

The Constitutional Defense of the Right of Children and Adolescents to Comprehensive Development in Terms of Physical Activities: An Educational, Preventive, and Legal Approach

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ABSTRACT:

One of the Ecuadorian State's core mandates is the constitutional preservation of children's and teenagers' right to holistic development. This right necessitates educational and preventive measures that guaranty inclusive and safe conditions when it comes to physical activities. The goal was to examine, from a legal, preventive, and pedagogical standpoint, the constitutional protection of children's and teenagers' right to integrated development in physical activities in the province of Pichincha. A mixed-method approach was used, with a descriptive-correlational scope at the explanatory level and a non-experimental design. Ninety-six participants, including administrators, coaches, and physical education teachers, were purposefully selected from the population of Pichincha's educational institutions and sports organizations. To ensure content validity and statistical reliability, semi-structured interviews, Likert-scale questionnaires, and an institutional checklist were used. The findings showed that the right to holistic development was widely recognized normatively, however there were variations in how protective procedures and training initiatives were carried out. The presence of preventive procedures and the perception of the right's effective guaranty were found to be positively and statistically significantly correlated. In order to effectively guaranty the constitutional protection of integral development in physical activities at the provincial level, legislative criteria, preventive, and education must be articulated.

Keywords: Children's rights, holistic development, and exercise.

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1. Introduction

The recognition of children's and adolescents' right to comprehensive development represents a central element of contemporary constitutional systems and international human rights protection. This right encompasses more than the satisfaction of basic needs, as it also involves conditions that enable individuals to achieve adequate physical, intellectual, emotional, and social development. In this context, physical activity, sports, recreation, play, and physical education should be considered substantive components of childhood development rather than activities limited to leisure or educational instruction. Nevertheless, the existence of constitutional and legal provisions does not necessarily guarantee their effective application. In educational institutions, sports organizations, and community environments, important differences may remain between the formal recognition of these rights and the conditions under which children and adolescents actually exercise them. This situation demonstrates the relevance of examining the issue through an integrated legal, preventive, and educational approach. The Province of Pichincha, Ecuador, provides an appropriate setting for such an analysis because of the significant participation of children and adolescents in schools, sports institutions, recreational activities, and community programs involving physical activity.

Current academic discussions have increasingly associated physical activity with the exercise of fundamental human rights, particularly because of its relationship with health, well-being, and quality of life (Messing et al., 2021). From a legal and theoretical standpoint, Levine (2024) proposes that young people should be recognized as holders of a specific right to participate in sport and physical activity. In a complementary manner, Lott (2022) and Lott (2025) examines the right to play as part of the economic, social, and cultural dimensions of human rights. His approach identifies factors such as the availability of appropriate spaces, sufficient time, and social recognition as relevant conditions for the effective exercise of this right. These contributions broaden the traditional conception

of comprehensive development because they demonstrate that children's rights depend not only on formal legal recognition but also on the physical, institutional, and social environments in which those rights are exercised.

Comparative constitutional studies also reveal that sport, recreation, and physical activity have progressively acquired greater relevance within Latin American constitutional frameworks (Dulitzky, 2025). Several countries have incorporated these matters into their constitutional provisions, either as autonomous social rights or as elements associated with human development. In Ecuador, the 2008 Constitution recognizes recreation, leisure, and participation in sport as rights that contribute to individual and collective development. Similarly, the Political Constitution of the Plurinational State of Bolivia of 2009 establishes sport and recreation in connection with comprehensive development, while the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela of 1999 assigns the State responsibilities concerning physical education, sport, and recreation. Despite these common constitutional orientations, the degree of judicial development and practical implementation varies among countries. In addition, Barnert et al. (2022) propose a systemic reconsideration of children's rights that moves beyond conventional welfare approaches and incorporates structural conditions affecting childhood. Johnson (2025), meanwhile, emphasizes that international children's rights standards can provide a foundation for strengthening institutional safeguarding mechanisms, particularly in sports organizations where minors may be exposed to different forms of vulnerability.

The protection of children in physical and sporting environments also requires a preventive approach. International research conducted in North America, Europe, and Oceania indicates that the effective protection of minors in sport depends on the existence of institutional safeguarding systems, prevention protocols, reporting procedures, and mechanisms capable of establishing responsibility when violations occur (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023; Everley,

2025). The literature addresses different forms of harm, including physical and psychological violence, sexual abuse, institutional negligence, and other practices that may undermine children's fundamental rights. Carr (2025) points out that the adoption of rights-based language in sports organizations may have little practical effect when it is not accompanied by concrete institutional arrangements. Donnelly (2024) examines another dimension of this problem by addressing child labor in elite sport and the conflict that may arise between commercial interests and the protection of fundamental rights. Similarly, Dowling (2024) explains that rights-based approaches within sports systems may encounter tensions between the genuine protection of children and the preservation of institutional or organizational interests. Such findings acquire particular importance in Ecuador, including the Province of Pichincha, where sports and physical activities constitute relevant environments for childhood development and therefore require adequate safeguards.

Educational institutions constitute another fundamental space for guaranteeing comprehensive development. Within schools, physical education can contribute not only to physical health but also to social interaction, emotional development, inclusion, and the acquisition of healthy habits. Burnett (2020) argues that physical education and health education should be approached explicitly from a children's rights perspective. García et al. (2024) likewise maintain that educational systems must undergo structural changes if they are to respond effectively to the demands associated with physical activity in the twenty-first century. The issue of inclusion is equally important. Marron et al. (2023) emphasize the necessity of developing pedagogical strategies that enable children with additional needs to participate meaningfully in physical activities. Such approaches are consistent with the principles of equality, inclusion, and non-discrimination that underpin contemporary children's rights frameworks.

The examination of public policies and regulatory systems demonstrates that progress has occurred,

although important implementation difficulties remain. Lane et al. (2024), through their analysis of sports policies in Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom, identify advances in the incorporation of human rights, child well-being, and safe participation into institutional and governmental strategies. At the same time, their findings reveal persistent difficulties involving coordination among institutions, monitoring capacity, and the practical application of established principles. Pavlogiannis et al. (2024) reach a related conclusion in their scoping review, noting that research concerning children's rights in sport remains dispersed across different disciplines and lacks sufficiently integrated legal frameworks to guide policymaking. De Paola et al. (2025) examine the medico-legal dimensions of sport from a human rights perspective, while Aine et al. (2022) argue that participation in sport should occur under conditions that guarantee a safe and healthy environment, generating responsibilities for both public authorities and organizations involved in sporting activities. These international experiences provide relevant comparative elements for understanding the Ecuadorian situation and assessing the constitutional protection of children's and adolescents' comprehensive development in Pichincha.

The importance of play and physical activity does not disappear under exceptional or adverse circumstances. Glos (2025) for example, analyzes the right to play in situations of armed conflict and emphasizes its fundamental and non-derogable character as an element of childhood development. This perspective reinforces the idea that play and physical activity should not be treated as secondary benefits available only under favorable conditions. Rather, they form part of the broader conditions necessary for human dignity, well-being, and the development of children and adolescents.

Although previous research has made important contributions, there remains a relevant theoretical and practical gap concerning the connection between constitutional guarantees of comprehensive development and the specific regulation of physical activities from preventive

and educational perspectives. This limitation becomes particularly significant in Pichincha because children and adolescents participate simultaneously in educational, recreational, community, and organized sporting environments. Existing studies have frequently addressed children's rights from the perspective of international law, examined particular problems within sports organizations, or focused on pedagogical dimensions of physical education. However, there is comparatively less research that brings these perspectives together and establishes a direct relationship between constitutional obligations, prevention strategies, inclusive education, and institutional safeguarding mechanisms within a specific Ecuadorian territorial context.

The relevance of this research therefore derives from the need to address the fragmentation that currently exists between legal principles and their practical application in the Province of Pichincha. From the constitutional perspective, it is necessary to establish more clearly the scope of the right to comprehensive development when it is exercised through physical activity and to determine the responsibilities assumed by the State in terms of respecting, protecting, and guaranteeing such rights. From the preventive standpoint, attention must be directed toward establishing appropriate standards concerning safety, supervision, institutional responsibility, and mechanisms for detecting and responding to potential violations. At the educational level, physical education should be understood as an instrument through which children's rights can progressively become effective, particularly when its implementation incorporates equality, inclusion, participation, and non-discrimination.

Based on this context, the research problem focuses on determining the manner in which constitutional protection of the right to comprehensive development of children and adolescents can be connected effectively with preventive and educational policies governing physical activities in the Province of Pichincha. The purpose is to identify the conditions required to establish environments that are safe, inclusive, and respectful of children's dignity. The absence

of an integrated approach may produce inconsistencies between constitutional provisions, public policies, institutional regulations, and the practices actually implemented in educational and sporting environments.

Consequently, the general objective of this research is to examine the constitutional protection of children's and adolescents' right to comprehensive development in relation to physical activities in the Province of Pichincha, incorporating legal, preventive, and educational perspectives. To achieve this purpose, the study pursues three specific objectives: (a) to analyze the scope and substantive content of the right to comprehensive development from constitutional and international human rights perspectives; (b) to determine the preventive, protective, and safeguarding standards that should govern educational and sporting environments involving minors; and (c) to formulate integrated guidelines capable of strengthening the implementation of this right through public policies and institutional actions.

The research is expected to contribute to the legal and educational fields by establishing a conceptual framework that relates fundamental rights to risk prevention and the pedagogical development of physical activity. Its principal contribution consists of identifying legal criteria and practical orientations that may improve the relationship between constitutional guarantees and the institutional realities experienced by children and adolescents in Pichincha. In this sense, comprehensive development is approached simultaneously as a legally protected right, a responsibility requiring institutional action, and a social and ethical commitment that demands effective conditions for participation in physical, educational, recreational, and sporting activities.

2. Methodology

• Method

The research followed a mixed methodological strategy in which qualitative and quantitative components were employed in a complementary

manner. This approach was selected to obtain a broader interpretation of the subject under study by connecting the examination of constitutional and legal provisions with empirical information obtained from educational institutions and sports organizations located in the Province of Pichincha. Consequently, the research combined doctrinal and normative analysis with evidence derived from the social and institutional context in which physical activities involving children and adolescents take place. As explained by Hernández et al. (2014), mixed-methods research allows qualitative and quantitative procedures to be integrated, thereby providing greater analytical richness and contributing to the robustness of the findings.

In terms of its purpose, the research was classified as applied. Rather than limiting the investigation to the identification and description of the existing situation, it was oriented toward generating practical guidelines that could contribute to improving the effective protection and implementation of the right to the comprehensive development of children and adolescents within physical activity environments at the provincial level.

A non-experimental, cross-sectional, and descriptive-explanatory research design was employed. The non-experimental nature of the study derives from the fact that the variables were examined as they occurred in their ordinary institutional and social contexts, without intentional intervention or manipulation by the researchers. The cross-sectional component refers to the fact that the empirical information was obtained during a defined period and at a single stage of observation. The descriptive-explanatory dimension involved two complementary purposes: first, identifying the characteristics of the existing situation concerning constitutional protection in physical activity settings; and second, examining the legal provisions, normative connections, and contextual factors that could contribute to understanding the deficiencies or limitations detected. In this regard, Bisquerra (2009) establishes that descriptive research is concerned with identifying the attributes and characteristics

of a phenomenon, whereas explanatory research seeks to establish relationships among factors and provide an interpretation of why particular situations occur.

The research reached a descriptive-correlational level with an explanatory orientation. At the descriptive level, the study examined the legal, institutional, and practical conditions associated with the protection of children's and adolescents' right to comprehensive development in environments involving physical activity. The correlational component considered the possible association between aspects such as the availability of safeguarding mechanisms, the preparation and training of personnel, and perceptions concerning the protection of children's rights. Finally, the explanatory component allowed these relationships to be interpreted from legal and preventive perspectives in accordance with the objectives established for the research.

• Participants

The population considered in the study included primary and secondary educational institutions together with youth-oriented sports organizations that were formally registered within the Province of Pichincha. Based on provincial administrative information, the target population was estimated at approximately 120 institutions in which children and adolescents participated in regular physical education activities and/or organized sports training programs.

A non-probabilistic purposive sampling procedure was applied to select the participating institutions. The selection criteria focused on organizations that had active physical education programs, youth sports training schools, or both types of activities. Following the application of these criteria, the final sample consisted of 18 institutions: 12 educational institutions and 6 sports organizations. The study involved 96 participants, comprising school administrators, physical education teachers, and coaches responsible for training children and adolescents in sports programs.

Table 1. Distribution of Participants

Group	n	Percentage
School administrators	18	18.75%
Physical education teachers	42	43.75%
Youth sports coaches	36	37.50%
Total	96	100%

Inclusion criteria

- Educational institutions located in the Province of Pichincha.
- Institutions with formal physical education or organized sports training programs.
- Institutional authorization and voluntary informed consent.

Exclusion criteria

- Institutions without structured physical activity programs.
- Staff members with fewer than six months of employment.
- Refusal to participate or absence of informed consent.

The selection criteria were justified by the need to include stakeholders directly involved in the practical implementation of the right to the comprehensive development of children and adolescents through physical activities, thereby ensuring contextual relevance.

- **Procedure**

The research was conducted in four sequential phases.

Phase 1. Documentary Review and Normative Analysis

A systematic review of the Constitution of Ecuador, secondary legislation, international legal instruments, and recent scientific literature was conducted. This phase established the theoretical and legal framework of the study and defined the analytical categories related to comprehensive development, safeguarding, prevention, and inclusion.

Phase 2. Instrument Development and Validation

Three data collection instruments were designed according to the study's analytical dimensions: constitutional protection, comprehensive development, safeguarding, risk prevention, and inclusion in physical activities.

- **Structured questionnaire**

A structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale was administered to physical education teachers and sports coaches. Response options ranged from:

1 = Strongly disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Agree

5 = Strongly agree

The questionnaire consisted of 20 items organized into three dimensions:

- Rights Protection and Guarantees:** My institution respects the rights of children and adolescents during physical and sports activities; physical activities implemented in my institution promote students' comprehensive development; staff responsible for physical activities possess sufficient knowledge regarding children's rights.
- Prevention and Safeguarding:** The institution has protocols to prevent violence, abuse, or discrimination; staff members receive regular training on the comprehensive protection of children and adolescents; clear procedures exist for reporting incidents affecting participants' rights.
- Inclusion and Participation:** Physical activities promote the participation of students with diverse abilities and conditions.; respect and equality are actively promoted during sports activities; students actively participate in safe recreational and sporting environments.

- Semi-Structured Interview Guide

A semi-structured interview guide consisting of ten open-ended questions was developed for institutional administrators to explore institutional management related to children's rights protection. Key questions included:

- a) What institutional policies or regulations govern physical and sports activities?
- b) What mechanisms are in place to protect the rights of children and adolescents during these activities?
- c) How are cases involving rights violations or risk situations managed?
- d) What training programs are provided to teachers and coaches regarding comprehensive child protection?
- e) In your opinion, what are the institution's main strengths and weaknesses in this area?

- Institutional Observation Checklist

An institutional checklist was used to objectively verify the presence or absence of key elements related to the comprehensive protection of children. Indicators were evaluated using dichotomous responses (Yes/No) and included:

Availability of written child protection protocols.

- a) Existence of regulations governing physical and sports activities.
- b) Records documenting training on children's rights.
- c) Formal mechanisms for reporting and monitoring incidents.
- d) Evidence of inclusion measures for students with specific needs.
- e) Institutional programs promoting safe physical activity.
- f) Instrument Validity and Reliability

Content validity was established through expert judgment involving three specialists: A constitutional law scholar with expertise in children's rights, a specialist in physical education and sports management, a researcher with expertise in research methodology and instrument design.

The experts evaluated each item according to clarity, relevance, coherence, and appropriateness, and the recommended revisions were incorporated before the instruments were administered.

A pilot study was subsequently conducted with 15 participants from institutions sharing characteristics similar to those included in the final sample. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.87, which is considered satisfactory according to the methodological standards proposed by Hernández et al. (2014), indicating a high level of internal reliability.

Phase 3. Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through both face-to-face and online administration of the instruments following institutional authorization. Participant confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed throughout the research process.

Phase 4. Data Organization and Triangulation

Quantitative data were organized into statistical databases, while qualitative information was classified into thematic categories. This process facilitated methodological triangulation by integrating documentary evidence with empirical findings.

• Data analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and measures of central tendency, to characterize participants' perceptions regarding the protection of the right to comprehensive development within physical activity settings. In addition, Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient was applied to examine the relationship between the existence of preventive safeguarding protocols and perceptions of the effective protection of children's rights.

Qualitative data were analyzed through thematic coding, identifying recurring patterns related to constitutional compliance, normative gaps, and institutional practices. Methodological triangulation was employed to compare

documentary evidence, stakeholder perceptions, and institutional verification findings.

The integration of both quantitative and qualitative analyses enabled the study to address its research objectives by examining the constitutional scope of the right to comprehensive development, identifying preventive standards applicable within the Province of Pichincha, and proposing integrative guidelines aligned with the province's institutional and social context.

3. Results

The findings are presented in accordance with the study objectives: (a) to examine the constitutional and international legal scope of the right to the comprehensive development of children and adolescents within the Ecuadorian context; (b) to identify preventive and safeguarding standards applicable to educational institutions and sports organizations in the Province of Pichincha; and (c) to propose integrative guidelines that strengthen the effective implementation of this right.

1. Constitutional scope and level of institutional implementation

The documentary analysis confirms that the Ecuadorian constitutional framework recognizes the right to the comprehensive development of children and adolescents and the principle of the best interests of the child as directly applicable constitutional mandates. Nevertheless, the empirical evidence reveals significant differences in the institutional operationalization of these principles within the context of physical activities.

The participating institutions comprised 12 public, faith-based, and private educational institutions located in the cantons of Quito, Rumiñahui, and Mejía, together with six youth sports organizations officially registered with the competent authorities of the Province of Pichincha. To preserve institutional confidentiality, the educational institutions were coded as EI-01 to EI-12, and the sports organizations as SO-01 to SO-06.

Data collection involved 18 institutional administrators, 42 physical education teachers,

and 36 youth sports coaches, all of whom participated voluntarily after providing informed consent. The institutional checklist was administered across all 18 participating organizations, allowing verification of the existence of regulatory documents, child protection protocols, and institutional safeguarding mechanisms related to children and adolescents.

Table 2. Availability of Institutional Regulations and Protocols

Indicator Assessed	Yes (%)	No (%)
Internal regulations explicitly referring to children's rights	83.3	16.7
Specific safeguarding protocol for physical activities	58.3	41.7
Formal reporting procedures for rights violations	66.7	33.3
Annual training program on children's rights	50.0	50.0
Inclusive adaptations in physical education	61.1	38.9

The institutional checklist revealed important differences among the organizations evaluated. Of the 18 institutions, 15 had internal regulations explicitly incorporating references to the rights of children and adolescents, whereas only 10 had specific safeguarding protocols applicable to physical education and sports activities.

Likewise, only nine institutions provided documentary evidence demonstrating the implementation of annual training programs for personnel responsible for physical activities. In contrast, 11 institutions presented evidence of inclusive adaptations for students with disabilities or specific educational needs.

These findings indicate that although the formal recognition of children's rights is relatively well established across the participating institutions, important shortcomings remain regarding the

implementation of specialized preventive mechanisms, particularly in relation to staff training and safeguarding.

2. Perceptions regarding the protection of the right to comprehensive development

The questionnaire administered to physical education teachers and sports coaches ($n = 78$) assessed participants' perceptions regarding the effective protection of the right to the comprehensive development of children and adolescents within physical activity settings.

Table 3. Perceptions of Rights Protection in Physical Activities

Item Evaluated	Mean (1–5)	Standard Deviation
Physical activities promote comprehensive development	4.52	0.61
Adequate safety conditions are in place	3.94	0.72
Preventive protocols are consistently implemented	3.48	0.89
Inclusion is guaranteed without discrimination	4.01	0.76
Staff receive sufficient training on children's rights	3.22	0.95

The results derive from the administration of a 20-item structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree) completed by 42 physical education teachers and 36 sports coaches.

Within the "Rights Protection and Guarantees" dimension, the statement "Physical activities promote the comprehensive development of children and adolescents" received the highest average score ($M = 4.52$), reflecting participants'

positive assessment of the educational value of physical activities.

Regarding the "Prevention and Safeguarding" dimension, respondents expressed lower levels of agreement with statements concerning specialized training and the systematic implementation of preventive protocols. In particular, the item "Personnel responsible for physical activities receive sufficient training on children's rights" obtained the lowest mean score ($M = 3.22$), making it the least positively evaluated indicator in the questionnaire.

Within the "Inclusion and Participation" dimension, most respondents agreed that physical activities foster participation without discrimination. Nevertheless, several participants identified limitations associated with infrastructure and resource availability for adequately supporting students with specific educational needs.

3. Relationship between preventive protocols and perceived effective protection

Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient was calculated to examine the relationship between the existence of preventive protocols and participants' perceptions regarding the effective protection of the right to comprehensive development.

Table 4. Correlation Between Preventive Protocols and Effective Rights Protection

Correlated Variables	Spearman's ρ	p-value
Preventive protocols – Perceived effective rights protection	0.61	<0.001

The resulting coefficient ($\rho = 0.61$) indicates a moderately strong positive and statistically significant correlation ($p < 0.001$). This finding demonstrates that institutions possessing well-established preventive protocols report higher levels of perceived effectiveness in protecting the

right to the comprehensive development of children and adolescents.

These results confirm that the preventive dimension is not merely a complementary component but rather a structural requirement for the constitutional realization of this right.

4. *Qualitative findings: thematic analysis*

The thematic analysis of the 18 semi-structured interviews conducted with institutional administrators identified three central categories derived from questions concerning institutional policies, child protection mechanisms, and institutional capacity-building needs.

- Formal recognition of the right

All interviewees agreed that comprehensive child development constitutes both a legal and educational obligation. Institutional administrators emphasized that physical activities are understood as spaces that promote holistic development rather than merely recreation or athletic performance.

- Structural limitations

Most participants identified challenges associated with budgetary constraints, insufficient specialized training, and the absence of technical guidelines specifically addressing the protection of children and adolescents during sports activities. Several administrators noted that existing protocols primarily respond to general school coexistence policies and do not adequately address risk situations unique to physical education and organized sports.

- Need for normative coordination

Participants consistently emphasized the importance of strengthening coordination among educational institutions, sports organizations, and relevant public authorities. They further highlighted the need for unified provincial guidelines to support the implementation of safeguarding protocols and comprehensive child protection measures.

The convergence of these themes suggests that the principal challenges do not stem from a lack of awareness regarding children's rights but

rather from the absence of standardized institutional mechanisms capable of ensuring their effective implementation within educational and sports settings.

4. Discussion

The discussion of the findings provides insight into the practical scope of the constitutional protection of the right to the comprehensive development of children and adolescents in the context of physical activities in the Province of Pichincha, Ecuador, by integrating the empirical evidence with the contemporary theoretical and doctrinal framework. The results indicate that while the formal recognition of this right has been widely incorporated into institutional regulations, its effective implementation varies considerably with respect to safeguarding protocols, specialized training, and supervisory mechanisms. This gap between normative recognition and practical implementation confirms that the constitutional guarantee of comprehensive development extends beyond the formal proclamation of rights and requires coherent preventive and educational structures to ensure their effective realization.

The finding that 83.3% of the participating institutions explicitly incorporate references to children's rights within their internal regulations demonstrates substantial normative alignment with the constitutional mandate. Nevertheless, the existence of specific safeguarding protocols in only 58.3% of the institutions indicates that the preventive dimension has not yet been fully institutionalized. This finding is consistent with Aine et al. (2022), who argue that children's right to participate in sport within a safe and healthy environment entails concrete organizational obligations rather than merely declaratory commitments. Similarly, Johnson (2025) emphasizes that the effectiveness of international children's rights law depends on its internalization through verifiable institutional policies. The findings obtained in the Province of Pichincha clearly illustrate the necessity of translating legal principles into operational institutional mechanisms.

The positive and statistically significant correlation ($\rho = 0.61$) between the existence of preventive protocols and the perceived effective protection of the right to comprehensive development confirms that the preventive dimension constitutes a structural component of this constitutional right. This empirical relationship supports the observations of Everley (2025), who argues that safeguarding policies in sport must explicitly place the child at the center of institutional practice rather than merely adopting formal declarations. Likewise, Tuakli-Wosornu et al., (2023) emphasize that the effectiveness of child protection systems depends upon the existence of clear and accessible procedures. In the present study, institutions with well-established safeguarding protocols exhibited higher levels of perceived rights protection, demonstrating that preventive measures enhance institutional trust while strengthening the practical realization of constitutional rights.

Within the educational context, the findings reveal that the promotion of comprehensive development through physical activity received a high level of agreement ($M = 4.52$), indicating a strong pedagogical recognition of its educational value. This empirical evidence is consistent with Burnett (2020), who argues that physical education should be understood as a fundamental right of the child rather than merely a curricular subject. Likewise, the findings support the position advanced by García et al. (2024), who contend that schools constitute privileged environments for promoting physical activity in the twenty-first century. The positive perceptions identified among participants in the Province of Pichincha demonstrate that the educational dimension of physical activity has been firmly internalized by both teachers and sports coaches.

Despite these positive findings, specialized training on children's rights received a comparatively lower mean score ($M = 3.22$), indicating deficiencies in legal and preventive professional preparation. This finding is consistent with the arguments advanced by Carr (2025) and Dowling (2024), who caution that rights-based discourses in sport lose credibility when they are not supported by robust

institutional structures and systematic professional training. The absence of continuous training programs in 50% of the participating institutions restricts the consolidation of a genuine rights-based institutional culture, thereby preventing the constitutional recognition of children's rights from achieving its full practical effectiveness.

From a structural perspective, the budgetary constraints and the absence of unified provincial guidelines identified during the interviews reveal a broader governance challenge. Lane et al. (2024) argue that the integration of human rights and child well-being into sports policies depends upon institutional coherence and continuous monitoring. The present findings demonstrate that, in the absence of standardized provincial directives, implementation relies largely on the individual initiatives of each institution, resulting in substantial disparities in the protection of children's constitutional rights.

More broadly, the need to integrate comprehensive development, prevention, and education confirms the gap identified by Pavlogiannis et al. (2024), who conclude that research on children's rights in sport lacks systematic legal frameworks capable of integrating these dimensions. The present study contributes to addressing this fragmentation by empirically demonstrating that the effective constitutional protection of children's rights requires continuous interaction among legal norms, preventive strategies, and educational practice. Furthermore, the medico-legal perspective proposed by De Paola et al. (2025) is reinforced by the present findings, as institutional responsibility for risk prevention emerges as an inseparable component of the effective protection of children's rights.

The inclusive dimension also deserves particular attention, given that 61.1% of the participating institutions reported implementing inclusive adaptations within physical education programs. Although this finding reflects meaningful progress, it simultaneously indicates considerable room for improvement. Marron et al. (2023) emphasize that genuine inclusion requires

structured pedagogical strategies rather than isolated accommodations. From a constitutional perspective, comprehensive development requires substantive equality and non-discrimination, thereby making inclusive educational practices an essential institutional standard rather than an optional measure.

The comparative constitutional analysis conducted by Dulitzky (2025) demonstrates that although the constitutional recognition of sport as a social right is common throughout Latin America, its practical enforceability depends upon the existence of concrete public policies. The findings obtained in the Province of Pichincha reflect precisely this dynamic: while the constitutional framework is robust, its effective implementation requires stronger preventive and educational institutionalization. Consistent with the theoretical framework proposed by Lott (2022) and Lott (2025), the rights to play and to engage in physical activity require adequate material, spatial, and cultural conditions to enable their meaningful exercise. The only partial availability of safeguarding protocols and professional training programs indicates that these enabling conditions have not yet been fully consolidated.

Finally, Glos's (2025) reflection on the inalienable nature of the right to play, even under adverse circumstances, further reinforces the interpretation that physical activity is not an ancillary component of child development but rather one of its essential constitutional dimensions. The findings of this study demonstrate that when institutions strengthen their preventive mechanisms and educational capacities, perceptions regarding the effective protection of children's rights increase significantly. This evidence confirms that constitutional protection requires not only legal recognition but also robust institutional support structures capable of translating constitutional principles into everyday educational and sporting practice.

5. Conclusion

The study found that the constitutional protection of the right to the comprehensive

development of children and adolescents in physical activity settings in the Province of Pichincha is supported by a strong legal framework but shows uneven institutional implementation.

Most institutions formally recognized children's rights in their internal regulations. However, only 58.3% had specific safeguarding protocols, indicating that preventive measures remain insufficiently institutionalized.

A significant positive correlation ($\rho = 0.61$; $p < 0.001$) was identified between the existence of preventive protocols and the perceived effective protection of children's rights. This finding demonstrates that safeguarding mechanisms are essential for the practical realization of the constitutional right to comprehensive development.

Physical activity was widely recognized as an effective means of promoting comprehensive child development ($M = 4.52$). In contrast, specialized training on children's rights received the lowest evaluation ($M = 3.22$), revealing important gaps in professional preparation.

Only half of the participating institutions implemented systematic annual training programs on children's rights, limiting the development of a consistent rights-based institutional culture.

Inclusive practices were identified in 61.1% of the institutions, reflecting progress while also highlighting the need for more comprehensive inclusion strategies.

The findings indicate that effective constitutional protection depends not only on legal recognition but also on institutional capacity, continuous professional training, standardized safeguarding protocols, and coordinated monitoring mechanisms.

Overall, the study demonstrates that integrating constitutional protection, prevention, and physical education provides a stronger framework for guaranteeing the comprehensive development of children and adolescents within educational and sports environments.

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8. Author Declaration

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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