

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Empowerment Through the Court: Basketball-Based PE and Female Student Development

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Abstract

Grounded in liberal and intersectional feminist frameworks, this study investigates the impact of collegiate Physical Education (PE) basketball on female college students' physical fitness, team cohesion, and self-confidence. The central objective was to determine whether structured participation in a basketball-based PE program enhances both physical and psychosocial development, while providing an inclusive learning environment that empowers women in sport. It was hypothesised that regular engagement in PE basketball would yield significant improvements in agility, endurance, coordination, perceived team cohesion, and self-confidence. A mixed-methods sequential explanatory design was employed, combining quantitative assessments of physical performance and psychosocial variables with qualitative focus group discussions (FGDs). Sixty female students aged 18-22 from a state university in the Philippines participated in a 12-week basketball intervention. Physical tests measured agility, endurance, and coordination, while validated scales, the Group Environment Questionnaire (Carron et al., 1985) and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), assessed team cohesion and confidence. Thematic analysis of FGDs explored perceptions of empowerment, social belonging, and gender norms. Results showed significant pre-post improvements in agility ($p < .01$), endurance ($p < .05$), and coordination ($p < .01$), alongside increased team cohesion and self-confidence ($p < .01$). Qualitative findings revealed three interrelated themes: empowerment through movement, social belonging, and breaking stereotypes. Together, these results demonstrate that collegiate basketball can function as a feminist pedagogical space challenging gender hierarchies, building agency, and fostering inclusive participation. The study contributes to global and regional dialogues on gender equity in education, aligning with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 3, 4, and 5, and advocates integrating women-centred, inclusive frameworks into PE curricula to promote holistic empowerment in higher education.

Keywords:

gender equality, good health and well-being, quality education, collegiate physical education, feminist pedagogy, women's basketball.

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Introduction

Basketball, as one of the most globally recognised team sports, has become an integral part of collegiate Physical Education (PE) curricula. Beyond its physical demands, basketball fosters team-

work, resilience, and confidence, making it a rich pedagogical tool in higher education. Universities worldwide increasingly recognise PE not only as a means of promoting physical activity but also as a platform for

shaping identity, inclusion, and empowerment (Ribeiro et al., 2024; Chaudhry et al., 2024). This study aims to determine whether participation in structured basketball activities leads to measurable improvements in both physical and psychosocial domains. It hypothesises that female students participating in a semester-long PE basketball course will demonstrate significant gains in agility, endurance, and coordination, along with increased team cohesion and self-confidence. The study also explores how women interpret these experiences through empowerment, social belonging, and resistance to gender stereotypes.

Unlike many team sports, basketball uniquely combines continuous play, rapid decision-making, and equal participation opportunities within a confined space, requiring constant interaction among players. Its fast-paced, inclusive nature ensures that all participants are actively engaged, thereby maximising opportunities for skill development, communication, and leadership. These characteristics make basketball particularly effective as a pedagogical tool for fostering both physical competence and psychosocial empowerment among female students.

Extensive research underscores the positive impact of sport participation on women's physical and psychosocial development (Hopkins et al., 2022; Sunarti et al., 2024). Recent studies indicate that women participating in team sports experience heightened self-esteem, peer support, and leadership development (Wheatley et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2021). However, persistent barriers ranging from unequal access to facilities to entrenched cultural stereotypes continue to limit women's full participation (Mann & Hacker, 2024; Fraser & Kochanek, 2023). These challenges highlight the importance of adopting feminist-informed approaches to PE that go beyond skill development to address equity and representation.

This study is grounded in liberal feminist ideology, which advocates for

equal access and opportunities for women in male-dominated domains such as sports (Ravn, 2023). Additionally, it incorporates an intersectional perspective (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins et al., 2021), recognising that multiple factors, including socioeconomic status, cultural background, and institutional support, influence female students' basketball experiences. Santillan et al. (2018) demonstrated that cultural adaptation processes shape engagement in unfamiliar contexts, a process that parallels female students' adaptation to structured sports environments. While feminist-informed sport studies have examined gender identity and participation broadly (Adom-Aboagye & Burnett, 2023; Ersöz, 2023), few have investigated the fusion of physical, psychological, and social outcomes of collegiate PE basketball for women in Southeast Asia. By combining quantitative measures of fitness and psychosocial growth with qualitative insights into lived experiences, this study extends existing scholarship. It also draws on localised perspectives, linking to prior research on students' motivation for physical activity (Martin et al., 2017), barriers to exercise participation (Martin & Santos, 2015), and recent innovations in PE assessment (Santos, 2024).

This study contributes to global education and development agendas by aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), and SDG 5 (Gender Equality), highlighting how inclusive Physical Education can promote holistic empowerment for women in higher education.

The main objective of this study is to investigate the effects of collegiate PE basketball participation on female students' (1) physical fitness, (2) team cohesion, and (3) self-confidence. Specifically, the study hypothesises that:

- H1: Female students will demonstrate significant improvements in agility, en-

- durance, and coordination after participating in a 12-week basketball program.
- H2: Female students will report enhanced perceptions of team cohesion and self-confidence following the program.
 - H3: Participation in PE basketball will be associated with qualitative themes of empowerment, social belonging, and resistance to gender stereotypes.

Methods and Materials

Research Design

This study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design (Creswell et al., 2018), in which quantitative data were collected and analysed first, followed by qualitative data to explain and enrich the quantitative findings. The quantitative component measured pre–post changes in physical and psychosocial outcomes, while the qualitative component, conducted through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), explored participants’ lived experiences of empowerment, social belonging, and identity formation. Integration occurred during the interpretation phase, in which qualitative insights were used to contextualise and explain the quantitative results.

Participants and Sampling

Sixty (n = 60) female undergraduate students enrolled in a basketball-based Physical Education course at a public university in the Philippines participated in the study. Participants were non-varsity students with no prior formal basketball training, ensuring a relatively homogeneous baseline in skill proficiency. A purposive sampling approach was utilised, targeting students who had voluntarily enrolled in the PE basketball course and consented to participate in both the physical fitness and psychosocial assessments.

Intervention

The intervention spanned twelve weeks, with two 90-minute sessions per week. Each session included warm-up drills, skill

development, scrimmages, and reflective cool-downs. The duration was balanced with practical semester constraints and provided evidence that significant fitness and psychosocial outcomes can emerge within similar time frames (Herbert, 2022; Burton et al., 2023).

Instruments

Physical Fitness Tests

Three fitness dimensions were evaluated: agility, endurance, and coordination, each chosen for its relevance to basketball performance and alignment with PE learning outcomes.

Agility: measured using the 5-10-5 Shuttle Run Test, which evaluates rapid directional change and neuromuscular coordination (Škorik et al., 2023).

Endurance: assessed through the 12-Minute Cooper Run Test, a validated field measure of aerobic capacity (Cooper, 1968).

Coordination: evaluated using the Wall Toss Test, which measures hand–eye coordination and timing precision (Hodgetts et al., 2021).

These standardised tests were selected because they represent essential components of basketball proficiency: speed, stamina, and control, consistent with PE objectives emphasising holistic physical competence (Santos, 2024; Martin & Santos, 2015). Previous studies have demonstrated their validity and test–retest reliability (Beato et al., 2023), ensuring credible measurement of physical gains throughout the intervention.

Psychosocial Measures

Two validated instruments were used to assess team cohesion and self-confidence, reflecting both individual and collective psychological growth.

Group Environment Questionnaire (GEQ) (Carron et al., 1985) measured team cohesion across four dimensions: individual attraction to group-task (ATG-T), individual attraction to group-social (ATG-S), group integration-task (GI-T), and group integration-social (GI-S). The

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) (Rosenberg, 1965) assessed general self-confidence and self-worth. The RSES has strong cross-cultural validity, as demonstrated by Schmitt and Allik (2005) across 53 countries. This validates its application in the current study to gauge shifts in students' self-esteem and confidence.

The adapted instrument consisted of 20 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Cronbach's alpha values obtained during pilot testing with 20 female students (excluded from the main sample) demonstrated strong internal consistency, 0.89 for team cohesion and 0.87 for self-confidence, indicating high reliability.

Both scales were selected for their strong psychometric properties and cross-cultural applicability in sport and educational settings (Ciampolini et al., 2021; Santos, 2024). The GEQ captures the social and task-oriented bonds that develop in group-based activities. At the same time, the RSES measures confidence as a stable psychological trait, making them well-suited to assess feminist and empowerment-oriented learning outcomes.

Procedures

The study spanned twelve weeks, aligning with the university's regular PE schedule. Sessions were held twice weekly, each lasting 90 minutes. The structure followed a progressive pedagogical sequence:

Weeks 1-4: Foundational skills and conditioning-warm-ups, body coordination, and rule familiarisation.

Weeks 5-8: Team-building, passing drills, and collaborative tactical exercises.

Weeks 9-12: Modified competitive games and reflective discussions emphasising teamwork, communication, and self-assessment.

Instruction followed the principles of feminist pedagogy, emphasising cooperation, inclusivity, and reflection over competition (Azzarito & Solomon, 2005). Throughout the intervention, the instructor encouraged open dialogue and peer

feedback, fostering an environment where women could express leadership and agency without fear of judgment.

Rationale for the Twelve-Week Duration

The twelve-week duration was established to balance pedagogical, physiological, and institutional considerations. Research indicates that perceptible improvements in physical and psychosocial outcomes typically manifest after 8-12 weeks of structured sport participation (Andersen et al., 2019). From an educational standpoint, this duration coincides with the semester cycle in Philippine higher education, enabling integration into regular coursework without disrupting students' schedules. The timeframe thus ensured both ecological validity and pedagogical feasibility.

Qualitative Component: Focus Group Discussions

Following the quantitative assessments, three Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted to provide qualitative depth and interpretive insight. Each session included 6-8 participants, totalling 20 across all discussions. Selection was voluntary, based on participants' willingness to share reflective experiences.

A semi-structured discussion guide was developed around three thematic areas:

- Experiences of empowerment and self-discovery through basketball participation.
- Team belonging and social connection.
- Perceptions of gender norms, stereotypes, and equality in sport.

Each session lasted approximately 60-75 minutes and was held in a quiet, accessible classroom. The discussions were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. Coding involved six steps: familiarisation, generation of initial codes, theme identification, review, definition, and naming. Two independent researchers coded the transcripts and

resolved discrepancies through discussion, ensuring inter-coder reliability. To enhance credibility, member checking was conducted by sharing the synthesised themes with participants for confirmation.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics 26. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were computed for all variables. Paired-sample t-tests compared pre–post changes in physical fitness and psychosocial scores, with statistical significance set at $p < .05$.

Qualitative data were integrated during the interpretation phase in alignment with a sequential explanatory design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The integration phase involved juxtaposing numerical trends with thematic narratives to provide a cohesive understanding of how female students' physical and psychological transformations coexisted within the feminist learning space.

Ethical Considerations

All participants provided informed consent prior to data collection and were explicitly informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Confidentiality was ensured using anonymised identifiers and the storage of data in password-protected files accessible only to the research team. Participants who joined focus group discussions provided additional consent for audio recording and were informed of how recordings would be stored, transcribed, and used solely for research purposes.

Results

Statistically significant improvements were observed across all physical fitness indicators following the intervention. Participants demonstrated enhanced agility, endurance, and coordination, indicating the effectiveness of the basketball-based PE

program in improving functional movement capacity. These findings are consistent with earlier evidence that structured basketball training improves cardiovascular efficiency, agility, and neuromuscular performance in youth (Hassan et al., 2023; Sunarti et al., 2024). The results also mirror those from similar studies in Southeast Asia, which highlight the benefits of sport-based PE in improving female students' physical literacy and motor competence (Martin & Santos, 2015).

From a feminist lens, these improvements go beyond physiological enhancement; they signify women's reclamation of physical agency in environments where athleticism is often coded as masculine (Hayhurst et al., 2021). As participants improved their coordination and stamina, they simultaneously challenged internalised notions of weakness, aligning with Mann and Hacker's (2024) assertion that inclusive PE spaces can dismantle gendered expectations.

Physical Fitness Outcomes (See Table 1.)

Statistically significant improvements were recorded across all three physical domains:

- *Agility*: $t(59) = 7.62, p < .01, d = 1.23$
- *Endurance*: $t(59) = 4.21, p < .05, d = 0.73$
- *Coordination*: $t(59) = 8.55, p < .01, d = 1.42$

Significant gains were also recorded in psychosocial variables. Participants reported higher perceptions of team cohesion and self-confidence following the program, underscoring the social and psychological value of cooperative, feminist-informed PE instruction. These findings echo prior studies emphasising the psychosocial benefits of cooperative, movement-based learn learning among women (Slutzky & Simpkins, 2009; Hopkins et al., 2022; Martin et al., 2016).

Table 1. Pre- and Post-Test Scores on Physical Fitness Measures (n = 60)

Fitness Component	Pre-Test (SD)	Mean	Post-Test (SD)	Mean	t-value	p-value
Agility (sec)	6.1 (0.42)		5.6 (0.38)		7.62	< .01
Endurance (meters)	1400 (185.4)		1600 (210.7)		4.21	< .05
Coordination (catches)	18 (3.5)		25 (4.2)		8.55	< .01

Participants' increased sense of team belonging can be attributed to feminist pedagogical strategies embedded in the intervention, such as collaborative drills, peer-led discussions, and reflective journaling, which emphasised empowerment over competition (Azzarito & Solmon, 2005; Pavlidis et al., 2023).

This aligns with Santos's (2024) recent validation study on fitness centre engagement, which found that cooperative and inclusive environments increase intrinsic motivation and confidence among women participants. The results affirm that basketball, when taught as a social and reflective experience rather than a purely performance-based activity, can strengthen interpersonal bonds and self-efficacy (Martin et al., 2017).

Moreover, these psychosocial gains align with Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) by promoting equal opportunities in physical education and fostering self-esteem among women in higher education (UNESCO, 2015). Through this lens, the program serves not just as a physical fitness intervention but as a transformative social practice that cultivates leadership and agency in female learners.

Psychosocial Gains (See Table 2.)

Team cohesion increased by 0.8 points on a 5-point scale ($p < .01$), while self-

confidence improved by a similar margin ($p < .01$). Statistical analysis of survey results showed a significant positive change in participants' perceptions of team cohesion and self-confidence.

Survey results showed marked improvements:

- *Team Cohesion*: Mean increase of 0.8 points on a 5-point scale ($p < .01$)
- *Self-Confidence*: Mean increase of 0.8 points ($p < .01$)

Qualitative Themes

Focus group discussions revealed three dominant themes (See Table 3.)

Empowerment Through Movement

From a feminist perspective, participants' narratives reflect the reclamation of bodily agency through sport. Improved physical competence enabled women to challenge internalised beliefs about weakness and athletic incapacity, aligning with liberal feminist assertions that access and participation foster empowerment. The participants typically reported a transition from self-doubt to greater physical confidence. A student said, "Before I took this class, I believed that I was not cut out for sports." "Now I have a powerful and quick feeling." According to Adom-Aboagye & Burnett (2023), these testimonies reflect a broader feminist discourse on the reclaiming of bodily agency through sport. It was also noticed that students

experienced moments of empowerment when they reported feeling proud of themselves for learning technical skills such as dribbling and shooting. Even

though they were relatively insignificant in the perspective of competition, these milestones signified major personal accomplishments.

Table 2. Mean Scores on Team Cohesion and Self-Confidence Measures (n = 60)

Psychosocial Construct	Pre-Test Mean (SD)	Post-Test Mean (SD)	Mean Difference	p-value
Team Cohesion	3.4 (0.58)	4.2 (0.63)	0.8	< .01
Self-Confidence	3.1 (0.65)	3.9 (0.60)	0.8	< .01

Table 3. Emergent Themes from Focus Group Discussions

Theme	Description	Sample Quote
Empowerment Through Movement	Students felt stronger and more confident physically and mentally.	“I used to feel weak in sports, but now I feel capable.”
Social Belonging	Peer support and bonding enhanced team enjoyment.	“It felt like we were a team, not just classmates.”
Breaking Stereotypes	Participants expressed pride in challenging gender norms.	“It feels good to show that girls can play just as hard.”

Social Belonging. The theme of social belonging illustrates how collective movement experiences function as sites of relational empowerment. Intersectional feminist theory helps explain how shared experiences reduced feelings of marginalisation and fostered mutual support among women navigating gendered sport spaces. As one participant put it, *“We supported each other through both our successes and our failures.”* That was the deciding factor in the event. According to Chaudhry et al. (2024), this underscores the significance of group activities for developing connections

among peers and promoting mutual respect. Co-experienced athletics may have had long-term benefits for relational development, as evidenced by ties that extended into social networks beyond the confines of the physical education class.

Challenging Gender Norms. One participant stated, *“People did not expect us to be this good.”* Another shared, *“It was a tremendously enlightening and empowering experience.”* These narratives illustrate how participation in basketball enabled students to challenge prevailing gender

expectations and reframe their capabilities. These kinds of experiences, as described by Collins et al. (2021), Hayhurst et al. (2021), and Sherry et al. (2024), are examples of how sports can function as environments that call into question the dominant gender norms in terms of how individuals present themselves in relation to their gender. In addition, students discussed instances in which they felt male classmates or family members grossly misjudged them.

Additionally, they discussed how their basketball performance became a powerful channel through which they reestablished their potential. These impacts are amplified within secure, welcoming environments that affirm women's experiences.

Interpretation and Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Data

The study integrates quantitative and qualitative data to reveal how physical gains and psychosocial growth interact. The measurable improvements in fitness (see Table 1) were complemented by participant narratives of empowerment and increased agency (see Table 3), showing how enhanced physical strength bolstered self-recognition and collective confidence. Parallel increases in team-cohesion scores (see Table 2) aligned with lived experiences of belonging and equality among peers, supporting the view that physical competence, social cohesion and self-confidence are interdependent outcomes of a feminist-informed pedagogy. Crucially, the findings extend prior work by illustrating how intersectional and cultural factors, such as modesty norms, peer judgement, and resource limitations, in a Southeast Asian educational context shape how female students experience empowerment through sport. Through collaborative instruction, reflection-based assessments, and student-led activity planning, basketball served not only as a tool for physical education but also as a socio-political medium for engaging leadership, agency, and critical dialogue about gender. The

model aligns with global efforts toward gender-transformative education.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that collegiate basketball serves not only as a physical training activity but also as a feminist pedagogical space where women negotiate identity, agency, and belonging. Using feminist and intersectional frameworks, this study demonstrates that inclusive PE instruction produces mutually reinforcing physical and psychosocial outcomes. Quantitative results revealed significant gains in agility, endurance, and coordination, consistent with prior research on structured sport participation (Burton et al., 2023; Sunarti et al., 2024), as well as increased self-confidence and team cohesion. Qualitative findings further highlighted empowerment through movement, strengthened social belonging, and the disruption of gender stereotypes, positioning basketball as a site of both skill development and identity formation. These findings align with feminist scholarship emphasising collective physical activity as a means for women to negotiate agency and reclaim space within male-dominated sport contexts (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins et al., 2021; Pavlidis et al., 2023). The sequential explanatory mixed-methods design enabled a deeper understanding of how quantitative improvements in fitness and psychosocial outcomes were reflected in participants' lived experiences (Fraser & Kochanek, 2023).

Conclusion

This study concludes that collegiate basketball courses in PE provide holistic benefits for female college students by simultaneously enhancing physical fitness, psychosocial development, and gender consciousness. The evidence confirms that structured sport interventions contribute not only to immediate health outcomes but also to broader processes of empowerment and inclusion in higher education. From a feminist perspective, the findings demonst-

rate that basketball can serve as a pedagogical tool to challenge entrenched stereotypes, foster solidarity among women, and promote gender equity in sport and educational institutions. While the 12-week intervention produced notable outcomes, limitations such as its relatively short duration and single-institution scope suggest that further research across diverse contexts is needed. Future studies could examine the sustainability of these benefits over longer periods and explore cross-cultural differences in how women experience empowerment through PE basketball.

Pedagogical Implications

The results of this study have significant implications for curriculum design and pedagogy in higher education. PE programs should not be restricted to the acquisition of technical skills but should intentionally incorporate strategies that foster critical reflection, collaboration, and empowerment. Basketball, when viewed through a feminist pedagogical lens, can serve as a vehicle for engaging students in discussions of gender equity, body image, and cultural diversity. Integrating reflective dialogues alongside physical training encourages students to connect their sporting experiences with broader social issues, thereby aligning PE with transformative educational goals. Additionally, the Inclusive PE Framework developed in this study illustrates how institutional inputs, program processes, and immediate outcomes can be linked to long-term societal impacts such as lifelong physical activity engagement and gender empowerment. This framework offers a practical model for educators seeking to align their courses with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those related to health (SDG 3), education (SDG 4), and gender equality (SDG 5). By adopting such approaches, universities can reposition PE as a critical space for advancing both student well-being and social justice.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the 12-week duration, while producing measurable gains, may not capture long-term sustainability. Future research should examine extended interventions and track whether benefits persist across semesters. Second, the use of a single-institution sample limits generalizability. Comparative studies across universities and regions are needed. Finally, while the study integrated quantitative and qualitative data, further exploration of intersectional differences, such as socio-economic status or cultural identity, would provide richer insights. Future studies could also build on Martin & Santos (2015) by examining barriers to sustained sport participation and on Santillan et al. (2018) by analysing cultural adaptation in female athletes.

Policy Recommendations

It is advocated that university administrators, PE curriculum writers, and educators implement the following policy guidelines to maximise the beneficial outcomes that can be achieved by female students participating in collegiate basketball for physical education:

- For University Administrators
Increase funding to ensure equitable access to facilities, equipment, and instructional support for women's PE programs. Implement gender-sensitivity training for faculty and administrators. Integrate inclusive PE indicators into institutional evaluation metrics.
- For PE Curriculum Developers
Design curricula that integrate physical training with structured reflection on gender, culture, and empowerment. Encourage interdisciplinary collaboration with gender studies and social sciences. Conduct regular program evaluations using mixed-methods approaches.
- For PE Teachers and Coaches
Foster classroom environments grounded in respect, collaboration, and encouragement. Use differentiated instruction to accom-

moderate diverse skill levels. Employ inclusive language and actively challenge gender stereotypes in sport contexts.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author used [Quill Bot and Grammarly] to assist with [e.g., improving language clarity, grammar, or phrasing]. The author carefully reviewed and revised the output to ensure accuracy and takes full responsibility for the content of the final manuscript.

Notes on Contributors

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