



## **The role of sports in improving the lifestyle of university students**

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### **Abstract**

This research aims to clarify the importance of practicing sports and its role in improving the lifestyle of university students. By understanding how sports contribute to strengthening social relationships within the academic community and enhancing the physical and mental health of university students, sports have become an effective tool in the modern era. They are not limited to entertainment or amusement but also contribute to building the character of university students, enhancing their interactive abilities, and instilling moral values such as cooperation, tolerance, and discipline. The study highlights the historical background of sports, starting from the civilizations of the Mesopotamian Valley, thru the Islamic civilization, up to the modern era, where it has become a means to enhance national belonging and combat deviant behaviors. The research seeks to propose practical mechanisms to activate sports activities, given their fundamental role in enhancing the lives of university youth on physical, psychological, and social levels. The study relied on the descriptive analytical method, where the questionnaire was distributed to 200 male and female students from different colleges at the University of Baghdad and Al-Mustansiriya University. The results showed that practicing sports positively contributes to the development of social skills such as cooperation, communication, and building friendships. And it improves mental and physical health. Accordingly, the research recommends increasing support for university sports activities to enhance the lifestyle of university students.

**Keywords:** Sports, improvement, lifestyle, university youth.

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## Introduction

Sports are considered one of the main factors that contribute to strengthening social bonds between individuals and have a significant impact on forming cohesive communities. Sports serves well as a channel towards understanding and the creation of a harmonious society, which promotes ethical values \_ e.g., co-operation, sportsmanship and mutual respect. In such a context, sport has special meanings to the students on campus since it can satisfy fundamental human needs, including those associated with physical, safety and sociability. Beyond this, sports are important to promoting mental health and physical health as well as enhancing social relationships and community inclusion. The involvement in a sporting activity itself leads to a harmony among the individuals and conduce tolerance and acceptance as such, helping the building of a strong and balanced personality.

The sports, a social and cultural phenomenon of the human society through time has been among existence one of the best ways for fun, physical development and relationship establishment between members too. The peoples of the Mesopotamian Valley practiced various types of sports and physical activities, which had a significant impact on the civilizations that followed. The ancient Iraqis built their civilization themselves, relying on science, knowledge, the beauty of things, moral integrity, and human values. Examples of these sports activities include wrestling, boxing, swimming, rowing, fencing, horse riding, chariot racing, animal wrestling, dancing, and hunting (Al-Maraawi 2023, p. 47).

The peoples of the Mesopotamian Valley practiced physical exercises and various sports activities during their leisure time, and these games provided their practitioners with endurance and high fitness. The ordinary daily activities evolved into sports practices, which manifested as a sign of advanced life in that era, and they became rituals in national, ethnic, religious, official, and social celebrations alike. (Al-Suhrawardi, 1980, p. 29).

And sports have a role in the Islamic era, as they have witnessed development. Among the most important known sports activities in Islamic civilization are racing and running, wrestling, grappling, and combat, which demonstrate competition, challenge, and dominance. In addition to swimming, archery, hunting, strength and endurance games, there are also well-known and widespread sports in Muslim countries for recreation and entertainment, such as physical and mental sports that still exist today, including ball games, tug-of-war, chess, and other sports. (Ismail 2021, p. 75)

Modern societies have recognized the importance of sports as a comprehensive tool that contributes to building a balanced individual physically, mentally, and morally. Sports are an

important factor that fosters community solidarity, as they are an effective means of breaking down barriers present in societies, whether they are religious or discriminatory. Therefore, sports have become a significant and recognized factor for progress, advancement, and social discipline (Awis 1994).

Sports provide an opportunity to build life skills for at-risk youth, enabling them to better handle the challenges of daily life and steer clear of involvement in violence, drug abuse, and various forms of crime (Wehba, 2022, p. 35). Thus, it is considered a means of combating crime and preventing delinquency.

Sports have their social values that work on improving various aspects of individuals' lives, especially university students who regularly practice them, and develop their interactive skills (Al-Sumaidani, 2017, pp. 23-24). Such as self-acceptance, acceptance of others, and showing cooperation with them to achieve a common goal (social harmony). Acquiring effective and positive social skills, which are manifested in social competence, communication with others, constructive cooperation with them, and solidarity to achieve desired goals and aspirations. Al-Atrash 2014, p. 1551).

Sports also have multiple functions, starting from health and preventive benefits. Poor physical fitness will result in negative effects on the health of young people, leading to early aging (Al-Zamel 2011, p. 9). Additionally, a lack of physical activity is considered one of the main causes of chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart and vascular diseases, and some types of cancer (Malavoy, M. 2013). (2013)).

Sports play an important role as they contribute to the promotion of human rights on a global level thru the interactions they generate among individuals who are diverse, belonging to different backgrounds and cultures. They unite people around a single subject regardless of color, race, or gender. Thanks to their inclusive nature, sports can instill tolerance, respect for others, and spread love among people. Moreover, they stand as an obstacle against all forms of discrimination.

In addition, there is a recreational function of sports that helps in utilizing free time, as the essence of sports is primarily based on recreational goals (Drouiche, 1990, p. 301). When individuals and university youth participate in recreational sports activities, it reflects on their motor and physiological abilities, helping them face life's challenges more easily. (Drouiche, 1990, p. 71), youth means strength, and sports are the best means to showcase this strength. Abdul Wahab 1995, p. 64).

Sports are important for stimulating the mind and maintaining physical health, as they have a significant impact on brain cells. A person who actively and sincerely engages in sports activities

has a more prepared mind than someone who succumbs to laziness and idleness. Building mental capacities and deep thinking cannot be achieved satisfactorily unless the body is healthy and fit, as the body is considered the medium for expressing the mind and will. Al-Qadi. (Al-Qadi et al., 1981, p. 11), as low to moderate intensity exercises improve central nervous system functions and enhance mental and cardiac performance. (Bahaa El-Din 1994, pp. 168-169).

The importance of sports extends to its moral and educational dimensions. High morals can be developed thru sports training and physical activities, and they can acquire good qualities such as taking initiative, self-control, esthetic appreciation, and so on. Additionally, sports and physical activities contribute to solving social problems such as social adaptation, social normalization, class and social mobility, minorities, delinquency and deviation, fan riots, and excessive sports crowds, and how sports have helped in solving some of these problems or alleviating their severity, especially among the youth. (Al-Khuli, 1996, p. 204) Al-Khouli 1996, p. 204). It also has a direct impact on strengthening social relationships between individuals, as physical or motor activity for humans is one of the socio-cultural phenomena associated with them since the beginning of creation. Sports and physical activities represent the most effective means in our current era, as they foster good international human relationships and connections and bring about harmony among the individuals of nations and communities on an international level. Ibrahim 2001, p. 19)

It is difficult for individuals in our contemporary societies to fulfill their duties, bear the burdens of daily life, and meet their requirements and responsibilities without social relationships connecting them to those around them, whether in the family, social, or various work environments. Wherever we turn, we find social patterns that color the relationships of individuals within their surrounding environments (Al-Nahar et al., 2015, p. 13).

Here comes the role of sports in strengthening the bonds between family members, which will lead to social cohesion, and consequently to national unity. Everyone loves the fun and enjoyment that sports of all kinds provide (Abdul Wahab, 1995, pp. 57-65). Social relationships are one of the essential implications to which sport and sports activities have leeway. With a background with higher social intensity and interactions, they contribute to the development of physical education and sports workers as part of nifty values, experiences and some social competence. These qualities help a person to grow in social dimensions, to develop personality, support socialization and upbringing as well as helps in streamlining with society's expectations; systems, laws and customs (Smith, A. 2009).



Sports serve society through promotion of social integration by creating a feeling of community between people. Through them a feeling of oneness is evoked and the sense of brotherhood becomes linked up with emotion. Sports develop sentiments of community, congruence with personal identity, friendship formation and the strengthening of friendships and affection among people (Al-Khouli, 1994: 53).

Implications of this positivist study are that it underscores the proactive role of sports activities in improving and enhancing the quality of university youth's lifestyle. Physical activities are no longer taken just like a form of fun or entertainment, exercise and gymnastics but have been made quite effective in the means of educating and socializing within the university community.

The research aims to clarify the importance of practicing sports and its role in improving the lifestyle of university students. By understanding how sports contribute to strengthening social relationships within the university environment. And enhancing social integration by developing relationships between individuals from diverse cultural and sectarian backgrounds, promoting the physical and mental health of university students, and suggesting ways to encourage sports practice within the university campus.

## Methodology

"Bernard Phillips" refers to the scientific method as the means thru which we can increase our understanding of phenomena from several aspects, such as defining the problem to be studied and increasing knowledge of its causes, as well as obtaining the basic data related to it, in addition to analyzing and interpreting this data in light of controlled rules in order to reach the general results related to the addressed problem (Salim, 2015, p. 37). In this research, we used the method that we see as suitable for the nature of the study, especially if we want to cover all its aspects to ensure that the study results are comprehensive and objective. The most useful and compatible method with the nature of the study was the social survey method.

The social survey method is considered one of the most important methods used in social research. It is a method or technique of social research in which the scientific method steps are scientifically applied to study a social phenomenon, problem, or specific social conditions prevailing in a defined geographical area, with the aim of obtaining information that depicts various aspects of the studied phenomenon (Mohammed, 2008, p. 376). Due to the difficulty of conducting a comprehensive survey of the community because of the lack of time and financial resources, the researcher used the sampling survey method, which provides the necessary resources, human efforts, and time for both the researcher and the subjects. In our current research, we relied on the social survey method using the sampling technique.



## Data collection

The questionnaire was used as the main tool for data collection. The questionnaire is defined as "a form that includes a set of questions revolving around psychological, social, or educational topics, answered by the respondent, or a means to obtain answers to a number of questions written in a form prepared for this purpose, which the respondent fills out themselves" (Al-Dulaimi, 2014, p. 91). Accordingly, the researchers designed a questionnaire form that was distributed to (university students, both male and female). The questionnaire was distributed in a suitable environment that allows university students to respond objectively, taking into account the conditions of time and place to ensure the highest levels of accuracy and reliability in the results.

## Sample design

Given the importance of statistical representation in generalizing research results, the purposive sampling method was adopted, which relies on the selection of participants based on the researcher's judgment and expertise. Due to the difficulty of conducting a comprehensive survey of all students at Iraqi universities, a sample of (200) male and female students was selected from the universities of Baghdad and Al-Mustansiriya, evenly distributed between two scientific colleges (Engineering, and Physical Education and Sports Sciences) and two humanitarian colleges (Political Science, and Tourism Sciences).

The distribution took into consideration the qualitative and geographical balance; 100 questionnaires were delivered to scientific colleges, while other 100 were assigned to humanitarian, each at the same number of both groups. The sample was comprised of student subjects grouped into ones who do participate in team sports and ones who do not, so that the differences between these two groups in SOC could be examined.

## Data Analysis

Analysis of the data was done by SPSS 24 version statistical software after data were entered. Frequencies, means and standard deviations were cut to measure the influence of sports practice on social relations in university youth according to the questions about it included in the Questionnaire.



## Results

**Table 1.** *Sports Contribute to Forming New Friendships*

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation	Result
Strongly Agree	37	18.5%	2.70	1.88	Moderate
Agree	60	30%			
Neutral	45	22.5%			
Disagree	36	18%			
Strongly Disagree	22	11%			
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>			

As the information presented in Table 2 supports, sixty respondents (30 percent of total sample) clearly accept that sports help to build new friendships. And 36 (18.0% of the whole sample) respondents disagree with it. These results indicate a moderate trend related to the statement, having an average score of 2.70 and the respondents' scores were moderately clustered toward a mean with an SD (standard deviation) = 1.88.

To conclude there are different views in university youth about the role of sports to develop friendship. The fact that the responses are generally moderate suggests a range of opinion on this issue, with respondents not taking radically extreme positions for or against the statement. Some people say sports will have them make new friends, while others think it is not so effective.

**Table 2.** *Sports Activities Contribute to Enhancing Cooperation and Teamwork Values*

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation	Result
Strongly Agree	32	16%	2.90	1.170	Moderate
Agree	70	35%			
Neutral	20	10%			
Disagree	64	32%			
Strongly Disagree	14	7%			
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>			

As the indicators in the table above show, 70 respondents, or 35% of the entire sample agree that sports practise develop values related to cooperation and teamwork. Conversely, 64 of the total sample expressed not agreeing with that statement, representing a mean average percentage of 32%. Therefore, the general attitude towards this statement of respondents (as shown by their responses) is neutral that can be seen from the mean value 2.90 and standard deviation 1.170 which shows moderately clustered around mean.

We conclude from this that there is a diversity of opinions among the respondents regarding the contribution of sports activities to promoting values of cooperation and teamwork among university youth. It is evident that the responses are moderate and that the general trend regarding the role of sports activities in promoting values of cooperation and teamwork is characterized by moderation, meaning that the respondents did not adopt extreme positions either in support or opposition to this issue. In other words, some believe that sports activities contribute to enhancing values of cooperation and teamwork among university youth, while others see their impact as limited in this regard. The variation in opinion may differ according to several other factors, such as gender, age, or the respondents' previous experiences. It has been found that most respondents agreed with the idea that sports activities contribute to promoting values of cooperation and teamwork.

**Table 3.** *Sports Contribute to Enhancing Your Ability to Communicate with Others*

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation	Result
Strongly Agree	40	20%			
Agree	20	10%			
Neutral	47	23.5%	2.85	1.31	Moderate
Disagree	69	34.5%			
Strongly Disagree	24	12%			
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>			

The indicators in the above table show that (69) respondents out of the total sample units, accounting for 34.5%, do not agree with the statement that sports contribute to enhancing your ability to communicate with others. This is followed by (40) respondents out of the total sample units, accounting for 20%, who strongly agree with the statement that sports contribute to enhancing your ability to communicate with others. This means that the direction of the statement



according to the respondents' answers is moderate, with a mean of (2.85) and a standard deviation of (1.31), indicating that their responses to this statement are moderately centered.

We conclude from this that there is a variation in opinions regarding the role of sports in enhancing communication skills, as the majority of respondents' answers are moderate. The general trend of the respondents' opinions is characterized by moderation, meaning that the respondents did not take extreme positions on the subject. The variation in opinion may differ according to several factors, including gender, age, or previous experiences of the respondents.

**Table 4.** *Team Sports Are Better Than Individual Sports*

Direction	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation	Result
Strongly Agree	60	30%	2.28	1.49	Moderate
Agree	70	35%			
Neutral	40	20%			
Disagree	18	9%			
Strongly Disagree	12	6%			
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>			

As the table indicates, 70 respondents (35% of the total sample) believe that collective sport activities are more appropriate than individual ones. In contrast, 6 % of the whole sample (n= 12) disagree entirely with this statement. The study results indicate a slight tendency with regard to the statement, with an average of 2.28 and standard deviation of 1.49; this means that responses are "orderly aggregated" around the mean.

We conclude that there is a diversity of opinions and differing viewpoints regarding the statement that collective sports activities are better than individual activities, as the responses to this statement were moderate. This indicates that the respondents did not adopt extreme views, whether supportive or opposing, on this subject. Furthermore, the direction of the respondents' opinions was varied, which may be attributed to factors such as gender, age, experiences, and the cultural background of the respondents.

**Table 5.** *Sports Enhance Social Relationships Among Individuals*

Direction	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation	Result
Strongly Agree	72	36%	2.19	1.126	Moderate
Agree	45	22.5%			
Neutral	38	19%			
Disagree	18	9%			
Strongly Disagree	27	13.5%			
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>			

The signals in the above table show that Sports can greatly improve personal relations between people. "(72) The entire sample becomes even less sceptic for this claim as (36%) strongly agree and advocate that sports is actually correlated with being social. Conversely, (27) respondents, 13.5% of the total sample, totally reject this statement. In general, the pattern of responses does not show a high level of consensus, with mean equals to (2.19) and standard deviation equal to (1.126), which means that they have moderate clustering around the central tendency regarding participants' attitudes towards this issue.

**Table 6.** *Social Relationships Help Increase Cohesion Among University Youth*

Direction	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation	Result
Strongly Agree	50	25%	2.52	1.29	Moderate
Agree	42	21%			
Neutral	56	28%			
Disagree	36	18%			
Strongly Disagree	16	8%			
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>			

The indicators in the table above suggest that sports significantly contribute to strengthening social relationships among individuals. Where 72 respondents, equivalent to 36% of

the sample, strongly agreed that sports enhance these social relationships. On the other hand, 27 respondents, equivalent to 13.5% of the sample, completely disagreed with this idea, considering that sports do not contribute to enhancing social relationships among individuals. Considering the mean, which was (2.19), and the standard deviation (1.126), it is clear that the overall trend of the responses is moderate, indicating a variation in the respondents' opinions and a diversity of views regarding this statement. Despite some opposing opinions, the results show that the majority believe that sports play a positive role in improving social relationships among individuals, especially university students.

We can conclude that sports play an important role in enhancing social relationships among individuals, as the data showed a moderate agreement among the respondents, indicating that sports can be an effective tool in building and strengthening social bonds.

## Discussion

What our research has concluded is that there is an agreement among the results of this study that there is a variation in the respondents' opinions regarding the questions that were distributed to them. Thru the data, it was found that practicing sports positively affects social interaction among university students and contributes to enhancing values of cooperation and teamwork. The data also clarified that sports reduce aggressive behaviors among individuals. And that team sports activities are better than individual activities. The results showed that sports have an impact on mental and physical health. Despite the varying opinions and differing attitudes of university students, the majority agreed that sports play a role in improving their lifestyle by contributing to positive behavior changes and building social relationships that increase the bond among young people. Additionally, sports have the ability to promote peace. Therefore, it can be said that sports have a positive role in the life of university students.

## Recommendations

1. Enhancing community sports infrastructure by establishing free or low-cost collective and individual sports facilities in neighborhoods
2. Reviving traditional popular sports: By organizing traditional popular sports such as long-distance running, popular matches, and the game of "Al-Muhaybis," they strengthen social bonds.
3. Building strategic partnerships with the private sector: The study recommends partnering with the private sector by collaborating with companies to support local sports activities,

providing government youth forums with the latest sports equipment, and offering discounts on gym memberships or prizes for events.

4. Launching sports programs with a unifying character: The unifying aspects of sports are highlighted, contributing to the spread of a culture of openness and communication among different segments of society. Launching sports programs with a unifying character: They highlight the unifying aspects of sports and contribute to spreading a culture of openness and communication among different segments of society.
5. Organizing voluntary community sports tournaments: by organizing voluntary community sports tournaments under the slogan of serving the community.
6. Supervision and professional development in private sports centers: The study recommends supervising private sports halls and setting criteria for selecting the trainers responsible for training the members of these halls.
7. Activating sports media as a means to encourage participation in collective activities and activating sports media as a means to enhance social cohesion and promote a culture of peace thru sports media.
8. Encouraging community participation among university students thru sports: and outside the university campus. Which contributes to enhancing communication between university students and local community members and strengthens their interaction with their social environment.
9. Diversifying sports programs within universities contributes to encouraging university youth to participate in physical activities, which enhances the spirit of cooperation and teamwork among university students and strengthens social bonds between them.
10. Improving the university sports environment and its academic integration: The study recommends equipping university sports halls with the latest modern sports equipment, adopting physical education as a core subject in various disciplines with the same importance as other academic subjects, supporting scientific research related to sports and health, and organizing periodic sports tournaments suitable for both genders to encourage university youth to participate in these tournaments.



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