



Influence of School Sporting Policy on the Development of Student Talent in Public Secondary Schools of Meru County. Kenya

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ABSTRACT

The research assessed how specific sports policies affect athletic development among students. The study addressed the critical research question: How do clarity and enforcement of sports policies influence the development of student sports talent? A mixed-methods approach was adopted, gathering quantitative data through structured questionnaires and qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews, involving 30 principals, 172 games masters, and 30 games captains from a variety of schools across Meru County. Quantitative results were significant. As presented in Table 1, a significant percentage of the participants, 52.9%, was not sure whether there existed policies on sports safety. This is a strong indication of policy non-transparency. Hypothesis testing, using chi-square, provided a chi-square statistic of 66.61 ($p < 0.001$), which is an indication of strong evidence in support of the proposition that greater policy transparency, coupled with effective policy enforcement results in better development of sports talents, as presented in Table 2. In light of the results, this study recommends that schools should adopt policies on sports and pass the information to the relevant school stakeholders for effective implementation. The management of education needs to put in place mechanisms under which school policies are frequently reviewed as well as implemented. These recommendations target the specific stakeholders of schools and local education authorities to ensure that sports programs at school levels are effectively implemented. The current research adds vital information to the field of sports education and policy formulation in stating that effective policy management is key to the development of athlete-students. Strategic management of policies would register significant impacts on the development of sporting talents and inform policy development, which is crucial to relevant school administrators with conditions similar to those of this study.

Keywords: School Sporting Policies, Student Talent Development

INTRODUCTION

Background to the study

The importance of organized sports policies cannot be underestimated in educational setups like schools, especially considering that sports are a globally acknowledged component of education. Besides, sports is a common activity that, due to its health promotion properties, must be included in students' lives within the school setting. In the context of school sports policies, it is essential to underline that they also contribute to the development of talent among students, raising interest levels and participation in school sports among other benefits (Lloyd & Oliver, 2019).

Noteworthy, research has adequately proven that the concept of sports talent development is a comprehensive and multi-dimensional process. This involves offering student talent with the best possible conditions, such as high-quality facilities, expert coaching, competitive opportunities, and a supportive socio-psychological environment for athletes (Abisai, 2014; Flashman, 2012). Research conducted in many places provides significant insights into the mechanics of sports talent development. For instance, the UK has built an athlete-centered culture that appreciates health-related outcomes in addition to performance-based results (Rongen et al., 2018). Studies in China have shown that the interaction of cultural, social, and physical factors greatly determines athletic development (Bonal et al., 2020).

Even with this global discourse on sports talent development, the literature has a gap regarding the effectiveness of sports policies in Kenyan public schools, particularly in counties such as Meru. This study, therefore, seeks to establish how well-structured and implemented sports policies in the public secondary schools of Meru County can bolster sports talent among students. The importance of this study is highlighted by the presence of policy frameworks, such as the Physical Education and Sports Policy for Basic Education established by the Ministry of Education in Kenya. This policy intends to promote the integration of sports into the school curriculum across the country in a comprehensive manner.

Nevertheless, there has been a lack of effective implementation, namely regarding the allocation of resources and the construction of infrastructure (Ministry of Education, 2021).

Meru County exhibits a relatively low level of involvement in national sports contests when compared to regions such as Rift Valley and Western Kenya, despite its economic importance.

This underrepresentation could result from the unavailability of sports facilities, the lack of clear sports policies, or insufficient implementation of existing policies by school heads and other stakeholders in sports development and management (Kenya Secondary Schools Sports Association, 2022). Against this background, this study sought to investigate the influence of school sporting policies on the development of student talent in public secondary schools in Meru County.

This study is critical not only because it will enhance the knowledge base on sports education and policy implementation but also because it will bridge the gap in the evolution of sports development as it relates to this region, Meru. These findings will provide enough information to guide policymakers and educational stakeholders to make these programs more effective, thus realizing a more inclusive and productive sports culture in schools across the county.

Research objective and Hypothesis

This study was based on the research objective to examine the extent to which school sporting policies influence the development of student talent in public secondary schools of Meru County. The hypothesis tested was that there is no significant relationship between the comprehensiveness of school sporting policies and the development of student sporting talent.

Methodology

Participants

Research participants were principals, games masters, and games captains drawn from public secondary schools in Meru County. Participants were being selected based on their duties in school sports management, and comprised a sample base selected out of 303 schools in the representation of both urban and rural schools in various sizes and sport programs. Participants were not compensated.

Research Instruments

The Quantitative Data described a questionnaire developed to gather data about the efficacy of the sporting policies, implementation, and perceived impact on student development. The considerations were policy awareness, resources as well as students' involvement in the sport. The Instrument was developed and implemented with regard to the methodological framework as proposed by Yamane (1967) wherein question items that would be used to obtain data from large populations have to be precise.

Qualitative Data Consisted of semi-structured interview guides from principals and games captains aimed at seeking deeper insights into the challenges and successes toward sports policy implementation. Again, Creswell & Plano Clark (2011) held an argument that the use of mixed methods in a research study possibly enriched research findings by providing more depth and breadth, thus guiding the enactment and use of interview guides.

Procedure

Data collection went on for three months where the research team administered and collected questionnaires during the trips made to every school. Interviews targeted in the schools or through phone calls whenever it was not viable to go to the locations; due to scheduling conflicts as Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011 discuss under convergent parallel design. Data were, therefore collected concurrently, both from the qualitative and quantitative spectra of the study for a more detailed presentation of facts on the impacts of the sports policies.

The convergent parallel design enables the data, both qualitative and quantitative, from the two sources to be squeezed concurrently in a way that assists in the corroboration and integration of the data in order to enhance the reliability and depth of the findings. This research approach can be justified by the facts of Creswell & Plano Clark (2011), where "The design permits triangulation together with the comparison and integration of the two forms that are grounded or compared".

Results

Results, analysis and discussion

The research used qualitative and quantitative elements to retrieve the information for this study on the influence of school sporting policy in developing student talent in public secondary schools in Meru County. The retrieval of quantitative data from questionnaires was those filled in by 30 principals, 172 games masters, and 30 games captains from different schools. Qualitative data was sourced from structured interviews with the same respondents and therefore will give deeper contextual implications of the sporting policies.

The study results have been presented through both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics show the distribution of the responses in regard to the existence and awareness of sporting policies in specific schools. Inferential analysis was done using the Chi-square test to determine the relationship between the sporting policies and student sports talent development, responding to the study hypothesis.

Table 1

Response Distribution on Sporting Policies

Existence or awareness	Strongly Agree (SA)	Agree (A)	Uncertain (U)	Disagree (D)	Strongly Disagree (SD)
Safety of students in sports	1 (0.6%)	45 (26.5%)	90 (52.9%)	30 (17.6%)	4 (2.4%)
Formation of sporting clubs	1 (0.6%)	36 (21.2%)	80 (47.1%)	45 (26.5%)	8 (4.7%)
Ensuring fun in sports	0 (0%)	38 (22.4%)	85 (50%)	40 (23.5%)	7 (4.1%)
Focus on participation, not competition	1 (0.6%)	41 (24.1%)	85 (50%)	40 (23.5%)	3 (1.8%)
Inclusivity in sporting activities	2 (1.2%)	38 (22.4%)	95 (55.9%)	30 (17.6%)	5 (2.9%)
Social media policy for athletes	2 (1.2%)	18 (10.6%)	40 (23.5%)	95 (55.9%)	15 (8.8%)

Analysis of Chi-square Test Results

The following is a Chi-square test for no significant relationship between the implementation of the policy on sports and development in sporting talent. It was done by comparing the observed frequencies from this table with expected frequencies under a no-relationship assumption between policies and talent development.

Table 2

Chi-square Test Results

Variable	Chi-square Value
Sporting Policy Implementation	66.61
p-value	< 0.001

A chi-square value of 66.61 at $p < 0.001$ presents a significant relationship and therefore rejects the null hypothesis (H_0), affirming that the existence and awareness regarding sporting policies significantly account for the development of sporting talents among students.

It is clear from the data in the Table 1 that a significant uncertainty exists among the respondents with regard to having definite sporting policies, especially in safety (52.9%), the formation of sport clubs (47.1%), and the promotion of enjoyment in activities relating to sports (50%). From all these policy statements, the high percentages of respondents who selected the option 'Uncertain' show very large levels of lack of clarity and awareness on policies that exist to guide student participation in sports.

Table 2 reflects the chi-square output that statistically attests to such results, which emphasize the influence of sporting policies on talent development. This statistical verification underlines the importance of having clear, well-communicated policies in creating a conducive atmosphere in investment for the nurturing of student sporting talents.

The realization of student talent in this regard is a matter of the developing of clear policy related to sports and effective communication to the stakeholders involved and resonates with the arguments ascribed to the importance of administrative support and structured sports environments in terms of student development as observed in other research (Martindale, Collins, & Abraham, 2007). However, it will also be drawn to attention that currently, a huge gap exists between clarity and effectiveness of such policies—especially within the realm of safety and inclusivity. This forms the highlight for the need for future research to be able to focus on development of comprehensive policy implementation followed by vigorous evaluation to cater to all student needs.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper dealt with examining the influence of school sporting policies on talent development among students in public secondary schools of Meru County. In conclusion, this study intends to outline the utilities of both findings and to give practical recommendations by taking the objectives again and delineating the key points derived.

Conclusion

The major research problem was finding out the impact of sporting policies on developing student sports talent in public secondary schools within Meru County. The study found out that gaps exist in the policy's transparency, awareness and communication, and this has negatively impacted the effectiveness in identification and nurturing of sports talent. The methodology used was a mixed-method approach in which both qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed to achieve better reliability.

The implications of the findings are manifold. The study adds to the body of knowledge in this area in so far as it underlines the fact that clear and well-implemented sporting policies have a critical role in ensuring talent development. This calls for the improvement of sports facilities and resources to be improved in a way that they create a suitable and better environment for student athletes. Indeed, results from this study indicate that effective

mentorship and motivational practices are very critical to enhancing the developmental benefits of school sport programs, which show that these should be incorporated elements in the sports education frameworks.

Recommendations

Based on the study's focus on the influence of school sporting policies on the development of students' sporting talent in public secondary schools in Meru County, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. The schools should design and apply a sports policy that is expressly stated and detailed and which takes into account every aspect related to talent identification and development of sporting talent among students.
2. Effective communication strategies need to be in place to ensure that the stakeholders are very well informed regarding existing sporting policies to exercise themselves. The stakeholders here include students, coaches, and parents, who can be reached through regular meetings, printed handouts, and digital communication platforms.
3. Schools should adopt assessment framework for the monitoring the impact of policies on sports development. This shall imply that there is a need to make annual reviews with regard to the effectiveness of the policy and whether adjustments are needed at the moment.

Suggestion for further Research

To address gaps in the current study and to explore new areas, future research could:

1. Study the impact of clear sporting policies on professional sports careers over the long term.
2. Explain the use technology to enhance sports training and sports administration at the school.
3. Conduct comparative research between schools having well-documented and established sports policies and those without to further quantify the impact of such policies.

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