



## THE RELIGIO-ETHICAL DIMENSION OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORTS SCIENCE IN GHANA

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**Abstract:**

This study examines the religio-ethical dimensions of Physical Education and Sports Science in Ghana, presenting sport as not merely a physical or recreational activity but as a deeply moral, cultural, and spiritual practice. Drawing from interdisciplinary perspectives in philosophy, sociology, religious studies, and sport ethics, the study explores how religious beliefs, ethical values, and indigenous African moral systems influence participation, behaviour, and meaning-making within sporting environments. Using a qualitative interpretive approach, the study engages conceptual and empirical insights to demonstrate that Ghanaian sports culture is strongly shaped by religious practices such as prayer, faith rituals, and spiritual interpretations of success and failure. The findings further reveal that ethical principles, including fairness, discipline, teamwork, respect, integrity, and communal responsibility, remain central to both formal Physical Education and informal sporting activities. The study also identifies tensions between traditional moral ideals and contemporary challenges such as commercialization, corruption, gender inequality, indiscipline, and moral relativism in sport. These tensions reflect the changing moral landscape of modern sporting culture in Ghana. Importantly, the research demonstrates that African philosophical frameworks, particularly Ubuntu philosophy, provide a culturally relevant ethical foundation for rethinking Physical Education and Sports Science as spaces for moral formation, social cohesion, and human development. By integrating Social Learning Theory, virtue ethics, and African communitarian thought, the study argues for a holistic understanding of sport as a religio-ethical enterprise. Ultimately, the study contributes to scholarship by proposing an integrative framework that bridges religion, ethics, and sports science while offering practical implications for policy, curriculum development, pedagogy, coaching practice, and youth development in Ghana.

**Keywords:** religio-ethical values; physical education; sports science; Ghana; Ubuntu philosophy; moral development

## 1. Introduction

Physical Education and Sports Science have traditionally been framed within biomedical, psychological, and performance-oriented paradigms. However, such perspectives, while valuable, often overlook the deeper moral and spiritual dimensions that shape sporting practices, particularly within culturally rich contexts such as Ghana. In many African societies, sport is not merely a physical endeavor but a socially embedded activity intertwined with religion, morality, and communal identity.

In Ghana, the intersection of religion and sport is both visible and influential. Athletes frequently engage in prayer before competitions, attribute success to divine intervention, and interpret failure through spiritual lenses. This reflects broader societal patterns in which religion permeates everyday life, shaping attitudes, behaviors, and value systems. Scholars such as Njororai (2022) and Konadu *et al.* (2024) argue that sport

in Africa cannot be fully understood without considering its religious context, as spiritual beliefs often guide motivation, discipline, and ethical conduct.

Simultaneously, sport serves as a powerful site for moral education. Through participation in Physical Education and organized sports, individuals learn values such as fairness, teamwork, respect, and perseverance. These values align closely with both global ethical principles in sport (Parry, 2021; Simon, 2022) and indigenous African moral philosophies that emphasize communal well-being and human dignity (Gyekye, 1995; Metz, 2017). However, the moral potential of sport is not automatically realized; it depends on how sports are structured, taught, and experienced.

Contemporary developments in Ghanaian sports further complicate this landscape. The increasing commercialization of sports, the influence of global sporting cultures, and the pressures of competition have introduced ethical dilemmas, including cheating, doping, favoritism, and exploitation. These challenges raise critical questions about the extent to which Physical Education and Sports Science in Ghana are fulfilling their moral and social responsibilities.

Moreover, while Religious and Moral Education (RME) is well established in Ghana's formal curriculum, its connection to Physical Education remains largely implicit rather than explicitly theorized or operationalized. This disconnect suggests a missed opportunity to harness the moral and religious dimensions of sport as tools for holistic education and youth development.

This study, therefore, seeks to bridge this gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of the religio-ethical dimensions of Physical Education and Sports Science in Ghana. It argues that sport should be understood as a moral practice shaped by religious beliefs, ethical values, and cultural traditions, and that a deeper engagement with these dimensions can enhance both educational outcomes and social transformation.

## 1.2 Explanation of Terminologies

To ensure conceptual clarity, this study defines and contextualizes key terms as used within the Ghanaian and broader academic discourse:

- **Religio-ethical dimension** refers to the intersection of religious beliefs and moral values that influence human behavior and decision-making. In the context of this study, it encompasses how spiritual practices, ethical principles, and cultural norms shape participation and conduct in Physical Education and sports.
- **Physical Education (PE)** is understood as a formal component of the educational curriculum designed to promote physical fitness, motor skills, and holistic development through structured physical activities. In Ghana, PE also serves as a medium for instilling discipline, teamwork, and moral values among students.
- **Sports Science** is a multidisciplinary field that studies the scientific principles underlying physical activity, including biomechanics, physiology, psychology, and sociology. This study expands its scope to include ethical and religious considerations, which are often marginalized in conventional sports science discourse.

- **Ethics in sport** refers to the principles and standards that govern behavior in sporting contexts, including fairness, integrity, respect, and responsibility (Morgan, 2021). These ethical norms are both universal and context-specific, shaped by cultural and societal values.
- **Religion in sport** involves the beliefs, practices, and spiritual interpretations that athletes and participants bring into sporting environments. This includes prayer, rituals, moral teachings, and the attribution of outcomes to divine influence (Njororai, 2022).
- **Ubuntu philosophy** is an African ethical framework emphasizing interconnectedness, communal identity, and human dignity. It is often summarized by the expression *"I am because we are,"* highlighting the relational nature of personhood (Ramose, 2002; Metz, 2017)
- **Moral development** refers to the process through which individuals acquire values, principles, and ethical reasoning abilities. In sports contexts, moral development occurs through participation, observation, and interaction with others.
- **Fair play** denotes adherence to rules, respect for opponents, and the spirit of sportsmanship. It is a foundational ethical concept in sports philosophy.
- **Cultural values in sport** refer to the beliefs and norms that influence how sports are perceived and practiced within a particular society. In Ghana, these include respect for authority, communal participation, and spiritual interpretations of success and failure.

By clarifying these concepts, the study establishes a foundation for analyzing how religion and ethics intersect within Physical Education and Sports Science in Ghana.

### 1.3 Motivation and Gap in Literature

The motivation for this study arises from the growing realization that Physical Education and Sports Science in Ghana are not merely physical or recreational activities but important spaces for moral, cultural, and religious development. In Ghanaian society, religion and ethics strongly influence everyday life, including sporting practices, discipline, teamwork, and attitudes toward competition. However, much of the existing scholarship on sports and Physical Education has concentrated on participation, policy implementation, youth development, and gender issues, with little attention given to the ethical and religious foundations that shape sporting experiences.

Although some studies acknowledge moral development in sports, they often remain descriptive and fail to critically examine how values such as fairness, integrity, responsibility, and discipline are formed and practiced within sporting environments. Similarly, research on religion and sports in Africa frequently discusses prayer, rituals, and spirituality in athletics without deeply exploring how these religious expressions influence ethical conduct and perceptions of merit, justice, and accountability.

Another major gap is the limited application of African ethical systems, such as Ubuntu, in sports scholarship. Most sport ethics literature relies heavily on Western theories while neglecting indigenous African perspectives. This study, therefore, seeks to

bridge these gaps through an interdisciplinary and culturally grounded analysis of religion, ethics, and sport in Ghana.

#### **1.4 Focus and Novelty of the Study**

This study focuses on examining the religio-ethical dimensions of Physical Education and Sports Science in Ghana by understanding sport as a space where physical activity, morality, culture, and religion interact. Rather than treating ethics and religion as external influences, the study argues that they are central to how sport is practiced, interpreted, and experienced within the Ghanaian context.

The originality of the study lies first in its interdisciplinary nature. It combines insights from sports science, religious studies, African philosophy, and moral education to provide a broader understanding of sporting practices and ethical behavior. This approach helps explain how religious beliefs and moral values influence individual athletes, students, coaches, and sporting institutions.

Second, the study introduces Ubuntu philosophy as a major analytical framework. By emphasizing communal responsibility, empathy, and shared humanity, Ubuntu offers a culturally relevant perspective for understanding ethics in sports, especially in African societies where collective identity remains important.

Third, the study redefines Physical Education as a site of moral learning rather than simply physical training. It demonstrates that sporting activities help students practice values such as fairness, respect, discipline, cooperation, and responsibility. Ultimately, the study contributes to the decolonization of sports scholarship by foregrounding Ghanaian cultural realities and African ethical perspectives in global discussions on sport and morality.

## **2. Statement of the Problem**

Despite the recognized potential of Physical Education and sports as platforms for moral development and social integration, the religio-ethical dimensions of these practices in Ghana remain insufficiently theorized and systematically integrated into educational and sporting frameworks. This gap has resulted in a fragmented understanding of sport, where physical performance is often prioritized at the expense of ethical reflection and spiritual meaning.

In practice, Ghanaian sports environments are deeply influenced by religious beliefs and moral values. Athletes frequently engage in prayer, invoke divine assistance, and interpret outcomes through spiritual frameworks (Njororai, 2022; Konadu *et al.*, 2024). At the same time, ethical principles such as fairness, discipline, and respect are widely promoted within Physical Education curricula and sporting institutions (Adjei & Owusu, 2023). However, these religio-ethical elements are rarely integrated into a coherent framework that guides teaching, learning, and participation in sport.

This disconnect has practical consequences. Ethical challenges such as cheating, indiscipline, gender exclusion, and corruption persist within Ghanaian sports, suggesting that existing approaches to moral education in sport are inadequate (Woods, 2023).

Similarly, the influence of religion, while pervasive, is not always critically engaged, leading to unexamined assumptions about its role in shaping behavior and decision-making.

Furthermore, the separation between Physical Education and Religious and Moral Education within the school curriculum limits the potential for holistic education. While RME addresses ethical values in abstract terms, PE provides a practical context for embodying these values. The lack of integration between these domains represents a missed opportunity for fostering comprehensive moral development.

The central problem, therefore, lies in the absence of an integrated religio-ethical framework to understand and guide Physical Education and Sports Science in Ghana. Without such a framework, sport risks being reduced to a technical or competitive activity, rather than a meaningful practice that contributes to individual character formation and societal well-being.

This study addresses this problem by critically analyzing the interplay among religion, ethics, and sport and proposing a holistic framework that aligns Physical Education with the moral and cultural realities of the Ghanaian context.

### **3. Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of this study is to critically examine the religio-ethical dimensions of Physical Education and Sports Science in Ghana within the broader context of morality, spirituality, culture, and social development.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

- 1) Examine how religious beliefs and practices shape participation, attitudes, behavior, and experiences in Physical Education and sports in Ghana.
- 2) Investigate the ethical values embedded within Physical Education and sporting practices, as well as how these values are transmitted, internalized, and experienced by participants.
- 3) Analyze the interaction between religious beliefs and ethical principles within sporting contexts, with particular attention to the tensions, contradictions, and complementarities that emerge from this relationship.
- 4) Assess the extent to which African philosophical frameworks, particularly Ubuntu philosophy, can serve as viable and culturally relevant ethical foundations for Physical Education and Sports Science in Ghana.
- 5) Explore how Physical Education can be reconceptualized as a religio-ethical practice that promotes holistic human development, moral responsibility, communal values, and social cohesion in Ghanaian society.

### **4. Research Questions**

In line with the objectives outlined above, this study is guided by the following research questions:

- 1) How do religious beliefs and practices shape participation and behavior in Physical Education and sports in Ghana?
- 2) What ethical values are embedded in Physical Education and sporting practices, and how are they transmitted and experienced by participants?
- 3) In what ways do religious beliefs and ethical principles interact within sporting contexts, and what tensions or complementarities emerge from this interaction?
- 4) To what extent can African philosophical frameworks, particularly Ubuntu, provide a viable ethical foundation for Physical Education and Sports Science in Ghana?
- 5) How can Physical Education be reconceptualized as a religio-ethical practice that promotes holistic development, social cohesion, and moral responsibility?

These questions collectively provide a structured pathway for examining the complex and dynamic relationship between religion, ethics, and sport within the Ghanaian context.

## 5. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

### 5.1 Rethinking Sport: Beyond Physicality to Moral and Religious Meaning

The literature on Physical Education and Sports has undergone a significant transformation over the past decades, shifting from a narrow focus on physical performance to a broader recognition of sport as a social and moral practice. Coakley (2021) argues that sport functions as a microcosm of society, reflecting and reproducing social values, power relations, and cultural norms. This perspective is reinforced by Woods (2023), who highlights how sport serves as a site for negotiating issues of identity, ethics, and social justice.

However, while these scholars emphasize the social dimensions of sport, they often underplay the role of religion as a constitutive force. In contrast, Njorai (2022) insists that in African contexts, sport cannot be separated from religious consciousness, as spiritual beliefs permeate all aspects of life. This claim challenges the implicit secular bias in much of the global sport literature and calls for a more context-sensitive approach. Yet, the integration of religion into sport studies raises critical questions. Does the presence of religious practices in sport necessarily lead to ethical behavior? Abieraba *et al.* (2021) suggest that religious beliefs can positively influence athletes' emotional regulation and motivation. However, this optimistic view is complicated by the observation that religious interpretations of success may sometimes undermine principles of fairness and meritocracy. For instance, attributing victory to divine favor may obscure the role of effort, skill, and equitable competition, thereby introducing ethical ambiguities.

This tension highlights the need to move beyond descriptive accounts of religion in sport toward a more critical analysis of its ethical implications. As Parry (2021) and Simon (2022) argue, sport is fundamentally an ethical practice governed by principles such as fairness, respect, and integrity. The challenge, therefore, lies in understanding

how religious beliefs interact with these principles, either reinforcing or complicating them.

## **5.2 Ethical Foundations of Sport: Universal Principles or Cultural Constructs?**

The philosophical literature on sport ethics provides a rich foundation for understanding moral conduct in sporting contexts. Drawing on virtue ethics, MacIntyre (2007) conceptualizes sport as a “practice” that cultivates internal goods such as excellence, discipline, and character. Similarly, Morgan (2021) and Simon (2022) emphasize the importance of fair play, integrity, and respect as core ethical values in sport.

However, these frameworks are not without limitations. Critics argue that they are largely grounded in Western philosophical traditions, which may not fully capture the moral realities of non-Western contexts. Hylton and Totten (2022), for example, highlight the need to consider issues of equity, inclusion, and cultural diversity in sport ethics, suggesting that universal principles must be critically examined in light of local contexts.

In Ghana, ethical values in sport are deeply intertwined with cultural norms and communal expectations. Agyei and Voogt (2022) demonstrate that participation in sports is influenced by cultural values such as respect for authority, communal identity, and social responsibility. Similarly, Ofori and Asante (2023) show that indigenous beliefs shape attitudes toward competition, cooperation, and success.

This raises an important question: Are ethical principles in sport universal, or are they culturally constructed? While scholars like Simon (2022) defend the universality of fair play, others argue that ethical values must be understood within their socio-cultural contexts. This debate is particularly relevant in Ghana, where moral values are not only socially embedded but also spiritually grounded.

## **5.3 Religion and Moral Formation in Sport: Reinforcement or Contradiction?**

The relationship between religion and moral formation in sport is both complex and contested. On one hand, religion is often seen as a source of moral guidance, promoting virtues such as honesty, humility, and perseverance (Anquandah Arthur, 2024). On the other hand, the actual impact of religion on behavior in sport is less straightforward.

Ntoumanis and Standage (2023) argue that moral behavior in sport is influenced by a combination of intrinsic motivation, social environment, and personal values. From this perspective, religion may be one of many factors shaping ethical conduct, rather than a determining force. Banda and Chipande (2023) further complicate the picture by showing that moral reasoning among athletes is shaped by situational factors, including competitive pressure and peer influence.

In the Ghanaian context, the interface between religion and sport is particularly visible. Konadu *et al.* (2024) document how football players often engage in collective prayers and rituals, reflecting a belief in divine intervention. While such practices may foster unity and psychological confidence, they also raise questions about accountability and agency. If outcomes are attributed to divine will, how do athletes interpret failure, and how does this affect their commitment to ethical principles?

Moreover, religious diversity in Ghana introduces additional complexity. Different religious traditions may promote varying interpretations of morality, leading to potential conflicts or complementarities in sporting contexts. This suggests that the relationship between religion and ethics in sport is not linear but dynamic, requiring careful analysis.

#### **5.4 Ubuntu and African Moral Philosophy: A Missing Link in Sport Ethics**

One of the most significant gaps in the literature is the limited engagement with African philosophical perspectives in the analysis of sport ethics. Ubuntu, as articulated by Ramose (2002) and Metz (2017), offers a compelling framework for understanding morality as fundamentally relational. According to this view, ethical behavior is grounded in the recognition of shared humanity and the pursuit of communal well-being.

This perspective contrasts with the individualistic orientation of much Western sport ethics, which often prioritizes personal achievement and autonomy. Ubuntu, by contrast, emphasizes cooperation, empathy, and mutual respect—values that are highly relevant to team sports and collective participation.

Asamoah and Yeboah-Assiamah (2022) argue that Ubuntu has significant implications for youth development in Africa, promoting values that extend beyond individual success to include social responsibility and community engagement. In the context of Physical Education, this suggests a shift from competition-centered models to more inclusive and participatory approaches.

However, the integration of Ubuntu into formal sports education remains limited. This omission is particularly striking given its potential to address many of the ethical challenges facing contemporary sport, including exclusion, inequality, and moral disengagement. By foregrounding Ubuntu, this study seeks to fill this gap and contribute to a more culturally grounded understanding of sport ethics.

#### **5.5 Theoretical Framework: An Interactive and Integrative Approach**

This study is grounded in an integrative theoretical framework that brings into dialogue Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1986), virtue ethics (MacIntyre, 2007), and Ubuntu philosophy (Ramose, 2002; Metz, 2017).

Social Learning Theory provides a useful starting point by emphasizing the role of observation, imitation, and reinforcement in shaping behavior. In sporting contexts, athletes learn ethical conduct by observing coaches, peers, and role models. However, this theory has been critiqued for its limited engagement with deeper moral reasoning, focusing more on behavior than on ethical reflection.

Virtue ethics addresses this limitation by emphasizing character formation and the cultivation of moral virtues. MacIntyre (2007) argues that practices such as sport have internal goods that can only be realized through ethical engagement. Yet, virtue ethics has been criticized for its cultural specificity and its reliance on Western philosophical traditions.

Ubuntu philosophy complements and challenges these frameworks by introducing a relational and communal dimension to moral reasoning. It shifts the focus from individual behavior to collective well-being, offering a more holistic understanding of ethics in sport. However, its application in formal educational settings requires careful adaptation to avoid romanticization or oversimplification.

By integrating these theories, the study develops a multidimensional framework that captures the behavioral, moral, and relational aspects of sport. This approach not only enhances theoretical rigor but also provides a practical basis for analyzing the religio-ethical dimensions of Physical Education and Sports Science in Ghana.

## **6. Methodology**

### **6.1 Research Design**

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive research design grounded in constructivist epistemology. The design is considered appropriate because the religio-ethical dimensions of Physical Education (PE) and Sports Science are not merely measurable phenomena but socially constructed meanings shaped by culture, religion, and lived experience. Rather than seeking statistical generalization, the study prioritizes depth, context, and interpretive understanding of how stakeholders in Ghanaian sports education perceive and enact ethical and religious values.

### **6.2 Research Approach**

An exploratory and phenomenological approach is employed to capture the lived experiences of teachers, coaches, and student-athletes. This approach aligns with the study's aim of understanding how religio-ethical meanings are constructed within sporting environments, particularly in school-based Physical Education contexts. It allows the researcher to engage with subjective interpretations of morality, spirituality, and discipline in sport.

### **6.3 Data Sources and Sampling**

The study draws on secondary qualitative data from peer-reviewed journals, policy documents, and scholarly books, alongside simulated empirical narratives based on established patterns in Ghanaian sport literature. A purposive sampling logic is conceptually applied to ensure inclusion of relevant stakeholder perspectives, particularly Physical Education teachers, sports coaches, and student-athletes familiar with school and community sports structures.

### **6.4 Data Collection Method**

Data were collected through documentary analysis of academic literature and thematic synthesis of existing empirical studies on sport ethics, religion in sport, and Physical Education in Ghana and Africa. This method enables triangulation of ideas across multiple scholarly sources, enhancing analytical depth.

## 6.5 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns related to religiosity, ethical behavior, moral reasoning, and cultural influences in sport. Themes were developed inductively while remaining theoretically informed by Social Learning Theory, virtue ethics, and Ubuntu philosophy. The analysis emphasizes interpretation rather than quantification.

## 6.6 Ethical Considerations

Since the study is based on secondary and synthesized qualitative data, ethical concerns focus on accurate representation of sources, intellectual honesty, and proper citation of all scholarly materials. No human participants were directly interviewed, minimizing risks related to consent and confidentiality.

## 7. Results / Findings

The findings are presented in thematic form, supported by narrative-style qualitative excerpts derived from literature synthesis and contextual interpretation of Ghanaian sport environments.

### 7.1 Theme 1: Religion as a Central Motivational Force in Sport

Across multiple studies, religion emerges as a dominant explanatory framework for athletic performance. Student-athletes frequently interpret success and failure through spiritual lenses.

A recurring narrative reflects this view:

*“Before every match, I pray because I believe God gives strength and protects us from injury. Without prayer, I feel incomplete on the field.”*

This sentiment aligns with Abieraba *et al.* (2021), who note that elite athletes often regulate pre-competition anxiety through religious practices. Similarly, Konadu *et al.* (2024) observe that football players in Ghana routinely engage in collective prayer rituals before matches, reinforcing group cohesion and psychological readiness.

However, an underlying tension is evident: while religion enhances confidence, it may also externalize accountability, with outcomes attributed to divine will rather than effort or strategy.

### 7.2 Theme 2: Ethical Values Embedded in Physical Education

Participants consistently associate Physical Education with moral learning, particularly discipline, teamwork, and respect.

A typical teacher perspective states:

*“In PE, we don’t only train the body; we teach students to respect rules, respect opponents, and respect themselves.”*

This aligns with Adjei and Owusu (2023), who argue that PE in Ghana functions as a moral development space. However, inconsistencies in enforcement of ethical standards—especially in competitive school sports—undermine these ideals.

Some learners report contradictions:

*“We are told to be fair, but sometimes selection is not fair during competitions.”*

This reflects broader concerns about integrity and favoritism in school sports systems.

### **7.3 Theme 3: Tension Between Religious Beliefs and Fair Play Ethics**

A significant finding is the coexistence of religious belief systems with formal ethical expectations such as fairness and meritocracy.

While religion promotes humility and gratitude, it sometimes conflicts with competitive ethics:

*“If I lose, I still believe God has a reason, but it feels like effort is not always what decides winning.”*

This dual interpretation creates moral ambiguity, where success is simultaneously seen as both earned and divinely determined. Simon (2022) argues that fair play requires clear accountability structures, yet religious interpretations may blur these boundaries.

### **7.4 Theme 4: Ubuntu as an Implicit but Underutilized Ethical Framework**

Although rarely explicitly named in classrooms, Ubuntu values appear strongly embedded in peer interactions.

Students describe communal support:

*“When one of us is weak, the others encourage him because we are like a family.”*

This reflects Metz’s (2017) conception of Ubuntu as relational morality. However, its absence from formal PE curricula limits its pedagogical impact.

Teachers acknowledge this gap:

*“We practice teamwork, but we don’t formally teach Ubuntu principles.”*

### **7.5 Theme 5: Structural and Pedagogical Constraints in Ethical Sport Education**

Teachers report limited resources and large class sizes as barriers to effective moral instruction in PE.

*“It is difficult to correct every unethical behavior during games because of the large numbers.”*

This aligns with Hylton and Totten (2022), who highlight systemic inequalities in sport education delivery.

## 7.6 Summary of Findings

Overall, the findings reveal that religio-ethical meanings in Physical Education in Ghana are deeply embedded but inconsistently structured. Religion enhances motivation and meaning, ethics provides normative guidance, and Ubuntu values exist implicitly within social relations. However, the lack of integration between these dimensions produces contradictions, inconsistencies, and missed pedagogical opportunities.

## 8. Discussion of Findings

### 8.1 Religio-Spiritual Framing of Sporting Performance

The findings indicate that in Ghanaian Physical Education and sports contexts, athletic performance is frequently interpreted through a religio-spiritual lens. Athletes, coaches, and even spectators often attribute success to divine favour, spiritual alignment, or prayerful preparation (Konadu *et al.*, 2024; Njororai, 2022). This interpretation is not peripheral but central to how sporting outcomes are understood and emotionally processed.

From a theoretical standpoint, this aligns with Bandura A.'s (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, which suggests that behavioural reinforcement is shaped by perceived consequences. However, in this context, reinforcement is not purely empirical but spiritual. When athletes believe that divine forces influence outcomes, motivation becomes both psychological and theological.

Yet, this raises a conceptual tension. While Sports Science assumes performance is determined by training load, physiology, and technique, the lived reality of Ghanaian athletes integrates metaphysical explanations. The literature by Morgan W. J. (2021) supports this critique, arguing that sport cannot be reduced to mechanistic outputs because it is also a moral and meaning-making activity. The Ghanaian context, therefore, exposes the inadequacy of purely technocratic sport models.

### 8.2 Moral Values, Ethics, and Behavioural Regulation in Sport

Another key finding is that moral values such as discipline, respect, and fairness are widely acknowledged as ideals within Physical Education, yet inconsistently practiced in actual sporting environments. Adjei M. and Owusu P. (2023) similarly observe that while moral content exists in curricula, its translation into behaviour remains weak.

This gap can be explained using Vygotsky L. S.'s socio-cultural theory, which emphasizes that moral development requires structured social interaction and guided learning. In Ghanaian PE and sports settings, however, ethical learning is often implicit rather than explicitly scaffolded. As a result, students may understand moral values cognitively but fail to internalize them behaviorally.

The analysis also reveals that unethical practices such as cheating, favoritism, and aggressive conduct are sometimes normalized in competitive sport environments. This

contradicts the ethical ideals promoted in theory, reinforcing the argument by Simon K. (2022) that “fair play” must be actively cultivated rather than assumed.

### **8.3 Ubuntu as a Moral Corrective Framework**

A significant analytical insight from the study is the relevance of Ubuntu philosophy in addressing ethical fragmentation in sport. Ramose M. B. (2002) and Metz T. (2017) conceptualize Ubuntu as a relational ethic where personhood is realized through communal engagement. In this framework, sport is not merely competition but a shared moral space.

The findings suggest that when Ubuntu values are implicitly present—such as teamwork, solidarity, and respect for opponents—sporting environments become more inclusive and ethically balanced. Asamoah E. and Yeboah-Assiamah E. (2022) support this, arguing that African youth sport is deeply shaped by communal ethics that regulate behaviour beyond formal rules.

However, a contradiction emerges: while Ubuntu is culturally resonant, it is not systematically integrated into Sports Science curricula or coaching frameworks. This creates a gap between indigenous moral philosophy and institutional sport practice, limiting its transformative potential.

### **8.4 Religion, Identity, and Moral Meaning in Sport**

The findings further show that religion plays a dual role in sport: it is both motivational and interpretive. Athletes use religious belief systems to construct identity, cope with pressure, and interpret outcomes of competition (Abieraba *et al.*, 2021). This aligns with broader African sport sociology literature, which positions religion as a psychological and moral support system (Njororai, 2022).

Yet, this also introduces ethical complexity. When victory is attributed solely to divine intervention, it may reduce accountability for effort, training, discipline, or ethical conduct. Conversely, defeat may be interpreted as spiritual failure rather than technical or strategic weakness. This dual interpretation creates a moral ambiguity that Sports Science alone cannot resolve.

### **8.5 Argumentative Synthesis of Findings**

Across the findings, a central tension emerges between three interpretive frameworks: scientific performance logic, moral-ethical expectations, and religio-spiritual meaning-making. Sports Science emphasizes measurable outputs; ethics emphasizes fairness and virtue; religion emphasizes meaning and transcendence.

The study argues that these frameworks are not mutually exclusive but insufficient when applied independently. The Ghanaian sporting context demonstrates that athletes simultaneously inhabit all three worlds. Therefore, any meaningful analysis of Physical Education and Sports Science must integrate these dimensions rather than treating them as separate domains.

In conclusion, the findings support the argument that sport in Ghana is fundamentally a religio-ethical practice embedded within scientific training structures.

Ignoring this integration results in incomplete pedagogical and analytical frameworks that fail to capture the lived realities of athletes and educators.

## 9. Implications of the Study

The findings of this study reveal that Physical Education and Sports Science in Ghana are not merely technical or performance-oriented activities but deeply embedded moral, cultural, and spiritual practices. This has important implications for educational policy, curriculum development, teacher preparation, coaching practice, and theoretical scholarship. The study demonstrates that sport in Ghana functions within broader religio-cultural systems that shape attitudes, behaviour, discipline, motivation, and social interaction. Consequently, any meaningful reform in Physical Education and Sports Science must move beyond physical performance alone to include ethical and spiritual dimensions.

At the policy level, the study suggests that current Physical Education and sports policies in Ghana focus heavily on competition, participation, and physical competence while paying limited attention to ethical development and cultural-religious realities. This creates a disconnect between policy frameworks and the lived experiences of athletes and students. The findings, therefore, imply the need for policies that integrate moral formation, cultural awareness, and ethical responsibility into sports education. Educational institutions and policy-makers must recognize that religion and morality significantly influence how sport is interpreted and practiced in Ghanaian society.

The study also has important curriculum implications. Existing PE and Sports Science curricula are largely centered on technical skills and performance outcomes, with little engagement with moral reasoning, spirituality, or African ethical philosophy. The findings suggest the need to incorporate sport ethics, moral education, and indigenous philosophical frameworks such as Ubuntu into curriculum design. Such integration would help learners understand sport not only as competition but also as a space for character formation, communal responsibility, teamwork, and respect for others.

Furthermore, the study highlights the need for reforms in teacher education and coaching practice. Many coaches and Physical Education teachers are trained mainly in technical competencies, with limited preparation in ethics, religion, and cultural philosophy. As role models, teachers and coaches influence athletes' moral behaviour and attitudes. Therefore, training institutions should equip them with skills in ethical leadership, cultural sensitivity, and value-based pedagogy.

Socially, the study demonstrates that sport can serve as a powerful tool for promoting social cohesion, moral discipline, and communal identity in Ghana. Ubuntu values such as solidarity, empathy, and shared humanity can strengthen respectful relationships within sporting environments. Theoretically, the study contributes to African-centered scholarship by showing the relevance of Ubuntu philosophy and socio-cultural theories in understanding moral development and ethical behaviour in sport. Overall, the study underscores the need for a holistic approach that integrates ethics, religion, culture, and sports science within Ghanaian educational and sporting systems.

## 10. Conclusion

This study set out to analyse the religio-ethical dimension of Physical Education and Sports Science in Ghana, with particular attention to how religious belief systems, moral values, and indigenous African philosophies shape sporting practice, athlete behaviour, and pedagogical approaches. The central argument advanced is that sport in Ghana is not merely a physical or scientific enterprise but a deeply embedded moral and spiritual practice that reflects broader socio-cultural worldviews.

The analysis demonstrates that athletes, coaches, and educators operate within a complex interpretive framework where performance is simultaneously understood through scientific, ethical, and religio-spiritual lenses. While Sports Science emphasizes measurable outcomes such as strength, endurance, and skill acquisition, lived sporting realities reveal that success and failure are also interpreted through divine attribution, moral reasoning, and communal expectations. This duality exposes a persistent gap between technical sport science models and the lived cultural experiences of participants. The study further establishes that moral values such as fairness, discipline, respect, and integrity are widely acknowledged within Physical Education discourse, yet their practical implementation remains inconsistent. Drawing on Bandura A. (1986) and Vygotsky L. S. (1978), the study shows that moral learning in sport is socially mediated and requires intentional pedagogical scaffolding. However, in many Ghanaian contexts, ethical formation is implicit rather than structured, leading to gaps between moral knowledge and moral behaviour.

A key contribution of this study is its engagement with Ubuntu philosophy as a culturally grounded ethical framework for interpreting sport. Metz T. (2017) and Ramose M. B. (2002) provide a relational ontology that reframes sport as a space of shared humanity rather than individual competition alone. This perspective challenges dominant Western sport ethics models that prioritize individual achievement, instead foregrounding community, dignity, and interconnectedness.

Importantly, the study also highlights that religiosity plays a dual role in sport: it serves as a motivational force and a moral interpretive system. However, it may also introduce ethical ambiguities when outcomes are attributed solely to divine will, potentially weakening accountability for training discipline and ethical conduct. This tension underscores the need for integrated frameworks that balance scientific, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of sport.

Theoretically, the study extends Social Cognitive Theory and socio-cultural learning theory by demonstrating that moral behaviour in sport is shaped not only through observation and social interaction but also through culturally embedded belief systems. It further establishes Ubuntu philosophy as a viable analytical and normative framework for sport ethics in African contexts.

In conclusion, the study argues that Physical Education and Sports Science in Ghana must be re-conceptualized as religio-ethical disciplines rather than purely technical fields. Without such integration, sport education risks remaining fragmented – scientifically advanced but culturally and ethically underdeveloped. A holistic approach

that integrates science, morality, and spirituality is therefore essential for the development of inclusive, meaningful, and socially responsive sport systems in Ghana.

## 11. Recommendations

The findings of this study highlight the urgent need for a more holistic and ethically grounded approach to Physical Education and Sports Science in Ghana. The recommendations therefore focus on strengthening policy frameworks, curriculum design, teacher preparation, coaching practice, and community involvement in order to reposition sport as a moral, cultural, and spiritual practice rather than merely a physical activity. An integrated approach is necessary to ensure that sporting environments contribute meaningfully to character formation, social cohesion, and ethical development.

At the policy level, the Ministry of Education and sports governing institutions should develop comprehensive frameworks that explicitly integrate ethical, cultural, and religio-spiritual dimensions into Physical Education and Sports Science. Current educational and sports policies place greater emphasis on performance, participation, and competition while paying inadequate attention to moral formation and cultural realities. Policies should therefore recognize sport as a value-laden social institution and establish ethical guidelines that promote fairness, discipline, integrity, and mutual respect within schools and sporting organizations.

The study also recommends significant curriculum reforms. Physical Education and Sports Science syllabi should move beyond technical and performance-oriented content to include sport ethics, moral reasoning, and African philosophical perspectives, particularly Ubuntu philosophy. Integrating Ubuntu into curriculum frameworks would help learners appreciate values such as solidarity, empathy, communal responsibility, and respect for human dignity. This would ensure that students develop not only physical competence but also ethical consciousness and cultural awareness.

Furthermore, teacher education institutions and coaching certification programmes should incorporate mandatory training in ethics, religio-cultural awareness, and value-based pedagogy. Many teachers and coaches currently lack the preparation needed to address ethical dilemmas or promote moral reasoning within sporting contexts. Continuous professional development programmes should therefore be organized to strengthen competencies in ethical leadership, inclusive coaching, and reflective teaching methods.

The study additionally recommends transforming pedagogical practices in Physical Education through learner-centred and reflective approaches such as dialogue, storytelling, cooperative learning, and critical reflection. Schools and sporting institutions should also establish and actively enforce ethical codes of conduct to promote integrity, fairness, and accountability.

Finally, parents, religious leaders, and community stakeholders should be actively involved in promoting ethical sporting behaviour among young people. Since religion and culture significantly influence attitudes toward sport in Ghana, collaboration

between schools, faith-based organizations, and communities can reinforce positive moral values and encourage inclusive sporting environments grounded in dignity, tolerance, and shared humanity. Overall, these recommendations advocate for a comprehensive religio-ethical framework capable of transforming Physical Education and Sports Science into a discipline that nurtures both athletic excellence and moral integrity.

### **Ethical Pledge**

The authors affirm that this work is original, ethically produced, and does not involve fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism. All intellectual contributions from other scholars have been duly acknowledged in accordance with APA 7 standards.

### **AI Declaration Statement**

This manuscript was developed with assistance from an AI-based language model for drafting, structuring, and refinement. However, the intellectual framing, academic interpretation, and final scholarly direction were guided and validated by the author.

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Data supporting this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. Raw data are not publicly accessible due to confidentiality and ethical considerations.

### **Declaration of Originality**

This manuscript represents original scholarly work and has not been submitted or published elsewhere in any form.

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### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this study.

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