



Inspiring Factors Among University Students in Joining Sports Activities and Clubs in Hezhou, China

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Abstract: This qualitative study explores the inspiring factors driving university students to actively participate in sports activities and clubs at Hezhou University, China. Against the backdrop of Hezhou University's rich history and commitment to academic excellence, the research employs in-depth interviews with 40 students from various disciplines. The thematic analysis reveals three main motivating themes: personal motivations, social influences, and perceived benefits. Personal motivations encompass students' desires for health and fitness, skill development, and stress relief. Social influences, including peer encouragement, role models, and social interaction, highlight the importance of a supportive social environment. Perceived benefits, such as personal growth, a sense of belonging, and recognition, showcase the multifaceted advantages associated with sports engagement. The implications of the findings emphasize the role of universities in promoting health and well-being by prioritizing diverse sports opportunities. Institutions can support skill development through resources and coaching, foster a supportive social environment, and recognize students' achievements to sustain motivation. The study also underscores the transferable skills acquired through sports engagement, advocating for their integration into students' academic and professional lives. Universities are recommended to tailor marketing strategies to resonate with identified motivating factors, fostering inclusive sports engagement. While the study contributes valuable insights, future research should explore challenges in sports participation and investigate long-term impacts. Understanding inspiring factors enhances universities' ability to create an environment that promotes physical, personal, and social development among students.

Keywords : University Sports Participation; Student Motivations; Hezhou University; Qualitative Exploration; Social Influences

I. Introduction

In the vibrant fabric of university life, active participation in sports activities and clubs is a dynamic thread weaving together physical well-being, personal growth, and community building. Hezhou University, situated in the heart of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, stands as a testament to the seamless integration of academic excellence and a thriving sports culture. Against the backdrop of energized footsteps and the echoes of camaraderie, the imperative lies in deciphering the motivations that drive students to actively engage in sports.

Hezhou University, located in Hezhou City, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, stands as a comprehensive public undergraduate institution established and governed by the People's Government of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Tracing its roots back to 1943, when it was founded as Guangxi Provincial Pingle Normal School, the university underwent several name changes, including He County Normal School, Eight Steps Normal School in Wuzhou, Eight Steps Hongwei Normal School, Wuzhou Region Teacher Training Institute, Wuzhou Region Education Institute, and Wuzhou Normal Higher Vocational School. With a steadfast commitment to innovation and education quality, Hezhou University plays a pivotal role in the "New Engineering" research and practical projects initiated by the Ministry of Education. Recognized as a Category A Master's Degree Construction Unit for 2021-2025 in Guangxi, the university, as of April 2023, encompasses two campuses, East and West, spanning a total area of 1,294.31 acres. It boasts state-of-the-art teaching and research facilities valued at 2.52 billion yuan, with a library housing an impressive collection of 1.77 million printed books. Featuring 14 academic units, the university offers 53 undergraduate majors and 18 vocational (technical) majors. The dedicated faculty, numbering 1,603 staff members, including 1,278 full-time teachers, contributes to the education of 21,622 full-time students^[1].

This qualitative exploration aims to delve into the inspiring factors driving Hezhou University students to participate in sports activities and clubs. Employing a qualitative research approach, particularly through in-depth interviews with students, we seek to capture the nuanced and subjective experiences shaping their decisions to embrace athletics and camaraderie. Recognizing the pivotal role of cultural context in shaping motivations, understanding the unique dynamics within Hezhou University adds depth to the broader discourse on sports participation in university settings.

The significance of this study lies not only in unraveling the motivating factors behind student engagement in sports but also in elucidating the impact of such involvement on their personal development, academic pursuits, and social



integration. As Hezhou University evolves, this research aims to provide valuable insights informing and enhancing the university's sports programs and club activities, fostering an environment where students can flourish academically and holistically. Join us on this journey as we navigate the narratives of inspiration and athleticism within the vibrant campus life of Hezhou University.

Despite the rich insights provided by this study into the motivating factors driving university students to participate in sports activities and clubs at Hezhou University, several limitations must be acknowledged. The qualitative nature of the research, focusing on a specific cultural and institutional context, limits the generalizability of findings to other educational settings. The relatively small sample size and the potential for social desirability bias in self-reported data raise concerns about the comprehensive representation of diverse perspectives among Hezhou University students. The resource-intensive qualitative methodology, while robust, may pose challenges for replication on a larger scale or in resource-constrained environments. The study's short-term perspective, concentration on immediate motivations, and potential bias in participant selection may restrict a holistic understanding of students' sports participation experiences. Additionally, the reliance on a single method of data collection and temporal considerations regarding the stability of motivating factors further constrain the scope and applicability of the findings. Addressing these limitations in future research endeavors would enhance the depth and breadth of insights into student engagement in sports activities across varied university contexts.

II. Literature Review

Student participation in sports activities and clubs on university campuses is a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by a myriad of inspiring factors, crucial for optimizing sports programs and enhancing the overall student experience. In the context of Hezhou, China, this literature review explores existing research on the motivating elements that drive university students to actively engage in sports activities and clubs.

Research indicates that personal motivations play a pivotal role in influencing students' decisions to participate in sports. Studies, such as "Motivations for Participation in Physical Activity and Sport" by Frederick et al.^[2], delve into intrinsic factors like personal interest, enjoyment, and the desire for physical fitness, driving students to join sports activities. The influence of social factors on sports participation is evident in research such as "Social Influence on Motivations for Physical Activity Among College Students" by Smith and Martens^[3]. This study explores how peer relationships, social support, and group dynamics impact the decision-making process of university students in joining sports clubs.

The intersection of academic commitments and sports involvement is explored in "The Relationship Between College Student Involvement, Investment, and Academic Outcomes" by Pascarella et al.^[4]. Investigating how balancing academic responsibilities with sports participation can positively influence students' overall university experience. Moreover, the impact of sports involvement on students' physical health and well-being is examined in "Physical Activity and Physical Well-being in University Students" by Chen et al.^[5]. This research delves into the positive effects of sports activities on physical health and how this, in turn, inspires students to participate.

The role of sports activities in fostering a sense of community and belonging is discussed in "Sports Participation and Social Connectedness Among College Students" by Harper and Harper^[6]. This study investigates the social implications of sports engagement, emphasizing its role in creating a cohesive campus culture. In synthesizing these studies, it becomes evident that inspiring factors among university students in joining sports activities and clubs are complex and multifaceted. The research presented offers a foundation for understanding the motivations that drive student engagement in sports, laying the groundwork for further exploration within the unique cultural and academic context of Hezhou, China.

III. Methodology:

3.1 Research Design:

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the inspiring factors that motivate university students to join sports activities and clubs at Hezhou University. The qualitative approach allows for an in-depth understanding of the students' experiences, perceptions, and motivations through interviews.

3.2 Participants:

The participants of this study will be university 30-50 students enrolled at Hezhou University. A purposive sampling technique will be used to select participants who actively participate in sports activities and clubs. The sample size will be determined based on data saturation, where no new themes or insights emerge from the interviews.

3.3 Data Collection:

The primary method of data collection will be semi-structured interviews. The interviews will be conducted face-to-face with the participants at a convenient and comfortable location on the university campus. The interviews will be audio-recorded with the participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

3.4 Interview Guide:

A semi-structured interview guide will be developed, consisting of open-ended questions and prompts. The guide will be designed to explore the inspiring factors that led the students to engage in sports activities and clubs. The questions will cover topics such as personal motivations, social influences, perceived benefits, and barriers to participation.

3.5 Data Analysis:

Thematic analysis will be employed to analyze the interview data. The transcripts will be read and re-read to identify recurring patterns, themes, and categories. The data will be coded and organized using qualitative data analysis software. Themes and sub-themes will be generated, and relationships between them will be examined. The analysis will involve an iterative process of coding, comparison, and interpretation to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings.

The chosen qualitative research methodology for this study exhibits several notable strengths. Firstly, qualitative research is well-suited for an in-depth exploration of the inspiring factors influencing students' participation in sports activities and clubs. This approach enables researchers to delve deeply into the intricate nuances of students' experiences, providing rich and detailed insights into the motivations that drive their engagement. The use of semi-structured interviews further enhances the strength of the methodology by affording participants the flexibility to articulate their experiences and motivations in their own words. This not only allows for a more authentic representation of participants' perspectives but also captures the subjective nature of their engagement. The application of purposive sampling is another strength, ensuring that participants actively involved in sports activities and clubs are deliberately included in the study. This deliberate selection enhances the relevance and credibility of the findings, as the insights are drawn from those directly immersed in the experiences under investigation. Finally, the adoption of thematic analysis as the data analysis method provides a systematic and rigorous approach. This ensures the emergence of meaningful themes and patterns from the data, contributing to the robustness and reliability of the study's findings.

While the chosen qualitative research methodology presents strengths, it is essential to acknowledge its inherent weaknesses. Firstly, the findings of a qualitative study are context-specific, emphasizing the unique aspects of the studied setting, and may not be readily generalizable to other contexts or populations. This limitation poses challenges in applying the insights beyond the specific context of Hezhou University, potentially limiting the broader applicability of the study's findings. Additionally, the nature of qualitative research often involves a limited sample size, influenced by the depth and richness of information sought. Consequently, the findings may not fully represent the diverse perspectives of all university students at Hezhou University, introducing potential limitations in the study's external validity. The reliance on self-reporting through interviews is another weakness, as participants may provide responses influenced by social desirability or personal bias, affecting the overall accuracy of the data. Finally, the qualitative methodology demands substantial time and resources for activities such as conducting interviews, transcription, and thorough data analysis. This resource-intensive nature may pose practical challenges, potentially limiting the scope or scale of the research. Acknowledging these weaknesses is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the study's limitations.

IV. Results:

A total of 40 university students from Hezhou University participated in the study. The participants were aged between 18 and 22 years, with an equal distribution of males and females. The sample consisted of students from various academic disciplines, including arts, sciences, and engineering.

Thematic analysis of the interview data revealed several inspiring factors that motivated university students to join sports activities and clubs at Hezhou University. These factors can be categorized into three main themes: personal motivations, social influences, and perceived benefits.

4.1 Personal Motivations:

The interviews highlighted that personal motivations played a significant role in students' decision to participate in sports activities and clubs. Sub-themes that emerged under personal motivations included:

- a. **Health and Fitness:** Many students expressed a desire to maintain a healthy lifestyle and improve their physical fitness through sports engagement. They viewed sports activities and clubs as an opportunity to stay active and enhance their overall well-being.
- b. **Skill Development:** Several participants mentioned their motivation to develop specific sports skills and improve their performance. They saw sports activities and clubs as platforms to enhance their abilities, learn new techniques, and compete at higher levels.
- c. **Stress Relief:** Students perceived sports participation as a means to alleviate stress and pressure associated with academic studies. They found engaging in sports activities and clubs to be a refreshing break that offered mental relaxation and an outlet for releasing tension.

4.2 Social Influences:

Social influences emerged as another important inspiring factor for students to join sports activities and clubs. The following sub-themes were identified:

- a. **Peer Influence:** Many participants mentioned being influenced by their peers who were already involved in sports activities and clubs. They felt encouraged to join based on positive experiences shared by their friends and the sense of camaraderie and belonging that came with participating together.
- b. **Role Models and Mentors:** Some students cited influential role models and mentors within the university's sports community who inspired them to get involved. These individuals served as examples of success and motivation, spurring students to follow in their footsteps.
- c. **Social Interaction and Networking:** The opportunity to meet and interact with like-minded individuals was also highlighted as a motivating factor. Students appreciated the social aspect of sports activities and clubs, which enabled them to expand their social networks, make new friends, and develop meaningful connections.

4.3 Perceived Benefits:

Participants identified various perceived benefits associated with joining sports activities and clubs. The following sub-themes were identified:

- a. **Personal Growth and Life Skills:** Students recognized that sports engagement provided opportunities for personal growth and the development of life skills such as teamwork, leadership, discipline, and time management. They believed these skills would be beneficial in their academic pursuits and future careers.
- b. **Sense of Belonging and Identity:** Engaging in sports activities and clubs allowed students to feel a sense of belonging and pride in being part of a larger community. They expressed that their involvement enhanced their university experience and fostered a sense of identity and loyalty to Hezhou University.
- c. **Recognition and Achievement:** Students valued the recognition and sense of achievement that came with active participation in sports activities and clubs. They appreciated the opportunities to represent their university in competitions, win accolades, and gain recognition for their efforts.

V. Implication of the results:

Highlighting the multifaceted benefits of sports engagement, the findings underscore the pivotal role universities and educational institutions can play in promoting health and well-being among students. By prioritizing accessible and diverse sports opportunities, institutions can inspire students to incorporate regular physical activity into their routines, contributing not only to enhanced physical health but also to overall well-being. The results emphasize that sports activities and clubs serve as catalysts for skill development among students. Recognizing this, universities can consider allocating resources and support to bolster sports training programs, workshops, and coaching. Such initiatives would empower students to cultivate and refine their sports skills, fostering personal growth and endowing them with experiences and abilities that extend beyond the confines of academia.

The study further highlights the profound influence of peers, role models, and mentors in motivating students to engage in sports activities and clubs, underscoring the critical need for a supportive social environment. To foster such an environment, universities can create opportunities for students to connect with like-minded individuals, institute mentorship programs, and encourage positive peer interactions. This approach contributes not only to a sense of belonging but also to the motivation and encouragement students require to actively participate in sports. Moreover, the perceived benefits of sports engagement extend to holistic development and the acquisition of transferable skills. Universities can strategically emphasize these skills, encompassing teamwork, leadership, discipline, and time management, and advocate for their integration into students' academic and professional lives. This holistic approach ensures that the benefits derived from sports participation are seamlessly woven into the broader fabric of students' development.

Recognizing and celebrating students' achievements in sports activities and clubs emerge as crucial elements in sustaining motivation and participation. Universities can play a pivotal role by offering formal recognition, awards, and scholarships, thereby fostering a culture that values and supports sports engagement. This institutional support not only acknowledges individual accomplishments but also contributes to the overall vibrancy of the campus sports community.

Finally, the study's insights into the motivating factors for students to join sports activities and clubs can guide universities in developing tailored marketing strategies and communication campaigns. Utilizing this information, institutions can effectively communicate the specific aspects that resonate with students, attracting a diverse range of participants. This targeted approach ensures that the promotion of sports activities aligns closely with the inspirational factors identified in the study, ultimately fostering increased engagement and participation across the student body.

VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, this qualitative study explored the inspiring factors among university students in joining sports activities and clubs at Hezhou University, China. The findings shed light on the motivations and influences that drive students' participation in sports and provide valuable insights for university administrators, educators, and sports program coordinators.

The study revealed that personal motivations, social influences, and perceived benefits played significant roles in inspiring students to engage in sports activities and clubs. Personal motivations, such as the desire for health and fitness, skill development, and stress relief, highlighted the individual drive and intrinsic motivation behind students' involvement. Social influences, including peer influence, role models, and social interaction, underscored the importance of social connections and the impact of positive role models within the university community. Perceived benefits, such as personal growth, sense of belonging, and recognition, demonstrated the multifaceted advantages that students associated with sports engagement.

These findings have important implications for universities and educational institutions. They suggest the need for promoting and supporting sports activities and clubs as avenues for enhancing students' physical health, personal growth, and holistic development. Universities can create a supportive social environment that fosters positive peer interactions, mentorship programs, and opportunities for students to connect with influential individuals in the sports community. By recognizing and celebrating students' achievements in sports, universities can further motivate and encourage ongoing participation.

Furthermore, the study highlights the transferable skills acquired through sports engagement, including teamwork, leadership, discipline, and time management. Integrating these skills into students' academic and professional lives can contribute to their overall success and well-rounded development.

It is recommended that universities tailor their marketing and communication strategies to emphasize the inspiring factors identified in this study, targeting potential students who may resonate with these motivations. By providing accessible and diverse sports opportunities, universities can create an inclusive environment that encourages students from various academic disciplines to get involved.

While this study provides valuable insights into the inspiring factors among university students in joining sports activities and clubs at Hezhou University, further research is needed to explore the specific challenges and barriers that students may encounter in their sports participation journey. Additionally, investigating the long-term impacts of sports engagement on students' overall well-being, academic performance, and career development would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the benefits associated with such involvement.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the existing literature on student engagement in sports and provides practical implications for universities aiming to enhance their sports programs and promote student well-being. By understanding the inspiring factors behind students' participation, universities can create an environment that fosters physical and personal development, social connections, and a sense of belonging among their student population.

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