

SPORTS MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND ATHLETICS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM OF SELECTED STATE UNIVERSITIES IN REGION IV-A: AN ANALYSIS

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Abstract

The study investigates the sports management practices and the effectiveness of athletic development initiatives in selected State Universities and Colleges (SUC's) in Region IV – A Philippines. The objectives aim to assess the implementation of sports management practices currently employed with regards to sport governance, sports awareness, sports accessibility, sports institute, sports facilities development, and sports linkages; assess the athletic development being implemented with regards to innovative management strategies, resource allocation, facility infrastructure and maintenance, and academic support and student services; determine the sports management practices influence the strategies for development of student – athletes; identify the experiences and level of effectiveness of coaches and student – athletes sports management and athletic development in their institution; and propose to enhance management and development of athletics programs in SUC's at Region IV – A. The convergent parallel mixed – method design was employed to administrators, coaches, and student – athletes with a total of 397. This study concludes that while sports management systems are formally established across SUCs in Region IV-A, their effectiveness lies not in procedural compliance but in how well they are operationalized to enable athlete-centered development. Therefore, SUCs in Region IV-A should shift from policy-driven compliance toward development-oriented sports management by institutionalizing monitoring and accountability mechanisms that directly support coaching quality, training consistency, and holistic athlete welfare.

Keywords: *sports management practices, athletics development program*

1. Introduction

International literature demonstrates that effective sports management systems contribute significantly to improved athletic outcomes, academic persistence, psychosocial well-being, and career readiness among student-athletes (Anderson, 2017; Brown & Robinson, 2018; Harrison & Lawrence, 2019). Global frameworks increasingly position athletics as an integrated institutional system rather than an auxiliary campus activity, requiring transparent governance, accountable leadership, inclusive policies, and sustainable

financing models (Geeraert, 2021; Ferkins & Shilbury, 2015). However, much of the empirical evidence underpinning these frameworks is derived from Western or highly professionalized sports environments, where institutional autonomy, funding stability, and governance capacity differ substantially from those of publicly funded universities in developing contexts. Consequently, the transferability of these global models to state-funded higher education institutions remains under-examined (De Bosscher et al., 2015; Andrews et al., 2016).

Central to addressing these challenges is the role of visionary, inclusive, and adaptive leadership within sports governance structures. Visionary leadership entails articulating long-term athletic development goals that align with institutional missions; inclusive leadership involves participatory decision-making processes that engage administrators, coaches, and student-athletes; and adaptive leadership is demonstrated through responsive policy adjustments, resource reallocation, and programmatic innovation under evolving institutional constraints (Ahmad Radzi et al., 2021; Geeraert, 2021). In practice, these leadership principles manifest in transparent budgeting, equitable access to facilities, responsive academic support, and evidence-based performance monitoring systems across multiple institutions.

Within the Philippine context, State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) serve as the primary institutional platforms for collegiate sports development and talent formation. National policy directives from the Commission on Higher Education and the Philippine Sports Commission emphasize the role of higher education institutions in promoting physical development, youth participation, and national athletic competitiveness. Despite these mandates, SUCs operate within persistent structural constraints, including limited and inconsistent funding, aging sports facilities, competing academic priorities, and uneven governance practices (Almazan, 2023; Defensor, 2021). These constraints raise critical questions regarding how sports management principles are interpreted, operationalized, and sustained within Philippine public higher education institutions.

Local and regional studies acknowledge that SUCs continue to produce competitive athletes at regional and national levels; however, existing Philippine literature remains largely descriptive, focusing on participation rates, competition results, or isolated program initiatives (Aquino & Reyes, 2022; Bondoc Jr., 2023). Few empirical studies adopt an integrative perspective that systematically examines how governance structures, financial resource allocation, facilities development, academic support systems, and leadership practices collectively influence athletic development outcomes. Moreover, the perspectives of coaches and student-athletes—who directly experience institutional policies, leadership decisions, and support mechanisms—remain underrepresented in empirical inquiry (Abayari et al., 2024; Cunningham et al., 2019). This limitation constrains the ability of policymakers and university administrators to evaluate whether existing sports management strategies effectively support holistic and sustainable athlete development.

In Region IV-A (CALABARZON), several SUCs have emerged as consistent contributors to national athletic performance. Despite this, no region-specific, integrative study has examined how institutional sports management practices shape athletic development outcomes within this context. Existing research often isolates individual management components or fails to account for the interaction among governance, funding, infrastructure, and academic support systems under resource-constrained conditions (Cullarin-Bernales, 2021; Elliott & Kellison, 2019). As a result, there is insufficient empirical evidence to inform strategic decision-making and policy implementation tailored to the institutional realities of CALABARZON-based SUCs.

In response to these gaps, the present study examines how sports management practices influence athletic development outcomes in selected SUCs in Region IV-A. Specifically, it investigates the extent to which governance and leadership structures, financial resource allocation, facilities and infrastructure, academic support systems, and institutional linkages shape both the performance and holistic development of student-athletes. By employing a mixed-methods approach that integrates quantitative data with qualitative

insights from coaches and student-athletes, the study moves beyond descriptive analysis to provide an evidence-based assessment of how institutional systems function in practice (Braun & Clarke, 2019; George, 2023).

The research analyzes the current practices in sports management and assesses the efficacy of athletic development initiatives implemented in selected State Universities and Colleges in Region IV-A with the following objectives:

1. Assess the implementation of sports management practices currently employed by State Universities and Colleges in Region IV-A with regards to sports governance, sport awareness, sports accessibility, sports institute, sports facilities development, and sports linkages.
2. Assess the athletic development being implemented by the State Universities and Colleges in Region IV-A with regards to Innovative management strategies, Resource allocation, Facility infrastructure and maintenance, and Academic Support and Student Services.
3. Determines the sports management practices influence the strategies for development of student-athletes.
4. Identify the experiences and perceived levels of effectiveness of coaches and student-athletes regarding sports management and athletic development in their institution.
5. Propose to enhance the management and development of athletics programs in State Universities and Colleges in Region IV-A.

Hypotheses

The existing sports management practices do not significantly influence the level of athletic development of student-athletes in the selected State Universities and Colleges.

The study conceptualizes the causality between sports management practices and the development and performance of student-athletes. In this way, successful sports management should predict and influence these outcomes, such as the well-round development of student-athletes and greater athletic success. However, barriers to the effective delivery of programs may significantly affect this relationship, weakening or strengthening the impact of management practices. For instance, limited finance or facilities can limit the opportunity for both training and competition even when management practices are successful. Analyzing these variables with their interrelationship is part of this research in the pursuit of a much more profound insight into the factors that make a program successful or otherwise in the region.

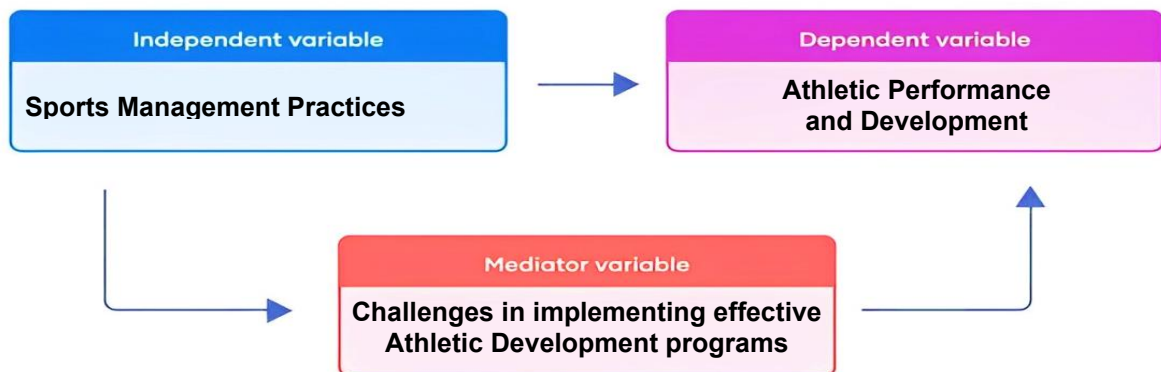


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

The overarching aim of this research is both timely and necessary, given the increasing demands on SUCs to produce competitive athletes while maintaining academic integrity, equity, and sustainability. By clarifying the relationship between institutional sports management practices and athlete development outcomes, the study seeks to generate evidence – based insights that can inform policy implementation, strengthen governance and leadership frameworks, and enhance the overall effectiveness of athletic programs in SUCs in Region IV-A.

2. Research Methodology

The study used a Convergent Parallel Mixed Methods Research Design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of sports management practices and their influence on the development and performance of student-athletes. In this design, both types of data are collected at the same time, analysed separately, and brought together during the interpretation phase to strengthen and enrich the overall findings.

This study employed a combination of sampling techniques suited to the characteristics of the respondent groups. A total of 397 respondents participated in the study, consisting of 110 coaches and 287 student – athletes from five selected State Universities and Colleges in Region IV – A. For student – athletes, stratified random sampling was used to ensure proportional representation from each selected State University and College in Region IV – A. For coaches, a total enumeration (census sampling) approach was adopted. All accessible coaches from the selected institutions were included in the study to provide a comprehensive view of sports governance, policy implementation, and program management. While stratified random sampling helps reduce selection bias by ensuring proportional representation, it may not fully capture differences across sports disciplines or academic levels. Nonetheless, the combined sampling approach offers sufficient coverage to generate valid and reliable findings relevant to sports management practices in Region IV – A. The distribution of respondents is presented in the table below:

Tertiary Education Institution	Coaches	Student Athletes
University A	15	72
University B	31	63
University C	9	24
University D	29	32
University E	26	96
Total	110	287

3. Results and Discussion

Table 1. Summary table of Sports Management Practices currently employed by the Universities in Region IV A.

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Sports Governance	3.27	Agree/ Implemented	3
Sports Awareness	3.33	Agree/ Implemented	1
Sports Accessibility	3.25	Agree/ Implemented	5
Sports Institute	3.28	Agree/ Implemented	2
Sports Facilities Development	3.26	Agree/ Implemented	4
Sports Linkages	3.16	Agree/ Implemented	6
General Weighted Mean	3.26	Agree/ Implemented	

Legend: 3.51-4.00 strongly agree/highly implemented; 2.51-3.50 agree/implemented; 1.51-2.50; disagree/partially implemented; 1.00-1.50strongly disagree/not implemented

Sports Management Practices. The table 1 shows the summary table of sports management practices currently employed by the Universities in Region IV – A with a total participant of 397 in this study.

The general weighted mean score of 3.26 (agree/implemented) explains the condition of system-wide functional adequacy, wherein foundational structures and practices are present but are not yet strategically integrated into a coherent, high-performing sports management system. From a systems theory perspective, the moderate rating implies that while individual management components operate satisfactorily, their collective impact on athletic development is diluted by uneven alignment, varying levels of institutional commitment, and limited cross-domain synergy.

Among the management domains, Sports Awareness emerged as the highest-ranked practice, highlighting universities' relative strength in visibility, communication, and promotional activities related to sports programs. Analytically, strong awareness mechanisms enhance institutional legitimacy and athlete recognition, contributing positively to engagement, morale, and social capital development (Misener & Doherty, 2009; Moustakas et al., 2023a; Moustakas et al., 2023b). However, the prominence of this domain also reveals an orientation toward symbolic and communicative functions, which, while important, do not independently guarantee sustained athletic development unless complemented by robust structural, financial, and relational supports (Ouyang & Yang, 2020; Nguyen et al., 2020).

In contrast, Sports Linkages recorded the lowest ranking among the management domains, reflecting persistent relational and network-based constraints in establishing sustained partnerships with external organizations, national sports bodies, and international institutions. Weak linkages limit access to higher-level competition, advanced training environments, and broader resource networks, which are critical for athlete progression beyond institutional contexts (Lee & Chang, 2020; Lee & Kim, 2021; Juezan et al., 2024; Keiper & Mays, 2018). The disparity between strong internal awareness and weak external engagement underscores a structural imbalance in the sports management system. Collectively, the findings suggest that while the surveyed SUCs have developed sufficient internal mechanisms for organizing, promoting, and administering sports programs, limited external linkages constrain the system's capacity to support advanced athlete development and competitive excellence. To achieve strategic effectiveness, universities must integrate awareness efforts with strengthened linkages, governance, facilities, and financial systems, translating visibility into opportunity and extending participation into sustainable athletic advancement (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Misener & Doherty, 2009).

Table 2. Summary Table of Strategies for Sustainable Athletic Development.

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. Innovative Management strategies	3.24	Agree/ Implemented	2
2. Resource Allocation	3.28	Agree/ Implemented	1
3. Facility Infrastructure and Maintenance	3.24	Agree/Implemented	3
4. Academic Support and Student Services	3.24	Agree/Implemented	4

General Weighted Mean

3.25

Agree/Implemented

Legend: 3.51-4.00 strongly agree/highly implemented; 2.51-3.50 agree/implemented; 1.51-2.50; disagree/partially implemented; 1.00-1.50strongly disagree/not implemented

Sustainable Athletic Development. Table 2 shows the strategies for sustainable athletic development with a total participant of 397 in this study.

The general weighted mean score of 3.25 (Agree/Implemented) suggesting that while institutions recognize the dual demands of academics and athletics, there is room for strengthening structured support mechanisms. This moderate rating indicates that existing programs provide some relief for student-athletes but may not fully address the complexity of balancing academic and athletic commitments.

Academic financial assistance (WM = 3.32) emerged as the most highly rated service, reflecting its effectiveness in promoting student-athlete retention and motivation. The emphasis on financial support aligns with prior research highlighting that adequate funding mitigates stressors associated with academic and athletic responsibilities, thereby facilitating continued engagement and performance in both domains. Tutoring and study hall integration (WM = 3.11) received the lowest rating, revealing critical gaps in the structured coordination of academic and athletic responsibilities. This finding underscores a key area for institutional enhancement, as the absence of integrated academic support programs may impede student-athletes’ ability to optimize cognitive engagement, learning outcomes, and time management while maintaining peak athletic performance (Lupo et al., 2024; Lorenz et al., 2010; López-Carril et al., 2020).

The moderate level of academic support services has direct implications for athletic development. Student-athletes experiencing insufficient structured academic assistance may face cognitive fatigue, suboptimal study habits, and time-management challenges, which can adversely affect training consistency, recovery, and competitive readiness. Conversely, targeted academic interventions—particularly financial support—can mitigate external stressors, allowing athletes to focus on skill development, strategic learning, and performance optimization (Miller et al., 2020; Miller et al., 2018; Ma, 2024). The observed gaps in tutoring and study hall integration suggest that universities could enhance athletic outcomes by implementing more synchronized academic-athletic programs, such as scheduled study sessions aligned with training timetables or individualized academic coaching. Strengthening these support mechanisms not only fosters academic success but also contributes to holistic athlete development, ensuring that student-athletes achieve optimal performance both on the field and in the classroom (Misener & Doherty, 2009; Misener & Doherty, 2013; Mallett et al., 2016).

Table 3. Relationship Between Sports Management Dimensions and Athletic Development: Regression Analysis Results

Sports Management	Athletic Development	Beta Coefficient (Unstandardized)	t-value	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
Sports Governance	Innovative Management Strategies	0.448	7.981	<0.001	Rejected	Significant
	Resource Allocation	0.452	5.37	<0.001	Rejected	Significant
	Facility Infrastructure and	0.357	2.222	0.027	Rejected	Significant

Maintenance						
Sports Awareness	Academic Support and Student Services	0.264	1.455	0.146	Accepted	Not Significant
	Innovative Management Strategies	-0.505	-0.528	<0.001	Rejected	Significant
	Resource Allocation Facility	-0.151	-1.155	0.249	Accepted	Not Significant
Sports Accessibility	Infrastructure and Maintenance	-0.341	-1.366	0.173	Accepted	Not Significant
	Academic Support and Student Services	-0.385	-1.136	0.174	Accepted	Not Significant
	Innovative Management Strategies	-0.505	-5.79	<0.001	Rejected	Significant
Sports Institute	Resource Allocation Facility	-0.093	-0.781	0.435	Accepted	Not Significant
	Infrastructure and Maintenance	0.729	3.209	0.001	Rejected	Significant
	Academic Support and Student Services	0.962	3.748	<0.001	Rejected	Significant
	Innovative Management Strategies	-0.164	-2.231	0.026	Rejected	Significant
	Resource Allocation Facility	-0.257	-2.321	0.021	Rejected	Significant
	Infrastructure and Maintenance	-0.414	-1.956	0.051	Accepted	Not Significant

Sports Facilities Development	Academic Support and Student Services	0.019	0.081	0.936	Accepted	Not Significant
	Innovative Management Strategies	-0.127	-1.689	0.092	Accepted	Not Significant
	Resource Allocation Facility	0.071	0.633	0.527	Accepted	Not Significant
Sports Linkages	Infrastructure and Maintenance Academic Support and Student Services	-0.47	-2.179	0.03	Rejected	Significant
	Innovative Management Strategies	-1.117	-4.58	<0.001	Rejected	Significant
	Resource Allocation Facility	1.122	20.28	<0.001	Rejected	Significant
	Infrastructure and Maintenance Academic Support and Student Services	0.975	11.756	<0.001	Rejected	Significant
	Innovative Management Strategies	1.119	7.049	<0.001	Rejected	Significant
	Resource Allocation Facility	1.209	6.743	<0.001	Rejected	Significant

Relationship between Sports Management Dimensions and Athletic Development. Table 3 shows the relationship between sports management dimensions and athletic development with a total participant of 397 in this study.

The regression analysis revealed nuanced relationships between various dimensions of sports management and athletic development. Overall, sports governance, accessibility, and linkages demonstrated significant contributions to athletic development across multiple indicators, suggesting that effective management, inclusive access, and robust institutional partnerships play pivotal roles in enhancing athlete performance and program outcomes. Conversely, certain dimensions of sports awareness and academic support did not consistently yield statistically significant effects, highlighting potential areas where strategic improvements are necessary to maximize the impact of athletic development initiatives (Pestaño & Ibarra, 2021; Ployduangrat, 2022). These results underscore the multifaceted nature of sports management, where structural, operational, and relational factors intersect to influence overall program effectiveness.

Among the predictors, sports linkages exhibited the highest beta coefficients across all management indicators, indicating the strongest and most consistent effect on athletic development. The positive and significant values for innovative management strategies ($\beta = 1.122$, $p < 0.001$), resource allocation ($\beta = 0.975$,

$p < 0.001$), facility infrastructure ($\beta = 1.119$, $p < 0.001$), and academic support ($\beta = 1.209$, $p < 0.001$) suggest that institutions with strong collaborations, community engagement, and external partnerships can mobilize resources more effectively and foster environments conducive to athlete growth. This aligns with existing literature emphasizing the importance of strategic partnerships and networked approaches in enhancing sports program outcomes, as linkages facilitate knowledge sharing, talent development, and access to broader resources (Ratten, 2020; Porto et al., 2022).

In contrast, academic support and student services frequently demonstrated the lowest beta coefficients and, in several cases, failed to reach statistical significance, particularly in relation to sports governance and sports institute indicators. For instance, academic support's effect on innovative management strategies ($\beta = 0.019$, $p = 0.936$) was not significant, suggesting that current academic support structures may not be fully integrated with athletic objectives or may lack targeted interventions for student-athletes. This finding resonates with prior studies highlighting the persistent challenge of balancing dual-role demands, where insufficient coordination between academic and athletic programs can limit both academic performance and athletic progression (Pate et al., 2019; Ramayudha, 2017).

The findings indicate that while certain aspects of sports management—particularly linkages and accessibility, exert a strong positive influence on athletic development, others, such as academic support and awareness initiatives, require strategic enhancement to realize their full potential. Institutions aiming to optimize athletic outcomes should focus on reinforcing external collaborations, upgrading facilities, and embedding academic support more cohesively within sports programs, thereby fostering holistic development for student-athletes (Richa et al., 2023; Pestaño & Ibarra, 2021).

Table 4. Regression Analysis of Sports Management Dimensions as Predictors of Athletic Development

Sports Management	Dependent Variable	Beta Coefficient (Unstandardized)	t-value	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
Sports Governance	Athletic Development	0.276	1.336	0.182	Accepted	Not Significant
Sports Awareness		-0.42	-1.311	0.191	Accepted	Not Significant
Sports Accessibility		1.001	3.435	0.001	Rejected	Significant
Sports Institute		-0.025	-0.091	0.927	Accepted	Not Significant
Sports Facilities Development		-0.468	-1.689	0.092	Accepted	Not Significant
Sports Linkages		0.514	2.524	0.012	Rejected	Significant

Legend: >0.05 level of significance

Regression Analysis. The table 4 shows the regression analysis of sports management dimensions as predictors of athletic development with a total participant of 397 in this study.

The regression analysis of sports management dimensions as predictors of athletic development indicates a mixed pattern of influence. Overall, sports accessibility and linkages emerged as significant predictors, while other dimensions such as sports governance, awareness, institute, and facilities development did not reach statistical significance. This suggests that providing inclusive access and fostering external partnerships are key drivers of effective athletic development, whereas other structural and managerial practices may require further enhancement to impact athlete outcomes (Moustakas, Petry, & Bauer, 2023a;

Ouyang & Yang, 2020). These findings underscore the importance of strategic prioritization within sports management to achieve meaningful improvements in athletic performance and development.

Among the significant predictors, sports accessibility exhibited the highest unstandardized beta coefficient ($\beta = 1.001$, $p = 0.001$), highlighting its substantial effect on athletic development. This result aligns with prior studies emphasizing that removing barriers and ensuring equitable access to facilities, programs, and resources enables athletes to fully engage in training and competition, ultimately enhancing performance outcomes (Moustakas, Petry, & Bauer, 2023b; Nguyen et al., 2020). Similarly, sports linkages also demonstrated a positive and significant effect ($\beta = 0.514$, $p = 0.012$), suggesting that collaborations with external organizations, community engagement, and institutional partnerships facilitate resource mobilization, knowledge sharing, and the creation of supportive athletic ecosystems.

Conversely, sports governance, awareness, institute, and facilities development did not show significant effects on athletic development. For instance, the influence of sports governance ($\beta = 0.276$, $p = 0.182$) and sports institute ($\beta = -0.025$, $p = 0.927$) was negligible, indicating that mere existence of policies or institutional structures may not translate into measurable improvements in athletic outcomes without effective implementation or integration with athlete-centered programs. This pattern echoes findings from studies emphasizing that structural frameworks alone are insufficient; active engagement, resource utilization, and programmatic alignment are critical to fostering meaningful athletic development (Ouyang & Yang, 2020; Moustakas, Petry, & Bauer, 2023a).

The findings highlight that while sports accessibility and linkages serve as strong catalysts for athletic development, other dimensions of sports management require strategic refinement to contribute effectively. Institutions should prioritize initiatives that enhance access, strengthen external partnerships, and integrate governance and facilities management with athlete-centered programming to optimize overall outcomes (Moustakas, Petry, & Bauer, 2023b; Nguyen et al., 2020).

Table 5. Challenges in the implementation of Sports Management Practices for Athletic Development

Themes (based on participants' responses)	Sample Excerpts of the Participants (verbatim)	Participants
Lack of facilities	<i>"By providing a court and venue for training. Improvement of facilities and hired experts." "Proper management."</i>	Coach 10, University E
Cooperation of subject professors	<i>"By consulting the dean, vice chancellor, and chairperson." "Just religiously follow what is written in the sports manual." "Follow the sports manual."</i>	Student Athlete 37 and Coach 28, University B
Conflict of schedule for training/facilities	<i>"By supporting the budget itself with supervision." "Add more budget for the training." "Support all student-athletes from benefits and incentives."</i>	Student Athlete 63 and Coach 6 University A

Lack of support for training equipment and materials	<i>"None so far. They removed the team. "Create programs that help the student-athletes." "Observe each sport to see what they need for improvement."</i>	Coach 19 University D
Scrutinization and justification of the budget	<i>"By proof of provision and justification." "All-out support by the management."; "Conduct more physical activities and events."</i>	Coach 1 University C
Exposure and recruitment concerns	<i>"The school offers free lodging and allowance."; "Stay-in incentives including free food."; "Give student-athletes what they deserve."</i>	Coach 8 University C
Budget request and financial limitations	<i>"Sports office proposed plan." "Invest in high-quality facilities and open them to public use." "Hire experts."</i>	Coach 9 University C
Balancing academics and sports	<i>"By giving incentives to our student-athletes."; "Do coaches get paid well?"; "More seminars to attend."</i>	Student Athlete 78 and Coach 14 University E
Limited resources and support	<i>"We use alternative equipment." "Provide facilities and equipment." "Provide alternative equipment and facilities."</i>	Coach 13 University E
Lack of allowance and benefits	<i>"By providing allowance and support for coaches and players." "Proper allowance for the coaches and the players." "Give fair compensation and incentives."</i>	Student Athlete 27 and Coach 15 University B

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Challenges in Sports Management Practices for Athletic Development. The table 5 shows the challenges in the implementation of sports management practices for athletic development with a total participant of 397 in this study.

The thematic analysis surfaced a powerful, integrative construct that captured the essence of how sports leadership is envisioned and enacted within Philippine higher education: Visionary, Inclusive, and Adaptive Scholarship Leadership. This overarching theme encapsulates the dynamic interplay of leadership

philosophies, institutional values, and lived experiences that collectively shape the landscape of sports management at the university level. It reflects not only the structural and policy-level dimensions of sports governance but also the humanistic and relational aspects, how people lead, collaborate, and respond to challenges in diverse academic-athletic environments.

At its core, this meta-theme is anchored in three interrelated sub-themes: Visionary Leadership, Inclusive Practices, and Adaptive Systems. Each of these is more than a conceptual category, they represent the practical, ethical, and strategic orientations that university leaders, athletic directors, coaches, and student-athletes bring into their daily work. Together, these themes provide a lens through which to understand how institutions attempt to balance excellence with equity, performance with participation, and structure with flexibility.

Visionary Leadership emerged as a recurring motif in participants' narratives, particularly in how institutional heads and coaches articulated long-term goals for sports programs. This type of leadership was often characterized by a future-oriented mindset, one that prioritized not only winning but also athlete development, education, and community impact. Respondents emphasized the importance of leaders who are proactive, innovative, and capable of aligning sports programs with broader academic missions and national development goals. In a resource-constrained context like the Philippines, having a vision that extends beyond medals and tournaments becomes both a moral and strategic imperative.

Inclusive Practices reflected the deep commitment, often aspirational but still powerfully articulated—to equity and access within sports systems. Inclusion was discussed in terms of gender equity, support for student-athletes from marginalized backgrounds, and the need to democratize access to training, facilities, and leadership opportunities. Participants consistently highlighted how inclusive leadership can empower athletes and coaches to thrive, particularly when policies are tailored to acknowledge the diverse needs of student-athletes who are navigating academic, personal, and athletic demands simultaneously. This inclusivity extended beyond representation; it was about belonging, voice, and shared ownership of the sports development process.

Adaptive Systems, meanwhile, spoke to the resilience and flexibility of sports programs in the face of external and internal pressures. Whether dealing with policy shifts, funding limitations, or the disruptions brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, stakeholders repeatedly described the necessity of responsive and agile leadership. Adaptation was not framed as reactive, but rather as a strategic competence: the ability to innovate, pivot, and redesign systems to remain relevant and effective. Coaches and program heads described practices such as decentralized decision-making, data-informed training strategies, and cross-sector collaboration as key enablers of adaptability. These adaptive approaches were often driven by leaders who understood that rigid systems do not survive in dynamic environments, especially when working with young people whose needs, contexts, and aspirations are rapidly evolving (Moustakas et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2020; Ouyang & Yang, 2020; Porto et al., 2022; Ramayudha, 2017).

Tutoring and study hall integration (WM = 3.11) received the lowest rating, revealing critical gaps in the structured coordination of academic and athletic responsibilities. This finding underscores a key area for institutional enhancement, as the absence of integrated academic support programs may impede student-athletes' ability to optimize cognitive engagement, learning outcomes, and time management while maintaining peak athletic performance (Lupo et al., 2024; Lorenz et al., 2010; López-Carril et al., 2020; Moustakas et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2020). The moderate level of academic support services has direct implications for athletic development. Student-athletes experiencing insufficient structured academic assistance may face cognitive fatigue, suboptimal study habits, and time-management challenges, which can adversely affect training consistency, recovery, and competitive readiness. Conversely, targeted academic interventions, particularly financial support, can mitigate external stressors, allowing athletes to focus on skill development, strategic learning, and performance optimization (Miller et al., 2020; Miller et al., 2018; Ma, 2024; Ouyang & Yang, 2020). The observed gaps in tutoring and study hall integration suggest that universities could enhance athletic outcomes by implementing more synchronized academic-athletic

programs, such as scheduled study sessions aligned with training timetables or individualized academic coaching. Strengthening these support mechanisms not only fosters academic success but also contributes to holistic athlete development, ensuring that student-athletes achieve optimal performance both on the field and in the classroom (Misener & Doherty, 2009; Misener & Doherty, 2013; Mallett et al., 2016; Porto et al., 2022; Ramayudha, 2017).

Taken together, Visionary, Inclusive, and Adaptive Scholarship Leadership reflects a holistic approach to university sports governance, one that goes beyond administration and enters the realm of stewardship, mentorship, and transformation. It acknowledges the emotional labor of coaching, the strategic foresight of administrators, and the agency of student-athletes as co-creators of their athletic and academic journeys. Importantly, this theme is deeply contextual. It responds to the unique challenges faced by Philippine universities: limited budgets, uneven resource distribution, regional disparities, and the often-precarious status of sports in academic institutions. And yet, it is also aspirational, speaking to what sports leadership can become when guided by values of justice, vision, and adaptability. This thematic insight serves as both a critique and a guidepost. It critiques leadership models that are top-down, exclusionary, or rigid, while illuminating pathways forward for more humane, sustainable, and empowering sports systems—ones where leadership is not just a function of position, but a practice of care, courage, and continuous learning (Moustakas et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2020; Ouyang & Yang, 2020; Porto et al., 2022; Ramayudha, 2017).

Recommendation

Informed by the study's findings, it is strongly recommended that sports management in higher education institutions, particularly State Universities and Colleges (SUCs), be systematically repositioned as a core developmental function that advances both athletic excellence and educational outcomes. Rather than operating as a predominantly administrative or compliance-driven system, sports management should institutionalize development-oriented governance and accountability mechanisms that directly support coaching effectiveness, training continuity, athlete welfare, and academic integration. Higher education institutions must strategically align financial, human, and infrastructural resources toward athlete-centered development, prioritizing continuous professional development for coaches, evidence-based training and performance monitoring systems, and comprehensive support services addressing academic, psychosocial, nutritional, and health needs. Administrative processes should be evaluated based on their capacity to enable developmental priorities, while program diversification, contextual specialization, and inter-institutional collaboration should be pursued to enhance equity, sustainability, and institutional competitiveness. Collectively, these measures affirm that effective sports management in higher education functions as a strategic enabler of holistic student-athlete development, reinforcing the dual mandate of universities to cultivate both competitive performance and educational attainment.

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