# Examining trajectories of gender equality in sport for development: A text mining analysis

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## ABSTRACT

The study aimed to identify key themes in gender equality discourse within sport for development (SFD) literature, map their evolution, and assess the influence of sociopolitical contexts on gender equality approaches in SFD. The methodology involved a text-mining analysis of 526 English-language research articles on gender equality and sport development published from 2000 to 2021. The findings revealed a trajectory in the literature from an acritical stage towards more nuanced activation and liberation stages, varying across sociopolitical contexts. Key themes included the role of cultural norms, the impact of policy frameworks, and the emergence of intersectional approaches. The analysis highlighted a shift from focusing on participation rates to addressing systemic barriers and power dynamics within SFD contexts. While recent literature has developed more sophisticated analytical categories for examining gender equality in sport, there remains a gap in research exploring the role of sociopolitical agents in driving change. The study's semantic configurations align closely with international sports frameworks, suggesting a strong influence of global policy on local SFD initiatives. This research provides a comprehensive, data-driven overview of how gender equality discourses in SFD have evolved over two decades. It underscores the importance of considering sociopolitical contexts in designing and implementing SFD programs to promote gender equality.

## KEYWORDS

# 1. INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality in sport remains a persistent global issue despite significant progress in recent decades. The modern Olympic movement, women leaders' involvement, and elite athletes' testimonies have highlighted this ongoing challenge (De Soysa & Zipp, 2019; Wicker, Breuer, & Von Hanau, 2012). While international and national institutions have adopted resolutions to reduce discrimination against women in sport (Dai & Menhas, 2020; Hylton & Totten, 2006), implementing these policies has often been slow and inconsistent. The gradual increase in women's participation in major sporting events, such as the Olympic Games, exemplifies this progress. Two of the most potent global and national Olympic committees have passed into the women's fold (De Souza et al., 2014; Mountjoy et al., 2018; Tjønndal, 2019). Former rower Tricia Smith, a member of the IOC, has chaired the Canadian Olympic Committee (COC) since 2015 (Mountjoy et al., 2018). In the United States, Susanne Lyons has chaired the National Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC) since January 2019 (Gaston, Blundell, & Fletcher, 2020). However, these achievements mask the underlying complexities and challenges in achieving true gender equality in sport.

In this context, using sport as a tool for development and addressing social issues has gained significant traction. International organizations such as the United Nations (UN), IOC, and FIFA have increasingly incorporated sport into their development agendas  (Darnell, 2012). The 1994 Brighton Declaration marked a pivotal moment for gender equality in sport, aligning with the third-wave feminist movement. Subsequently, gender equality became a focal point in the Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) sector, reinforced by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and later the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The potential of sport to contribute to development goals and peace has been increasingly recognized (Dai & Menhas, 2020; Lindsey & Chapman, 2017). As a common international language, sport has the power to overcome cultural, social, and political barriers, making it a unique tool for promoting equality and social inclusion (Giulianotti, 2011; Lindsey & Darby, 2019). This potential has led to a growing body of scholarly research focused on conceptualizing and recognizing sport's role in achieving development and peace goals (Coalter, 2010; Hancock et al., 2013; Lindsey & Darby, 2019; Moura, 2021; Peachey, 2018).

Despite these efforts and the increasing recognition of sport's potential, a significant gap exists between policy and practice in achieving gender equality in sport. This gap forms the central research problem that this study aims to address. By examining the trajectories of gender equality

discourse in sport for development literature, we seek to understand why, despite numerous initiatives and policies, true gender equality in sport remains elusive.

We employ a sociopolitical development (SPD) framework to address this complex issue. This approach offers a valuable lens for understanding how social power produces and sustains inequities and how individuals can engage in activism to combat oppression and achieve liberation (Watts et al., 2003). The SPD framework is particularly relevant to studying gender equality in sport as it emphasizes the importance of critical awareness, resistance, and action in driving social change.

The SPD framework begins with perceiving and resisting oppression through critical awareness (Watts et al., 2003). It posits that initiating resistance is crucial for producing actions that bring tangible change (Carmen et al., 2015; Kornbluh et al., 2015; Watts et al., 1999). Within this framework, activism emerges as a critical aspect of sociopolitical development (Watts & Guessous, 2006; Watts et al., 2003). Activists work strategically with others to create a more just society according to shared values (Anyiwo et al., 2018; Watts et al., 1999).

In the context of gender equality in sport, this activism can take various forms: supporting women and girls in sport, employing pressure tactics to gain concessions, instituting rules to increase social and political participation, and running organizations with a mission of social change aligned with SDG goals (Chawansky et al., 2017; Dai & Menhas, 2020; De Soysa & Zipp, 2019; Niyonsenga et al., 2021). This process necessitates promoting skills, knowledge, and capacity through community organizing, training, education, and mobilization (De Soysa & Zipp, 2019).

The discourse of gender equality in sport inherently implies social action in the context of oppression and human rights (Donnelly, 2008; Kidd & Donnelly, 2000). By applying the SPD framework to our analysis, we can better understand how cultural and political forces shape the status of women in sport and society at large. This approach allows us to conceptualize how individuals turn to activism, acquire knowledge and analytical skills, and act within political and social systems to combat oppression and achieve liberation (Nanayakkara, 2012; Norman, 2010). By integrating the SPD framework into our analysis of gender equality in sport for development, we aim to provide a more nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between policy, practice, and societal attitudes. This approach allows us to examine the progress, persistent barriers, and strategies to overcome them.

### Sport and Gender Equality

Sport has been used as an observatory of humanitarian objectives and an instrument to improve the living conditions of people facing critical and challenging life postures (Beutler, 2008; Hancock et al., 2013; Moura, 2021). With this in mind, the initiation of development objectives and activities through sport has deepened and solidly developed with the UN (De Soysa & Zipp, 2019; Kidd, 2008), which was then reinforced by partnerships with programs of international sports organizations such as the IOC and FIFA (Darnell, 2012).

Indeed, in the 21st century, UNESCO, IWG, IOC, and other vital bodies have launched many activities to support girls and women worldwide. In 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, date) adopted at the United Nations General Assembly was signed by 189 countries except the United States and several states in the Middle East and Africa (De Soysa & Zipp, 2019).

Many efforts support equality in the following decades. At the same time, the 1994 Brighton Declaration was an establishing moment for gender equality in sport alongside the third-wave feminist movement. Thanks to these efforts, gender equality in sport has become one of the hot topics in the international development sector. Alongside the sport for Development and Peace (SDP) movement, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were launched by the UN, which offered a gender focus structure for the SDP Sector and, after that, a revised version of the Goals embedded in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Furthermore, the UN nominated 2005 as an "International Year of Sport and Physical Education (IYSPE)." Alongside the UN efforts, the IOC declared its 2020 Agenda, which emphasized that they must "foster gender equality" (Gaston et al., 2020). Moreover, in 2017, UNOSDP, established in 2001, shifted the coordination of SDP to the IOC (IOC, 2005).

In April 2014, the IOC and the UN officially united under a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to use the power of sport to promote peace and economic development (Mountjoy et al., 2014). These lobbying efforts were assisted in 2002 by the publication of eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This publication represented an attempt to achieve a comprehensive and coordinated strategic approach to tackling development issues and was based on a more precise definition of priority areas for investment. Significantly, many of these were focused on personal and social inclusion issues that, in the late 1990s, had become associated with sports policy in more

economically developed societies (Coalter, 2010; Eime et al., 2021): helping girls and women and addressing issues of public health (Kidd, 2008, 2010).

However, sport-oriented programs for development goals have not been broad and permanent. Nevertheless, the consciousness of sport's potential to accomplish development goals and peace has increased (Dai & Menhas, 2020; Lindsey & Chapman, 2017). Moreover, as a common international language, sport can overcome cultural, social, and political discrimination and inequalities (Giulianotti, 2011; Lindsey & Darby, 2019).

In addition, scholarly research has paid more attention to conceptualizing and recognizing sport achievement as an agent in providing new millennium development and peace goals (Coalter, 2010; Hancock et al., 2013; Lindsey & Darby, 2019; Moura, 2021; Peachey, 2018). At the same time, the sport has been addressed as an innovative vehicle to meet development goals worldwide and solutions to prevailing problems.

Novel thinking highlights sport as an essential part of a holistic approach to development and peace goals as it frequently furthers local, national, and international development agendas (Lindsey & Chapman, 2017

). The sport could help us create a better world; however, there is still progress to further the purpose of true equality.

### *Sports Activism: Socio-Political Perspective and Gender Equality*

Literature on sociopolitical development mainly begins with perceiving and resisting oppression through critical awareness (Watts et al., 2003). Initiating resistance is crucial for producing actions to bring tangible change (Carmen et al., 2015; Kornbluh et al., 2015; Watts et al., 1999). Activism is a highlighted aspect of the sociopolitical development process (Watts & Guessous, 2006; Watts et al., 2003). Activism should be paid pivotal attention. Individuals became activists who worked strategically with others to provide a more just society according to shared values (Anyiwo et al., 2018; Watts et al., 1999). Therefore, the strategies should change society's or institutions' actions to follow the new trends and principles.

The actions of supporting women and girls in sport, pressure tactics aimed at gaining concessions, instituting the rules to make more opportunities to increase social and political participation, and running organizations with a mission of social change for *SDGs* goals (Chawansky et al., 2017; Dai & Menhas, 2020; De Soysa & Zipp, 2019; Niyonsenga et al., 2021). This process

needs to promote people's skills, knowledge, and capacity through community organizing, training, educating, and mobilizing (De Soysa & Zipp, 2019).

The discourse of Gender Equality in sport implies social action in the context of oppression and human rights (Donnelly, 2008; Kidd & Donnelly, 2000). Moreover, sociopolitical development draws attention to a perception of the cultural and political forces that form one's status in society (Watts et al., 2003). In sport history, there has been allocated to the struggle for gender equality and liberation, which influenced the feminist movement, and objections by women athletes were spread. Women athletes' activism is a powerful barometer of the sociopolitical climate surrounding gender issues in sport. Indeed, sport is a microcosm reflecting society's evolving attitudes towards civil rights movements, with gender equality and women's empowerment emerging as critical catalysts for social change and creating a more equitable society. By adopting this multifaceted approach, we can better understand the transformative potential of sport as a vehicle for social change and gender equality. This study examines the evolution of gender equality approaches in sport for development (SFD) using a socio-political development framework. The research aims to identify key themes in gender equality discourse within SFD literature, map their evolution, and assess the influence of socio-political contexts on gender equality approaches in SFD. It aims to address the following research questions:

1. What are the primary topics addressed in the publications?
2. Are there vocabulary words specific to different periods?
3. What are the key themes and discussions within the literature?

## 2. METHODS

This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) combined with advanced text-mining techniques to analyze the evolution of gender equality discourse in sport for development. Our approach aims to synthesize and compare evidence from a specific topic following a systematic search strategy ((Snyder, 2019), focusing on developing women's sport to inform policymakers and decision-makers in sportive institutions (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Design of the systematic literature review

| Specifications for SRL | Development of Women's Sport |
|---|---|
| Database | Google Scholar, ProQuest, PubMed, Scopus, Springer |
| Periods | 2000-2021 |
| Exclusion criteria | Articles offtopic |
| Number of articles obtained | 526 |
| Number of articles retained | 448 |

Table 1 shows the SLR design in which, with the keywords ("gender equality," "sport for development," "women," "sport," and "organization"), we explored the content of 6 bibliographic databases (Google Scholar, ProQuest, PubMed, Scopus, Springer, Willy), to identify 448 articles which concerned our problematic, from the last twenty years.

Systematic Literature Review: We conducted a comprehensive search across six bibliographic databases: Google Scholar, ProQuest, PubMed, Scopus, Springer, and Willy. The search used keywords including "gender equality," "sport for development," "women," "sport," and "organization." Our initial search yielded 526 articles, which were screened for relevance, resulting in a final sample of 448 articles published between 2000 and 2021.

Text Mining Approach: To facilitate the description and analysis of the textual data, we employed text mining techniques described by Caballero-Julia & Campillo (2021). This approach allows for efficient knowledge generation from mathematical algorithms, aligning with our goal of identifying patterns and trends in the literature over time.

Data Preparation: We extracted the abstract from each article to create a bibliographic matrix containing key information (authors, year, journals). We generated a lexical table – a matrix with word frequencies from this. Each article was assigned a unique identifier (ID) to facilitate data retrieval and control of the selection process.

IRaMuTeQ Software: We utilized IRaMuTeQ software for our text mining analysis due to its robust capabilities in statistical analysis of textual data (SATD). IRaMuTeQ was chosen for its ability to perform:

Correspondence Factor Analysis (CFA): This technique allows for the visualization of proximities between rows of the matrix and the modalities of variables placed on factor axes.

Reinert's Method: This approach identifies profiles or classes using the Descending Hierarchical Classification of word frequencies.

These techniques align with our research objectives by enabling us to identify key themes, track their evolution, and visualize relationships between concepts within the literature.

MANOVA-Biplot Analysis: Following the initial text mining, we conducted a MANOVA-Biplot analysis with a Bonferroni correction, per Caballero-Julia & Campillo (2021) instructions. This additional step enhances our ability to interpret the results by visually representing the multivariate data.

To this end, it is needed to transform the lexical table using a characterization value, "which makes it possible to calculate the relative weights of each word in the matrix, according to their specific presence in an article, instead of focusing only on high frequencies [...] It responds to the formula:

$$f'_{ij} = \frac{f_{ij}}{\sqrt{max_{fi}}\sqrt{max_{fj}}}$$

(Caballero-Julia & Campillo, 2021, p.9)

Data Transformation: To prepare the data for MANOVA-Biplot analysis, we transformed the lexical table using a characterization value. This transformation calculates the relative weights of each word in the matrix based on their specific presence in an article rather than focusing solely on high frequencies. This approach allows for a more nuanced analysis of word usage and importance across the corpus. Our chosen methodology aligns closely with the socio-political development framework that underpins this study. By employing text-mining techniques, we can identify and track the evolution of key concepts related to gender equality in sport over time. This approach allows us to:

1) Map the trajectory of gender equality discourse in sport for development literature from 2000 to 2021.
2) Identify socio-political factors influencing the implementation of gender equality initiatives in sport by analyzing the context and frequency of relevant terms.

3) Assess the alignment between international policy frameworks and local-level sport for development practices by comparing the language used in academic literature with policy documents.

The combination of SLR and text mining techniques provides a robust and systematic approach to analyzing a large corpus of literature. It allows us to identify patterns and trends that might not be apparent through traditional literature review methods. It offers insights into the evolving discourse on gender equality in sport for development.

Limitations and Considerations: While our methodology offers numerous advantages, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations. Text mining, while powerful, can sometimes miss nuanced meanings or context. To mitigate this, we supplemented our automated analysis with a manual review of key articles and themes identified through the text-mining process. Additionally, our focus on English-language publications may limit the global representativeness of our findings. Future research could expand on this by including literature in other languages to provide a more comprehensive global perspective.

## 3. RESULTS

This article systematically reviews the literature by analyzing the research articles from the scientific databases using a statistical analysis of textual data (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Representative articles identified in the systematic literature review

| Classe | ID | Database | Authors | Title |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 11 | Scopus | Eime et al. (2021) | Gender-inclusive sporting environments: the proportion of women in non-player roles over recent years |
| | 115 | Scopus | Krahn (2019) | Sport Policy Praxis: Examining How Canadian Sport Policy Practically Advances the Careers of Nascent Female Coaches |
| | 276 | Scopus | Davis & Edwards (2014) | The new IOC and IAAF policies on female eligibility: old Emperor, new clothes? |
| | 415 | JCR | Wicker et al. (2012) | Gender Effects on Organizational Problems—Evidence from Non-Profit Sports Clubs in Germany |
| | 443 | Scopus | Koca et al. (2011) | Attitudes towards Women's Work Roles and Women Managers in a Sports Organization: The Case of Turkey |
| 2 | 82 | JCR | Adriaanse (2019) | The influence of gendered emotional relations on gender equality in sport governance |

| | 88 | JCR | Tjønndal (2019) | 'I do not think they realize how good we are': Innovation, inclusion, and exclusion in women's Olympic boxing |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 361 | Scopus | Ottesen et al. (2010) | Gender relations in Scandinavian sport organizations – a comparison of the situation and the policies in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden |
| | 395 | JCR | Schweinbenz (2009) | Selling Femininity: The Introduction of Women's Rowing at the 1976 Olympic Games |
| | 252 | Scopus | Goslin & Kluka (2014) | Women and sport leadership: perceptions of Malawi women educated in sport business leadership |
| 3 | 25 | Scopus | Matthews (2021) | Political advances for women and sport in the mid-1990s |
| | 199 | Scopus | Salazar Benítez (2016) | The Fragility of Gender Equality Policies in Spain |
| | 350 | JCR | Giulianotti (2006) | The Sport, Development and Peace Sector: A Model of Four Social Policy Domains |
| | 367 | JCR | Norman (2010) | Feeling Second Best: Elite Women Coaches' Experiences |
| | 376 | Scopus | Kidd (2010) | Epilogue: the struggles must continue |
| 4 | 62 | JCR | Meier & von Uechtriz (2020) | The Key Role of Sport Policies for the Popularity of Women's Sports: A Case Study on Women's Soccer in Germany |
| | 179 | JCR | Adriaanse (2016) | Gender Diversity in the Governance of Sport Associations: The Sydney Scoreboard Global Index of Participation |
| | 256 | JCR | Ha et al. (2014) | Hurdling Over Sex? Sport, Science, and Equity |
| | 316 | JCR | Nanayakkara (2012) | Crossing Boundaries and Changing Identities: Empowering South Asian Women through Sport and Physical Activities |
| | 358 | Scopus | Pelak (2010) | Women and gender in South African soccer: a brief history |

In Figure 1, Reinert's method lets us explore the four crucial topics in the analyzed text. The dendrogram shows two pairs of topics classified according to their significance.
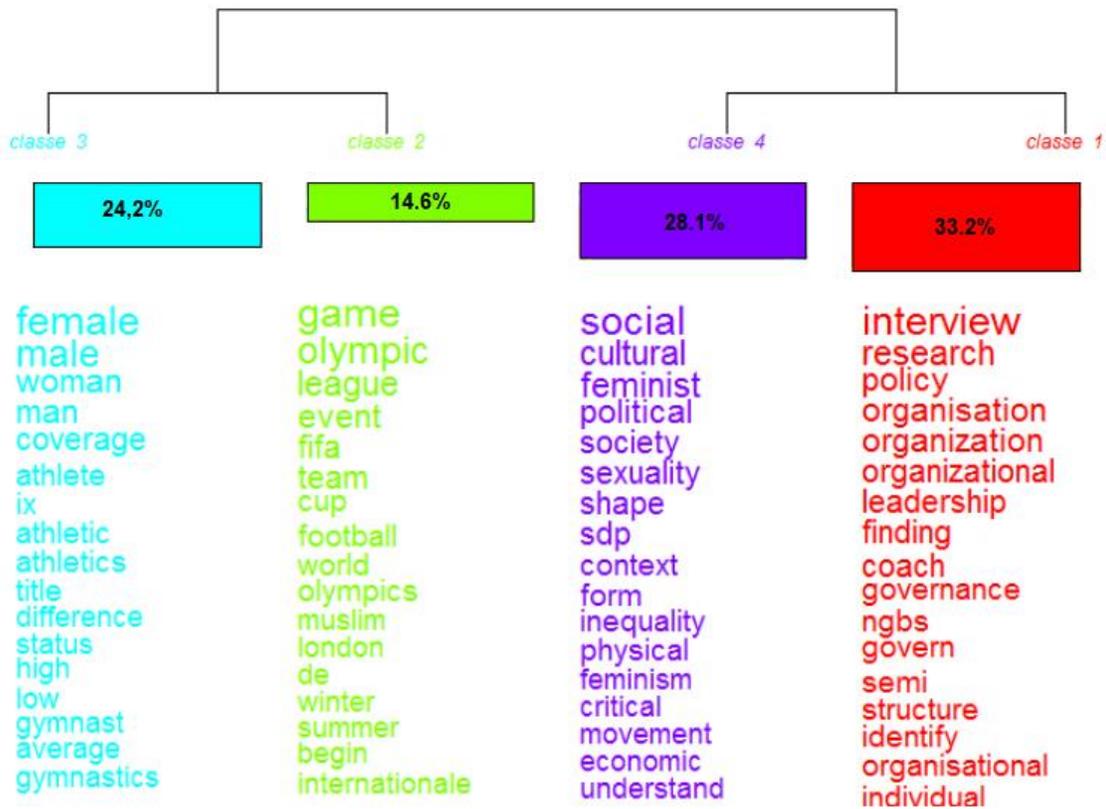
**Figure 1.** Dendrogram of words provided by Reinert's method

According to this solution, a first-class (red) retrieves the words interview, research, policy, organization, and others that could be interpreted as the methodological part of abstracts. At the same time, it reveals a qualitative method predominance using semi-structured interviews as the principal instrument in the organizational research of women's sportive activity. As can be read on the list, leadership, and governance seem to be a combination of words that complete the methodological orientation, which is probably the principal aim of this study.

Another classification (class 4 in purple) presents a feminist perspective on analyzing the social and cultural context by criticizing inequalities. Class 1 and 4, the most frequent (33,2% and 28,1%, respectively), are placed on the first and fourth quadrants of the Correspondence Factor Analysis represented in Figure 1, which could be seen as the cloud of words for each class.

At the other end, classes 2 and 3 retrieve two lists of words with the last two topics (second and third quadrants on the CFA). Class 2, the least frequent (14,6%), talks about the Olympic Games and the top sporting events. Class 3 (24,2%) lists the words female, male, woman, man, coverage,
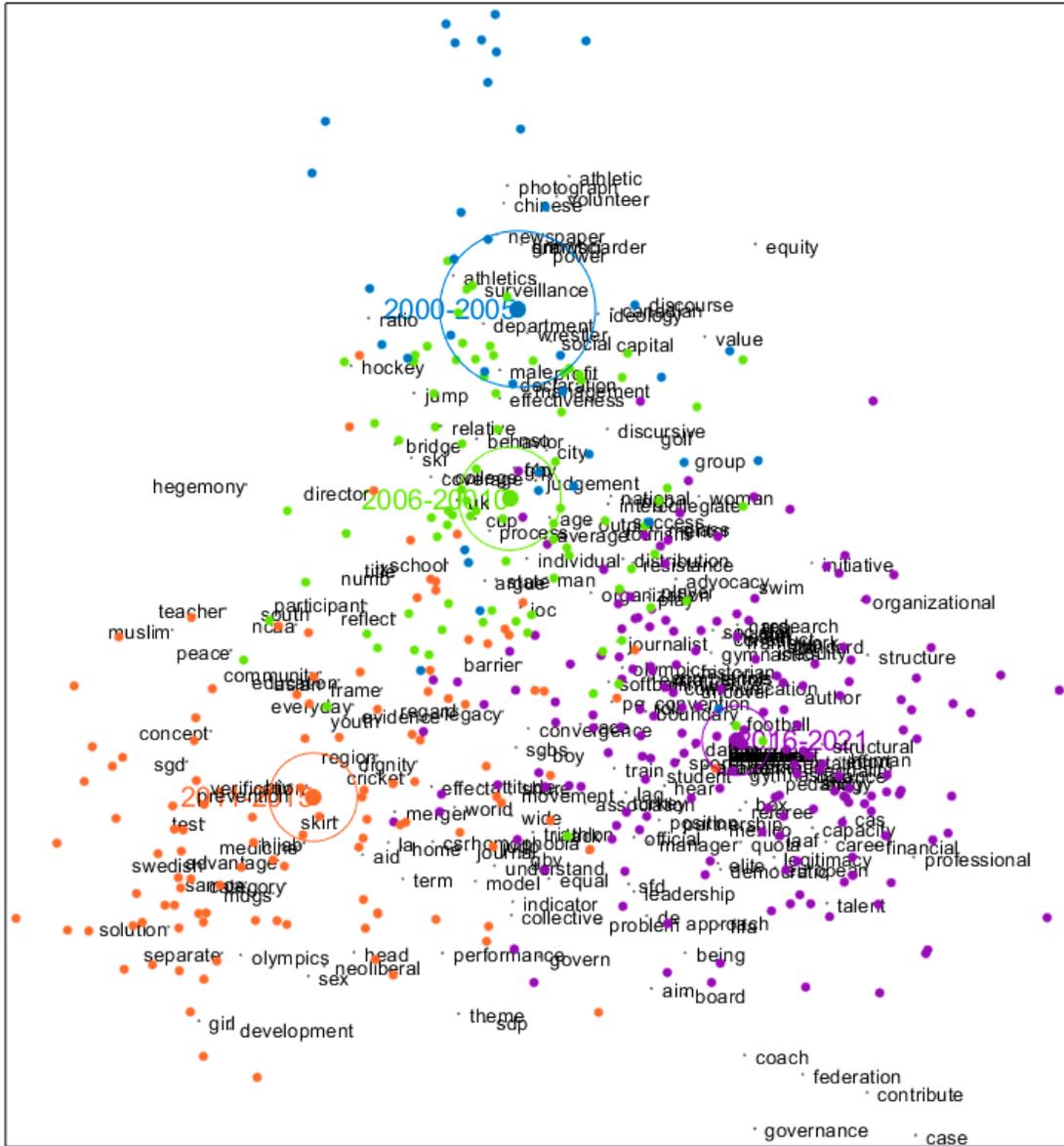
and many others, like an athlete or athletic, retrieving references about differences between women and men, especially about status and coverage issues (Figure 2).
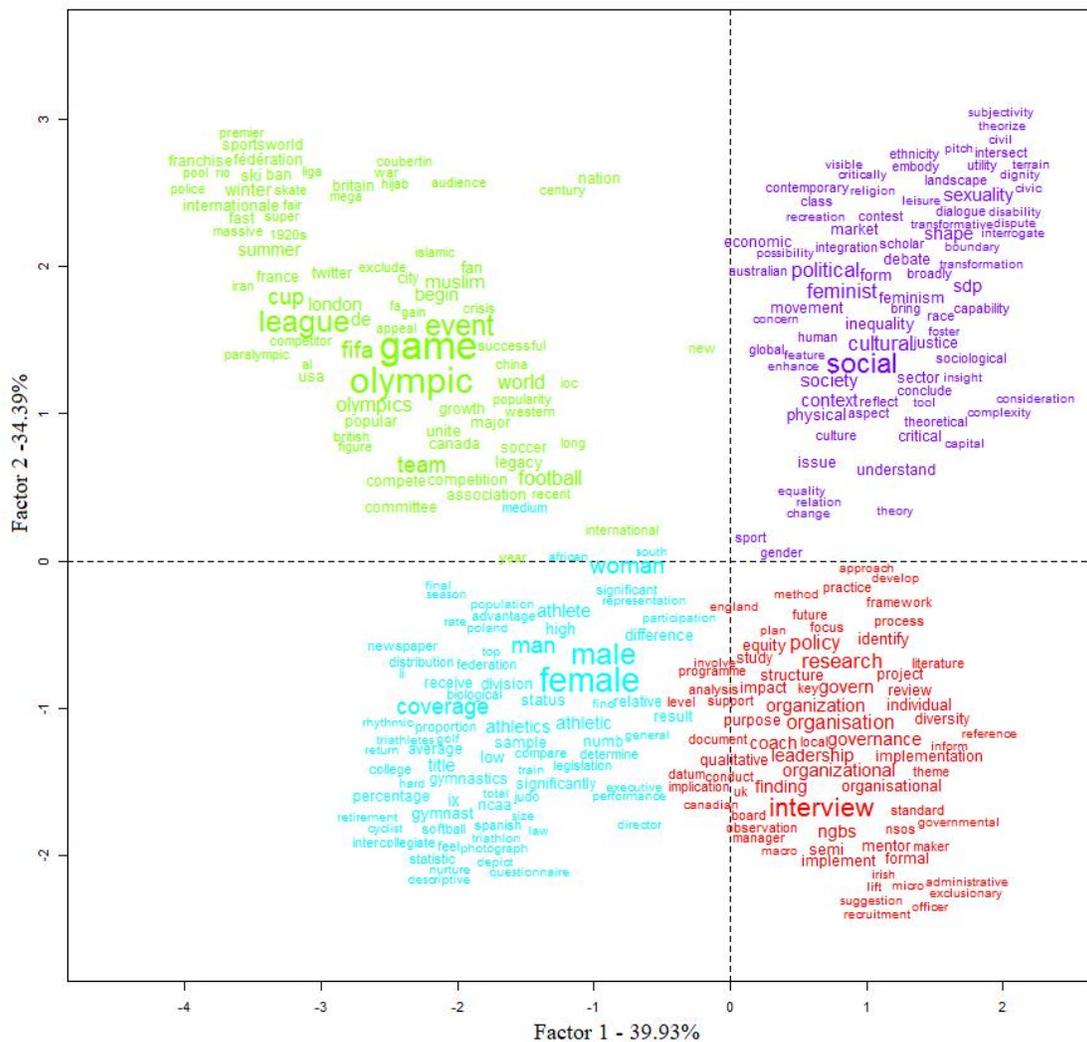


**Figure 2.** Correspondence factor analysis of article texts by year of publication using Reinert's method

By exploring data using MANOVA-Biplot (see Figure 3), the differences could be seen according to the year of publication. In the figure, every single point represents an article, and the circle with the year of publication represents the confidence limits around the barycenter point of the groups (2000-2005, 2006-2010, 2011-2015, and 2016-2021).

**Figure 3.** Canonical/MANOVA-Biplot of text using the year of publication

According to the analysis, every group is well-differentiated and distributed across the plane 1-2 (two first canonical variables), indicating significant abstract differences. In other words, topics are distributed in time, and authors have been inclined to a specific topic in a specific historical period. The analysis with the more characteristic words reveals that from 2000 to 2005, articles have been characterized by the influence of the discourse about inequality in athletic careers (Class 3 in

Reinert's analysis). This topic has lost force after five years (2006-2010), even if no new characteristic topic exists.

From 2011 to 2015, a new set of words focused on femininity, sexism, and gender identities. From 2016 to 2021, the new discourse discusses the development of solutions for women's inclusion in the Olympic Games. However, in the new articles, authors have been interested in the professional development of women's sport and its governance in the sportive structures.

Finally, it is necessary to mention that articles are distributed across the plane, mixing the topics. That means an article could take many topics independently of the historical tendency.

## 4. DISCUSSION

The systematic review of the literature on gender equality in sport for development, utilizing statistical analysis of textual data, reveals several key themes and trends that align with the sociopolitical development framework.

Reinert's method identified four crucial topics in the analyzed texts. The first class, predominantly methodological, highlights a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews to examine organizational aspects of women's sportive activity. This focus on leadership and governance aligns with the sociopolitical development framework's emphasis on understanding power structures and decision-making processes (Watts et al., 2003).

The second class presents a feminist perspective, critiquing inequalities within social and cultural contexts. It aligns closely with the critical awareness stage of sociopolitical development, where individuals begin to recognize and resist oppression (Carmen et al., 2015; Kornbluh et al., 2015).

The third and fourth classes focus on the Olympic Games and top sporting events and gender differences in athletic status and media coverage, respectively. These themes reflect the broader societal context in which gender equality in sport is negotiated and contested.

The MANOVA-Biplot analysis (Figure 3) reveals a clear evolution in research focus over time. From 2000 to 2005, discourse centered on inequality in athletic careers. 2006-2010 saw a shift away from this topic without a new focus emerging. From 2011 to 2015, attention turned to femininity, sexism, and gender identities, indicating a more nuanced understanding of gender issues in sport. The most recent period (2016-2021) has seen increased focus on solutions for women's inclusion in the Olympic Games and professional development of women's sport and its governance.

The early focus on inequalities represents the critical awareness stage, while the later emphasis on solutions and governance reflects the action stage (Carmen et al., 2015; Kornbluh et al., 2015; Watts et al., 1999).

The activism is a highlighted aspect of the sociopolitical development process (Watts et al., 1999; Watts et al., 2003). The evolution of research focus over time demonstrates the dynamic nature of gender equality discourse in sport. The shift from identifying inequalities to exploring solutions and governance structures suggests a maturing field, moving from problem identification to problem-solving. This progression aligns with the sociopolitical development framework's emphasis on moving from awareness to action (Anyiwo et al., 2018; Watts et al., 1999).

However, the study's persistence of themes related to inequalities and sexism indicates that progress is not linear. It reflects the complex nature of sociopolitical development, where advances can coexist with ongoing challenges (Watts et al., 1999). The role of sport as a platform for advancing gender equality is evident in our findings. Sport provides a visible arena for illustrating oppression and inequality, initiating critical awareness (Watts et al., 2003). The feminist discourse and gender equality issues identified in our analysis demonstrate how sport has been used to activate people and institutions toward change

The findings also highlight the importance of considering intersectionality in gender equality efforts in sport. The emergence of themes related to femininity and gender identities in the 2011-2015 period suggests a more nuanced understanding of gender issues, acknowledging that women's experiences in sport are not monolithic but are shaped by various factors, including race, class, and sexuality.

The focus on governance and leadership in recent years aligns with the sociopolitical development framework's emphasis on systemic change. It suggests a recognition that achieving gender equality in sport requires not just individual-level changes but also structural transformations in how sport is organized and governed (Salido-Fernández & Muñoz-Muñoz, 2021).

However, the analysis also reveals ongoing challenges. The persistent focus on inequalities, even in recent years, indicates that despite progress, significant barriers remain. It aligns with the sociopolitical development perspective that social change is often a long-term process involving ongoing struggle and negotiation (Watts et al., 2003). The evolution of research focus from inequality discourse to institutional actions reflects the stages of sociopolitical development from

critical awareness to action. However, the continued presence of inequality themes suggests this process is ongoing and non-linear.

Even if Figures 1 and 2 of the results of the textual analysis show in a preponderant way the interest of researchers in the analysis of the impact of major sporting events, the football World Cup, the Olympic games, and various world championships on the evolution of the representativeness of women and its influence on the economy of a country. However, the prospect of future benefits may hide the real intentions of gender equality because the athletic woman has become an actual product in the making. Therefore, "health and economic" factors can give meaning to the interpretation of the evolution of the status of women who are more or less accepted in a predominantly male environment (Gil-Píriz et al., 2021).

The study has several limitations. The focus on English-language publications may limit the global representativeness of our findings. Additionally, text mining, while powerful, may miss nuanced meanings or context. Future research could address these limitations by including non-English publications and complementing text mining with in-depth qualitative analysis.

## 5. IMPLICATIONS

This study's exploration of gender equality and sport for development (SFD) reveals crucial implications for leveraging sports as a catalyst for social change. Our findings highlight a trajectory from acritical acceptance to activation and liberation, demonstrating the potential of SFD programs to foster critical consciousness and drive collective action.

Considering the difficulties women face, especially in a society with solid patriarchal norms, which restrict their capacity for involvement, mainly in sport, it is crucial to understand how gender equality discussions can be applicable to institute the possible sociopolitical action in the frame of SFD programs.

The results underscore the pivotal role of SFD programs in developing critical consciousness among women participants. To maximize this potential, Incorporating structured reflection sessions into SFD activities encourages participants to analyze and discuss gender-based inequalities they experience or observe. Furthermore, they utilize sports narratives and athlete stories as teaching tools to illustrate overcoming adversity and challenging societal norms. Moreover, they design activities that explicitly link sports skills to broader life skills, emphasizing problem-solving, leadership, and advocacy.

Some previous studies discussing inequalities and feminism in sport centralized mainly on critical consciousness as a component of sociopolitical action (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). Women athletes' stories help move toward constructing a collective identity (Carr, 2003). Therefore, The study highlights how sports can serve as a collective identity formation and mobilization platform. SFD programs can capitalize on this by creating mentorship programs that connect experienced athletes with newcomers, fostering a sense of community and shared purpose—and Organizing community events or campaigns led by program participants, allowing them to apply their developing leadership skills to real-world challenges and establishing networks between different SFD programs to share resources, strategies, and success stories, amplifying the collective voice for gender equality.

Many studies have focused on SFD programs' role in widespread gender equality and women empowerment (Lindsey & Darby, 2019; Peachey, 2018). In addition, from the sociopolitical perspective, critical consciousness is a fundamental step to taking action and involvement (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015), which is the purpose of SFD. While a high level of involvement in activism is companied with the liberation of disenfranchised groups and empowering them (Watts & Flanagan, 2007), this structure offers opportunities to involve individuals in variations forms and ways to develop critical consciousness and transform it into action (Watts et al., 2003). Besides, institutional actions in the form of SFD action plans have a catalyzer role in rapidly developing the process. Finally, discourses in scientific articles about sport and SFD programs point to women's gender equality and empowerment towards transformative action.

The observed trajectory from acritical acceptance to activation and liberation has significant implications for SFD program design. It is first, Adapting program content to participants' current stage of critical consciousness, gradually introducing more complex concepts and action-oriented activities. Second, Implementing long-term programs that allow for sustained engagement, recognizing that the development of critical consciousness and activism is a process that unfolds over time. Third, incorporate regular assessment of participants' progress along this trajectory, using tools like participatory action research to inform program adjustments.

The study emphasizes the catalyzing role of institutional actions in accelerating progress. It is necessary to Advocate for integrating SFD programs into broader gender equality policies at local, national, and international levels, collaborate with educational institutions to develop curricula that combine sports, gender studies, and civic engagement, and engage with sports governing bodies to implement gender equality initiatives beyond participation numbers to address systemic barriers.

Sport is more than a reflection of entertainment or competition. Suppose it tends to become unified, particularly with its political and social role importance, which makes it an essential element in our societies for participation in the development of globalization (Thomson et al., 2020). In this perspective, states and their institutions are increasingly interested in the role that sport plays at the sociopolitical level because it is directly or latently involved in the internal and external policies, interacting as a mediator of social changes, catalyzing the often national and even patriotic energies. Having become a significant phenomenon of social transformations, in the framework of our study, researchers attempt to distinguish the roles of sport in promoting gender equality as one of the objectives of the SDGs through policies and systematic interventions established with further recognition by international organizations.

Concerning sports' broader sociopolitical role, SFD programs should Partner with media outlets to increase the visibility of women's sports and highlight stories of empowerment through SFD programs. Engage male allies in leadership positions within sports organizations to champion gender equality initiatives. Utilize major sporting events as platforms to raise awareness about gender issues and showcase the impact of SFD programs.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

This study illuminates the transformative potential of sport for development programs in advancing gender equality. By fostering critical consciousness, facilitating collective action, and the journey from awareness to activism, SFD programs can play a pivotal role in challenging and reshaping societal norms. As we move forward, we must continue refining our approaches, grounding them in evidence-based practices, and amplifying the voices of women and girls in sports. Through these concerted efforts, we can harness the power of sport to create more equitable and inclusive societies, contributing significantly to achieving sustainable development goals.

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The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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