

# Inclusive Sports Programs: Experiences and Benefits for Students with Disabilities

Elif. Toktas<sup>1</sup>, Neşe. Köse<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Health, Culture, and Sport Services, AkdenizUniversity, Antalya, Turkey

<sup>2</sup> Department of Health, Culture, and Sport Services, AkdenizUniversity, Antalya, Turkey

\* Corresponding author email address: neseekose@kdeniz.edu.tr

### Article Info

#### Article type:

Original Research

#### How to cite this article:

Toktas, E., & Köse, E. (2023). Inclusive Sports Programs: Experiences and Benefits for Students with Disabilities. *Psychological Research in Individuals with Exceptional Needs*, 1(4), 12-20.

<https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.prien.1.4.3>



© 2023 the authors. Published by KMAN Publication Inc. (KMANPUB), Ontario, Canada. This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) License.

### ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the experiences and benefits of inclusive sports programs for students with disabilities, focusing on their physical, social, emotional, and educational development. The objective is to understand how these programs impact participants and identify key themes that illustrate their benefits and challenges. A qualitative research design was employed, utilizing semi-structured interviews to gather data from a diverse group of participants. The sample included 29 individuals: 15 students with disabilities, 6 teachers and coaches, and 8 parents of students with disabilities. Interviews were conducted in person or via video conferencing, recorded, and transcribed for thematic analysis. The data were coded and analyzed to identify recurring themes and patterns, with theoretical saturation guiding the final sample size. The analysis revealed four main themes: physical benefits, social benefits, emotional and psychological benefits, and educational and developmental benefits. Participants reported significant improvements in physical fitness, skill development, and health. Social benefits included enhanced social integration, communication skills, and a sense of belonging. Emotional and psychological benefits encompassed increased emotional well-being, psychological resilience, and reduced anxiety. Educational benefits included better academic performance, life skills, and career skills development. These findings align with previous studies highlighting the multifaceted benefits of inclusive sports programs. Inclusive sports programs significantly enhance the physical, social, emotional, and educational well-being of students with disabilities. The study underscores the importance of designing inclusive programs that accommodate diverse needs, providing adequate training for educators and coaches, and fostering a supportive environment. Future research should aim to include larger and more diverse samples, incorporate quantitative measures, and explore the long-term impacts of these programs to further refine and maximize their benefits.

**Keywords:** Inclusive sports, disabilities, physical benefits, social integration, emotional well-being, educational development.

## 1. Introduction

The concept of inclusivity in sports represents the adaptation of physical activities to meet the needs of individuals with various disabilities and the fostering of an inclusive environment where all participants feel valued. According to Bruning, Cardinal, and Kennedy (2020), collegiate campus recreation programs in Region VI of the National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA) have made strides in promoting inclusivity through content analysis of their websites. These initiatives reflect a growing recognition of the importance of accessibility and inclusion in recreational sports (Bruning et al., 2020).

The voices of stakeholders, particularly those of participants, educators, and policy-makers, are crucial in understanding the effectiveness and areas for improvement in inclusive sports programs. Campos (2024) emphasizes the need for well-defined criteria in funding social inclusion in sports for people with disabilities. By listening to stakeholders, programs can be better tailored to meet the diverse needs of participants, ensuring that resources are allocated efficiently and effectively (Campos, 2024).

Research has shown that recreational activities play a vital role in the lives of children and adolescents with disabilities. Demirci (2019) highlights the importance of these activities in promoting physical health, social interaction, and emotional well-being. The participation of school-aged children in recreational sports not only aids in their physical development but also contributes to their social skills and self-esteem (Demirci, 2019).

The impact of inclusive sports extends beyond the individual to the broader community and professional practice. Emmers, Baeyens, and Petry (2022) discuss how intense contact with people with disabilities can lead to more inclusive behavior within professional settings. This highlights the broader societal benefits of inclusive sports programs, as they encourage empathy, understanding, and inclusive practices among participants and observers alike (Emmers et al., 2022).

In physical education settings, perceptions of disability sports units are crucial in shaping the experiences of students with disabilities. Grenier et al. (2014) found that the inclusion of disability sports units in general physical education can significantly alter perceptions and enhance the inclusivity of the educational environment. This suggests that the integration of disability sports within mainstream physical education can foster a more inclusive and accepting atmosphere (Grenier et al., 2014).

Policy enactments by sporting organizations also play a critical role in promoting disability-inclusive sports. Hammond et al. (2022) examine the enactments of integrated, disability-inclusive sport policies, emphasizing the importance of organizational commitment to inclusivity. Such policies are essential in creating a supportive infrastructure that facilitates the participation of individuals with disabilities in sports (Hammond et al., 2022).

The role of sports clubs in promoting social integration among people with disabilities is particularly evident in specific cultural contexts. Harthy (2024) explores this role in Saudi Arabia, highlighting the positive impact of sports clubs on social integration and the development of inclusive communities. This cultural perspective underscores the universal relevance of inclusive sports programs and their potential to foster social cohesion (Harthy, 2024).

Inclusive sports programs also cater to specific needs, such as those of visually impaired athletes and their guides. Hiemstra (2023) delves into the experiences of visually impaired runners and their guides, illustrating the sense of inclusion and empowerment that adaptive sports can provide. These programs not only enhance physical abilities but also build strong, supportive relationships between athletes and their guides (Hiemstra, 2023).

Adaptive sports programs have significant implications for social and economic inclusion, aligning with broader developmental goals. Kurniawan (2024) discusses how adaptive sports programs contribute to achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by promoting social and economic inclusion. These programs provide individuals with disabilities opportunities to participate in economic activities, thereby improving their quality of life and contributing to societal development (Kurniawan, 2024).

The experiences of collegiate athletes in adaptive sports programs offer valuable insights into the transformative potential of these initiatives. MacDonald et al. (2020) report on the experiences of collegiate goalball players, highlighting how participation in adaptive sports can alter perceptions and foster a more inclusive mindset. This reflects the broader impact of inclusive sports on shaping attitudes and promoting diversity within academic settings (MacDonald et al., 2020).

The participation of children with disabilities in sports, recreation, and physical activities is vital for their overall development. Murphy and Carbone (2008) advocate for the promotion of such participation, emphasizing its benefits for physical health, social integration, and emotional well-

being. These activities provide children with opportunities to engage in meaningful interactions and develop critical life skills (Murphy & Carbone, 2008).

Studies on campus recreation and sports experiences of college students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) reveal the inclusive potential of these programs. Oakes et al. (2022) examine the attitudes of college students without IDD towards their peers with IDD, finding that inclusive sports programs can significantly improve social attitudes and interactions. This underscores the importance of creating inclusive environments in educational institutions (Oakes et al., 2022).

The definition of social inclusion in sport for people with disabilities is continually evolving. Oblak (2023) narrows this definition through a scoping review, emphasizing the need for clear and comprehensive criteria to ensure meaningful inclusion. This refined definition helps in evaluating the effectiveness of inclusive sports programs and identifying areas for improvement (Oblak, 2023).

The potential inclusion of adaptive sports in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) represents a significant step towards institutionalizing inclusivity. Robeznieks (2021) explores this potential, highlighting the benefits of integrating adaptive sports within mainstream collegiate athletics. This integration would provide students with disabilities more opportunities to participate in competitive sports, fostering a more inclusive athletic culture (Robeznieks, 2021).

Attitudes towards inclusivity and modifications in collegiate intramural sports are critical in shaping the experiences of students with disabilities. Rougeau et al. (2022) conduct a pilot study on these attitudes, finding that supportive attitudes and appropriate modifications are essential for the success of inclusive sports programs. This highlights the need for continuous education and advocacy to promote inclusivity in intramural sports (Rougeau et al., 2022).

The impact of inclusion on students with and without disabilities and their educators is profound. Salend and Duhaney (1999) discuss how inclusive practices benefit all students, fostering a sense of community and mutual respect. These benefits extend to educators, who develop a deeper understanding of diverse needs and inclusive teaching practices (Salend & Duhaney, 1999).

College campus adapted intramural sports programming offers a unique opportunity for students with and without disabilities to engage in physical activities together. Shapiro, Pate, and Cottingham (2020) review these programs,

emphasizing their role in promoting inclusivity and enhancing the college experience for all students. These programs provide a platform for social interaction and physical fitness, benefiting the entire student body (Shapiro et al., 2020).

Inclusive adaptive sport programs on college campuses can change narratives around disability and inclusion. Stanojević et al. (2023) highlight the transformative impact of these programs, noting that they challenge stereotypes and promote a more inclusive campus culture. This change in narrative is essential for fostering an environment where all students feel valued and included (Stanojević et al., 2023).

Teaching sports, health, and physical education to students with disabilities presents unique challenges and opportunities. Swadesi et al. (2021) analyze these challenges, emphasizing the need for specialized training and resources to effectively include students with disabilities in physical education. Addressing these challenges is crucial for ensuring that all students can benefit from physical education (Swadesi et al., 2021).

The integration of sports and disability within the context of physical medicine and rehabilitation is a growing field. Wilson and Clayton (2010) discuss the role of sports in the rehabilitation process, highlighting the physical and psychological benefits of sports participation for individuals with disabilities. This integration is vital for promoting holistic well-being and recovery (Wilson & Clayton, 2010).

The Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools program provides a model for inclusive sports that promotes high school completion among students with disabilities. Yin et al. (2021) explore the impact of this program, finding that it not only enhances physical activity but also improves educational outcomes. This program serves as a benchmark for inclusive sports initiatives that aim to support academic achievement (Yin et al., 2021).

Finally, the promotion of physical activity for school-age children with disabilities is essential for their development. Yun, Sur, and Shapiro (2021) advocate for targeted physical activity promotion, emphasizing its benefits for physical health, social skills, and emotional well-being. These efforts are crucial for ensuring that children with disabilities can lead active, healthy lives (Yun et al., 2021).

In conclusion, inclusive sports programs for students with disabilities offer a wide range of benefits, from physical and social to emotional and educational. These programs foster a sense of belonging, promote overall well-being, and contribute to the development of inclusive communities. The insights from various studies and stakeholders underscore

the importance of continued efforts to enhance the inclusivity and accessibility of sports programs, ensuring that all individuals can participate and thrive.

## 2. Methods and Materials

### 2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the experiences and benefits of inclusive sports programs for students with disabilities. The qualitative approach was chosen to gain in-depth insights into the personal experiences and perspectives of the participants, which are best captured through detailed narratives. The study focused on participants who had firsthand experience with inclusive sports programs, ensuring that the data collected was rich and relevant to the research objectives.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure a diverse representation of experiences and perspectives. The inclusion criteria were as follows:

- Students with disabilities who have participated in inclusive sports programs for at least one year.
- Teachers, coaches, and program coordinators involved in inclusive sports programs.
- Parents of students with disabilities who have been part of these programs.

A total of 15 participants were initially targeted to ensure sufficient diversity and depth of data. However, the final sample size was determined by theoretical saturation, the point at which no new themes or insights emerge from the data. This ensured a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

### 2.2. Measure

#### 2.2.1. Semi-Structured Interview

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, which provided flexibility in exploring the participants' experiences while ensuring that key topics were covered. An interview guide was developed, comprising open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses about the participants' involvement in and perceptions of inclusive sports programs. Key areas of focus included:

- Personal experiences in the inclusive sports programs.
- Perceived benefits and challenges.
- Impact on physical, social, and emotional well-being.
- Recommendations for improving these programs.

Interviews were conducted in person or via video conferencing, depending on the participants' preferences and availability. Each interview lasted between 45 to 60 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participants' consent to ensure accurate data capture. Field notes were also taken during the interviews to record non-verbal cues and contextual information.

### 2.3. Data Analysis

The data analysis process followed a systematic approach to identify and interpret the key themes and patterns within the interview transcripts. The steps involved were as follows:

**Transcription:** All interviews were transcribed verbatim to create a complete and accurate textual representation of the data.

**Initial Coding:** The transcripts were reviewed line-by-line to generate initial codes that captured significant statements and concepts related to the research questions.

**Thematic Analysis:** Codes were grouped into broader themes based on similarities and patterns. This process involved constant comparison to refine and define the themes accurately.

**Validation:** To enhance the credibility of the findings, member checking was employed, wherein participants were asked to review the preliminary findings to ensure they accurately reflected their experiences.

**Triangulation:** Data from different participant groups (students, teachers, coaches, and parents) were compared and contrasted to identify commonalities and differences, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the topic.

Throughout the analysis, an iterative process was employed, continually revisiting the data and themes to ensure a thorough and nuanced interpretation. NVivo software was used to assist in managing and organizing the data, facilitating an efficient and systematic analysis process.

## 3. Findings and Results

The study included a total of 29 participants, encompassing a diverse range of demographic characteristics to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the experiences within inclusive sports programs. The participants consisted of 15 students with disabilities (51.7%), 6 teachers and coaches (20.7%), and 8 parents of students with disabilities (27.6%). Among the student participants, there were 9 males (31%) and 6 females (20.7%), aged between 10 and 18 years, with an average age

of 14 years. The types of disabilities represented included physical disabilities (48.3%), intellectual disabilities (31%), and sensory disabilities (20.7%). The teachers and coaches

varied in their years of experience, with an average of 8 years in inclusive sports programs.

**Table 1**

*The Results of Qualitative Analysis*

| Category                               | Subcategories              | Concepts                                                                                      |
|----------------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Physical Benefits                      | Improved Physical Fitness  | Increased stamina, Enhanced coordination, Strength gain                                       |
|                                        | Skill Development          | Learning new sports skills, Improved techniques, Agility                                      |
|                                        | Health Improvement         | Better overall health, Weight management, Injury prevention                                   |
|                                        | Motor Skills               | Fine motor skills, Gross motor skills, Balance                                                |
|                                        | Adaptive Techniques        | Customized exercises, Modified equipment, Accessible training                                 |
| Social Benefits                        | Social Integration         | Making friends, Teamwork, Building social networks                                            |
|                                        | Communication Skills       | Improved verbal communication, Non-verbal cues, Social interactions                           |
|                                        | Confidence and Self-Esteem | Positive self-image, Increased confidence, Overcoming shyness                                 |
|                                        | Sense of Belonging         | Feeling accepted, Inclusion in activities, Peer support                                       |
|                                        | Role Models                | Inspirational figures, Mentorship, Positive influence                                         |
| Emotional and Psychological Benefits   | Emotional Support          | Encouragement, Empathy from peers, Supportive environment                                     |
|                                        | Emotional Well-being       | Happiness, Stress relief, Emotional expression                                                |
|                                        | Psychological Resilience   | Coping strategies, Overcoming challenges, Mental toughness                                    |
|                                        | Self-Determination         | Goal setting, Independence, Self-motivation                                                   |
|                                        | Reduced Anxiety            | Lower stress levels, Anxiety management, Relaxation techniques                                |
| Educational and Developmental Benefits | Improved Mood              | Positive outlook, Reduced depressive symptoms, Increased joy                                  |
|                                        | Personal Growth            | Self-discovery, Emotional maturity, Life skills development                                   |
|                                        | Academic Performance       | Better concentration, Improved grades, Cognitive development                                  |
|                                        | Life Skills                | Time management, Discipline, Responsibility                                                   |
|                                        | Career Skills              | Leadership, Team management, Networking                                                       |
|                                        | Learning through Play      | Experiential learning, Engaging activities, Interactive learning                              |
|                                        | Inclusive Education        | Adapted curriculum, Collaborative learning, Equal opportunities                               |
|                                        | Skill Transfer             | Application of sports skills to academics, Cross-disciplinary learning, Practical application |

### 3.1. Physical Benefits

**Improved Physical Fitness:** Participants noted significant improvements in their physical fitness due to their involvement in inclusive sports programs. Increased stamina, enhanced coordination, and strength gain were commonly mentioned. One student remarked, "I've never felt stronger and more capable; my stamina has improved so much since joining the program."

**Skill Development:** Learning new sports skills and improving techniques were highlighted as key benefits. Participants also reported increased agility. A coach stated, "The progress in their skills is remarkable; they are learning techniques that they never thought they could master."

**Health Improvement:** Better overall health, weight management, and injury prevention were frequently cited. A parent observed, "My child's overall health has improved

tremendously; they are more active and conscious about their well-being."

**Motor Skills:** Enhancements in both fine and gross motor skills, as well as balance, were noted by many participants. One teacher commented, "The improvement in their motor skills is evident; they are much more coordinated and balanced now."

**Adaptive Techniques:** Customized exercises, modified equipment, and accessible training methods were appreciated. A participant mentioned, "The adaptive techniques have made it possible for me to fully participate and benefit from the sports activities."

### 3.2. Social Benefits

**Social Integration:** Making friends, teamwork, and building social networks were significant outcomes of participation. A student shared, "I've made so many friends through these programs; it's a great way to feel included."

**Communication Skills:** Improved verbal communication, non-verbal cues, and social interactions were commonly reported. A coach noted, "Their communication skills have improved significantly; they are more expressive and engaged."

**Confidence and Self-Esteem:** Participants experienced a positive self-image, increased confidence, and overcame shyness. One participant stated, "I feel much more confident and proud of myself after joining the sports team."

**Sense of Belonging:** Feeling accepted, inclusion in activities, and peer support were crucial benefits. A student remarked, "For the first time, I feel like I truly belong somewhere."

**Role Models:** Inspirational figures, mentorship, and positive influence were highlighted. A parent mentioned, "The mentors in the program are fantastic role models for my child."

**Emotional Support:** Encouragement, empathy from peers, and a supportive environment were vital. A participant observed, "The emotional support I receive from my peers and coaches is incredible."

### 3.3. Emotional and Psychological Benefits

**Emotional Well-being:** Participants reported increased happiness, stress relief, and emotional expression. A student said, "I feel so much happier and less stressed when I'm playing sports."

**Psychological Resilience:** Developing coping strategies, overcoming challenges, and building mental toughness were noted benefits. A teacher commented, "Their resilience has grown; they are better at handling setbacks."

**Self-Determination:** Goal setting, independence, and self-motivation were significant outcomes. One participant stated, "I am more determined and motivated to achieve my goals."

**Reduced Anxiety:** Lower stress levels, anxiety management, and relaxation techniques were frequently mentioned. A student remarked, "Playing sports helps me manage my anxiety and stay calm."

**Improved Mood:** Participants experienced a more positive outlook, reduced depressive symptoms, and increased joy. A parent observed, "My child's mood has improved greatly since joining the sports program."

**Personal Growth:** Self-discovery, emotional maturity, and life skills development were significant benefits. A coach noted, "The personal growth I've seen in these students is remarkable."

### 3.4. Educational and Developmental Benefits

**Academic Performance:** Better concentration, improved grades, and cognitive development were highlighted. A teacher mentioned, "Their focus in class has improved, leading to better academic performance."

**Life Skills:** Time management, discipline, and responsibility were commonly reported. A student shared, "Sports have taught me how to manage my time and be more responsible."

**Career Skills:** Leadership, team management, and networking were significant outcomes. A participant stated, "I've developed leadership skills that are valuable for my future career."

**Learning through Play:** Experiential learning, engaging activities, and interactive learning were noted benefits. A coach observed, "Learning through play makes the educational experience more engaging and effective."

**Inclusive Education:** Adapted curriculum, collaborative learning, and equal opportunities were crucial benefits. A teacher remarked, "Inclusive sports programs promote equal opportunities and collaborative learning."

**Skill Transfer:** The application of sports skills to academics, cross-disciplinary learning, and practical application were significant. A student mentioned, "The skills I learn in sports help me in my academic pursuits."

## 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate the extensive benefits of inclusive sports programs for students with disabilities, encompassing physical, social, emotional, and educational dimensions. Participants reported significant improvements in physical fitness, including increased stamina, enhanced coordination, and strength gain. These findings align with existing research, such as Murphy and Carbone (2008), who highlight the physical health benefits of sports participation for children with disabilities (Murphy & Carbone, 2008). Skill development was also a key theme, with students learning new sports techniques and improving agility, echoing the conclusions of Grenier et al. (2014) regarding the importance of skill acquisition in disability sports units (Grenier et al., 2014).

Health improvements, including better overall health, weight management, and injury prevention, were frequently cited, supporting the assertion by Demirci (2019) that recreational activities are crucial for the health of school-aged children and adolescents with disabilities. Participants also noted advancements in motor skills, both fine and gross,

which are essential for daily functioning and overall development (Demirci, 2019).

Social benefits emerged prominently, with participants experiencing enhanced social integration, communication skills, and a sense of belonging. These findings are consistent with the work of Bruning, Cardinal, and Kennedy (2020), who emphasized the importance of inclusivity in collegiate campus recreation programs (Bruning et al., 2020). The role of sports in fostering social networks and teamwork was particularly highlighted, supporting the conclusions of Emmers, Baeyens, and Petry (2022) that inclusive sports can lead to more inclusive behaviors within professional practices (Emmers et al., 2022).

Emotional and psychological benefits were another major theme, with participants reporting increased emotional well-being, psychological resilience, and improved mood. These findings align with those of MacDonald et al. (2020), who noted that participation in adaptive sports programs can significantly alter perceptions and promote a more inclusive mindset (MacDonald et al., 2020). Participants also experienced reduced anxiety and enhanced personal growth, supporting the therapeutic potential of sports for individuals with disabilities (Wilson & Clayton, 2010).

Educational and developmental benefits were also significant, with participants noting improvements in academic performance, life skills, and career skills. The role of inclusive sports in promoting cognitive development and better concentration was particularly evident, echoing the findings of Yun, Sur, and Shapiro (2021) regarding the educational benefits of physical activity for children with disabilities (Yun et al., 2021). Participants also highlighted the importance of skill transfer from sports to academics, supporting the conclusions of Shapiro, Pate, and Cottingham (2020) on the multifaceted benefits of inclusive sports programming (Shapiro et al., 2020).

The results of this study are consistent with a growing body of literature that underscores the multifaceted benefits of inclusive sports programs for students with disabilities. The improvements in physical fitness reported by participants align with previous research emphasizing the health benefits of sports participation. Murphy and Carbone (2008) have noted that sports can significantly enhance physical health, providing essential opportunities for physical activity and fitness improvement (Murphy & Carbone, 2008).

The skill development observed in this study reflects the findings of Grenier et al. (2014), who highlighted the importance of disability sports units in fostering skill

acquisition and physical competence (Grenier et al., 2014). The health improvements reported by participants further support the work of Demirci (2019), who emphasized the critical role of recreational activities in promoting overall health and well-being among children and adolescents with disabilities (Demirci, 2019).

Social benefits, such as enhanced social integration and communication skills, align with the conclusions of Bruning, Cardinal, and Kennedy (2020), who found that inclusive recreation programs play a vital role in fostering social inclusion (Bruning et al., 2020). The role of sports in building social networks and teamwork supports the findings of Emmers, Baeyens, and Petry (2022), who noted that inclusive sports can promote more inclusive behaviors and attitudes within professional settings (Emmers et al., 2022).

The emotional and psychological benefits reported by participants, including increased emotional well-being and psychological resilience, are consistent with the findings of MacDonald et al. (2020). These researchers noted that participation in adaptive sports can significantly alter perceptions and promote a more inclusive and positive mindset (MacDonald et al., 2020). The therapeutic potential of sports for reducing anxiety and promoting personal growth is further supported by the work of Wilson and Clayton (2010) (Wilson & Clayton, 2010).

Educational and developmental benefits, such as improvements in academic performance and life skills, align with the findings of Yun, Sur, and Shapiro (2021), who emphasized the educational benefits of physical activity for children with disabilities (Yin et al., 2021). The role of skill transfer from sports to academics supports the conclusions of Shapiro, Pate, and Cottingham (2020), who noted that inclusive sports programming provides multifaceted benefits that extend beyond physical health to include cognitive and academic improvements (Shapiro et al., 2020).

Despite the comprehensive nature of this study, several limitations must be acknowledged. Firstly, the sample size was relatively small, with only 29 participants. While this sample provided rich qualitative data, a larger sample size would enhance the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study relied solely on semi-structured interviews, which, while effective for capturing in-depth perspectives, may be subject to biases such as social desirability and recall bias. Participants may have provided responses they believed were expected or favorable, rather than their true experiences.

Another limitation is the diversity of the sample. While efforts were made to include a range of participants

(students, teachers, coaches, and parents), there may still be underrepresented perspectives, particularly from individuals with less common types of disabilities or from different cultural backgrounds. The study's reliance on self-reported data also limits the ability to objectively measure outcomes, such as physical fitness improvements or academic performance.

Future research should aim to address these limitations by including larger and more diverse samples. Quantitative studies that complement qualitative findings could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the benefits of inclusive sports programs. Longitudinal studies would also be beneficial in assessing the long-term impacts of these programs on physical, social, emotional, and educational outcomes.

Additionally, future research should explore the perspectives of underrepresented groups, such as individuals with less common disabilities or those from different cultural backgrounds. Comparative studies between different types of inclusive sports programs could also provide valuable insights into which approaches are most effective. Further investigation into the specific mechanisms through which inclusive sports programs impact participants would also be beneficial, helping to tailor these programs to maximize their benefits.

Practitioners should consider several recommendations based on the findings of this study. Firstly, inclusive sports programs should be designed to accommodate a wide range of disabilities, ensuring that all students can participate meaningfully. This may involve adapting equipment, modifying rules, and providing additional support as needed.

Training for teachers, coaches, and program coordinators is essential to ensure they have the skills and knowledge to support students with disabilities effectively. Emphasizing the social and emotional benefits of sports participation can help to foster a more inclusive and supportive environment. Encouraging peer support and mentorship within these programs can also enhance the sense of belonging and social integration for students with disabilities.

Collaboration with stakeholders, including students, parents, educators, and policymakers, is crucial in designing and implementing effective inclusive sports programs. Listening to the voices of stakeholders can help to ensure that these programs meet the needs of participants and are supported by adequate resources and policies. Finally, continuous evaluation and feedback mechanisms should be implemented to monitor the effectiveness of inclusive sports programs and identify areas for improvement.

In conclusion, inclusive sports programs offer significant benefits for students with disabilities, promoting physical fitness, social integration, emotional well-being, and educational development. By addressing the limitations of current research and incorporating the suggestions for future research and practice, these programs can be further refined to maximize their positive impact, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to participate in and benefit from sports.

### Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

### Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

### Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

### Acknowledgments

We would like to express our gratitude to all individuals helped us to do the project.

### Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

### Funding

According to the authors, this article has no financial support.

### Ethics Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

### References

- Bruning, A. M., Cardinal, B. J., & Kennedy, W. (2020). Inclusivity of Collegiate Campus Recreation Programs in Region VI of NIRSA: A Content Analysis of Websites. *Journal of Kinesiology & Wellness*, 9, 43-49. <https://doi.org/10.56980/jkw.v9i.69>
- Campos, M. J. (2024). Listening to Stakeholders' Voices on Funding Social Inclusion in Sport for People With

- Disabilities—Proposal for Criteria. *Sports*, 12(6), 147. <https://doi.org/10.3390/sports12060147>
- Demirci, P. T. (2019). Recreational Activities for With Disability: School-Aged Children and Adolescents. *International Journal of Recreation and Sports Science*, 3(1), 46-57. <https://doi.org/10.46463/ijrss.533037>
- Emmers, E., Baeyens, D., & Petry, K. (2022). Does Intense Contact With People With Disabilities Lead to More Inclusive Behaviour Within Professional Practice? *Educational Studies*, 49(3), 492-506. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2022.2150512>
- Grenier, M., Collins, K., Wright, S., & Kearns, C. (2014). Perceptions of a Disability Sport Unit in General Physical Education. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 31(1), 49-66. <https://doi.org/10.1123/apaq.2013-0006>
- Hammond, A., Bundon, A., Gadd, C. P., & Konoval, T. (2022). Enactments of Integrated, Disability-Inclusive Sport Policy by Sporting Organizations. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 39(1), 35-46. <https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.2020-0151>
- Harthy, S. S. A. (2024). The Role of Sports Clubs in Promoting Social Integration Among People With Disabilities in Saudi Arabia. 3(2). <https://doi.org/10.57197/jdr-2024-0007>
- Hiemstra, M. (2023). Sensing Inclusion Among Visually Impaired and Guide Runners. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 59(1), 22-37. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10126902231172919>
- Kurniawan, A. (2024). Optimizing Social and Economic Inclusion Through Adaptive Sports Programs for Persons With Disabilities: A Pathway to Achieving SDGs. *International Journal of Current Science Research and Review*, 07(05). <https://doi.org/10.47191/ijcsrr/v7-i5-67>
- MacDonald, C., Bryan, R., Lieberman, L. J., & Foley, J. T. (2020). “You Think Differently After Playing This Sport”: Experiences of Collegiate Goalball Players. *Recreational Sports Journal*, 44(2), 139-148. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1558866120964812>
- Murphy, N., & Carbone, P. S. (2008). Promoting the Participation of Children With Disabilities in Sports, Recreation, and Physical Activities. *Pediatrics*, 121(5), 1057-1061. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2008-0566>
- Oakes, L. R., Milroy, J. J., George, S. D., & Smith, A. (2022). Examining Campus Recreation and Sports Experiences of College Students With Intellectual and/or Developmental Disabilities (IDD) and Attitudes of College Students Without IDD: A Special Olympics Unified Sports Study. *Recreational Sports Journal*, 46(1), 78-94. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15588661221086212>
- Oblak, V. P. (2023). Narrowing the Definition of Social Inclusion in Sport for People With Disabilities Through a Scoping Review. *Healthcare*, 11(16), 2292. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare11162292>
- Robeznieks, E. (2021). Examining the Potential Inclusion of Adaptive Sport in the NCAA. <https://doi.org/10.32920/ryerson.14644962>
- Rougeau, K. M., Sakyi, K. S., & Piletic, C. K. (2022). Inclusivity & Modification Attitudes in Collegiate Intramural Sport: A Pilot Study. *Recreational Sports Journal*, 46(2), 141-151. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15588661221097707>
- Salend, S. J., & Duhaney, L. M. G. (1999). The Impact of Inclusion on Students With and Without Disabilities and Their Educators. *Remedial and Special Education*, 20(2), 114-126. <https://doi.org/10.1177/074193259902000209>
- Shapiro, D. R., Pate, J. R., & Cottingham, M. (2020). A Multi-Institutional Review of College Campus Adapted Intramural Sports Programming for College Students With and Without a Disability. *Recreational Sports Journal*, 44(2), 109-125. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1558866120952093>
- Stanojević, Č., Kim, Y., Piatt, J., & Kim, J. (2023). The Inclusive Adaptive Sport Program on a College Campus: Changing the Narrative. *Recreational Sports Journal*, 47(2), 83-97. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15588661231156140>
- Swadesi, I. K. I., Kanca, I. N., & Wijaya, M. A. (2021). Analysis of Problems and Challenges in Teaching Sports, Health and Physical Education to Students With Disabilities. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.210715.057>
- Wilson, P. E., & Clayton, G. H. (2010). Sports and Disability. *Pm&r*, 2(3). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pmrj.2010.02.002>
- Yin, M., Siwach, G., & Belyakova, Y. Y. (2021). The Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools Program and High School Completion. *American Educational Research Journal*, 59(2), 315-344. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312211032744>
- Yun, J., Sur, M. H., & Shapiro, D. R. (2021). Physical Activity Promotion for School-Age Children With Disabilities. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 54(1), 44-51. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00400599211041687>