

Factors Associated with Sport Development among Secondary School Students in Ondo State, Nigeria

Elumaro Adeboye Israel* & Akinradewo Precious

Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

The intendment of the Nigerian national policies on sport and education is that participation in sports is a veritable tool for the overall development of the child, thus, schools are planned to make provision for sporting activities to encourage participation among children and the youth. However, it has been observed that sport development among school children is progressively on a declining course across the contemporary Nigerian society. Therefore, this study investigated the relationship between sport development and four variables among secondary school students in Ondo State, Nigeria. The variables included access to sporting facilities, access to sport personnel, access to finance and students' interest in sport participation. A self-developed questionnaire was used for data collection among study participants (N=210), Pearson's correlation revealed moderate positive correlations between sport development and access to sporting facilities, access to sport personnel, access to finance, and students' interest in sport participation. Implication for practice was discussed and recommendation made for further studies.

Keywords: Sport Development, Access to Facilities, Access to Personnel, Access to Finance, Interests

INTRODUCTION

Physical activities form an integral component of the total school experience for pupils and students across all levels of education. Beginning from the primary schools through tertiary institutions, pupils and most students devote a reasonable time per day to participation in various forms of physical activities. Young children in elementary and primary schools require physical activities to promote proper growth and development (Cale & Harris, 2006) and to stay active through the various educational activities that take place in schools each day (Trapp, et al., 2012). Thus, it is commonplace for teachers of such youngsters to intermittently introduce mild to moderate physical activities during lessons/classes primarily to keep pupils awake from sleep and active in class activities. Beyond physical activities and exercises during lessons, children are equally taken outdoors to participate in various forms of physical activities, exercises, and sports during which time pupils have opportunities to have fun by competing with peers in their choice activities. This is the story of the average Nigerian who at least have passed through one elementary/primary school or the other at some point in his/her life. Similarly, it is standard practice to have organized sporting activities in what is traditionally known as Physical Education (P.E.) taking place in schools (Pangrazi & Beighle, 2019), where pupils are taught various skills in different sports including athletes, jumping events, throwing events, and ball games depending on the stage of development of the child. The frequency of P.E. sessions could range from being a daily event to a couple of times per week; these sessions provide P.E. teachers opportunities to introduce children to different sports with the intention of helping the child to identify his/her area of innate potential. Once a child demonstrates ability in one sport or the other, the system progressively exposes him/her to such activity to encourage development in that area, so pupils could be grouped into events where they showed innate ability.

* Corresponding author: adeboye.elumaro@aaau.edu.ng

Furthermore, most Nigerian schools organise annual interhouse sports competitions (Mumunni & Kayode, 2015) where pupils compete among themselves in different sports with awards for best performances to both individual pupil/athlete as well as the houses they represent. This carnival-like event is usually the biggest extramural activity in schools each year (Aluko & Adodo, 2011) and serves as the beginning of talent identification and development for those pupils who would later go on to become professional athletes in their adulthood. By the time the child leaves primary school, an indication of his/her athletic potential would have been unearthed for further development in the subsequent educational institutions. The same practice is maintained in the secondary school where students continue to build on the sporting foundations laid in the primary schools as they now would begin to focus on their sport(s) of interest alongside their educational development. To sustain this process, schools (public and private) are required to create the enabling environment for sport development by making provision for sporting facilities and personnel to generate and sustain students' interest in sport participation. Parent also have a role to play in helping the child identify and develop his/her innate sporting potential (Cote, 1999). For example, parent may show interest in their children's athletic development by providing moral and financial support for the child. The child will be encouraged if parents create time to attend events where the child is a participant and make provision for kits and other equipment needed for meaningful participation in sport.

The Nigeria government has laid a good foundation for sport development among children and the youth by recognising the role of regular physical activities in the overall development of the child. As a matter of policy, schools are required to make provision for physical activities and sports (Abdullah & Mohamad, 2016) before they are licensed for operation. Furthermore, the Federal Ministry of Education, which is the government agency directly in charge of education in Nigeria, works in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Sport at the national level to ensure the promotion of school sport in the country (Yazid, 2014), similar synergy exists between the two ministries at the state level. Schools are not only required to have basic sporting facilities such as the track and field, tennis court, volleyball court, and gymnasium, they are equally expected to recruit sport personnel to coordinate and oversee sporting activities among their pupils and students. Therefore, any school (primary or secondary) where these basic requirements are not provided does not have a healthy environment for educational development, and in fact, will jeopardize the overall growth and development of the child. This is because regular physical activities through sports participation contributes to educational as well as physical development of the child (Bailey, 2006; Hills, King, & Armstrong, 2007). The school sport system is, hence, a critical factor of talent identification and development in sports in Nigeria (Elumaro, Georgios, Martindale, & Westbury, 2016), because schools are about the only formal organisation where people (i.e. children and the youth) can develop their sporting potentials in the country. In many Nigerian communities, the school is the only place where facilities are available for children to take part in sports, similarly, it is equally within the four walls of the school that many Nigerian children would have access to sport training, and personnel because of the conspicuous absence of the club structure and functional community centers. Therefore, any problem with the school sport system portends a negative effect on sport development among children and the youth.

Meanwhile, two trends have been growing simultaneously across Nigerian communities vis-à-vis infrastructural decay in schools (Akhiero, 2011; Asaju, 2012; Nwafor, Uchendu, & Akani, 2015) and a decline in the level of sport development among the people, particularly, children and the youth (Jeroh, 2012; Akindutire & Olanipekun, 2014; Bolarinwa, 2021). While stakeholders continue to raise alarm over the lack of investment in physical infrastructure across Nigerian schools, the existing structures have suffered neglect with regards to maintenance. Consequently, many schools can merely afford classrooms and sitting arrangement for their teaming pupils/students. The neglect in schools also extend to staffing as many schools in the contemporary Nigerian community lack the personnel to deliver on their core mandates, and as a result, the few available staff members are continuously overlaboured. Moreso, Nigerian schools are now plagued with lack of sporting facilities and personnel to coordinate sporting activities in schools (Orunaboka & Nwachukwu, 2012). Many pupils/students now focus only on their educational development leaving out participation in sport because the school environment has grown to become unsupportive of sport development. Could the decay in school infrastructure be the bane of sport development among school aged children and the youth in Nigeria? It is reasonable to suspect that poor infrastructure and lack of personnel will negatively impact students' interest in sporting activities. At the same time, it will also be interesting to underscore the relationship between access to finance and sport develop among children and youths across Nigerian communities. It is against this background that the current study sought to examine the relationship between four factors (including access to facilities, access to personnel, students' interest in sport participation, and access to finance) and sport development using secondary school students in Ondo State as the case study.

Consequently, the four research hypotheses stated below were raised to guide the study.

1. There will be no significant relationship between sport development and access to sporting facilities among secondary school students in Ondo State,
2. There will be no significant relationship between sport development and access to personnel among secondary school students in Ondo State,
3. There will be no significant relationship between sport development and students' interest in sport participation among secondary school students in Ondo State, and
4. There will be no significant relationship between sport development and access to finance among secondary school students in Ondo State.

METHOD

A total of two hundred and ten secondary school students (210) participated in the study; 96 (45.7%) were males, while 114 (54.3%) were females. The age of participants ranged between 11 and 16 years; 86 (41%) of the participants were in junior secondary school classes, while 124 (59%) belonged to the senior secondary school classes. All participants were purposefully recruited based on the sporting environments in their schools.

Sport development in this study referred to the level at which students participate in sporting activities and the opportunity to identify and develop their innate sporting talents. Four variables of sport development were identified including access to sporting facilities, access to sport personnel, students' interest in sporting activities, and access to finance. A 20-item, self-developed questionnaire named Factors of Sport Development Questionnaire (FSDQ) was used for data collection. The instrument comprised four sub-scales, one for each of the variables of the study including access to sporting facilities (5 items), access to sport personnel (5 items), students' interest in sporting activities (5 items) and access to finance (5 items). Cronbach's alpha was adopted to test internal consistency of the four sub-scales of the instrument and all the four recorded sufficient alpha coefficient with the following results: access to facility ($\alpha=.68$); access to personnel ($\alpha=.78$); access to finance ($\alpha=.72$); and interest in sport participation ($\alpha=.77$). A test, re-test method was equally used to test the stability over time of the instrument among 20 students outside the actual sample for the study, the test also returned an adequate correlation ($r=.74$). Pearson's correlation was used to test the four hypotheses of the study.

RESULT

Pearson's correlation showed a moderate positive correlation ($r=.55$, $\alpha<0.01$) between sport development ($N=210$, $M=14.49$, $SD=1.92$) and access to sporting facilities ($N=210$, $M=14.74$, $SD=3.26$); moderate positive correlation ($r=.56$, $\alpha<0.01$) between sport development and access to personnel ($N=210$, $M=13.93$, $SD=3.54$); moderate positive correlation ($r=.60$, $\alpha<0.01$) between sport development and access to finance ($N=210$, $M=14.15$, $SD=3.35$); and a moderate positive correlation ($r=.61$, $\alpha<0.01$) between sport development and students' interest in sport participation ($N=210$, $M=15.12$, $SD=3.04$). The data further showed a strong positive correlation between students' interest in sport participation and access to facilities ($r=.76$, $\alpha<0.05$), and a strong positive correlation between students' interest in sport participation and access to finance ($r=.73$, $\alpha<0.05$). Therefore, students had better experience in sport development where there was more access to sporting facilities, sport personnel, finance, and when students were more interested in taking part in sporting activities. Also, students had more interest in sport development where there was access to sporting facilities as well as when there was access to finance.

DISCUSSION

The current finding revealed positive correlations between sport development and the four variables of the study, namely, access to sporting facilities, access to sports personnel, access to finance, and students' interest to participate in sporting activities. This finding, therefore, indicated a relationship between the two growing trends earlier mentioned in this study including infrastructural decay in schools and a decline in sport development among school aged children and youths across the Nigerian society. The current finding also supports extant literature that availability of sport infrastructure contributes to sport development (Wicker, Breuer, & Pawlowski, 2009; Hallmann, Wicker, Breuer, & Schonherr, 2012) among pupils and students, and that it is practically impossible to promote sport participation in the absence of the enabling environment to motivate children's interest in sporting activities (Allender, Cowburn, & Foster, 2006). If these trends are to be reversed, then it is important that all stakeholders agree on the need to invest in infrastructural development of Nigerian schools to make provision for study facilities as well as sporting facilities such that qualitative cognitive development of the child can be complemented with the corresponding physical, moral, and emotional development that accompany sustained participation in sport among children. Taking part in sports does not only aid physical development of the child, but also helps the child to develop interpersonal relationship skills required for proper integration into the society and to develop positive self-image (Hellison, 2010). Since among

the core functions of schools is to transmit the cultural heritage of the people from one generation to the other (Nakpodia, 2010), sport development among school children must be given the priority it deserves to help schools fulfil this mandate. Children who regularly engaged in sporting activities have been noted to develop confidence in themselves (Payne, Reynolds, Brown, & Fleming , 2003) both in and outside the sporting arena and the ability to engage maintain positive social relationship. Given that sport participation is a very regimented endeavour, children who take in sports develop valuable ethics such as discipline, self-control, hard work and most importantly, team spirit; all of which contribute to the overall personality development of the child.

Apart from the relationship between access to sporting facilities and sport development, the current study also indicated that a positive relationship exists between sport development and access to sports personnel in schools. Sports personnel refers to games' masters and coaches as well as physical educators who would coordinate and oversee all sporting activities and events in schools. Without these professionals, children might be engaging in inappropriate activities and thus attract negative outcomes. There is evidence to suggest that Nigerian schools are short-staffed and lacking in the number of employees required to run a healthy school system (Omorogbe & Ewansiha, 2013). In many instances, schools do not have trained personnel to take charge of sporting activities and events, as a result, a teacher (who does not necessarily possess the matching credentials) is appointed to as the games' master to oversee the organisation of sporting activities in school. These round poles in square holes are part of the reasons for the declining standards of sport development among Nigerian children and the youth. School proprietors (public and private) need to engage the services of trained sport personnel including coaches, physical educators and or sport administrators to oversee the organisation of sporting activities in schools. This way, children will have access to the right set of personnel to guide their involvement in sporting activities. Investment in sport personnel will help children identify innate sporting potentials and lead them towards the appropriate channel for sport development, thus, sport development will continue to suffer until the people with the right skillsets are engaged by school owners to lead sporting activities in schools. Unfortunately, many sporting talents now go undiscovered among Nigerian children and young people due to these issues and the country continues to record poor performances at international sporting events.

The third variable associated with sport development by the current result is access to finance. Athletes need access to finance if the process of sport development is to be unhindered. Given the physically demanding nature of sporting activities, athletes need access to money for feeding during training as well as for hydration. At times, sport trainings are scheduled for evenings after the normal school hours in which case athletes would require transportation fares to attend such trainings and to sustain themselves during the training. In most sports, there will be the need to buy the equipment required for participation like rackets and balls in tennis, balls in football, hockey sticks in hockey and so on, this of course, is in addition to the dresses and foot wears requirement for each sport. Inability to afford this equipment could lead to children losing interest in sport development. For example, a child that cannot afford a pair of spiking shoes will not be able to compete effectively with the peers that possess the appropriate foot wears immaterial of how much effort the child invests into the competition. Similarly, lack of access to finance for children who play football could mean playing football with bare foot while other teammates and or opponents are putting on the right foot wears, this can lead to injury, and thus, make training and competition an uninspiring experience for the poor child. Therefore, it is not surprising that this result indicates a positive relationship between sport development and access to finance among secondary school students in Ondo State, Nigeria. While the government and school owners are responsible for the two earlier variables (i.e. facilities and personnel) access to finance places a responsibility on the parents. Parents should be able to support their children's athletic development not only by encouraging children with their presence during training and or competitions, but it is also equally important that parents provide the financial support required by children to develop their sporting potentials. When parents support their children by procuring sporting kits, dresses and other equipment required for effective sport participation, they directly communicate confidence in the child's ability for successful development in sport. Athletes can then draw strength from the fact that their parents believe in them to inspire self-confidence and self-belief, these two are among the key factors of successful talent development in sport.

The final variable associated with sport development among secondary school students in Ondo State by the current finding is the students' interest in sport participation. Interest is central to the likelihood that students take part in sport development activities because interest is a key factor of participation. In fact, the three earlier factors (i.e. facilities, personnel, and finance), apart from having direct relationships with sport development, are important to the extent that they help promote students' interest in sport participation. Both access to facilities and access to finance returned strong positive correlations with students' interest in sport participation in the current data. Therefore, while school owners make efforts towards improving on the sporting environment in schools by making provision for facilities and trained personnel, it is equally important that parents fulfil their own responsibility of providing financial support for sport development among their children. Hence, previous studies have reported the need for a network of coherent support from all stakeholders to promote effective talent identification and development.

Implication for Practice

The current data have identified four variables of sport development among secondary school students in Ondo State, Nigeria including access to sporting facilities, access to trained personnel, access to finance, and students' interest in sport participation. It is therefore important that school owners ensure that adequate provisions are made for these factors in schools so that schools can fulfil the core mandate of providing an enabling environment for the overall development of the child. Since regular participation in physical activities through sports helps children's physical, emotional and moral development, schools must make sure that they do not only focus on the cognitive development of the child but complement mental development with the corresponding levels of physical, emotional, and moral development by creative the school environment where effective sport development can thrive. Similarly, parents have been identified as having a role to play in the athletic development of their children, therefore, it is imperative that schools collaborate with parents to promote sport development among children.

However, it is important to exercise caution in the interpretation and application of the current finding because the data did not address the possibility of cause-effect relationships between sport development and the four variables in focus. Therefore, the finding does not indicate whether either access to sporting facilities, access to personnel, access to finance, or students' interest in sport participation constitute a causative factor of sport development and vice-versa. It is in the light of the above that further studies are recommended to investigate the possibility of cause-effect relationships between the variables and sport development. Nevertheless, the current data has established positive relationship between the four variables and sport development, and thus, serves as a foundation upon which future research in this direction can be built.

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