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INPLASY

Motor Competence in African Children: A Scoping Review

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ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Support - FCT – PT.

Review stage at the time of initial registration - Data analysis.

Conflicts of interest - None declared.

INPLASY registration number: INPLASY2026110063

Amendments - This protocol was registered with the International Platform of Registered Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Protocols (INPLASY) on 17 November 2026 and was last updated on 17 November 2026.

INTRODUCTION

Review question / Objective To map and synthesize the available scientific literature on motor competence, motor skills, and related constructs in African children.

Background The context of this scoping review covers studies conducted on the African continent, focusing on preschool children (aged 2 to 5 years) and school-aged children (aged 6 to 12 years).

Rationale The rationale of the study is grounded in the fact that the development of motor competence in childhood constitutes an essential indicator of health, well-being, and overall development, demonstrating strong positive associations with physical activity and physical fitness levels throughout childhood and adolescence. Given this scenario, it becomes imperative to consolidate and critically reflect on the existing knowledge on the African continent, thereby mapping the available literature, identifying the studied populations, examining the assessment instruments used, and addressing crucial gaps in regional research.

METHODS

Strategy of data synthesis Data extraction is performed independently by reviewer AT and verified by reviewer AF using a standardized data extraction table. The extracted data are organized into descriptive tables to facilitate comparison across studies, allowing for the mapping of patterns, trends, gaps in the literature, and geographical distribution in the African region. The search strategy used was: ("Motor Skills"[Mesh] OR "motor skills"[tiab] OR "motor competence"[tiab]) AND ("Child"[Mesh] OR child*[tiab]) AND ("Africa"[Mesh] OR Afri-ca*[tiab]).

Eligibility criteria The eligibility criteria for this scoping review are structured according to the PCC (Population–Concept–Context) framework, including empirical studies written in English, published between January 1, 2015, and March 7, 2026, and conducted on the African continent

(across preschool, school, community, or clinical settings) that investigate motor competence, motor skills, or related constructs in typically developing children aged 2 to 12 years (preschool children aged 2 to 5 years and school-aged children aged 6 to 12 years). Conversely, studies conducted outside Africa, investigations involving children with disabilities or pathological conditions, samples including participants over 12 years of age, adults, or parents, as well as articles focused exclusively on cognitive parameters, are excluded.

Source of evidence screening and selection
The screening and selection of evidence began with the identification of 471 records across the PubMed, Scopus, and Web of Science databases, of which 39 duplicates were removed. Following the title and abstract screening of 432 articles, 53 publications were assessed for eligibility in full text. Of these, 43 were excluded for failing to meet the established criteria (including the assessment of cognitive parameters only, samples including parents, ages above 12 years, or studies outside the African context), resulting in a final total of 10 articles included in the qualitative and narrative synthesis of the scoping review.

Data management Data management is based on exporting all identified records to the bibliographic management software Mendeley for duplicate removal, followed by standardized data extraction conducted by one reviewer (AT) and verified by a second reviewer (AF), with discrepancies resolved by a third reviewer (BT) during consensus meetings. The extracted data will subsequently be organized into descriptive tables to facilitate comparison across studies and the mapping of patterns and trends in the literature.

Language restriction Articles written in English.

Country(ies) involved Angola and Portugal.

Keywords Motor development; Health; Physical activity; Motor skills.

Contributions of each author
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