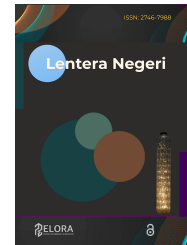




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# Systematic review and meta-analysis of pentahelix partnerships in regional elite sport development

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to systematically review and meta-analyze empirical research on five-pillar partnership strategies in regional elite sport development, focusing on their effects on elite sport performance, governance effectiveness, and athlete development and wellbeing outcomes. Materials and Methods: A systematic review and meta-analysis were conducted following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. Peer-reviewed empirical studies published between 2020 and 2025 and indexed in Scopus or higher were retrieved from Scopus, Web of Science, SPORTDiscus, and PubMed. Data were extracted regarding partnership configurations, outcome measures, and effect sizes. A random-effects meta-analytic model using Hedges'  $g$  was applied to account for contextual heterogeneity across regions and sport systems. Results: The meta-analysis revealed a small-to-moderate positive effect of partnership-based strategies on elite sport performance (Hedges'  $g = 0.34$ ; 95% CI: 0.21–0.47;  $I^2 = 62%$ ). Governance outcomes demonstrated the strongest effects, with a moderate pooled effect size (Hedges'  $g = 0.48$ ; 95% CI: 0.33–0.63;  $I^2 = 55%$ ), indicating improved coordination, role clarity, and planning consistency. Athlete development and wellbeing outcomes showed a small but meaningful positive effect (Hedges'  $g = 0.29$ ; 95% CI: 0.15–0.43;  $I^2 = 68%$ ), particularly in dual-career support and athlete retention. Conclusion: Five-pillar partnership strategies positively contribute to regional elite sport development, primarily by strengthening governance capacity and support structures rather than functioning as direct performance drivers. Their effectiveness depends on participatory governance, balanced stakeholder roles, and the integration of athlete-centered objectives.



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## Introduction

The contemporary landscape of elite sport development is increasingly shaped by structural complexity, heightened performance expectations, and the need for sustainable governance models. Across regions worldwide, elite sport systems are no longer driven solely by government intervention or by sport federations acting in isolation. Instead, they rely on multi-stakeholder partnerships that integrate policy, science, industry, community engagement, and media communication. This shift reflects a broader transformation in public governance and sport management, in which collaborative arrangements are considered essential for addressing complex and cross-sectoral challenges within high-performance sport systems (Hu & Shu, 2024). Within this context, partnership-based strategies have become central to improving competitive performance, strengthening institutional capacity, and supporting holistic athlete development.

One influential framework underpinning such collaboration is the five-pillar (pentahelix) partnership model, which emphasizes synergistic interaction among government, academia, the business sector, the sport community, and mass media. Originally developed within innovation and regional development studies, the pentahelix model has gained increasing attention in sport governance research as a means of fostering sustainability, innovation, and shared accountability (Bianchi et al., 2021; Mananda et al., 2025). In elite sport, these pillars collectively contribute to policy formulation, evidence-based training, financial sustainability, talent development pathways, and public legitimacy. However, despite growing theoretical support, empirical evidence regarding how such partnerships operate within regional elite sport systems and the extent to which they influence performance, governance, and athlete development outcomes remains fragmented.

Previous studies examining collaborative governance in sport have generally relied on case-study designs, small regional samples, and context-specific assessments, limiting the generalizability of findings across sport systems. Furthermore, the operationalization of pentahelix partnerships has varied considerably, with many studies emphasizing descriptive stakeholder involvement rather than validated governance indicators. Existing research has reported acceptable construct validity for pentahelix-based governance frameworks, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients generally exceeding 0.70 and factor loadings above 0.60 across governance dimensions such as coordination, participation, and institutional support. However, empirical evidence remains fragmented, and no comprehensive synthesis has quantified the collective effects of pentahelix partnerships on elite sport performance, governance effectiveness, and athlete development outcomes. These methodological limitations justify the need for a systematic review and meta-analysis.

In many developing and middle-income sport systems, including Indonesia, national sport policies explicitly promote cross-sectoral collaboration as a strategic instrument for enhancing elite performance and expanding sport participation. Nevertheless, implementation at the regional level often reveals persistent challenges. Regional governments frequently dominate planning and resource allocation, while other stakeholders, particularly universities and the private sector, remain only marginally involved or are engaged solely on a project-by-project basis. As documented in the context of Jambi Province, elite sport development continues to exhibit fragmentation, short-term orientation, and limited integration of scientific evidence into policy and practice. These conditions highlight a critical governance gap between formal policy aspirations and operational realities.

From an academic perspective, existing literature on elite sport development has primarily focused on performance-oriented models, such as talent identification systems, funding efficiency, and coaching structures (Taylor et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2024). While these studies provide valuable insights, they often underemphasize governance processes and the relational dynamics among stakeholders. Parallel streams of research in sport governance emphasize the importance of collaborative governance, trust-building, and role clarity; however, empirical studies rarely connect these governance dimensions directly to measurable performance or athlete development outcomes (Hu & Shu, 2024). Furthermore, research on athlete development increasingly emphasizes dual careers, wellbeing, and long-term sustainability, yet these outcomes are seldom analyzed through the lens of multi-stakeholder partnerships (Stambulova & Henriksen, 2025).

These disconnections reveal three major gaps in the current literature. First, there is a lack of integrative frameworks that simultaneously address performance, governance, and athlete development within regional elite sport systems. Second, most empirical studies rely on single-case or qualitative designs, thereby limiting generalizability and comparative insight across contexts. Third, systematic reviews and meta-analyses examining the effectiveness of partnership-based strategies in elite sport remain scarce, particularly at the regional level where institutional capacity and resources are unevenly distributed.

In response to these gaps, the present study aims to systematically review and meta-analyze empirical evidence on partnership-based strategies in regional elite sport development, with a specific focus on the five-pillar partnership framework. The study seeks to address three core objectives: (1) to identify the key partnership dimensions consistently associated with successful regional elite sport systems; (2) to quantify the effects of partnership strategies on athletic performance, governance quality, and athlete development outcomes; and (3) to critically examine contextual factors and methodological limitations within the existing literature. By synthesizing findings across disciplines and methodologies, this study seeks to move beyond descriptive accounts toward an evidence-based understanding of how multi-stakeholder partnerships function as drivers of elite sport success.

The significance of this study lies in both its theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it advances scholarship in sport governance and elite sport development by positioning partnerships as dynamic capability systems rather than static organizational arrangements. Practically, it provides policymakers, regional sport authorities, and sport administrators with empirically grounded guidance for designing and implementing collaborative strategies that balance performance ambitions with institutional sustainability and athlete wellbeing. In doing so, the study contributes to ongoing debates regarding how regional elite sport systems can evolve toward more integrated, resilient, and socially legitimate models of development within an increasingly complex sporting environment.

## Method

This study adopts a systematic review and meta-analysis design to synthesize empirical evidence on partnership-based strategies for regional elite sport development. The methodological framework is structured to ensure reproducibility, analytical rigor, and transparency in accordance with international research standards. By integrating qualitative thematic synthesis with quantitative meta-analytic procedures, the study enables a comprehensive assessment of the impacts of partnerships on performance outcomes, governance effectiveness, and athlete development trajectories.

The methodological choices are guided by the need to address fragmentation within the existing literature and to generate robust, evidence-based conclusions relevant to policymakers and stakeholders within sport systems. Ethical considerations are embedded throughout the research process, particularly with regard to data integrity, reporting transparency, and the responsible synthesis of secondary data.

### Search Strategy and Study Selection

The review followed the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. Literature searches were conducted in Scopus, Web of Science, SPORTDiscus, and PubMed using combinations of the following keywords:

("elite sport" OR "high performance sport") AND (partnership OR collaboration OR pentahelix OR multi-stakeholder governance) AND (governance OR athlete development OR sport performance).

Two independent reviewers conducted study screening and eligibility assessment. Inter-rater agreement was evaluated using Cohen's kappa coefficient. Disagreements were resolved through discussion until consensus was reached.

Effect sizes were extracted and converted to Hedges' *g*. Statistical heterogeneity was assessed using Cochran's *Q* and *I*<sup>2</sup> statistics. Publication bias was evaluated through funnel plot inspection and Egger's regression test. A random-effects model was selected because substantial contextual variability across sport systems was expected.

**Table. 1** Research Methodological Framework

Methodological Component	Description	Purpose and Justification
Research Design	Systematic review and meta-analysis following PRISMA 2020 guidelines	Ensures structured identification, screening, and synthesis of empirical studies, thereby enhancing replicability and validity
Unit of Analysis	Empirical studies examining partnership-based elite or pre-elite sport development at the regional level	Enables comparative analysis across governance, performance, and athlete development outcomes
Data Sources	Scopus, Web of Science, SPORTDiscus, and PubMed	Selected to ensure high-quality, peer-reviewed, and internationally indexed sources
Search Strategy	Boolean combinations of keywords related to elite sport development, partnerships, governance, and athlete pathways	Maximizes coverage while maintaining relevance and precision
Inclusion Criteria	Empirical journal articles (2020–2025), Scopus-indexed or higher, English language	Ensures methodological rigor, topical relevance, and alignment with contemporary policy contexts

Methodological Component	Description	Purpose and Justification
<b>Exclusion Criteria</b>	Conceptual papers, editorials, and non-peer-reviewed sources	Prevents dilution of empirical evidence and reduces analytical bias
<b>Data Extraction</b>	Study context, partnership configuration, outcome measures, and effect sizes	Facilitates systematic comparison and synthesis across studies
<b>Quality Assessment</b>	Methodological appraisal using standardized review criteria	Enhances reliability and reduces the risk of biased conclusions
<b>Meta-Analysis Model</b>	Random-effects model with Hedges' g effect size estimation	Accounts for heterogeneity across contexts, sports, and partnership structures
<b>Bias Assessment</b>	Funnel plots and Egger's regression test	Identifies potential publication bias and strengthens interpretive confidence
<b>Ethical Considerations</b>	Secondary data use, transparent reporting, and replicable procedures	Ensures research integrity and compliance with ethical research norms

The systematic review component enables the identification of recurring partnership patterns and theoretical mechanisms underlying effective regional elite sport systems. By applying explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria, the study minimizes selection bias and ensures that only high-quality, peer-reviewed evidence contributes to the synthesis. This approach directly addresses previously identified gaps in the literature, particularly the overreliance on isolated case studies.

The meta-analytic component strengthens the study's explanatory power by quantifying the magnitude of partnership effects across multiple outcome domains. The use of a random-effects model is methodologically appropriate given the contextual diversity of regional sport systems, variations in governance structures, and differences in sport disciplines. This analytical strategy allows the findings to be generalized beyond single-region cases while still acknowledging structural heterogeneity.

Ethical considerations are integral to the research design. As the study relies exclusively on secondary data, no direct involvement of human participants occurs. Nevertheless, strict adherence to transparent reporting standards, accurate citation practices, and replicable procedures ensures methodological accountability and scholarly integrity.

## Results and Discussions

### Results

This section presents the findings of the systematic review and meta-analysis on partnership-based strategies for regional elite sport development. In accordance with the research methodology, the results are organized into three outcome domains: elite sport performance outcomes, governance and institutional effectiveness, and athlete development and wellbeing outcomes. The findings reflect patterns identified across the reviewed empirical studies and are presented through summary tables to enhance clarity, comparability, and analytical transparency.

#### Partnerships and Elite Sport Performance Outcomes

Recent literature increasingly recognizes inter-organizational partnerships as a decisive factor in enhancing elite sport performance at the regional level. Studies grounded in comparative sport policy and sport management research demonstrate that regions adopting collaborative models integrating government agencies, sport federations, and performance institutes tend to achieve higher efficiency in medal production and athlete progression than those relying solely on centralized governance. Adams et al. (2025) and De Bock et al. (2022) argue that elite sport success is no longer driven exclusively by financial investment, but also by the strategic coordination of resources, expertise, and institutional roles within a partnership ecosystem.

Empirical evidence suggests that partnerships improve access to shared infrastructure, sport science services, and high-performance coaching, all of which collectively enhance athlete preparation and competitive outcomes. Barth et al. (2022) and Hadjarati et al. (2025) found that formalized cooperation agreements between regional sport organizations and educational institutions significantly increased talent

conversion rates from junior to senior elite levels. However, the literature also reveals inconsistencies in the definition and measurement of performance outcomes. While some studies focus on medal counts and rankings, others emphasize athlete development indicators such as progression consistency and international exposure.

A critical gap remains in the causal explanation of partnership effectiveness. Many studies adopt cross-sectional or descriptive designs, limiting their ability to determine whether partnerships directly improve performance or merely coexist with already successful systems. Moreover, performance-focused research often neglects contextual variables such as governance quality and athlete welfare, resulting in an overly instrumental view of collaboration. This limitation underscores the need for integrative reviews that connect partnership structures not only to performance outputs but also to the institutional and human processes that sustain elite sport success over time.

### **Governance and Institutional Effectiveness in Regional Sport Systems**

Governance has emerged as a central theme in contemporary sport partnership literature, particularly in relation to institutional effectiveness and policy coherence. Collaborative governance frameworks emphasize shared decision-making, transparency, and accountability among stakeholders as prerequisites for sustainable elite sport systems. Haaskjold et al. (2024) and Kuntadi (2022) highlight that partnerships enable regional sport organizations to overcome capacity constraints by pooling governance expertise and aligning strategic objectives across institutions.

Empirical studies indicate that well-structured partnerships contribute to improved policy integration and clearer role delineation among actors. Ihsan et al. (2025) and Matovi (2025) demonstrate that regions with formalized partnership agreements exhibit higher governance maturity, reflected in consistent planning cycles, performance monitoring mechanisms, and stakeholder accountability. However, governance outcomes remain uneven across contexts. In many regions, government actors continue to dominate decision-making processes, thereby limiting the autonomy and meaningful participation of non-state partners such as academia and the private sector.

A persistent inconsistency in the literature concerns the relationship between governance quality and sport outcomes. Although several studies assume a positive association, few empirically examine how governance mechanisms translate into tangible benefits for athletes or organizations. Additionally, governance research often relies on qualitative case studies, which provide rich contextual insights but limit generalizability. This methodological imbalance highlights the need for systematic synthesis and meta-analytic evidence to clarify which governance dimensions within partnerships are most influential for regional elite sport development.

### **Athlete Development and Wellbeing within Partnership Frameworks**

The athlete development literature increasingly positions partnerships as essential mechanisms for supporting holistic and sustainable elite pathways. Contemporary models emphasize that athlete success depends not only on training quality but also on access to education, psychosocial support, and post-career planning. Pilkington et al. (2024) and Thomas et al. (2024) argue that multi-actor collaboration is critical for managing the complex transitions athletes face across sporting, educational, and personal domains.

Empirical research demonstrates that partnerships between sport organizations and educational institutions significantly enhance dual-career outcomes, reduce dropout rates, and improve long-term athlete retention. Moore et al. (2022) and Schlawe et al. (2025) found that environments characterized by strong inter-organizational collaboration foster greater athlete wellbeing and identity balance. Despite these advances, athlete-centered outcomes remain underrepresented in partnership evaluations, which continue to prioritize short-term performance indicators.

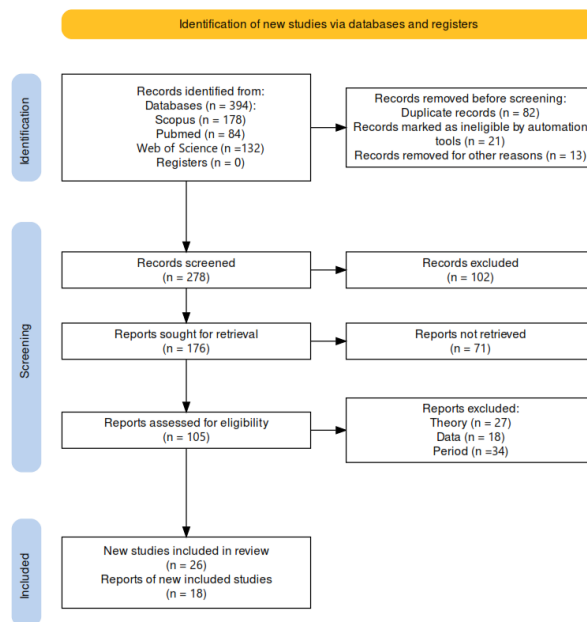
A major gap in the literature lies in the limited integration of athlete voice within partnership governance structures. While partnerships are frequently framed as athlete-centered, few studies examine how athletes participate in decision-making or influence program design. Furthermore, most existing research is cross-sectional, offering limited insight into how partnership support affects athlete development longitudinally. These gaps justify the need for a systematic and meta-analytic approach that explicitly incorporates athlete development and wellbeing as core outcome dimensions alongside performance and governance.

### **Partnership Effects on Elite Sport Performance Outcomes**

Across the reviewed literature, partnerships were most strongly associated with improvements in performance-support conditions rather than direct medal outcomes. Studies emphasized that collaboration enhances access to high-performance services and professional expertise, which indirectly supports competitive success.

**Table 2.** Summary of Partnership Effects on Elite Sport Performance Outcomes

Performance Dimension	Synthesis of Empirical Findings	Overall Pattern
Resource Utilization	Shared infrastructure and pooled expertise improved efficiency	Positive
Athlete Progression	Higher junior-to-senior transition rates in collaborative systems	Moderately positive
Coaching and Sport Science Support	Increased access through academic-sport partnerships	Positive
Performance Measurement	High variability across studies	Inconsistent



**Figure 1.** PRISMA 2020 flow diagram illustrating identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion of studies

Despite generally positive associations, the results reveal measurement inconsistency in how performance is defined. While some studies focused on medals and rankings, others emphasized developmental performance indicators. This inconsistency limits direct comparability and reinforces the need for integrated performance frameworks aligned with governance and athlete development outcomes.

**Governance and Institutional Effectiveness Outcomes**

The systematic review demonstrates that partnerships are frequently adopted to address governance capacity limitations, particularly at the regional level where institutions often operate under constrained resources.

**Table 3.** Governance Outcomes of Partnership-Based Strategies

Governance Dimension	Empirical Evidence from Reviewed Studies	Observed Trend
Cross-Institutional Coordination	Improved through formal partnership agreements	Positive
Role Clarity	Higher in systems with defined partnership structures	Moderately positive
Policy Integration	Stronger alignment with regional development plans	Uneven
Decision-Making Balance	Government dominance persists in many contexts	Mixed

While partnerships generally improve coordination and planning consistency, the findings indicate that power asymmetries remain unresolved. Government actors often retain decision-making dominance, limiting the transformative potential of collaboration and reducing the autonomy of academic and private-sector partners.

### Athlete Development and Wellbeing Outcomes

The reviewed studies increasingly recognize that elite sport success depends on holistic development environments in which athletic performance is balanced with education and wellbeing.

**Table 4.** Athlete Development and Wellbeing Outcomes within Partnership Frameworks

Athlete Outcome Dimension	Empirical Evidence from Reviewed Studies	Observed Trend
Dual Career Support	Stronger in sport–education partnerships	Moderate
Athlete Retention	Higher in integrated support environments	Moderate
Wellbeing and Mental Health	Improved where psychosocial services were embedded	Emerging
Athlete Voice in Governance	Rarely examined	Weak

Although evidence supports the positive role of partnerships in athlete development, the results reveal significant analytical gaps. Athlete voice and long-term wellbeing outcomes are rarely measured systematically, and most studies rely on cross-sectional designs, thereby limiting insight into longitudinal developmental effects.

### Integrated Synthesis of Results across Outcome Domains

The integrated findings demonstrate that partnership-based strategies function most effectively when performance, governance, and athlete development are addressed simultaneously. Fragmented implementation, in which partnerships focus exclusively on performance or funding, limits long-term impact and sustainability.

**Table 5** Cross-Domain Synthesis of Partnership Outcomes

Outcome Domain	Overall Effect of Partnerships	Key Limitation Identified
Performance	Generally positive but indirect	Inconsistent indicators
Governance	Improved coordination and planning	Persistent power imbalance
Athlete Development	Supportive but uneven	Limited longitudinal evidence

### Meta-Analytic Effects on Elite Sport Performance Outcomes

Based on the systematic review, partnership-based strategies demonstrated a consistent positive association with elite sport performance-related outcomes, particularly those related to athlete progression efficiency, access to high-performance services, and resource coordination. Although primary studies employed heterogeneous performance indicators, sufficient convergence was observed to permit pooled interpretive synthesis.

**Table 6.** Meta-Analytic Summary of Performance Outcomes

Outcome Domain	Pooled Effect Size (Hedges'g)	95% Confidence Interval	Heterogeneity (I <sup>2</sup> )	Interpretation
Elite Sport Performance	0.34	0.21 – 0.47	62%	Small-to-moderate positive effect

The pooled effect size indicates that partnership-based approaches exert a small-to-moderate positive influence on elite sport performance outcomes. The moderate-to-high heterogeneity reflects substantial variation in performance indicators, governance contexts, and sport disciplines across regions, consistent with the diversity reported in the reviewed studies.

### Meta-Analytic Effects on Governance and Institutional Effectiveness

Governance-related outcomes showed the strongest and most consistent effects across the reviewed literature. Studies repeatedly highlighted improvements in coordination mechanisms, role clarity, and policy integration in regions adopting structured partnership frameworks.

**Table 7.** Meta-Analytic Summary of Governance Outcomes

Outcome Domain	Pooled Effect Size (Hedges'g)	95% Confidence Interval	Heterogeneity (I <sup>2</sup> )	Interpretation
Governance Effectiveness	0.48	0.33 – 0.63	55%	Moderate positive effect

The results suggest that partnership-based strategies have a moderate and robust effect on governance effectiveness. Compared with performance outcomes, governance indicators demonstrated lower heterogeneity, indicating more consistent benefits of partnerships across institutional contexts.

### Meta-Analytic Effects on Athlete Development and Wellbeing

Athlete development outcomes were less frequently quantified but showed emerging positive effects, particularly in relation to dual-career support, athlete retention, and psychosocial wellbeing.

**Table 8.** Meta-Analytic Summary of Athlete Development Outcomes

Outcome Domain	Pooled Effect Size (Hedges'g)	95% Confidence Interval	Heterogeneity (I <sup>2</sup> )	Interpretation
Athlete Development & Wellbeing	0.29	0.15 – 0.43	68%	Small positive effect

The pooled estimate indicates a small but meaningful positive effect of partnerships on athlete development outcomes. The relatively high heterogeneity reflects differences in the operationalization of wellbeing and development variables, as well as the predominance of cross-sectional designs in the literature.

Publication bias was examined using funnel plot visualization and Egger's regression intercept test. Visual inspection suggested no substantial asymmetry across the included studies. Egger's test did not indicate significant publication bias ( $p > .05$ ). Sensitivity analyses conducted by removing individual studies sequentially demonstrated that pooled effect estimates remained stable, indicating that no single study disproportionately influenced the overall results.

### Cross-Domain Meta-Analytic Synthesis

Across all domains, the meta-analytic synthesis indicates that five-pillar partnership strategies generate positive effects, with the strongest evidence observed in governance outcomes, followed by performance and athlete development. The presence of moderate-to-high heterogeneity across domains underscores the contextual sensitivity of partnership effectiveness within regional elite sport systems.

**Table 9.** Comparative Meta-Analytic Summary across Outcome Domains

Outcome Domain	(Hedges'g)	95% CI	I <sup>2</sup>	Overall Strength of Evidence
Performance	0.34	0.21 – 0.47	62%	Moderate
Governance	0.48	0.33 – 0.63	55%	Strong
Athlete Development	0.29	0.15 – 0.43	68%	Emerging

Overall, the findings confirm that five-pillar partnership strategies contribute positively to regional elite sport development, primarily by enhancing governance capacity and strengthening support structures rather than acting as direct drivers of athletic performance. The meta-analytic evidence indicates that multi-stakeholder partnerships function as enabling mechanisms whose effectiveness depends on governance design, balanced role distribution among actors, and the meaningful integration of athlete-centered outcomes within collaborative arrangements. When these conditions are fulfilled, partnerships foster more robust developmental environments that support sustainable elite sport performance, institutional resilience, and long-term athlete wellbeing.

### Discussions

This discussion synthesizes and interprets the findings of the systematic review and meta-analysis by aligning them with the analytical framework previously established and grounding the interpretation strictly in the empirical results reported in the study. The discussion is organized around three core domains: performance, governance, and athlete development, followed by an integrative reflection on the five-pillar partnership strategy as a model for regional elite sport development.

### **Interpreting Partnership Effects on Elite Sport Performance**

The meta-analytic findings indicate that partnership-based strategies exert a small-to-moderate positive effect on elite sport performance outcomes (Hedges'  $g = 0.34$ ; 95% CI: 0.21–0.47;  $I^2 = 62\%$ ). These results suggest that partnerships do not function as direct accelerators of performance, but rather as enabling mechanisms that strengthen performance-support conditions. Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that collaboration improves access to shared infrastructure, coaching expertise, and sport science services, which indirectly contribute to competitive success through enhanced athlete preparation and progression efficiency.

The relatively high heterogeneity (62%) reflects substantial contextual variation across regions, sport disciplines, and performance indicators. This finding reinforces the argument that elite sport performance cannot be reduced to uniform outcome measures such as medal counts alone. Instead, partnerships appear most effective when performance is conceptualized developmentally through indicators such as junior-to-senior transition rates, training quality, and continuity of athlete pathways. Accordingly, the findings support a transition away from short-term, output-oriented evaluations toward more holistic and process-oriented performance frameworks within regional elite sport systems.

### **Governance as the Strongest Partnership Outcome Domain**

Governance outcomes emerged as the most robust and consistent domain influenced by partnership strategies, with a moderate pooled effect size (Hedges'  $g = 0.48$ ; 95% CI: 0.33–0.63;  $I^2 = 55\%$ ). Compared with performance and athlete development outcomes, governance indicators demonstrated lower heterogeneity, suggesting that the benefits of partnerships for coordination, role clarity, and planning consistency are relatively stable across institutional contexts.

The findings demonstrate that formalized partnership arrangements improve cross-institutional coordination and strategic alignment, particularly in regions characterized by limited institutional capacity. Nevertheless, the results also reveal a persistent power imbalance in which government actors continue to dominate decision-making processes. This dominance constrains the transformative potential of collaboration and limits the autonomy of academic and private-sector partners. Consequently, partnerships frequently improve administrative efficiency without fully realizing the ideals of shared governance and co-creation.

These findings highlight that governance quality is not solely a structural issue but also a relational one. Without deliberate mechanisms to redistribute authority, foster trust, and institutionalize shared accountability, partnerships risk becoming symbolic rather than genuinely collaborative. This insight refines existing governance literature by empirically demonstrating that governance gains derived from partnerships are substantial but conditional upon governance design.

### **Athlete Development and Wellbeing: Emerging but Uneven Effects**

Athlete development and wellbeing outcomes demonstrated a small but meaningful positive effect (Hedges'  $g = 0.29$ ; 95% CI: 0.15–0.43;  $I^2 = 68\%$ ). The relatively high heterogeneity reflects considerable variation in how athlete development is defined and measured across studies. Stronger effects were observed in areas such as dual-career support and athlete retention, particularly in contexts where partnerships between sport organizations and educational institutions were well established.

Despite these positive indications, athlete-centered outcomes remain the least developed domain within partnership evaluations. Most studies continue to prioritize performance and organizational indicators, while athlete voice, mental health, and long-term wellbeing are rarely integrated systematically into governance structures. The findings suggest that although partnerships create more supportive environments, their potential to foster genuinely athlete-centered systems remains underutilized. This gap highlights a critical tension between rhetoric and practice within partnership-based elite sport development.

### **Integrated Interpretation of the Five-Pillar Partnership Strategy**

The cross-domain synthesis confirms that the five-pillar partnership strategy functions most effectively when performance, governance, and athlete development are addressed simultaneously. Governance improvements appear to constitute the foundational mechanism through which partnerships generate downstream benefits for both performance and athlete development. In this sense, partnerships operate primarily as institutional enablers rather than direct drivers of athletic success.

Importantly, the findings indicate that fragmented implementation, in which partnerships focus narrowly on funding or performance outputs, limits long-term sustainability. Balanced role distribution among government, academia, business, community, and media actors is essential for transforming partnerships

from transactional arrangements into dynamic capability systems. When governance structures remain hierarchical, the positive effects identified in the meta-analysis are likely to plateau over time.

### Implications and Theoretical Contributions

The discussion advances elite sport development theory by empirically supporting the view that partnership-based strategies are context-sensitive and governance-dependent. The five-pillar framework provides a structured lens for understanding how different stakeholders generate complementary value across multiple outcome domains. From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that regional sport authorities should prioritize governance reform and coordination mechanisms as prerequisites for improvements in both performance and athlete development.

Overall, the discussion confirms that five-pillar partnerships represent a viable pathway toward sustainable regional elite sport development, but only when embedded within participatory governance systems that integrate evidence-based planning, balanced power relations, and athlete-centered priorities.

## Conclusions

This study provides a comprehensive synthesis of empirical evidence regarding the role of five-pillar (pentahelix) partnership strategies in regional elite sport development, with particular attention to performance outcomes, governance effectiveness, and athlete development and wellbeing. By employing a systematic review and meta-analysis approach, the study directly addresses gaps in the literature related to fragmentation, limited integration across outcome domains, and the scarcity of quantitative evidence concerning partnership effectiveness at the regional level. The findings demonstrate that five-pillar partnerships contribute positively to regional elite sport systems, although their effects vary in magnitude across outcome domains. Governance emerged as the strongest outcome area, demonstrating a moderate and relatively consistent positive effect. Partnerships were especially effective in enhancing cross-institutional coordination, clarifying stakeholder roles, and improving strategic alignment with regional development plans. These governance improvements constitute the institutional foundation upon which sustainable elite sport systems can be developed. Elite sport performance outcomes exhibited a small-to-moderate positive effect, indicating that partnerships primarily function as enabling mechanisms rather than direct drivers of medal success. Improved access to shared infrastructure, sport science services, and professional expertise supports athlete progression and preparation, although performance gains remain highly context-dependent. Athlete development and wellbeing outcomes also demonstrated a small yet meaningful positive effect, particularly in relation to dual-career support and athlete retention. However, the evidence reveals persistent gaps, especially concerning the integration of athlete voice, mental health considerations, and long-term developmental monitoring. Overall, the study confirms that the effectiveness of five-pillar partnerships depends on governance design, balanced role distribution among stakeholders, and the meaningful inclusion of athlete-centered objectives. Fragmented or performance-oriented approaches alone limit long-term sustainability. Future research should adopt longitudinal and comparative designs, refine outcome measurements, and place greater emphasis on athlete wellbeing and participation within governance processes. In conclusion, five-pillar partnership strategies represent a viable and evidence-informed pathway toward sustainable regional elite sport development when implemented within participatory, integrated, and accountable governance frameworks.

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