

Perceived Social Benefits And Challenges Of Sports In Nigerian Universities: University Of Abuja As A Case

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Abstract: Sports have been seen as parts of means through which people of different categories seek for healthy living and mental alertness for various activities. Apart from this benefit, sports have also been adjudged as potent tool for promotion of unity among schools (from elementary to university levels) and maintenance of peace and development between nations. It is against this backdrop that this research investigates the students' perceived benefits and challenges of engaging in one sporting activity or the other, using participant development model and theory of planned behaviour. Survey research design was employed for the study. Five hundred and twenty-two students of the University of Abuja were sampled. The generated data were analysed through simple and frequency count percentage method with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS IBM 20) software. The study, among other findings found that sampled students engaged in sporting activities on campus for health improvement, relaxation and fun, physical growth and social relationship purposes, while time factor and inadequate facilities are the reasons for not actively involved in sports. The policy recommendations of the study cut across the need for National Sports Commission (NSC) and National Universities Commission (NUC) to work out modality on the review of existing sport programmes and curriculum in the Nigerian universities so as to ameliorate challenges identified in the study and consideration of students' involvement in one sporting activity or the other as part of learning process, especially improving students' mental alertness that would contribute significantly to their academic successes among others. Bisallah Hashim Ibrahim Perceived Social Benefits And Challenges Of Sports In Nigerian Universities: University Of Abuja As A Case: <http://www.sciencepub.net/academia>. [Bisallah Hashim Ibrahim. **Perceived Social Benefits And Challenges Of Sports In Nigerian Universities: University Of Abuja As A Case.** *Academ Arena* 2014;6(1):14-21]. (ISSN 1553-992X). <http://www.sciencepub.net/academia>. 3

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1.0 Introduction

It is an established fact that Nigerians across all age categories are lover of sports of different kinds. This is usually demonstrated when they are watching or participating in any sporting activity. Before and since independence Nigeria has participated in various sporting competitions at regional and international levels. At various competitions involved in, the country's representatives were either won or known for their superlative performances. These representatives are basically sourced through different development programmes revolved around specific sporting activities that youth engaged in at local, state and national levels. Post-primary and higher institutions of learning are parts of places where talented youth are sourced for these competitions. At these institutions, varied programmes are organized and intra and inter-school competitions are held as part of educational training for the students. Suffice to note that many competitions are not compulsory, but students are always encouraged to engage in one sporting activity or the other for the purpose of increasing their health status, especially against certain dreaded diseases that have the tendency of thwarting their academic career.

This is in line with United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace's (2013) observation that all forms of physical activity that contribute to physical fitness, mental well-being and social interaction are sports. These include play, recreation, organized casual or competitive sport, and indigenous sports or games.

Having identified the essence of sports as part of educational strategies for the development of the students at different levels, the Nigerian government in 1966 established National Universities Games Association (NUGA) saddled with the responsibilities of organizing different sports competitions for the university students with the aim of discovering new talents for regional and international competitions and at the same time, contributing to the physical development of the students-cum-promotion of national unity. Fifteen sporting events are approved by the association as university games. These include track and field, badminton, basketball, chess, cricket, handball, hockey, judo, soccer, squash, swimming, table tennis, taekwondo, tennis and volleyball. Since the emergence of the association in 1966 following the first West African University Games (WAUG) held

at the University of Ibadan in 1965, the nation has benefitted and still benefiting from different sports competitions organized by the body. In this regard, the students are not left out too. Some have participated actively or passively in one of these events at intra and inter-school competitions or at individual level amongst other colleagues with different reasons and orientations.

It is against this backdrop that this study aims at revealing how the selected students of the University of Abuja perceived specific social benefits derived in participating in the approved sporting events apropos the challenges facing them while participating in the events, the reasons for being active or passive and alternative mechanisms for sports improvement in the Nigerian universities. Specifically, what social benefits do the students of University of Abuja perceive from sports in Nigerian Universities? What are the students' reasons for and not actively engaging in sporting activities? What strategies do the students consider as alternative mechanisms for sports improvement in Nigerian Universities?

1.1 Statement Of The Problem

Studies have been conducted in the area of recreation or sports using non-university settings at the neglect of the university environments, where both educational, psychological and social relationship are being sought by students despite their differences in terms of race, culture and religion. Available studies at the university level indicate mere literature reviews of varied concepts and constructs aimed at formulating models and theories that would expand researching into sporting events within the institutions of higher learning (Sibthorp, Paisley and Gookin, 2007; United Nation Inter-Agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace, 2013).

However, the researcher was able to pinpoint some studies that concentrated on societal level in relation with university's domain (Coalter, 2005; Darker, 2007; Abdullah, 2010; Bailey, Collins, Ford, MacNamera, Toms and Pearce, 2010; Calvo, Cervell, Jimnez, Iglesias, Antonio and Murcia, 2010; Alla and Ajibua, 2012). These studies have established the needed gap that should be filled. Despite that developed and developing nations have sought talented students in various sporting activities at university level for national, regional and international engagements; there are no substantial studies on the benefits and challenges facing students in the course of participating in one or two activities within and outside the university's arena (inter-university competition). The previous studies examined did not investigate likely benefits and challenges associated with school sports at the university level in developing nations such as Nigeria.

Sibthorp, Paisley and Gookin (2007) examined programs offered by the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) to develop an etiological model of participant development. Hierarchical modeling results identified participant antecedents and malleable program characteristics that predict participant development measured by a set of six targeted outcomes: communication, leadership, small group behavior, judgment in the outdoors, outdoor skills, and environmental awareness. Participants' perceptions of personal empowerment and previous expedition experience were both related to increases in all targeted outcomes. Five other predictor variables were significant in certain models. The research built and tested a viable program model of the relationships between participant and program characteristics and their impact on participant development. Expanding the study to the individual's ability to perform sporting activity, Darker (2007) employed theory of planned behaviour to walking, with the main purpose of developing and evaluating measures and intervention towards walking as an exercise. Through interpretive phenomenological analysis of selected participants to provide a rich and detailed account of walking, the researcher found that walking was regarded as not being proper exercise by the participants. Perceptions of walking were also found to be incongruent with the study's setting (Birmingham) health promotion campaigns, which focused on the health benefits of walking.

Using self-determination theory to explain sport persistence and dropout in adolescent athletes, Calvo, Cervell, Jimnez, Iglesias, Antonio and Murcia (2010) found that higher levels of motivation, external regulation and interjected regulation and by lower satisfaction of relatedness and autonomy needs constituted contributing factors for sport dropout that exist among four hundred and ninety two soccer players between the ages of 13 and 17 years sampled. Specifically, the scholars tested self-determination theory which proposes that humans have three fundamental needs of individual for engaging and withdrawing from one sporting activity or the other. The needs include: to feel autonomous in performing an activity, to perceive relatedness with others in the community of involvement and to perceive competence in relation to the activity. Using theory of planned behaviour for the investigation of Saudi adolescents in physical activity, Abdullah (2010) examines social and psychological determinants of participation in leisure time physical activity. The study found that attitudes, subjective norms, perceptions of behavioural control predicted physical activity intentions in a Saudi Arabia context. In addition, descriptive norms, self-efficacy, and past behaviour contributed to the prediction of intention,

while self-identity did not. The research also identified Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC) as the key determinant of walking behaviour.

In another study with specific focus on the need to restructure sport activities in schools, especially high schools and higher colleges in Nigeria, Alla and Ajibua (2012) proposed an organizational structure-cum-model for achieving developmental goal of Physical Education. The model was recommended against the backdrop of National Policy of Education which provides for the promotion of emotional, physical and psychological health of all children through Physical Education. Specifically, the current study aims at revealing social benefits the students of University of Abuja perceive from sports in Nigerian Universities, the students' reasons for and not actively engaging in sporting activities and strategies consider as alternative mechanisms for sports improvement in Nigerian Universities.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the gap in knowledge discovered and theories that underpinned the study. The following questions are posed:

1. What social benefits do the students of University of Abuja perceive from sports in Nigerian Universities?
2. What are the students' reasons for and not actively engaging in sporting activities?
3. What strategies do the students consider as alternative mechanisms for sports improvement in Nigerian Universities?

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Sports And Development: The Interplay

Sports and development are inseparable in human life. Sports enable individuals, groups, societies and nations to achieve certain development objectives individually and or collectively. In the area of health, sports serve various purposes in terms of reducing individual's chance of having or developing varied health issues or problems. For the group or society in general, sports have been described as tool for maintaining peace and ensuring effective cooperation on ways of tackling certain phenomena. Apart from that, sports have also be found to be useful for the provision of psychological benefits such as fostering social integration and teaching coping mechanisms as well as psychological benefits such as reducing depression and improving concentration. Thus, sports from play to physical activity and organized competitive event have important roles to play in all societies (United Nation Inter-Agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace, 2013). These societies are not limited to towns and cities but also the universities environment, often referred as gowns. It should be

stressed that gender, race and age are not prerequisites for including someone in sports and participating in any sporting activity or otherwise stated by organizing body of such sport category. Bailey, Collins, Ford, MacNamera, Toms and Pearce (2010:2) write that:

A number of key social or environmental factors can affect participation, attrition and involvement in sport and physical activity during childhood and adolescence. While there is evidence of the importance of factors, such as the family, socioeconomic status, educational background, geographical location, gender, ethnicity, peers and identity, there is little consideration of any of these factors within existing participant development models. The most influential factor seems to be the family and young people from a two-parent or career family, which has far more opportunities and access to provision than those from a single-parent or career family.

Using National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) in the United States as setting for their study, Sibthorp, Paisley and Gookin (2007) examine predictors of growth within sports recreation. The scholars identify age, sex, previous expedition experience, and sense of personal empowerment as participant-level predictors. The course-level predictors included the group's perception of the group's level of functioning, the group's perception of the level of challenge presented by the course terrain, the group's perception of the instructors' rapport with the group, and the length of the course in days. The same scholars consider the predictors under participant-level as measured antecedent variables thought to impact participant development (outcome achievement) and course-level's predictors as measured programme design and implementation variables thought to impact participant development (outcome achievement).

2.2 Understanding Social Benefits Of Sports

Examining the benefits of engaging in sporting activities, Huggins and Randell (2007) highlight health, confidence, peace building, national pride, teamwork, role models, academic success, workplace skills and community development as basic values of sport to individuals and nations in general. According to the scholars, physical activity develops healthy life style habits and is beneficial for physical and mental health. Four hours of physical activity a week has been shown to reduce the risk of many diseases, such as breast cancer and heart disease. Developing such positive habits in childhood can have life-long positive benefits. Thus, there is a need to encourage young ones to participate in at least a sporting activity with aim of improving their mental alertness that would contribute significantly to their academic

achievements in all aspects. Apart from health benefits that people believed to be the most significant contribution of sports to human development, especially when someone seems unhealthy, participating in sport has also been seen as an opportunity of improving the quality of life of individuals and communities, promote social inclusion, counter anti-social behaviour, raise individual self-esteem and confidence, and widen horizons; forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels (Council of Europe, 2001; SportsScotland, 2003) quoted in Coalter (2005). Referring to The Acheson Report on inequalities and health, Coalter (2005) stresses social aspects of sports within the purview of opportunities afforded by exercise, which might also lead to wider social networks and social cohesion.

However, to maximize full potentials of sports, Coalter (2005) highlights managing for outcomes, the nature of the sporting experience, supervision, leadership and management, frequency, intensity and adherence as determinant factors. According to the scholar, the individual should be cleared about assumptions that underpin his or her involvement in any sporting activity. This will go in a long way of revealing what would be the outcomes that constitute the benefits to be derived from such sport. Previous sporting experience within the context of various purposes that motivate the participant, effective supervision, quality leadership and management on the part of the relevant stakeholders in any sporting activity someone wants to participate in and the extent to which the person participate and followed the specific rules also have the tendency of determine the actual benefits to be enjoyed from sports. The scholar concludes that these factors are especially important in order to obtain fitness and health benefits; they also have implications for the development of sporting and social skills and changed attitudes and values. Put it succinctly, United Nation Inter-Agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace (2013) observes that stimulating economic growth; effectively designed sport programmes strengthen basic human capabilities, create connections between individuals and teach core values and life skills.

3.0 Theory/Calculation

3.1 Participant Development Model

The model focuses on three area of individual or collective participation in sporting activity. These areas include physical, psychological, and social domains (Bailey, Collins, Ford, MacNamera, Toms and Pearce, 2010:2). The model is in line with the present study on the premise that people either participate in sporting activity individually or collectively in a specific social sphere with the

intents of achieving certain social benefits-cum-personal development.

3.2 Theory Of Planned Behaviour

The theory of planned behaviour was proposed by IcekAjzen in 1985 through his article "From intentions to actions: A theory of planned behaviour." It was developed from the theory of reasoned action, which was proposed by Martin Fishbein together with IcekAjzen in 1975. The theory states that attitude toward behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control, together shape an individual's behavioural intentions and behaviour (Wikipedia, 2013). The theory is relevant to the current study on the basis that the sampled students' active or passive engagement in approved sporting events would be consequent upon their previously held stance on the importance of such events and perceived circumstances that would be motivating factors for participating or not.

3. Methods And Materials

Survey research design was used as appropriate method of carrying out this study due to the specific purpose of evaluating the views of the selected students of the University of Abuja on social benefits and challenges of sports in the Nigerian universities. For the purpose of selecting representative sample size, available sampling technique was adopted due to the inability of the researcher to access complete list of students in the departments purposively chosen for the study. Questionnaire was however used for the collection of relevant data from the 522 respondents sampled for the study. The questionnaire was structured in line with 4 Likert Scaling Measurement format starting from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Two research assistants were employed for the distribution of the copies of questionnaire to ensure high rate return. Specifically, they waited till each participant filled appropriate sections of his or her copy of the questionnaire. The generated data were analysed through simple and frequency count percentage method with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS IBM 20) software, while the findings were also presented in tables followed by interpretations and discussions of findings in line with the reviewed conceptual and theoretical framework.

4 Results And Discussion

From the outset, this study sets out to investigate social benefits the Nigerian students derived from participating in various sporting activities on campus and varied challenges that impede University's sporting activities. Through identified variables and theoretical underpinnings of the study, three research questions were formulated

and data were sourced by employing questionnaire as main research instrument, which is appropriate for the research design adopted for the study. Five hundred and twenty-two students of the University of Abuja, Nigeria participated in the study. Out of the sampled population, 243 representing 46.6% were male while 279 (53.4%) were female. The students cut across all departments of the institution. These include: History (0.6%), Law (3.3%), Accounting (10.3%), Banking and Finance (3.8%), Sociology (8.0%), Medicine (8.4%), Geography (3.6%), Chemistry (2.5%), Theatre Arts (9.4%), Education (4.0%), Political Science (11.5%), Microbiology (4.2%), Veterinary Medicine (2.9%), Computer Science (3.8%), Physics (5.2%), Economics (5.7%), Public Administration (9.8%) and Electrical-Electronics Engineering (2.9%). It could be deduced

from the analysis that students from the department of Political Science, Accounting and Public Administration participated more than other departments in the study. However, the data gathered are discussed below through the formulated research questions:

Research Question One: What social benefits do the students of University of Abuja perceive from sports in Nigerian Universities?

This question was set purposely to find out the categories of social benefits the sampled students derived from engaging in various sporting activities on campus. The views of the respondents were sought through Likert scaling measurement. The findings are interpreted and presented below in a table.

Table 1: Social Benefits Students Derived from Participating in Sports Activities on Campus

S/N	Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total	
		No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
		1.	Sporting activities that I engaged in helped me in establishing new friends and maintaining old ones	231	44.2	120	22.9	98	18.7	73	13.9
2.	Sporting activities have improved my interpersonal relationship	230	44.0	110	21.0	123	23.5	59	11.3	522	100
3.	Sporting activities that I engaged in have increased my team spirit	145	27.7	160	30.6	117	22.4	100	19.1	522	100
4.	Sporting activities that I participated in helped in reducing my quest for anti-social behavior	249	47.7	200	38.3	60	11.4	13	2.4	522	100
5.	My self-esteem has improved as a result of sporting activities that I engaged in on campus	220	42.1	145	27.7	107	20.4	50	9.5	522	100
6.	I feel belonging whenever I participated in a sporting event on campus	266	50.9	168	32.1	68	13.0	20	3.8	522	100

The above table 1 reveals various social benefits the sampled respondents derived from participating in sports activities. Majority of the respondents 449 (86%) were of the view that by engaging in various games their quest for anti-social behaviour have reduced, while 434 representing 83% said they always have sense of belonging whenever they are participating in different sports activities. From the table, it has also been established by the 365 (69.8%) of the total respondents (n=522) that the self-esteem of the students of the university under study always increase when they are involving in sporting events. Friendship initiation and maintenance-cum-interpersonal relationship improvement also occurred during sporting programmes. This finding corroborates Council of Europe (2001) and Sportsotland (2003) views' on participating in sport. The due observe that participation in sport is an opportunity of improving the quality of life of individuals and communities, promote social inclusion, counter anti-social behaviour, raise

individual self-esteem and confidence, and widen horizons; forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels. The finding is also in support of the Coalter (2005) assertion that social aspects of sports within the purview of opportunities afforded by exercise, might also lead to wider social networks and social cohesion.

Research Question Two: What are the students' reasons for and not actively engaging in sporting activities?

Education without physical development on the part of the learner is incomplete. Sports remain one of the means through which this development can be achieved. Students need to be allowed to engage in various sporting events that will enhance their ability to comprehend stated learning's objectives. It is on this premise that this question was drafted to find out different reasons students adduce for participating in sporting events on campus. The generated findings are interpreted and discussed below:

Table 2: Students' Reasons for Participating in Sporting Events on Campus

Variable	No	%
To improve one's health	189	36.2
To develop physically	102	19.5
To relax and have fun	103	19.7
To be with friends	61	11.6
To improve self esteem	13	2.4
To develop new skills	4	0.76
To build character/identity	1	0.19
To help disadvantaged people to integrate into society	30	5.7
To stimulate the spirit of competition	10	1.9
To meet people from other cultures	2	0.3
To showcase excellence	7	1.34
Total	522	100

According to the data presented in table 3 above, it shows that majority of the students, who

responded to the study participated in sporting programmes purposely to improve their health status, for relaxation and fun, for physical growth, and identifying with friends and colleagues from their departments and others. These reasons were established through the opinions of 189 (36.2%), 103 (19.7%), 102 (19.5%) and 61 (11.6%).

Table 3: Students' Reasons for not activelyengaging in Sporting Events on Campus

Variable	No	%
Time factor	389	74.5
Dislike for sports	13	2.4
Expensive nature	8	1.5
Lack of facilities	63	12.0
Other reasons	49	9.3
Total	522	100

Table 4: Respondents' Strategies consider as Alternative Mechanisms for Sports Improvement in the Nigerian Universities

S/N	Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total	
		No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
1.	Public-Private sponsorship should be put in place and maintained	249	47.7	136	26.0	123	23.5	14	2.6	522	100
2.	Sports' Endowment Fund should be initiated for the universities across the country	267	51.1	156	29.8	65	12.4	34	6.5	522	100
3.	A compulsory general course should be designed for all the students as part of requirements for the award of first degree	145	27.7	128	24.5	220	42.1	29	5.5	522	100
4.	Sports value re-orientation through sports department should be organized across the nation's universities	256	49.0	183	35.0	56	10.7	27	5.1	522	100
5.	Students should be mandated to participate in one sporting event whether at departmental, faculty, inter-university or national levels before their graduation	120	22.9	67	12.8	189	36.2	146	27.9	522	100

In accordance with the data presented in table 4 above, out of the total respondents (n=522) of the study, 439 amounting to 84% believed that the concerned stakeholders in sports in the Nigerian universities need to re-orientate the students on the values and essence of participating in sports' activities on campus, while 423 (80.9%), 385 (73.7%) and 273 (52.2%) suggested public endowment fund, public-private partnership/sponsorship and development of a general compulsory course for the students as alternative mechanisms for sports improvement in the

The above table 3 indicates various reasons the students adduced for not participating in sporting activities on the campus. It is clearly established that insufficient time remains the main factor impeding the students' involvement in sporting events. This is indicated by the majority's views (74.5%) of the

sampled respondents. Lack of enough sporting facilities is also cited as reason for not involving in sporting activities 63 (12.0%). Thus, it could be concluded that various academic activities usually affect students' sporting activities. From the data presented in table 2 and 3, and interpretation that

follow, the sampled students engaged in sporting activities on campus for health improvement, relaxation and fun, physical growth and social relationship purposes, while time factor and inadequate facilities are the reasons for not actively involved in sports. These findings are in agreement with Coalter's (2005) stance on maximizing full benefits of sports. The scholar notes managing for outcomes, the nature of the sporting experience, supervision, leadership and management, frequency, intensity and adherence are the determinant factors. The finding is also align with United Nation Inter-Agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace's (2013) observation that, stimulating economic growth; effectively designed sport programmes, strengthen basic human capabilities; create connections between individuals and teach core values and life skills. The findings are specifically in consonance with the proposition of theory of planned behaviour which states that attitude toward behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control, together shape an individual's behavioural intentions and behaviour.

Research Question Three: What strategies do the students consider as alternative mechanisms for sports improvement in Nigerian Universities?

The rationale for the formulation of this research question was to reveal methods or strategies the sampled students perceive as alternative means for sports improvement in the Nigerian Universities in view of various reasons for engaging and not participating in sporting events on campus.

Nigerian universities. The current finding agrees with the position of United Nation Inter-Agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace (2013) that effectively designed sport programmes strengthen basic human capabilities

5 Conclusion And Recommendations

The study has established that public-private intervention in the university's sports is not enough and that the university curriculum remains one of the factors impeding students for active engagement in various sporting activities within the university environment. The study also revealed social relationship initiation and maintenance as the main benefits students derived from involving in sporting events while on campus apart from health-related and other benefits. From the conclusion reached, the following recommendations are considered by the researcher for concerned authorities and policy makers in the Nigerian universities working in the area of promoting university sports:

1. There is need for National Sports Commission (NSC) and National Universities Commission (NUC) to work out modality on the

review of existing sport programmes and curriculum in the Nigeria universities so as to ameliorate challenges identified in the study.

2. Universities should consider students' involvement in one sporting activity or the other as part of learning process, especially improving students' mental alertness that would contribute significantly to their academic successes.

3. Sport administrators in the universities should embark on sensitization tours within their universities environments; informing students of different categories on the need to participate in sporting events while on campus.

4. State and federal governments including private organisations and individuals that own universities should provide enabling environment for various sports to thrive, by providing adequate funds and materials needed in areas marked as sports arena.

5. The social benefits of sports as identified by the students should be explored for the promotion of peace and unity among the country's varied ethnic groups. This will be advantageous in solving various ethno-religious crises in the country.

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