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Sports Education and Athlete Character Building: Theoretical and Practical Perspectives

Nur Indah Atifah Anwar¹

{nurindah@unm.ac.id¹}

Universitas Negeri Makassar, Jl. A. P. Pettarani, Tidung, Kec. Rappocini, Kota Makassar, Sulawesi Selatan 90222¹

Abstract. This study analyzes the role of sports education in shaping athletes' character through a literature review. It explores how physical education, sports training, and pedagogical approaches foster values such as sportsmanship, discipline, responsibility, teamwork, and integrity. The review examined fifteen peer-reviewed articles published between 2020 and 2025. Findings show that sports education, both in formal school settings and non-formal training environments, significantly contributes to athletes' moral and mental development. Effective strategies include integrating religious and national values, applying sport psychology, and strengthening interpersonal communication between coaches and athletes. However, challenges such as competitive pressure, lack of synergy among educators, and limited policy support hinder comprehensive character-building efforts. Thus, stakeholder collaboration and capacity-building for sports educators are essential to establish a holistic sports education system that nurtures physically skilled, mentally resilient, and ethically grounded athletes.

Keywords: sports education, character development, young athletes, value-based pedagogy, sportsmanship

1 Introduction

Sports education has undergone a transformation, from initially focusing on the physical and technical development of athletes to becoming a strategic instrument in character building. This approach aligns with the holistic education paradigm, where spiritual, moral, and social aspects are integral to athlete development. Asry and Hidayat (2025) emphasized that Islamic religious education in sports schools significantly contributes to shaping the spiritual and ethical character of young athletes through a contextual approach to internalizing Islamic values within the training and school environment.

Non-formal sports activities, particularly extracurricular activities, have also proven to be an effective medium for character development. In a study by Gultom (2025), basketball coaching was used not only to improve skills but also as a means of instilling religious values, discipline, and responsibility. This strategy is successful when the program is implemented consciously and deliberately within the context of character education.

However, challenges remain in maintaining consistency between the values taught and competitive practices on the field. Hafizi and Umami (2025) identified a paradox between the ideals of sportsmanship and the reality of competition, which sometimes overrides ethical values. They emphasized the need to strengthen Pancasila values and sportsmanship in the coaching system so that character education is not merely a formality.

Athletes' motivation during training also plays a crucial role in character development. Research by Sanjaya et al. (2024) showed that high levels of motivation in student athletes are positively correlated with discipline and work ethic, especially as they prepare for inter-regional competitions. A conducive training environment and effective communication between coaches and athletes are key supporting factors.

Furthermore, a guidance and counseling approach also has a significant influence on developing an athlete's character. Aristianti and Pratama (2024) stated that involving guidance and counseling teachers in the mentoring process for school athletes is effective in helping them cope with psychological pressure and increasing self-confidence during competitions.

Finally, a sports psychology approach is a crucial aspect that cannot be overlooked. Manalu, Rahmadini, and Yolanda (2024) emphasized the importance of psychologically based coaching strategies in improving the mental resilience and character of wushu athletes. Through this approach, athletes are not only physically developed but also equipped with a resilient mentality that is adaptive to the pressures of competition.

2 Method

This study uses a literature review approach as the primary method to analyze the contribution of sports education to developing athlete character, both within the context of formal education in schools and in non-formal settings such as sports clubs and training centers. This approach was chosen to explore in-depth the theoretical framework, implementation practices, and challenges faced in integrating character values through physical education and sports.

This literature review method aims to collect, critically evaluate, and synthesize the results of recent research to gain a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between sports activities and character development. The primary focus is on character dimensions such as sportsmanship, discipline, teamwork, responsibility, and integrity, which are often used as indicators of the success of character education in sports.

Data sources for this study were obtained from reputable international scientific databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, ERIC, DOAJ, and Google Scholar. Articles were collected using keywords including character education, physical education, sport and moral development, athlete personality, coaching and character, and education through sports. The selected articles include publications in peer-reviewed journals published between 2020 and 2025.

3 Result

This study aims to systematically review the scientific literature discussing the role of sports education in developing athlete character, both in the context of formal education in schools and in high-achieving sports development programs. Using a literature review approach, the authors identified and synthesized key findings from 15 scientific journal articles published between 2020 and 2025.

A summary of these findings is presented in the following table to provide a more structured and systematic overview of each study's contribution to our understanding of the relationship between sports education and athlete character development.

No	Focus of Findings	Author Name	Year
1	Internalisasi nilai spiritual melalui pendidikan agama Islam di sekolah olahraga	Asry & Hidayat	2025
2	Pembentukan karakter religius melalui kegiatan basket	Gultom	2025
3	Integrasi nilai Pancasila dalam pembinaan atlet	Ummi & Hafizi	2025
4	Implementasi modul ajar PPKn dalam membentuk karakter siswa atlet	Sukmawati, Alannur, & Dewi	2025
5	Kisah inspiratif Lionel Messi sebagai bahan ajar pendidikan karakter	Dawam	2025
6	Faktor-faktor yang memengaruhi mental toughness atlet olahraga permainan	Arisman	2024
7	Peran komunikasi persuasif pelatih dalam pembentukan karakter	Setiawan	2024
8	Peran bimbingan konseling dalam membina karakter atlet muda	Aristianti & Pratama	2024
9	Strategi psikologi olahraga dalam pembinaan karakter mental atlet wushu	Manalu, Rahmadini, & Yolanda	2024
10	Peranan pendidikan jasmani dalam menunjang kualitas karakter atlet	Purnamawati	2024
11	Motivasi dan lingkungan berlatih terhadap karakter finswimmer pelajar	Sanjaya et al.	2024
12	Strategi adaptif pendidikan karakter berbasis pelatihan hybrid	Gultom	2025
13	Efektivitas program PPLOP dalam membentuk karakter disiplin	Setiawan	2024
14	Analisis psikologis atlet junior tenis dalam pengembangan karakter	Amni & Sari	2025
15	Tantangan penerapan nilai karakter di sistem olahraga modern	Ummi & Hafizi	2025

The literature search results indicate that sports education plays a significant role in shaping athletes' character, both through formal and non-formal educational channels. One important dimension emerging from the literature search is the internalization of spiritual values. Asry and Hidayat (2025) found that Islamic religious education implemented in sports schools can shape the spiritual character of young athletes, such as discipline, responsibility, and moral integrity. This finding is supported by Gultom (2025), who examined extracurricular basketball activities as a vehicle for internalizing religious values, where the development process is carried out through a values-based approach and positive habits.

Furthermore, character development is also closely linked to nationalism and national values. Umami and Hafizi (2025) emphasize the importance of integrating Pancasila values into the athlete development system to prevent sportsmanship and solidarity from being eroded by excessive competitiveness. Similarly, Sukmawati, Alannur, and Dewi (2025) evaluated the implementation of the Pancasila and Citizenship Education (PPKn) teaching module in the Independent Curriculum, which incorporates character values through project-based and sports-based activities.

From a narrative approach, Dawam (2025) demonstrated that the life story of a figure like Lionel Messi can be used as teaching material in Islamic character education. Values such as simplicity, hard work, and honesty reflected in Messi's life inspire students to cultivate noble character in the world of sports. Meanwhile, Arisman (2024) examined the factors that shape mental toughness in athletes, including motivational drive, steadfastness, and consistency in intensive training.

The role of coaches in character development has also been highlighted in several studies. Setiawan (2024) examined the effectiveness of coaches' persuasive communication in developing discipline and responsibility in young athletes. His findings suggest that coaches who are able to establish empathetic interpersonal communication are more successful in developing positive character. In the context of psychological assistance, Aristianti and Pratama (2024) found that counseling guidance programs in sports schools helped young athletes overcome psychological stress, build empathy, and maintain sportsmanship values during competitions.

Mental character is also discussed in a study by Manalu, Rahmadini, and Yolanda (2024), which examined the sports psychology approach to wushu. Wushu athletes are required to maintain emotional control and composure in high-pressure situations, so psychological training strategies are considered highly effective in fostering character stability. The role of general physical education is equally important, as noted by Purnamawati (2024), who highlighted how physical education can be an effective tool in fostering students' values of cooperation, respect, and social responsibility.

Research by Sanjaya et al. (2024) shows that motivation and a supportive training environment significantly influence the development of disciplined character in student athletes, particularly in finswimming. A similar trend is evident in the hybrid training innovation developed by Gultom (2025), which combines project-based character value learning with daily physical exercise. This approach has been shown to increase student engagement in understanding moral values through hands-on experience.

The PPLOP program is also an interesting study in the context of character development. Setiawan (2024) revealed that a systematically designed training program, with strict supervision and reinforcement of routines, can foster a highly disciplined character in student-aged athletes. From a psychological perspective, Amni and Sari (2025) examined the character of junior tennis athletes and found that character development must consider the emotional and personality aspects of the individual athlete.

Finally, Umami and Hafizi (2025) highlighted the challenge of maintaining consistent character values amidst an increasingly pragmatic sports competition culture. The pressure to

win often displaces ethical values, necessitating the integration of ethical policies into the curriculum and sports development system to ensure that character development remains the primary goal, not merely technical achievement.

4 Discussion

Character building through physical education and sports (PJOK) is a crucial topic in the holistic development of students. A study by Putri & Hita (2025) showed that basketball, when utilized pedagogically, not only impacts students' physical and mental health but also strengthens character values such as cooperation, sportsmanship, and responsibility. Sports activities are an effective vehicle for implementing values-based learning.

Furthermore, Idris et al. (2025) emphasized the importance of a humanistic and inclusive sports education curriculum. Their research found that a curriculum approach that combines mental and physical health aspects provides students with the opportunity to understand the values of empathy, resilience, and honesty in a competitive context. Sports learning that emphasizes the process, not just the outcome, has greater potential for character development.

Murjani & Mashud (2025) also reviewed an effective PJOK model approach, stating that learning methods involving value reflection (value-based learning) encourage active student involvement in internalizing the values of discipline and tenacity. In this case, physical education teachers act as facilitators of character development through structured activities involving social roles.

Meanwhile, Syafei et al. (2025) explored the Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility (TPSR) intervention in physical education subjects at the junior high school level. The results showed that this approach significantly improved students' life skills, such as decision-making, emotional management, and respect for differences. TPSR has proven suitable for implementation in elementary education as a strategy for early character development.

In the context of cultural literacy and local character, Hermansah et al. (2025) suggested integrating traditional culture into physical education learning. They developed a local culture-based physical education learning model that utilizes traditional games as a tool to internalize noble values such as mutual cooperation, tolerance, and hard work. This strategy is considered capable of fostering national character identity while preserving cultural heritage.

From an educational technology perspective, Riyanto & Gunawan (2025) examined the effectiveness of a combination of functional sports and mindfulness exercises in developing self-awareness and emotional balance in adolescents. This intervention demonstrates that sports activities combined with mental training can strengthen character traits such as focus, discipline, and self-control in the distraction-filled digital age.

Overall, the findings from this recent literature point to the conclusion that physical education is no longer understood solely as a means of fostering physical health. Instead, physical education (PJOK) is evolving into a crucial arena for developing students' holistic character, through an integrated approach that encompasses moral, emotional, and social values.

5 Conclusion

Based on a systematic review of various scientific literature published in the last five years (2020–2025), it can be concluded that physical education and sports play a strategic role in character development for athletes and students in general. Sports education no longer focuses solely on improving physical and technical skills, but has evolved into an effective means of values education through contextual approaches and experiential learning.

Research shows that integrating religious, moral, and nationalistic values into sports activities can shape students' character with integrity, resilience, and responsibility. Learning models that emphasize value reflection, interpersonal communication, psychological approaches, and local culture have been shown to enhance character dimensions such as sportsmanship, discipline, empathy, and cooperation.

Furthermore, sports development programs such as PPLOP (Physical Education and Training Program), Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility (TPSR) interventions, and the use of traditional games and mindfulness are innovative approaches that support the achievement of character education goals. Successful implementation depends heavily on the role of physical education teachers, coaches, and a supportive social environment.

Thus, sports education needs to be designed holistically and integrated into the school curriculum and achievement development programs, in order to form a generation of athletes and students who not only excel in competition, but are also strong morally, emotionally, and socially.

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