



The Influence of Extracurricular Sports Activities on Students' Social Skills

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to conceptually and empirically analyze the influence of extracurricular sports activities on the social skills of students at SMP N 1 Medan. Social skills are understood as non-cognitive competencies encompassing interpersonal communication, cooperation, empathy, self-control, and adherence to rules, which play a crucial role in academic success and psychosocial adjustment in adolescents. The study employed a mixed methods approach with a sequential explanatory design. It began with quantitative data collection through a social skills questionnaire from 120 students (both participants and non-participants in extracurricular sports activities), followed by in-depth interviews to enrich the interpretation of the statistical results. Quantitative analysis was conducted using mean difference tests and multiple regression, while qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis. The results indicate that participation in extracurricular sports activities has a positive and significant impact on students' social skills, particularly in the dimensions of interpersonal communication, teamwork, and adherence to rules. Qualitative findings revealed that intensive interaction in practice and matches, team dynamics, and the value of sportsmanship provide a context for authentic social learning. Overall, this study confirms that extracurricular sports are a strategic vehicle in developing students' social-emotional competencies and need to be managed in a structured, pedagogical, and sustainable manner by schools.

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INTRODUCTION

Social skills are a non-cognitive competency that plays a significant role in academic success, psychosocial well-being, and work readiness in adulthood. Several recent studies confirm that social skills including interpersonal communication, cooperation, emotional regulation, empathy, adherence to norms, and the ability to build positive relationships are correlated with academic achievement, student engagement, and long-term social adaptation (OECD, 2019; Jones et al., 2015; Taylor et al., 2017). In the context of 21st-century education, strengthening social and emotional competencies is even considered as important as mastery of literacy and numeracy because it



contributes to psychological resilience, productivity, and collaboration in the workplace (Heckman & Kautz, 2016; World Economic Forum, 2020).

Schools, as formal institutions, are not only responsible for cognitive development but also have a strategic mandate to shape students' character and social skills. The implementation of character education and social and emotional learning (SEL) approaches has shown that school-based interventions can improve students' social competence, prosocial behavior, and adjustment (Durlak et al., 2011; Corcoran et al., 2018). However, intracurricular learning is often constrained by a rigid curriculum structure and academic orientation, leaving little space for authentic social practice.

In this context, extracurricular activities—particularly sports—are seen as a potential vehicle for developing social skills in a more contextualized way. Unlike regular physical education lessons, extracurricular sports activities take place outside of formal school hours in a more flexible and participatory atmosphere. Empirical research indicates that participation in school sports is associated with improved teamwork, communication, leadership, self-discipline, and social responsibility (Holt et al., 2017; Bean & Forneris, 2016; Opstoel et al., 2020). Furthermore, involvement in sports teams provides hands-on experience in resolving conflicts, managing competitive pressure, and practicing sportsmanship and fair play.

However, the relationship between extracurricular sports participation and social skills is not always linear or automatic. Several studies have shown that positive impacts are strongly influenced by program quality, coach competence, and the team's social climate (Gould & Carson, 2008; Turnnidge et al., 2014; Newman et al., 2020). In practice, programs that focus solely on achievement without integrating educational values may fail to optimize students' social development. This issue requires a more in-depth study of how and under what conditions extracurricular sports actually contribute to the development of social skills. Theoretically, the influence of sports activities on social skills can be explained through the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) framework, which emphasizes five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2020). The sports context provides authentic situations that require students to manage emotions during wins and losses, communicate within a team, understand others' perspectives, and make decisions in competitive situations.

Recent meta-analyses have shown that sports programs designed with a positive youth development (PYD) approach significantly increase prosocial behavior, empathy, and responsibility (Ciocanel et al., 2017; Holt et al., 2017). Longitudinal studies in Europe and North America report that active participation in school sports is correlated with increased social engagement, leadership, and a sense of belonging to the school (Fredricks & Eccles, 2016; Oberle et al., 2019). In fact, Opstoel et al. (2020) found that students involved in structured sports scored higher on the dimensions of cooperation and self-control than non-participants. From the perspective of social network theory, involvement in extracurricular activities expands friendship networks and improves the quality of social support, which contributes to adolescent psychosocial adaptation

(Veenstra et al., 2018). Meanwhile, developmental psychology approaches emphasize that adolescence is a crucial period for social identity formation and emotion regulation, so collective experiences in sports teams can be an effective medium for social learning (Lerner et al., 2015).

Research in Asia is also beginning to show similar findings. Studies in Korea and Japan report that participation in school sports clubs is positively correlated with empathy, self-control, and social adjustment (Kim et al., 2018; Nakagawa & Suzukamo, 2019). In Indonesia, several studies report the contribution of extracurricular sports to strengthening the character traits of discipline, responsibility, and cooperation (Juliantine, 2022; Suryadi et al., 2021). However, most studies still use correlational quantitative designs and have not deeply explored the dynamics of students' experiences in the context of school sports.

Thus, recent developments in the literature indicate a growing consensus that sport has the potential to be an effective medium for social learning, especially when designed with a structured and values-oriented pedagogical approach (Turnnidge et al., 2014; Newman et al., 2020).

Despite the strong empirical evidence, several relevant research gaps remain. First, many studies examine the general relationship between extracurricular participation and socio-emotional outcomes without specifically isolating the extracurricular sports context as a unique social learning space. This is despite the fact that the characteristics of sport competition, teamwork, and game rules have different dynamics than those of arts or academic activities. Second, the dominance of correlational quantitative approaches limits understanding of the internal mechanisms by which experiences in team sports shape social skills. Studies integrating qualitative approaches to explore students' subjective experiences are still relatively limited (Bean et al., 2018). Yet, individual interpretations of social experiences significantly influence the internalization of values. Third, research in the Southeast Asian context, particularly Indonesia, still lacks comprehensive methodological designs. Collectivist cultural factors, school social norms, and teacher-student relationship patterns can moderate the influence of sports activities on social development. The global literature does not fully reflect these dynamics. Fourth, there are few studies using mixed methods designs to systematically integrate quantitative and qualitative findings to understand the role of extracurricular sports activities on students' social skills.

Based on this gap, this study aims to analyze the influence of extracurricular sports activities on students' social skills using a sequential explanatory mixed methods design. The quantitative phase is used to statistically test relationships and effect sizes, while the qualitative phase aims to deepen understanding of students' experiences in building communication, cooperation, emotional regulation, and responsibility through sports activities. The novelty of this research lies in: (1) A specific focus on extracurricular sports as a context for social learning; (2) The integration of a mixed-methods design to uncover the relationships and mechanisms of social skill formation; (3) The research context in Indonesian schools contributes to the global literature on sport and

adolescent social development; (4) The development of a conceptual model that maps the pathways of the influence of sport participation on social skill dimensions based on the SEL and PYD frameworks. Theoretically, this research enriches the literature on sport as a medium for character and social education. Practically, the research findings are expected to form the basis for policy development and the design of extracurricular sports programs that are not only achievement-oriented but also systematically support the development of students' social skills as capital for academic and future success.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a mixed methods approach with a sequential explanatory design, which involved quantitative data collection and analysis in the first stage, followed by qualitative exploration to deepen and explain the statistical findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Ivankova & Wingo, 2018). This approach is recommended in education and sport studies when researchers want to understand not only the magnitude of effects but also the underlying psychosocial mechanisms (Fetters & Molina-Azorin, 2017; Turner et al., 2020). The quantitative phase employed a non-experimental comparative design to compare the social skills of students who participated in extracurricular sports and those who did not. This model is relevant to adolescent development research examining the impact of sport participation on social competence (Opstoel et al., 2020; Holt et al., 2017). The qualitative phase used in-depth case studies to explore students' subjective experiences in the context of school sports, as recommended in the positive youth development (PYD) and social and emotional learning (SEL) frameworks (Bean et al., 2018; Newman et al., 2020).

Subjects/Participants

The research population was all seventh-ninth grade students at SMP N 1 Medan who participated in active extracurricular sports programs (soccer, basketball, and badminton). The quantitative sample was selected through purposive sampling with the following criteria: (1) participating in extracurricular sports for at least one semester, and (2) not participating in extracurricular activities as a comparison group. The total sample size was 120 students (60 participants and 60 non-participants). This comparative approach aligns with research showing significant differences in social competence between sports participants and non-participants (Fredricks & Eccles, 2016; Oberle et al., 2019). The qualitative phase involved 12–15 students selected using maximum variation sampling based on social skills score categories (high, medium, low) and sport type. This strategy increased the depth and diversity of participant perspectives (Palinkas et al., 2015) and allowed for exploration of contextual factors such as team relationships and the role of coaches (Turnnidge et al., 2014).

Research Instrument

The quantitative instrument was a social skills questionnaire adapted from the adolescent social-emotional competency scale based on the SEL framework (CASEL, 2020; Taylor et al., 2017). The dimensions measured included interpersonal

communication, cooperation, empathy, self-control, and adherence to rules. The scale used a 5-point Likert format. The adaptation process followed forward-back translation procedures, readability testing, and limited pilot testing. Internal reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha (≥ 0.70), and construct validity through exploratory factor analysis (Hair et al., 2019), as recommended in educational psychometric measurement (Boateng et al., 2018). The qualitative instrument consisted of a semi-structured interview guide that explored training experiences, peer-coach relationship dynamics, conflict resolution, and internalization of sportsmanship and discipline values. This approach aligns with qualitative research in the context of youth sports, which emphasizes the importance of narrative experiences (Bean et al., 2018; Newman et al., 2020).

Research Procedure

The study began with obtaining school permission and parental consent (informed consent), in accordance with ethical principles of educational research (BERA, 2018). The quantitative phase involved completing questionnaires in a classroom setting under researcher supervision. Sports participation data were verified through school documentation (attendance lists and membership).

After initial analysis, qualitative participants were selected based on score variations. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim. This procedure ensured data accuracy and trustworthiness through member checking and peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017).

Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Normality and homogeneity tests were conducted before independent t-tests were conducted to compare the two groups. Multiple regression analysis was used to examine the contribution of sports participation to social skills, controlling for demographic variables (Field, 2018). This approach is commonly used in studies of adolescent social development (Vella et al., 2017).

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis through open coding, categorization, and theme identification (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Data integration was carried out at the interpretation stage using a connecting and building strategy, linking statistical results to narratives of student experiences (Fetters & Molina-Azorin, 2017). This approach yielded a comprehensive understanding of how extracurricular sports activities influence the construction of students' social skills empirically and contextually.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Quantitative Results

Descriptive analysis showed that students participating in extracurricular sports had higher social skills scores compared to non-participants. This finding is consistent with international research reporting that participation in structured sports is positively correlated with social competence and prosocial behavior (Opstoel et al., 2020; Holt et

al., 2017; Oberle et al., 2019). The mean total score for the participating group was in the medium-high category, while the mean score for the non-participating group was in the medium category.

The most striking differences were found in the dimensions of interpersonal communication and cooperation, two aspects theoretically closely linked to sports team dynamics (Newman et al., 2020; Bean et al., 2018). This supports the Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2020) framework, which emphasizes the importance of collaborative contexts in strengthening relationship skills.

Table 1.
 Mean Social Skills Scores Based on Extracurricular Participation

Group	N	M (Total)	SD
Extracurricular sports participants	60	82.45	6.21
Non-extracurricular sports participants	60	75.18	7.04

Note: Maximum score = 100; M = mean; SD = standard deviation.

An independent samples t-test showed a significant difference in the total social skills score, $t(118) = 6.12$, $p < 0.001$. Specifically, significant differences were found in the dimensions of communication ($p < 0.001$), cooperation ($p < 0.001$), and compliance with rules ($p = 0.002$), while the dimensions of empathy and self-control showed moderate but still significant differences ($p < 0.05$). These findings align with studies by Fredricks and Eccles (2016) and Vella et al. (2017), which confirmed that school sports activities increase social engagement and behavioral control.

Multiple regression analyses were conducted controlling for gender and grade level. The results showed that participation in extracurricular sports was a significant positive predictor of social skills ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$), contributing 28% of the variance in scores ($R^2 = 0.28$). This finding supports the findings of Ciocanel et al. (2017) and Turnidge et al. (2014) that structured sports serve as a positive youth development context that supports social development.

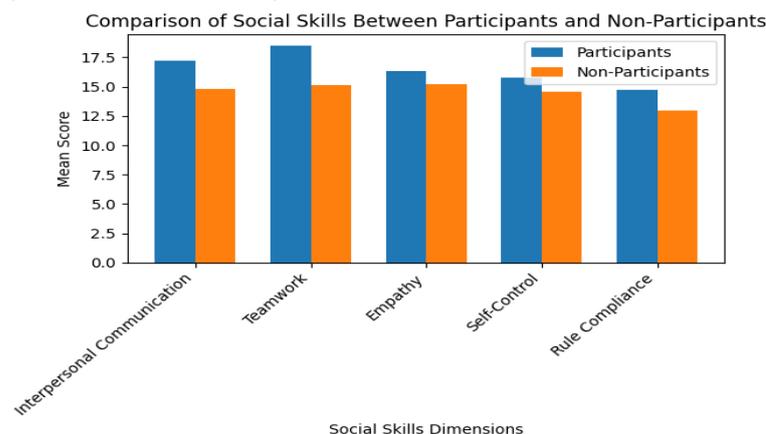


Diagram 1.
 Comparison of Mean Social Skills Dimensions

The diagram shows that the largest differences are in communication and cooperation, supporting the literature that sports team dynamics stimulate intensive social interactions (Holt et al., 2017; Newman et al., 2020).

Qualitative Results

1. Communication Learning and Courage to Speak Up
Students reported that practices and matches required them to actively speak up, give instructions, and support their teammates. This reinforces the findings of Bean et al. (2018) that sport provides a safe space for building interpersonal confidence.
2. Teamwork and Solidarity
Participants described the importance of collective strategy, mutual assistance, and shared responsibility. This finding is consistent with the PYD framework, which emphasizes collaboration as a means of social learning (Holt et al., 2017).
3. Sportsmanship and Respect for Rules
Students reported learning to accept referee decisions and match outcomes in a mature manner. This aligns with research that shows that sport increases adherence to social norms (Opstoel et al., 2020).
4. Emotional Management and Discipline
Several students mentioned the ability to control anger when losing and consistently follow a practice schedule. Literature shows that competitive experiences help adolescents regulate their emotions (Oberle et al., 2019; Newman et al., 2020).

Strikingly, many students reported transfer of skills to the classroom context, such as increased confidence during presentations and greater cooperation in group work. This finding supports the theory of transfer of learning in sports contexts (Turnnidge et al., 2014).

Integration of Findings

The integration of quantitative and qualitative data demonstrated consistency between statistical scores and students' subjective experiences. Significant differences in the communication and cooperation dimensions were reinforced by students' narratives of intense team interactions. Thus, the influence of extracurricular sports on social skills is not only confirmed numerically but also explained contextually through authentic social learning experiences.

Overall, the results of this study reinforce the consensus in the literature over the past decade that school sports, when managed in a structured and educational manner, are an effective medium for developing adolescents' social skills.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that student involvement in extracurricular sports activities is significantly associated with better social skills compared to students who are not involved, particularly in the areas of interpersonal communication, cooperation, and adherence to rules. This finding is consistent with various studies over the past decade that confirm that participation in structured sports in school settings is positively correlated with the development of adolescents' social and emotional competencies (Holt et al., 2017; Opstoel et al., 2020; Oberle et al., 2019). Empirically, a meta-analysis by Ciocanel et al. (2017) showed that positive youth development (PYD)-based sports programs have moderate to strong effects on increasing prosocial behavior

and reducing problem behavior. Thus, these results strengthen the literature's consensus that school sports can be an effective social education context.

From a Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) perspective, repeated training and competition experiences provide authentic situations for students to develop relationship skills, self-management, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2020; Taylor et al., 2017). Regular practice requires students to communicate clearly, listen to instructions, and adapt their behavior to team dynamics. Competition creates emotional pressure that encourages self-regulation and impulse control. Interviews in this study indicate that students view the sports field as a social learning space, where they learn to speak in front of others, communicate strategies, and support teammates. This finding aligns with studies by Bean et al. (2018) and Newman et al. (2020), which found that team interactions in sports strengthen social confidence and the ability to express opinions.

Theoretically, sports integrate three key elements: competition, collaboration, and adherence to rules. This combination creates a unique context that differs from other extracurricular activities. Competition encourages emotional management and psychological resilience; collaboration strengthens communication and teamwork; while adherence to rules instills normative values such as honesty and responsibility (Turnnidge et al., 2014; Vella et al., 2017). Within the framework of social learning theory, observing the behavior of coaches and teammates serves as a modeling process that reinforces the internalization of values (Bandura, 2011). The results of this study indicate that students learn to collectively accept victory and defeat, respect referee decisions, and resolve conflicts constructively important indicators of adaptive social skills.

The findings on the importance of sportsmanship and respect for rules confirm the literature suggesting that sports serve as a vehicle for moral and social ethical education (Arnold, 2018; Opstoel et al., 2020). The experience of following game rules and accepting the consequences for violations trains students to understand social norms concretely. In a collectivist cultural context like Indonesia, team dynamics and group solidarity have the potential to strengthen a sense of social responsibility and cohesion (Kim et al., 2018). Thus, the influence of extracurricular sports on social skills is dual: instrumental (strengthening communication and cooperation) and normative (internalization of values and ethics).

However, the literature also indicates that the relationship between physical activity and social skills is not always positive. Several studies confirm that program quality, psychosocial climate, and coach leadership style are determining factors (Gould & Carson, 2008; Newman et al., 2020). Programs that are too achievement-oriented without integrating pedagogical goals can lead to excessive pressure or unresolved conflict. In this study, student narratives indicated that emotional support from coaches and an inclusive team atmosphere played a crucial role in fostering positive social experiences. This reinforces the view that sport should be designed as a structured educational program, not simply a competitive arena (Holt et al., 2017).

The use of a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design in this study provides important methodological contributions. Quantitative data demonstrated significant differences in social skills scores between participants and non-participants, while

qualitative data explained the mechanisms behind these differences. This integration supports the recommendation of Fetters and Molina-Azorin (2017) that a mixed-method approach enhances interpretive validity in educational research. The statistical findings regarding improved communication and cooperation are further clarified by students' experiences, who described strategy discussions, role coordination, and team solidarity as concrete social learning processes.

The practical implications of this research are broad. First, schools need to position extracurricular sports as structured social development programs, not simply supplementary activities. Explicitly integrating SEL objectives into the training curriculum for example, through post-training reflections or discussions on sportsmanship values can strengthen the program's social impact (Taylor et al., 2017). Second, coaches and mentors play a central role as agents of socialization. Coaches' pedagogical competence, empathy, and moral role models have been shown to influence the quality of student experiences (Vella et al., 2017; Newman et al., 2020). Therefore, coaching coaches in psychosocial aspects is a strategic necessity.

Furthermore, the results of this study indicate the potential transfer of social skills from the sports context to the academic context. Students reported greater confidence in class presentations and greater cooperation in group work. This phenomenon supports the transfer of learning theory, which states that skills learned in one context can be applied to another if there are similarities in social and motivational structures (Turnnidge et al., 2014). Thus, extracurricular sports can contribute not only to social development but also to improving the quality of classroom learning interactions.

However, this study has several limitations. The study was conducted in a single school, so generalizations should be made with caution. Furthermore, the use of self-report questionnaires has the potential to introduce social bias, although this was offset by in-depth interview data. This study also did not differentiate in detail the effects of individual and team sports, despite the literature indicating possible variations in social effects between the two (Opstoel et al., 2020). Future longitudinal and multi-site research will strengthen causal evidence and broaden understanding of cultural contexts.

Overall, this discussion confirms that extracurricular sports activities, when designed pedagogically and supportively, are an effective medium for developing students' social skills. The integration of competition, collaboration, and normative values within sports creates authentic and meaningful social learning experiences. Therefore, managing extracurricular sports that are oriented towards social-emotional development can be a strategic strategy for schools in forming a generation that is not only academically intelligent, but also socially and morally mature.

CONCLUSION

This study conceptually and empirically confirms that participation in extracurricular sports activities has a positive effect on the social skills of middle school

students, particularly in the dimensions of interpersonal communication, cooperation, and adherence to rules. Quantitatively, significant differences were found between students participating and non-participating in extracurricular sports activities, indicating that involvement in structured sports activities significantly contributes to improved social competence. These findings align with the social and emotional learning framework and the positive youth development approach, which positions sport as an authentic and contextual social learning context.

Qualitatively, the dynamics of training, competitive experiences, interactions with coaches, and team solidarity were shown to provide a platform for internalizing the values of sportsmanship, responsibility, emotional regulation, and respect for rules. Thus, the influence of extracurricular sports activities is not only instrumental in improving communication skills but also normative through the formation of social and moral character.

The implication is that schools need to manage extracurricular sports activities as a planned social-emotional development program, supported by competent coaches and with explicit pedagogical objectives. Further research is recommended using longitudinal and multi-site designs to strengthen causal evidence and explore variations in influence across sport types and school cultural contexts.

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