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Predictors of Athletic Performance of University Athletes in Nigerian University Games Association (NUGA) in South-East Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study determined predictors of athletic performance of university athletes in Nigerian university games association in South East Nigeria. Three null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. The correlational survey research design was adopted. The population of the study comprised all the 1,895 athletes from Zone G of the Nigerian university sports administrative zones. The sample size consisted of 600 athletes using the multi-stage sampling technique was adopted for this study. Four instruments were used to collect data for the study. The instruments were subjected to face validity by three experts. Cronbach's Alpha method was used to determine the internal consistency and co-efficients of 0.92, 0.67, 0.84 and 0.65 were obtained. The researcher with five research assistants helped in the administration and collection of the instruments. Regression analysis was used to analyze data for the study. It was found that adequacy of funding, and adequacy of facilities and equipment were significant predictors of athletic performance, with adequacy of facilities making the highest contribution to athletic performance. Based on the findings, it was recommended, among other things, that universities in South East Nigeria should invest in the sports and athletic facilities and equipment to enhance athletic performance, growth in sports and wellbeing within the universities and their external environment.

KEYWORDS

Athletic Performance, University, Athletics, Nigerian University Games Association.



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Introduction

Sport has permeated the Nigerian society just as in many other societies worldwide. As a social phenomenon, sport has grown from its humble beginning of being an instrument of entertainment and recreation to becoming a visible and prominent business phenomenon that could no more be ignored in the social, political and economic environment of any nation. Sport therefore remains a veritable tool that unites the people of every nation; it brings people together no matter their socio-economic status, educational status, religious belief and gender. It has inherent values of enhancing physical, mental, social and psychological well-being of individuals besides the economic value derivable from its participation (Hamafyelto, 2018). In this regard, the fourteenth objective of the National Policy of Sports seeks to address the inclusion of sports in all the strata of our educational curriculum including the tertiary level (Akani and Brisibe, 2020).

In tertiary institutions like the Universities, sports is managed by the sports Directorate which is headed by Directors of sports who have the highest qualification and experience among the staff followed by deputy director of sports, sport co-ordinators; office staff and technical crew, which is made up of: coaches, masseurs and psychologists who have vital roles in promoting sports in tertiary institution. Universities provide avenues for the youths to acquire knowledge, life-saving skills and productive life. To this end, university therefore design programmes to include curricula and extra-curricular activities integrated to meet the developmental goals harped in the national policy of education (NPE, 2014). Universities world over are noted for producing the best and high profile athletes that bring honour to their nations while other nations make best use of their universities to distinguish themselves in sports.

In the Nigerian context, the inception of the Nigerian University Games (NUGA) in 1966 further establishes this recognition. This bi-annual competition targeted at unifying Nigerian universities from across all geopolitical regions is hosted rotationally and largely dependent on established criteria related to the adequacy of sports facilities and equipment within the university institution. The Nigeria University Games is a forum for University athletes who have been identified as champions to represent their Universities in a fiesta that comprises all Nigeria Universities which is organized every two years, thereby promoting friendship among University students in Nigeria (Akani and Brisibe, 2020). Thus, the Nigeria University Games become popular for University athletes to compete at optimal level since those that performed excellently at the end of the events will represent the country in the Olympics and other competitions.

Nigeria universities are yet to imbibe the global trend of engaging the students' body actively. Nigeria flag was hoisted at the 1983 Summer Universiade, also known as World University Games in Edmonton, Canada when five U.S. based student-athletes won gold medals for the nation, Sunday Uti (400m), Yusuf Ali (long jump), AjayiAgbebaku (triple jump), Innocent Egbunike (200m), and Chidi Imo (100m) (Hamafyelto, 2018). If Nigeria universities will ever win at the World University Games (FISU) it must rely on students studying outside the country. This is because they have better training facilities and equipment, trainers and proper incentives and motivation. Obviously, universities remain the leading way to Olympic honour. Recently, 94 athletes represented Nigeria at the 2022 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham, England, with Tobi Amusan winning the Gold medal in 100-metres hurdles (world record), Ese Brume winning Gold medal in the long jump and a three-time African senior champion in the long jump.

It appears Nigerian universities do not take pride in making their students stand out tall among their peers by reading and sporting. It is amazing that of the five hundred and fifty (550) Team

USA Olympians for Rio 2016, four hundred and thirty (430) were college athletes (Swain, 2016). It remains a fact that the concern of Nigeria universities is about knowledge-based education rather than all-inclusive education which is a major factor militating against the desired growth and development of sports in our universities. This is most unfortunate and lamentable because by this thinking university sports which is in perilous state would continue to decline due to decrease in the number of students engaging in sports. One of the areas of sport that appears to be under represented in university sports is the athletics.

Athletics is an exclusive collection of sporting events that involve competitive running, jumping, throwing, and walking. The most common types of athletics competitions are track and Field events, jumping and throwing events, running events and combined events (Maria and Paolo, 2020). An athlete is considered to be an individual who is engaged in physical activity and exercise on a regular basis.

One of the places to discover an athlete is in the university. Nigerian universities have been blamed for failing Nigeria in producing elite athletes for international sports competitions. This recrimination stems from the fact that most successful sporting nations of the world like the United States, Russia, and Germany recruit most of their athletes from among universities (Jeroh, 2015). Since Nigeria's appearance and participation at the World University Games, it was only in 1975 that a home-based athlete in the person of Late Major Taiwo Ogunjobi won a bronze medal in 400 metres hurdles in Rome (Akani and Brisibe, 2020).

Where athletes are produced from the universities, evidence abounds that such nations invest a lot of money in providing standard facilities and equipment, athletic scholarships, and other forms of motivation at the disposal of the student athletes (Akani and Brisibe, 2020). Only very few Nigerian universities give recognition to the athletic performance of their students. Very few Nigerian universities possess adequate standard sporting facilities and equipment that can be used in producing Olympic materials (Awoma, Okakah and Arainwu, 2015). The authors further remarked that there seems to be a little or no relationship between the State Sports Councils coaches, ministry of sports officials and the university efforts to produce star athletes. Yet, universities are expected to perform miracles at national sports meeting with all these glaring examples of shortfalls. It is important to note that the success or failure in athletic performance is hinged on some factors such as availability and quality of sports coaches; funding, sport facilities and equipment, nutrition and stress level (Bakari, 2017).

Sport coaches are those trained and are charged with the duty of managing sport at any level. They can also predict athletes' performance in athletics. This is why Watt (2016) stressed that they perform management duties at different levels of sports. Abeku (2017) argued that a major hindrance to the development of athletics at university level factors related to coaches. To this effect, it is important that universities have sufficient number of sport coaches and coaches especially as regards track and field events.

Another important predictor of athletes' performance in athletic activities is funding. Funding of sports services is an essential factor in the promotion of sports management in every tertiary institution. If sports programme are to be organized consistently and continuously, it should ensure that there is adequate and continuous generation of funds for sports through proper budgeting (Kabido, 2016).

Adequacy of sports facilities and equipment constitutes one of the essential predictor of athlete performance in athletics in the university. According to Ikhioya (2018) availability of standard sports facilities and equipment, maintenance of facility repairs, availability of standard sports arena for competition is paramount towards athletic performance. Emiola (2018) maintained that training and competing with modern and standard facilities and equipment are part of intrinsic incentive to athletes. Facilities and equipment occupy such available place in all the ramifications of sports administration. Adequacy of sport facilities and equipment play a major role in sports development. Good sports programmes can function at full effectiveness only when they are supported with effective facilities and equipment in good conditions (Aluko, 2018). Athletes have come to realize that improved performances and development of special skills which can earn them better incentives can be enhanced through better sports facilities and modern equipment.

Recently, reports on students' performance in NUGA has not been encouraging. Awodipe (2022), for instance, reported that stakeholders believe that over the years NUGA's capacity to produce talents has been abysmally low and that relevant supports are needed to improve the situation. Similar downward spiral in sports performance was reported of national team's in Olympics, a situation that was said to be connected to poor economy (Centre for the Study of Economics of Africa, CSEA, 2021). Performing below expectation could lead to a number of malpractices such as use of substances to up performance, the use of mercenaries, and drop in participation in sports among other unfavourable consequences. It is based on the foregoing therefore, that this study determined the predictors of athletic performance of University athletes in Nigerian University games association in South East Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to determine predictors of athletic performance of university athletes in Nigerian university games association in South East Nigeria. In specific terms, the study determined whether:

1. Adequacy of Sports coaches predicts athletic performance of University athletes in Nigerian university games association in South East Nigeria
2. Adequacy of funding predicts athletic performance of University athletes in Nigerian university games association in South East Nigeria.
3. Adequacy of sport equipment predicts of athletic performance of University athletes in Nigerian university games association in South East Nigeria

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha level:

1. Adequacy of sport coaches does not significantly predict athletic performance among university athletes during NUGA.
2. Adequacy of funding does not significantly predict athletic performance among university athletes during NUGA.
3. Adequacy of sport equipment does not significantly predict athletic performance among university athletes during NUGA.

Method

Correlational research design was employed for this study. The study was conducted in South-eastern geo-political zone of Nigeria. The population of the study comprised 1,895 athletes from Zone G of the Nigerian university sports administrative zones. The sample size of the study was 600 athletes drawn using stage sampling technique. Four sets of questionnaires were used to collect data for the study. These were: Adequacy of Sports Coaches Questionnaire (ASCQ), Sports Funding Adequacy Questionnaire (SFAQ), Adequacy of Sports Facilities and Equipment Questionnaire (ASFEQ) and Perceived Athletic Performance Questionnaire (PAPQ). ASCQ and SFAQ were 8-item questionnaire based on Likert response scale of “strongly agree”, “agree”, “disagree” and “strongly disagree.” ASFEQ was 12-item questionnaire based dichotomous response format “adequate” and “not adequate. The PAPQ was a 4-item questionnaire based on “excellent,” “above average,” “average,” and “below average.” The instruments were face validated by three experts in Faculty of Education Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The reliability of ASCQ, SFAQ and PAPQ were determined with internal consistency method using Cronbach’s Alpha. The values obtained were 0.92, 0.67 and 0.84. On the other hand, KuderRichardson formula 20 was used to ascertain the reliability for ASFEQ which yield a value of 0.65. The researchers administered the instrument to the research participants with the help of five research assistants. Regression analysis was used to analyze data for the study and *P*-value was used to determine the significance of the prediction for the three hypotheses. The decision rule was: a null hypothesis was rejected where the calculated *p*-value was less than the stipulated level of significance (0.05) whereas a null hypothesis was not rejected where the calculated *p*-value was greater than the stipulated level of significance (0.05) values. The reverse is the case where the calculated *p*-value was greater than the stipulated level of significance.

Results

Table 1: Simple Regression Analysis with Adequacy of Sports Coaches as Predictor of Athletic Performance among University Athletes during NUGA.

Predictor	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>F</i> (1,526)	<i>p</i> -value	Decision
Adequacy of Sports Coaches	0.02	0.00	0.15	0.703	Not Significant

The simple regression result displayed in Table 1 shows that adequacy of sports coaches is a weak and not a significant predictor of athletic performance among university athletes in NUGA, *R* = 0.02, *F* (1,526) = 0.15 and *p*-value >0.05. Since the obtained *p*-value was greater than stipulated 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 2: Simple Regression Analysis with Adequacy of Funding as Predictor of Athletic Performance among University Athletes during NUGA.

Predictor	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>F</i> (1,526)	<i>p</i> -value	Decision
Adequacy of Funding	0.20	0.04	20.95	0.000	Significant

The simple regression result displayed in Table 2 shows that adequacy of funding is a modest and significant predictor of athletic performance among university athletes in NUGA, $R = 0.20$, $F(1,526) = 20.95$ and p -value < 0.05 . This implies that adequacy of funding contributes 4% to the variance in athletic performance among university athletes, and this contribution was significant. The null hypothesis was, therefore, rejected.

Table 3: Simple Regression Analysis with Adequacy of Sports Facilities and Equipment as Predictor of Athletic Performance among University Athletes during NUGA.

Predictor	R	R^2	$F(1,526)$	p -value	Decision
Adequacy of Sports Facilities and Equipment	0.33	0.11	62.67	0.000	Significant

The simple regression result displayed in Table 3 shows that adequacy of sports facilities and equipment is a significant predictor of athletic performance among university athletes in NUGA, $R = 0.33$, $F(1,526) = 62.67$ and p -value < 0.05 . This implies that adequacy of sports facilities and equipment contributes 11% to the variance in athletic performance among university athletes and this contribution was significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Discussion

The finding revealed that adequacy of sport coaches did not significant predict athletic performance among university athletes during Nigerian University Games Association (NUGA). This means that the quality and effectiveness of coaches does not have a notable and measurable impact on how well university athletes perform in the NUGA. This finding is not in line with the finding of Adeyeye and Kehinder (2015) that quality, competence, and coaching methods employed by sport coaches have a significant influence on how well university athletes perform in the NUGA. This difference between the Kehinder's finding and this current one could be because of the time lag between the two studies. There is rapid growth in technology and rolessocial media such as YouTube and other online platforms play in youth development, including in sports, cannot be overlooked. Perhaps students are currently making use of online coaches and virtual sports platforms to gain skills in sports now than before, thereby paying less attention to the face-to-face sports coaching.

This finding revealed that adequacy of funding is a significant predictor of athletic performance among university athletes during NUGA. This implies that the amount of financial support and resources provided to university sports programs is a strong and meaningful factor that can forecast or influence how well university athletes will perform in the Nigerian University Games Association (NUGA). This finding agreed with that of Momoh (2014) that the amount of funding provided to university sports programs significantly influences the athletic performance of university athletes during the NUGA.

The finding revealed that adequacy of sport facilities and equipment is a significant predictor of athletic performance among university athletes during NUGA. This implies that adequacy of sport facilities and equipment is a key and noteworthy factor that can consistently indicate or influence the athletic performance of university athletes during NUGA. In other words, it is a powerful and important variable when trying to understand or predict how well these athletes will perform. This

finding disagreed with the finding of Awoma et al. (2015) that equipment did not significantly predict sports development in Edo State, Nigeria. The difference between both findings could be as a result of diverse opinions of respondents based on geographical location.

Conclusion

The study on predictors of athletic performance among university athletes in the Nigerian University Games Association in South East Nigeria has revealed several key factors that influence performance. Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that factors such as adequate funding, and adequate facilities and equipment are crucial in determining athletic performance.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Universities in South East Nigeria should invest funding sports and providing facilities and equipment to motivate students to engage in sports. Universities can also engage in collaborations with other universities in the use of sporting facilities so that universities that do not have sufficient facilities and equipment can benefit from using sporting facilities of other universities. This way sporting activities in the universities will be promoted and well-being of students and staff within the university and other members of the host communities will benefit.
2. Universities in South East Nigeria should provide scholarships and financial aid to athletes to cover their educational expenses, including tuition, books, and living expenses. This reduces financial stress on athletes, allowing them to focus on training and competition.
3. Coaches of each sport should ensure that all facilities and equipment meets safety standards and regulations as well as making sure that all athletes have equal access to necessary facilities and equipment to create a level playing field.

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