

Evaluation of a university service-learning experience of physical activity and sports in a juvenile justice context from the participants' perspective

Valoración de una experiencia de aprendizaje-servicio universitario de actividad físico-deportiva en un contexto de justicia juvenil desde la perspectiva de las personas participantes

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to assess the transformative impact of a service-learning experience through a social sports event at a juvenile justice centre, where an external group and incarcerated individuals came together to design, carry out and evaluate a programme of cooperative motor skills challenges. This study presents the participants' perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages identified, with the goal of improving the programme. A qualitative research design is put forward, using content analysis as the research technique, based on the dimensions of personal, social, and professional development; perceived learning; and suggestions for improvement. This service-learning experience involved four institutional representatives from a Juvenile Detention and Education Centre on the island of Tenerife (Spain), 18 incarcerated individuals, and 21 university students enrolled in a Master's programme in teacher education. Four data collection instruments were used in the evaluation: personal interviews, portfolios, short video presentations, and focus groups. The results confirm that service-learning is a resource with transformative potential for social inclusion, promoting empowerment, decision-making to address challenges, overcoming prejudices, and generating positive experiences. It is concluded that, despite some differences in the

Date of receipt of the original: 08/07/2025

Date of approval: 18/11/2025

Please, cite this article as follows: Gómez-Rijo, A., García-Fariña, A., Fernández-Cabrera, J. M., & Jiménez-Jiménez, F. (2026). Evaluation of a university service-learning experience of physical activity and sports in a juvenile justice context from the participants' perspective [Valoración de una experiencia de aprendizaje-servicio universitario de actividad físico-deportiva en un contexto de justicia juvenil desde la perspectiva de las personas participantes]. *Revista Española de Pedagogía*, 84(294), 253-272. <https://doi.org/10.9781/rep.2026.402>

perceptions of the various participants, overall there is a shared vision of the dimensions studied, with nuances on the interpretation of each.

Keywords: methodology; physical education; university; innovation; social inclusion; teacher training.

Resumen

El objetivo de este estudio es valorar el alcance transformador de una experiencia de aprendizaje-servicio a través de un encuentro sociodeportivo en un centro de justicia juvenil, donde un colectivo externo y las personas privadas de libertad diseñan, desarrollan y valoran conjuntamente un programa de retos cooperativos de carácter motivador. En este estudio se presenta la percepción de las ventajas e inconvenientes señaladas por las personas participantes con el objeto de mejorarla. Se propone un diseño de investigación cualitativa, que utiliza el análisis de contenido como técnica, a partir de las dimensiones: desarrollo personal, social y profesional, aprendizaje percibido y propuestas de mejora. Participaron 4 responsables institucionales de un Centro de Internamiento Educativo de Menores de la isla de Tenerife (España), 18 personas privadas de libertad y 21 estudiantes universitarios del Máster en formación del profesorado. En su valoración, se utilizaron cuatro instrumentos de recogida de datos: entrevistas individuales, portafolios, píldoras audiovisuales y grupos focales. Los resultados constatan que el aprendizaje servicio constituye un recurso con potencial transformador para la inclusión social, promoviendo el empoderamiento, la toma de decisiones para afrontar retos, la superación de prejuicios y la generación de experiencias satisfactorias. Se concluye que el contraste de las percepciones entre los diversos agentes participantes evidencia una visión compartida sobre las dimensiones estudiadas, con matices sobre la interpretación de cada una de ellas.

Palabras clave: metodología; educación física; universidad; innovación; inclusión social; formación del profesorado.

1. Introduction

The prospects that underlie service-learning (SL) in the university environment are grounded in the creation of real scenarios in which students can apply their learn learning, foster their social commitment to vulnerable groups and overcome stereotypes, while also driving personal and social development (Blanco Cano & García-Martín, 2021; Bonastre *et al.*, 2021; Jiménez *et al.*, 2022; Luna *et al.*, 2018). However, focusing solely on this group could limit the transformative scope of this methodology, as it is vital to understand the impact that these experiences have on the various actors involved, and on the community to whom the service is provided. The assessment of impact therefore extends to any kind of development experienced by the people within the community itself (Redondo-Corcobado & Fuentes, 2020). For this purpose, the dimensions defined by these authors in terms of the contributions of SL, based on Furco's framework (2004), could prove useful: personal, social, academic and professional development.

In the context of SL experiences involving physical activity and sports, benefits can be seen in relation to all these dimensions. For example, with regard to social development, SL offers the recipient group the chance to develop their social skills and take on responsibilities as part of a reciprocal process (Chiva-Bartoll *et al.*, 2019). This interactivity not only leads to changes in self-perception, but also promotes the development of social competencies that can make it easier to integrate into the community, to improve it, and even contribute

to its transformation (Aubert *et al.*, 2014; Santos-Rego *et al.*, 2015). With regard to personal development, changes in the thoughts, feelings and self-esteem of the students who lead SL experiences have been reported, leading them to feel better about their personal qualities (Chiva-Bartoll *et al.*, 2019). There are also implications for the personal growth of the service recipients, such as boosted self-confidence (López-de-Arana *et al.*, 2023), and the service providers' ability to recognise and overcome prejudices (Jiménez *et al.*, 2022). Moreover, this type of experience has also been shown to increase willingness to do physical exercise among the service recipients, and to encourage processes of reflection that ensure students are aware of what they learn and what they need to learn (Santos-Pastor *et al.*, 2021). In terms of students' academic and professional development, benefits include the development of teaching competencies (Capella-Peris *et al.*, 2020), the linking of theory and practice (Chiva-Bartoll *et al.*, 2020; Franco-Solá & Figueras, 2020), the promotion of a critical and inclusive attitude (Chiva-Bartoll *et al.*, 2020), as well as competencies mainly related to knowledge mastery, problem-solving skills, attitudes towards learning or the ability to relate learning to the world around them (Chiva-Bartoll *et al.*, 2019). With regard to the institutional representatives of the centres that receive the service, the focus is on expanding their professional competencies and reflecting on their professional practice, offering suggestions for improvement (García-Fariña *et al.*, 2024).

When considering the role of physical activity and sports in the context of detention centres specifically related to juvenile justice (Spanish Royal Decree 1774/2004, of 30 July), it is clear that it has traditionally been first and foremost associated with active leisure and physical fitness. However, some centres also include learning objectives in their education programmes, making it possible to enhance pedagogical interventions. As such, the implementation of SL experiences in these centres offers distinctive educational value by allowing incarcerated individuals to interact with external actors, providing a much more enriching experience for all groups involved. In these centres, judicial measures are applied within a semi-open or closed regime. Centres based on a closed regime are where SL experiences have the greatest potential for personal and social transformation.

With regard to SL experiences in the context of social sports events (SSE) held at prison compounds and juvenile detention centres, the sense of welcoming, empowerment and collective celebration are particularly significant (Jiménez *et al.*, 2022; Hinojosa-Alcalde *et al.*, 2022; Ríos, 2017), as participants are encouraged to get involved, and joint decision-making takes place in a context of mutual recognition and acceptance, allowing both groups to express themselves in a committed and natural way. In this study, we use the term "social sports event" (SSE) to describe a planned day of cooperative physical activity and sports, during which incarcerated individuals take part together with an external group (master's students), where the purpose is two-fold: to provide a meaningful motor skills experience and to offer an interactive educational event for both groups. From a reciprocal approach (Chiva-Bartoll *et al.*, 2019), the SSE allows incarcerated individuals to interact with outsiders, develop their social skills and take on responsibilities. They are provided with a prime environment in which to develop their social and personal skills, giving them better chances of successful reintegration into society (García-Fariña *et al.*, 2024).

Finally, the context of physical activity and sports is particularly fitting for SL in juvenile justice for three reasons. Firstly, its playful nature makes it easier to involve young people whose educational path may have been marked by academic failure or disengagement. Secondly, cooperative challenges foster positive interdependence, communication and coordination between peers, which are key to building bonds and developing social skills. Moreover, the possibility of adapting motor activities to different levels of skill, together with a reciprocal approach to the interaction, allows all participants to experience recognition and self-efficacy, both of which are fundamental to the social inclusion and reintegration that inspire SL in juvenile justice contexts.

Reflecting on the impact of an SL experience on the various actors involved is crucial in order to identify how it could be improved and ensure its sustainability. Therefore, the

aim of this study is to assess the transformative impact of an SL experience through an SSE at a juvenile justice centre, from the perspective of the various actors involved (master's students, incarcerated individuals and the institutional representatives of the group of service recipients).

2. Method

2.1. Study Design

This study was conducted based on the qualitative interpretive paradigm, taking the perspectives of phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty, 1994) and symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1982) as key points of reference. This paradigm and its related perspectives are particularly useful if the aim is to uncover the meaning socially constructed by participants (Sparkes, 1992). This research design contributes to understanding individual and shared perceptions among the different agents involved in the SSE.

2.2. Participants

The participants of the experience were four institutional representatives (IR) of a Juvenile Detention and Education Centre (JDEC) on the island of Tenerife (Spain): the centre's director, educational coordinator, educator and Physical Education teacher; 18 incarcerated individuals (II) (12 boys and 6 girls); and 21 students of the Master's Degree in Teacher Training (MS) at the Universidad de La Laguna (ULL) (13 boys and 8 girls). The MS and IR chose to take part on a voluntary basis, while the II were selected by the JDEC educators.

2.3. Data Collection Instruments

The following instruments were used in the evaluation of the SL experience:

1. Portfolios (PF). During the module, the MS each prepared a portfolio in which they recorded self-reflections and perceptions about their approach to SL as a pedagogical strategy, as well as about their involvement in the SSE experience. Although the portfolio was built gradually over the year, it was finally submitted and assessed at the end of the module. It consisted of a written collection of their reflections on their involvement in the SSE.
2. Personal interview (PI). A semi-structured interview was used to collect data on the II's perceptions. The interview, consisting of seven questions, sought to shed light on the experiential and educational aspects of taking part in the SSE.
3. Short videos (SV). To gather the perceptions of the MS, two SV were recorded for each of the participants: one after the first SSE and another upon finishing the experience at the end of year. Each SV was under a minute long.
4. Focus group (FG). Two focus groups were used to record the perceptions of IR and MS. Both focus groups were moderated by two of the researchers conducting the study. The characteristics of each focus group were as follows:
 1. IR focus group. Participants of this group were selected with intention, as they were all JDEC staff members who had been involved somehow in organising the SSE.
 2. MS focus group. As a criterion for homogeneity, members of this group were selected based on their active involvement in the organisation, design and execution of the SSE. As a criterion for heterogeneity, both sexes were included (three girls and four boys). One of the researchers acted as a moderator, tasked with informing the participants about the procedure and requiring their verbal consent. All of this was recorded and videotaped. They

were also told that they could leave the group at any time, maintaining the right not to take part. At the end, they were thanked for their participation and the draft transcript was shared to be cross-checked and altered where necessary.

In order to triangulate the perspectives between the groups of participants, the dimensions put forward by Furco (2004) were considered in both the interview and the IR/MS focus groups (Table 1). The groups were also encouraged to offer suggestions for improvement.

TABLE 1. Structure of the data collection instruments used in the SL experience and actors involved.

Instrument	Description	Actors
Portfolio	Identification of the activity, evaluation of execution and suggestions on how to improve. Reflection on the process of presenting the SL model as the chosen methodology, and evaluation of the SSE experience.	21 MS (13 boys and 8 girls)
Personal interview	<p>The questions asked were as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What three aspects of the experience would you highlight positively, taking into account: a) the preparations in the lead-up to the SSE? and b) the SSE itself? 2. Do you consider that both the preparation and the execution of the SSE: a) has helped improve the atmosphere and interaction with the rest of your classmates in the Physical Education class? Why? and b) has helped improve your relationship with your Physical Education teacher? In what way? (social dimension) 3. Do you think you have learned anything from this experience? If so, name at least three things that you have learned. (personal dimension) 4. Would you recommend this experience to others? Why? 5. What aspects would you change or include in the experience? 	13 II (11 boys and 2 girls)
Short videos	Evaluation of interaction with JDEC agents and the experience overall	9 MS (5 boys and 4 girls)
Focus group - IR	<p>The interview question script was divided into 5 dimensions and their related questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In your role, do you consider that experiences like this can support the education of JDEC students? On which aspects of learning do you think this experience has had the greatest impact? (academic dimension) What suggestions would you make to improve the educational impact of the SSE's design from your respective scope of action? (suggestions for improvement) 2. How do you assess the personal impact of the SSE on the incarcerated individuals who have taken part? (personal dimension) 	4 IRs (2 men and 2 women)

Focus group - IR	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. As those responsible for the academic and personal life of JDEC students, to what extent do you think experiences like this can help the professionals involved in this educational and social process? (professional dimension) 5. Identify the three most important things about the experience and three things to improve. What overall impact do you think this experience has had on daily life in the JDEC and on the different authorities involved? (professional dimension) In terms of the SSE's organisation, what do you think has worked best and what needs to be improved? What could be done from all areas of centre management to promote experiences of this kind, which tend to remain confined to the JDEC context? (suggestions for improvement) Is there anything else you would like to add about this SL experience? 	4 IRs (2 men and 2 women)
Focus group - MS	<p>The interview question script was divided into 5 dimensions and their related questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What have you learned from this experience in relation to the module? (academic dimension) Do you think this experience should be continued in the university environment? 2. To what extent has this experience had a personal impact on you? (personal dimension) 3. To what extent do you think experiences like this help to improve the conditions of groups with social needs? How can experiences like this help to improve your social engagement in the community? (social dimension) For what reasons would you recommend others to take part in an SL experience? 4. Do you think this experience has helped to improve your training as future teachers? Do you feel able to carry out SL experiences in your future professional practice? (professional dimension) 5. Identify the three most important things about the experience and three things to improve. (suggestions for improvement) Is there anything else you would like to add about this SL experience? 	7 MS (4 boys and 3 girls)

Source: Prepared by the authors.

2.4. Procedure

The experience was conducted over one school year through a collaboration agreement between the ULL and the Canary Islands' Youth Foundation (IDEO). It focused on the collaborative design, execution and evaluation of two SSE programmes between the MS and II. The first event was held at the JDEC facilities; the second took place at the ULL's Faculty of Education. The entire SSE process was as follows:

1. Initial phase: preparation. First of all, the heads of the JDEC were contacted and they agreed to take part in the experience. A timeline was set for its design and execution. The MS then received information about the experience and the chance to take part on a voluntary basis. During this phase, an educator from the JDEC visited the Faculty to provide the students with some information about the centre and II. Finally, a commitment was made to design and test a set of cooperative motor skills challenges, whereby each group of participants had to come up with four motor activities for each session.
2. Intermediate phase: execution. Execution began with the first SSE at the JDEC facilities. The participation dynamics were as follows: 1) the whole group was welcomed and the objectives of the experience were explained, as were the rules for taking part; 2) then, each group (II and MS) took turns to present their cooperative challenges. These cooperative challenges took the form of cooperative physical activities with a motor skill objective, presented as a collective challenge with multiple solutions to be solved as a group, through actions tailored to the individual characteristics of each and every participant (Fernández-Río & Velázquez-Callado, 2005); and 3) the experience ended with refreshments for all participants. The second SSE was held on site at the ULL, and followed the same participation dynamics as the first one.
3. Final phase: evaluation of the experience. At the end of the academic year, the experience was evaluated by everyone involved in the project. This period was used to gather and analyse the data collected through the various instruments used.

2.5. Data Analysis

Content analysis was used to distinguish units of meaning and establish relationships between the various dimensions. A mixed-method strategy was used to analyse the qualitative data, combining both a deductive approach based on the dimensions put forward by Redondo-Corcobado & Fuentes (2020)—employing Furco’s (2004) framework—and an inductive approach based on the substantive theories emerging from the participants (MS, II and IR). The program ATLAS.ti (version 24) was also used for qualitative analysis.

As for the process of categorisation, an initial phase of deduction was carried out to define some of the study dimensions, in accordance with Redondo-Corcobado & Fuentes (2020). From there, the qualitative inductive/exploratory process continued, based on content analysis of the substantive theories provided by the various actors. This led to the initial formulation of the qualitative category system (with a hierarchical classification structure consisting of 6 dimensions and 18 categories). The text was then segmented into units of meaning and coded according to this category system. As a unit of context, the SSE was chosen for all documents. The following steps were taken to process the resulting data:

1. A collaborative project was created, in which all related documents were transcribed.
2. A thorough reading was carried out in order to select passages of text and assign codes according to the categories studied (Table 2).
3. The appropriate reports (outputs) were created, forming the basis of the analysis and interpretation of the data. The program ATLAS.ti was used to generate outputs by selecting a code and extracting all text fragments related to that code.

By way of example, the statement “it’s true that we had certain prejudices about the type of students we met there...” (MS-PF) was segmented as a unit of meaning and coded under the PRE (Prejudices) category of the personal development dimension.

From a qualitative perspective, the quality of the data was controlled and ensured based on the consensus of the coders (Anguera & Hernández-Mendo, 2013). This process was carried out as follows:

1. The four authors of this article were divided into pairs.
2. Each pair coded a separate document based on discussion, reflection and consensus between the two partners.
3. The two pairs then came together to cross-check and validate each category based on discussion, analysis, evaluation and, finally, consensus on the placement of the category studied.

Table 2 shows all dimensions and categories used in the analysis of the statements made by those who took part in the SL experience.

TABLE 2. Category system with corresponding codes and definitions.

Dimension	Category	Code	Definition
1. Personal Development	Empowerment	EMP	Taking on a leading role
	Positive experience	PEX	Positive evaluations of the experience
	Prejudices	PRE	Challenging preconceptions
	Personal challenge	CHA	Identification of personal challenge
2. Social Development	Social skills	SKI	Recognition and acceptance of others
	Transferability	TRN	Identifying future behaviour
3. Perceived Learning	Educational scope	SCO	Meaningful contribution of the practical process and reflection
	Cooperation	COP	Recognition of collaboration
	Development of values	VAL	Identification of desired effects
	Presentation strategies	PRS	Identification of effective alternative methods
4. Professional Development	Attribution of intention	INT	Attribution of purpose to the experience
	Institutional impact	INS	Effects on the organisational functioning of the centre/institution
	Support for motivation	SUP	Identification of positive effects on motivation
	Response to diversity or professional transferability	DIV	Adaptation of tasks to all students
	Professional competencies	PRC	Educational development of the professionals

5. Suggestions for Improvement	Institutional involvement	INV	Level of involvement of participants
	Visibility	VIS	Internal and external reporting of the experience
	Execution of the events	EXE	Suggestions about the organisation and design of the SSE programmes
	Overall organisation	ORG	Identification of organisational aspects such as frequency and timing of events
	Content	CON	Inclusion of other content in the events

Source: Prepared by the authors.

3. Results and Discussion

The results from the data collection instruments were then organised quantitatively (percentage occurrence of each dimension and category) and qualitatively through interpretation and comparison with Redondo-Corcobado & Fuentes' (2020) dimensions, based on Furco's (2004) framework, together with previous research on SL in the area of motor skills, specifically in the context of detention centres and juvenile justice.

3.1. Quantitative Analysis

Table 3 shows the percentage occurrence of each dimension (analysis across dimensions) and of each category within these dimensions (analysis within dimensions) for each group of participants (MS, II, and IR).

TABLE 3. Quantitative analysis of dimensions and categories used in the research.

Dimension	% across dimensions (Quotations = 206)	Código	Actors			
			% within dimensions			
			MS	II	IR	Total
1. Personal Development	38.35	EMP	0.00	3.80	2.53	6.33
		PEX	26.58	37.97	5.06	69.62
		PRE	13.92	3.80	2.53	20.25
		CHA	1.27	1.27	1.27	3.80
		Total	41.77	46.84	11.39	
2. Social Development	19.90	SKI	17.07	60.98	7.32	85.37
		TRN	0.00	4.88	9.76	14.63
		Total	17.07	65.85	17.07	

		SCO	20.00	0.00	5.71	25.71
		COP	5.71	20.00	0.00	25.71
3. Perceived Learning	16.99	VAL	5.71	28.57	5.71	40.00
		PRS	8.57	0.00	0.00	8.57
		Total	40.00	48.57	11.43	
		INT	4.55	0.00	36.36	40.91
		INS	0.00	0.00	9.09	9.09
4. Professional Development	10.68	SUP	9.09	13.64	9.09	31.82
		DIV	4.55	0.00	0.00	4.55
		PRC	0.00	0.00	13.64	13.64
		Total	18.18	13.64	68.18	
		INV	0.00	0.00	10.34	10.34
5. Suggestions for Improvement	14.08	VIS	3.45	0.00	17.24	20.69
		EXE	20.69	0.00	0.00	20.69
		ORG	6.90	3.45	20.69	31.03
		CON	0.00	10.34	6.90	17.24
		Total	31.03	13.79	55.17	

Source: Prepared by the authors.

The results of this study reveal a range of perceptions raised among the various actors who took part in the SL experience delivered through physical activity and sports in a juvenile justice context. This aligns with previous studies (García-Fariña, 2024; Jiménez *et al.*, 2022) that highlight the transformative potential of SL experiences delivered through physical activity and sports with regard to participants' perceptions; as well as their educational scope for developing personal, social and professional competencies, both for university students and for the recipient groups (Cañadas, 2021; Chiva-Bartoll *et al.*, 2019).

3.2. Personal Development

This dimension, comprised of four categories, represented the highest percentage of total references made by the various actors (38.35%). "Personal development" has been considered as a dimension for the analysis of SL experiences in previous research (Furco, 2004). Analysis within dimensions revealed the PEX category (69.62%) as the most significant, followed by PRE (20.25%), EMP (6.33%) and CHA (3.8%). When distinguishing the results for this dimension by actor, the PEX category was most highly rated by the II (37.97%), followed by the MS (26.58%) and the IR (5.06%). PRE was the second highest-rated category by the MS (13.92%), followed by the II (3.80%) and the IR (2.53%). It is noteworthy that the EMP category was only significant for the II (3.80%) and the IR (2.53%), with no references to it by the MS.

TABLE 4. Evidence of the categories within the personal development dimension.

Category	Evidence	Actor-Instrument
EMP	“This type of activity improves the kids’ expectations” (JA)	IR-FG
	“We came together to represent our model” (JM)	II-PI
PEX	“It was a really nice and enriching experience” (CL)	MS-SV
	“It’s good to have activities here with people from outside to learn new things” (JM)	II-PI
PRE	“It’s true that we had certain prejudices about the type of students we met there, about the centre and about their attitude towards us” (NI)	MS-PF
CHA	“Being part of something serious, important” (JA)	IR-FG
	“Performance” (AR)	II-PI

Source: Prepared by the authors.

The results show that personal development was the highest-rated dimension among the participants, particularly in terms of the event being a positive experience and being capable of challenging prejudices. For example, the II described the SSE as “a really nice and enriching experience” and highly valued the opportunity to experience “activities with people from outside to learn new things”, which is reflected in the PEX category. With regard to challenging prejudices (PRE), several university students acknowledged a profound change with respect to their preconceptions: “It’s true that we had certain prejudices about the type of students we met there, about the centre and about their attitude towards us”. The statements studied show a profound reinterpretation of personal identity, pointing to the transformative potential of the SL experience in reconstructing deeply-rooted perceptions in the minds of all participants. These results have previously been demonstrated in studies conducted in similar juvenile justice contexts (García-Fariña, 2024; Jiménez *et al.*, 2022; Fernández-Cabrera *et al.*, 2021). This leads us to believe that, beyond their immediate educational value, there is a need for these experiences to be seen not just as isolated informal activities, but as long-term educational projects with a firm place in the curriculum at all levels of education. For II, it offers a chance to take on a leading role and develop a more positive view of themselves, which is in line with the findings of López-de-Arana *et al.* (2023). As part of a recent systematic review, these authors claim that these experiences help to improve how the recipients perceive their own bodies, increase their confidence in their abilities, and boost their ambition. Personal skills of this kind are significantly lacking in these groups, and therefore these initiatives help to strengthen personal identity and promote the social reintegration of II. These results thus support the implementation of this type of method not as an isolated informal initiative, but as rooted in the lesson plans of all teachers as part of their commitment to social inclusion.

3.3. Social Development

This dimension, comprised of two categories, represented the second-highest percentage of total references made by the various actors (19.90%). Analysis within dimensions revealed the SKI category as the most significant (85.37%). The remaining references related to TRN (14.63%). When distinguishing the results for this dimension by actor, the SKI category was mentioned by all (MS = 17.07%; II = 60.98%; IR = 7.32%). As was the case with the EMP category, it is noteworthy that the TRN category was only significant for the II (4.88%) and the IR (9.76%), with no references to it by the MS.

TABLE 5. Evidence of the categories within the social development dimension.

Category	Evidence	Actor-Instrument
SKI	“They all behaved very well, they were quite engaged, cheerful and they all joined in with us” (AZ)	MS-SV
	“Their behaviour and attitudes were great and they behaved spectacularly with each other” (YU)	IR-FG
	“You learn to socialise with new people” (AR)	II-PI
TRN	“Above all, learning to interact again, learning how to behave in society. The task was to give importance to them, and the biggest thing they learn is how to behave again” (EN)	IR-FG
	“We gained more confidence” (YA)	II-PI

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Analysis of the social dimension underlines the role of SL in providing a space for interaction and developing social skills. The SKI category was referred to the most, especially by the II and IR. The incarcerated individuals highlighted that “you learn to socialise with new people” (II), while the MS noted that “they all behaved very well, they were quite engaged, cheerful and they all joined in with us”. This suggests that the opportunity for the incarcerated individuals to interact with people from outside the JDEC helps to improve their communication and cooperation skills. This supports the claims of Bruce (2013) and Corbatón-Martínez *et al.* (2015) on the ability of SL to create spaces for inclusive interaction and to promote pro-social attitudes. Specifically, the improvement of social skills is a major concern of the institutions responsible for II. This type of initiative strengthens the use of these skills in simulated learning environments, thus supporting the social reintegration of vulnerable groups.

Moreover, the TRN of social skills to other contexts was particularly highlighted by the IR, suggesting that these experiences could have a lasting impact on the children’s social reintegration. In this regard, the research by Douglas *et al.* (2019) underlines the role of SL in the acquisition of key competencies for life in society, reinforcing the idea that these initiatives can be a valuable tool in juvenile justice settings. SL is thus a catalyst for socialisation and resocialisation processes, as well as a key socio-educational intervention strategy in juvenile detention settings (Luna *et al.*, 2018; García-Fariña *et al.*, 2024), with positive effects on group interaction and preparation for social reintegration (Douglas *et al.*, 2019; Ríos, 2017).

3.4. Perceived Learning

This dimension, comprised of four categories, represented the third-highest percentage of total references made by the various actors (16.99%). Analysis within dimensions revealed the VAL category as the most significant (40%). This was followed by SCO and COP, both at 25.71%. The remaining references related to PRS (8.57%). When distinguishing the results for this dimension by actor, the MS referred to the SCO category the most (20%), followed by PRS (8.57%) and then VAL and COP, both at 5.71%. The II referred to VAL (28.57%) and COP (20%) as the most significant categories, but referred neither to SCO nor PRS. The IR considered SCO and VAL to be equally significant, both at 5.71%, but did not refer to the other categories.

TABLE 6. Evidence of the categories within the perceived learning dimension.

Category	Evidence	Actor-Instrument
SCO	“We learned to lead teamwork activities, presentations and cooperative challenges that will no doubt help us as future teachers” (JO)	MS-PF
	“Given the negative label attached to judicial measures, this alternative method can be offered to alter their life paths and help them make good choices in the future” (AN)	IR-FG
COP	“The kids collaborated in an engaged and active way” (VI)	MS-SV
	“Communication has improved and we all have to do things together” (HA)	II-PI
VAL	“Important for working on basic values” (AN)	IR-FG
	“It’s possible to play without competing, through collaboration and discipline in the game” (AB)	II-PI
PRS	“...to create a good atmosphere among the whole group, and to get to know each other and try to learn some names” (AZ)	MS-PF

Source: Prepared by the authors.

The perceived learning dimension highlights the potential of SL to achieve meaningful, applicable learning. The MS explicitly recognised the educational scope (SCO) of the experience, stating that “we learned to conduct teamwork activities, presentation activities and cooperative challenges that will no doubt help us as future teachers”. Meanwhile, for the II, the focus was on the development of values (VAL) and cooperation (COP), evidenced by the statements “it’s possible to play without competing, through collaboration and discipline in the game” and “the kids collaborated in a dynamic and active way”. SCO was highly rated among the MS and IR, confirming its usefulness as a pedagogical strategy in teacher education (Capella-Peris *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, COP and VAL were also widely referred to by the II, reinforcing the idea that shared learning supports the acquisition of interpersonal competencies.

The PRS category was only referred to by the MS, suggesting that the experience helped to improve their communication and teaching skills. This is in line with Chiva-Bartoll *et al.* (2020), who claim that SL supports the development of certain professional competencies, which improves students’ ability to adapt to different educational settings.

All participants were aware that this type of experience strengthens knowledge, values and training practices that support the development of academic competencies for those implementing it. Understanding which activities are best for the development of values, cooperation and situated learning is a recurring concern among authors both in the broader field of pedagogy and SL (Santos-Rego *et al.*, 2015) and in the narrower field of physical activity and sports (Chiva-Bartoll *et al.*, 2020; Santos-Pastor *et al.*, 2021). This meeting point between reflection, theory and practice (educational praxis) reveals the value of SL as a tool not only for social inclusion, but also for functional learning to be applied in the professional future of all actors involved, especially the MS.

3.5. Professional Development

This dimension, comprised of five categories, represented the lowest percentage of the total number of mentions by the various actors (10.68%). Analysis within dimensions revealed the INT category as the most significant (40.91%). This was followed by SUP

(31.82%), PRC (13.64%), INS (9.09%) and lastly DIV (4.55%). When distinguishing the results for this dimension by actor, the MS mentioned the SUP category the most (9.09%), followed by INT and DIV, both at 4.55%. There were no references to PRC or INS. The II mentioned SUP (13.64%), but did not mention any other category. The IR mentioned INT the most (36.36%), followed by PRC (13.64%) and, lastly, SUP and INS, both at 9.09%. There were no references to DIV.

TABLE 7. Evidence of the categories within the professional development dimension.

Category	Evidence	Actor-Instrument
INT	“All we have to give comes from within us. To make them enjoy sport with us” (AZ)	MS-SV
	“Beyond knowing theory and concepts, it’s clear that the most important part of the content is the relational aspect” (JA)	IR-FG
INS	“There is no sense of institutionalisation regarding these things. Many of us are totally unaware of this project. This is our self-criticism. We must put it on the agenda” (JA)	IR-FG
SUP	“The fact that they attended meant you saw a certain level of motivation on their part, like they were involved” (NI)	MS-SV
	“Because you learn new things” (ME)	II-PI
DIV	“Learning more about this model in my case has given me an idea of how it works, and will surely allow me to put it into practice in future in one way or another” (AZ)	MS-PF
PRC	“This kind of thing changes you and adds excitement to your year, it puts you in a position to think about new things” (JA)	IR-FG

Source: Prepared by the authors.

INT and SUP were the highest-rated categories, suggesting that the experience helped to raise awareness among the future teachers of the importance of creating inclusive learning environments. However, DIV received less mention, which implies there is still room for strengthening the ties between SL and initial teacher education. This is in line with Franco-Solá & Figueras (2020), who highlight the need to include SL in curricula in order to strengthen its educational impact.

3.6. Suggestions for Improvement

This dimension, also comprised of five categories, represented 14.08% of the total number of mentions by the various actors. Analysis within dimensions revealed the ORG category as the most significant (31.03%). This was followed by VIS and EXE, both at 20.69%, then CON (17.24%) and lastly INV (10.34%). When distinguishing the results for this dimension by actor, the MS mentioned the EXE category the most (20.69%), followed by ORG (6.9%) and VIS (3.45%). There were no references to INV or CON. The II mentioned CON (10.34%) and ORG (3.45%), but did not mention any other category. The IR mentioned ORG the most (20.69%), followed by VIS (17.24%), INV (10.34%) and lastly CON (6.9%). There were no references to EXE.

TABLE 8. Evidence of the categories within the suggestions for improvement dimension.

Category	Evidence	Actor-Instrument
INV	“It’s important to involve everyone at the centre so they can see that it’s not just a simple activity, but that it can be a fruitful activity for everyone. There’s a lack of involvement on the part of the school authorities” (AN)	IR-FG
VIS	“Improve visibility in terms of awareness and formality, to make it more formal” (AN)	IR-FG
EXE	“Since they’re very friendly with each other and find it hard to divide themselves when it comes to making groups, we should take charge to avoid them making their own groups with just their friends, because that wasn’t the intention” (GA)	MS-SV
ORG	“Food for Moroccans” (HA) “We need more initiatives involving as many kids as possible, beyond the modules” (JA)	II-PI IR-FG
CON	“Expressive movement, group dynamics. This would be good for all the kids” (EN) “A football match with everyone” (FR)	IR-FG II-PI

Source: Prepared by the authors.

With regard to suggestions for improvement, from a cultural perspective, we acknowledge the demand from the II to take into account their specific eating habits, leading us to reflect on the need to consider the cultural variables of the participating groups in the design of SL experiences. The suggestions also underline the importance of increasing visibility and institutional involvement, as well as greater systematisation and strategic planning. Some participants also suggested reporting the experiences in more widely accessible materials, not just in scientific articles aimed at a few academics specialising in SL, which is in line with the work of Francisco-Garcés *et al.* (2024), who offer a critique and suggestions for researching, implementing and disseminating university SL experiences delivered through physical activity and sports. This poses a future challenge for those involved in university research related to SL, in accordance with the commitment to social responsibility that must be promoted in this type of experience.

When comparing the responses from the various actors, it can be seen that the various dimensions had a certain impact on all the actors involved. However, each group focused on different aspects. Thus, while the II and MS showed greater responsiveness to aspects related to personal development and perceived learning, the IR put greater emphasis on the contributions in terms of professional development and suggestions for improvement.

Regarding the varied distribution of categories among the actors, the fact that empowerment (EMP) was only significant in the statements made by the II and IR, and not in those made by the MS, can be interpreted as a stance taken by each group in the experience. The II experienced this SSE, above all, as a special opportunity to take on a leading role in a tightly controlled context, which is reflected in statements such as “being part of something serious, important”. The IR, significantly, viewed this change from a

professional perspective, valuing its potential to support the reintegration process and to add some excitement to life at the centre. The MS, on the other hand, focused primarily on academic learning and prejudices (PRE). This suggests that SL not only has different effects, but is also understood in different ways, which should be taken into account in the design and evaluation of future experiences.

4. Conclusions

The resulting evidence shows that university SL experiences in the area of physical activity and sports, carried out in the context of juvenile justice, can be a resource with transformative potential for social inclusion. Not only do these experiences support the personal development of those who take part in them, but they also establish a solid link between theory and practice, thus enhancing the education of future teachers while supporting the development of social skills required for the social reintegration of II. Interacting through the SSE has also helped to improve communication between the different groups involved. This type of initiative can also promote empowerment, decision-making to address challenges, overcoming prejudices, and generates a positive experience for all participants. Moreover, the interaction and development of social skills among all participants provides a necessary justification for promoting the social reintegration of II. From an educational perspective, SL experiences can improve knowledge acquisition and its application in real contexts, as stated by those who took part in this initiative. These benefits serve as important indicators that SL should be recognised as an effective pedagogical strategy to improve the personal, social and professional competencies of all participants through physical activity and sports.

With regard to the limitations of this study, we recognise that the results must be taken with caution, as the sample was from a single juvenile justice centre in a specific context (the island of Tenerife), and dealt with the unique case of incarcerated minors. Social desirability bias may have also impacted the II's responses in the interviews, or those of the MS in the focus group. Another potential issue to consider is the short duration of the experience, therefore great care should be taken when considering the long-term impact of the intervention. Finally, there is a clear need to better align the dimensions included in the interview question scripts, as well as the focus groups conducted, based on significant indicators of transformation from an SL experience.

Future lines of research could focus on longitudinal studies with the same sample to determine long-term effects, or replicate the experience in the same type of centre or similar ones, in different contexts, with people with other characteristics (a semi-open facility, for example). It is also recommended to focus future research on the medium/long-term impact on the reintegration of II by following up with these individuals once they have left detention centres. Finally, it may be useful to explore hybrid alternatives that combine SL with other methods to determine the scope of the interventions carried out and their transformative impact on a personal, social, academic and professional level.

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Francisco Jiménez-Jiménez. Conceptualisation, data processing, drafting, revising and editing.

AI Statement

The authors hereby confirm that they have not used AI in the production of this article.

Funding

This article has not received any public or private funding.

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