



Examining the Influence of School Mentorship Programs on Sporting Talent Development in Public Secondary Schools in Meru County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

The study will establish the impact of mentorship programs in schools on the development of students' sporting talents in public secondary schools in Meru County, Kenya. This research study was motivated by the least representation of Meru County in national sports competitions and therefore aimed at finding the gaps in mentorship support and assessing how structured mentorship programs contribute to building athletic skills and engagement. Some of the research questions focused on the relationship between mentorship and the development of sporting talents, the level of administrative involvement, and influence of mentorship in terms of the students' competitiveness. Data from principals, games masters, and student games captains were assessed through a convergent parallel mixed-methods design via questionnaires and interviews. Chi-square tests of the quantitative data showed that mentorship programs were indeed related to the talent development outcomes: $\chi^2 = 21.63, p < 0.05$. Thus, structured mentorship had positive effects on the sporting skills and motivation development among the students. Qualitative results further supported such findings, where interview responses from principals indicated mentorship as one of the key influencers in students' active participation and commitment to sport. The study, therefore, based on the findings, recommends a mentorship program that is specifically enhanced specialized training of the administrators and coaches from outside in order to provide new and different experiences. Policy makers are encouraged to invest their resources in mentorship programs so as regional imbalances in the development and participation of sports talents are addressed. The finding emphasizes that a mentorship program is an important foundation in developing the students' talent, which would be part of their personal growth and/or athletic professional futures later on.

Keywords: Mentorship Programs, Sporting Talent Development, School Administration, Secondary Schools

INTRODUCTION

Background of the study

In this context, school institutions have regarded sporting talent development as part of developing physical, psychological, and social development in the younger generation. Schools are a very unique environment for sports talent development due to the availability of structured programs and support from the school administration, which play a very important role in shaping students' involvement in sport activities. This area has received considerable interest throughout the world, as modern educational institutions have been entrusted not only with the intellectual but also with the complex development of their students (Abrahamson et al., 2019). This has raised questions about the places of mentorship, sports policies, and administrative support in the development of talent among public secondary schools in Kenya. Recent studies have highlighted that without administrative strategies in terms of mentorship programs and motivational policies, the schools cannot fully develop the sporting talents of students (Ministry of Education, 2021).

Research has documented that mentorship programs contribute a great deal to nurturing the talents of students by providing them with role models and continuous guidance instrumental in developing important skills and instilling confidence (Hoffman, 2018). However, data on participation of students drawn from public secondary schools in Meru County during national-level competitions were sparse, suggesting a gap in effectiveness created through current mechanisms of support for sporting talent (KSSSA, 2018).

In this regard, the study was guided by the under-researched issue of mentorship programs as a form of administrative support in students' sporting talent development in public secondary schools in Meru County despite growing evidence on its importance (Berg & Surujlal, 2013). Indeed, empirical studies have pointed out the need for structured support from school administrations in making competitive athletic programs through regular coaching sessions, encouragement, and mentorship. For instance, structured mentorship programs have seen positive returns in a number of international contexts; students exposed to this form of mentorship demonstrated greater levels of engagement and performance in sport (Sandardos & Chambers, 2019). Whereas mentorship in sport is well contextualized internationally, Kenyan public secondary schools experienced differing levels of support structures and resource allocations, which undermined the efficacy of such initiatives (Ministry of Education, 2021).

While some improvement was noted, studies showed that only a few students within Meru County had shone in the field of sports beyond regional competitions, raising many questions on the sufficiency of the support systems. These schools are largely absent from the list of award winners at the national level. For example, recent SOYA awards data showed very few, if any, secondary schools from Meru County, unlike other regions like the Rift Valley, where the culture of mentorship in sport is well outlined (Kenya Secondary Schools Sports Association, 2022).

The apparent disparity created a resolution of a key gap in research understanding on the role of mentorship programs based in schools and their direct influence on the students' sporting talents. Such a gap has been addressed by this paper, which has examined the impact that the mentorship programs have on the sporting talent development in the Meru County public secondary schools. This was mainly to investigate the efficacy of mentorship as an administrative approach in fostering students' athletic abilities and involvements. Based on the mentorship structure, this study developed the scant literature that exists on how structured support at school promotes sporting talent, which is in line with the identified 'gap' from the review where other studies emphasized identifying talent and offering general administrative support without evaluating specific mentorship schemes (Abisai, 2014).

It holds particular relevance in the Kenyan environment, where sport success or participation portends career opportunities and oftentimes personal development. Sport lays a firm foundation in the life skills of students, including, among others, resiliency, teamwork, and setting goals, all important out of the school setups (Lloyd & Oliver, 2019). The evidence provided by Lloyd and Oliver (2019) has informed policymakers and school administrators of how mentorship impacts talent development in devising effective mechanisms that have raised the profile of opportunities for students in sport, standing tall alongside national educational objectives.

The study has been able to fill this gap by focusing specifically on the mentorship component within school administrative support systems in Meru County. It has been able to establish through empirical investigation how mentorship programs are effective in bringing out the students' sporting talents and thus form a good base for structured support systems at schools.

Statement of problem

The study indicated that Meru County public secondary schools have limited participation and success in national sports competitions. This depicts huge gaps regarding support for the development of sporting talent within the region. While these benefits associated with sports for students' physical, social, and mental well-being are well comprehended, few mentorship programs and administrative arrangements are in place in most schools in this county to get them better at developing their sports talent. Compared to other counties that have well-established mentorship support, Meru County is far behind, since students have comparatively limited opportunities for career pathways and growth in sports.

The survey found that the general problem existed of a lack of administrative support, notably structured mentorship programs vital in developing students' sporting skills. Many countries worldwide have realized that mentorship in schools aids in increasing youth participation, advancing skill levels, and building supportive environments that foster athletic potential. The absence of such mechanisms has led to a developmental gap in Meru County, limiting possibilities of students competing at higher/competitive levels in sport.

It targeted the effect of mentorship, therefore, explored how organized schemes of mentorship would bridge gaps between basic sports participation and competitive talent development. The findings showed that mentorship programs, where well implemented, transform students' sporting talents, especially in public secondary schools in Meru County, where administrative support for sports is minimal.

The identified challenges were addressed, and the potential of mentorship in increasing the students' competitiveness was underlined, further illustrating its wider implication on socio-economic and personal growth. Thus, the findings recommend mentorship programs that could considerably raise a case for Meru County participation in national competitions as making a significant contribution to Kenya's sports pool of talent, creating various professional paths for local students.

Research Objective

The study aimed to analyze the influence of the implementation of school mentorship programs in developing students' sporting talent within public secondary schools in Meru County.

Hypothesis

The hypothesis for this study was:

H03: There is no statistical relationship at 0.05 percent significant level between the implementation of school mentorship programs and development of students' sporting talent within public secondary schools in Meru County, Kenya.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive survey design for establishing the relationship that exists between the provision of sports facilities and the development of sporting talent amongst students in public secondary schools in Meru County, Kenya. Theulative survey design was obviously used within this study because such a design provided an in-depth analysis of prevailing conditions and relationships that existed within the setting of schools, thereby giving in-depth insight into how sports facilities and mentorship influence student talent development.

Target Population, Sample Selection

The target population was the public secondary schools in Meru County, while the target group comprised only students who have been involved in sport activities, school administrator headings of sport programs, and sports teachers. The sampling technique was multistage to ensure that representation is comprehensive.

First, schools were stratified by their geographical locations within the county so that regional diversity would be captured. Upon stratification by geographic location, a simple random sample of schools was then selected from each of these strata. From each school selected, purposive sampling identified sports teachers and administrators involved with the management of sports programs. Students actively participating in sports were selected through systematic random sampling.

The sample size was determined based on Cochran's formula to make sure that there is sufficient statistical power to analyze the relations among variables.

Data Collection Instruments

Data collection was done using both structured questionnaires and semi-structured interview guides for quantitative and qualitative data, respectively. The instrument for students contained closed and open-ended questions that elicited their views on the availability, quality, and impact of sports facilities and the influence of mentorship programs. A semi-structured interview guide for the sports teachers and school administrators allowed for an in-depth discussion on administrative support, the state of sports facilities, and mentorship structures.

Pilot Study

The instruments for data collection had first been pretested in two public secondary schools that were not within the sample area. Such a pilot phase gave an opportunity to make necessary adjustments in enhancing clarity, reliability, and coherence of questions based on the participant's feedback and reactions. Pilot data refined the approach in order for seamless data collection during the main study.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was done through visits to each selected school. The questionnaires were administered to the sampled students, while interviews were also carried out with sports teachers and administrators. Ethical considerations were paramount, ensuring that informed consent was sought from and provided by each participant, with confidentiality

Data Analysis

Data analysis included both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics in SPSS software. Descriptive statistics, such as frequency distributions and percentages, summarized trends related to sports facility availability and student engagement. Inferential statistics, specifically chi-square tests, were used to test the hypothesis on the relationship between mentorship program implementation and the development of students' sporting talent, with significance levels set at 0.05. Qualitative data from interviews were transcribed and analyzed thematically, with themes developed around patterns in mentorship impact and administrative support, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the study's findings.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from educational authorities in Meru County before data collection began. Informed consent was sought from all participants, with confidentiality guaranteed for all responses and assurances given that participation was voluntary. These ethical practices ensured that participants' rights and well-being were respected throughout the research process.

Data Analysis

Data analysis included both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data obtained from questionnaires were processed using SPSS software, employing both descriptive and inferential statistics.

Descriptive statistics in the form of frequency distributions and percentages summed up the trends about the availability of sports facilities and student engagement in various activities. Hypothesis testing was done against the development of students' sporting talents with the implementation of the mentorship program using the application of an inferential statistics chi-square test by setting the level of significance at 0.05. Qualitative data from interviews were transcribed through thematic analysis. Themes were identified on patterns of mentorship impact and administrative support to comprehensively develop aspects of the findings for this study.

Ethical Considerations

The study was cleared ethically to obtain approval before data collection with relevant educational authorities in Meru County. Informed consent on all participants was sought at the commencement of each interview, ensuring confidentiality for all responses and assurances that participation in an interview was voluntary. This, therefore, assured respect for the rights and welfare of participants through the ethical practices of the research undertaking.

RESULTS

Analysis and Discussion

This section presents a detailed analysis of the data collected to establish the influence of mentoring programs at school on the development of students' sporting talent within public secondary schools in Meru County, Kenya. The findings are discussed in relation to the research objectives, interpreting and showing implications with statistical evidence. Where appropriate, statistical significance is indicated, showing key trends in findings that support the hypothesis and overall context of the study.

It was meant to ascertain whether mentorship programs significantly contribute to developing sporting talent. As indicated in Table 1, which states the percentage of the responses by participants to statements on the role of school administration in promoting sporting talent, there is a trend where a high percentage of agreement depicts full acceptance of the administrative involvement in mentoring activities. These facts are further necessitated by the statistical tests undertaken, especially the chi-square analysis. The chi-square statistic was 21.63, with its associated p-value of 0.000237. It follows from this that there is sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis, H03, which confirms a statistically significant relationship between mentorship programs and the development of sporting talents.

Table 1 School Mentorship Programs and Sporting Talent Development

Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD
The school administration is actively involved in investing substantial time in the sporting talent development of a student	75 (44.1%)	45 (26.5%)	35 (20.6%)	10 (5.9%)	5 (2.9%)
The school administration avails coaches who are actively involved in mentoring students in terms of sporting activities	80 (47.1%)	47 (27.6%)	30 (17.6%)	9 (5.3%)	4 (2.4%)
The school administration organizes sports talent mentorship programs that enhance student talent development	69 (40.6%)	45 (26.5%)	40 (23.5%)	11 (6.5%)	5 (2.9%)
School administration acts as role models for students' participation in sporting activities	68 (40.0%)	52 (30.6%)	35 (20.6%)	12 (7.1%)	3 (1.8%)
The school administration closely monitors students' participation in sports	73 (42.9%)	48 (28.2%)	33 (19.4%)	10 (5.9%)	6 (3.5%)
The school administration takes competitive school sports seriously and this enhances talent development	69 (40.6%)	54 (31.8%)	32 (18.8%)	8 (4.7%)	7 (4.1%)
The school administration values sports and takes it as being central to school culture and this enhances sports talent development	69 (40.6%)	50 (29.4%)	36 (21.2%)	11 (6.5%)	4 (2.4%)
School administration enhances sports talent development by organizing regular inter-class and inter-dormitory (if applicable) sporting competitions	67 (39.4%)	49 (28.8%)	38 (22.4%)	10 (5.9%)	6 (3.5%)
School administration enhances sports talent development by using sports as a vehicle to build school spirit and develop responsibility	66 (38.8%)	52 (30.6%)	37 (21.8%)	10 (5.9%)	5 (2.9%)
School administration enhances sports talent development by reporting on and celebrating sporting performance regularly	67 (39.4%)	53 (31.2%)	34 (20.0%)	9 (5.3%)	7 (4.1%)

A majority of 120 participants, which accounted for 70.6%, as reflected from Table 1 above, strongly agreed/agreed that the school administration should be actively involved in different areas that promote the development of sporting talents.

The hypothesis testing, with a view to establishing whether mentorship programs were effective in bringing out sporting talents, was pursued to test H03: There is no significant statistical relationship between the implementation of school mentorship programs and the development of students' sporting talent in public secondary schools in Meru County, Kenya.

Observed means in the contribution of mentorship programs to sporting talent development depict a dispersion of responses over various levels of agreement. Table 2 and Table 3 further put the data into perspective by detailing both observed and expected values hence allowing such a statistical test of association between mentorship programs and sporting talent development.

Table 2 Observed Averages for Contribution of Mentorship Programs and Sporting Talent Development

Variable	SA	A	U	D	SD
Averages (actual count) for contribution of mentorship programs	68.4	49.5	36.0	10.0	4.7
Averages (actual count) for Sporting Talent Development	43.33	55.83	27.67	23.67	19.5

Table 3 Expected Values and Chi-Squared Values (in Brackets)

Variable	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total Chi Square
Contribution of mentorship programs	55.84 (2.84)	52.41 (0.16)	31.69 (0.58)	16.71 (2.83)	12.04 (4.53)	10.94
Sporting Talent Development	55.89 (2.85)	52.92 (0.16)	31.98 (0.57)	16.96 (2.62)	12.16 (4.49)	10.69
Total chi-squared	5.69	0.32	1.15	5.45	9.02	21.63

The associated chi-squared statistic of 21.63 shows a high level of association between the growth in students' sporting talent and the contribution of mentorship programs, supported by a very high p-value. The p-value associated with this chi-squared statistic is 0.000237. Since the p-value of 0.000237 is less than the significance level of 0.05, it means that the study concludes there is a significant relationship between the contribution of mentorship programs and the development of students' sporting talents.

The finding from the analysis is that mentorship programs have had a leading positive impact on developing sporting talent in public secondary schools of Meru County. The administrative involvement coupled with competent coaching and ushering in supportive sport culture has all combined to help improve the students' sporting skill. However, there is identified enhancement of schools' competitive focus since competitiveness is paramount for higher levels of success in sports. The recommendations are that schools in Meru County focus on mentorship programs and ensure a well-balanced approach between mentorship and competition to ensure all-rounded talent development.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This study analyzed the effects of mentorship programs in schools on the development of students' sporting talent in public secondary schools in Meru County. The results showed that mentorship programs, especially with the active involvement of school administrations, contributed a lot to the growth of students' talent in sports. The fact that most of them agree on the role of administration in mentorship, that is, organizing sports mentorship activities, availing coaches, and acting as positive role models, contributes in proving that mentorship actually has a measurable impact on talent development. Based on the qualitative and quantitative data, mentorship does play a critical role in nurturing motivation, competence, and the related skills of developing young talents in support of the findings on optimal enabling environments for mentorship. These findings bring to the fore the values of structured mentorship initiatives and suggest that any investment in such programs will pay off in talent cultivation.

Recommendations

Based on the study findings, it is recommended that:

- i. Policymakers and school administrations stress the importance of structured mentorship programs, where the roles of sports coaches and mentors are clearly stated for continued involvement and development of the students while at school.
- ii. Schools may establish partnerships with private sports mentors or professional coaches to diversify skills, inspiration types, and professional advice for students, so as to potentially enhance skill improvement and talent identification.
- iii. Professional development of school administrators is further developed in order to make them able professionals in providing the necessary support and sustainability for effective mentorship programs that create enabling and resourceful environments for sports talent development.
- iv. More institutional support to mentorship activities, including regular monitoring and evaluation of mentorship programs, to ensure standards are kept high and the strategies that best support students' sporting talent growth are adopted.

Suggestions for Further Research

To extend the insights gained from this study, future research could:

- i. Delve into the impact of mentorship within various regions to understand more about specific challenges and effective strategies in different socio-economic and cultural contexts.
- ii. The long-term effects of school mentorship programs on the students' sports career will be analyzed, thus providing evidence with regard to the sustainability of talent development in school-based mentorship programs.

- iii. Other variables such as student personal attributes or community support from outside the institution can be considered to understand how these variables act to enhance the benefits of sports mentorship.
- iv. Conduct specific comparative research among mentorship strategies selected from different sports fields in order to identify whether certain types of mentorship are effective in one athletic field but not as effective in another; thus, deriving the most appropriate way of mentoring for the best outcomes.

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