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Promoting development of entrepreneurial skills of youth in Ghana through a structured sport intervention program

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Introduction: The purpose of this brief report is to describe how a structured sport-based positive life skills program can be used in promoting the development of entrepreneurial skills of youth in Ghana.

Methods: A total of 29 youth participated in the study with 11 as the control group and the remaining 18 as the intervention group. The students in the intervention together with 5 parents participated in a weekend mapping camp. Data for the study was collected with the Youth Experience Survey for Sport to measure the Life skills and entrepreneurship skills using a quasi experimental pre and post test control group design.

Results: The youth in the intervention group reported important physical and personal benefits and entrepreneurial skills such as cooperation (teamwork), risk taking, creativity, leadership, cognitive development, and positive engagement in physical activity which they did not previously have. The results are similar to existing published papers giving this report a commendable validity and reliability.

Discussion: Similar to the previously published papers, the perceived gains in this report also show that exposing youth to a structured sport-based positive life skills program produce both physical benefits and development of lifelong skills necessary to develop skills necessary for entrepreneurial endeavors. When this intervention is upscaled in Ghana the country could offset high youth unemployment with its associated challenges.

KEYWORDS

entrepreneurship, attributes, sports, Ghana, physical activity, life skills, personal and social development

Introduction

The cross-cutting nature of sports allows individual and organizations to use it as a platform to promote positive youth development (Camiré, 2012; Bruner et al., 2021; Malete et al., 2022; McCole et al., 2022) and to reduce the occurrence of aggression (Carraro et al., 2014). Positive youth development (PYD), an asset-based approach to youth development, has attracted considerable attention (Lerner et al., 2005, 2021; Holt and Neely, 2011; Catalano et al., 2019;

McLaren et al., 2021; Zhu and Shek, 2021; Qi et al., 2022). This is because this approach represents a paradigm shift in the conception of youth development. It presents significant opportunities for re-examining youth development in the Ghanaian context where the deficit paradigm abounds.

The country has a significant youth population and is faced with many challenges including high youth unemployment, underperforming education systems, low transition rates to college, and in many cases youth despondency. The presence of so many challenges increase the propensity for unconscious systematic bias towards looking for what does not work while at the expense of strengths and possibilities. Incidentally, this is also endemic to the perception of the African continent. Therefore, a PYD approach would view the high youth demographic in Ghana not as a problem that needs to be solved or managed, but as an asset that needs to be optimized to enhance the country's socio-economic transformation. Until recently, most youth development initiatives across Africa used a deficit paradigm to address challenges. This has resulted in missed opportunities to tap into youth talent and youth propensity for innovation and entrepreneurship as part of the development strategy. Fortunately, this is gradually changing as in Africa the papers published by Maleté et al. (2022) and McCole et al. (2022) have shown that youth development can take on a paradigm shift using structured sports learning resources.

An important, but highly neglected aspect of youth development is knowing the kinds of skill sets they need and value, and how they learn them. Also, knowing how youths' skills and talents can be optimized to impact their own livelihoods and their communities remains a challenge. However, a growing body of knowledge regarding entrepreneurial skills, beliefs and attitude is emerging and has promise to address the challenges. Entrepreneurial skills, beliefs and attitude include but not limited to creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, risk taking, and communication (Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship, 2018). In this brief report, data from the five-dimension youth experience survey for sport (YES-S) was used to describe entrepreneurial skills, beliefs and attitude of youth and their parents who participated in a structured sports-based program in Ghana. Inspired by the two previously published papers by Maleté et al. (2022) and McCole et al. (2022), this report further extends and validates the power of structured sport-based PYD curriculum to nurture entrepreneurial skills, beliefs and attitude in youth.

Aim and hypotheses

1. To describe how the exposure to a structured sport intervention program would lead to improvements in overall social skills of youth.
2. To explore the usefulness of a structured sport intervention program to youth goal setting, and initiative skills promotion.
3. To know whether participation in a structured sport intervention program would provoke sense of cognition in youth.

Conceptual framework

This study was conceptualized within the broader sport-based youth development (SBYD) framework. The SBYD field is founded on the

notion that sports programs should do more than just increase physical performance; they should also aid in the social-psychological development of children (Camiré, 2012; Holt et al., 2012; Bruner et al., 2021; Maleté et al., 2022). Gould and Carson (2008) noted that sports participation can promote a variety of positive youth outcomes, including personal and social responsibility (Wright and Burton, 2008; Bruner et al., 2021), social skills development (Holt et al., 2011), and academic performance (Dwyer et al., 2001).

Many sports programs with a life skill focus have traditionally catered to at-risk adolescents in order to assist them to overcome challenges in their surroundings (Jacobs and Wright, 2018). Some football programs in metropolitan areas, for example, aim to keep adolescents off the streets so they may socialize and participate in sports in a safe environment. While these sorts of programs have been successful in meeting baseline goals such as providing a secure space for adolescents to be physically active, SBYD program goals should be more comprehensive and target all youth, not only at-risk youth. SBYD programs, in particular, aim to improve positive adolescent characteristics (e.g., self-control or leadership) rather than repairing or overcoming teenage weaknesses (e.g., preventing drug use or gang involvement; Lerner et al., 2005). Positive youth development (Larson, 2006), social and emotional learning (Durlak et al., 2011), and the 5C's paradigm (competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring; Lerner et al., 2005) are all used in the SBYD sector.

In general, SBYD programs provide children from all backgrounds with the chance to learn technical sports skills (e.g., shooting a free throw in basketball) as well as life skills (e.g., leadership, self-control) that they can apply outside of the sports environment.

Life skills

Life skills, according to Danish et al. (2005), are those skills that enable individuals to succeed in the various situations in which they live, such as school, home, and in their neighborhoods. Life skills are internal human assets that can be enabled or built through sport and transferred for application in non-sport circumstances, according to Gould and Carson (2008). Because life skills, like sport skills, are learned through demonstration, modelling, and practice, while certain positive qualities like self-esteem and global self-confidence can improve through sport participation, these are not life skills because they are personal qualities that cannot be easily taught, learned, and practiced (Danish and Hale, 1981). While sports skills comprise physical and technical motions particular to the sport's content (for example, dribbling a basketball or serving a tennis ball), life skills can be generalized or adapted to a non-sport setting (Danish et al., 2005). Examples of life skills in this article include leadership, self-control, respect, and self-direction. While sports skills comprise physical and technical motions particular to the sport's content (for example, dribbling a basketball or serving a tennis ball), life skills can be generalized or adapted to a non-sport setting (Danish et al., 2005). This report focused on the four core dimensions of the youth experience survey for sport (YES-S) to measure Life skills of the youth, i.e., social skills, goal setting, initiative skills, and cognitive skills. The assumption was that a good sport-based entrepreneurship and life skill intervention program can lead to a significant improvement in social skills, goal setting, initiative skills, and cognitive skills among youth in Ghana.

Entrepreneurial skills

Youth entrepreneurship is a concept in global economics that is thought to be important for economic development and social transformation (Rodov and Truong, 2015). The Global Entrepreneurship and Development Institute (GEDI) which ranks countries based on important economic metrics including GDP, ranked Ghana 93 on the 2018 Global Entrepreneurship Index ranking. This report focuses on entrepreneurial skills, beliefs and attitude which encompass but not limited to collaboration and teamwork, initiative and innovation, and critical thinking and problem-solving. Just to list a few.

Within the context of team sports for example, these entrepreneurial skills, beliefs and attitude prevail. They are part of active culture of sports and render a powerful tool to harnessing entrepreneurial skills, beliefs and attitude. Consciously or unconsciously, when youth engage in a sports, specific roles are executed which can harness development of entrepreneurial skills, beliefs and attitude. More achievement has been shown, when the sports learning experience is structure (Maleté et al., 2022). Also, incidental learning occurs when youth engage in organized sports participation without a structured intention to develop or promote entrepreneurial skills (McCole et al., 2022).

Social skills

There is a growing body of empirical research that lends support to the utilization of sport-based interventions tactics in the process of enhancing an individual's social skills (Brunelle et al., 2007; Anderson-Butcher and Cash, 2010; Hellison, 2011; Riley and Anderson-Butcher, 2012; Draper and Coalter, 2016). Several findings have proposed that regular sports participation during childhood and adolescence contributes to the acquisition of social skills such as collaboration, rights advocacy, recognition of responsibilities, developing empathy, self-control, and leadership; as a result, the level of aggression is reduced, and positive peer relationships are maintained (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2013). Zekioglu et al. (2018) discussed social skills as a person's verbal or nonverbal behavioral communication abilities that are in accordance with social standards and allow him or her to live in accordance with the social circle. These skills allow a person to communicate effectively with others and have a positive influence on them. Further findings suggest that social skills are necessary for participating in sports that demand working together as a team or that entail sharing the same space with other people. These abilities include internalizing social norms, structuring behaviors in accordance with rules, respecting other people, establishing, and maintaining publicity, speaking with others, collaborating with the group, accepting responsibility, and offering appropriate feedback. In this respect, individuals who have the chance to engage in a community or to develop individual connections through social skills training programs in sporting settings have been able to transfer their talents to other areas of their social life and have adopted a more positive outlook in their interpersonal interactions. This is because these individuals get the opportunity to build and connect with their peers through these programs.

As a result, given Ghana's high youth unemployment and other development challenges, intentional development of life skills and entrepreneurial mindsets through sport-based positive youth development programs has the potential to yield significant gains (Maleté et al., 2022). As a result, the goal of this study was to see if exposure to a sport-PYD and entrepreneurship intervention

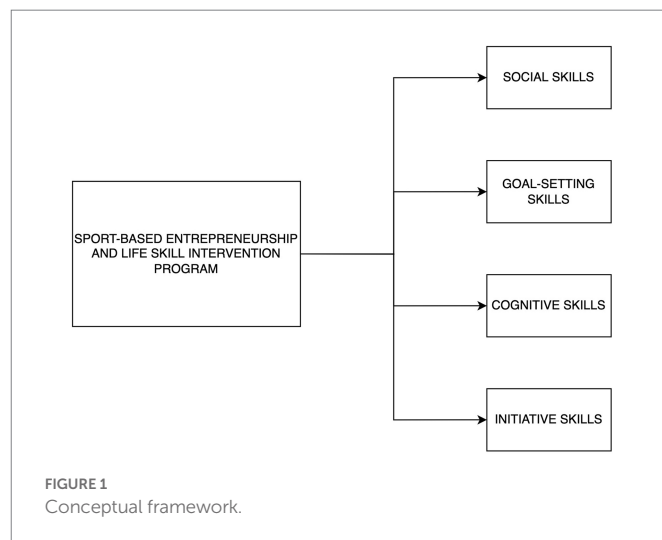
program would result in improvements in life skills and entrepreneurial skills, beliefs and attitude among Ghanaian youth. We tested the following hypothesis and conceptualized our hypothesized model in Figure 1.

1. There will be a significant improvement in youth social skills, goal setting, initiative skills, and cognitive skills from pre- to post-intervention.
2. Youth exposed to a sport-based PYD program will report significant improvements in social skills, goal setting, initiative skills, and cognitive skills compared to youth in a sport-only control program.

Method

Population

There was a total of 29 youth in the study. Eighteen (18) of the participants had gone through the sport-based entrepreneurship and life skill intervention program while the remaining 11 served as a control group. The participants were grouped into two different camps; Winneba camp and Ghanata camp. At Ghanata, 8 participants were involved in the study. This was made of 5 returning students who had been part of the PYD program since 2018, and 3 new students who were introduced to the intervention. At Winneba 21 participants were involved. This consisted of 10 newly recruited students who taken through the intervention and 11 others who served as control. The control group did not participate in the intervention. However, there was willingness to be part of the study. Out of the total 29, the participants comprised 17 male students and 12 female students. The gender difference was on the basis of the availability of the students. All participants were between the ages 14 and 22. Besides the 5 returning students who had obtained 18 years and above, all the remaining 13 youths were within the ages of 11–18 years. In order to ensure a fair representation of urban and rural youth and a higher representation of youths from low socioeconomic backgrounds, we recruited 3 schools from urban communities; Ashaiman, Labone, and Winneba, and 3 schools from rural communities; Awutu Winton, Fettehman, and Dodowa. School settings, neighborhoods, and parental income were



used as a proxy for socioeconomic background. Purposive sampling was used in order to accommodate the varying demographic variables. There was audio and video recording of all the sessions for later transcriptions.

Activities/program

A quasi-experimental pre-post-test control group design was used in this study. The intervention program was created by the principal investigators. The research team members had experience designing and implementing research and outreach programs in youth sports, life skills, pedagogy, entrepreneurship education, and community sustainability. Sport-based life skills and entrepreneurship lessons and activities were delivered concurrently over 6 days, divided into two overnight camps. Each camp lasted 3 days. The control program followed a similar camp structure, ran concurrently with the intervention, and included typical sports activities.

The program covered all costs associated with the camp, including housing, meals, and transportation from home to the venues and back. The survey tools were completed by both the intervention and control groups on their first day at the camps and the last days of the camp. The camps were held from Fridays through to Sundays. A typical day program ran from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. In the evenings, the campers participated in a variety of guided social activities such as field games and watching movies.

The intervention program's sport and life skills component included social, risk-taking, and creativity games. A typical sporting activity included the use of cones, coshing balls, football, and a basket. The activities were chosen to teach a variety of skills such as teamwork, goal setting, interpersonal communication, problem-solving, and leadership. These skills were chosen because they were relevant to evaluating how students were willing to take risks and the creative strategies, they could adopt to avoid losses.

To teach entrepreneurial mindsets, age-appropriate experiential training workshops on topics such as market research, identifying entrepreneurial opportunities, and financial literacy was used. Participants were instructed to look for parallels between life skills learned in sports and skills identified as important to entrepreneur success, such as goal setting, calculated risk-taking, resilience, and leadership. The daily program was structured to deliver these as separate and combined activities, which were chosen for use in this study, to enhance the learning of individual life skills and entrepreneurship, as well as demonstrate the connection between them. A summary of the program is presented in [Appendix 1](#).

Data collection

Data for the study was collected with the aid of the Youth Experience Survey for Sport (YES-S) instrument. Since most of our participants were below 18 years, consent forms were given to the prospective participant's teachers and parents to enable them to decide whether or not they were willing to allow their wards to participate in the program. Only those who express readiness and willingness were taken through the program and given the research questionnaires to complete. Questionnaires were administered to a sample of youth participants who had been involved in structured sports programs, as well as a control group of youth who had not participated in such programs.

Measures

We employed the youth experience survey for sport (YES-S; [Sullivan et al., 2015](#)) to measure the Life skills and entrepreneurship mindset of the youth. The YES-S is a validated 22-item Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 4 (yes definitely). The Original scale contains 37 items which were developed by [Hansen and Larson \(2005\)](#) to assess personal and interpersonal developmental experiences and negative experiences in structured activities on five major scales (4 positive and 1 negative). The positive scales comprised Personal and Social Skills, which contains 4 items (e.g., become better at taking feedback), Initiative Experiences (4 items, e.g., I learned to focus my attention), Cognitive Skills (4 items, e.g., I have improved, Skills for finding information), and Goal Setting (4 items, e.g., I learned to find ways to achieve my goals). The sole negative factor on the scale is the Negative Experiences dimension, which contains 6 items (e.g., adult leaders in this activity are controlling and manipulative). We only employed the 4 positive dimensions of the scale to measure the Life skills and entrepreneurship mindset of the youth. The composite scale produced a Cronbach Alpha of 0.85. How the subscales produced reliability coefficients ranging from 0.51 to 0.76. These were deemed reliable considering the sample size. For the qualitative instruments, we used self-designed semi-structured interview guides.

Results

We initially conducted a pre-test and a post-test analysis to determine the effectiveness of the intervention (sport-based entrepreneurship and life skill intervention program) on youth personal and social skills, cognitive skills, Goal setting skills, and their initiative skills. The results from the pre-test, post-test is displayed in [Table 1](#).

The mean scores on [Table 1](#) portrays that the intervention led to an improvement in the social skills of the youth. For instance, after going through the treatment, there was an improvement of the mean scores of the youth personal and social skills from 3.44 to 3.80. This implies that, after the intervention, the youth reported they had become better in terms of sharing responsibilities among group members and have also learned to become emotionally intelligent. This pre-supposes that the sport-based entrepreneurship and life skill intervention program we organized was relevant for the youth in terms of improving of their social skills.

TABLE 1 Pre-test and post-test analysis on entrepreneurship tendencies.

Variables	Mean	SD	t	Df	p
Social skills					
Pre-test	3.44	0.59	1.88	27	0.07
Post-test	3.80	0.25			
Goal setting skills					
Pre-test	3.49	0.64	1.33	26	0.20
Post-test	3.75	0.19			
Initiative					
Pre-test	3.57	0.51	0.75	27	0.46
Post-test	3.70	0.40			
Cognitive skills					
Pre-test	3.24	0.54	0.84	27	0.41
Post-test	3.41	0.54			

Also, the youth reported an improvement in their Goal setting and initiative skills. The difference in the mean scores implies that participating in the sport-based entrepreneurship and life skill intervention program leads to an improvement their Goal setting and initiative skills. This implies that the program helped youth to device different ways to achieving their goals and consider possible obstacles when making plans.

In the end, we test whether or not the youth participants' engagement in a sport-based entrepreneurial and life skill intervention will lead to a stronger sense of cognitive skills. The results of this test point in the expected direction. After the intervention, we found that the cognitive abilities of the youth had significantly improved. This improvement in cognitive skills includes the ability to locate information, enhance academic skills (reading, writing, mathematics, etc.), improve skills with computers or the internet, and improve artistic or creative talents. This suggests that the program was beneficial for the youth in terms of the intellectual growth that it encouraged.

These findings are consistent with the extant literature about the influence of PYD programs on youth cognitive development, social skills, goal setting, and initiative skills. For instance, our findings corroborate with Maleté et al. (2022) observation of significant pre to post-test improvement of youth life skills. Our findings also support Gould and Carson (2008) observation that life skills are internal human assets that can be enabled or built through sport and transferred for application in non-sport circumstances.

We probed further to compare our intervention group to another group that did not participate in the program. This was done to validate the pre-test and the post-test results. Table 2 is a summary of the results detailing the treatment and the control group.

The results in Table 2 portrays that in all conditions, the treatment groups had a higher mean score than the control groups. For instance, the treatment condition reported a mean score of 3.75 compared to the control group mean score of 3.44. This implies the relevance of the intervention for the youth. The situation was not different from the social skills, initiative ability, and the cognitive skills of the youth.

There was an improvement in goal setting skills for the intervention group (Mean = 3.75, SD = 0.22) than the control group (Mean = 3.44, SD = 0.70). The implication is that the intervention encourages the youth carefully assess their goals. When children are routinely exposed

to a sport-based entrepreneurship and life skill intervention program, there is a higher probability that their goal setting abilities will develop. Our analysis again portrays that youth that participated in the sport-based entrepreneurship and life skill intervention program had a higher mean score (Mean = 3.63, SD = 0.47) on initiative skills than those in the group (Mean = 3.53, SD = 0.54). This presupposes that the intervention helped in improving the initiative skills of the participants. Also, the treatment group performed better in cognitive skills than the control group. Meaning that participation sport-based entrepreneurship and life skill intervention program is relevant in improving the cognitive skills of youth in Ghana.

The present finding further validates the sports-based youth development (SBYD) framework which posits that sports participation can promote a variety of positive youth outcomes, including personal and social responsibility (Wright and Burton, 2008), social skills development (Holt et al., 2011), and academic performance (Dwyer et al., 2001). Also, the findings are similar to Lerner et al.'s (2005) observation that SBYD programs provide children from all backgrounds with the chance to learn technical sports skills as well as life skills that they can apply outside of the sports environment.

The analysis in Table 3 above shows a significant positive relationship between physical activities and social skills ($r=0.482, p=0.008$). This implies that as youth continues to participate in physical activities on daily basis, they develop the sense of belongingness. That is, youth who consistently engage in physical activities have significant improvement in social skills. There was also a significant positive relationship between Physical activities and initiative skills ($r=0.450, p=0.014$) and significant positive relationship between Physical activities and Goal setting ($r=0.364, p=0.044$). That is youth are able to initiate and set better goals for themselves when they involve much in sports and physical activities. Our findings on the other hand showed no significant improvement in youth cognitive development after engaging in physical activities and sports.

This finding partially supports Anderson-Butcher et al. (2013) assertion that regular sports participation during childhood and adolescence contributes to the acquisition of social skills such as collaboration, rights advocacy, recognition of responsibilities, developing empathy, self-control, and leadership; as a result, the level of aggression is reduced, and positive peer relationships are maintained (Table 4).

TABLE 2 Summary of treatment and the control group on entrepreneurship tendencies.

Variables	Mean	SD	t	Df	p
Social skills					
Treatment group	3.83	0.26	1.30	19	0.21
Control group	3.50	0.60			
Goal setting skills					
Treatment group	3.75	0.22	1.02	18	0.32
Control Group	3.44	0.70			
Initiative					
Treatment group	3.63	0.47	0.36	19	0.72
Control group	3.53	0.54			
Cognitive skills					
Treatment group	3.42	0.56	0.71	19	0.49
Control group	3.23	0.54			

TABLE 3 Correlation matrix on the relationship between physical activities and entrepreneurship tendencies.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. PA	1				
2. Social skills	0.482**	1			
3. Cognitive	0.066	0.459**	1		
4. Initiative	0.450*	0.646**	0.439**	1	
5. Goal Setting	0.364*	0.736**	0.517**	0.787**	1

* $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$ (one-tailed), PA= Physical Activities.

TABLE 4 Correlation matrix of age and youth entrepreneurship tendencies.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Age	1				
2. Social	-0.108	1			
3. Cognitive	-0.020	0.459*	1		
4. Initiative	-0.347	0.646**	0.439*	1	
5. Goal setting	-0.203	0.736**	0.517**	0.787**	1

* $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$ (one tailed).

The results above indicate that age has no significant correlation with any of the youth entrepreneurship tendencies. The implication is that whether the youth will be better or improve their social skills, cognitive, initiative, or goalsetting skills does not depend on the age of the person. This presupposes that, youth irrespective of their age can be trained to become better in terms of sharing responsibilities among group members, be emotionally intelligent, goalsetting and initiative skills, and intellectual growth.

There was however significant positive relationship among the study variables. For instance, we observed a positive relationship between youth social skills and cognitive development ($r=0.46$, $p<0.05$). The implication is that when youth are trained to be able to share responsibilities among people around them, their intellectual abilities also develop. In sum, all the variables correlated significantly with each other. The improvement in one variable, leads to a significant rise in the other variable. It is therefore imperative that in an intervention program that is geared towards improving youth entrepreneurship should holistically consider social skills, cognitive development, initiative skills, and goalsetting skills as they complement each other.

Discussion

The findings in this report show that a sport-based entrepreneurship program has high promise for improving social skills of youth. The series of team bonding activities in the lessons and field activities (see [Appendix 1](#)), strengthen the interactions among the participants. Therefore, it is crucial to weave sports-based interventions into the physical education, playtime and after school experiences that school provides for learning. This way, youth will have opportunities to interact with the critical elements in sports to harness entrepreneurial skills. Sports is physical activity and there is strong evidence in the research literature which shows high promise for the development of physical fitness for healthy living. This relationship between physical activity and sports and health as well as cognition is so huge and cannot be played down in the developmental agenda for children and youth in school.

This brief report has a number of limitations. First, the relatively small sample size. Collecting data from only 5 parents and 18 pupils is undoubtedly a major constraint. However, it is important to recast the intent of this report as a country-specific follow-on data emerging from three African country research published by [Maleté et al. \(2022\)](#) and [McCole et al. \(2022\)](#).

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Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/[Supplementary material](#), further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The research team met all the expectations and requirements of the University of Ghana, Ethics Committee for the Humanities and obtained approval for the conduct of the study. Written informed consent to participate in this study was provided by the participants’ legal guardian/next of kin.

Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Supplementary material

The [Supplementary material](#) for this article can be found online at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/feduc.2023.1135084/full#supplementary-material>

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