



# The Role of School Sport in Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals of the Government Program's Vision

**Nofal Saleh Dakhil 1**

Faculty Of Polytechnics, Middle Euphrates Technical University, Iraq

**Ali Karim Fanteel 2**

Faculty Of Polytechnics, Middle Euphrates Technical University, Iraq

**Adnan Hamid Yassin 3**

Faculty of Polytechnics, Middle Euphrates Technical University, Iraq

## Abstract.

### Background

Sustainable development has become an important agenda in education and sport, particularly in strengthening human and natural resource development through school activities and effective institutional management.

### Objectives

This study aimed to apply the concepts of sustainable development to the School Activity Department of the Directorate of Education in Qadisiyah Governorate and to explain the role of effective school administration in supporting sustainable development.

### Methods

This study used a descriptive conceptual approach by analyzing sustainable development concepts, school sport activities, government programs, and institutional cooperation related to youth and sport development in Iraq.

### Results

The findings indicate that Iraq has actively promoted the Sustainable Development Goals through school sport, government programs, sport leadership, conferences, seminars, and cooperation among the Ministry of Youth and Sports, sport federations, the Olympic Committee, the United Nations Office, and international sport organizations.

### Conclusion

School sport and effective school administration play an important role in achieving sustainable development by strengthening human resources, promoting institutional partnerships, and supporting government efforts to activate the Sustainable Development Goals.

**Keywords:** School Sport; Sustainable Development Goals; Government Programs; Physical Education; School Administration.

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\*Correspondence: [nawfal.dakhil@atu.edu.iq](mailto:nawfal.dakhil@atu.edu.iq)

Correspondence author Nofal Saleh Dakhil

Correspondence Author Faculty of Polytechnics, Middle Euphrates Technical University, Iraq



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## INTRODUCTION

Sport has increasingly been recognized as an effective instrument for promoting sustainable development, peace, and social transformation. Since the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, sport has gained international attention because of its contribution to health promotion, quality education, social inclusion, gender equality, and community empowerment. The United Nations acknowledged that sport is an important enabler of sustainable development due to its ability to foster tolerance, respect, cooperation, and participation among individuals and communities. In the educational context, school sport plays a strategic role in shaping healthy, productive, and socially responsible generations.

School sport is not limited to physical activity alone but also functions as an educational and social development medium. Participation in school sport activities contributes to students' physical fitness, psychological well-being, discipline, teamwork, leadership, and social interaction. Previous studies have demonstrated that regular involvement in physical activity positively influences self-confidence, mental health, social cohesion, and educational engagement. Furthermore, school sport supports several Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions).

The relationship between sport and sustainable development has become increasingly important in developing countries, including Iraq, where government institutions seek to strengthen educational and youth development programs through sport-based initiatives. The Iraqi government, through the Ministry of Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Education, has organized various conferences, seminars, and collaborative programs aimed at promoting sustainable development through sport. These initiatives involve partnerships with sport federations, the Olympic Committee, international organizations, and the United Nations Office to strengthen the implementation of sustainable development policies in the educational and community sectors.

In addition, effective school administration is considered an important factor in achieving sustainable development goals within educational institutions. School management contributes to policy implementation, program sustainability, resource management, and the development of inclusive educational environments. The integration of sustainable development principles into school sport programs requires institutional commitment, inter-sectoral collaboration, and long-term strategic planning. Therefore, school sport should be viewed not only as a recreational activity but also as a strategic mechanism for social development, youth empowerment, and community engagement.

Despite the growing recognition of sport as a tool for sustainable development, studies specifically examining the role of school sport within government development visions remain limited, particularly in the Iraqi educational context. Most previous studies have focused primarily on health or physical education outcomes without comprehensively exploring the broader contribution of school sport to sustainable development and government policy implementation. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the role of school sport in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals within the framework of government programs and educational development initiatives in Iraq.

## METHOD

### Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design using a conceptual and literature-based approach. The study focused on analyzing the role of school sport in supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals within the framework of government development programs in Iraq. The research emphasized the exploration of sustainable development concepts, educational policies, institutional cooperation, and the contribution of school sport to social and educational development.

### Participant

This study did not involve human participants directly because it was conducted using a literature review and conceptual analysis approach. The sources of data consisted of government reports, policy documents, international sustainable development frameworks, and previous scientific studies related to school sport, sustainable development, education, youth empowerment, and sport governance. Relevant references from national and international publications were used to support the analysis and interpretation of findings.

### Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. The analysis process involved identifying relevant concepts related to school sport and sustainable development, organizing the information into thematic categories, interpreting relationships between variables, and synthesizing findings from previous literature and policy documents. The thematic analysis focused on several major aspects, including health promotion, quality education, gender equality, social inclusion, institutional partnership, youth empowerment, and government support for sustainable development through school sport programs.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

The findings of this study demonstrate that school sport plays a significant role in supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals within the framework of government development programs in Iraq. The analysis identified several major contributions of school sport, including health promotion, educational development, social inclusion, gender equality, peacebuilding, and institutional partnership.

First, school sport contributes to improving public health and student well-being. Regular participation in physical activity was found to support physical fitness, healthy lifestyles, mental health, and the prevention of non-communicable diseases among children and adolescents. School sport activities also contribute to improving students' self-confidence, psychological stability, and social interaction.

Second, school sport supports the achievement of quality education by developing students' discipline, teamwork, leadership, cooperation, and respect for rules. Sport activities integrated within educational programs provide opportunities for students to acquire social and life skills that are essential for future participation in society and professional life. The findings also indicate that school sport contributes to strengthening inclusive education by encouraging equal participation among students from different social backgrounds.

Third, the results reveal that school sport contributes to gender equality and youth empowerment. Participation in sport activities provides opportunities for girls and boys to develop confidence, demonstrate their abilities, and participate equally in social and educational environments. School sport also challenges traditional stereotypes related to gender roles and promotes social integration within communities.

Fourth, the findings show that school sport promotes peacebuilding and social cohesion. Sport activities create environments that encourage tolerance, mutual respect, cooperation, and intercultural communication. School sport was also identified as an important mechanism for reducing violence, extremism, and social conflict through positive youth engagement and community participation.

Finally, the study found that achieving sustainable development through school sport requires strong institutional support and inter-sectoral collaboration. The Ministry of Education, Ministry of Youth and Sports, sport federations, Olympic institutions, and international organizations play an important role in organizing conferences, seminars, and sport development programs aimed at supporting the implementation of sustainable development policies in Iraq.

### Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that school sport plays an important role in supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within the framework of government development programs. School sport contributes not only to physical health but also to educational improvement, social integration, youth empowerment, and community development. These findings are consistent with the global perspective of the United Nations, which recognizes sport as an important enabler of sustainable development because of its contribution to peace, tolerance, inclusion, and human development.

The results indicate that school sport significantly supports health promotion and well-being among students. Regular participation in physical activity helps improve physical fitness, mental health, and healthy lifestyle behaviors. This finding supports previous studies showing that physical activity positively influences psychological well-being, self-esteem, and social interaction among children and adolescents. Furthermore, sport participation contributes to the prevention of non-communicable diseases and encourages long-term healthy habits. These outcomes are closely aligned with SDG 3 concerning good health and well-being.

In the educational context, school sport contributes to the development of discipline, teamwork, leadership, cooperation, and respect for social rules. The findings suggest that sport-based educational activities strengthen students' social competencies and improve their engagement within the school environment. This result is consistent with previous studies reporting that physical education and school sport support the development of cognitive, emotional, and social skills necessary for lifelong learning and

quality education. Therefore, school sport should be considered an integral component of educational development strategies rather than merely a complementary extracurricular activity.

The study also highlights the contribution of school sport to gender equality and social inclusion. Participation in sport activities provides equal opportunities for boys and girls to develop confidence, demonstrate competence, and participate actively in educational and social environments. This finding is supported by previous research indicating that sport participation can challenge gender stereotypes and promote empowerment among women and youth. Inclusive school sport programs therefore contribute directly to SDG 5 concerning gender equality and social empowerment.

Another important finding is the role of school sport in strengthening peacebuilding and social cohesion. Sport activities create opportunities for communication, tolerance, cooperation, and intercultural understanding among students and communities. In conflict-prone or socially divided societies, school sport can function as a unifying mechanism that reduces social tensions and promotes peaceful interaction. Previous studies have similarly emphasized that sport can serve as an effective platform for promoting peace, reducing violence, and encouraging positive youth engagement within communities.

The findings further demonstrate that sustainable school sport development requires strong institutional collaboration and effective governance. Government institutions, including the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, sport federations, and international organizations, play a critical role in designing and implementing sustainable sport programs. The organization of conferences, seminars, and partnerships reflects Iraq's commitment to integrating sustainable development principles into educational and sport policies. Effective policy coordination, resource management, and institutional support are therefore essential for maximizing the contribution of school sport to sustainable development.

Despite the positive contribution of school sport, several challenges remain, including limited funding, insufficient infrastructure, weak institutional capacity, and social inequalities affecting access to sport participation. These barriers may hinder the effectiveness of sustainable development initiatives within the educational sector. Therefore, future policies should focus on strengthening school sport infrastructure, increasing institutional cooperation, improving management quality, and expanding inclusive sport participation opportunities for all students.

Overall, this study demonstrates that school sport represents a strategic instrument for supporting sustainable development through education, health promotion, social integration, and youth empowerment. Integrating school sport into national development agendas can contribute significantly to achieving long-term sustainable social and educational transformation.

## **CONCLUSION**

School sport plays a strategic role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals through its contribution to health promotion, quality education, gender equality, social inclusion, youth empowerment, and peacebuilding. The findings indicate that integrating sport into educational and government development programs can support sustainable social and human development in Iraq. Effective school administration, institutional collaboration, and government commitment are essential to maximize the contribution of school sport toward sustainable development. Therefore, strengthening school sport policies, improving infrastructure, and expanding inclusive participation opportunities should become important priorities in future educational and development strategies.

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## **AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT**

Nofal Saleh Dakhil contributed to the conceptualization of the study, data collection, literature analysis, and manuscript drafting. Ali Karim Fanteel contributed to the research design, data interpretation,

and critical revision of the manuscript. Adnan Hamid Yassin contributed to the supervision of the study, validation of the findings, and final approval of the manuscript for publication. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND FUNDING

The authors declare no conflict of interest related to the conduct, authorship, or publication of this study.

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