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RUNNING WITH A TIME LIMIT: EXPERIENCES OF FORMER STUDENTS WITH
SPORTS DEVELOPMENT

Master's Thesis

Education and Globalisation, Master's in Education

2023

University of Oulu

Faculty of Education

Running with a Time Limit: Experiences of former students with sports development

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Master's Thesis, 86 pages, 3 appendices

May 2023

Abstract

The components of play and sports have been central to human existence. In today's world, sports is a social phenomenon which encapsulates various concepts of development in the modern society. Schools are essential places for sporting opportunities, and therefore the students are an important stakeholder in sports development in society. This study locates the various factors at the local as well as global levels that impact the opportunities to participate in sports.

The research aims to understand former students' experiences with sports and the factors that impact the involvement and continued participation in sports in Delhi NCR, India. This study adopts a qualitative framework with a constructivist/interpretivist paradigm to use sports as an umbrella term for play, physical activity and physical education. The participants for this research are 14 former students from the region of Delhi who graduated from school between 2010-2020. The data was collected through the method of retrospective semi-structured interviews.

Reflexive Thematic Analysis was employed to find themes that captured the perceptions of the former students. The three themes identified were: "to play or to study", "who gets to play and stay", and "changing but slowly". This study finds that several factors impact sports development in the context of Delhi, such as academics, parental influence, the attitude of teachers, curricular provisions, and availability and utilisation of physical resources. The barriers to sports emerge from the narrow understanding of sports at the societal level. In conclusion, this study captures the experiences of the youth, the former students, to create a timeline for sports development in the urban- private school context. It also highlights the space for further research.

Keywords- India, sports development, sports in India, physical education, curriculum, societal perceptions

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Iida Kauhanen who has been extremely supportive and patient throughout the entire process and provided me with invaluable feedback and guidance.

I could not have undertaken this journey without the EdGlo'21 faculty and friends who have transformed my understanding of learning.

I am thankful for all the participants who participated and went above and beyond to share their stories.

I must thank also the support systems from Salwan, my school coach, who ignited my passion for sports and the friends who have been running with me ever since.

This journey would not have been possible without my pillars of support, the family and friends who are always encouraging and kind from near and far.

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1 Introduction

India is a vast nation with a large and diverse population. Growing up, I would hear the sound of fireworks on three main occasions- Diwali (Indian Festival), marriages or when India won an important cricket match. Sports, for the most part, was centred around viewing the cricket matches, and the audience for Pakistan versus India match would be the talk of the town. The type of sports may vary from region to region, but sports is a central part of the fabric of nationalism and society in India.

Globally, sports is considered an essential activity for the youth, particularly for their education and development. The youth should have the opportunity to try different sports with qualified coaches as it can foster the development of important skills for sports participation (Myer et al., 2016). Timperio et al. (2013) found that family is an important factor in determining the physical activity levels of children. They found that intervention in terms of a supportive family environment, equipment, and emotional support are critical to children's physical activity levels. A study done in Turkey by Timurtaş et al. (2022) found similar trends where age played a role in physical activity. They found that more adolescents were physically inactive. In terms of school, they provided optimised playgrounds and more break time as possible interventions for increasing the physical activity levels of students (Timurtaş et al., 2022).

In this research, sports is understood as a social phenomenon in the globalised world where several approaches to sports are at play simultaneously, such as sports for development and development of sport. Physical activity and talent development are important goals of sports policies and education curriculum. Schools offer the space and environment suitable for participating in and delivering sports (Lim et al., 2011).

The power of sports to transform lives has been recognised worldwide, and therefore it has become a central component of the school curriculum. Despite the importance of sports, it remains under-researched as a field within itself in the Indian context. Existing studies have focused on the role of sports for development in the Indian context (Kay, 2009) or potential sports for nationalistic pursuits in the international arena (Majumdar, 2011). There is a need to understand how sports development in Indian society is at the grassroots. The perspectives and experiences of students throughout their educational journeys have rarely been the primary goal of the studies. This study aims to understand how former students experience sports

development in the region of Delhi and what motivates them to continue participating in sports. More specifically, this study focuses on the following research questions-

RQ1- How do former students experience the development of sports in their lives in school and afterwards?

RQ2- What are the kinds of factors impacting their involvement and continued participation in sports?

This study is within the qualitative framework under the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm. The data for this study was collected through semi-structured retrospective interviews.

Before looking at sports development, we must first locate sports as phenomena and the understanding of the term 'sports' in this research. The second and third sections focus on the theories and concepts around sports in society. The theoretical framework utilises sports as a social phenomenon and combines various factors that impact sports development. The fourth section provides an overview of education and the sporting field in India to locate the need for understanding and exploring students' perspectives. The fifth section expands on the research framework, which focuses on the epistemological and ontological assumptions that form the foundation of the study. The sixth section discusses the methods of data collection and the reasons for choosing a particular method. Sections seven and eight focus on the analysis and findings. This study uses Reflexive Thematic Analysis by Braun and Clarke (2021a) to analyse the data and describe the findings.

Consequently, in the ninth section, the findings and the research process are reflected within the broader framework and theories. This section includes the theoretical and practical implications of the study while also highlighting the ethical considerations and the limitations of this research. Finally, the tenth section concludes with the considerations for further research and reflects on the whole research process.

It is imperative to state my positionality. I must also locate my background and subjectivity within the research process. Pertaining to the qualitative framework, the study then discusses the broad understanding of sports for this research.

1.1 Positionality

Personal, cultural, historical and contextual aspects influence qualitative research. Ontologically, qualitative research recognises that the researchers are also socially subjective beings. It is well acknowledged that researchers bring their subjectivity to the research process (Cousin, 2010). Therefore, the researcher must establish the context and address their experiences and positionality. They must identify and clarify their positionality while undertaking any research, as it greatly impacts the process and output of the research. Positionality can be understood as the individual's worldview, which is closely related to and influenced by ontology and epistemology. That is to say that the researcher's worldview is shaped by their view of the nature of social reality and their beliefs about knowledge construction (Holmes, 2020, p.1).

In order to ensure transparency and establish context for my research for the readers, I will briefly discuss my background. I grew up in a middle-class neighbourhood in Delhi NCR. In our neighbourhood, playing outdoors was popular and accessible as we had a playground. Football, in particular, was the primary sport. I have previously enrolled in private training academies for football and badminton. I have trained in track and field and discus throw at my school. I had intensive sports experiences during the last 3-4 years of my high school education. However, ultimately, I did not pursue sports in my higher education. I engage in sports for fun and leisure now. My interest in the field of sports in schools developed as a consequence of my own experiences of actively competing in football and track during my school education. The reasons for pursuing this field were further strengthened and expanded with my interaction and learning in the Education and Globalisation program, which introduced me to global perspectives. In many ways, this research is a culmination of questions that have been running around in my mind while reflecting on my own sporting journey and listening to the stories of other athletes (former and professional).

As a student of social sciences, I do not prescribe to one absolute truth. I believe that there is the existence of several truths that are situational. Within any research framework, positionality is central to the process of knowledge construction. By clarifying and providing information about one's own beliefs and lens, we reiterate the importance of subjectivity and acknowledge that a researcher is not separate from the study that they conduct (Holmes, 2020). I locate myself within the constructs of knowledge and recognise that I am embedded within the social processes I am attempting to study. My own subjectivity informs my understanding. Given my

familiarity and my experiences with sports and education in Delhi, this research can be considered from an insider positionally or ontologically speaking from an 'emic' account as it provides an insider view of reality (as explained in Holmes, 2020, p.5). My experiences are rooted within the same context regarding region, nationality, age group, race, and culture. Mercer (2007) considers employing the insider position can be a double-edged sword by weighing the pros and cons as something might be advantageous such as familiarity with the context. However, it may also lead the researcher to take some things for granted. This perspective is central to the data collection and analysis.

The research topic is close to my journey, and my experiences would lean towards an insider position; however, I do not prescribe an insider or outsider position in this research. All participants constantly engage in meaning-making with an intersectional world; each experience and perspective is unique. I strongly agree with Mercer (2007) as she explains that the insider/outsider is not a binary but should be considered a continuum or more pluralistic by recognising that human beings cannot be ascribed and defined by any single attribute (p.7).

This research adopts a qualitative framework as it enables the research to interpret and locate the experiences of individuals within the broader phenomenon. This research undertakes a social constructivist approach to constructing knowledge and acknowledges that there is not just one absolute truth but multiple truths.

1.2 Sports as an Umbrella Term

For this study, the term sports has been understood very broadly. 'Sports' has been used as an umbrella term for organised team play, leisure, and training. It includes physical activity as well as physical education. It has been broadly defined to encompass the various connotations that the participants may understand and express. The purpose of this study was to understand how the meaning of sports and sports as a phenomenon was understood and even transformed throughout the lives of the participant with regard to their school education. Therefore owing to the qualitative framework and the constructivist paradigm, the meaning of what 'sports' meant was left open-ended and the participants were asked to explain it however they seemed fit. Leaving it open-ended can encompass the activities that might not be technically or traditionally accepted as a 'sport' such as walking, yoga or even videogames. Their sports experiences could be defined on their terms, whether as players or spectators.

Other reasons for using sport as an umbrella term are my reflections and interactions. My interactions with local Finns and my research on school sports in Finland revealed that the term for school sports in Finnish curricula could not precisely translate to sports. The very concept of sports or physical activity is understood and applied very differently in the Finnish curriculum. The subject of 'Liikunta' contains three components of sports, physical activity and movement (Mihajlovic, 2019). Further interactions with people from the international community revealed how the terms for sports in school, either colloquially or within the policies, loosely translated to many different terms such as 'games', 'physical activity', 'sports' or 'physical education'. These are conceptually similar but distinct and carry different connotations.

Interestingly, the term for sports is 'Khel' in the Hindi language, and it does not have one fixed meaning. Depending on the context, it can be understood as play, games or sports. This piqued my interest in reflecting on my own context, where school sports were rarely referred to as 'sports' but rather 'games'. These interactions left the definition of sports open-ended and free to be defined by the participants. Sports as a concept was questioned and restructured during this research, and qualitative methodology was helpful as it is concerned with the meaning of concepts (Goertz & Mahoney, 2012).

2 Locating the Field of Sports

It is essential to clearly elucidate the understanding of sports before looking at the theories on sports. In this section, I explain definitions of sports and their relevance for different spheres of life. This section will also link how sports activity is relevant for educational institutions.

2.1 Understanding Sports and its Components

Sports is a vast field, and many scholars have attempted to analyse and define it through different lenses. Delaney and Madigan (2021) define sports to be “institutionalised, structured and sanctioned competitive activities (e.g. competitive running, jumping, and throwing) that go beyond the realm of play that involve physical exertion and/or the use of athletic skills” (p.16). The terms institutionalized and sanctioned carry the connotation of culture and norms. Components of play, physical activity and physical education are central to sports.

Sports, leisure, or physical activity have been a social affair throughout history. The twentieth century saw the growth of literature, which regarded ‘play as central to human life’ (Huizinga, 1938; Caillois, 1962, as cited in Rodriguez, 2006). Internationally, the United Nations Child Rights Convention (UNCRC) declares ‘play’ as a universal right. Article 31 of UNCRC recognises “the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts” (OHCHR, n.d.). Further, Nussbaum is a pioneer in the capabilities approach to freedom, where she explains the ten central human capabilities which are important for human existence. One of the central capabilities is play or, more precisely, “Play: being able to laugh, to play, and to enjoy recreational activities” (1997, p.288).

The importance of sports is realised through its contribution and benefits to the health and fitness of humans. Physical activity is considered to be a central tenet of sports. The emphasis on physical activity has been reinforced by international bodies such as the World Health Organisation (WHO), which supports and recommends physical activity for all ages to achieve overall well-being. WHO defines physical activity as “all movement including during leisure time, for transport to get to and from places, or as part of a person’s work. Both moderate- and vigorous-intensity physical activity improve health” (n.d.). Therefore, activities for fun, playing for leisure, walking, and even biking for transportation are considered physical activities.

2.2 Sports in Schools

Education and sports are two of the most important institutions in the society (Laker,2002, p.1). Schools provide a particularly important space and environment for the promotion of physical activity (Lim et al., 2011). Since the 20th century, research has increasingly focused on physical activity. The international bodies further turned their attention to the lack of physical activity amongst populations across the globe. Sports has been recognised as more than just the health or the physical benefits that it may have. Physical education is another central component of sports which can have multilevel benefits that go beyond the sector of health. Figure 1 depicts how the schools are at the heart of all the different forms of activities related to sports, such as physical education, physical activity and even talent development. Habyarimana et al. (2022) claim that physical education and sports, particularly in schools, has become central to the community in the globalised world. They highlight that the benefits of these activities are in the domains of cognitive, academic, physical, affective, social, moral, cultural as well as sustainable development (Habyarimana et al., 2022, p.4). Physical education in schools is considered to be a great channel and space for inculcating physical activity for recreation and leisure (Green, 2014). Sporting provisions and opportunities are present in terms of the infrastructure as well as the curriculum or free time for children to engage in play and access the playground. Schools are a great place for sports intervention (Bocarro et al., 2008).



Figure 1: Sports in schools at the intersection of physical activity, personal and talent development

2.3 Sports in the Contemporary World

In the 21st century, sports has transformed to be a big phenomenon which has several interconnected meanings. These can be in the forms of spectatorship, competitive and elite sports, and play for fun. Throughout history, states have been using the arena of sports to showcase athletic prowess and state systems to seek out which one is better (Murray, 2013). However, the dimensions of sports have transformed with the media and commercial giants in the globalised world.

In the New world order that emerged in contemporary times, the international political economy and global politics of mega sports events are interconnected in such a way that hosting and bidding on international games can reinforce trends in the international political economy (Grix & Lee, 2013). However, the economic gains are not directly realised by the nation. The broadcasting and coverage of these events make it possible to speculate the entire nation with its facilities and resources. It is not only the geography but also the history of the nation on the view (Freeman, 2012). The mascots and ceremony render a unique opportunity for the host nation to showcase their culture and tradition. According to social constructivists, the concept of power is not only material, it is ideational. Nation states strive to gain legitimacy, a mark of approval that they are acting in accordance with the system and embodying the values which are respected in the international community (Barnett, 2008). Campbell describes sports as a “lingua franca” where it can help facilitate cooperation among nations through Olympic competitions (2013, p.18). It is important to be critical of the power structures in the global sphere and their impact. Sengupta (2017) opines how the act of hosting these mega sporting events in the Indian context is about development and progress in terms of ‘catching up to the west.’

The race for medals and showcasing talent, as well as hosting the mega sports events, remains central to the agendas of nations. Therefore, the emphasis has been increasingly on elite development. The policy choices have been between sports participation of the masses or the participation of the elite. The political sphere also tends to focus more on elite sports and harbouring talent as Nicholson et al. (2011) define, “..sport participation or the sports activities of a nation’s non-elite athletes has remained less obviously politicized and as a result has received less public attention” (p.2). Global competitions might tend to precede the performance and participation of the community.

3 Sports, Development and Society

It is central to understand the theories surrounding the term of ‘sports development’ for this thesis. In this chapter, I will establish what are the concepts around sports and how it is important for us to study sports in society and schools in today’s world. The overarching theory that encompasses all the other forms of sports is sports as a social phenomenon. It is within this field that I will locate sports development or the progression of sports in an individual’s life, mostly in terms of competitive play. School as an institution can foster both of these concepts. The field of sports is evolving rapidly in the globalised world, and there are many new contexts and uses of sports that are being researched. The theories for sports development are fairly recent, and most of them centred in the 20th century, and most of the theories are based in the Western context.

3.1 Sports as a Social Phenomenon

It is in the larger historical and socio-economic framework of sports in a globalised world that we locate the sociology of sports. Sports can be understood as a social phenomenon. It takes place in the public or social sphere and impacts the process of socialisation of individuals. Greendorfer and Bruce (1991) highlight that the socialisation process is embedded in the broader concept of ‘power, ideology and hegemony’ (p.135). They focus on sports as an activity that is reflective of realities and ideologies that are prevalent in society at large. The process of socialisation is very important for two reasons- to determine how people understand sports within the larger social context and to determine and understand the social impact of sports. They argue that-

“In other words, sport reproduces social reality and transmits those aspects of culture that convey meanings about the social, political and the economic order of society; about gender, race and class relations; about the body and physical activity.” (p.137)

Therefore, the aspects that impact sports participation are also reproduced through and within sports. Success and participation in sports depend not only on skills but also on the larger social environment and relationships (Blynova et al., 2020). People take part in sports not just as mere participants but also through being spectators and fans of sports and sports organisations. Kenyon and McPherson (1973), through their work, emphasise a social theory of sports and describe how people participate in sports primarily as participants but also in different

secondary ways as consumers of sports. With the expansion of media and the commercialisation of sports, people are also consumers of sports (as fans and viewers). The idea of sports for development or the intentional use of sports for the development of the population at large has been popularised over the last few decades and has been widely recognised at the international level as a great method of utilising sports for the social good.

The participation and development of sports are neither linear nor unilateral. Given the complexity of it as a social phenomenon, we must pay attention to the multiple concepts and theories to grasp an understanding of sports development. The fields of sports and development are changing and transforming in developing nations. Tinaz and Knott (2021) highlight that within the globalised world, the field of sports has come a long way, and there have been many forms of practices with ‘sport’ and ‘development’ across the nations. Astle et al. (2019) argue that how the terminologies used between sports and development pave the way for different interpretations of sport development. The field of sport development is dynamic. The aspects and agents involved change over time, and with them, the definition of sport development (Houlihan & White, 2002, as cited in Tinaz & Knott, 2021, p.1). Sports is a complex and social phenomenon which involves a variety of activities and multiple causes which are often overlapping. Moreover, it involves differing levels of intensity as the forms of competition and commitment also vary. Engaging in sports is not the result of a single cause (Green, 2014, p.26). This theoretical framework goes over two of the very important phenomena impacting participation- ‘sports *for* development’ and ‘development *of* sports.’ As Astle (2014, as cited in Tinaz & Knott, 2021, p.3) distinguishes that ‘sports for development’ primarily is concerned with promoting sports in developing countries, more centred around the societal outcomes of sports. At the same time, the development of sports is focused on sporting outcomes (Astle et al., 2019).

For this research, I consider Sports for development to be a factor within the larger concept of the development of sports in Indian society, as developmental programs have received some attention from global bodies. I use the terms of development of sport and sports development interchangeably. In Figure 2 below, we can see that the development of sports in society is impacted by several factors, where sports for development is only one component of it. These are all interconnected.

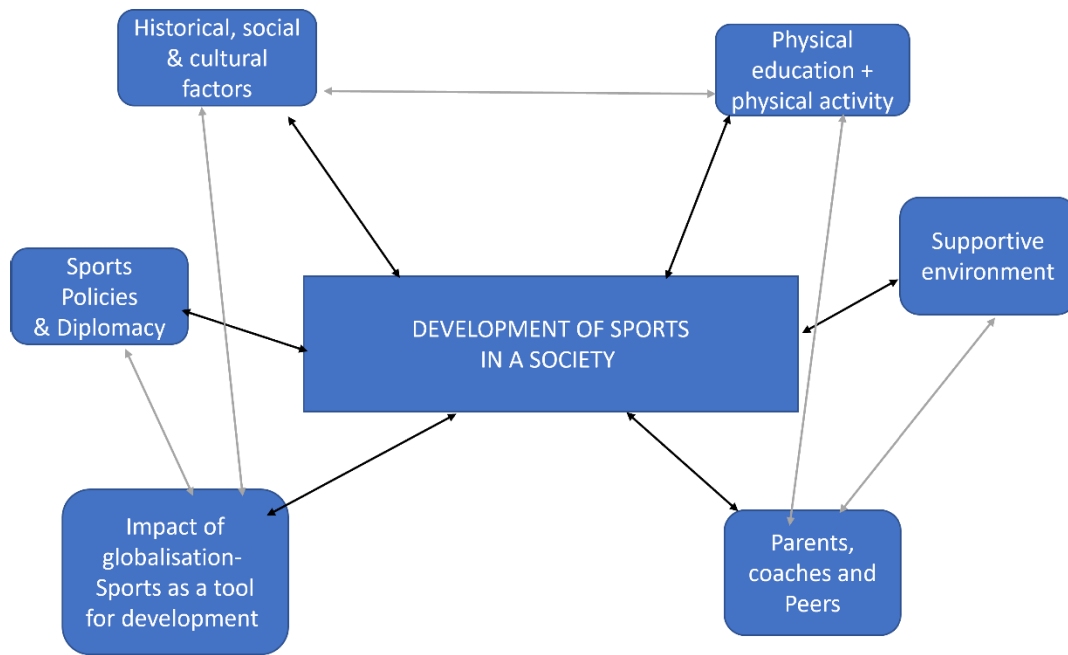


Figure 2: Multiple factors impacting the development of sports

3.2 Sports for Development

The non-athletic sphere has observed immense growth in terms of community sports, where play and sports are used as a tool for social development. Sports as means for change has been utilised in various fields of life such as education, health, and community development by involving several stakeholders, including the policy makers and the community. Participation in sports can have many benefits that go beyond fitness, such as better academic performance (Fox et al., 2010), development of feelings of belongingness and increased school engagement (Yanık, 2018), social integration (Burrman et al., 2017; Gasser & Levinson, 2004), and forming friendships (Eliasson, 2015). It can help individuals lead a ‘quality life’ by offering health benefits like reduced stress levels and higher productivity (Ava-Maria, 2015). Sports may even help “eliminate the economic differences affecting the subjective well-being levels of students” (Mallı & Yıldızhan, 2018, p.112). The sports for development (SfD) movement utilises sports as a driver of social change and transformation (Lyras & Peachy, 2011). Within this movement, it is important to be critical of the investments made by rich countries to middle and low-income countries (Philip et al., 2022). Scholars are critical and wary of the impact and implications of sports as a tool for betterment may have on society, sports evangelism (Giulianotti, 2004); exclusion of certain groups (Burrman et al., 2017); preserving status quo, and push the responsibility onto the individual to make better (Coakley, 2011). The sports for

development and youth sports programs are grounded in the assumptions that there is a need to guide disadvantaged youth in order for them to make better life choices (Coakley, 2011). Within the globalised world, the history of sports and colonialism, as well as neocolonialism, must be critically examined when employing sports as a tool (Giulianotti, 2004). Sports for Development movement is very influential in the globalised world, and we must be aware of the impact of international bodies and their involvement, and consequently, the impact that they may have on influencing the sports policies and governance in the global south.

3.3 Development of Sports

Development of Sports is focused on the different opportunities to play and the different experiences that can occur in sports participation (Shilbury et al., 2008). Sports development primarily focuses on the participants and fostering opportunities for them to engage in sporting activities (Astle et al., 2019). It is concerned with various stakeholders involved in providing opportunities for sports. The problems and issues within this field have been choosing whether to prioritise the foundation of participation or elite competitive play (Hylton, 2013). Contrasting to the Sports for Development movement, Sports development contains talent development that focuses on sports as a means of competitive participation and the development of elite athletes who will engage in sports professionally. A significant stream of sports within the larger field is talent development and elite sports. This stream aims to develop athletes from a young age, to help the children identify their interest in sports and explore different training methods to play sports professionally. There have been a few theories which highlight the trajectory of athlete development or sport development. It must be noted that most of these theories are located in the European or American context. Nevertheless, they act as examples and possible guides of what can be the crucial stages of sports development. Figure 3 has been constructed utilising the different theories that will be discussed below to understand the theories on sports and talent development.

3.3.1 Athletic Development

Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) have extensively mapped out the transitional stages in an athlete's lifetime. They undertake a holistic approach to the development of an athlete where they consider intersecting levels of development such as the athletic, psychological, psychosocial, academic, and vocational levels. Their work is centred around a well-rounded

model of development. They consider development into a professional career and retirement. Whereas for this research, I consider the level until the mastery stage or higher education, which has been mapped around approximately 20-25 years of age.

Three of the most essential concepts from Wylleman and Lavallee's work would be the transforming and dynamic role of parents, where they describe that the role of parents and their support is particularly vital in terms of initiation to sports participation and keeps on transforming as the athlete progresses in their journeys. Secondly, they consider adolescence a very delicate period with many changes in the lifespan and provide for the social and even physiological changes that occur during this stage of life. Lastly, they emphasise how education – academic and vocational- impacts an athlete's development. It is crucial to take into account all spheres of advancement and look into the intersecting ways in which they can affect athletic development. The development of sports does not occur in a vacuum. A significant gap that was identified by them was the lack of research with the perspective of sports as an end within itself- learning to complement the development of sporting abilities. This research aims to look into the “whole athlete” (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004, p.523), wherein they consider all the other spheres of development, such as academic, social, psychological and athletic development, that form the foundation of the skill and talent development of the athlete.

Martindale et al. (2005) review the sport development for athletes and suggest that there is often too much emphasis on early talent spotting and talent development from young ages. However, expanding to more ‘integrated, systematic and holistic’ (p.371) approaches that focus on the athlete's development is needed. Their work was mostly centred around the UK context. They highlight several essential aspects for sports development. Their work emphasises the need to shift the targets from early success to long-term goals while fostering the athlete's development in all spheres, such as providing support for transitions in their athletic journeys. The success of athletes in sustained continuation of sports and elite-competitive ways is determined by inculcating their life skills outside of sports (Martindale et al., 2005).

Green (2005) provides a great importance on the stages of entrance, retention and athlete advancement in sports. She opines that the transition from the stages of mass participation to high-performance athletes must be paid adequate attention to and restructured. The initial phase of the sports development is the entrance. This stage of introduction to sports depends upon four major factors -recruitment, motivation, socialisation, and commitment (p. 236). The second stage afterwards would be retention which ensures if the participant chooses to stay and

continue to play and progress in sports. The theory of sports development pays attention to the bodily and genetic attributes that are often highlighted as necessary given the physical nature of sports. However, her work aims to go beyond them and illuminates that social factors also play a significant role. It highlights the impact of socialisation in an athlete's transition and fostering progression to top-level elite competitive play. The social factors that impact retention and advancement must be paid careful attention.

Socialisation is identified as one of the significant factors for continued participation in sports. It is a factor that impacts the transition to different sporting stages and their motivation to continue to play sports. Perceptions of society affect access and engagement in sports. Stroot (2012) opines that many social factors such as gender, social class, race and ethnicity influence the access and opportunities to participate in sports. Therefore, intervention on some levels is vital to ensure that all people and youth can access and participate in sports. This study mainly points to the American context. These can also be extended to the Indian context by extending the impact of social class and caste. According to the study by Singh and Misra (2016), adolescent girls in rural areas are less likely to participate in sports and physical exercise in India. Skelton (2000) analyses the development of football and schools and its implications on the construction of masculinity, where their identity is affected by gender, class, and ethnicity.

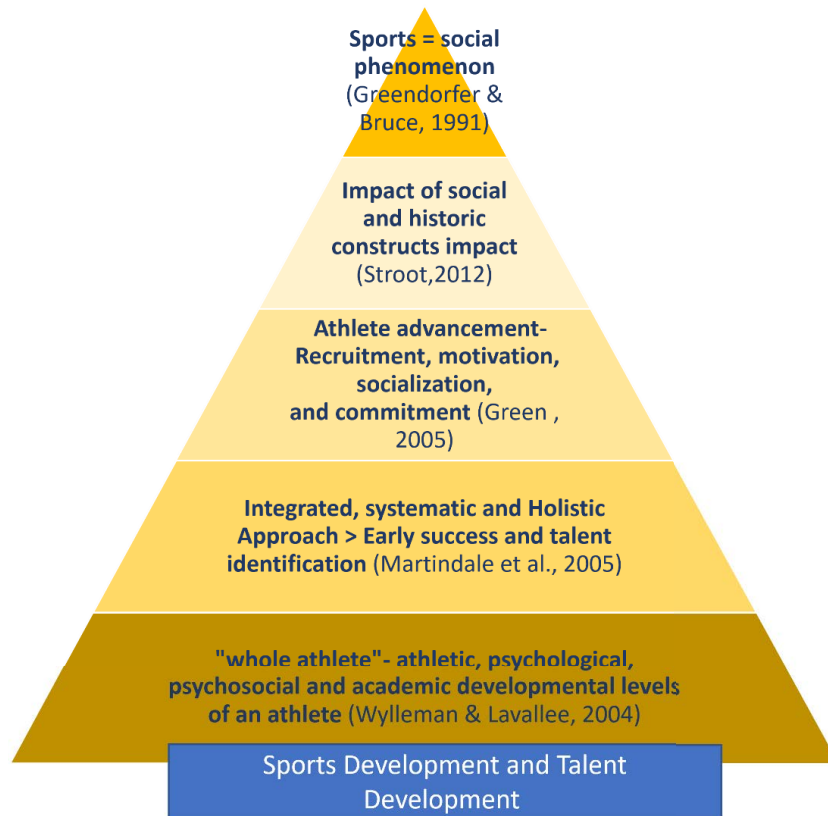


Figure 3: Theories on sports and talent development

3.3.2 Motivation to Play

Motivation is a key factor influencing sports participation and continuation. For this research, we will utilise the social cognitive approach highlighting the construction of perceptions and social context (Keegan et al., 2011). The definition of motivation is extended to understand it as impacted by social perceptions and socially learnt ideas of the outcomes. Motivation can also be defined as “ways of thinking guided by exposure to other people” (Roberts, 2009 as cited in Keegan et al., 2011, p.4). Parents, coaches and peers play an essential role in the continuation in sports.

In the personal sphere, relationships influence the participation of the students. Parents and coaches play a significant role in the development of sportspersons (Fraser-Thomas et al. (2008). The involvement and influence of parents are observed in varying stages of sports development. Coaches play a critical role in the participants’ lives. Social relationships with peers and close friendships are also central to developing and participating in sports. Several scholars have researched and reviewed these aspects in different contexts.

Three main influences on the positive development in terms of life skills from sports are coaches, parents and peers (Mossman et al., 2021). There are several different factors which impact the participation and motivation of children to play sports. Bailey et al. (2013) reviewed the literature to find that psychological factors and sociocultural contexts significantly affect children's sport participation. They found some major aspects of sports participation in children- two of which were the role and influence of parents and the impact of friends and peers. Fun and enjoyment and the ability to learn are also significant factors.

Parental support and influence greatly impact children's sport participation (Siekańska, 2012). Parents can play a negative and positive role in the children's participation in sports (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2006). Mossman et al. (2021) find that peers have the most significant impact on the life skills development of youth sports participants. Coaches play a vital role in guiding students and training such that children stay motivated and develop sustainably (Bailey et al., 2013). Strachan et al. (2011) studied coaches' perspectives to find three major components for athletic development, which combine the socio-emotional and physical resources available to the athlete for growth. Their study found three major elements- the existence of an appropriate training environment, opportunities for physical, personal and social skill development and supportive interactions (p.9). The youth should be able to try different sports with qualified coaches as it can foster the development of essential skills for sports participation (Myer et al., 2016).

Figure 4 depicts how the development of sports in a society is not in isolation. It is impacted by several factors, and schools are a central domain for sports development. With this, we incorporate the various theories and concepts of sports development.

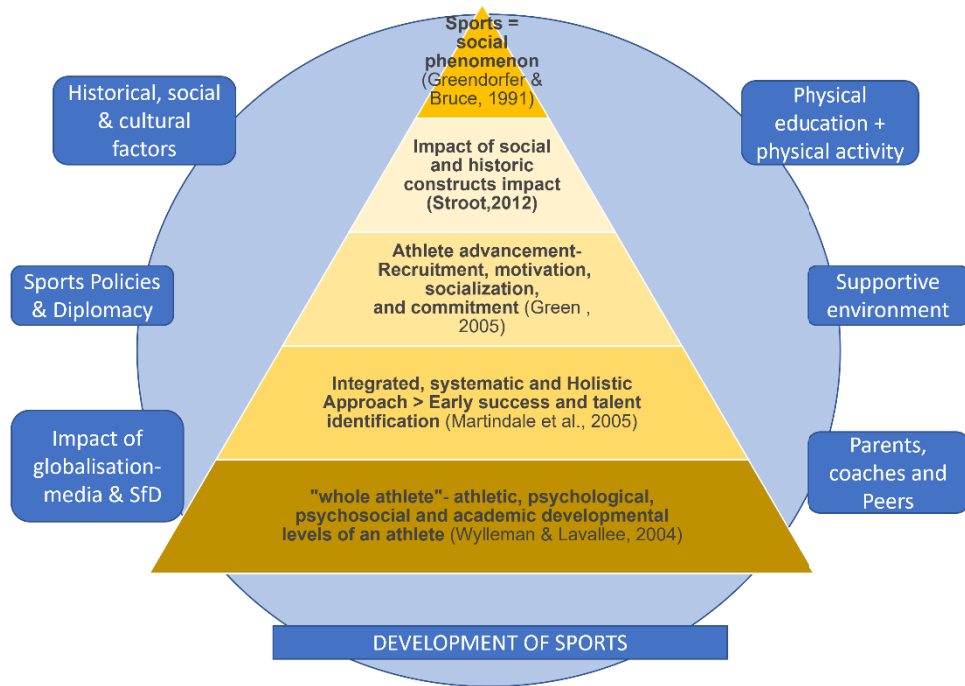


Figure 4: Sports Development: theory and factors

The conceptual framework centralises the theories of sports development to focus on initiation, retention and socialisation into sports while acknowledging the presence of global, social, personal, cultural and colonial factors. These theories and concepts exist in the field of sports which are formed in the modern world being actively influenced by international sporting competitions, international sports governing bodies (e.g. International Olympic Committee), Sports Diplomacy, as well as historical factors of colonialism and even war. Talent identification and development, at the heart of many national sports policies, exist within this field for excellence.

4 Context in India

This study is located in the Indian context, specifically in the Delhi National Capital Region (NCR) which includes several neighbouring districts around the city of Delhi. I chose to locate and limit this study to this region as India is very diverse, and language could be a barrier to participants expressing their views and experiences. Moreover, the local realities of the education system and sociocultural trends may also vary. In order to minimise the scope of any miscommunication that may occur, I chose to locate the study in Delhi, where I could easily reach out to participants and interact with them in the Hindi language if necessary. I have located sports in the broader global and national framework in the previous chapters. Since educational institutions and education systems are essential factors in providing spaces and environments for engagement in sports, as seen in the sections above, I will briefly give an overview of the Indian education system before discussing sports in India.

4.1 Education in India

Indian education system has been heavily influenced by colonialism. The public investments in human development during British rule were negligible, and primary education was not adequately focused upon. Caste and religion are two critical factors that influenced access to school education in British India (Chaudhary, 2009). Post-independence in the mid-20th century, efforts were made to focus on literacy rates. However, free and compulsory education was recognised as a right only in 2009. India is a vast nation with over 15 lakh schools across the country. The privatisation of education is a fascinating phenomenon in India. Out of the total schools, around 22% of the schools are private schools which receive no funding from the government (UDISE+, 2021-22).

Looking at Delhi particularly, this region has around 5619 schools, of which 46% of the schools are privately funded and managed (UDISE+, 2021-22). The development and nature of private schools in India are heterogeneous, as the fee and resources vary vastly. There is a broad range of private and un-aided schools. Privatisation of education has given rise to the emergence of 'low-fee private' schools where the parents incur the fee, but the tuition is kept at the lowest possible rates (Härmä, 2011, p.351). The range of private tuition impacts the availability and accessibility of resources across different private schools.

These aspects provide a unique context for the development of education as well as sports. Anand (2015) researched the impact of globalisation on the education system in India by focusing on private and public schools in Delhi. The infrastructure and utilisation of resources are more prominent in the private schools, while the public schools in Delhi face many administrative issues and lag in the physical infrastructure. Institutional and social barriers act as a deterrent to sport participation in schools. Gender and the institution type (private or public) have a significant impact on physical activity in Delhi schools (Satija et al., 2018).

Given the large population size, there is high competition across Indian society. After-school tuition centres are becoming very common. Students enrol in these tuition classes after their school to prepare for exams. These are particularly common for the subjects of Maths, Science and English. There is also a growing culture of ‘Coaching’ classes by organisations that prepare the students for post-school entrance exams for seeking admission into colleges, particularly for STEM courses. Amidst all this, sports are provided little priority in schools. Katapally et al. (2016) also found that academics are provided precedence over athletics and physical activity, which could be a major contributing factor to poor performance in physical activity.

The education system of India emphasises the examination, especially the Board Examinations, which are present for matriculation (10th grade) and graduation (12th grade). The academics become more complex from 9th grade onwards as more subjects are introduced. Moreover, the matriculation examination determines which stream or subjects one would get to choose in their finishing years of schooling. These results carry great significance in the choices available to a student.

4.2 Sports in India

Historically, India has a long tradition of sports and learning, as can be seen in the Indian Epic of Mahabharata and the guru-shishya parampara (loosely translated to the mentor and student tradition) between Dronacharya with Arjun or Eklavya. Some of the traditional sports include Pasha (boardgame), Chess, wrestling, Kabaddi (team contact sport), carrom (boardgame), and Kancha (marbles) (Sen, 2015). However, most sports, as we know them today, were not indigenous to India. Organised sports such as badminton, cricket, football, field hockey, tennis and golf have a colonial past as they were introduced to Indian society during British rule and globalisation. Sports development in the Indian context shares a deep-rooted history of

colonialism and patronage. Moreover, physical education as a subject has colonial roots in the Indian context (Choudhary, 2021, p.30).

Field Hockey is recognised as the national sport of India and has garnered support in recent years. However, the love and popularity of Cricket are ever-present across the entire nation. Clarke and Mondal (2022) write that India has retained some indigenous sports and integrated them into the modern sports ecosystem, such as Kabaddi, Kho-Kho and yoga but also incorporated the sports from the colonial period. Despite the rich tradition of indigenous sports and the influences of colonial introduction to organised sports, the status of sports has not been popular. In administrative terms, sports remain a state subject, meaning that it is under the purview of state governments and not the national government. It is clubbed together with cinema, entertainment, and amusements. This points to the common mentality towards sports at large in society (Ministry of External Affairs, n.d.). In a study to understand the perceptions of elite sports in India, Khasnis et al. (2021b) found that the lack of sports culture and the lagging research in coaching and sports sciences are important factors in the current sports field. They highlight that changes in the sporting field are in progress. India's sports field and policies are still in their evolutionary stages (Clarke & Mondal, 2022).

The sports landscape of India has been witnessing gradual change. The number of schools with playgrounds has increased by three percent from 2018-19 to 2021-22. The New Education Policy 2020 has focused on transforming education in many different ways (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020). It reimagines the pedagogical and curricular structures. Under this policy, sports is envisaged to be an important aspect of the school curriculum and lays emphasis on sports integrated approach to learning, even for classroom learning. In the past decade, several policies and programmes have been introduced in the field of sports. The most prominent one would be the 'Khelo India' Initiative launched in 2017, which is a national level programme for the development of sports. Wani and Gopinath (2019) describe this initiative to "revive the sports culture at the grassroots level" (p.346). It has twelve main pillars and aims, of which three are particularly relevant for school students, these are- 'Physical fitness of school Children', 'Talent Search and Development' and 'Youth Games for schools' students' (Khelo India, n.d.). The FITIndia movement was launched in 2019 with the aim of transforming the mindset towards physical fitness and movement (Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, n.d.). It also aims to create awareness by creating platforms about general information. Furthermore, one of the goals of these two initiatives has also been to encourage the revival of indigenous sports.

One of the important factors that have shaped the current dynamic of sports is the impact of media. The increased access and attention to sports in media provide a great stage for emphasising sports (Dubey, 2022). India is known for the Bollywood Film Industry, and in the past decade, the film industry has taken a keen interest in the stories of sportspersons. It has released several biopics of Indian Athletes. This has certainly added to the awareness around sports and the struggles and possibilities that this field offers.

Sports in India are often discussed and researched in terms of the large population and poor performance in the international sporting arena. Various scholars have explored this gap to highlight the reasons for this poor policy implementation (Khasnis et al., 2021a), the need for more efforts in the sports field (Nandakumar & Sandhu, 2014), the lack of a synergised sports culture (Majumdar, as cited in Chandran, 2016, paras.9-10) and the need for health and performance enhancing interventions (Dubey, 2022).

Another central issue in the sports domain is the emphasis on sedentary behaviour and physical activity amongst the youth. The World Health Organization (WHO) recommended guidelines for physical activity for children between 5-17 years of age is at least 60 minutes of moderate daily activity and at least three days within the week of intensive training. According to the WHO website, in 2022, in the age group of 11-17 years, i.e. during adolescence, 74% of the people have been reported with physical inactivity in India(n.d.). Bhawra et al. (2023) reviewed the literature on the levels of physical activity and physical education amongst Indian adolescence and found that despite the prevalence of physical education in the curriculum and the presence of the physical infrastructure, the schools did not promote the recommended 60 minutes of accumulated physical activity. Moreover, the limited access to equipment posed another barrier (Bhawra et al., 2017, p.77). Satija et al. (2018) looked into the barriers to physical activity for students in Delhi. They identified multiple obstructions to the engagement of students in Physical activity for school students in Delhi. According to them, these barriers exist at various levels - institutional (fewer opportunities to engage in physical activity), personal, social and environmental. They also found a great gender divide in the physical activity engagement of the students. The status of school sports and physical education is declining, and there is a need to focus on utilising sports for students (Singh, 2016).

This section provides the key aspects of the educational and sporting field in Delhi and India. This section helps us in arriving at the major gap and argument for researching the perceptions

and experiences of the students and what factors impacted their involvement and continued participation in sports.

5 Research Framework

This chapter will delve into the qualitative framework that sets the foundation of this research. It will also focus on the foundational assumptions that shape the research. As the main idea was to understand the students' experiences retrospectively, I chose a qualitative framework. In this chapter, I will explain this framework's epistemological and ontological assumptions.

This research was conducted under the qualitative research framework. One of the central aims or, as explained, the 'essence' of this research (Mason, 2017) is to understand how students understood and experienced 'sports' during their educational journey in the schools and afterwards. The qualitative framework is fit for this study as it deals with the meaning of the concept of 'sports' (Goertz & Mahoney, 2012).

A constructivist/interpretivist approach has been employed for this research. Social constructivism is a worldview that captures how the researcher assigns meaning and makes sense of the world and the experiences. There can be various meanings for any one experience or object. The constructivist approach is closely linked with the interpretivist paradigm. As Creswell and Poth (2016, p.21) explain, since the social constructivist paradigm heavily involves the researcher interacting, positioning and interpreting the experiences and perceptions of others in the social world, it can also be called interpretivist. Under the interpretivist paradigm, reality is considered to be socially constructed. This paradigm has been chosen considering the larger social context that impacts the students' choices in pursuing sports in Delhi. This framework will allow the flexibility and framework for understanding the changes that may reflect in the participants' views concerning the decade of 2010-20. By utilising the interpretivist paradigm, ontological and epistemological assumptions are also introduced. Under the qualitative paradigm, it is imperative for the researcher to understand that there can be several different ways to understand and interpret social realities (Mason, 2017). Wahyuni (2012) provides that ontology can be understood as an individual's perception of reality. The ontological assumptions that form the basis of this research paradigm would be that realities are socially produced and plural. These multiple realities are constructed and given meaning through the interactions and dialogues of humans in society (Moen, 2006). Epistemology is concerned with knowledge- primarily around the beliefs in the ways of generating, understanding and utilising knowledge (Wahyuni, 2012). The knowledge is perceived as relative and heavily influenced by the socio-cultural context that has been increasingly influenced by globalisation. As Cleary et al. (2014) argue that "qualitative

research is epistemologically grounded in social constructivist, symbolic interactionist, or other interpretive conceptual frameworks, or perspectives” (p.473).

Within the qualitative framework, pluralism and subjectivity are also fundamental aspects. Subjectivity helps us in providing insight into how an individual interprets and constructs their own worldview. This framework equips the researcher with interpretive flexibility and knowledge construction from multiple sources (Morgan & Drury, 2003).

6 Data Collection

This section will focus on the phase of data collection for this research. The method of data collection was qualitative semi-structured retrospective interviews. The interviews were conducted online as well as offline.

6.1 Reaching Out to Participants

An online Microsoft form was created to find prospective interviewees for the study. The form was circulated in November 2022. It contained 15 questions and a section to leave contact information if the respondents were interested in participation. The questions ranged from basic contact information to general questions about sports, such as if they enjoyed playing sports in school or when they engaged in sports. No personal identifiers were included in the form to ensure and respect the privacy of the participants. The main aim of this questionnaire was to help reach out to the prospective participants and to get a perspective about the possible areas of interest and developments for the study. The total number of responses was 59. It was very surprising to see that many answers had mixed responses, as can be seen in Figure 5. The option of 'no' and 'not sure' was also used in many cases.

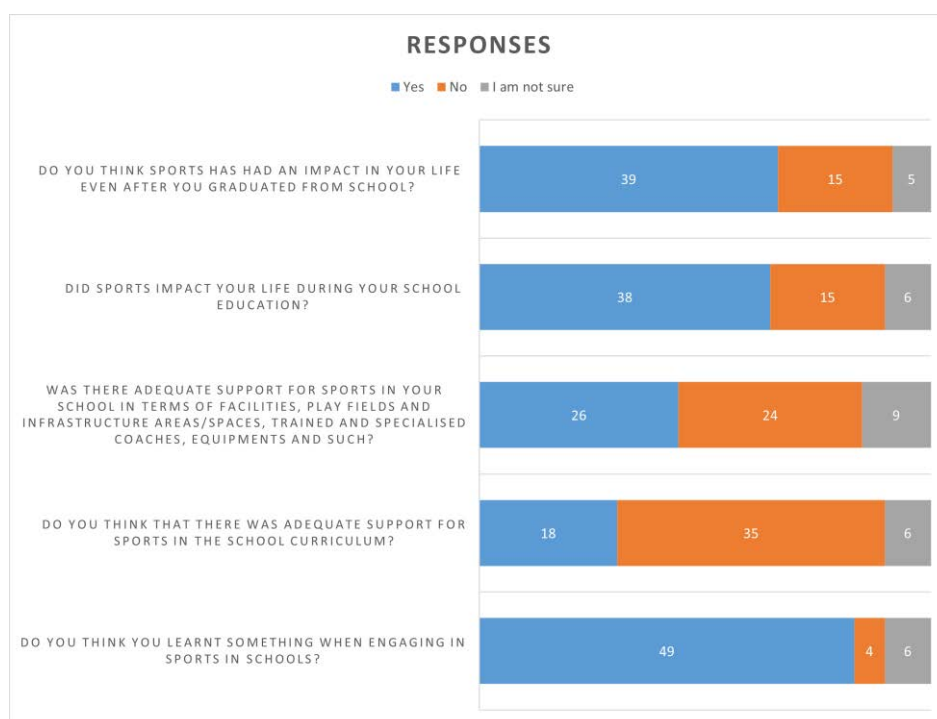


Figure 5: Summary of some questions in the online form

The form and responses helped illustrate a bigger picture of the experiences of the students. Later, some of the figures were also helpful in forming the interview questions. (for detailed questions and responses, see appendix).

To understand sports as an umbrella, I felt that it was necessary to try and contact a broader range of participants experienced in different types of sports. I was unsuccessful in getting the participants who had experiences with other sports via the snowballing method. Most of my acquaintances were only associated with football or athletics and belonged to a specific region of Delhi. This form helped expand the scope of the research and connected me with people who had experiences with a variety of different sports and perhaps attended schools in other regions of the Delhi NCR. However, bearing in mind the diversity of educational institutes and contexts within the region of Delhi, I set some parameters-

- The participants must have pursued their school education from a formal education institution with regular school (as opposed to open or distance learning)
- They must have graduated from their school between the years of 2011-2021.

Only those students who had attended regular and formal schools were chosen in order to get a better idea about their experience with school provisions, curriculums and overall policies. The purpose of choosing the years was included to capture the changing trends in the school culture regarding sports. These years were also particularly interesting as they included students who had graduated during the covid-19 pandemic years. Moreover, Delhi hosted the Commonwealth Games in the year of 2010, which led to a boost in the sports culture and infrastructure in the city (Majumdar, 2011). These former students may have experienced the changes in sporting facilities. Given the diversity and intersectionalities in India's population, these parameters helped make this research more feasible as the participants were largely from the urban context of Delhi NCR.

6.2 Interviews and Participants

The data collection was undertaken in the months of December 2022 and January 2023. A total of 14 semi-structured retrospective interviews were conducted, of which twelve were online via Zoom and Google Meet platforms, and two were in person. Out of all participants, four were entirely unknown to me, three were acquaintances, and seven were friends and family who were well-known. Table 1 below provides a more detailed description of the participants

of this research. An artificial intelligence software- Otter.ai, was used to record the audio and assist in the transcription of the interviews. The interviews were conducted as bilingual (English and Hindi), although broadly, the participants expressed and interacted in English. I have translated the phrases and sections into Hindi. Six participants identified as females, and 8 identified as males. The interviews ranged from 23 to 89 minutes. The interviews had 11 open-ended questions (See appendix 3 for more details).

A pilot interview was conducted to determine the accuracy of the questions and if any changes should be made to the interview questions and style. This pilot was tested with a close friend, and the interview fared well and has been included in this final research.

Table 1. Participants of the study

Name (Pseudonym)	Age	Gender	Year of graduation from school	Type of School
Deepti	23	Female	2017	Private
Rohit	23	Male	2017	Private
Rahul	27	Male	2014	Private
Shashi	23	Female	2017	Private
Veer	25	Male	2015	Private
Shakti	23	Female	2017	Private
Arjun	23	Male	2017	Private
Abhimanyu	23	Male	2017	Private
Naman	24	Male	2016	Private
Sanya	21	Female	2019	Private

Karan	20	Male	2020	Private
Naina	22	Female	2018	Private
Sonu	20	Male	2020	Private
Rani	21	Female	2019	Private

This mode of data collection was chosen for various reasons. According to Mogashoa (2014), interactions are an essential form of meaning-making and data collection. Creswell and Poth (2016, p.21) opine that in qualitative research, the researchers rely on different stories and make sense of others' experiences. The broad and open-ended questions are beneficial in this process as it aids in establishing the context and the meanings that the interviewees want to present. These are also valuable in interpreting and assigning meanings. This was done for several purposes; qualitative interviews are particularly relevant for this research as they help in providing insight into other people's subjective experiences and attitudes (Peräkylä & Ruusovuori, 2018).

Most importantly, qualitative interviews can overcome and accommodate the distances of space and time. This meant that participants in India could be contacted and interviewed online, providing great flexibility for the physical distance. The questions were semi-structured. They were kept open-ended, and more topics were explored as they were mentioned. This form of data collection allows for greater flexibility in enabling reciprocity between the research participants (Kallio et al., 2016). Another reason for choosing interviews is because they can help bring up topics that might not be discussed otherwise in the every day, they can help reach the unreachable social reality (Peräkylä & Ruusovuori, 2018) and disclose the hidden facets of human and organisational behaviour (Qu & Dumay, 2011, p.246).

Because of my own experiences with the context and the field, semi-structured interviews helped in deeper and more meaningful conversations between the interviewee and the interviewer. This form of interview is also suitable as the research aims to capture the phenomenon and opinions, making it possible for the participants to express multiple and diverse perceptions. The interviews are retrospective as they involve the participant to engage in recalling and retelling past episodic events. These kinds of interviews are very relevant when

emphasising and reflecting on the development of athletes (Côté et al. 2005). This method is particularly helpful for exploring the topics which happened in the past. Martindale et al. (2005) claim that retrospective interviews are beneficial to understand the long-term development that takes place in the lives of athletes. They are also helpful in capturing the development of their interest and motivation throughout their educational journeys.

This method allows one to acknowledge that knowledge construction is from interactions between people and their environments. It will enable them to respect the cultural and historical context of the research by recognising them as important factors in meaning-making (Mogashoa, 2014). Semi-structured interviews allow for more reflexivity as they help make the interviewer visible as a knowledge-producing participant (Brinkmann, 2018, p.1002).

This section describes the method of data collection for this study and the various advantages for opting for semi-structured retrospective interviews in this research.

7 Analysis

Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) by Braun and Clarke (2021a) has been utilised as the analysis method for this qualitative study. This analysis method is independent of the theoretical frameworks meaning that it is not tied strictly to any specific frameworks, allowing flexibility to be adopted and applied to different frameworks. It was very effective in helping me analyse a vast topic. It allowed me to initiate my data collection across a wide range of participants in the early stages of my studies. I chose to adopt thematic analysis for the research as it is not directly connected with any particular epistemological or theoretical perspectives, and this offers the flexibility for conducting a qualitative study and incorporating the interviews of varying time stamps (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017, p. 3352). Despite being independent of any one theoretical framework, it is essential to acknowledge that the data cannot be analysed in an epistemological vacuum (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.84). It enabled me to conduct my research inductively. It helped me to bring forth the perspectives and first-hand experiences of students within Indian society with sports by employing the constructivist paradigm. Reflexive Thematic Analysis has been particularly important for this research as it helped me by providing a framework for undertaking research which would trace the ideas and patterns surrounding a field of study that did not have abundant literature in that specific context. The perspectives of Indian students surrounding sports have rarely been the central research topic. I had a clear picture of the broad field of research, i.e., sports in schools in India.

The central aspect of this form of analysis is that it recognises and places the researcher's subjectivity as a critical component in the qualitative research process (Braun & Clarke, 2021a). It focuses on the researcher practising reflexivity or being aware of their role, subjectivity and biases throughout the analysis. As I was familiar with the context, this method was fundamental in my journey as a learner and former student-athlete. The analysis for this study is inductive, meaning that it is data driven. It aims to help identify and interpret the central aspects of the data concerning the research question. Therefore, in this research, we find the interpretive patterns of meanings (themes) in former students' views and experiences with sports in schools.

This research will follow the six-phase analysis as explained by Braun and Clarke (2021a, p.35)- (a) Familiarising yourself with the data, (b) Coding, (c) Generating initial themes, (d) Developing and reviewing themes, (e) Refining, defining and naming themes, and (f) Writing up. At this stage, it is also important to highlight that the analysis process is not linear. It is a

recursive process which involves constantly going back and forth (Braun & Clarke, 2021a). I have adapted the six-step framework to this study. All of the steps were conducted as expressed by Braun & Clarke (2021a). For this study, they will be presented in four sections. The first section discusses data familiarisation, and the second section captures the coding phases- initial coding and aggregation; the third section focuses on finding and reviewing themes; and the fourth section revolves around the definition of themes and the report.

7.1 Familiarisation with Data

The first step involves familiarising oneself with the data. As the data was collected first-hand via interviews, there was some level of familiarity with the data. Despite this, it is essential to immerse oneself in the data while beginning to undertake thematic analysis. For this purpose, I reviewed all the data while transcribing and read all the transcripts twice. At this stage, transcription of the audio data is an important step. The Otter.ai software assisted with the transcription. However, the transcription had to be thoroughly checked and corrected as the software mainly failed to detect the Indian accent accurately. This helped to familiarise the initial step of the analysis.

7.2 Coding the Data

Coding is a process central to this analysis. During this phase, codes are recognised and highlighted. Codes can be understood as the “smallest units of analysis” (Braun & Clarke, 2021a, p.52). They capture an interesting concept or relevant data to the research question. The NVIVO software was used for generating and revising codes. The exercise of coding was done in several phases. Open coding was done with the entire data set. Each sentence was coded, and then the codes were revised. The process of coding in these methods provides for semantic and latent coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Latent coding helps the researcher go beyond the face value and helps focus on the underlying assumptions and concepts. This is congruent with the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the research. The latent type of codes aims to go beyond the surface level and interpret and analyse the underlying meanings of the data. It seeks to identify the aspects and trends that give meaning to the data. The latent coding helped in identifying the socio-cultural contexts and the larger impact of various factors shaping the journeys of participants with sports. The codes were reviewed and then aggregated

if they shared a main core idea. The aggregation of codes helped provide more structure for the analysis. This process is essential as it lays the foundation for analysing the themes.

7.3 Searching and Reviewing Themes

The analysis process was time-consuming and reiterative. It was not linear. Simultaneously, this process was clubbed with reviewing and revisiting the research questions. This step of the research spanned over many weeks and required me to go back and forth around reading the codes and reviewing the initial themes that were generated. This analysis method is useful in identifying and understanding the collective meanings and interpreting the data rather than simply summarising the data. The process of analysis centres around identifying and defining ‘themes’ which can be understood as “ patterns of shared meaning underpinned or united by a core concept” (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p.593). Reflexivity was central to this process of identification of themes within the data.

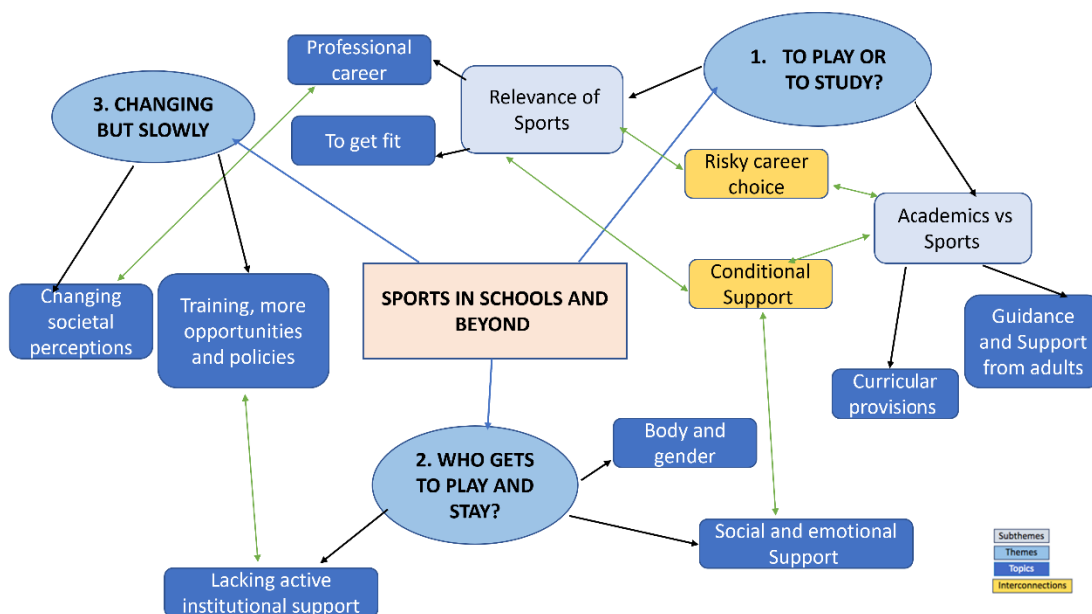


Figure 6: Map showing the themes, sub themes and the interconnections

7.4 Refining, Defining and Naming the Themes

The refinement of themes was a rigorous process. The data was extensive and required careful understanding and recognition of patterns with an underlying shared meaning. Only two sub-themes were identified within the first theme as it proved difficult to understand which patterns were substantial enough. During this period, I mapped out a large number of mind maps and

charts with pens and paper. The act of physically drawing and sketching out the charts and maps helped provide a clear picture around the themes and the shared meanings. This process helped me chart out and have a more accurate idea about the connections and practicalities related to the themes and the sub-themes.

The themes were narrowed down, and ultimately, I identified three themes for my research. They are named as follows :

1. To study or to play?
2. Who gets to play and stay?
3. Changing, but slowly.

The last phase of the analysis is writing up. The following section on findings will provide a detailed account of the report and the definition of themes.

8 Findings

The previous section discussed the analysis process and how I arrived at my themes for this research. This section will discuss the themes in greater detail with their definitions and the data that provides some context to the findings. This section defines the three themes. The first theme focuses on the binary and hierarchy between academics and sports, the second theme focuses on the factors that impact involvement and continuation of sports participation, and lastly, the third theme revolves around what gaps have been identified and what changes need to be made for sports development to flourish in the context of Delhi.

8.1 Theme 1: To study or to play?

One of the most significant patterns that emerged was a binary between playing and studying. An interesting trend was noticed across the responses from the participants where they answered about sports in schools by mentioning academics or studies in the classroom associated with exams. There were multiple factors contributing to this division, as can be seen in Figure 7. The examination of the dataset revealed that academics as a deciding factor for participating or continued participation in sports was embedded in the institutional structures, such as the curriculum mainly being focused on achieving grades and appearing for board examinations. The respondents opined in several instances how the curriculum, provisions, administration and even the teachers were more inclined towards academics.

The prevalence of academics was evident in the lack of social and emotional support for engaging in sports by the adults (parents, teachers, coaches). This support fluctuates through the different grades and highlights how participants recalled their own experiences or instances of fellow classmates who were allowed to participate as long as they were good in academics. Interestingly, the participants mentioned a dichotomy in their identity as students and athletes. Lastly, support was noted concerning the career options where academics was observed to be 'safer' in contrast to sports being 'risky' regarding professional and financial safety.

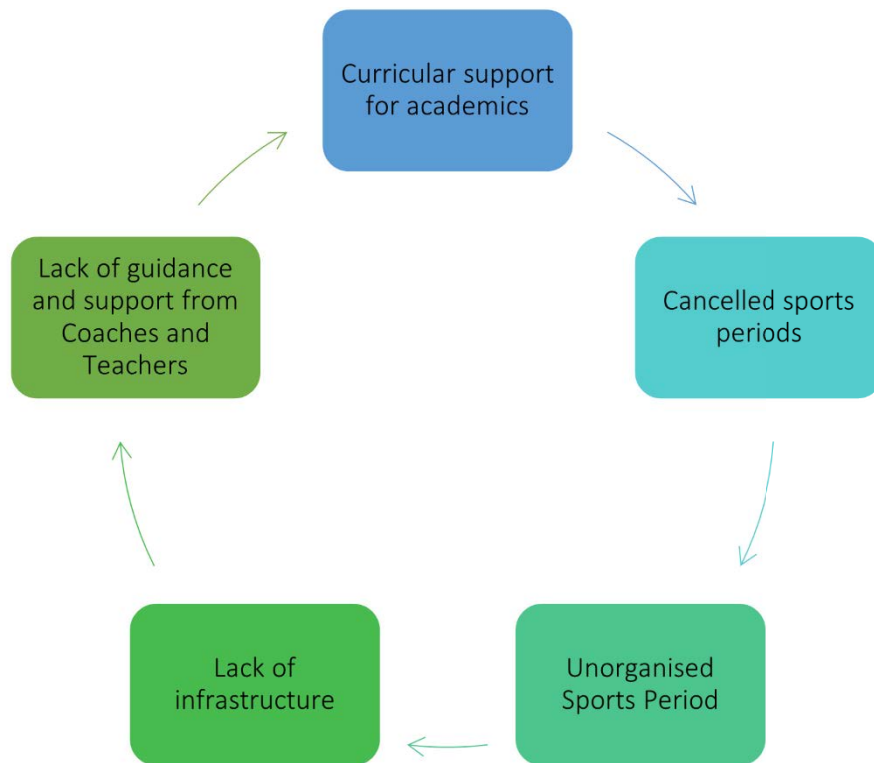


Figure 7: More support for academics in school

8.1.1 Academics versus Sports

Almost all participants recalled two commonly mentioned provisions for engaging in sports- during school hours or before school practice, colloquially known as the ‘games’ period and the ‘zero’ period. The games period would be a designated time during the school day, often between other classes, and the zero period could be a time during school hours or before the classes began for training.

The curriculum provided more space for academics in several ways. Most students recalled that only one or two weekly game periods were available. The division between classroom studies and sports has taken shape in terms of the institutional and societal outlooks towards sports impact the participants located sports in their school lives.

“How the sports played a role in my schooling, would majorly be around as a separate from academics. We hardly had one or two periods every week, and they were just to use as a recreational activity, nothing more than that.” (Rohit)

The above extract explains how there was a limited time for sports and the provisions did not focus on the development of sports during the designated time. The participants also expressed that the curriculum was primarily not supportive of sport participation.

“The school curriculum focused on developing skills with respect to the boards that we were appearing for. The curriculum was only dedicated to boards, it did not focus on sports. The curriculum was only related to medical subjects or even mathematical subjects to take the children sit down and study.” (Sonu)

The main objective of the curriculum seemed to be revolving around board examinations. In addition to the main emphasis on academic goals, participants also recalled how there was not enough time dedicated to sports and unorganised. The students recognised that there was not enough guidance for the games period. The period was mainly students playing on their own without much support or advice from the sports teacher. Despite the limited options in the curriculum, there were also informal practices such as ‘cancelled’ sports periods observed by participants.

“I didn't like the fact that in at least in Delhi, we have this culture of cancelled sports period for academics, which I did not like because sports in itself it's very important.” (Rani)

Moreover, the sports period could be overtaken or cancelled for the sake of an academic subject, but participants recalled that the vice versa would never happen. To this end, academic learning was always prioritised over sports participation. Further, there was also a clash of schedules of tests and tournaments. This impacted the student-athletes who competed in the sports competitions. They argue that one of the biggest failures at the institutional level was that the school curriculum and the tournaments were not aligned, and they often had to miss the tournaments if the teachers did not accommodate them.

“So the School also had tournaments, interschool and intercollege in school, but there were many very minimal, but sometimes they collided with the exams because every school has different pattern. For example, apart from the board exam, some unit tests and assignments, I used to have problem with that. Sometimes I had to miss exams and give them after the rest of the class, or sometimes there were teachers who didn't support me. So I had very much problem in giving exam scoring marks. So, this is a problem that curriculum is not supporting my sports because they don't align.” (Arjun)

This instance maps out the division between sports participation and studying, where ultimately, the student-athlete has to be accommodated and make an active choice to appear

for the exam or the sports tournament. This forces the student-athlete to make a choice on their own and risk the chance of missing two crucial aspects of their school life. This clash sharpens the dichotomy between studying and playing.

Another essential aspect that influenced this division of sports and studies was the attitude of the adults, namely the parents and teachers. Several participants have recalled either their own experiences or the instances that happened with their peers regarding the support for participating in sports. One of the participants also recalled that the main concern stemmed from their academic achievement or the status of their studies-

“Blatantly, I would say there was zero support from the academic teachers like they used to praise us when we used to get trophies, but the next question would be, have you done your homework? So you'll know, at the end of the day, what matters to them is that they want all of their students to get good grades. There is the utmost priority to them.” (Abhimanyu)

The priority for the academic teacher would be solely on academic achievements. The lack of support was explicit and implicit in the school as can be reflected in the attitude of the teachers. It stemmed from devaluing and reducing their sports achievements to the status of their studies. The discouragement was often related to the future of their sports participation. This was done in a manner in which their involvement in sports was viewed as temporary and not fruitful for their future. The general understanding of sports prevents students from participating in sports as it is seen as a temporary hobby.

“I feel like there's a lot more focus on education in the sense of what you study in the classroom. And sports is usually thought as you're wasting your time or you're just not using your time wisely.” (Shashi)

This binary is also reflected in how student-athletes reflect on their sense of belonging. One of the participants who had actively trained for their sport before school regularly also opined that

“It (training and sports) really doesn't connect me to school. Even the practice, everything was before school hours. It was never connected.” (Shakti)

In such instances, the underlying idea is that sports is something that students practice outside of the school timings while studying, and academics are at the centre of the school environment. Despite training within the same space, the dichotomy is established with the clear distinction of practice before school hours. The lack of support was evident more explicitly in terms of the

availability and visibility of the physical resources and curriculum provisions but also extended to the intangible factors of social and emotional support.

This sub-theme underlines how institutional and societal provisions shape a binary in academics and sports. In most cases, there is a hierarchy where academics are the preferred norm for school education. This hierarchy is also interconnected and interwoven with the second theme, particularly in terms of career choices.

8.1.2 Relevance of Sports

Another important subtheme that was emerging was the constant reference to the value of sports. The participants had described instances where the scope of sports was narrowly defined and reduced to its utility. This is mainly centred around the use of sports in the professional lives of the students. To this end, I observed that repetitively, the value and utility of sports in post-school life were brought into focus. A fascinating thread that was noticed from the interviews was how the support for participating in sports seemed to change as the participants progressed through their educational journeys. This support is related to the lack of awareness around career options and professional roles in the sporting field. The support is gradually withdrawn as the students approach the career-forming and academically challenging years of 9th to 12th grades. The subsequently perceived low relevance of sports is questioned as justification for the changing support systems of the athlete. Moreover, the idea of the relevance of sports is constructed in contrast to how the participants reported the relevance and benefits of sports participation in their lives.

Outside of School, the perceptions and efforts of parents were monumental in widening or narrowing this gap between academics and sports. Parents often discourage the students from playing by directly referring to the career options and the financial risk of pursuing sports. There is a very narrow idea towards the scope of sports.

“Basically, the problem in the country is what our parents say: What will you earn after retiring from sports or what if you don't get that break, you don't get to that level that you can earn for your family that much?” (Arjun)

The extract above captures how financial uncertainty in the future of sports is one of the most significant factors leading to the criticality towards the relevance of sports. The end goal of sports seems to become a professional and elite competitor, which seems to be a very uncertain

career choice. This idea of hard work and difficult breakthroughs in sports seems prevalent in society. This uncertainty is what widens the hierarchy-

“....there’s not enough financial incentive and no real safety net if you do not make it to the top level(in sports). That's why I think people choose the more safer path of like studying and choosing the academic options.” (Naman)

It emerged that financial security and safety are central to sports' relevance in Indian society. In contrast to the ‘risky’ sports field, the academic field after school education is considered a much ‘safer’ option. The risk of failure in sports also prevents adults from encouraging their children into sports as the high demand and the competition in the field. This makes a career in sports a gamble and prevents parents from encouraging their children in sports. The opportunities in a professional sports career are not widely available.

“But what my mother used to tell me, and which I will agree to as well, that according to the population and in our country, the opportunity for sports is very less. So the chances of one making a career in sports is very little, considering they have the best of the abilities also.” (Sonu)

There is a lot of scepticism about a future in sports after school. The uncertainty is even around the individuals who are very talented and play to the best of their abilities. The limited opportunities and high competition make it a challenging career path. The underlying fear and high competition also add to the withdrawal of support from the adults.

“..not just our teachers for our parents as well. It's like you have to perform well in studies, then only you can be a part of any sports activity. And not many people want I wouldn't say they don't want their sons or daughters to become sportspersons, They do want that they want their son or their daughter to be like, Virat Kohli, or like, Sania Nehwal. But they also know that the fact that there's a lot of competition, and only one in a million reach that level. So, they like to play safe and the teachers want their students and the parents wants they want their kids to perform better in studies.” (Veer)

The criticality towards sports is observed because of the risks that it poses and how there is a minimal chance of making it in sports. Sports have a financial risk, and luck plays a huge role in determining who will go professional. Simultaneously, the participants recall what the outlook towards sports was primarily understood as secondary to studies. Participants referred to sports as being understood by society at large as something to pass the time or an afterthought of studies. The financial aspect of a career in sports raised questions for the participants as the guidance by the adults from the parents and the teachers was shaped by their own perceptions

of what purpose sports serve in the students' lives. Participation in sports is encouraged based on the returns that it would get and what direct and explicit purposes it can serve to the participants. The discouragement was also noticed indirectly by witnessing other students around you who were demotivated and discriminated against from actively participating in sports-

“One of my classmates used to be good at sports, and he was good in athletics. He was good at volleyball and good at football....There was this one teacher of social sciences. She was so pissed about it. In front of the class said " tera kuch nahi hoga sports se, koi naukri nahi milegi, koi school, kuch tere jaane ke baad kuch nahi hoga (nothing good will happen to you because of this sport, sports won't get you anywhere, not a good job or into a good school.” (Rani)

The immediate reference for playing sports is to see if it can land you a job or serve a purpose in your career building. The treatment of classmates also acts an important and impressional factor in the devaluing of sports for an individual. In another case, it was also encouraged if it served a purpose for you to fit into society's idea of a fit body-

“The reason that I didn't enjoy sports period so much is because I felt looked at in a way that I felt was judgmental, and it's not just for my peers. It's also from the people who taught us. They would just like point out things about how you're unhealthy. You should play sports and you'd fix it. I think just that sort of perspective, even if one person says it at some point, it stays with you for every sports period that's to come.” (Sanya)

This is a very powerful extract because it narrows down the purpose of sports to get into shape and fit into the societal standards of beauty and fitness. Sports are encouraged on the basis of their purpose and the very narrow and visible impact they can offer to the participants. The perceived benefits of sports were narrowed to only a few tangible changes in the physical body. These are the practices that deter students from participating in sports.

In contrast, the participants reported several intangible benefits and life skills developments. Sports' actual benefits and impact have been overwhelming in the social sphere and skills for the participants' professional lives. Most of the benefits were related to the soft skills and life values that the participants were able to develop through the experience of playing sports, such as calmness and tolerance, confidence, dedication, and perseverance, as well as an appreciation for talent and physical fitness. Other participants expressed how most of their friendships have persisted after school because of the sports and how participating in sports has led them to meet and interact with different people.

“The experience of playing in tournaments, going to places with your team playing against difficult teams, learning from them, adapting their strategies, going to new schools, and meeting new people, learning new things. That was the best experience I could ever have in my school life. The exposure that one gets from experiencing these things cannot be compared to anything else. And some things that are just learned by experience cannot be taught directly. So I feel this experience played a vital role in developing both skills related to sports and other skills as well.” (Sonu)

Across playing different sports, sports' social impact was evident in all the interviews. The experiences of sports have allowed them to experience first-hand ideas about meeting people from all walks of life, travelling for tournaments provided the opportunity to be independent at a very young age, established friendships with students from different schools but also, sports provided an opportunity for students to make friends outside their social group even within the same grade.

For participants who played sports post-school, it became a topic of discussion. It acted as an easy icebreaker or conversation starter in the informal and formal capacity.

“I'm still a person who is from the very apart from the crowd because the college people, in the past previous college also in this college also know me because I play tennis. I'm different from them. So that's a way of interacting with people. I strike a conversation on this only that I play sports.” (Arjun)

Similarly, another participant recalled a very direct advantage of playing sports in their professional life while appearing for interviews.

“And other learnings I will talk about is me getting a job or me getting an internship. For me it's so heavily dependent on sports because in so many interviews, I remember talking about me being in long distance or me being in sport since like I was ninth grade and that was definitely a very interesting story other people wanted to like listen to. Even if I'm talking with my co workers. I'm able to share an interest with them. So it definitely kept helping me after school.” (Naina)

This extract captures how one of the most important advantages of playing sports was the help in job interviews and sports as a topic of conversation in new work environments. These are fundamental ways participants have experienced the benefits of playing sports in their school education. The ideas presented by the adults during the participants' school education do not necessarily reflect their experiences with the value of sports. The relevance of sports is essential

in terms of profession. Even though the participants had not pursued a career directly related to sports, their background in sports has been vital in their professional life.

This sub-theme emphasises how the relevance of sports is focused on the direct and very overt benefits that sports can impart. The idea of the relevance of sports after school as a student is constructed to be centred around professional or elite sports. However, as the participants report from their own experiences, the relevance and benefits of sports in their youth after their school education are not always overt and tangible.

8.2 Theme 2: Who gets to play and stay?

This theme encapsulates the factors that impact how the participants started to play and if they continued to play those sports. The participants' responses reflected that personal goals formed a minor but significant part of their motivation to play. The analysis of the data revealed that there were several patterns around the perceptions and support for starting and continuing to play. Figure 8 describes stereotypes around the physical body, social and emotional support and institutional support.

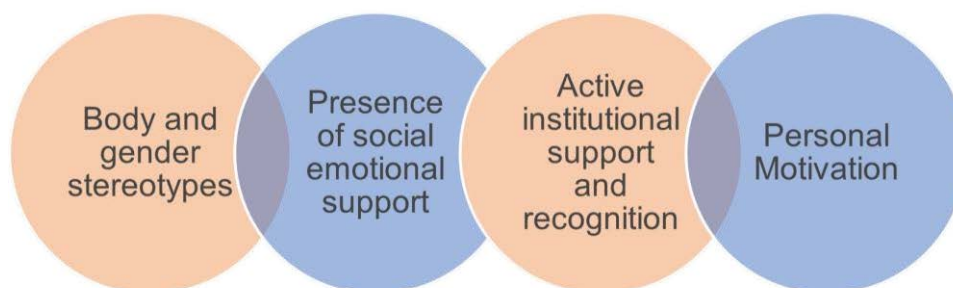


Figure 8: Factors impacting sports participation and continuation

This theme discusses the motivational factors and highlights the deterrents and demotivating factors for participating in sports.

8.2.1 Which bodies get to play?

There are several factors and perceptions that impact or rather limit the choice of sports for the participants. The most prominent factor highlighted was the body stereotypes around certain sports. Given the physical nature of most sports, the ‘body’ and the stereotypes attached to which bodies can play have been a recurring topic in many different ways. It was interesting and shocking to see that even as little children, the participants were aware about who gets to be a sports player. These notions of bodily attributes are embedded in society but also are being reproduced within the social sphere of schools and determine which bodies or who is worthy of being a sports person. And these lofty notions around bodies and gender deters children from simply trying out a sport.

“Or if I was playing volleyball, it was mostly like, 'Oh, if you're tall, only then you can play it. But if you're tall, you can play it well' That was already like an idea attached to it” (Naina)

Even at a young age, as school students, participants mentioned how they were deterred from playing sports as they were not tall enough.

“I wasn't too tall to play basketball at that moment.” (Rohit)

Height was a common aspect around volleyball and basketball and how they were either encouraged or deterred from choosing these sports.

“that's another thing which we have to change the mentality that even fat kids can play, and they play very good, but they don't play because of this shame. They will be called names.” (Rani)

Besides the attribute of height, weight is another aspect. Here is already an ideal body type in the minds of the people who can play sports. This idea that only certain body types and physical attributes can play sports was already embedded in young children’s minds. Along with physical characteristics, gender was another very influential factor at times in the background but sometimes more evident in the participants' experiences as students. Interestingly, the female participants talked about the fat shaming of their fellow boy classmates. Especially in the higher grades, in teenage years, the female participants recalled how girls would have the ‘option’ or ‘excuse’ for getting out of doing exercise, citing the menstrual cycle, while the boys had no choice, and all of the boys would be expected to play constantly. The inherent idea is that their boy peers would be expected to know and participate regardless of any other aspect.

“We had some exercise set, you have to do push-ups. The girls were given the flexibility of not doing the push-ups but the boys? The fat boys were shamed; they were shamed very badly. So the girls were not shamed because, regardless of the body build, the slim and the fat girls equally did not know how to do the push ups. It is okay if the girls do not do the push ups but they were like 'the boys should know how to do everything', they can't be weak. That's the toxic masculinity.” (Rani)

The above extract captures nuanced issues regarding physical bodies, gender and the expectations from sports. It mentions the intersection of gender and body types. This idea that one gender would simply know and excel in sports while the other gender is understood to be weak exemplifies how society and school environments shape who gets to play sports. In other cases, gender was observed in structures by participants in terms of uniforms and safety. However, gender also appeared subtly as the participants used the terms ‘boys’ or ‘girls’. It was inherent in the ways that the participants mentioned or phrased their sentences-

“I think as a boy, especially sports definitely means a lot to me. And when you're younger, sports gives you a lot of freedom..” (Karan)

Participation is enabled or consequently disabled by the ideas surrounding socially acceptable bodies in sports. The social norms and structures are powerful in ingraining and strengthening the stereotypes around sportspersons’ physical attributes.

8.2.2 Presence of Social and Emotional Support

Encouragement and support from the adults in the personal sphere of the children are increasingly recognised as necessary in the initial stages of sports participation. Participants mention their coach or parents encouraging them to play a specific sport or enrolling them in classes. However, surprisingly, in some cases, the choice of sport was more circumstantial than intentional. For instance, Arjun, who played Tennis competitively through his university years, started it early in primary school. After dabbling in some sports, the decision to play Tennis was purely because it was more frequent than cricket.

“Then I was shuffling between football and cricket. Then finally, I started playing Tennis because I went to the sports complex, but my father said, let's give you a professional training. So we went for cricket, but the cricket training was only three days a week. So my father said, ‘What will you do the rest of the three days?’ He saw people playing Tennis. He asked the receptionist

in the sports complex- ‘How many days that tennis coaching happened?’ They said six days so my father said you will play Tennis. So that's how I started” (Arjun)

This extract also emphasises how the parental role was crucial for the children starting to play certain sports where the support can simply be for participation and not centred towards a particular sport. Parental support, encouragement and initiative are monumental factors in helping children get introduced to certain sports and start playing them. This was also the case for others-

“I know the first sport I picked up was football. My dad basically forced me to go to football with him.” (Naina)

This participant recalled that her father was very passionate about football and therefore took her to play the sport. In other instances, the impact was also indirect. Abhimanyu expressed that being inspired by the coach was also a factor was starting to play sports. And while the adults in the immediate vicinity were impactful in determining if and what sports the participants played, international athletes were often cited as motivational reasons.

“Then Virat Kohli, obviously. In 2012. One of the I was in 2013. I came into sixth grade, and India won the World Cup in 2012. So that two years span when I was allowed to play with the leather ball. That was like we looked up to Virat Kohli (Indian Cricketer)then when I finally came into basketball, Steph Curry is definitely one of the best basketball players, he got me hooked up (on basketball), and he still has me hooked up on it right now.” (Karan)

Supporting and viewing international athletes have been one of the biggest reasons cited by participants. Mainly, the participants focused on footballers or Virat Kohli (former Indian Cricket team captain) as their inspirations for their sustained interest in sports.

Continued participation in sports and training obviously impacts other aspects of school life. The vital aspect is the emotional support from parents and teachers which often changed as the students progressed through the school years. Several students recall how the nature of support for playing sports changed as they progressed in school. In particular around the higher grades of 9-12th grades. Participants recall from personal experience and second-hand accounts of discouragement and discrimination from academic teachers towards student-athletes. Emotional and social support must be present in the educational spaces in terms of guidance and encouragement from the coach but also support from the academic teachers. In the instance below, one of the participants shared how they did not feel respected by their teachers. The belief and support in their sports participation from their academic teacher were missing. This

lack of respect hinders the fostering of essential emotional support for the student-athlete to continue participation.

“I do see there were teachers who didn't respect me. To them, you were just playing sports as a outdoor games and not like a serious thing that you're actually do in your life. A lot of teachers don't really consider it to be like a real career or real important thing. They just assume that you're just doing it for fun....until and unless you are very good at studies, they would judge you for doing sports. I would say that was a main factor if you're doing good in studies and they will say ‘okay, good, good. Wow, You are like all rounder.’ But like if you're not good at studies, but you are good at sports, they will shame you for it. They will say, you can't do anything in your life, sports se kuch nahi hoga, padhna toh padega(nothing can happen from sports, you would have to study ultimately).” (Shakti)

Good academic performance is the main determinant of the teacher's respect and support. This support was lacking in many school environments. Teachers tended to respect and support sports participation of students who were good in academic learning. The performance within the classroom determines the support to play outside the class. This attitude negatively impacted sports development and made it difficult for student-athletes to pursue sports. Disregard to the sports that one plays can have a long-lasting impact on sport participation.

The lack of parental support can negatively impact participation. In another view, Abhimanyu, a participant who was very passionate about football and wished to pursue a career in the sport but could not, regards that the emotional support from parents was very crucial in discontinuing to play sports-

“If my parents would have said, ‘Son, do whatever you want to do. We don't care if you score bad in your exams, or even in your boards. We'll support you. We know for a fact that you won't flunk your class for sure, because you are not that bad of a student. But we have seen the kind of player that you are, and we don't care if you make it or not in future, but what matters to us is that we want you to at least go and explore it.’ At least try. There's a light at the end of that tunnel should at least go, and it's worth trying.” (Abhimanyu)

Positive support from parents can immensely impact the sports development. In contrast, in the extract below, Arjun recalls how the support of his parents was monumental for him as they reassured him and did not pressure him to excel in his studies and balance his sports training as a student-

“My parents also said that you don't have to score 95% You just have to score 80% 85% and we'll be happy because you also been playing sports alongside. So, thing that my parents didn't

force me to excel in both, be the best in both helped me a lot so that I can pursue Tennis for a long time.” (Arjun)

The role of parents and teachers can be both positive and negative and especially matters in the latter years of the school life. Emotional support is central. This support could be withdrawn when academics are threatened to be compromised for the sake of pursuing the sport. The teachers are vital to the support. The tournaments and competitions coincide with academic submissions. The support is required for fostering environments where student-athletes can balance their educational and sports development.

“So if we were supposed to go out for a competition, then we would have to compromise on our classes and then because we would go on and that is something that we were not able to cope up with. And then as we found out that we have to leave more and more classes, that became a little tough, and I didn't feel that the (academic) teachers also were very supportive of it.” (Deepti)

Social and emotional support was also available from peers and observed in the school environment. Supportive environments are also shaped by how fellow students treat the athletes.

“I used to love the respect I used to get from the students. It was very interesting like, you know, because the awards I used to get and everything that I loved, that that kind of respect I used to get from like students.” (Shakti)

In the cases where the adults might not have been fully respectful or supportive, fellow peers and students respected and appreciated the efforts of the student-athlete. This is an essential component in shaping supportive environments. Friendships are also central to the support systems for sustained sports participation. The social impact of sports has already been noted in the benefits and positive impact that the participants mentioned as the biggest takeaways from sports. The participants also spoke highly about their friendships in sports. Friends through sports were seen as an important factor in continued participation. Support systems for participation has been found in meaningful social relationships. As Rahul explains that the support in the field of sports is playing and watching it with friends-

“Mostly my friends. Mostly playing with friends pushing each other, and then watching football. I think that they were the two main things that really guided me or motivated me to pursue any like a sport, football.” (Rahul)

Friendships helped the participants stay motivated in their sports. Moreover, in terms of sports injuries, friends were also recalled as one of the support systems during recovery.

Therefore, one of the factors that influenced participation in sports would be the presence of social and emotional support from parents, teachers and peers. The aspects shape the environment that determines if there would have sustained sports participation.

8.2.3 Lack of Active Institutional Support

Aside from the social and emotional support, institutional support at the initial stages is also important in making participation accessible. Participants talked about how the school authorities or even the governmental authorities did not actively support the talent development but belatedly took pride in the students' achievements. The authorities rewarded the students after they have put in their own individual efforts, seldom even training outside the school in sports complexes or academies with little to no support from the school or government. And only once, when the players achieved, the rewards would be awarded. Investment and active support is required at all times but particularly at the initial stages. This was missing in many cases.

“...they (the administration) won't support you when you're actually like training for it. It would more so be a hurdle. I remember in school sometimes the authority saying, oh, like, you can't come early in the morning. If you don't have permission from the school, you can't train there. But when you actually get a medal or like you gain recognition for the school, then they will like give you a cash prize, or they would like to know felicitate you in the school assembly. I think rather than it being an afterthought of like, 'oh, somebody did well now I will give them a prize or like I would give them appreciation' it would be 'oh they're training hard. Let me give them appreciation at this stage'.” (Naina)

This practice of delayed rewards and support points to the bigger notion of sports being something that is the responsibility on the student themselves until it benefits the school. The participants recalled several instances where they saw the student-athletes training privately and then the school rewarded them occasionally. This lack of active support was a major hurdle for continued participation. Accessibility and affordability also become a big challenge. Financial support is also important to access. Since most of the school are private and incur a tuition fee, participants mentioned that some allowance or financial support to practice sports competitively would be very beneficial.

8.3 Theme 3: Changing but slowly.

The underlying pattern that was identified in terms of progress in the sports field was how change was happening at multiple levels but at a very gradual pace. Participants identified several aspects that needed to be changed and some that were in the process of changing. These are categorised into two topics: societal perceptions that call for changing in the very understanding of sports and the institutional changes as seen in Figure 9 below. Though societal changes have been kept as the foundation, however, changes at both levels are equally essential.

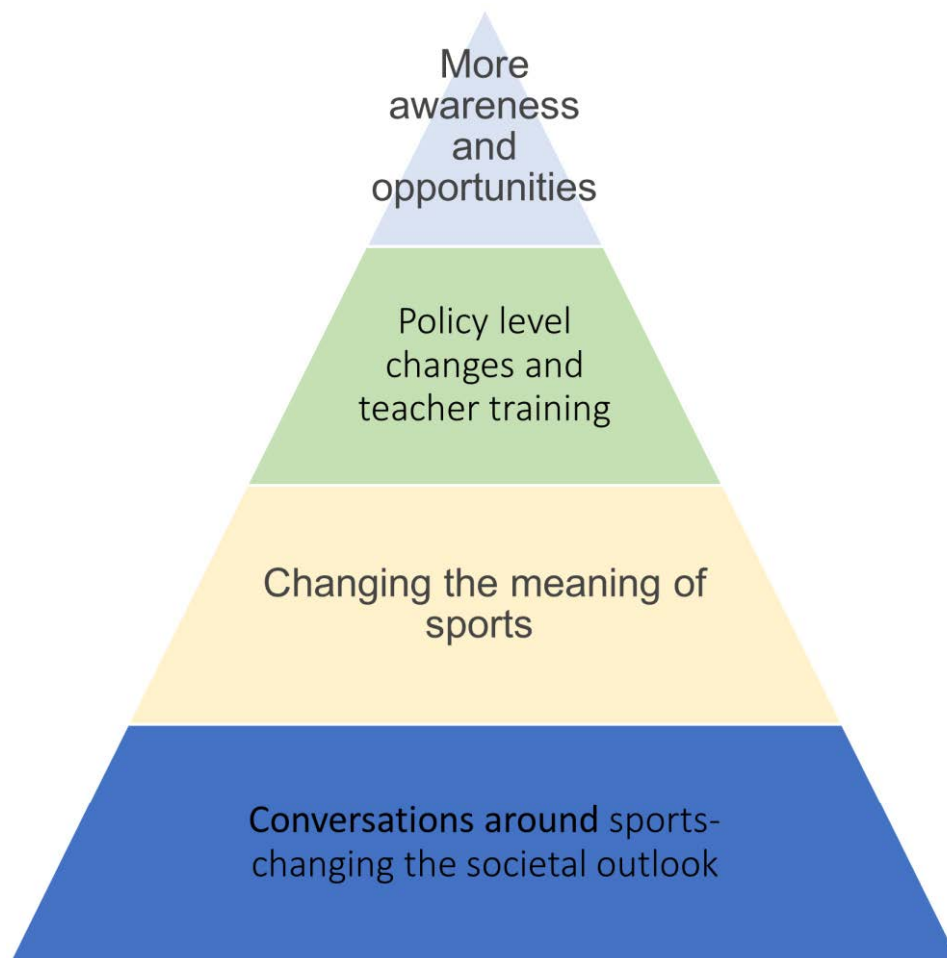


Figure 9: Changes required as identified by participants

8.3.1 Societal Perceptions

The key barrier for continued participation in sports during their school education was surrounding the societal understanding around who can play sports and the perceptions around the end goal. The participants noted that there needs to be a change in terms of more guidance, support, and encouragement from the adults (parents, teachers, mentors, and coaches) to simply

try out sports and play for the sake of fun and even all-around fitness. Moreover, participants noted that there needs to be more opportunities for having conversations around sensitisation in sports and spread awareness for potential that sports can offer. At the societal level, the perceptions need to be restructured and revisited to make space for more opportunities for young kids to play sports in school.

“I believe the change needs to be at school level only, at the grassroots level because people need to, by people, I mean, teachers and parents need to understand that there's much more in life than studies and people can have a good life if they're involved in sports as well. They can, and not only if they make, you know, the highest level if your kid is not, getting to the highest level. Well, at least he or she tried and if they are involved in sports, at their young age, they would feel happy and they they would be fit. And then also parents should support their kids and like, they should guide them as well that if you're not able to make it in sport, it would be a bit difficult for you in life considering the other aspects.” (Veer)

The active support in terms of emotional and social support and guidance were two foundational aspects that were noted as missing from their own upbringing by the participants. This type of support and having spaces for sensitisation around the societal expectation from sports are key to the retention and talent development in sports. Since sports comes attached with very strict and rigorous physical training and strong mentality, participants mentioned the need for having sports counsellors and sensitisation workshops for sports participation.

More importantly, several participants mentioned how social media had helped bring in the possibilities of the sporting success with the recent Olympic achievement and popularising the tutorials for practising sports and fitness at home. However, participants draw upon a huge gap in terms of career advise in fields alternative to academics. The career guidance around the professions that sports as a field can offer beyond the professional athlete were also central to the changes that the participants identified.

“I think people need to talk more about like, oh, you can do sports right now. And after that, maybe you can choose if you don't make it in that terms (professionally). You can start doing other things related to sports. It's just not like either like you make Team India and cricket or there's nothing else and you can't earn money after that. So I think that being able to tell students that there's more careers beyond that. And there is career in like athletics or there's career in that (sport). I see a lot of people who have done well in athletics, they earn enough like they earn good money. I do think they worked 50 More times than any other person who's earning the same amount to be able to be at that place.” (Naina)

This extract captures how conversations in larger environments can help widen the idea of what sports can be after school and how examples are available if discussions around these topics can be initiated. The conversation needs to be involving all stakeholders and not just students.

8.3.2 Institutional Level

When the participants talked about what they had felt was missing or what was lacking and inadequate in their own schools, a pattern around institutional factors was observed where participants cited how more provisions can be made available at the institutional level or the old ones can be reformed to ensure more conducive and enabling environments for sports.

The availability and access to physical resources such as track field, playground, and equipment for playing sports varied across the different schools and instances. However, their importance was highlighted very evidently by all the participants.

“We didn't even have like nets. For cricket until I was in 11th. And like that is the state for cricket. You can imagine we did have a football pitch, but we didn't have anything for cricket. This was a private thing like outside my school.” (Rahul)

The lack of infrastructure had not been updated in many cases. This extract captures how the lack of resources also encourages enrolment in academies and training centres outside of the school. This leads to lack of accessibility as most of these centres can be far and even expensive as private stakeholders run them. There is a need to establish the infrastructure in the school.

It is not enough to simply have the physical infrastructures present in schools as the participants mentioned that the mere presence did not equate to accessibility. Despite having a football field, in this case by highlighted by Abhimanyu, there was not designated and adequate space for all the sports.

“So one but one thing that I feel was pretty bad was that we had one playground. And we had seven sports that was played simultaneously at the same time. Everybody's doing their own thing. And it's like you would hear complaints when it shouldn't be shooting towards the goal and it hit someone else.” (Abhimanyu)

Beyond physical infrastructure and equipment, the gaps were actively identified in how these resources were utilised. Besides accessible spaces and equipment, guidance and advice from a trained and competent coach and mentors are important for creating environments for sports.

Several participants observed how guidance was missing for playing around in school. Training of the coach and teachers was identified as a critical missing point.

The lack of resources often also provided creativity and flexibility. In the instances of lack of proper resources, participants talked about flexible solutions, such as one of the primary schools did not have an outdoor playground on their premises. Sometimes, the students were taken to the nearby park for outdoor events. Moreover, if there was a lack of faculty for that dedicated sports, even teaching/ academic staff was able to substitute the PE teacher- such as in the case of

“So we did practice football on our own. And we even had like our western music teacher who was passionate about football who would coach us from time to time.” (Naman)

In some instances, the gaps were filled, if not completed, overcome by having some flexibility that afforded temporary solutions for the sports training to be made possible. Overall, these changes were reported to be in progress but moving at a very gradual pace.

8.4 Summarising Findings

In this section, I will provide a summary of the findings of the research about the experience of sports. From the results, I could map out the factors that impact and enable the sports participation of former school students rooted in the larger societal perceptions. This section provides an interlinked idea of how physical and socially constructed factors impact and determine continued involvement in sports. Students' perceptions of sports are diverse, and they understand them through abstract and practical meanings. Their understanding is shaped within the larger context of socio-cultural and institutional aspects of the educational system. Sports development is experienced differently with varying levels of motivations and trajectories with sports involvement. Based on the findings, Figure 10 combines the different aspects shaping students' sports experiences.

As shown in Figure 10, some factors embedded in the context impact the participants' experience of sports development, such as the idea of a risky career or conditional support for sports. Students experience sports as a social phenomenon embedded in the larger institutions of education and society. Their participation is impacted by various factors that are diverse and interlinked.

The role of parents was central to the initial involvement in sports. The influence and guidance of the coach generated early interest and helped the participant get interested in sports at a young age. Social interactions and meaningful relationships are the most important and are two of the vital life skill and valuable outcomes of participating in sports during their school years. The presence of supportive environments for sports encompasses the presence of support systems from parents, peers and teachers, as well as access to training.

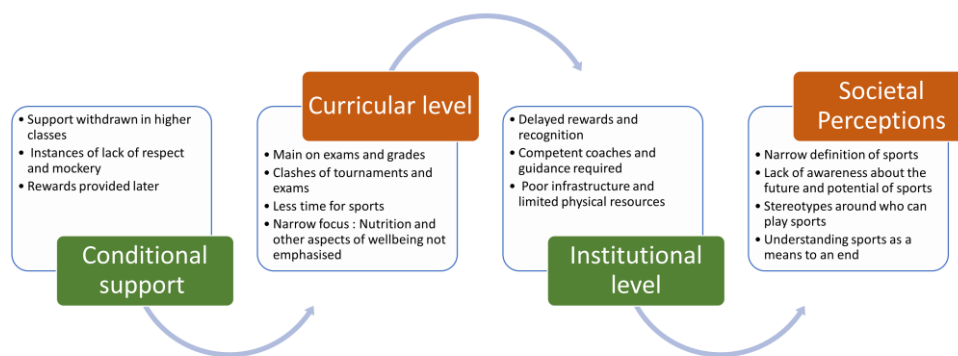


Figure 10: Factors shaping the participation and continuation in sports

The central aspect and the overarching theme for sports participation stem from understanding the value and contribution of sports to one’s life. This is the most influential factor forming the basis of sports participation. The understanding of sports is viewed from a utilitarian perspective and, therefore, only supported if it fulfils the goals that are considered as important. These can be getting into (fit/physical) shape, getting a job, or scoring marks in the subject of Physical education. This reduces the value of sports to be supplementary to bigger goals. The value of sports is decided against the value of academics. Studying in classrooms and scoring in examinations are considered to be more important for a student.

There is a mismatch in the perceived contribution of sports and the actual multifaceted benefits realised through sport participation in one’s life. The study finds that one of the biggest obstacles preventing the retention and continuity of sports is a lack of guidance and options for the adults (parents and teachers) and the students.

At the curricular level, the binary and hierarchical order of academics and sports regards sports as secondary. The status of sports is often seen as a hobby, a break from studies, or a leisure activity between studying periods. This is also reflected in the limited physical resources for sports in a school. The participants had very different experiences with the availability of sporting equipment and exposure to quality infrastructure for training. From their ecological environments, the lack of physical resources acts as an essential indicator of the value of sports. The curriculum also reflects these perceptions as it is not found to support playing sports. The curriculum is structured to corroborate more support to the students' academic development. The barriers are evident in the teachers' attitude and their remarks, which question the utility of sports. The presence of practices such as the cancelled or overtaken sports period only adds to the lower status of sports in an educational setting.

The factors can be enablers such as parental support and infrastructure but also act as barriers to the continuation of sports development for the participants. The significant challenges lie at the institutional level (curriculum, policies, and infrastructure) as well as societal level (body, gender, narrow meaning of sports). These levels need to be targeted in future initiatives to provide space for the development and learning for sports, not just through sports.

9 Discussion

This thesis section is centred around the findings and their implications within the broader framework of existing literature and theories presented in the sections above. This section has four main topics. Firstly, I will focus on theoretical implications that will locate this study within the theories and literature that formed the foundation for this research. Secondly, I go through the study's practical implications- primarily, what is the contribution of this study and what changes can be identified within the scope of this research. Thirdly, I reflect on the ethical standpoints of this study. I chose to review the ethics with the values relevant to qualitative research. Lastly, I acknowledge the aspects that possibly limit this study.

9.1 Theoretical Implications

This study found a convergence with some of the facets of the theories of sports development based in the global north. It also found some factors that are unique to the Indian context. Figure 11 focuses on providing a timeline for sports development through this study to understand better where the trajectories stand in the purview of the theories and concepts.

The most prominent factor in the development of sports was families. Families play an essential role in the personal sphere. Parental support and initiative have been identified as very influential in anticipating how the participants take part in sports. This parental support is also changing throughout the student's schooling. The role of parents is evident at the earlier stage but also present throughout the sport's development in schools. Wyllemann and Lavallee (2004) provide that the part of parents transitions as the athlete grows and develops. They also give significant importance to the stages of transition to higher education. At this stage, they highlight how the risks and disadvantages of a potential professional career are considered. While support from the academic institution, coaches and others is vital, parents play a significant role at this stage (Wyllemann & Lavalle, 2004, p.517). As seen from the Figure 11, the research findings also confirm that parental support and the considerations for academics and professional development simultaneously impact sports development.

The fears and uncertainties of the adults (parents and teachers) around the children's career options seemed to influence the support for sports participation negatively as Fraser-Thomas and Côté (2006) found that the role of parents had varying impacts, parents had positive as well as negative impact on the participation of sports. The negative support from parents stems

largely from unawareness about the potential professions in the broad field of sports. The families withdrew their support to encourage their children to pursue the safer option of academics. This is true for teachers and the overall school environment, Ahmed et al. (2020) claim that physical education is non-compulsory and not so well respected in Indian schools. The conditional support observed throughout the career-forming years designates a higher position to academics in society, devaluing sports to a lower status. At its core, this devaluation stems from fear, uncertainty, unawareness or simply ignorance regarding sports' value and utility towards life during and after post-school education. The notion that the benefit from sports has to be visible in terms of a profession in sports is so deeply rooted that it was also noticeable when asked about the lessons/learning from sports, many people hesitated before answering. Seldom I rephrased the question to ask what skills or values they had picked up from playing sports. This rephrased interjection provided an immediate answer of soft skills and core life values which they continue to carry.

Interestingly, this research found a reference to the utilitarian idea of sports. In a study in Germany, Hallmann and Breuer (2014) found a fascinating finding about sports in the social sphere. They found that social recognition or the significance/value attached to sports in a social environment affects sports participation. The perceptions around the value of sports impact and influences sports participation. This social significance has a positive effect on sports participation. This is highlighted in this study as the social recognition of sports in terms of its value in Indian society is very prevalent in the educational system and also in society at large. Within the Indian society, the sports ecosystem is influenced by many factors, the history that has shaped the popularity of certain sports, the competitiveness in society for very few opportunities, the sports policies and educational curriculums. At the centre of societal perceptions is the need for a stable career choice and a financially secure future. There is a lack of awareness of the various professions, such as sports management, sports psychology, and physiotherapy that are viable sports options within the field. The future in sports is primarily understood as a narrow career path as a professional athlete. This also led to a societal construct around which bodies can play sports- participants recalled that as young as 5th grade, they realized that only certain body types are considered worthy of playing and enjoying certain sports.

In the theoretical framework, Green (2005) provided great importance to motivation and socialization for retention in sports. The research findings highlight that several factors, such as personal goals, support in the personal sphere, and access to resources, impact retention in

sports. Congruent with her model of sport development, this study found that socialization is a central factor in determining continued involvement in sports. Notably, in the context of this research, socialization in terms of bodily stereotypes and the idea of a ‘good’ student who would be praised and respected is very influential in determining continued participation. Stroot (2012) found the social factors impacting access to sporting opportunities. In this context, we find that gender and social class play a more significant role than race and ethnicity in terms of accessibility and opportunities in sports.

In Figure 11 below, a timeline for sports engagement and support can be traced. From the dataset, between 1st-8th grade, the most common form of engagement is through the games period in schools as provided in the curriculum. Depending on accessibility and guidance, children may engage in sports outside the curriculum, such as training before classes and private sports academics. The provisions at the curriculum level are central to participation in sports.

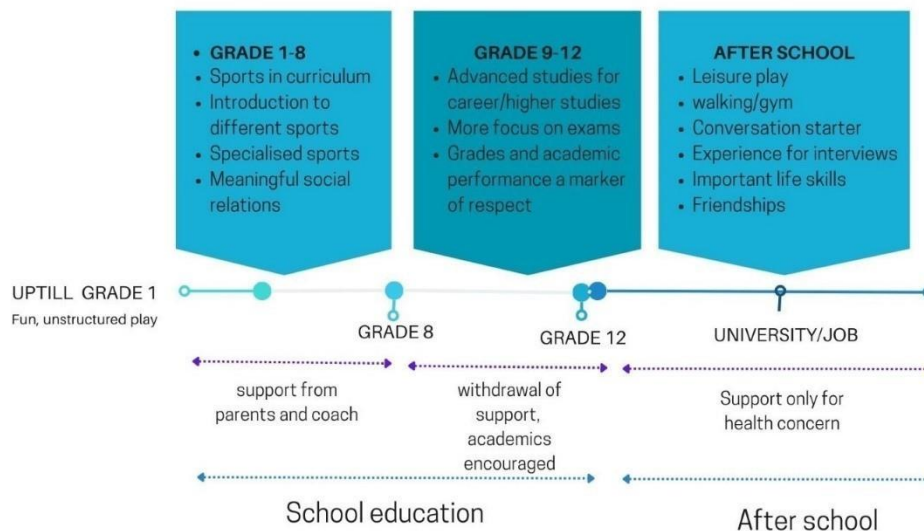


Figure 11: Timeline with support for participation in sports

In this study, many participants recalled playing a few popular sports of cricket, badminton, basketball, football and volleyball. Opportunities for playing and sampling a variety of sports at a young age can help develop fundamental skills and interests. Smith (2006, as cited in Green, 2014, p.19) finds that the 15–16-year-olds who were exposed to a higher number of PE activities (between different 13-25 activities) in the curriculum displayed a greater level of

participation in other extracurricular activities as well. This highlights that the age for encouragement in sports needs to be revisited at the curricular and societal levels.

Besides the involvement of parents and coaches, friendships also act as a positive influence on sport participation. Most participants had started to play one of the school sports rigorously and went to represent the school between 1-8th grades. According to Wylleman and Lavallee's (2004) understanding of the development model, 10-12 years is when the transition into intensive training occurs. This is somewhat congruent with the findings as most students had tried out different sports and started training for specific sports. However, the transition to the next stage, which the scholars explain to be the Elite level at 18-19 years, did not occur for many participants as they withdrew completely or decreased the intensity of participation in sports.

There is a drastic change in the period between 9-12th grades. Here there is the withdrawal of support from parents in most cases, or conditional support is observed. Performance in academics is the yardstick for respect and praise from schoolteachers. The main reason for this is because the studies in the classroom get more advanced, and emphasis is provided to the exams and grades for career development and higher education. Later during higher education or professional life, the support resurfaced only if a health or fitness concern existed. Sports engagement is often reduced to leisure and casual activities.

This study also found that social interactions and peers were salient in life skills development through sport participation (Mossman et al., 2021). This study did not find any significant mention of the impact of life skills developed outside of sports on sport participation. However, as Martindale et al. (2005) emphasize, there is a need to shift focus away from short-term achievement in sports. Sports as an activity is not viewed and valued because of the benefits that it might be reaping latently or subsequently later in life in direct ways. The main idea that eventually determines the worth of playing sports and the support to participate in it is determined by the very overt and explicit impact it can have on one's life after school education. This sheds light on how we detach the fun and playful aspect of sports and make it more utilitarian for the students. As the students progressed in their school lives, many highlighted that as academics got more advanced and demanding, sports became very utilitarian in two ways- either it was viewed as a break from studies or as a waste of time.

9.2 Practical Implications

The practical implications will discuss the emerging gaps and opportunities for growth in the field of sports development in India. Broadly, the participants noted that change is progressing but at a languid pace.

These changing perceptions were also reflected in the recent policies in India that were discussed in section 4, which mentioned FitIndia, Khelo India as well as the New Education Policy in India.

There is a need to encourage mass sports participation by shifting the focus away from just talent development. There is hope as new programmes and policies launched during the last decade aimed at school students and general fitness. Health and wellness, alongside the many non-competitive benefits that sports offers, are essential and need to be highlighted. Fraser-Thomas et al.(2008) found that recreational, unstructured and fun play is central to the development of athletes. Long-term sports programs must focus on diverse and playful sports and extracurricular.

However, these policies must be critically examined as Khasnis et al. (2021b) opine that the issue is not the lack of investment in policies and schemes but rather their limited success and the gap in the examination of their low success rate and poor implementation. Although the recent FitIndia initiative emphasizes fitness and awareness, Clarke and Mondal (2022) opine that mass participation is a goal that is included but seldom achieved in Indian sports policies. The implementation of the policies must take into account the ground realities at the school level. There is a need to provide more space for school sports and physical education as vehicles of introduction to meaningful and enjoyable sports experiences to inculcate overall health values. Clarke and Mondal (2022) review the policies and the literature surrounding sports policy development that the National Sports Policy (2001) focused on mass participation and talent development. Almost two decades later, the emphasis on fitness and the culture of physical activity has been targeted through the initiative of the FitIndia Movement. The goal of talent identification has preceded the aim of encouraging mass participation. They provide that the policy development and implementation must be focused on achieving the highlighted goals of sport participation as this impacts school sports. The growing emphasis on talent development and identification has shifted the focus away from physical education, school sports and physical activity to promote and impact physical fitness and health (Chelladurai et al., 2011, as cited in Clarke & Mondal, 2022, p.10). A bottom-up approach that considers the

ground realities and intangible social perceptions must be examined for proper implementation. Collaboration between practitioners, parents and youth sports programs is also crucial to the success of the policy in youth sports (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2006).

At the school level, several changes are essential. The curriculum must aim to incorporate more opportunities for children to try out different sports. Accessible interventions are required keeping in mind the social construct of the society in terms of age, gender, transport, economics and safety for students. Exposure to different sports, especially in the teenage years, is very important in sports participation. Curriculum development must ensure adequate support and exposure to various sports. This sampling significantly impacts the participant's motivation to continue to engage in sports (Kirk, 2005, as cited in Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2006, p.14). The school curriculum is a very central determinant for making space for sports for young students. The curriculum needs to provide more space for extracurricular activities and utilize the opportunities to enhance and encourage sports in schools. If done carefully, interventions made in the physical education curriculum can also help contribute to a lifelong participation in sports (Bocarro et al., 2008). Supportive environments for sports participation, along with sporting literacy, are required in Indian schools (Salian & Kumar, 2022). Côté et al. (2003, as cited in Kirk, 2005, p. 249) provide more meaningful and fun playing opportunities for students to engage in sports and sample various sports. This helps develop competencies which are foundational for retention in sports. Therefore, the curriculum and teaching provisions must be such that all students feel safe and welcome to try out different sports.

Teacher training to ensure the competence of the coaches is also identified as one of the urgent solutions required. Teacher training is central to achieving this goal in schools, especially at the elementary level. Pesce et al. (2013) found that trained specialists and multi-sports approaches are important for enhanced development. At the institutional level, psychological support for student-athletes as well as the coaches must also be emphasized. This sphere must be focused upon, and support must begin at the school level. Thakkar (2019) highlights the importance of providing athletes with adequate mental health and psychological support. She opines that this field is nascent and needs to develop with proper training in place to help support the athletes.

New policies which encapsulate the broader definitions of sports and target mass participation in sports for lifelong participation can also be helpful for shifting the concentration from the narrow and utility-driven perceptions of sports. MacNamara et al. (2011) go beyond the linear

development models and explore how physical education and sports can ensure lifelong participation. They propose a change in approaches at the curricular level. The main idea is to focus on psychomotor and psycho-behavioural factors in sports interventions to ensure that the aim is long-term engagement in sports. Collins et al. (2012) criticize the narrow developmental framework of elite sports and provide for a broader approach. They provide a 'participant continuum' across the three worlds of sports where they categorize that the participant may perform in the competitive world, such as the elite performance in clubs or marathons or for personal wellbeing. They provide that development in sports is non-linear and dynamic and must be understood in a continuum across the different worlds driven by the purposes of excellence and personal wellbeing. In this sense, more policies that are centred around the overall wellbeing of sports participants can be popularized.

There is hope in the belief that change is slowly happening and is in progress. To this end, for facilitating a shift in societal perceptions, participants cited the role of social media in popularising the success of recent success of Indian athletes and making physical activity and sports tutorials more accessible. With access to social media, awareness around the choices of sports has become more easily accessible to parents and children. There must be interventions at the policy and societal level to restructure what we understand to be the end goal of sports and make it more accessible and open to everyone, regardless of athletic capacity. Sports participation is very complex, and multimodal studies involving different stakeholders with diverse approaches can help understand the impact of sports on youth, physical education in schools as well as lifelong sports participation (Green, 2014).

There is a need for awareness around the possibilities and relevance that sport as a field has in the lives of an individual. To this end, more knowledge production and research reflecting the local realities is important. Elite sports development theories have been majorly done in developed nations, and there is a lack of prominent research in this field in the context of developing nations such as India (Nandakumar & Sandhu, 2014). One of the ways to provide more awareness around sports can be by highlighting the history of sports. The history of sports must be researched and taught in India under the broader framework of our history in the Indian context (Bandyopadhyay, 2005).

This could provide a ground for further research and contribute to the knowledge construction of theorizing the development of the sport in non-western societies. This thesis would also be helpful for parents and coaches in understanding the experiences of the students to guide and

support them in a better manner. This study provides insight into how students' interests and motivations are transformed in their youth.

9.3 Ethics, Trustworthiness, and Transparency

Perhaps the most critical part of the research is reflecting on the process. Qualitative research does not pertain to the traditional forms of validity that are more useful for quantitative or positivist frameworks. Instead, qualitative frameworks rely on transparency, trustworthiness and addressing biases. More than simply addressing bias, trustworthiness and rigour are important in qualitative research as it is subjective and reflexive in nature (Galdas, 2017). It is central to the reliability of this research that I reflect on transparency throughout the research process.

This reflection does not pertain to one single method but instead focuses on multiple values provided by different scholars for consideration in qualitative research.

9.3.1 Selection Bias

Acknowledging and clearly defining the steps to reduce bias is essential in research. Bias or the influence or favour towards specific topics, people or choices is present in all study designs (Smith & Noble, 2014). Research is a human activity; therefore, it is fallible and impacted by our human attributes (Norris, 1997). Our experiences and knowledge affect the research. Bias may have been present in the selection of participants. Smith & Noble (2014) provide that qualitative research often utilises sampling of participants so that participants with experience in a particular field are included. In the section that discusses the data collection method, I have clarified and justified the reasons for choosing a specific group of participants.

9.3.2 Autonomy and Power

Orb et al. (2001) provide for the need to pay close attention to the principles of autonomy, beneficence and justice for qualitative research. In this research, the principle of autonomy and consent were carefully considered in diverse ways. Firstly, to protect the participants' privacy, a data privacy form was shared with them detailing the purpose of this research. Secondly, consent was required for the online form and during the interview process. Thirdly, the names of the participants have been anonymised, and pseudonyms have been used to avoid any

possible risk of identification. Finally, it was also emphasised that the participants could choose to withdraw from the research at any point without any consequences. I will expand on the topics of power and consent below.

Mercer (2007) also opines that researchers employing the insider lens to the research must consider two primary ethical considerations- disclosing information to participants and reporting incidental data. The former is concerned with informing participants clearly about the aims and the research process without disclosing too much to sway or influence their responses in any manner. This was particularly important for me as I am embedded in the same context and dealing with otherwise familiar participants. I share a close relationship with some of the participants. Honest and open communication was established. Secondly, the incidental information or data that is revealed outside the conversations or without informing the participant prior to the recording process must not be included. These practices were followed, and privacy notices with detailed information about the research were shared with participants before the interviews. Once the recording was started, they were informed explicitly, and their consent was required. After the recording was stopped, I engaged in some chat or final thoughts, which were kept from the research data.

The values of power and consent are central to the qualitative research process. Ethical considerations are crucial in qualitative research, especially in the method of interviewing (Kvale, 2003). Several steps were taken throughout the research process to minimise any harm or bias that may have occurred during this study. Conducting interviews in a qualitative study carries a power imbalance (Kvale, 2003) that must be carefully examined, and the research must be mindful of minimising this. The interview must not be one-sided. There should be space for reciprocity. The interviews for this research were semi-structured and provided space for exchange and freedom for the participant to speak about the thoughts and experiences that they found relevant. Allmark et al. (2009) reviewed the ethical issues surrounding the use of in-depth interviews in qualitative research and found informed consent and privacy to be some of the major themes. A consent form was clearly formulated and shared with the participants before the interview process. Clear verbal consent was also sought before beginning the interview process. The online form was anonymous and did not collect any personal identifiers.

Further, in an effort to minimise power imbalance that may have occurred and help provide transparency in the process, an overview of the form and data collection was explained prior to the interviews. The online forms helped give the participant a general idea about the research

topic. They would have helped them make a more informed decision about participating in this research. In order to review the interview process, a pilot interview was conducted, and feedback was taken into account.

9.3.3 Trustworthiness

The credibility of a qualitative study is based on trustworthiness. Hadi and Closs (2016) provide several methods to ensure trustworthiness throughout the research process. For this study, I will focus exclusively on reflexivity and thick description, as I believe that these values are the most applicable.

Morse et al. (2002) explain that verification in qualitative research adheres to the mechanisms embedded within the process and allows the researcher to go back and forth to verify and ensure that all the research steps are congruent. The reiterative process of forming the themes and the inductive method of Reflexive Thematic Analysis allowed me to revisit the research question and design. Reflexivity was adopted as it is one of the central tenets of the analysis methods. This method strives for the subjectivity of the researcher as an analytic resource (Braun & Clarke, 2021a, p. 330). Reflexivity is present in all stages- in theory, data and interpretation. Analysis was not rigid but recursive (Braun & Clarke, 2021b). Following the inductive or data-driven analysis, theories were informed, and attention was paid to the congruency with the research paradigm and understanding of knowledge. This was a reiterative process to ensure that reflexivity was present in all stages of research. The value of reflexivity requires that the researcher is aware of their biases and subjectivity. I have strived to be transparent throughout the research process by ensuring that my positionality and subjectivity are made aware to the audience.

Lastly, I focus on thick descriptions for the data. Brinkmann and Kvale (2005) opine that contextualisation is central to qualitative inquiry. Throughout this study, I have provided clear information and descriptions to be transparent. I have strived to utilise thick descriptions of the context of the quote to help the readers understand the information better. I also stated my positionality and described the context of the study. The unique aspects of the region of Delhi has been established to ensure clarity to the readers about the specific context.

9.4 Limitations

This qualitative study acknowledges that the researcher is not divorced from the research process but rather embedded in it, as discussed in the sections above. To this end, one of the most important limitations to highlight is my subjectivity, which may have impacted any parts of the research. In Reflexive Thematic Analysis, subjectivity is not simply viewed as a limitation but rather as a strength and a necessity for qualitative research analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021a). Nevertheless, I feel that it is not a limitation but an important aspect of this research that needs to be critically considered. As Braun and Clarke(2021a) opine that ‘reflexivity is a journey not a destination’ (p.15). I have tried to acknowledge and strive for transparency and clarity around my own background and positionality and the possible biases that they may create in this entire research process. In the constructivist/interpretivist framework, I remain a subjective human being with a belief in multiple truths, which carries certain implications for this research.

One prominent limitation of this study is specificity of the context. It is done with participants from somewhat similar backgrounds in terms of their education in urban, private, and English medium institutions. This study has been conducted in a very specific context of India. The online form for contacting prospective participants was in English. Therefore, it was accessed by the sections of populations which were English speaking as well as had access to the internet. The participants had all attended private fee-paying schools and came from largely the middle-class families. This study highlights the experiences of a very specific population of India from the urbanised region of Delhi. This limits the scope of the study and generalised claims cannot be made about other contexts in Indian regions.

The interviews were conducted with participants who had graduated within the span of 10 years. It is important to understand that the findings in this study are dependent upon the ability of the participants to recall. In retrospective studies, the data collection depends upon recall and memory (Smith & Noble, 2014). This might have influenced the study.

The theories for sports development are not based in the local context but rather centred around the global north. While reading the research by Clarke and Mondal (2022) where they highlight their limitation to be literature in English, I realised how all of the literature that I had cited was also in the English language. This thesis discusses the sectors of education and sports in India which have both been affected and drastically restructured since colonial times. The

literature available is also in English. This is perhaps one of the most significant limitations of the study that the theoretical framework utilises the theories located in the global north.

10 Conclusion

This study has focused on the perceptions and experiences of former students with sports in relation to their lives in schools and afterwards in the region of Delhi. Academics are seen to be of utmost importance during school, and this priority is shaped by institutional provisions such as curriculum but also through social perceptions such as support from parents and comments by teachers. Sports is viewed from a very utilitarian perspective. There is a mismatch between the perceived relevance of sports by adults and the actual realised benefits by the participants. The former students gained many benefits from sports participation in life skills and social relationships that helped them professionally. Parents, friends and coaches impact the various stages of development and participation in sports. This study has recognised that sports are experienced very personally. Multiple factors are at play in the personal sphere and the material provisions available to them that impact participant involvement and their continued development in sports. This research has helped draw attention to the larger field of sports and how we perceive sports development.

This research has aimed to contribute to a small, nevertheless significant aspect of the sporting system in India. It highlighted the intertwined factors that make up the development of the sport for the former students in the private schools of Delhi. More than focusing on these factors, this study was also successful in shedding light on the need for more critical research that must be conducted to understand the sports development in a well-rounded manner. Finally, it helped me reflect on my understanding and construction of sports development in society. This section will focus briefly on further research possibilities and reflections.

10.1 Possibilities for Further Research

This study has been one of the very few studies that focused on students' experiences with sports as a whole to understand what enables their understanding and continuation in participation. It has captured significant and unique factors that impact the environment for the development of sports for children and youth.

At this stage, it is important to establish that this study is not representative of the entire region of Delhi or India. While many factors, such as the institutional barriers and policies and even perceptions of parents and coaches, may be similar in many parts of India, the engagement and accessibility to play can look very different for different individuals. This study has found some

very interesting trends in the context of Delhi and provides space for more research in similar fields. It points to the larger gap in policy formation and implementation where they need to consider the multitude of barriers to continued sports participation.

This study also provides ground for several other gaps under-researched in the Indian context and the sporting field. Further research can be conducted across different subjects and age groups in similar contexts. Moreover, a similar study can be conducted in other developing nations or post-colonial contexts. Comparison between this context of Delhi and other urban cities of the world would also help understand the different factors that impact sports development and how historically and culturally, different societies have focused more on certain sports. I will mention the areas in which further research could be conducted-

As academics was seen to be a curriculum priority, the institutional provisions provided less space for other activities such as sports. It would be very interesting to do a similar study with the students and the youth around other extracurricular subjects. Academics and grades seemed to be prioritised, and it would be worthwhile to see and compare how the students in the Indian education system experience other extracurricular activities such as dance, music or fine arts.

Another very interesting point was the influence of the adults and their guidance. The support from the coaches and mentors was observed as changing and gradually becoming more open to the idea of sports. It would be very interesting to extend the framework of this research to other age groups, such as people in their middle life or retirement. Research like such could also help trace the development of sport across different generations. Further research can also be done in different age groups about lifelong physical activity.

Families play a very important role in the sport development. In this study, the participants rarely mentioned siblings as a factor in their sport participation. Focusing on families- parents, siblings and even the grandparents' influence on sport development would be very interesting. Previous studies had focused on the influence of adults and friends on sports participation (Hallmann & Breuer, 2014). This was observed, and many participants had found the 'modern' or 'young' parents were more open and supportive for their children to try out different sports. A generational change could be one of the reasons. In the Norwegian context, parental involvement has increased for their children in organised sports (Stefansen, et al., 2018). Similar research can be conducted to note if the parental perceptions have transformed.

This research limited to a minor section of the Indian population, to this end, mor research could be helpful in different Indian contexts across different cities, different types of schools and in the rural areas. Comparative study between other developing nations would be very interesting.

Gender and social class emerged subtly as well as prominently in the process of sport development by the youth. Adopting a specific lens for the research to understand the experiences of youth with sports is also one of the spheres in which more research is required.

10.2 Further Reflections

This research has provided an invaluable experience and insights around sports. It has led to many integral reflections, sports is a social phenomenon and each individual experiences it very differently. Undertaking this project has helped me think about the questions that had been on my mind for a long time and helped me provide alternative perspectives. Sports is very personal and central to an individual. It can have a wide range of impact ranging from positive to negative development. The perceptions of the participants are shaped by their personal experiences and through the instances where they witnessed their fellow peers and friends being treated poorly for pursuing sports. At the beginning of this research, I was stuck with a dearth of literature in the context of India. Moreover, the theories of talent development were located in the global north. It is central to note that not every nation can afford to invest in sports in the same ways. I reflect on this in the greater domain of knowledge production in today's world.

Most of the writings in the Indian context about sports were quick to point out the gaps in Indian system and shed light on some solutions or pathways for success. This form of quick criticism and need for solutions, often comparing the success of other nations, was also evident in some of the interviews. Perhaps my own thought process centred around this. Social perceptions along with institutional provisions work together to confer a secondary place to sports in education. Exposure to different systems and diverse systems of sports development is significant to the globalised world.

Media plays an important role in the globalised world of sports and actively shapes the power structures. Mishra (2012) analysed the international news coverage of the 2010 commonwealth games by the western countries to find that the coverage focused on the deficiencies of India.

The news tended to highlight the problems and the negative stereotypes. Interestingly, a comparison of the coverage for the developed and the developing countries revealed that they differed vastly. It was found that most of the articles in the developed nations tended to focus on mismanagement and less on the athletics. In contrast, the developing countries mainly drew attention to the shortcomings (Mishra, 2013).

The knowledge produced is subject to the larger framework of the globalised world. We often find ourselves comparing to a system which is performing well in sports but ignoring the entire historical and socio-cultural fabric of the society. More context sensitive research is required for the global south. The existing pathways for development must be critically viewed within broader framework of knowledge production hierarchies of the modern globalised world while acknowledging the histories of the local contexts.

Along with criticality, one must remember that sports is a diverse field and can be practised in different ways and on various levels. I would like to conclude this research with a beautiful quote by Nelson Mandela

“Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does” (2000).

May we all continue to be inspired by sports and find common ground for conversation and fun.

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Appendix 1: Online form to contact prospective participants

E-Mail

Master's Thesis - Sports in Schools and Beyond

Hello,

I am a master's student in the Education and Globalisation program at the Faculty of Education, University of Oulu. As a part of my studies, I am conducting a research about the **Sports in Schools and Beyond**. The purpose of my research is to understand the experiences of students with sports during their school education retrospectively. This research is intended for participants who have graduated between the years **2012-2021** and attended the schools in **Delhi NCR**.

I kindly request your consent for collecting information from you for the research purpose through this online questionnaire containing questions about your experiences and perception, and your interest in participating in this research further via interviews.

The first section contains some questions about your **experiences** with sports in schools and in your journey afterwards. The second section relates to the **interviews**, please fill it if you are interested in taking part in the research via interviews. Interviews can be conducted online or in person.

All information will be used anonymously, respecting your dignity. No personal details that enable identifying you will be included in the analyses and reporting. Participation in the study is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study any time before the publication of the study without any further reasoning. There will be no negative consequences for you if you choose not to participate in the study or if you withdraw from the study. However, if you withdraw from the study, data collected prior to your withdrawal may still be used in the study.

Please fill this form if you are interested in taking part in the research.

Privacy notice is available upon request, please send an email for the same.

If you wish to know about this research, please contact me via svats21@student.oulu.fi

Thank you.

Form

Mandatory Questions (1-15)

1. I participate in this research voluntarily and understand what participating in this research means. (choose one)

Yes, No

2. Age

3. Gender (Please put 'prefer not to say' if you do not wish to share)

4. Year of graduation (from school)

5. What kind of school did you attend? (choose one)

- Public
- Private

6. What word comes to your mind when you think of sports?

7. Which sports did you play in school? (choose one or more)

- Unorganised Play and Games
- Cricket
- Yoga
- Badminton
- Football
- Track and Field
- Volleyball
- Basketball
- Tennis
- Gymnastics

8. What were the spaces in your school where you played sports? (choose one or more)

- Playground
- Corridors and Hallways
- Empty Classrooms

- Field/court for Designated Sports

9. When did you engage in sports and physical activity? (choose one or more)

- Assigned sports classes with a PE teacher
- Before or after school practice arranged by the school

10. Did you enjoy sports in your school? (choose one)

- Yes
- No
- I am not sure

11. Do you think you learnt something when engaging in sports in schools? (choose one)

- Yes
- No
- I am not sure

12. Do you think that there was adequate support for sports in the school curriculum? (choose one)

- Yes
- No
- I am not sure

13. Was there adequate support for sports in your school in terms of facilities, play fields and infrastructure areas/spaces, trained and specialised coaches, equipment and such? (choose one)

- Yes
- No
- I am not sure

14. Did sports impact your life during your school education? (choose one)

- Yes
- No
- I am not sure

15. Do you think sports has had an impact in your life even after you graduated from school?
(choose one)

- Yes
- No
- I am not sure

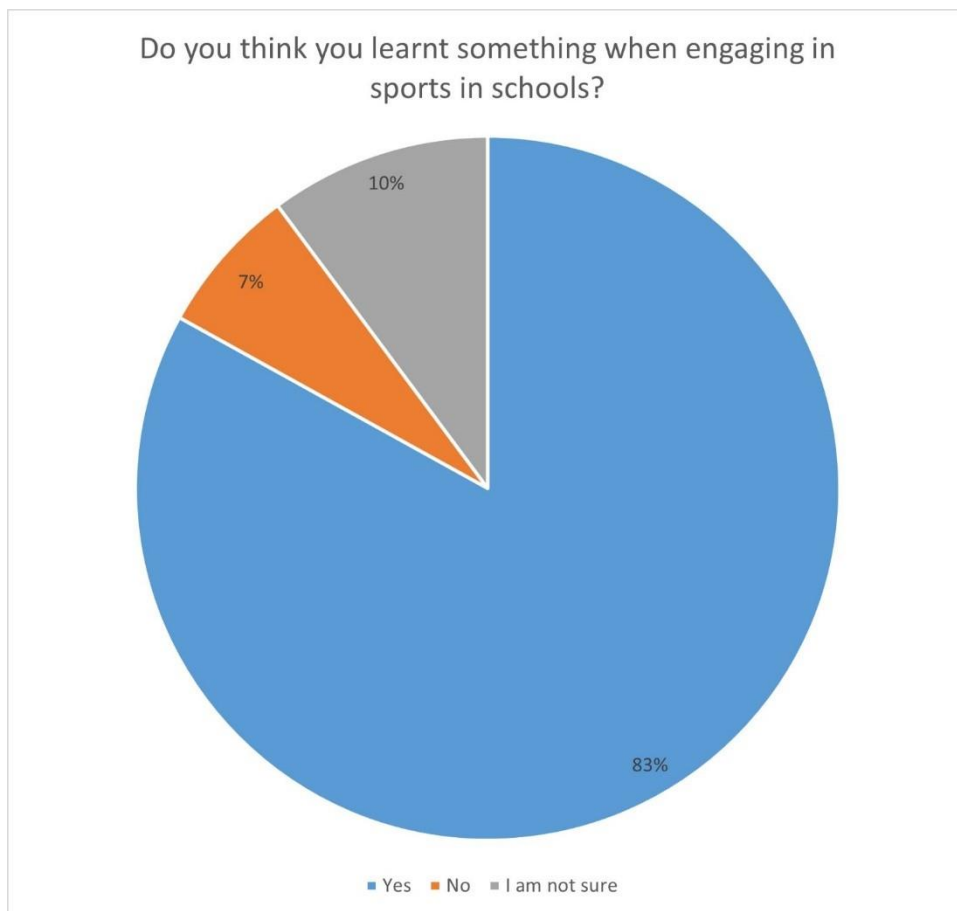
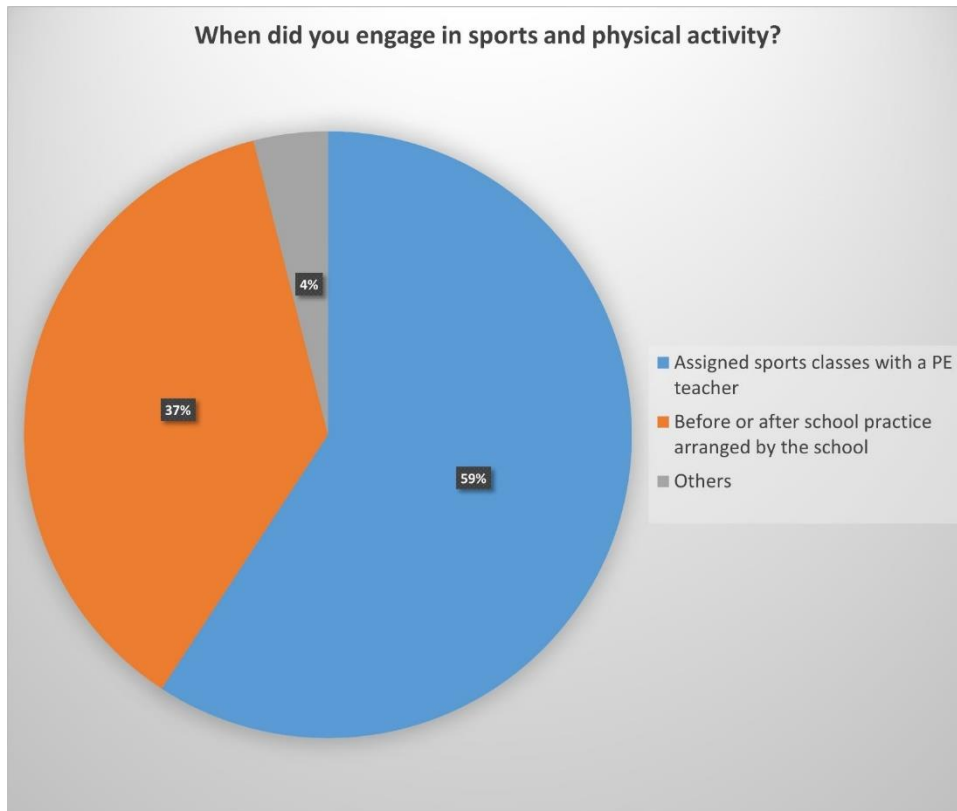
(Questions 16-18 were not compulsory)

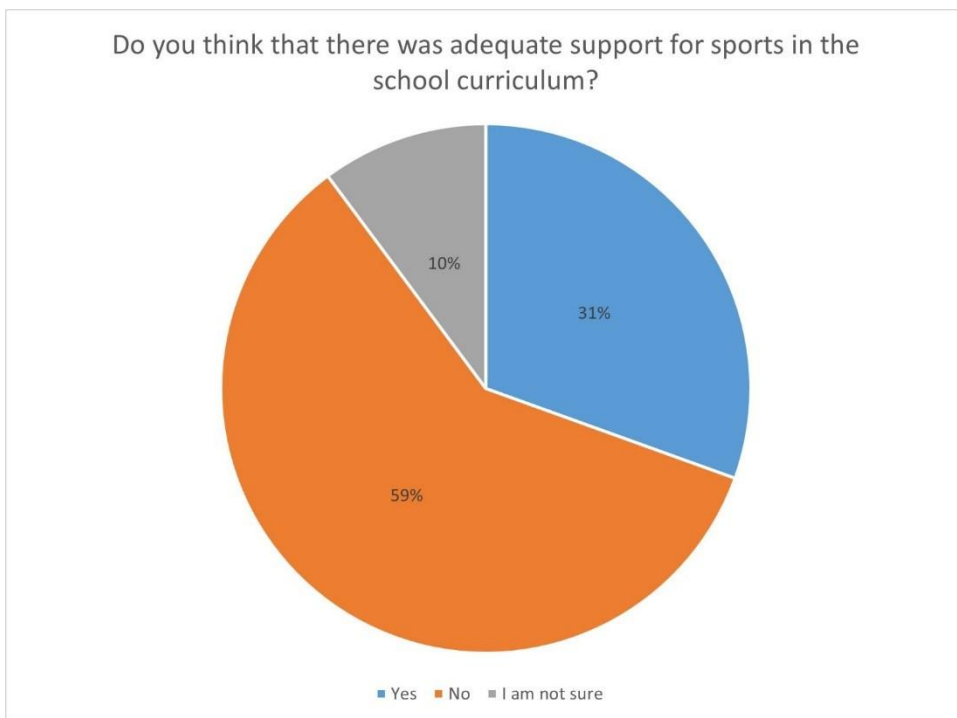
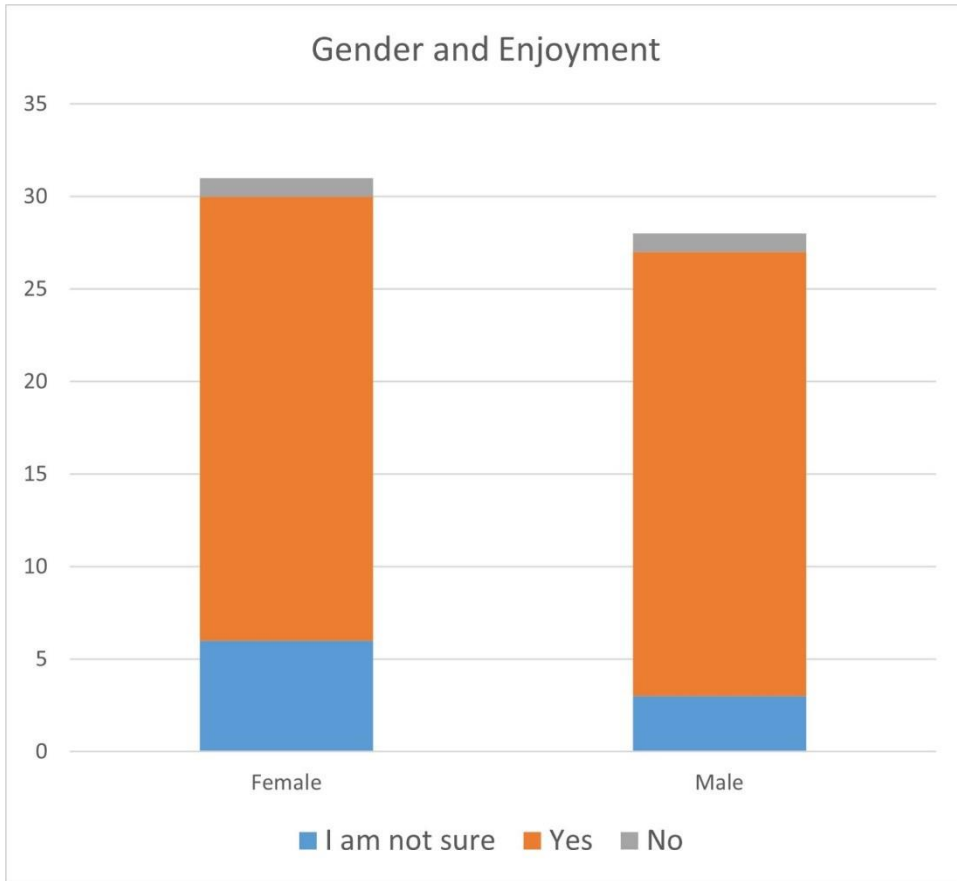
16. Would you be interested in online interviews about your experiences with sports in schools?

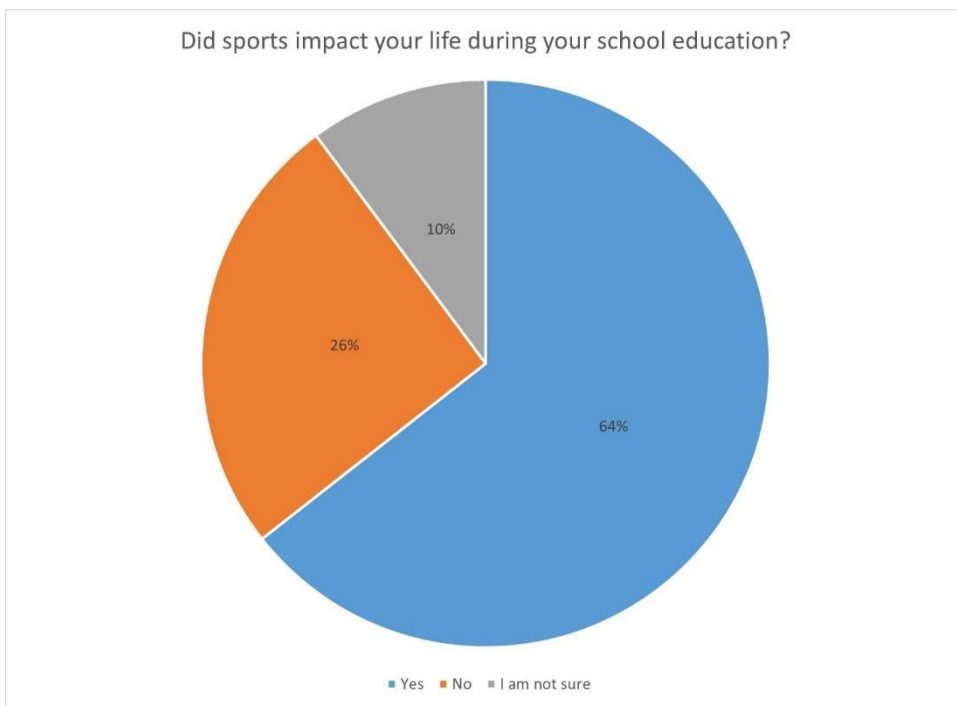
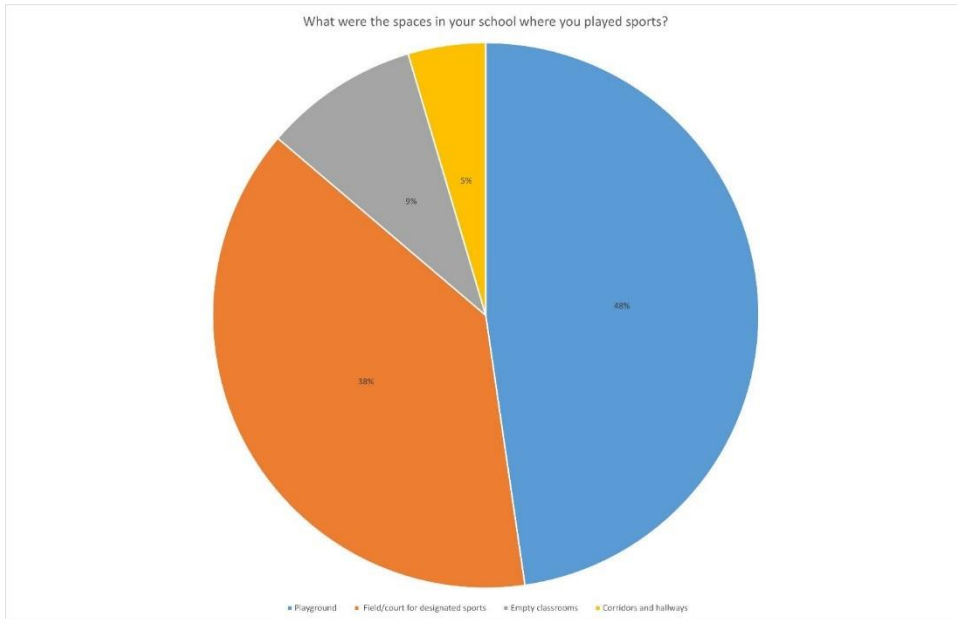
17. if yes, then when can you participate in the interview? You can provide a specific date(s) or week that would suit your schedule.

18. How would like to be contacted? Please leave your email/phone number below.

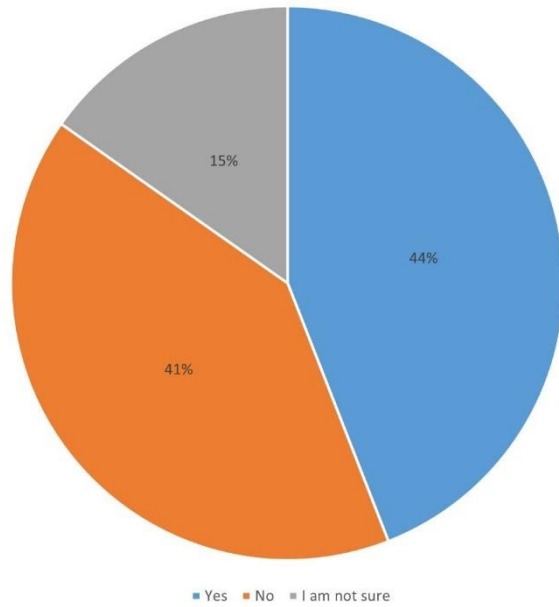
Appendix 2: Responses from the Online Form



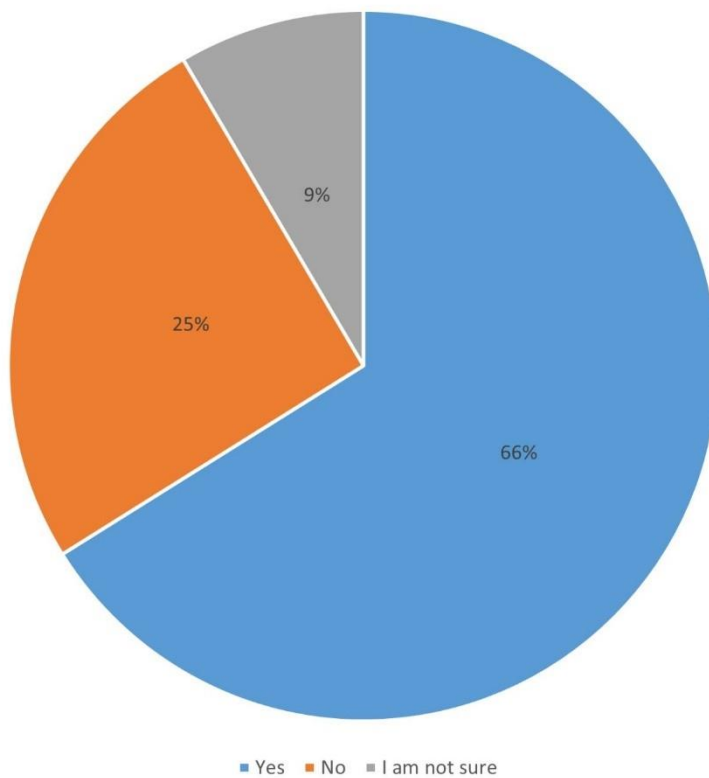




Was there adequate support for sports in your school in terms of facilities, play fields and infrastructure areas/spaces, trained and specialised coaches, equipments and such?



Do you think sports has had an impact in your life even after you graduated from school?



Appendix 3: Questions from the Interviews

1. Can you talk to me about your school, how was it, what did you like in it?
2. What do sports mean to you? What can you tell me about your experience with sports in life?
3. When and where did you play sports in schools, what can you remember about it? What do you remember about sports in your school?
4. What motivated/demotivated you during sporting activities in your schooling?
5. How has your school impacted your participation in sports? (Who or what impacted it)
Can you talk to me about the support for sports in your life, what actions, or who was involved?
6. Do you think sports have helped you?
7. How have sports helped you during your school life and afterward?
8. Is there something that you regret that you were not able to do in school, in sports or because of sports? If there is something that you wished to see changed?
9. Was there something that was integral but was missed and not paid attention to by the school and the policy (curriculum)?
10. How were the spaces and environment of the school and did they have an impact on your sports participation?
11. If you have identified any gaps, do you think that they are being noticed and actively worked on, by the system and society?