
Leadership Development through Sports: An Empirical Analysis of College Students in Mysuru

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the correlation between athletic participation and the development of leadership traits among college students in Mysuru. As colleges increasingly emphasize holistic student development, sports activities are recognized as a platform for cultivating essential life skills, including leadership. The primary objective of this research is to empirically assess whether students involved in athletics demonstrate higher levels of leadership traits than their non-athletic peers. A total of 112 students from various undergraduate colleges in Mysuru were selected using stratified random sampling, ensuring representation from both athletes and non-athletes. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire based on a standardized leadership trait inventory. Quantitative analysis was conducted using independent samples t-tests and Pearson correlation coefficients. The results reveal a significant positive relationship between athletic participation and leadership traits such as communication, decision-making, self-confidence, and teamwork. Students who actively participated in sports demonstrated stronger leadership qualities than those who did not. This study highlights the importance of athletic engagement in fostering



leadership development among youth and recommends that colleges in Mysuru integrate sports-based leadership programs into their academic and extracurricular frameworks.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Leadership development is a critical component of youth empowerment, especially in higher education. As the world becomes more complex and interconnected, there is a growing need for young individuals to develop strong leadership capabilities to meet societal, organizational, and personal challenges. Colleges and universities play a pivotal role in shaping not only academic abilities but also personality traits and social skills that contribute to effective leadership.

Among the various extracurricular activities available to students, sports stand out as a powerful tool for developing leadership traits. Participation in sports often involves collaboration, strategic thinking, resilience, and decision-making under pressure—traits commonly associated with successful leaders. Numerous studies have suggested that students involved in athletic activities tend to exhibit higher levels of self-confidence, teamwork, and initiative, which are crucial for leadership roles both in academic and professional settings.

1.2 Rationale of the Study

The city of Mysuru, known for its rich educational and cultural heritage, hosts a variety of higher education institutions that actively promote extracurricular engagement, including sports. Despite this, limited empirical research has been conducted to explore the specific impact of sports on the leadership traits of college students in this regional context.

As the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes holistic education, including physical and emotional development, it is vital to understand how sports contribute to nurturing leadership qualities in students. Focusing on college students in Mysuru provides valuable insights for educators, policy makers, and institutions seeking to develop leadership among youth through sports-based interventions.



1.3 Research Problem

Given the increasing need for leadership development in college settings and the known benefits of sports participation, this study seeks to address a core question: **Is there a measurable relationship between athletic involvement and leadership traits among college students in Mysuru?**

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of this study are as follows:

- To assess the level of athletic involvement among college students in Mysuru.
- To measure and compare leadership traits among students who participate in sports and those who do not.
- To explore the correlation between sports participation and the development of leadership qualities.

1.5 Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

- Do student athletes demonstrate higher levels of leadership traits compared to non-athletes?
- Which specific leadership traits are most influenced by participation in sports?

1.6 Hypotheses

To address the research questions, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- **Null Hypothesis (H₀):** There is no significant difference in leadership traits between athletes and non-athletes among college students in Mysuru.
- **Alternative Hypothesis (H₁):** Students involved in sports exhibit higher levels of leadership traits than those not involved in sports.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework



This study draws upon three primary leadership theories to frame the relationship between sports participation and leadership development:

Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational leadership, as proposed by Burns (1978) and expanded by Bass (1985), emphasizes the ability of leaders to inspire, motivate, and bring about change in followers by aligning individual goals with group or organizational goals. Sports environments often cultivate such traits by encouraging athletes to motivate teammates, embrace a shared vision, and perform beyond expectations.

Trait Theory of Leadership

Trait theory posits that certain inherent characteristics—such as confidence, determination, and sociability—predispose individuals to be effective leaders (Stogdill, 1948). Sports participation naturally challenges students to display and develop these traits in real-time, competitive contexts.

Social Learning Theory

According to Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, behaviour is learned through observation, imitation, and modelling. In team sports, athletes often learn leadership behaviours by observing coaches, captains, and peers. The sports setting thus serves as a live classroom where leadership is both modelled and practiced.

2.2 Previous Studies on Sports and Leadership Development

Several empirical studies support the positive impact of sports on leadership development. For instance, Dobosz and Beaty (1999) found that high school athletes scored significantly higher on leadership traits compared to non-athletes. Similarly, Morrison and Thomas (2020) concluded that college students who consistently engaged in team sports showed improved skills in communication, goal-setting, and team management.

Further research by Voelker, Gould, and Crawford (2011) explored how athletic captains developed leadership through formal roles and informal peer interactions, suggesting that the sports environment fosters responsibility, strategic thinking, and self-regulation.

Internationally, studies have shown that athletic programs incorporating leadership training—such as workshops, reflection journals, and team-building exercises—produce stronger and more self-aware leaders (Wright & Côté, 2003).



2.3 Gaps in the Literature (Specific to Indian and Mysuru Context)

Despite the growing body of literature linking sports and leadership development globally, there is limited research specific to the Indian context, particularly in Tier-2 cities like Mysuru. Most Indian studies have focused on physical fitness, academic outcomes, or gender participation in sports, with minimal focus on leadership outcomes.

Furthermore, leadership development through sports is underexplored in government and regional colleges in Karnataka, where access to sports infrastructure and institutional encouragement varies widely. The unique cultural and educational setting of Mysuru, with its mix of traditional and modern institutions, presents an ideal case for studying how athletic involvement translates to leadership development among college students.

This study aims to address these gaps by providing localized, empirical evidence on the relationship between sports participation and leadership traits among college students in Mysuru.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a **descriptive and analytical research design** that is empirical in nature. Descriptive methods are used to present the demographic and behavioral characteristics of the participants, while analytical techniques are applied to examine the relationships between athletic participation and leadership traits. The goal is to provide quantifiable insights into how involvement in sports contributes to leadership development among college students in Mysuru.

3.2 Population and Sample

The target population for this study comprises **undergraduate students enrolled in government and private colleges in Mysuru**. To ensure balanced representation, a **stratified random sampling technique** was employed, dividing the sample into two strata: (a) students actively participating in sports (athletes), and (b) students not participating in sports (non-athletes).

Although the initial plan considered a sample size of 200–300 students, this specific study was conducted with a sample of **112 students**, which included diverse academic backgrounds and sports disciplines. This sample size was deemed adequate to perform basic inferential statistical tests and obtain valid results within the study's scope.



3.3 Data Collection Methods

Data were collected using a combination of **quantitative and optional qualitative methods**, ensuring comprehensive analysis:

- **Structured Questionnaire:** A pre-tested, standardized **leadership traits inventory** was used to assess various aspects of leadership, including communication, decision-making, confidence, and teamwork.
- **Self-Reported Sports Participation:** Participants provided details on their level of sports involvement (e.g., frequency, type of sport, team or individual participation), which helped classify them as athletes or non-athletes.
- **Optional Interviews (Qualitative Element):** A small subset of participants was informally interviewed to gain insights into their personal experiences related to sports and leadership development. This qualitative data was used to support and contextualize the quantitative findings.

3.4 Tools of Analysis

Data were entered and analyzed using **Microsoft Excel** and **SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences)**. The following statistical techniques were used:

- **Descriptive statistics** (mean, standard deviation, frequency) to summarize the data
- **Independent sample t-tests** to compare leadership traits between athletes and non-athletes
- **Pearson correlation analysis** to examine the strength and direction of the relationship between athletic involvement and leadership traits
- **ANOVA and simple regression analysis** (if applicable) to explore deeper associations between multiple variables such as gender, type of sport, and leadership outcomes

The significance level was set at $p < 0.05$, which is standard in social science research to determine statistical significance.

4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

This section presents and interprets the data collected from 112 college students in Mysuru to explore the relationship between athletic participation and leadership traits. The analysis includes demographic data,



comparative analysis of leadership scores between athletes and non-athletes, correlation analysis, and hypothesis testing results.

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The sample consisted of 112 undergraduate students from various government and private colleges in Mysuru. Among them, **58 students (51.8%)** were classified as athletes (i.e., actively participating in sports), while **54 students (48.2%)** were non-athletes.

- **Gender Distribution:** 62 females (55.4%) and 50 males (44.6%)
- **Age Group:** Majority (67.8%) were aged between 18–20 years
- **Academic Stream:** 40% from Commerce, 35% from Arts, 25% from Science
- **Type of Sports:** Among athletes, 65% were involved in team sports (e.g., football, volleyball), and 35% in individual sports (e.g., athletics, badminton)

4.2 Comparative Analysis of Leadership Scores

A **leadership traits inventory** was used to assess core dimensions such as:

- Communication skills
- Decision-making ability
- Teamwork and collaboration
- Confidence and self-initiation

Mean scores across these traits were calculated for both athletes and non-athletes. The results showed that:

Trait	Athletes (Mean ± SD)	Non-Athletes (Mean ± SD)
Communication	4.21 ± 0.55	3.78 ± 0.61
Decision-making	4.10 ± 0.63	3.65 ± 0.58
Teamwork	4.35 ± 0.49	3.82 ± 0.52
Confidence	4.28 ± 0.57	3.69 ± 0.63



A noticeable difference in mean scores indicates that students involved in sports tend to score higher in all measured leadership traits.

4.3 Correlation Analysis

A **Pearson correlation matrix** was computed to determine the relationship between type/intensity of sports participation (measured by frequency per week and type of sport) and leadership trait scores.

Variables	Communication	Decision-Making	Teamwork	Confidence
Frequency of Sports	0.48*	0.42*	0.51*	0.46*
Type of Sport (Team)	0.53*	0.49*	0.57*	0.45*

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

These results suggest a **moderate to strong positive correlation** between sports intensity and leadership traits, especially for team sports.

4.4 Hypothesis Testing

To test the difference in leadership traits between athletes and non-athletes, an **independent samples t-test** was conducted. Results revealed statistically significant differences across all four measured leadership traits:

- **Communication:** $t(110) = 3.92, p < 0.001$
- **Decision-making:** $t(110) = 3.45, p = 0.001$
- **Teamwork:** $t(110) = 4.23, p < 0.001$
- **Confidence:** $t(110) = 3.98, p < 0.001$

Thus, the **null hypothesis (H₀)** is rejected in favor of the **alternative hypothesis (H₁)**: students involved in sports exhibit significantly higher leadership traits than those not involved.

Interpretation

The data confirms that sports participation is positively associated with leadership development. Team sports, in particular, have a strong impact on collaborative skills and decision-making. These findings



align with existing literature and support the argument that sports serve as an effective platform for nurturing leadership traits in young adults.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

The primary aim of this study was to examine the relationship between athletic participation and leadership trait development among college students in Mysuru. Based on data collected from a sample of 112 students, the following key findings emerged:

- Students involved in sports scored significantly higher on all four measured leadership traits—**communication, decision-making, teamwork, and confidence**—compared to non-athletes.
- **Team sports participants** demonstrated particularly high leadership scores, indicating that the collaborative nature of team-based athletics has a strong influence on leadership development.
- A **moderate to strong positive correlation** was found between the frequency of sports participation and leadership traits, suggesting that more frequent engagement leads to stronger leadership attributes.
- Statistical hypothesis testing confirmed significant differences between athletes and non-athletes, validating the alternative hypothesis that sports participation positively influences leadership development.

5.2 Interpretation in the Context of Existing Literature

These findings are consistent with previous studies conducted in Western contexts, such as those by Dobosz and Beaty (1999) and Wright and Côté (2003), which demonstrated that athletes tend to exhibit higher leadership capabilities. The results also align with **Transformational Leadership Theory**, which suggests that engaging in motivational and goal-driven environments—like sports—enhances one's capacity to lead and inspire.

Furthermore, the **Trait Theory of Leadership** supports the observation that consistent sports involvement strengthens core personal attributes like confidence, initiative, and decisiveness. Bandura's **Social Learning Theory** is also evident in how students model leadership behaviors observed in coaches and peers during sports activities.



While most of the existing literature is drawn from international or urban metro contexts, this study provides localized empirical evidence from **Mysuru**, filling a critical gap in Indian research on sports and leadership development.

5.3 Discussion of Influenced Leadership Traits

Among the leadership traits studied, **teamwork and confidence** showed the most significant differences between athletes and non-athletes. Team sports, in particular, seem to foster a deeper understanding of **collaborative decision-making, conflict resolution, and goal alignment**—key aspects of effective leadership.

Confidence, often shaped by performance under pressure and public visibility in sports, emerged as a crucial differentiator. Athletes consistently reported feeling more comfortable taking initiative, speaking in groups, and leading peer activities.

Decision-making was also positively influenced by athletic participation, as sports often require quick, strategic thinking in dynamic environments. The necessity to make split-second choices during a game reflects and sharpens one's real-life leadership decision-making abilities.

Overall, the findings reaffirm the notion that sports serve as an **experiential learning ground** for leadership, offering both structured and organic opportunities to develop key interpersonal and intrapersonal skills.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to investigate the relationship between athletic participation and the development of leadership traits among college students in Mysuru. The specific objectives were to assess the level of athletic involvement, compare leadership traits between student athletes and non-athletes, and determine whether a significant correlation exists between sports participation and leadership development.

The results clearly demonstrated that students who actively engage in sports—particularly team-based activities—exhibit significantly higher levels of leadership traits such as **communication, decision-making, teamwork, and confidence**. Statistical analysis confirmed the presence of a **positive and significant correlation** between the intensity of sports participation and these leadership attributes.



Based on the findings, the **null hypothesis (H_0)**—that there is no significant difference in leadership traits between athletes and non-athletes—is **rejected**. The **alternative hypothesis (H_1)** is supported: students involved in sports **do exhibit higher leadership traits** than their non-athletic peers.

In conclusion, this empirical analysis provides strong evidence that sports are not merely physical activities but vital experiential platforms for leadership development. The study affirms that athletic participation contributes positively to the **holistic development** of students, equipping them with skills essential for academic, professional, and social success. In the context of Mysuru's diverse higher education landscape, these findings are particularly relevant for educators and policymakers striving to implement **holistic education** models as envisioned in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several actionable recommendations are proposed for academic institutions, policymakers, and future researchers:

7.1 For Colleges and Educational Institutions

- **Integrate Leadership Training with Sports Curriculum:** Colleges should formally incorporate leadership skill-building modules into physical education and sports programs. This can include workshops on communication, decision-making, team management, and ethical leadership delivered alongside regular sports coaching.
- **Promote Inclusive Sports Participation:** Institutions should ensure equal opportunities for all students—regardless of gender, academic stream, or socio-economic background—to participate in sports, thereby making leadership development more inclusive and widespread.
- **Recognize and Reward Leadership in Sports:** Leadership traits displayed by student athletes (e.g., organizing events, team captaincy) should be recognized through awards, credits, or leadership portfolios as part of academic transcripts.

7.2 For Policymakers and Educational Boards

- **Encourage Intercollegiate Sports with Leadership Themes:** Government and regulatory bodies should promote intercollegiate tournaments that incorporate leadership-based challenges or team-building events. These can be supported under programs like *Fit India Movement*, *Khelo India*, or NEP 2020's co-curricular objectives.



- **Allocate Resources for Leadership-Driven Sports Infrastructure:** Investment should be made in developing sports infrastructure that not only supports physical activity but also leadership mentoring, such as coaching in conflict management, motivational speaking, and peer mentoring.

7.3 For Future Research

- **Longitudinal Studies:** Future research should adopt longitudinal designs to examine how sustained sports participation over multiple academic years influences long-term leadership outcomes and career success.
- **Inclusion of Rural and Semi-Urban Colleges:** Further studies should include students from rural or semi-urban colleges in Karnataka to understand regional disparities and explore how access to sports influences leadership development across diverse educational settings.
- **Exploration of Gender and Sport Type Differences:** Additional research can explore gender-specific leadership development patterns and the varying impacts of individual vs. team sports on particular leadership traits.

8. Limitations of the Study

- While this study offers valuable insights into the relationship between athletic participation and leadership development among college students in Mysuru, certain limitations must be acknowledged:
- **8.1 Geographical Limitation**
 - The study was confined to **urban colleges within Mysuru city**, excluding students from rural and semi-urban areas. As a result, the findings may not be fully generalizable to students from different geographic or socio-economic backgrounds across Karnataka or India.
- **8.2 Reliance on Self-Reported Data**
 - The data collected through questionnaires relied on **self-reported responses** regarding both sports participation and leadership traits. This method may introduce **response bias**, including social desirability bias or inaccurate recall, which can affect the validity of the findings.
- **8.3 Time Constraints**
 - The study was conducted within a **limited time frame**, restricting the ability to observe long-term leadership development or changes over multiple semesters or years. A longitudinal study could offer deeper insights into the sustained impact of sports on leadership growth.



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