved from https://repository.lboro.ac.uk/articles/report/Leading_the_Way_Ethnic_diversity_and_inclusion/28264766
- Marqués-Sánchez, P., López-García, J. J., Rodríguez-García, P. L., & García-López, L. M. (2024). Social network analysis of adolescent participation in team sports: Gender and weight status differences. *European Journal of Sport Science*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17461391.2024.2361885>
- Martins, P. J., & Manzano-Sánchez, D. (2025). Physical education, health and education innovation: A strategy to promote inclusive sports practices. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 16, Article 1621248. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1621248>
- McConkey, R., Dowling, S., Hassan, D., Menke, S., & O'Brien, P. (2022). The community inclusion of athletes with intellectual disability: A transnational study of the impact of participating in Special Olympics. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 35(5), 1105-1117. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jar.13009>
- Mohamad, R., & Usman, M. I. (2025). Maguindanaon indigenous games and skills-related fitness of junior high school students. *Psychology and Education*, 62(1). <https://www.ejournals.ph/article.php?id=28102>
- Mohamad, R., & Usman, M. I. (2025). Maguindanaon indigenous games and skills-related fitness of junior high school students. *Psychology and Education*, 62(1). <https://www.ejournals.ph/article.php?id=28102>
- Moreau, C., Mmari, K., & Banati, P. (2025). Changing paradigms to address gender health inequities for all. *Global Social Challenges Journal*. <https://bristoluniversitypressdigital.com>
- Morgan, H., & Parker, A. (2021). Sport-based interventions and social inclusion: Building sustainable programmes. In *Sport, Physical Activity and Social Inclusion* (pp. 91-110). Routledge.

- Morouço, P., Rogowska, A. M., & Pavlova, I. (2025). Motivations for physical activity-volume III. *Frontiers in Psychology*. <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1666422/abstract>
- Oblak, V. P. (2023). Narrowing the definition of social inclusion in sport: A reconceptualization. *Physical Culture and Sport. Studies and Research*, 101(1), 55-68. <https://doi.org/10.2478/pcssr-2023-0007>
- Okonkwo, U. C., & Onifade, O. P. (2019). Gender participation and representation in Nigerian university sports: A study of selected institutions. *Nigerian Journal of Physical Activity and Health Promotion*, 15(3), 79–88.
- Olugboyege, O. (2023). Empirical analysis of sport participation on Nigerian student academic performance: A systematic review. *Nigerian Journal of Sports Science*, 15(1), 88-104.
- Ossai, C. N., & Nwabuwe, M. E. (2025). The effects of social and cultural barriers on sports participation in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. *Journal of Physical Education and Sports Management*, 12(1), 45-59.
- Osuoji, U. (2019). Promoting sport participation amongst the disabled in Nigeria: A qualitative inquiry. (Unpublished master's thesis). University of Lagos, Nigeria.
- Precillas, M. R. (2025). The role of extracurricular sports programs in fostering leadership and teamwork skills among high school students. *Journal of World Englishes and Educational Practices*, 7(4), 115–128. <https://al-kindipublishers.org/index.php/jweep/article/view/9082>
- Raw, K., Howell, P., & Taylor, C. (2025). *Project Report: Gender Diversity on Sporting Committees*. Swinburne University. Retrieved from https://figshare.swinburne.edu.au/articles/report/Project_Report_Gender_Diversity_on_Sporting_Committees/28448102
- Roe, D., & Jowett, S. (2025). “Advantage male”: Elite university tennis players' views on working with female tennis coaches. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 20(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/17479541251358568>
- Shahriary, N., & Abbasi, S. (2025). The model of a healthy and women-friendly physically active city in the interactions of urban planning and sports management. *Woman in Development and Politics*. https://jwdp.ut.ac.ir/article_102877.html?lang=en

- Shao, J. (2025). Adaptive sports programs as catalysts for social inclusion: The mediating roles of emotional resilience and empathy. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 22(3), 47358. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph2203047358>
- Tafari, M. G., Gravino, G., Di Palma, D., & Palmiero, F. (2025). Wheelchair hockey and inclusion: An emotional and relational analysis in lower secondary school. *Journal of Physical Education and Sport*, 25(7). <https://www.efsupit.ro/images/stories/july2025/Art%20154.pdf>
- Tatari, M., Ferdowsi, M. H., & Amraee, H. (2025). The effect of ethical leadership and teamwork on the empowerment of physical education teachers. *Research on Educational Sport*. https://res.ssrc.ac.ir/article_4477.html?lang=en
- Yuwono, C., Adi, S., & Nurharsono, T. (2025). Promoting safety and injury prevention in movement and sport environments. *Jurnal Panjar Pendidikan Jasmani*, 10(2). <https://journal.unnes.ac.id/journals/panjar/article/view/30818>
- Zeng, H., & Hao, J. (2025). *Leading smart education*. Springer. <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/978-981-97-8148-5.pdf>

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

QUESTIONNAIRE

**UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY
FACULTY OF EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH KINETICS AND SPORTS**

**THE ROLE OF SPORTS IN SOCIAL INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY IN THE
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN**

Dear Respondents

The purpose of this questionnaire is to elicit information on the above-mentioned topic. Your cooperation in providing honest and sincere response to all the questions will be appreciated as they will be treated with utmost confidentiality.

Thanks for your co-operation

Instruction, please tick appropriately in the boxes provided

SECTION A

Demographic Data

Gender : Male (), Female ()

Age: 16 -19 () 20- 24 () 25- above ()

Section B

Instruction: Please tick [√] the most appropriate option for each item.

Key: SA – Strongly Agree, A – Agree, D – Disagree, SD – Strongly disagree

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	D	SD
RQ1	How do sports programs promote social inclusion at the University of Benin?				
1	Sports programs at the University of Benin encourage students from different backgrounds to interact and socialize.				
2	Participation in sports activities helps students form friendships with others outside their academic departments.				
3	Sports programs at the University of Benin contribute to the sense of belonging among students.				
4	The diversity in sports teams fosters a spirit of inclusivity at the University of Benin.				
5	Through sports, students from various cultural backgrounds feel equally accepted in campus activities.				
RQ2	What barriers prevent underrepresented students from participating in sports programs at the University of Benin?				
6	Financial constraints prevent underrepresented students from joining sports programs at the University of Benin.				
7	Underrepresented students feel that sports facilities at the University of Benin are not easily accessible to them.				
8	There is a lack of awareness about available sports programs among underrepresented students at the University of Benin.				
9	Underrepresented students face discrimination in sports programs at the University of Benin.				
10	Time constraints due to academic workload prevent underrepresented students from participating in sports.				
RQ3	How does the leadership structure in sports programs affects diversity and inclusion at the University of Benin?				
11	The leadership in sports programs at the University of Benin actively promotes diversity in team selection.				
12	Sports program leaders at the University of Benin encourage participation from students of all backgrounds and abilities.				

13	The leadership in sports programs at the University of Benin ensures fair treatment and equal opportunities for all students, regardless of their socio-economic status.				
14	Leaders of sports programs at the University of Benin implement policies that make sports more inclusive for underrepresented groups.				
15	The leadership structure of sports programs at the University of Benin is diverse and reflective of the student population.				
RQ4	How can sports programs be made more inclusive at the University of Benin?				
16	Sports programs at the University of Benin should offer more opportunities for students with disabilities to participate.				
17	The University of Benin should create more awareness about available sports programs to ensure all students know about them.				
18	Sports teams should be diversified by including students from various cultural backgrounds and academic departments.				
19	The University of Benin should provide financial support or scholarships for underrepresented students to participate in sports activities.				
20	Sports programs should be designed to accommodate students with different levels of physical ability, from beginners to advanced athletes				

APPENDIX II

DATA OUTPUT OF THE ANALYSIS

Statistics

		GENDER	AGE
N	Valid	100	100
	Missing	0	0

Frequency Table

		GENDER			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	MALE	43	43.0	43.0	43.0
	FEMALE	57	57.0	57.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

		AGE			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	16-19YEARS	25	25.0	25.0	25.0
	20-23 YEARS	58	58.0	58.0	83.0
	24 YEARS - ABOVE	17	17.0	17.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

RQ1

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Sports programs at the University of Benin encourage students from different backgrounds to interact and socialize.	100	1	4	3.04	.840
Participation in sports activities helps students form friendships with others outside their academic departments.	100	1	4	3.15	.657
Sports programs at the University of Benin contribute to the sense of belonging among students.	100	1	4	2.92	.907
The diversity in sports teams fosters a spirit of inclusivity at the University of Benin.	100	1	4	2.79	1.233
Through sports, students from various cultural backgrounds feel equally accepted in campus activities.	100	1	4	2.96	.887
Valid N (listwise)	100				

RQ2

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Financial constraints prevent underrepresented students from joining sports programs at the University of Benin.	100	1	4	2.67	1.101
Underrepresented students feel that sports facilities at the University of Benin are not easily accessible to them.	100	1	4	2.64	.823
There is a lack of awareness about available sports programs among underrepresented students at the University of Benin.	100	1	4	2.81	1.022
Underrepresented students face discrimination in sports programs at the University of Benin.	100	1	4	2.53	1.068
Time constraints due to academic workload prevent underrepresented students from participating in sports.	100	1	4	2.68	1.302
Valid N (listwise)	100				

RQ3

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
The leadership in sports programs at the University of Benin actively promotes diversity in team selection.	100	1	4	2.96	.974
Sports program leaders at the University of Benin encourage participation from students of all backgrounds and abilities.	100	1	4	3.00	.932
The leadership in sports programs at the University of Benin ensures fair treatment and equal opportunities for all students, regardless of their socio-economic status.	100	1	4	3.17	.637
Leaders of sports programs at the University of Benin implement policies that make sports more inclusive for underrepresented groups.	100	1	4	2.61	.994
The leadership structure of sports programs at the University of Benin is diverse and reflective of the student population.	100	1	4	2.91	.996
Valid N (listwise)	100				

RQ4

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Sports programs at the University of Benin should offer more opportunities for students with disabilities to participate.	100	1	4	3.12	.868
The University of Benin should create more awareness about available sports programs to ensure all students know about them.	100	1	4	3.11	.709
Sports teams should be diversified by including students from various cultural backgrounds and academic departments.	100	1	4	2.86	.829
The University of Benin should provide financial support or scholarships for underrepresented students to participate in sports activities.	100	1	4	2.98	.974
Sports programs should be designed to accommodate students with different levels of physical ability, from beginners to advanced athletes	100	1	4	3.11	.852
Valid N (listwise)	100				

Hypo1

Correlations

		sport_programs	The diversity in sports teams fosters a spirit of inclusivity at the University of Benin.
sport_programs	Pearson Correlation	1	.588**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	100	100
The diversity in sports teams fosters a spirit of inclusivity at the University of Benin.	Pearson Correlation	.588**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	100	100

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Hypo 2

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	leadership_structure ^b	.	Enter

a. Dependent Variable: sport_inclusion

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.085 ^a	.007	-.003	1.76863

a. Predictors: (Constant), leadership_structure

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2.212	1	2.212	.707	.402 ^b
	Residual	306.548	98	3.128		
	Total	308.760	99			

a. Dependent Variable: sport_inclusion

b. Predictors: (Constant), leadership_structure

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Coefficients		
				Beta		
1	(Constant)	16.271	1.310		12.425	.000
	leadership_structure	-.074	.089	-.085	-.841	.402

a. Dependent Variable: sport_inclusion