

Assessing the Association between Provision of Sports Facilities and Student Sporting Talent Development in Public Secondary Schools in Meru County, Kenya

Lucy Karemi Karemu¹, Prof. Paul Maithya², Prof. Florence Kisirkoi²

¹Executive Coach and Trainer, ²Department of Curriculum Instruction and Educational Management, Maasai Mara University

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ABSTRACT

The study assessed the relationship between the availability of sports facilities and the development of sporting talent among students in public secondary schools in Meru County, Kenya. The study attempted to establish whether, with increased sports facilities, the students' sporting talent development improved. The research employed a convergent parallel design, merging quantitative data from questionnaires and qualitative data from semi-structured interviews conducted with principals, games masters, and students from 172 schools in Meru county. The analytical methods included the use of both descriptive and inferential statistics. The results indicated a direct relationship between the quality of sports facilities and the level of student sports talent development. Precisely, schools with better-developed sports facilities are favorably positioned to report better student participation and their performance in sports. For example, 56.5% of the respondents felt the current facilities were wanting, which affects the students' performance in sports. The null hypothesis (Ho), however, was rejected, yielding evidence of a significant relationship between the provision of facilities and sporting talent development (Chi-square=51.80, $p < .00001$). The study recommends to school administrators that facility improvement and maintenance be given the highest consideration, such that more and more facilities are opened up for the use of all students. The allocation of sports facilities resources in public schools must be an agenda of policy planners. Further, sports programs have to be assessed continuously and realigned to the needs of students at all times. In effect, these point to the need for adequate facilities to provide support for the development of student-athletes. The study is crucial not only in bridging the regional gap that existed in such data but also as a model for other similar research exercises in other contexts toward policy enhancement and educational planning for the holistic development of students through sports.

Keywords: sports facilities, student sporting talent development

INTRODUCTION

Background to the study

Sporting Talent development includes ensuring access to well-equipped sporting facilities, the presence of experienced coaches, opportunities for competitive participation, appropriate training methods, and a motivating atmosphere, with crucial support from teachers, peers, and family (Flashman, 2012).

The provision of sports facilities within education settings profoundly affects the development of the sporting talent of students. This issue increasingly attracts attention from the levels of academics and policy around the globe. The research domain is covered within sports science, educational policy, and developmental psychology, upon which broad socio-educational implications are brought forth.

Studies in the recent past have shown that, in the views of Lloyd and Oliver (2019), better sporting facilities are a requirement for the full physiological development of young athletes. This condition has been postulated to offer optimal environments capable of improving the physical capabilities of young athletes. Although they are insightful concerning the biomechanical benefits of environments equipped at their best, they mostly fail to consider the broader educational and psychosocial impacts of these settings. This points to a fundamental gap in the present research, particularly in how such facilities impact sustaining involvement and progression in a sports career for students of different socio-economic settings.

The study of Baker et al. (2017) and Rongen et al. (2018) uncovered the knowledge horizon for environmental characteristics in sports talent development. Baker et al. emphasized the role played by environments for physical training under the circumstances of talent development programs. The study demanded a thorough investigation of socio-economic barriers that may affect the provision and effectiveness of such facilities. Nevertheless, Rongen et al. stated that the health results and the contribution to an athlete-centered culture should measure the value the talent development systems bring. Both research works would, therefore, raise attention toward the need for more research around sports facility provision.

This study, therefore, found it necessary to address the gaps found within the provision and quality of sports facilities in public secondary schools in Meru County, which would influence sporting talent development, to show the place of administrative strategies and socioeconomic barriers upon availability and maintenance of such facilities. This research intended to map existing infrastructure and also understanding its adequacy in creating a conducive environment that would precipitate sports excellence and educational enrichment.

This study implies that the information derived from the analysis can go a long way in informing policies and formulation of adequate planning concerning the provision of sports facilities that will be necessary for ensuring proper talent nurturing for future gains to realize other educational and psychosocial benefits.

Statement of problem

The interest in the study emanated from the observed under-representation and underperformance of students in public secondary schools in Meru County at the national sports competition level as per records from the Kenya Secondary Schools Sports Association. There is a general acknowledgment of the significance and importance of sports in today's world. Though sports help in the physical development of the individual, inculcate discipline in an individual, and open potential career avenues for many individuals, public schools in Meru County have constantly been underperforming in national sports arenas. This research has therefore set out to investigate the bigger problem of the insufficient provision of sports facilities within those schools and the possible consequential influence on the development of student sporting talent. The general problem is thus set in the global context of waning youth sports participation due to inadequate infrastructure, where specific shortfalls in sports facility provision might deter the nurturing of sporting talents. According to the study, this makes well-equipped sports facilities important in the effective development of young athletes.

The study specifically dealt with the problem of the existing mismatch between the effort made by the school administration in offering sports facilities and the actual development of sporting talents. Theory points out that even if school administrations have exercised some effort towards improving sporting facilities, if the facilities are either insufficient or inappropriate, students' sporting talent development will be impeded.

The focus of this study was, therefore, Meru County, where recent statistics have indicated an appalling trend of low participation and limelight at the national sports competition in comparison to high level of participation by public secondary schools in Rift Valley and Western Kenya regions. Ignoring the problem will lead to continued underperformance in sports and possible undeveloped sports careers among students. This study is significant, for it sought to highlight some of the areas where inadequacies in the provision of sports facilities prevailed while giving suggestions that, school administrations and policymakers can use to create a strong sports culture to help harness sporting talent in public secondary schools in Meru County.

Research Objective

To assess the association between sports facility provision by school administrations and the development of student sporting talent in Meru County's public secondary schools.

Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant association between the provision of sports facilities and the development of sporting talent in public secondary schools in Meru County, Kenya.

METHODOLOGY

This mixed-method approach analyzed findings from both quantitative and qualitative sources to ensure the enhancement of the credibility of the findings. Convergent parallel design which was utilized allowed for comprehensive data analysis in quantitative terms and subjective views, thus enabling it to give a multifaceted understanding of the implications of facilities of sports on student sporting talent as supported by Lewis (2015).

The target population of the principals, games' masters, and games' captains was drawn from 303 public secondary schools in Meru County. A sample size of 172 games' masters was arrived at using the Yamane formula to ensure that the data collected was statistically significant. On the other hand, the study selected 30 principals and 30 games' captains for contextual enhancement of the study findings, according to Yamane (1967).

Data were collected through structured questionnaires addressed to the games' masters and semi-structured interviews conducted with the principals and games' captains. In essence, the questions dwelt on the availability and quality of the sports facilities and their influence on the development of talent among the students. The nature and effectiveness of the school sporting facilities were qualitatively explained in interviews.

This was achieved by testing both the reliability and validity of the used instruments. Content validity was achieved through expert evaluation of the instrument, while reliability was done through the test-retest technique that yielded Cronbach alpha above 0.7, a measure for good internal consistency (Ghazali, 2016).

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS, and further analysis was made from both descriptive and inferential statistics to record the responses according to the data analysis quantitatively. Qualitative data was analyzed thematically so that the findings of this study flowed with the research objectives. These methods allowed for a fine survey of the influence of sports facilities in sporting talent development among schools in Meru County.

Ethical considerations were stringently adhered to. Approvals had to be obtained from the relevant authorities. All the participants also had to give their consent, ensuring that the research maintained the subjects' anonymity and respected the standards of conducting ethical studies.

RESULTS

Analysis and Discussion

Analyzed findings from public secondary schools across Meru County shows that significantly wide variations exist in sporting talent development among students, dependent on the availability and quality of sports facilities. The findings support the hypothesis that better sports facilities enhance sporting talent. This relationship is visually represented in various tables, notably Table 12 and Table 13.

Table Presentation: Table 12 - Sporting Facilities and Sporting Talent Development

Statement	Strongly Agree (SA)	Agree (A)	Uncertain (U)	Disagree (D)	Strongly Disagree (SD)
School administration is actively involved in providing physical facilities	7 (4.1%)	33 (19.4%)	25 (14.7%)	49 (28.8%)	56 (32.9%)
Sporting facilities are adequate	9 (5.3%)	35 (20.6%)	30 (17.6%)	51 (30.0%)	45 (26.5%)
Budget allocations for sporting facilities	8 (4.7%)	35 (20.6%)	35 (20.6%)	52 (30.6%)	40 (23.5%)
Provision of sporting space such as playing fields	6 (3.5%)	35 (20.6%)	29 (17.1%)	57 (33.5%)	43 (25.3%)
Provision of sporting equipment	7 (4.1%)	40 (23.5%)	30 (17.6%)	53 (31.2%)	40 (23.5%)
Investment in sports to enhance talent development	8 (4.7%)	34 (20.0%)	25 (14.7%)	57 (33.5%)	46 (27.1%)

The responses recorded from the data show that over 60% of the respondents hold the view that the involvement of the school administration in providing physical facilities is inadequate, with 32.9% strongly disagreeing and 28.8% disagreeing. Similarly, 56.5% find the sporting facilities poor, with 26.5% strongly disagreeing and 30% disagreeing. Financial commitment to sports infrastructure is seen as wanting since 54.1% of the respondents, including of 23.5% who strongly disagreed and 30.6% who disagreed, expressing dissatisfaction with the budget allocated for sporting facilities. Also, 58.8% of the respondents consider sports spaces like playing fields insufficient, with 25.3% strongly disagreeing, and 33.5% disagreeing. When questioned on sports equipment, 54.7% responded as inadequate, of which 23.5% are those who strongly disagreed, while 31.2% disagreed. 60.6% of the respondents viewed investment in sports as inadequate for enhancing talent development, where 27.1% strongly disagreed, and 33.5% disagreed. These percentages concern the quality and extent of support given to sporting development in public secondary schools within Meru County.

Semi-structured interviews with administrators in the schools indicate that they are committed to the development of sports facilities to varying degrees. Indeed, these have directly impacted the development of student talents in sports. From most of these discussions, the theme of consistent and substantial investment in sports infrastructure emerges as a key factor in fostering and nurturing students' sporting talents.

The result of the total Chi-square of 51.80 is greater than critical Chi-squares of 9.488 for $\alpha=0.05$ and 4 degrees of freedom with a P-value smaller than 00001. Because the result is significant, the null hypothesis was rejected and concluded that the provision of sports facilities and the development of sporting talents in Meru County are related. This promotes the earlier findings stipulated by Ngeti et al. (2018), asserting that lack of adequate sports infrastructure hurts sports management in all schools in the Republic of Kenya. This further highlights the need for improved facilities in sports to support student-athletes and their related development needs.

The study brings together some qualitative insights and quantitative findings that would lead to an understanding of the degree to which the sports facility element facilitates this development of student sporting talents. Previous research conducted by Ngeti et al. (2018) equally related to the need for appropriate facilities. In a slight deviation, Ryan and Deci (2020) contributed their discussions alluding that intrinsic motivation improves talent development. The results reiterate the belief that both physical structures towards sports development are vital if students are to be more engaged and perform better in sports activities.

This study, conducted in public schools in Meru County, revealed a statistically significant relationship between the availability and quality of sports facilities and the development of sporting talents.

As such, there is need for policy enhancement to ensure increased funding for sports infrastructural improvement. Further research is recommended to examine the long-term effects of investments in sports infrastructure. Conducting similar studies in other geographical locations would assist in generalizing the findings.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

From the results, a relationship is therefore established between the availability and quality of the training equipment at the school and development of sporting talent. Despite the good intentions and policies made by the school administration, there is still a marked disparity in the provision and upkeep of facilities that are crucial to the development of sporting talent.

The study lent credence to previous findings that well-equipped sporting facilities help structure the process of excelling in sports and indirectly enhance student engagement, leading to improved overall achievement. The findings of this study emphasize the critical impact of well-equipped sports facilities on talent development, complementing trends observed in other regional and county contexts, with an emphasis on a universal aspect.

Recommendations

The study makes the following recommendations:

1. Enhancing sports facilities by upgrading and equipping all schools in Meru County is a top priority. This may involve providing modern sports equipment and games, improving playing fields, and establishing more facilities accessible to both girls and boys. Without these upgrades, the equitable development of students' sporting talents may not be fully achieved.
2. Schools can establish strategic partnerships with local governments and private organizations. These collaborations are vital in securing the necessary funds and materials for creating or upgrading the school's sports facilities.
3. The decision-makers should improve the funding for sports infrastructure in public schools to enhance the development of sporting talents at the grassroots level.
4. Regular evaluations of sports facilities and programs are necessary to ensure they meet the required standards and address students' needs. Additionally, feedback from both students and coaches should be considered when making changes and improvements.

Suggestion for Further Research

The study offers the following suggestions for further research:

1. Expanding the geographical scope to include other counties or regions, allowing for comparisons and generalization of findings across different settings. This would help in understanding the variability and applicability of conclusions beyond Meru County.
2. Conducting research on the relationship between sports participation and academic performance to provide a clearer understanding of the role of sports in educational institutions. This study would shed light on how sports influence educational outcomes and the overall development of students.

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