



The Scouting Paradox: When Competitive Success Undermines Educational Success in Character-Centered Scouting Education

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Abstract

Competition has become an increasingly prominent feature of contemporary scouting programs, yet its educational implications remain insufficiently understood. Existing scholarship generally portrays competition as a developmental mechanism that promotes competence, confidence, leadership, and positive youth outcomes, while providing limited explanation for situations in which competitive achievement and educational achievement diverge. This conceptual article addresses this theoretical gap by developing the Scouting Paradox Framework, a model explaining how increasing competitive success may progressively undermine educational success within character-centered scouting education. Drawing upon Achievement Goal Theory, Self-Determination Theory, Experiential Learning Theory, Positive Youth Development, and organizational perspectives on goal displacement, the article synthesizes previously disconnected literature streams into an integrated conceptual framework. The proposed model identifies Competition Pressure, Motivational Climate Shift, Educational Displacement, Character Development Outcomes, and Educational Success as key constructs explaining the relationship between competition and developmental outcomes. The study contributes to theory by introducing Educational Displacement as a novel construct that explains how educational objectives become subordinated to competitive priorities and by extending existing youth development theories toward organizational-level educational processes. The framework provides a foundation for future empirical research examining how character-centered organizations can preserve developmental purpose while engaging with competitive activities.

Keywords

scouting education; educational displacement; positive youth development; achievement goal theory; motivational climate; nonformal education

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1. Introduction

Scouting has long been recognized as one of the world's most influential nonformal educational movements, designed to foster character formation, citizenship, leadership, self-reliance, and service through experiential learning and youth-centered activities. Unlike formal schooling, scouting emphasizes learning by doing, peer collaboration, outdoor experiences, and progressive personal development as pathways toward holistic youth growth. These educational principles align closely with broader theories of character education, self-determination, experiential learning, and positive youth development, all of which emphasize the importance of nurturing personal growth rather than merely achieving external performance outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Lickona, 1996; Turnnidge et al., 2014). Contemporary youth development research further suggests that developmental outcomes are shaped not simply by participation itself but by the quality of developmental experiences embedded within educational environments, including opportunities for autonomy, meaningful contribution, supportive relationships, and reflective learning (Arnold & Gagnon, 2019; Eccles, 2002).

In recent decades, however, scouting organizations in many countries have increasingly integrated competitive activities into their educational programs. Competitions, skill contests, jamboree evaluations, leadership tournaments, pioneering contests, and various forms of ranking systems have become common mechanisms for motivating participation and demonstrating organizational excellence. From an educational perspective, competition can provide valuable opportunities for youth to develop competence, confidence, teamwork, discipline, and resilience. Achievement Goal Theory suggests that appropriately structured challenges can enhance motivation and performance when participants focus on mastery, learning, and self-improvement (Ames, 1992; Elliot & McGregor, 2001). Likewise, research on Positive Youth Development indicates that structured youth activities can contribute to competence, confidence, character, caring, and social connection when supported by positive developmental climates (Holt et al., 2017).

Despite these benefits, growing evidence from youth development, educational psychology, and sport pedagogy suggests that competitive environments do not automatically produce positive educational outcomes. The developmental consequences of competition appear to depend heavily on motivational climates, leadership practices, organizational values, and the quality of interpersonal relationships embedded within the activity context (Hodge & Lonsdale, 2011; Ntoumanis, 2001). When competition becomes excessively outcome-oriented, participants may gradually prioritize winning over learning, external recognition over personal growth, and superiority over cooperation. Under such conditions, activities originally intended to support education may begin to undermine the very developmental objectives they were designed to achieve.

Research has demonstrated that highly competitive environments may be associated with moral disengagement, antisocial behavior, cheating tendencies, excessive performance pressure, and reduced prosocial conduct among youth participants (Boardley et al., 2020; Kang et al., 2021; Lucidi et al., 2017). Other studies have found that motivational climates emphasizing external performance and social comparison can weaken intrinsic motivation, reduce psychological need satisfaction, and negatively affect well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Collectively, these findings challenge the common assumption that competitive success necessarily reflects educational success.

The issue becomes particularly important in scouting because competition occupies a fundamentally different role than it does in sport. In competitive sport, winning often constitutes a legitimate and explicit objective. In scouting, however, competitions are intended to function primarily as educational instruments rather than educational endpoints. The central mission of scouting remains the development of character, citizenship, service,

leadership, and personal growth. Consequently, a critical question emerges: What happens when competitive success becomes more important than educational development?

Existing scholarship provides only partial answers to this question. Achievement Goal Theory distinguishes between mastery-oriented and performance-oriented motivations (Ames, 1992; Nicholls, 1984a), while Self-Determination Theory explains how autonomy, competence, and relatedness shape developmental outcomes (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2020). Experiential Learning Theory emphasizes the transformative potential of meaningful experiences and reflective learning processes (Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Morris, 2020). Likewise, Positive Youth Development literature highlights the mechanisms through which structured youth activities foster developmental assets and life skills (Holt et al., 2017). However, these perspectives rarely examine situations in which competitive achievement and educational achievement diverge from one another.

A review of the broader literature reveals three major conceptual gaps. First, competition is frequently treated as an inherently beneficial developmental mechanism, while insufficient attention is given to its potentially counterproductive consequences (Eime et al., 2013; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005). Second, many studies assume that participation automatically produces character development without adequately explaining the contextual mechanisms through which developmental outcomes may be strengthened or weakened (Holt et al., 2017). Third, existing models provide limited explanation for situations in which increasing competitive success coincides with declining educational outcomes, particularly within nonformal educational settings such as scouting.

This article argues that these limitations stem from the absence of a conceptual framework capable of explaining the tension between competitive achievement and educational purpose. To address this gap, the article introduces the concept of the Scouting Paradox, defined as a condition in which increasing competitive success progressively weakens the educational objectives of scouting. The paradox does not suggest that competition is inherently harmful. Rather, it proposes that competition may generate contradictory effects depending on how it shapes motivational climates, organizational priorities, and developmental experiences.

Building upon Achievement Goal Theory, Self-Determination Theory, Experiential Learning Theory, and Positive Youth Development perspectives, this article develops a new conceptual framework that explains how competition pressure may trigger a shift from mastery-oriented educational environments toward performance-oriented cultures. Such a shift may subsequently produce a process termed Educational Displacement, whereby educational objectives are gradually replaced by competitive objectives. As educational displacement intensifies, opportunities for character formation, leadership development, cooperation, and service learning may become increasingly constrained.

Accordingly, the primary objective of this article is to develop a conceptual explanation of how competitive success can undermine educational success within scouting education. Specifically, the article seeks to (1) critically examine existing assumptions regarding competition and youth development, (2) identify the mechanisms through which competition may displace educational objectives, and (3) propose the Scouting Paradox Framework as a theoretical model for understanding the relationship between competition pressure, motivational climate, educational displacement, character development outcomes, and educational success.

The article contributes to the literature in three important ways. First, it extends existing theories of youth development by conceptualizing competition as a potentially paradoxical educational force rather than an inherently positive mechanism. Second, it introduces the novel construct of Educational Displacement, which explains how educational purposes may gradually be subordinated to competitive priorities. Third, it offers a conceptual framework specifically designed for scouting and other nonformal educational contexts, thereby

expanding scholarly understanding of how educational missions can be preserved amid increasing competitive pressures. Through these contributions, the article aims to stimulate further theoretical and empirical research on the conditions under which competition supports (or undermines) the fundamental goals of character-centered scouting education.

2. Theoretical Foundations

Scouting is fundamentally an educational movement that seeks to promote holistic youth development through experiential learning, social interaction, community engagement, and progressive self-development. Understanding how competition may simultaneously support and undermine educational outcomes requires a multidisciplinary theoretical foundation. This article draws upon four complementary perspectives: Achievement Goal Theory, Self-Determination Theory, Experiential Learning Theory, and Positive Youth Development. Together, these perspectives provide a comprehensive lens for examining the educational implications of competitive environments and for understanding the conditions under which competitive success may diverge from educational success.

2.1 Achievement Goal Theory and the Orientation of Success

Achievement Goal Theory (AGT) provides one of the most influential frameworks for understanding how individuals define success and evaluate competence within achievement settings. Early formulations of the theory distinguished between task-oriented and ego-oriented conceptions of achievement (Nicholls, 1984b). Task-oriented individuals evaluate success based on personal improvement, mastery, effort, and learning, whereas ego-oriented individuals define success through outperforming others and demonstrating superior ability.

Subsequent developments expanded this perspective by emphasizing the role of contextual factors in shaping motivational orientations. (Ames, 1992) argued that learning environments create distinct motivational climates that influence how participants interpret success and failure. Mastery climates encourage effort, improvement, cooperation, and learning, while performance climates emphasize comparison, competition, and external recognition. Research consistently demonstrates that mastery-oriented environments are associated with greater persistence, intrinsic motivation, adaptive coping, and positive learning outcomes (Ames, 1992; Kaplan & Maehr, 2007).

Further refinements introduced the distinction between approach and avoidance motivations. Elliot & Church (1997) proposed that achievement behavior is influenced not only by desired outcomes but also by the avoidance of failure. Elliot & McGregor (2001) subsequently developed the 2 × 2 achievement goal framework, differentiating mastery-approach, mastery-avoidance, performance-approach, and performance-avoidance goals. This framework highlights how individuals may pursue competence development or seek superiority over others while simultaneously attempting to avoid failure or incompetence.

Within scouting education, AGT suggests that competitions may generate very different developmental outcomes depending on how success is defined and communicated. When competitions are framed as opportunities for learning, growth, and skill development, they may reinforce mastery-oriented motivations. However, when recognition, rankings, and trophies become dominant indicators of success, performance-oriented motivations may increasingly shape participant behavior. Such conditions can gradually shift attention away from personal development and toward social comparison, creating tensions between educational objectives and competitive achievement (Barron & Harackiewicz, 2001; Harackiewicz et al., 2002; Lisa Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2008).

Consequently, Achievement Goal Theory provides an important foundation for understanding how competitive environments may influence the educational mission of

scouting. The theory suggests that the developmental consequences of competition depend less on competition itself and more on the motivational climate surrounding it.

2.2 Self-Determination Theory and Educational Development

While Achievement Goal Theory explains how success is defined, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) explains the psychological conditions necessary for healthy development and sustained motivation. SDT proposes that optimal functioning depends upon the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Autonomy refers to the experience of acting voluntarily and in accordance with personal values. Competence reflects feelings of effectiveness and capability in interacting with the environment. Relatedness involves the experience of belonging, connection, and meaningful relationships with others. When these psychological needs are satisfied, individuals are more likely to experience intrinsic motivation, well-being, persistence, and personal growth (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Research across educational and youth development contexts consistently supports the importance of these needs. Autonomy-supportive environments promote engagement and self-directed learning, whereas controlling environments often reduce intrinsic motivation and psychological well-being (Bartholomew et al., 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Similarly, supportive relationships with leaders, coaches, and peers contribute significantly to developmental outcomes (Lefever et al., 2025; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003).

The relevance of SDT to scouting is particularly significant because scouting traditionally emphasizes self-directed learning, peer collaboration, and progressive personal development. The patrol system, outdoor activities, and learning-by-doing approach all provide opportunities for satisfying autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs. However, excessive emphasis on competitive achievement may unintentionally disrupt this balance. Highly competitive environments may increase external regulation, encourage social comparison, and weaken cooperative relationships, thereby reducing autonomy and relatedness among participants (Jakobsen, 2022).

Moreover, recent studies suggest that motivational climates emphasizing external rewards and performance outcomes can contribute to undesirable behavioral consequences, including moral disengagement, cheating, and reduced prosocial behavior. These findings indicate that educational outcomes depend not only on participation itself but also on the psychological quality of the environment in which participation occurs.

Thus, Self-Determination Theory provides a crucial explanation for why competitive success does not automatically translate into educational success. Educational development occurs when participation satisfies fundamental psychological needs rather than when participants merely achieve external recognition.

2.3 Experiential Learning Theory and the Educational Purpose of Activities

Experiential learning occupies a central position within scouting philosophy. Learning in scouting is not primarily acquired through lectures or direct instruction but through active participation, reflection, experimentation, and practical engagement with real-world situations. Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) provides a useful framework for understanding this educational process.

Kolb & Kolb (2005) conceptualized learning as a cyclical process involving concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Learning emerges when individuals engage with experiences, reflect upon them, derive meaning from those reflections, and apply new understandings to future situations. Experiential learning therefore emphasizes transformation rather than simple performance.

Subsequent scholarship has expanded and refined ELT. Holman et al. (1997) argued that experiential learning should be understood as a socially embedded process rather than merely an individual cognitive cycle. More recently, (Morris, 2020) highlighted the importance of reflection and contextual interpretation in transforming experiences into meaningful learning outcomes.

The educational significance of this perspective lies in its distinction between activity participation and learning outcomes. Participation alone does not guarantee learning. Rather, educational outcomes emerge when experiences are intentionally structured to promote reflection, meaning-making, and personal growth. This distinction is particularly important in competitive settings.

Within scouting, competitions may provide rich learning opportunities when participants are encouraged to reflect on teamwork, leadership, problem-solving, resilience, and ethical decision-making. However, if the primary focus shifts toward winning, rankings, or external rewards, the reflective dimension of experiential learning may be diminished. Activities that were originally intended as educational experiences may become performance-oriented events focused primarily on outcomes rather than learning processes.

Therefore, Experiential Learning Theory suggests that educational success depends on how experiences are interpreted and integrated into personal development. Competitive achievement alone does not guarantee meaningful learning and may even divert attention from the reflective processes necessary for educational growth.

2.4 Positive Youth Development and Character-Centered Education

Positive Youth Development (PYD) represents one of the most influential contemporary approaches to youth education and development. Rather than viewing young people as problems to be managed, PYD views them as resources to be developed through supportive relationships, meaningful participation, and opportunities for contribution (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005).

A central contribution of PYD is the Five Cs framework, which identifies competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring as key developmental outcomes. These dimensions collectively contribute to a sixth outcome contribution which reflects active participation in society and service to others (Holt et al., 2017; Turnnidge et al., 2014).

Research has consistently demonstrated that structured youth activities can foster positive developmental outcomes when they provide supportive relationships, opportunities for leadership, meaningful challenges, and opportunities for reflection (Eime et al., 2013; Holt et al., 2017). More recent studies continue to emphasize the importance of motivational climate, social identity, and interpersonal relationships in shaping developmental outcomes among young people (Gu & Cheng, 2026).

Importantly, PYD scholarship also recognizes that developmental outcomes are not automatic consequences of participation. Activities may produce positive or negative outcomes depending on organizational culture, leadership practices, and social environments. Studies examining youth sport have documented both prosocial and antisocial consequences of competitive participation, highlighting the importance of contextual influences (Boardley et al., 2020; Hodge & Lonsdale, 2011; Kavussanu, 2006).

This insight is highly relevant to scouting education. Although scouting seeks to promote character, leadership, citizenship, and service, these outcomes cannot be assumed merely because young people participate in scouting activities. Educational outcomes depend upon how activities are structured, interpreted, and integrated into broader developmental objectives.

Taken together, Achievement Goal Theory, Self-Determination Theory, Experiential Learning Theory, and Positive Youth Development provide complementary explanations of how educational outcomes emerge within youth organizations. Achievement Goal Theory explains how success is defined; Self-Determination Theory explains the psychological conditions necessary for development; Experiential Learning Theory explains how experiences become learning; and Positive Youth Development identifies the developmental outcomes that educational activities seek to achieve. However, despite their collective strengths, these theories do not fully explain situations in which increasing competitive success coincides with declining educational outcomes. Addressing this limitation requires a critical examination of the existing literature, which forms the focus of the next section.

Although these theoretical perspectives explain important aspects of youth development, each addresses different dimensions of educational processes. Figure 1 synthesizes their complementary contributions and illustrates why an additional framework is needed to explain the divergence between competitive success and educational success.

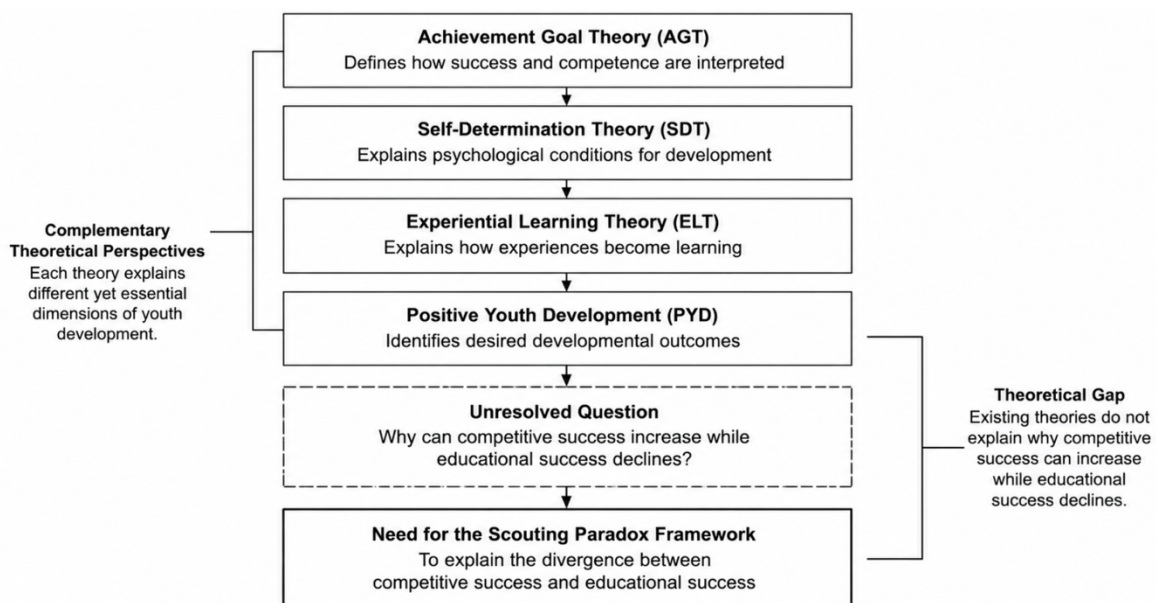


Figure 1. Theoretical Foundations of the Scouting Paradox Framework

Source: Developed by the authors based on Achievement Goal Theory (Nicholls, 1984; Ames, 1992), Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2020), Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Morris, 2020), and Positive Youth Development literature (Holt et al., 2017).

Figure 1 demonstrates that existing theories provide complementary explanations regarding achievement orientation, psychological need satisfaction, experiential learning processes, and developmental outcomes. However, none explicitly explains circumstances in which competitive achievement and educational achievement diverge. This unresolved theoretical space motivates the development of the Scouting Paradox Framework, which seeks to explain how educational priorities may gradually become displaced by competitive priorities.

While the four theoretical perspectives offer valuable insights into youth development and educational processes, each addresses a distinct aspect of competition and learning.

Table 1. Theoretical Synthesis and Conceptual Contributions of Existing Perspectives

Theory	Primary Focus	Contribution	Remaining Limitation
Achievement Goal Theory (AGT)	Definitions of success and competence	Explains how mastery-oriented and performance-oriented climates shape motivation, behavior, and achievement outcomes.	Does not explain how performance-oriented climates may gradually reshape organizational priorities and educational purpose.

Theory	Primary Focus	Contribution	Remaining Limitation
Self-Determination Theory (SDT)	Psychological need satisfaction	Explains how autonomy, competence, and relatedness support motivation, well-being, and developmental outcomes.	Does not explain how competitive environments may transform educational missions at the organizational level.
Experiential Learning Theory (ELT)	Learning through experience and reflection	Explains how experiences become meaningful learning through reflection, conceptualization, and application.	Does not explain why educational experiences may become displaced by performance-oriented objectives.
Positive Youth Development (PYD)	Desired developmental outcomes	Identifies key developmental outcomes such as competence, confidence, character, caring, connection, and contribution.	Does not explain circumstances in which participation remains high while developmental outcomes decline.

Source: Developed by the authors based on Achievement Goal Theory (Nicholls, 1984; Ames, 1992; Elliot & McGregor, 2001), Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2020), Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Morris, 2020), and Positive Youth Development literature (Holt et al., 2017).

Table 1 demonstrates that existing theories provide complementary explanations regarding motivation, learning processes, psychological development, and developmental outcomes. However, none explicitly explains how competitive success may progressively become disconnected from educational success. This shared limitation reveals a critical theoretical gap and justifies the development of the Scouting Paradox Framework, particularly the introduction of Educational Displacement as a new explanatory construct.

3. Critique of Existing Literature

The preceding theoretical review demonstrates that competition can serve as a powerful mechanism for motivation, learning, and youth development. Achievement Goal Theory, Self-Determination Theory, Experiential Learning Theory, and Positive Youth Development collectively suggest that structured activities can foster competence, confidence, leadership, character, and social development. However, despite substantial scholarly attention to youth participation, competition, and developmental outcomes, important conceptual limitations remain. Existing literature provides valuable insights into the benefits of participation but offers limited explanations for circumstances in which competitive achievement and educational achievement diverge.

This section critically examines four major limitations within the existing literature. Together, these limitations reveal the need for a conceptual framework capable of explaining how competitive success may, under certain conditions, undermine educational success.

3.1 The Assumption that Competition Is Inherently Developmental

A dominant assumption across youth development literature is that participation in structured competitive activities naturally generates positive developmental outcomes. Numerous studies report beneficial effects of organized youth activities on competence, confidence, social skills, well-being, leadership, and character development (Eime et al., 2013; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Holt et al., 2017). More recent reviews continue to document positive associations between participation and developmental outcomes among young people.

While these contributions are valuable, they frequently emphasize positive outcomes without adequately examining potential contradictions. Participation itself is often treated as a proxy for development, creating an implicit assumption that involvement in structured activities necessarily produces educational benefits. Yet emerging scholarship increasingly argues that developmental outcomes depend less on participation per se and more on program quality, relational experiences, and developmental processes embedded within the activity

context (Bowers et al., 2010). Consequently, participation alone provides limited explanatory power for understanding why similar activities may produce markedly different developmental outcomes.

This tendency is particularly visible in studies examining sport-based youth development. Competitive activities are frequently described as vehicles for character building, teamwork, leadership, and life-skill acquisition (Gu & Cheng, 2026; Turnnidge et al., 2014). Yet empirical findings simultaneously indicate that competitive environments may also contribute to aggression, moral disengagement, antisocial behavior, cheating, and excessive performance pressure (Boardley et al., 2020; Kang et al., 2021; Lucidi et al., 2017). These contradictory findings suggest that competition is not inherently developmental. Rather, its educational value appears contingent upon contextual, relational, and motivational conditions.

Consequently, existing literature tends to overemphasize the developmental benefits of competition while under-theorizing the conditions under which competition may become educationally counterproductive. This limitation is especially problematic in scouting education, where competition is intended to function as a pedagogical instrument rather than an educational endpoint.

3.2 Character Development Is Often Assumed Rather Than Explained

A second limitation concerns the treatment of character development outcomes. Character formation occupies a central position in both scouting philosophy and youth development scholarship. Educational programs are commonly justified on the assumption that participation promotes responsibility, integrity, cooperation, citizenship, and prosocial behavior (Holt et al., 2017; Lickona, 1996).

However, much of the literature assumes rather than explains how character development occurs. Participation is often treated as inherently developmental, while competition is similarly presumed to foster character growth. Such linear assumptions overlook the complexity of developmental processes and fail to explain the psychological, social, and organizational mechanisms through which educational experiences become genuinely character-forming.

Such assumptions overlook the complexity of developmental processes. Experiential Learning Theory emphasizes that experiences become educational only when accompanied by reflection, meaning-making, and personal integration (Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Morris, 2020). Likewise, Self-Determination Theory suggests that positive developmental outcomes depend on the satisfaction of psychological needs rather than on participation alone (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Recent scholarship further suggests that character development should be understood as an emergent process shaped by social relationships, organizational norms, leadership practices, and repeated opportunities for moral reflection (Kristjánsson & Fowers, 2024; Nucci et al., 2021). From this perspective, educational activities do not directly produce character outcomes; rather, they create conditions under which character formation may or may not occur.

Research has also shown that competitive environments may foster both prosocial and antisocial behaviors depending on motivational climate, leadership practices, and prevailing social norms (Boardley et al., 2020; Hodge & Lonsdale, 2011; Kavussanu, 2006). These findings indicate that character development cannot be regarded as an automatic consequence of participation.

Nevertheless, existing literature rarely specifies the mechanisms through which educational objectives become strengthened, weakened, or displaced. As a result, scholars often know whether developmental outcomes occur, but not how organizational processes influence

those outcomes. This conceptual ambiguity limits the ability of current theories to explain variation across educational settings.

3.3 The Dominance of Sport-Based Perspectives

A third limitation concerns the disciplinary foundations of existing research. Much of the literature addressing competition and youth development originates from sport psychology, sport pedagogy, and sport management. These fields have generated valuable knowledge regarding motivation, performance, coaching, and athlete development (Hodge & Lonsdale, 2011; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Ntoumanis, 2001).

However, educational goals within sport and scouting are not necessarily identical. In competitive sport, performance outcomes frequently constitute legitimate objectives. Winning competitions, achieving rankings, and demonstrating superior performance are often integral components of the activity itself. Consequently, competitive success and organizational success are frequently aligned.

In contrast, scouting is fundamentally an educational movement rather than a performance-oriented institution. Its primary objectives involve character formation, leadership development, citizenship, service, social responsibility, and personal growth. Competitive activities exist within scouting, but they are intended to support broader educational goals rather than replace them.

The dominance of sport-based perspectives therefore creates an important conceptual blind spot. Existing theories are generally designed to explain how competition influences performance, motivation, or participation. They provide considerably less guidance regarding how competition may influence educational missions within nonformal learning environments. As a result, concepts developed within sport settings may not fully capture the tensions experienced in organizations whose primary purpose is developmental rather than competitive.

This limitation suggests the need for a framework that explicitly addresses educational purpose rather than performance outcomes alone. Such a framework must account for the possibility that competitive achievement and educational achievement may not always move in the same direction.

3.4 The Absence of a Framework Explaining Divergence Between Competitive and Educational Success

The most significant limitation within the existing literature is the absence of a framework capable of explaining divergence between competitive success and educational success.

Achievement Goal Theory explains how individuals define competence and pursue achievement (Ames, 1992; Nicholls, 1984b). Self-Determination Theory explains the psychological conditions necessary for healthy development (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Experiential Learning Theory explains how experiences become learning (Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Morris, 2020). Positive Youth Development identifies desired developmental outcomes (Holt et al., 2017).

Yet none of these perspectives explicitly addresses situations in which competitive achievement increases while educational achievement declines.

For example, a scouting unit may consistently win competitions while simultaneously experiencing declining cooperation, reduced peer support, weakened service orientation, excessive performance pressure, or diminished opportunities for reflective learning. From a competitive perspective, the unit appears successful. From an educational perspective, however, its developmental mission may be deteriorating.

The broader organizational literature offers partial parallels through concepts such as mission drift and goal displacement, which describe situations in which instrumental objectives gradually replace foundational organizational purposes (Ebrahim et al., 2014). However, these perspectives have rarely been applied to youth development or scouting education. Consequently, there remains no integrated framework explaining how educational priorities become subordinated to competitive priorities within youth-serving organizations.

This omission is particularly important because educational organizations frequently evaluate success through visible indicators such as rankings, awards, trophies, and public recognition. As these indicators become increasingly influential, educational goals may gradually lose prominence. Existing literature lacks a conceptual construct capable of describing this process and explaining its developmental consequences.

3.5 Identifying the Conceptual Gap

The preceding critique reveals a common pattern across the literature. Existing research largely assumes that competition contributes positively to development, treats character outcomes as largely self-evident, relies heavily on sport-based perspectives, and lacks an integrated explanation for situations in which competitive and educational outcomes diverge.

Taken together, these limitations point toward an unresolved conceptual problem:

How can an activity become increasingly successful in competitive terms while simultaneously becoming less successful in educational terms?

Answering this question requires moving beyond traditional discussions of competition, motivation, and participation. It requires a framework capable of explaining how competitive pressures reshape organizational priorities, alter motivational climates, and ultimately influence developmental outcomes.

To address this gap, the next section introduces the Scouting Paradox Framework and proposes the novel construct of Educational Displacement. The framework seeks to explain the mechanisms through which competition pressure may gradually transform educational environments, creating conditions in which competitive success no longer serves educational success but instead begins to undermine it.

The literature reviewed in the preceding sections provides valuable explanations regarding motivation, participation, and youth development. However, important conceptual limitations remain. Figure 2 summarizes these limitations and illustrates the unresolved theoretical gap that motivates the development of the Scouting Paradox Framework.

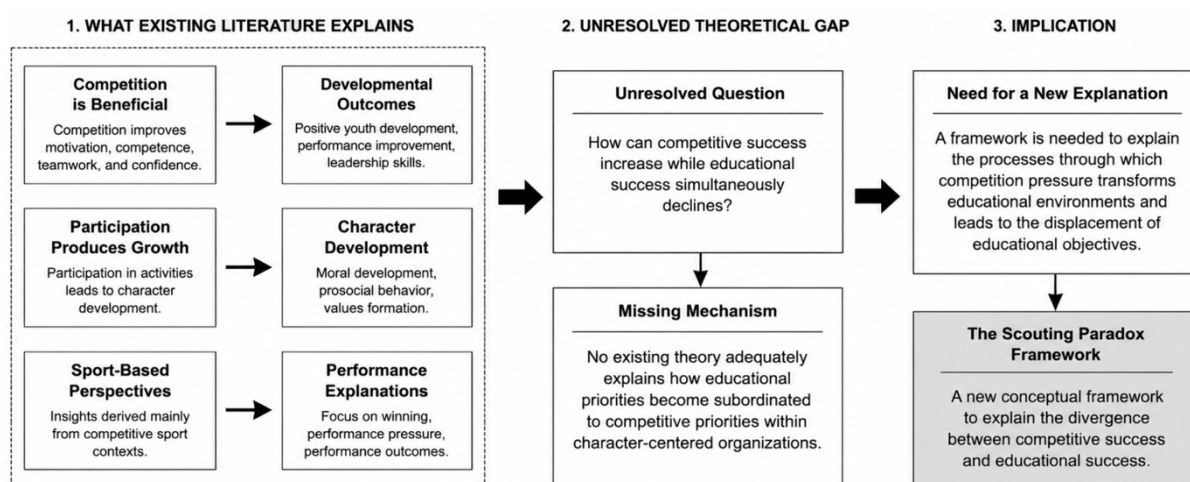


Figure 2. Conceptual Gap Leading to the Scouting Paradox Framework

Source: Developed by the authors based on the critical review of Achievement Goal Theory, Self-Determination Theory, Experiential Learning Theory, Positive Youth Development, and related youth development literature.

Figure 2 illustrates the central conceptual limitation identified in existing scholarship. Although prior studies explain how competition influences motivation, participation, and developmental outcomes, they provide limited explanation for situations in which competitive achievement and educational achievement diverge. The absence of a mechanism explaining how educational priorities become subordinated to competitive priorities creates the theoretical gap addressed by the Scouting Paradox Framework.

4. The Scouting Paradox Framework

4.1 Introducing the Scouting Paradox

The preceding critique revealed a significant limitation within existing scholarship. Although competition is widely regarded as a potentially valuable educational mechanism, current theories provide limited explanation for situations in which increasing competitive success coincides with declining educational outcomes. To address this limitation, this article introduces the concept of the Scouting Paradox.

The Scouting Paradox refers to a condition in which increasing competitive success progressively weakens the educational objectives of scouting. The paradox emerges when competitive achievement shifts from being an educational instrument to becoming an educational objective in its own right. Under such circumstances, activities originally intended to foster character formation, leadership development, citizenship, cooperation, and service become increasingly organized around rankings, trophies, public recognition, and performance outcomes.

Importantly, the Scouting Paradox does not imply that competition is inherently harmful. Rather, competition possesses a dual developmental potential. When embedded within mastery-oriented educational environments, competition can stimulate learning, competence development, confidence, resilience, and personal growth (Ames, 1992; Elliot & McGregor, 2001). However, when competitive outcomes become dominant indicators of success, competition may encourage excessive social comparison, performance pressure, and external validation, thereby weakening educational priorities (Boardley et al., 2020; Ryan & Deci, 2020). The central challenge is therefore not whether competition exists, but whether competition remains subordinate to educational purpose.

To explain this process, the present framework proposes a mediating mechanism termed Educational Displacement, through which competitive priorities gradually reshape educational environments and developmental outcomes.

4.2 Educational Displacement: A New Conceptual Construct

Educational Displacement refers to the gradual process through which educational objectives become subordinated to competitive objectives within youth development activities and educational organizations. Rather than representing a sudden breakdown of educational practice, Educational Displacement describes a progressive reordering of organizational priorities in which competitive achievement increasingly becomes the dominant criterion for evaluating success.

The concept builds upon insights from Achievement Goal Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Positive Youth Development while drawing conceptual support from organizational research on goal displacement and mission drift. These perspectives collectively suggest that organizations may gradually replace foundational purposes with more visible, measurable, or institutionally rewarded outcomes (Ebrahim et al., 2014; Merton, 1968). Within scouting, such a process may occur when championships, rankings, and public recognition become more influential than character formation, service, citizenship, and leadership development.

Educational Displacement differs conceptually from educational failure. Educational failure refers to situations in which intended educational outcomes are not achieved. Educational Displacement, by contrast, refers to a transformation in the purpose of participation itself. Educational goals may remain formally present in mission statements, official rhetoric, and organizational documents, yet become increasingly marginalized in daily practice and decision-making. Consequently, organizations experiencing Educational Displacement may continue to appear successful according to conventional indicators while simultaneously experiencing a decline in developmental quality.

From a developmental perspective, Educational Displacement can be understood as a gradual transformation of the educational ecology of participation. As competitive priorities become increasingly influential, opportunities for meaningful participation, reflective learning, service engagement, and developmental relationships may become progressively constrained. Participation remains high and competitive achievements may even increase, yet educational outcomes become less central to organizational life. The framework therefore conceptualizes Educational Displacement as the principal mechanism through which competition pressure may ultimately weaken educational success.

4.3 Construct 1: Competition Pressure

The first component of the framework is Competition Pressure, defined as the extent to which individuals and organizations experience expectations to achieve competitive success. Such pressure may originate from multiple sources, including organizational expectations, parental aspirations, peer comparison, public recognition systems, rankings, awards, and institutional reputation.

Achievement Goal Theory suggests that environments emphasizing normative comparison encourage performance-oriented definitions of success (Ames, 1992; Elliot & Church, 1997). In such environments, participants become increasingly attentive to external indicators of achievement and social status. Recent research similarly indicates that excessive emphasis on measurable outcomes may contribute to performance anxiety, external regulation, and maladaptive motivational responses.

Within scouting, competition pressure often develops gradually rather than intentionally. Competitive activities are frequently introduced as educational tools intended to stimulate engagement and challenge. However, repeated success in competitions may become associated with organizational prestige and public legitimacy. As trophies, championships, and rankings become increasingly salient indicators of accomplishment, leaders and participants may begin to evaluate success primarily through competitive outcomes rather than developmental progress. Competition pressure therefore represents the initiating condition of the framework, creating circumstances under which educational priorities may begin to shift.

4.4 Construct 2: Motivational Climate Shift

The second component is Motivational Climate Shift, which refers to movement from a mastery-oriented educational environment toward a performance-oriented environment. Mastery climates emphasize learning, effort, improvement, cooperation, and personal growth, whereas performance climates emphasize comparison, superiority, public recognition, and winning.

Achievement Goal Theory proposes that these climates generate fundamentally different patterns of motivation and behavior (Ames, 1992; Elliot & McGregor, 2001). Mastery-oriented environments tend to promote persistence, intrinsic motivation, adaptive learning strategies, and positive developmental outcomes. In contrast, performance-oriented environments encourage social comparison and increase the importance of external validation.

Self-Determination Theory further suggests that highly performance-focused environments may weaken autonomy and relatedness while strengthening external forms of regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Within scouting organizations, increasing competition pressure may gradually alter how activities are interpreted. Events initially framed as opportunities for learning and growth may become understood primarily as opportunities to demonstrate superiority and achieve recognition. As this shift occurs, participants become increasingly concerned with outperforming others rather than improving themselves, thereby altering the educational character of participation.

4.5 Construct 3: Educational Displacement

Educational Displacement functions as the central mediating mechanism within the framework. The construct explains how competition pressure and performance-oriented motivational climates become translated into developmental consequences.

The framework proposes that Educational Displacement unfolds through three interconnected processes. First, organizations experience goal displacement, whereby competitive success increasingly becomes the dominant indicator of achievement. Character formation, leadership development, citizenship, and service continue to be acknowledged rhetorically, yet competitive outcomes receive greater attention in evaluation and recognition systems. Success becomes defined less by developmental growth and more by visible accomplishments.

Second, changing priorities generate resource displacement. As competitive outcomes become increasingly valued, organizational resources such as time, attention, energy, personnel, and programmatic effort become concentrated on activities that maximize competitive performance. Although educational activities may continue to exist, they occupy a progressively smaller proportion of organizational attention. This process creates educational narrowing, whereby developmental experiences become less diverse and less central.

Third, prolonged exposure to competitive priorities may generate identity displacement. Participants begin to define personal and collective success through winning rather than learning, service, cooperation, or leadership development. Competitive achievement becomes embedded within organizational culture and participant identity. Once this occurs, performance-oriented norms become self-reinforcing, making displacement increasingly difficult to reverse.

Together, these processes explain how educational environments may gradually transform without experiencing overt organizational failure. Educational means become reoriented toward competitive ends, creating conditions under which competitive success and educational success may increasingly diverge.

4.6 Construct 4: Character Development Outcomes

Character Development Outcomes represent the first major educational consequence of Educational Displacement. Character education scholarship identifies integrity, responsibility, respect, citizenship, empathy, and moral commitment as central developmental outcomes (Lickona, 1996). Similarly, Positive Youth Development emphasizes character and caring as core developmental assets associated with healthy youth development (Holt et al., 2017).

However, empirical evidence suggests that competitive environments may produce contradictory effects. While appropriately structured competition may encourage discipline and perseverance, excessive emphasis on performance outcomes has been associated with moral disengagement, cheating, antisocial behavior, and reduced prosocial conduct (Boardley et al., 2020; Gentile et al., 2022; Lucidi et al., 2017). These findings suggest that

character development is highly sensitive to the motivational and organizational contexts within which participation occurs.

The framework therefore proposes that Educational Displacement weakens core dimensions of character development, including cooperation, integrity, service orientation, empathy, and collective responsibility. As competitive priorities become increasingly dominant, opportunities for cultivating these developmental outcomes become progressively constrained.

4.7 Construct 5: Educational Success

Educational Success represents the ultimate outcome of the framework. Unlike competitive success, which focuses on short-term performance accomplishments, educational success refers to long-term developmental outcomes consistent with the mission of scouting.

Drawing upon Positive Youth Development, Self-Determination Theory, and experiential learning scholarship, educational success encompasses four interconnected dimensions: personal growth, social development, moral development, and leadership development. Personal growth includes self-regulation, resilience, and self-development. Social development involves cooperation, peer support, and community engagement. Moral development includes integrity, responsibility, and citizenship. Leadership development encompasses initiative, service-based leadership, and collective problem-solving.

These dimensions collectively reflect the educational aspirations of scouting. Importantly, educational success cannot be reduced to competitive accomplishment. A participant may achieve exceptional competitive results while simultaneously demonstrating limited growth in character, service orientation, citizenship, or leadership. The Scouting Paradox emerges precisely when these two forms of success become disconnected.

4.8 Conceptual Propositions

Based on the proposed framework, five propositions are advanced. First, Competition Pressure positively influences Motivational Climate Shift toward performance-oriented environments. Second, Motivational Climate Shift positively influences Educational Displacement. Third, Educational Displacement negatively influences Character Development Outcomes. Fourth, Character Development Outcomes positively influence Educational Success. Finally, Educational Displacement mediates the relationship between Competition Pressure and Educational Success.

Together, these propositions specify the causal logic of the framework and provide a foundation for future empirical testing.

The proposed framework consists of five interrelated constructs that collectively explain how competition may influence educational outcomes within scouting. Table 2 summarizes the definitions, dimensions, and expected relationships among these constructs, thereby clarifying the conceptual architecture underlying the Scouting Paradox Framework.

Table 2. Core Constructs and Proposed Relationships in the Scouting Paradox Framework

Construct	Definition	Dimensions / Indicators	Expected Relationship
Competition Pressure	The extent to which individuals or organizations experience expectations to achieve competitive success.	Rankings, trophies, awards, public recognition, organizational prestige, performance expectations.	Positively influences Motivational Climate Shift.
Motivational Climate Shift	The movement from a mastery-oriented educational climate toward a performance-oriented climate.	Social comparison, external validation, winning orientation, outcome emphasis, performance evaluation.	Positively influences Educational Displacement.

Construct	Definition	Dimensions / Indicators	Expected Relationship
Educational Displacement	The gradual process through which educational objectives become subordinated to competitive objectives.	Goal Displacement, Resource Displacement, Identity Displacement.	Negatively influences Character Development Outcomes and mediates the effects of Competition Pressure.
Character Development Outcomes	Developmental outcomes associated with the educational mission of scouting.	Cooperation, integrity, empathy, service orientation, collective responsibility.	Positively influences Educational Success.
Educational Success	Long-term developmental achievements aligned with the mission of scouting education.	Personal growth, social development, moral development, leadership development.	Represents the ultimate outcome of the framework.

Source: Developed by the authors based on the proposed Scouting Paradox Framework and the synthesis of Achievement Goal Theory, Self-Determination Theory, Experiential Learning Theory, Positive Youth Development, and organizational goal displacement literature

Table 2 summarizes the conceptual structure of the Scouting Paradox Framework. The framework proposes a sequential pathway in which Competition Pressure contributes to a Motivational Climate Shift, which subsequently triggers Educational Displacement. Through goal, resource, and identity displacement processes, developmental opportunities become constrained, weakening Character Development Outcomes and ultimately reducing Educational Success. The table therefore clarifies the causal logic underlying the framework's theoretical propositions.

4.9 The Scouting Paradox Framework

The proposed framework conceptualizes a developmental pathway through which competition may generate contradictory educational consequences. Competition Pressure initiates a shift toward performance-oriented motivational climates. These climates contribute to Educational Displacement, which gradually transforms organizational priorities, resource allocation patterns, and participant identities. As Educational Displacement intensifies, opportunities for character development become increasingly constrained, ultimately weakening Educational Success.

By introducing Educational Displacement as a mediating construct, the framework extends existing theories of motivation, youth development, and experiential learning while providing a scouting-specific explanation for the divergence between competitive achievement and educational achievement. Rather than assuming that competition automatically supports development, the framework explains the conditions under which competition remains educationally beneficial and the conditions under which it begins to undermine the developmental mission of scouting. In doing so, the Scouting Paradox Framework offers a new theoretical lens for understanding how character-centered educational organizations can preserve their developmental purpose amid growing competitive pressures.

To explain how competitive achievement may gradually undermine educational purpose, the Scouting Paradox Framework integrates motivational, developmental, and organizational perspectives into a single causal model. Figure 3 illustrates the proposed pathway linking competition pressure to educational success through the mediating process of Educational Displacement.

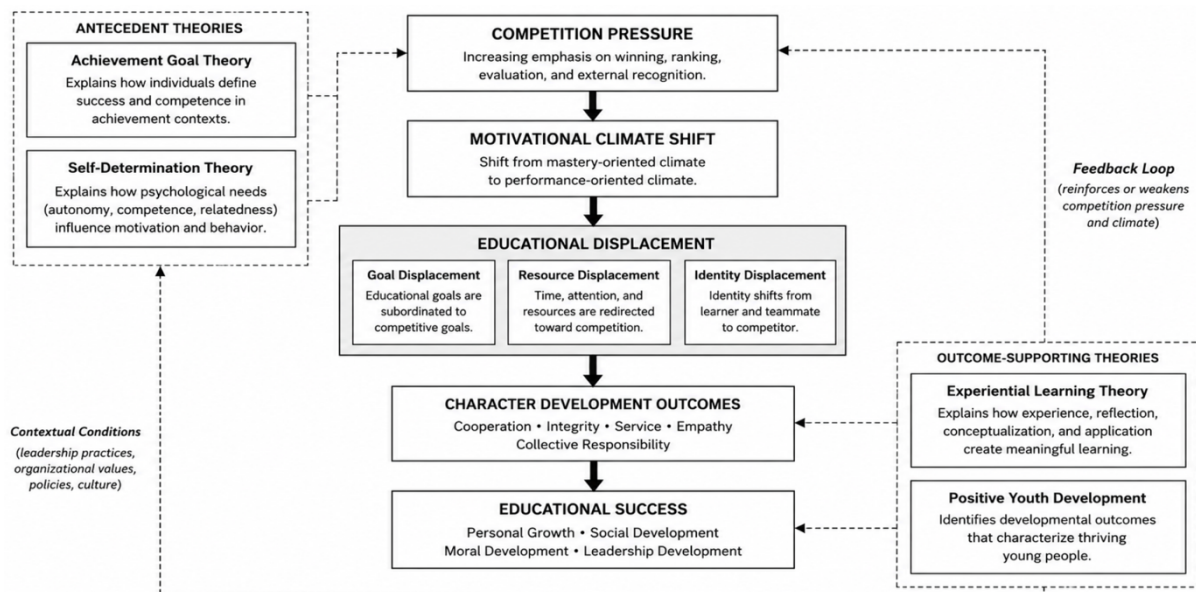


Figure 3. The Scouting Paradox Framework

Source: Developed by the authors based on Achievement Goal Theory (Nicholls, 1984; Ames, 1992), Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2020), Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Morris, 2020), Positive Youth Development (Holt et al., 2017), and organizational goal displacement literature (Merton, 1968; Ebrahim et al., 2014).

Figure 3 presents the core theoretical contribution of this article. The framework proposes that competition pressure initiates a shift toward performance-oriented motivational climates, which subsequently trigger Educational Displacement through goal, resource, and identity displacement processes. As displacement intensifies, opportunities for character development become constrained, ultimately reducing educational success. The model therefore explains how competitive success and educational success may progressively diverge within character-centered scouting organizations.

5. Discussion and Future Research

The purpose of this article has been to address a fundamental yet underexplored question within scouting education: Can increasing competitive success undermine educational success? Existing theories have provided valuable explanations regarding motivation, experiential learning, and youth development, yet they offer limited insight into situations in which competitive achievement and educational achievement move in different directions. To address this limitation, this article introduced the Scouting Paradox Framework and proposed Educational Displacement as a novel mechanism explaining how competition pressure may gradually reshape educational priorities and developmental outcomes.

The central argument of the framework is that competition is not inherently beneficial or harmful. Rather, its educational consequences depend on how it is embedded within organizational cultures, motivational climates, and systems of evaluation. This perspective shifts attention away from competition itself and toward the conditions under which competition either supports or undermines developmental goals.

5.1 Reframing Competition as an Educational Means Rather Than an Educational End

One of the most important implications of the proposed framework is the need to reconsider the educational role of competition within scouting. Existing youth development research generally acknowledges that appropriately structured challenge can promote competence, confidence, resilience, and leadership development (Geldhof et al., 2019; Gu & Cheng,

2026). However, the present framework suggests that developmental benefits emerge not from competition itself but from the extent to which competition remains aligned with broader educational purposes.

The concept of Educational Displacement highlights a critical distinction between competition as a developmental resource and competition as a dominant organizational objective. When competitive activities function as vehicles for learning, reflection, teamwork, and personal growth, they may strengthen developmental outcomes. Conversely, when competitive achievement becomes the primary measure of success, educational priorities may gradually become subordinated to performance outcomes.

This perspective aligns with contemporary developmental systems approaches, which emphasize that youth outcomes are shaped by the interaction between individual development and contextual influences rather than by participation alone (Lerner et al., 2021). Accordingly, the educational value of scouting competitions should be assessed not merely through performance outcomes but through their contribution to leadership development, citizenship, service, cooperation, and character formation. The framework therefore supports a shift from competition-centered evaluation toward character-centered evaluation within scouting education.

5.2 Implications for Leadership and Educational Practice

The framework also underscores the critical role of scout leaders, adult volunteers, and educational practitioners in shaping developmental environments. Research grounded in Self-Determination Theory demonstrates that leadership practices significantly influence autonomy, competence, relatedness, and long-term motivation among young people (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Vansteenkiste et al., 2020). Similarly, recent Positive Youth Development scholarship emphasizes the importance of supportive adult relationships, developmental quality, and meaningful youth participation in producing positive outcomes (Arnold & Gagnon, 2019; Wang et al., 2021).

Within scouting contexts, leaders function as interpreters of competition. The same competitive event may be framed either as an opportunity for learning and self-improvement or as a test of superiority and status. This distinction is crucial because motivational climates shape how participants define success and evaluate their own experiences. Leaders who emphasize effort, reflection, cooperation, ethical conduct, and service are more likely to cultivate mastery-oriented climates that support developmental growth. In contrast, excessive emphasis on rankings, prestige, and public recognition may unintentionally reinforce performance-oriented norms that contribute to Educational Displacement.

The framework therefore suggests that effective scouting leadership involves not only organizing activities but also protecting the educational meaning of those activities. Leaders should remain attentive to indicators of displacement, including increasing social comparison, disproportionate investment in competitive preparation, declining participation among less competitive members, and the gradual replacement of developmental language with performance-oriented language.

5.3 Organizational and Policy Implications

At the organizational level, the framework challenges prevailing assumptions regarding how success should be evaluated within youth-serving institutions. Competitive achievements are often easier to measure and communicate than developmental outcomes. As a result, organizations may unintentionally construct evaluation systems that privilege visible performance indicators while overlooking less visible educational outcomes.

This concern parallels broader debates in educational accountability research. Scholars have argued that excessive reliance on measurable indicators may encourage goal

distortion, narrowing of educational priorities, and unintended forms of mission drift (Biesta, 2022). The concept of Educational Displacement extends this discussion into the context of scouting and nonformal education by suggesting that performance indicators may gradually replace developmental objectives as the primary basis for organizational recognition.

To reduce this risk, scouting organizations may benefit from adopting more balanced systems of evaluation that incorporate developmental indicators alongside competitive accomplishments. Such indicators may include leadership growth, peer mentoring, community service participation, ethical conduct, collaborative problem-solving, civic engagement, and evidence of personal development. By broadening the criteria through which success is recognized, organizations may be better positioned to preserve their educational mission while still benefiting from the motivational advantages associated with competition.

5.4 Theoretical Contributions

Beyond its practical implications, the framework contributes to theory development in several important ways. First, it extends Achievement Goal Theory by shifting attention from individual motivational outcomes to the broader organizational consequences of performance-oriented climates. While existing research has primarily focused on how motivational climates influence participant behavior, the present framework demonstrates how such climates may gradually reshape organizational priorities themselves.

Second, the framework contributes to Self-Determination Theory by highlighting how competitive environments may influence developmental outcomes indirectly through changes in educational ecology. This perspective expands existing discussions of autonomy, competence, and relatedness by emphasizing the organizational conditions under which psychological need satisfaction becomes increasingly difficult to achieve.

Third, the framework contributes to Positive Youth Development scholarship by identifying a mechanism through which developmental opportunities may become constrained despite high levels of participation and organizational activity. Existing literature has often assumed that structured participation produces positive outcomes when developmental assets are present. The concept of Educational Displacement suggests that participation alone may be insufficient if organizational priorities become increasingly disconnected from developmental goals.

Most importantly, the article introduces Educational Displacement as a distinct conceptual construct. Although previous scholarship has examined competition, motivation, moral functioning, and youth development, little attention has been given to the process through which educational purposes become progressively subordinated to competitive priorities. Educational Displacement provides a theoretical explanation for this transformation and offers a foundation for future conceptual and empirical work across scouting, youth development, sport-based education, and other nonformal learning environments.

5.5 Future Research Directions

As a conceptual framework, the Scouting Paradox Framework requires empirical refinement and validation. A primary priority for future research is the development and validation of measurement instruments capable of assessing Educational Displacement and its proposed dimensions. Such work would allow researchers to examine variation across organizations and identify conditions under which displacement is most likely to emerge.

Future quantitative studies should also test the causal relationships proposed within the framework, particularly the pathways linking Competition Pressure, Motivational Climate Shift, Educational Displacement, Character Development Outcomes, and Educational Success. Comparative studies across scouting units, youth organizations, and educational

programs may further clarify how organizational culture, leadership practices, and evaluation systems influence displacement processes.

Qualitative research offers another promising avenue. Investigating how leaders, volunteers, parents, and young people interpret competition and educational success may provide deeper insight into how developmental priorities are negotiated, maintained, or transformed in practice. Finally, future scholarship should examine whether similar dynamics occur in youth sport, extracurricular education, outdoor education, leadership programs, and other nonformal learning contexts where educational and competitive objectives coexist.

Taken together, these directions would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how organizations can preserve developmental purpose while harnessing the motivational benefits of competition.

Ultimately, the Scouting Paradox Framework suggests that educational success should not be assumed simply because competitive success is achieved. The relationship between these outcomes is contingent rather than automatic. Educational outcomes depend on the extent to which organizations preserve their developmental mission while engaging with competitive activities. Recognizing this distinction is essential if scouting is to remain faithful to its foundational purpose of developing character, citizenship, leadership, and service among young people.

6. Conclusion

This article began with a fundamental yet insufficiently examined question within scouting education and youth development research: can increasing competitive success undermine educational success? Although existing scholarship has extensively documented the motivational, developmental, and educational benefits of structured youth activities, limited attention has been devoted to situations in which competitive achievement and educational achievement diverge. Previous theoretical perspectives, including Achievement Goal Theory, Self-Determination Theory, Experiential Learning Theory, and Positive Youth Development, provide important insights into how developmental outcomes emerge, yet they offer only partial explanations for circumstances in which organizational success in competitive terms may coincide with declining educational outcomes. Addressing this gap, the present study sought to develop a conceptual explanation of how competition may gradually weaken educational objectives within character-centered scouting environments.

The primary contribution of this article lies in the introduction of the Scouting Paradox Framework and the development of Educational Displacement as a novel conceptual construct. Rather than treating competition as either inherently beneficial or inherently harmful, the framework conceptualizes competition as a contingent educational force whose developmental consequences depend upon motivational climates, organizational priorities, and systems of evaluation. By identifying Educational Displacement as the mechanism through which educational purposes may gradually become subordinated to competitive priorities, the framework provides a theoretical explanation for a phenomenon that existing literature has largely overlooked. In doing so, the study moves beyond dominant assumptions that participation and competition automatically generate developmental outcomes and instead highlights the importance of educational alignment between organizational activities and developmental goals.

The framework advances current knowledge in several ways. First, it extends Achievement Goal Theory by demonstrating how performance-oriented climates may influence not only individual motivation but also the educational purpose of organizations. Second, it contributes to Self-Determination Theory by emphasizing how competitive environments may alter the developmental ecology within which autonomy, competence, and relatedness are cultivated. Third, it enriches Positive Youth Development scholarship by identifying a

process through which developmental opportunities may become constrained despite high levels of participation and organizational activity. Most importantly, the study integrates previously disconnected streams of research on competition, youth development, motivational climate, mission drift, and organizational priorities into a coherent conceptual model capable of explaining the divergence between competitive success and educational success.

Beyond its theoretical contributions, the framework offers practical implications for leaders, educators, volunteers, and policymakers involved in scouting and other youth-serving organizations. The findings suggest that educational quality cannot be assessed solely through visible indicators such as rankings, awards, or competitive accomplishments. Instead, organizations must develop evaluation systems that recognize broader developmental outcomes, including leadership growth, citizenship, cooperation, service, ethical conduct, and character formation. The framework further highlights the importance of leadership practices that preserve mastery-oriented learning environments and prevent competitive achievement from becoming the dominant measure of organizational success.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. As a conceptual study, the framework has not yet been empirically tested and therefore requires validation across different organizational and cultural contexts. Furthermore, the proposed relationships among Competition Pressure, Motivational Climate Shift, Educational Displacement, Character Development Outcomes, and Educational Success remain theoretical and should be examined through quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method approaches. The framework was also developed primarily within the context of scouting education, and its applicability to other youth development settings requires further investigation.

These limitations provide fertile opportunities for future research. Subsequent studies should focus on operationalizing and validating the Educational Displacement construct, examining its multidimensional structure, and testing the proposed propositions across diverse youth organizations. Comparative research may explore how leadership practices, organizational culture, evaluation systems, and national scouting traditions influence displacement processes. Future scholarship may also investigate whether similar dynamics emerge in youth sport, extracurricular education, outdoor education, leadership development programs, and other nonformal learning environments where educational and competitive objectives coexist. Such efforts would contribute to a broader understanding of how organizations can balance performance expectations with developmental responsibilities.

Ultimately, the central insight of this study is that competitive success should not be assumed to represent educational success. Educational missions are sustained not by competition itself, but by the extent to which competition remains aligned with developmental purpose. The Scouting Paradox Framework therefore challenges scholars and practitioners to reconsider how success is defined, evaluated, and pursued within youth organizations. By illuminating the mechanisms through which educational priorities may gradually become displaced by competitive priorities, this study offers a new theoretical lens for understanding and protecting the developmental mission of scouting. More broadly, it underscores a critical principle for character-centered education in the twenty-first century: the greatest threat to educational purpose may not be the absence of achievement, but the gradual transformation of achievement into an end rather than a means of human development.

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