

Assessing the Relationship between Sports Tourism and Career Development Skills among Chinese University Students

Jie Lu^{1,2,*}, Dr. VIOLETA S. DULATRE¹, Dr. GLICERIA C. LUNAG¹

¹ Graduate School Faculty, Adamson University, Manila, CO 0900, Philippines

² Zhejiang Financial College, Hangzhou, Zhejiang, China

* Corresponding author: Jie Lu (Email: 472478130@qq.com)

Abstract: This study examined the correlation between students' engagement in sports tourism and the enhancement of their career development skills, emphasizing aspects such as self-awareness, job exploration, goal setting, networking abilities, resilience, and career preparedness. The study employed descriptive and correlational research techniques to collect data from 400 respondents using validated survey questionnaires. The findings indicated that students' engagement in sports tourism is predominantly at an average level across active, nostalgic, adventure, health and wellness, and cultural sports tourism, with diminished participation in event-based sports tourism. The evaluation of career development competencies was uniformly average across all parameters. Statistical studies revealed no significant variations in participation or skill rating when respondents were categorized by profile characteristics, including sex and year level. A notable positive link was identified between engagement in sports tourism and the development of career skills, with correlation values varying from moderate to high. This underscores the potential of sports tourism as a viable platform for cultivating transferable skills crucial for professional advancement. According to the findings, policy recommendations were suggested, such as incorporating sports tourism into academic curricula, providing customized skill development programs, cultivating collaborations with sports groups, and guaranteeing equitable access to opportunities. These projects seek to augment students' involvement in sports tourism while fostering their comprehensive personal and professional growth.

Keywords: Sports Tourism, Self-awareness, Career Exploration, Goal Setting Networking Skills, Resilience, Career Readiness.

1. Introduction

Sports tourism, an emerging field within the tourist industry, amalgamates two significant global phenomena—sports and travel—into a vibrant experience that captivates players and spectators. In China, sports tourism has been progressively expanding due to the government's emphasis on cultivating sports as a fundamental element of its national economic development and public welfare plan. The nation has significantly invested in sports infrastructure, hosting major international sporting events such as the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics, and has advocated for sports participation as a component of its “Healthy China 2030” initiative (Zhang et al., 2021). In this environment, Chinese colleges acknowledge the significance of sports tourism as a vital means of student involvement and educational experience. Universities have started promoting student participation in diverse sports tourism activities, including adventure sports, cultural sports festivals, and attendance at international athletic events, serving as leisure and a means for personal and professional growth. Notwithstanding these endeavors, the incorporation of sports tourism inside university environments in China encounters significant obstacles.

Numerous obstacles have arisen that limit the efficacy of sports tourism initiatives in Chinese colleges. A significant concern is the disparate access to resources across institutions. Elite colleges in big cities often possess world-class sports facilities and worldwide collaborations, but many smaller or rural institutions contend with inadequate infrastructure and insufficient institutional support (Chen & Wang, 2020).

Moreover, students often lack knowledge and comprehension about the prospective professional advantages of engaging in sports tourism activities. Many students see sports tourism as a leisure activity, neglecting its potential to develop essential skills for future professions. The poor execution of sports tourism programs across various schools results in several students needing more chances that might significantly influence their personal and professional development (Liu et al., 2019).

Studies indicate that engagement in sports tourism might enhance the acquisition of several career-oriented skills. Participation in various sports tourism activities exposes students to scenarios that need cooperation, leadership, decision-making, flexibility, and problem-solving—highly esteemed skills in the contemporary workforce (Jiang & Han, 2022). Students involved in adventure sports tourism frequently cultivate resilience and risk management skills through physical challenges. In contrast, those participating in cultural sports tourism may improve their cross-cultural communication skills by engaging with individuals from diverse backgrounds (Wu et al., 2020). Moreover, students involved in large-scale event-based sports tourism activities, such as marathons or international sports festivals, often develop essential networking skills and enhance their self-awareness via cooperation and collaboration. These experiences provide practical applications of talents that are difficult to grow in conventional classroom environments (Chen, 2021).

Even with the increasing evidence endorsing the advantages of sports tourism for professional advancement, a

substantial study vacuum persists in comprehending how these activities especially enhance job abilities among Chinese university students. Most current research emphasizes the economic effects of sports tourism or its capacity to foster cultural interchange, while neglecting a crucial area: its impact on students' job preparedness (Zhou & Li, 2020). As experiential learning is increasingly recognized as fundamental to student development, it is crucial to investigate how sports tourism might be systematically included in the university curriculum to improve students' employability and future success. This research is particularly pertinent as Chinese universities encounter increasing pressure to align their curricula with the requirements of a competitive global job market, where employers emphasize technical expertise and soft skills such as communication, leadership, and resilience (Jiang & Han, 2022).

This research examines the correlation between sports tourism engagement and career development competencies among Chinese university students. This study aims to investigate the influence of various forms of sports tourism—namely active sports tourism, event-based sports tourism, nostalgia sports tourism, adventure sports tourism, and cultural sports tourism—on the enhancement of essential career competencies, including self-awareness, career exploration, goal setting, networking, resilience, and career readiness (Zhang et al., 2021). This research will elucidate how sports tourism might be used as an instructional instrument at Chinese colleges to enhance physical and emotional well-being and professional development.

Furthermore, the findings is especially pertinent for Chinese policymakers and university administrators. As China persists in its pursuit of global leadership across several sectors, the need for a workforce possessing both technical proficiency and interpersonal skills is becoming urgent. Incorporating sports tourism into university curricula may provide a creative remedy to this issue, enabling students to cultivate the comprehensive skill sets necessary for today's competitive employment landscape (Zhou & Li, 2020). This research aims to enhance the existing knowledge base by identifying the potential of sports tourism in promoting career development and providing actionable recommendations for universities to fortify their programs, ensuring that students derive maximum benefit from these experiences.

This study addresses the research gap concerning the interaction of sports tourism and career development within Chinese higher education. It provides significant insights into the use of sports tourism as a strategic instrument to augment students' career preparedness. This study also provides essential recommendations for institutions aiming to enhance student development programs, ensuring students are adequately equipped for contemporary employment difficulties.

2. Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to assess the relationship between sports tourism and career development skills among Chinese university students.

Specifically, this study delved into the following questions:

(1) What is the profile of the respondents in terms of:

- 1) sex
- 2) course

(2) What is the level of participation of the students in sports tourism in terms of:

- 1) Active Sports Tourism

2) Event-based Sports Tourism

3) Nostalgia Sports Tourism

4) Adventure Sports Tourism

5) Health and Wellness Sports Tourism

6) Cultural Sports Tourism

(3) Is there a significant difference in the level of participation of respondents in sports tourism when they are grouped according to profile?

(4) What is the assessment of the respondents of their career development skills in terms of:

- 1) Self-awareness
- 2) Career exploration
- 3) Goal setting
- 4) Networking skills
- 5) Resilience
- 6) Career readiness

(5) Is there a significant difference in the assessment of the respondents of the career development skills when they are grouped according to profile?

(6) Is there a significant relationship between level of respondents' participation in sports tourism and their career development skills?

(7) Based on the results of the study, what policy recommendation can be made to strengthen sports tourism in universities and career development skills of students?

3. Hypotheses

There is no significant difference in the level of participation of respondents in sports tourism when they are grouped according to profile.

There is no significant difference in the assessment of the respondents of the career development skills when they are grouped according to profile.

There is no significant relationship between level of respondents' participation in sports tourism and their career development skills.

4. Research Design

This study employed a descriptive comparative correlational research methodology to investigate the relationship between sports tourism and career development competencies among Chinese university students. This technique allowed the researcher to identify the characteristics of the respondents, compare differences across groups based on certain demographics, and examine potential correlations between the level of participation in sports tourism and the development of key work skills. The design was suitable for this research as it offered a comprehensive framework for analyzing the impact of students' involvement in sports tourism activities on their personal and professional growth.

The descriptive component of the research sought to deliver a thorough picture of the respondents' attributes, namely their level of participation in various types of sports tourism. These encompassed active sports tourism, event-based tourism, nostalgic sports tourism, adventurous sports tourism, health and wellness sports tourism, and cultural sports tourism (Creswell, 2014). The descriptive method enabled a fundamental understanding of the frequency and intensity of student participation in these activities, accurately reflecting the overall engagement in sports tourism within the sample group.

The comparative aspect of the research design sought to

determine if significant differences were present in students' participation in sports tourism and the development of work skills, impacted by demographic variables such as gender and academic discipline (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). This aspect of the research enabled the comparison of different groups within the sample, examining if particular demographic variables influenced the degree of involvement in sports tourism or the development of critical work skills. The study investigated if male students engaged more in daring sports tourism or if students in particular courses were more predisposed to develop networking skills through sports tourism activities.

The correlational component of the research design aimed to examine the relationship between engagement in sports tourism and the enhancement of career development skills, such as self-awareness, career exploration, goal setting, networking capabilities, resilience, and career readiness (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A correlational study was appropriate for examining the statistical association between two or more variables: the extent of students' participation in sports tourism and the improvement of career-related skills (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2019). The correlational method, while not demonstrating causality, provided valuable insights into the strength and direction of the relationship between these variables, crucial for tackling the main study question.

The descriptive comparative correlational design was particularly appropriate for this study as it elucidated students' engagement in sports tourism, compared differences among various student groups, and examined potential correlations between participation in sports tourism and the enhancement of career skills. This method yielded an extensive understanding of how sports tourism activities improved students' job readiness and enabled the identification of demographic factors influencing participation and skill enhancement. The correlational feature was essential for assessing the extent to which heightened involvement in sports tourism linked with enhanced professional abilities, providing useful insights for educators and policymakers.

5. Sampling Method

This study employed a stratified sampling method to ensure that the sample adequately represented the many populations of university students in China. Stratified sampling included dividing the population into distinct groupings, or strata, and randomly picking individuals from each stratum. This method was particularly appropriate for this research, since it facilitated the inclusion of students from varied demographics and academic fields, ensuring that the sample appropriately reflected the wider student population involved in sports tourism.

The study's population consisted of students from five institutions in China. These universities were selected to represent several geographical regions, institutional types (e.g., public and private), and academic fields (e.g., technical, comprehensive, and liberal arts). This technique ensured that the sample represented the diversity of the student population in China, hence improving the generalizability of the results to the broader student body.

The stratified sampling method involved dividing the student population at each school into specific strata based on critical demographic criteria, such as gender and topic of study. This ensured adequate representation of students across several academic disciplines and gender categories in the sample. A random sample of students was selected from each

stratum to engage in the investigation. This method yielded a balanced and representative sample that effectively reflected the diversity of students in terms of demographic and academic characteristics.

The stratified sampling strategy was particularly beneficial in this study since it ensured proportional representation of all pertinent subgroups within the student population. For example, if one university had a higher percentage of students in health sciences while another focused on engineering programs, this method ensured that both academic disciplines were adequately represented in the study population. This technique was crucial for assessing participation levels in sports tourism, developing career-related skills among diverse demographic groups, and investigating potential relationships among these factors.

6. Results, Analysis, and Interpretation

1) Profile of the Respondents

Table 1. Frequencies and Percentage of Demographic Factors

Sex	Counts	% of Total
Female	263	66 %
Male	137	34 %
Year Level	Counts	% of Total
First Year	109	27 %
Fourth Year	86	22 %
Second Year	104	26 %
Third Year	101	25 %

Table 1 shows the frequency and percentages of demographic data for a sample of students, including sex and year level. Based on their gender, 66% of the students were female and 34% were male. This may suggest that the vast majority of the students are female.

In terms of the year level, 27% were first years, 22% were fourth years, 26% were second years, and 25% were third. This may indicate that the majority of the survey participants are first-year students.

Level of Participation of the Students in Sports Tourism

Table 2 presents the evaluation of students' engagement in sports via active sports tourism yielded a composite mean score of 2.79, accompanied by a standard deviation of 0.70. This signifies a moderate degree of participation, wherein students predominantly concur with the signs of active sports tourism. The statement with the highest mean score of 3.13 and a standard deviation of 0.77 was, "As part of my usual sports routines, I have to travel to different places." This indicates that students strongly link sports involvement with travel, emphasizing the significance of movement and discovery in their athletic activities. Hallmann and Breuer (2020) highlight the twin advantages of sports tourism, wherein travel serves as a means for physical engagement and cultural enhancement. This association illustrates wider trends in which young persons merge fitness with exploration, favoring active and experiential leisure (Karakis et al., 2022).

Table 2. Assessment of the Level of Participation of the Students in Sports in terms of Active Sports Tourism

Indicators	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
As part of my usual sports routines, I have to travel to different places.	3.13	0.77	Average	1
A big part of my travel adventures is doing physical things.	2.80	0.87	Average	5
I like taking trips where I can do sports like riding or running.	2.94	0.84	Average	3
I go to certain places just to take part in planned sports events.	2.53	0.88	Average	9.5
When I travel, I often do sports outside.	2.75	0.88	Average	6
I look for places that are known for letting people do active sports while traveling.	2.82	0.84	Average	4
I like playing games against other people while I'm on vacation.	3.10	0.70	Average	2
Some of the most important things for me about traveling are playing sports.	2.65	0.93	Average	8
The sports facilities at the place where I'm going determine where I go on vacation.	2.53	0.91	Average	9.5
When I go to new places, I always do sports as part of my schedule.	2.69	0.92	Average	7
COMPOSITE MEAN	2.79	0.70	Average	

Legend: 1.00-1.50: Strongly Disagree (Very Low); 1.51-2.50: Disagree (Low); 2.51-3.50; Agree (Average); 3.51-4.00: Strongly Agree (High)

The comments "I go to certain places just to participate in organized sports events" and "The sports facilities at my destination influence my vacation choices" had the lowest mean scores of 2.53. These data suggest that students are hardly affected by organized sports activities and amenities in their trip plans. This may stem from a preference for autonomous, impromptu activities over structured, competitive events. Woźniak et al. (2021) assert that contemporary sports tourists increasingly value autonomy and customization in their pursuits, diverging from conventional, pre-arranged sports tourism options. Furthermore, financial or logistical limitations may inhibit participation in planned activities, as shown by Perić et al. (2022), who observed that cost and accessibility are pivotal elements affecting student engagement in sports tourism.

The significant involvement in travel-oriented sports indicates potential for educational institutions and tourist organizations to develop programs that combine travel and sports. Universities might create sports-focused holiday packages or partner with tourist businesses to give economical and accessible possibilities for students. Furthermore, emphasizing the cultural and physical

advantages of these activities may promote wider engagement. The inadequate priority of organized sports events and infrastructures highlights the necessity to enhance the attractiveness and accessibility of these activities. Strategies may encompass marketing events via targeted ads, providing subsidies for students, or enhancing facility inclusiveness to address varied requirements. Research conducted by Şahin and Akçay (2023) underscores the significance of accessibility and inclusion in sports tourism, particularly for younger demographics encountering financial and logistical obstacles.

In conclusion, whereas students exhibit a distinct preference for travel-oriented sports activities, there exists a significant disparity in their engagement in organized sports events and their utilization of location-specific amenities. Rectifying this discrepancy necessitates a balance between offering flexible, self-directed options and improving the appeal and accessibility of organized sporting activities. By doing so, universities and tourism stakeholders may promote a more comprehensive involvement in active sports tourism, enhancing both the physical and cultural development of students.

Table 3. Assessment of the Level of Participation of the Students in Sports in terms of Event- Sports Tourism

Indicators	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
I often have to travel to get to sports events.	2.62	0.90	Average	2
I'm ready to go to significant sporting events that are far away.	2.39	0.94	Low	10
I do touristy things involving sports events like the Olympics and the World Cup.	2.56	0.89	Average	3
I schedule my trips around significant sports events.	2.54	0.92	Average	4
When I travel, I make it a point to see live sports events.	2.52	0.87	Average	5
I participate in travel based on certain sports games and events.	2.63	0.87	Average	1
I'd instead participate in event-based sports tourism than view.	2.43	0.90	Low	7.5
Going to a sports event in another country was the main reason I went there.	2.43	0.89	Low	7.5
One of the main reasons I travel is to see sports events.	2.45	0.89	Low	6
I've visited many places to see their big sports games.	2.41	0.91	Low	9
COMPOSITE MEAN	2.50	0.81	Low	

Legend: 1.00-1.50: Strongly Disagree (Very Low); 1.51-2.50: Disagree (Low); 2.51-3.50; Agree (Average); 3.51-4.00: Strongly Agree (High)

Table 3 outlines the assessment of student involvement levels in sports as it relates to event-sport tourism. The level of participation of the students in event-based sports tourism had an aggregate mean score of 2.50 with a standard deviation of 0.81 which indicates a low level of participation. Among the indicators, the highest mean score of 2.63 (SD 0.87) was

given to the statement "I travel according to some sports games and events." Such results could imply that students sometimes travel by way of certain sports-related occasions, thus semi-ins staff plays a part in some areas of life in which sports are the center. This resonates with the work done in Buning and Walker (2022) which suggests that although

respondents see event-based sports tourism as attractive, participation in such events is mediated by potential opportunities and personal interests.

In comparison, the statement, "I'm ready to go to major sporting events that are distant," had the second lowest means score at 2.39, with a standard deviation of 0.94. This shows a low willingness of students to use considerable time and money to travel long distances to attend major sports events. Likewise, other items, like "Going to a sports event in another country was the main reason I went there" and "I've been to a lot of places to see their big sports games," also placed low, once again confirming the finding that students generally display low under-played interest towards international or major event-based sports tourism. According to Pansari et al. According to Xia et al. (2020), students cited financial and logistical challenges as the most common barriers deterring them from traveling long distances or internationally for sports competitions. Also these results may demonstrate that students have not been familiar with large sporting tourism events and a comprehend to the value of the sport tourism events from promotion perspective.

A high mean score for traveling to certain sports games and events indicates that while students may not travel often for major sports events, there is potential interest for attending localized or nearby sporting events. This will allow educational institutions and sports organizations to take advantage of this and perhaps plan or encourage events that are within reach geographically and financially for students. Partnerships with local sports leagues or hosting community-level tournaments could lead to participation, for example. As proposed by Karakus et al. (2021) Growth of local sports tourism initiatives provide an opportunity for local community involvement and affordable involvement by younger participants.

Conversely, the low scores for long-distance travel to major sports events highlight the scope to tackle financial and logistical barriers. Travel subsidies within countries, student discounts for tickets or group travel arrangements could be offered to help make mass events more accessible, Mr. Hughes said. Also, digital solutions, such as live-streamed sports tournaments combined with virtual experiences, could help bridge the gap for students who can't make it in person. According to Almeida et al. However, technological advancements enable virtual sports tourism experiences, which can offer a means of engaging physically for those with limited resources (2023).

The results suggest a moderate preference towards localized event-based sports tourism and significant barriers to participation in mega or international sporting events. By alleviating economic and logistical burdens and also highlighting the way that accessible, local events have the potential to stimulate participation, both institutions and sports organizations can incentivize many more people to find joy in movement. These initiatives may help to instill a culture of sports tourism in students to enhance their physical and social experiences.

7. Conclusion

1) The elevated percentage of female respondents and the predominance of first-year students indicate that programs and activities pertaining to sports tourism and career development have to be tailored to this group. The emphasis on younger students is a chance to cultivate core abilities early, which can develop as they advance in their academic pursuits.

Strategies promoting gender balance must be implemented to guarantee equitable involvement and opportunity for both male and female students.

2) The average engagement in several sectors of sports tourism reveals that students are somewhat involved, indicating potential for increased participation, especially in event-based sports tourism, which currently exhibits low involvement. This indicates the necessity for campaigns to enhance knowledge of the advantages of event-based sports tourism, including cultural exposure and networking possibilities. Initiatives that combine sports tourism with academic or professional objectives may enhance involvement levels.

3) The absence of notable disparities in sports tourism participation by gender or course suggests that current programs are fair and inclusive. This conclusion emphasizes the necessity of tailored initiatives that cater to individual interests and preferences to enhance participation rates.

4) The continuous average evaluation of career development skills indicates a necessity for focused interventions to enhance students' abilities in areas such as goal planning, networking, and job preparedness. Institutions can implement organized programs, including seminars, mentoring opportunities, and experiential learning activities, to assist students in surpassing average levels and cultivating more substantial career-related abilities.

5) The lack of notable disparities in career development abilities among profile factors underscores the fairness of institutional resources and chances. This conclusion underscores the necessity for customized strategies to tackle the distinct problems and advantages of various groups, ensuring that all students may maximize their career development achievements.

6) The notable and beneficial correlation between engagement in sports tourism and the enhancement of career development skills highlights the importance of sports tourism as a medium for comprehensive personal and professional growth. This discovery indicates that institutions have to incorporate sports tourism into their professional development programs, highlighting its significance in cultivating transferable skills like resilience, self-awareness, and networking.

8. Recommendations

1) Develop orientation events and seminars particularly aimed at first-year students to cultivate essential career development skills from the outset. Implement gender-sensitive activities, including mentorship programs and leadership possibilities, to guarantee equitable involvement and professional development for both male and female students.

2) Coordinate campus-wide athletic activities and encourage involvement in external sports competitions or festivals to enhance visibility in event-driven sports tourism. Collaborate with local and national sports groups to establish subsidized travel opportunities for students to visit or engage in prominent sporting events.

3) Administer surveys to ascertain students' interests and preferences about sports tourism. Develop customized programs and activities, such as adventure sports camps, cultural sports exchanges, or health and wellness retreats, to address the varied requirements of students.

4) Provide organized professional development seminars concentrating on certain aspects such as goal setting,

networking, and career preparedness. These programs may encompass practical activities such as simulated interviews, networking meetings with industry professionals, and career goal-setting workshops led by specialists.

5) Create tailored career coaching or counseling services to meet the specific problems and capabilities of students from diverse academic backgrounds or demographic groupings. Facilitate access to self-assessment instruments and tailored comments to assist students in honing their career trajectories.

6) Integrate sports tourism activities into professional development programs by highlighting their role in cultivating transferable qualities such as collaboration, resilience, and cultural awareness. For instance, arrange leadership retreats that incorporate adventure sports or cultural tourism to facilitate the development of practical skills among students in a dynamic setting.

7) Enhance accessibility to internships, cooperative education, and work shadowing initiatives that integrate career development with experience learning in sports-related environments. Facilitate chances for students to assume leadership positions at sports tourism activities to enhance confidence and practical skills.

8) Implement recognition programs, including diplomas or rewards, for students who engage in sports tourism and professional development initiatives. Utilize these incentives to encourage students to immerse themselves more profoundly in both domains.

9) Utilize digital platforms and mobile applications to furnish students with access to networking tools, career planning information, and self-assessment activities. Promote the utilization of these technologies to monitor advancement and engage with mentors and colleagues.

10) Engage with sports groups, tourist boards, and industry stakeholders to offer a wider range of accessible and economical sports tourism options for students. Establish collaborations with professional networks to provide students with exposure to authentic career development situations related to sports tourism initiatives.

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