

ORIGINAL ARTICLE**Developing a Cultural Advancement Model for Student Sports in Nasiriyah Province, Iraq: A Grounded Theory Approach****Husham Abdulameer Naeem Aljther¹, Yaghob Badriazarin^{2*}, Sajjad Pashaei³**

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EXTENDED A B S T R A C T**Introduction**

Sport is widely acknowledged as a multidimensional phenomenon that intersects with education, health, culture, and social development. In culturally diverse societies such as Iraq, student sport can serve as a strategic tool for fostering national unity, promoting shared values, and enhancing the physical and psychological well-being of youth. It contributes not only to physical fitness but also to the cultivation of discipline, teamwork, and civic engagement. Despite its potential, the cultural development of student sports in Iraq remains underexplored, especially at the provincial level. Nasiriyah Province, located in southern Iraq, presents a unique socio-cultural context shaped by tribal affiliations, religious diversity, and historical legacies. These factors influence how sport is perceived, practiced, and institutionalized in schools. While national policies emphasize the role of sport in education, implementation at the local level faces challenges such as limited infrastructure, gender disparities, and weak inter-organizational coordination. This study aims to identify and analyze the cultural factors influencing student sports in Nasiriyah and to develop a localized model for cultural advancement in school-based sports. The research responds to the need for a comprehensive understanding of how educational, psychological, social, and institutional variables interact to shape the cultural landscape of student sports in Iraq.

Methodology

To address these objectives, the study employed a qualitative research design based on Grounded Theory, specifically using Glaser's systematic and inductive approach. This method allows for theory generation directly from field data without imposing pre-existing theoretical frameworks. It is particularly suitable for exploring complex social phenomena where variables are interdependent and context-sensitive. The study population included school sports managers, physical education experts, and teachers in Nasiriyah Province. Participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling, ensuring that those with relevant experience and insight were included. Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, meaning no new conceptual insights emerged from additional interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using open-ended questions designed to elicit deep reflections on cultural, educational, and institutional aspects of student sports. Interview

questions covered themes such as teaching practices, student engagement, parental attitudes, administrative support, and cultural perceptions of sport. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed through three stages of coding: open coding to identify initial concepts and label data segments, axial coding to group concepts into categories and explore relationships, and selective coding to integrate categories into a central theoretical framework. Memo writing and constant comparison were used throughout the process to refine emerging themes and ensure analytical rigor. The iterative nature of Grounded Theory enabled the development of a conceptual model grounded in the lived experiences of participants.

Findings

To address these objectives, the study employed a qualitative research design based on Grounded Theory, specifically using Glaser's systematic and inductive approach. This method allows for theory generation directly from field data without imposing pre-existing theoretical frameworks. It is particularly suitable for exploring complex social phenomena where variables are interdependent and context-sensitive. The study population included school sports managers, physical education experts, and teachers in Nasiriyah Province. Participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling, ensuring that those with relevant experience and insight were included. Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, meaning no new conceptual insights emerged from additional interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using open-ended questions designed to elicit deep reflections on cultural, educational, and institutional aspects of student sports. Interview questions covered themes such as teaching practices, student engagement, parental attitudes, administrative support, and cultural perceptions of sport. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed through three stages of coding: open coding to identify initial concepts and label data segments, axial coding to group concepts into categories and explore relationships, and selective coding to integrate categories into a central theoretical framework. Memo writing and constant comparison were used throughout the process to refine emerging themes and ensure analytical rigor. The iterative nature of Grounded Theory enabled the development of a conceptual model grounded in the lived experiences of participants.

Based on the data analysis, a conceptual model was developed to illustrate the dynamics of cultural development in student sports. The central category identified was "Integrated Cultural Development in Student Sports," which connects with subcategories such as educational infrastructure, motivational environment, institutional collaboration, resource allocation, program diversity, and evaluation mechanisms. Educational infrastructure refers to teacher training, curriculum design, and cultural pedagogy. Motivational environment includes incentives, role models, and a supportive school climate. Institutional collaboration involves partnerships between schools, education departments, and sports federations. Resource allocation encompasses financial support, equipment provision, and human resource development. Program diversity reflects varied sports activities tailored to student interests and cultural contexts. Evaluation mechanisms include monitoring, feedback, and continuous improvement systems. This model emphasizes that cultural development in student sports is not a linear process but a dynamic system requiring coordinated efforts across multiple domains.

Discussion & Conclusion

The findings align with previous research indicating that sport is a powerful medium for cultural transmission and social cohesion. Studies by Hajipour (2024), Ghanat (2022), and Halabian et al. (2014) support the notion that ethical education, teacher empowerment, and institutional support are critical for embedding cultural values in sports. Moreover, the research confirms that cultural barriers-such as gender norms, religious constraints, and socio-economic disparities-must be addressed through inclusive and context-sensitive strategies. In Nasiriyah, the limited participation of girls in sports due to conservative norms, lack of female

coaches, and inadequate facilities highlights the need for gender-sensitive policies. Similarly, the absence of structured collaboration between schools and sports organizations undermines the sustainability of cultural programs. The study also underscores the importance of recognizing and celebrating local sports traditions as a means of fostering cultural pride and identity among students.

Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed. At the policy level, it is essential to develop a strategic roadmap for cultural development in school sports, allocate dedicated budgets for cultural and sports programs, and establish monitoring and evaluation frameworks for school sports initiatives. Educational reforms should integrate cultural education into physical education curricula, organize regular training workshops for teachers on cultural pedagogy, and promote interdisciplinary approaches linking sport, history, and ethics. Community engagement must involve parents and community leaders in sports planning, launch awareness campaigns on the benefits of sport for youth development, and encourage volunteerism and mentorship in school sports programs. Infrastructure development should focus on upgrading sports facilities with attention to gender equity, providing culturally appropriate sports attire and equipment, and ensuring accessibility for students from marginalized backgrounds. Program innovation requires designing diverse sports activities reflecting student interests and cultural heritage, using technology and media to enhance student engagement, and fostering student-led initiatives and peer-to-peer learning in sports. Institutional collaboration should be formalized through partnerships between schools and local sports clubs, coordination with ministries of education, youth, and culture, and sharing best practices across provinces to build a national framework.

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on cultural development in student sports by offering a grounded, context-specific model for Nasiriyah Province. It highlights the multifaceted nature of cultural advancement and the need for systemic, inclusive, and sustainable approaches. By addressing educational gaps, social barriers, and institutional weaknesses, stakeholders can transform student sports into a vibrant platform for cultural enrichment and youth empowerment. The proposed model serves as a practical guide for policymakers, educators, and sports professionals seeking to enhance the cultural dimension of school sports in Iraq. Future research may explore the applicability of this model in other provinces and examine its impact on student outcomes over time.

KEYWORDS

Cultural Development, Student Sports, Grounded Theory, Sports Participation, Education System.

