

Full Length Research Paper

Relationship between participation motives and connection to soccer of male university players

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Participation in physical activity or sport has numerous benefits. This is more apt at the university level where students pursue multiple roles. However little is known on the participation motives and extent of connection (attachment) to different sport codes at the university level. The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between participation motives and connection to soccer of male university players. It was predicted that participation motives and connection to soccer would not be mediated by selected demographic factors of birth rank and level of study. Data was collected through self-administered questionnaires from male university soccer players (n=242) who were taking part in a university soccer championship. Data was analyzed through descriptive statistics of percentages and means, while inferential statistics of one ANOVA was used to test for differences. The major motives for participation in soccer were to develop physical skills and abilities, keeping in shape and interaction with others with significant differences ($p < 0.05$) based on birth ranks and year of study. Most of the soccer players were highly connected to soccer through attraction, identity affirmation and centrality with no significant differences ($p > 0.05$) attributed to level of study and birth ranks. Study recommends that coaches and team trainers need to take stock of the players motives as they schedule training and competition. They should also explore ways and means of ensuring that soccer players are networked for continued participation.

Key words: Participation, motives, connection, university, soccer.

INTRODUCTION

Participation in physical activity or competitive sport at university level is believed to have numerous sociological, psychological, health, economic, and academic benefits (Greendorfer, 2002; Diehl et al., 2018). Consequently,

participation in sports is highly encouraged and occupies a huge part of university budget. This comes in form of travel, sports infrastructure, human resource and scheduled competitions at national, regional and global

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level. Indeed, some of the universities in Kenya market their academic programs through sports excellence and investment in specific sports. For example, some universities have partnered with high schools and they admit students specifically for sport participation and formation of strong athletic teams. Other universities have availed athletic scholarships for students to boast their performance in sport competitions (Rintaugu et al., 2011).

However, the endless debate is whether universities should continue spending resources on the few university students who take part in sport at the expense of academic programs where all students are involved. This comes from the background that majority of university students are not involved in physical activities (PA) more so sport competitions (Suminski et al., 2002; Ajowi et al., 2016). This view is buttressed in epidemiological evidence which indicate that the level of PA decline from high school to college and activity patterns in college population are generally insufficient to improve their health and fitness (Kilpatric et al., 2005).

In Kenya, just like other parts of the world, soccer is a very popular sport starting from the primary schools to universities. Indeed, some of the university athletes not only play soccer for their university teams, but also for outside clubs and the national team. It is interesting to unearth the motivational factors of the university soccer players as they pursue excellence in both academic pursuits and soccer. Motivation in sport refers to those psychological processes that trigger the arousal, direction and persistence of behavior (Nevid, 2012). Motivation is considered critical to sport participation and performance because it demonstrates the intention, activation and regulation of driving force of behavior (Ryan and Deci, 2001). Broadly speaking, motivation for sport participation can be categorized into two broad areas of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Diehl et al., 2018). Intrinsically motivated participants will take part in sport activities for pleasure, fun or other self-determined reasons such as enjoyment, satisfaction and health. Extrinsic factors for sport participation may include benefits such as tangible and materials such as travel, money or social rewards (prestige, recognition). Vallerand and Loiser (1999) opined that if the reasons for sport participation are intrinsic then positive results such as adherence and commitment can be obtained. On the other hand, Garcia-Mas et al. (2010) contends that extrinsic motivation has a higher contribution to enjoyment whereas intrinsic motivation has a higher contribution to commitment.

Another important framework related to motivation in soccer is connection. Connection refers to the extent to which the player feels that soccer has become part of his/her life. The five facets of connection include attraction, identity affirmation, identity expression, centrality and social bonding (Kyle et al., 2007). Once the athletes are connected to soccer this will impact on their athletic identity and sport commitment. Sport commitment

zeroes down to the wish and decision of maintaining participation in sport (Scanlan et al., 1993). It is determined by the degree of sport enjoyment obtained through participation, involvement opportunities derived from participation, social constraints support and/or pressures and the impact of the perceived involvement alternatives to sport. It would thus appear that connected soccer athletes would have their participation motives highly visible and salient. It may also be assumed that connected athletes may not be able to shift their allegiance away from soccer and they will remain committed and would go out of their way to seek excellence in soccer performance.

In navigating these two concepts of participation motivation and connection to soccer, it was presumed that the birth rank and level of study of the player's would influence the relationship between the two concepts. Socio-psychological literature reveals that middle-borns are over-represented in sport competitions (Udoh, 1997; Rintaugu, 2005). Other studies have reported that first-borns are less likely than last born to participate in sport considered dangerous such as hockey and football (McPherson et al., 1989). Consequently, it was apt to predict that the participation motives and connection to soccer will decline as athletes advance in their university studies. This is not remote as first year students have many challenges as they are try to settle down in campus life, away from their parents, lost fame from high school and discrimination by the older students (Kyle et al., 2007; Njororai, 2010). The transition to university life is a process marked by a variety of significant change. For example, university life creates a shift in routine and habits in environments that were previously secure and predictable in which there was a sense of control (Bray and Born, 2004). Indeed, Wood (2011) opines that university athletes are faced with increased stress and a new set of responsibilities as they move away from home leaving some decisions to be made without parental influences. Understanding motivation and connection of soccer athletes is critical to the development of sport careers and will enable stakeholders to provide meaningful assistance as well as create an appropriate enabling environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous studies have been conducted on motivation and connection to intramurals, physical activity and sport participation but the findings are inconsistent and inconclusive. For example, Ryan et al. (1997) investigated whether students' initial motivation usually predicted individual attendance and adherence to that particular sport and found that individuals who were mainly motivated by competence and enjoyment were primarily motivated intrinsically. They further reported that several other factors could play a role in individual choices of

sport including intrinsic and extrinsic motives.

In a related study, Vlachopoulos et al. (2000) examined self-determination perspectives related to sport motivation in a diverse sample of college athletes and non-athletes and explored relationships between identified motivational profiles and quality of participant motivational outcomes in sport. It was found that athletes had low extrinsic motivation with high intrinsic motivation and having both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. In another study, Wilson et al. (2004) noted that the most important motivational factors for sport participation among males and females were affiliation, fitness, skill development and friendship. Kilpatrick et al. (2005) in their study on the motives for participants versus exercisers among college students indicated that participants were more likely to report intrinsic motives such as enjoyment and challenge for engaging in sport whereas motivation for exercisers were more extrinsic and focused on appearance, weight and stress management. This is replicated in Zaharidis et al. (2006) findings on the six participation motives of skill development and competition, status/recognition energy release, team atmosphere friendship and having fun through social interactions and fitness in a related study, Kondric et al. (2013) examined the differences in motivation to participate in sport activities among sports science students from three different countries (Slovenia, Croatia and Germany) and found that the student motives consisted of friendship, popularity, fitness and health, social status, sport events and relaxation. Similarly, Diehl et al. (2018) found that the reasons for participation in university sport and physical activity among university students in Germany were life balance, fun and pleasure and contact with others.

A number of studies on motivational factors and sport participation have been carried out in Africa with diverse results. For example, in Nigeria, Ipinmoroti (2011) found that skill development, psychological well-being, physical fitness and social relationships were reported as important purposes of participation in competitive sport among Nigerian college athletes. Similarly, Omoregie and Obajimi (2011) investigated the extent to which motives for sports participation predicted motivation outcomes of university athletes in track and field events and found that ammotivation emerged as a strong negative outcome measure. In South Africa, Van Heerden (2014) explored the relationship between motivation drivers and sport participation among university sport science students and found a negative correlation between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. From the above studies it appears that participation in sport seems to be attractive to students due to fun, enjoyment, improving skills, learning, being with friends, success, winning and health (Gaston-Gayles, 2005; Waldron and Dieser, 2010).

In Kenya, a number of studies on motivation in sport among university students have been carried out but the findings are inconclusive (Gitonga et al., 2003; Gitonga et

al., 2011; Rintaugu and Ngetich, 2012; Rintaugu et al., 2014; Ajowi et al., 2016). For example, Gitonga et al. (2003) examined participation motives among university athletes and found that participation motives differed based on gender, type of sport and level of experience. Gitonga et al. (2011) study involving women volleyball players (some teams had university students) in Africa found that their continued participation in volleyball was due to success, personal development, desire to excel and career opportunities. However, the study involved women players only and a few isolated players were university students. Rintaugu and Ngetich (2012) reported that the main motives for sport science students' participation in physical activities were weight management, enjoyment and revitalization while the least motivators were stress management and competition. These motives varied based on the gender of the respondents. Rintaugu et al. (2014) reported that 90% of university athletes joined sport due to enjoyment and their continued participation was due to success. Finally, Ajowi et al. (2016) investigated the participation motives of Kenyan female soccer players and found that the primary motives for participation were to improve skills, physical fitness and team spirit. However, the motives did not differ based on female soccer player's age, sport experience and year of study. Based on the review of previous studies it is apparent a lot has been done on motives for sport participation. However, there is a lacuna as none of the studies has focused on the nexus between motivation and the extent of connection to soccer. Thus, the purpose of the study was to examine relationship between participation motivation and connection to soccer of university athletes. This was apt as university sport administrators need to structure training/competition in line with participation motivation and connection to soccer. The soccer player's in Kenyan universities cannot be treated as a homogenous group and therefore it was apt to predict that their participation motives and connection to soccer will be mediated by their level of study and birth positions.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study design and Sample

A descriptive survey design was used to collect data from 242 student-athletes who were taking part in a Kenya university sports association (KUSA) soccer championship. This comprised of 73 (30.16%) fourth year students, 70 (28.9%), second year 65 (26.9%) third year 30 (12.4%) first years and 4 (1.7%) fifth years. In terms of birth ranks, most of the players were middle born 106 (43%), first born 86 (35.5%) and last born 50 (20.7%). As regards duration of play, 93 (38.42%) had played for 3 years, 80 (33.05%) had played for 2 years, 41 (16.94%) for one year, 23 (9.50%) and 5 (2.06%) had played for the university for 4 and 5 years respectively. Regarding family member's participation in soccer, 150 (61.98%) of the family members participated in soccer, while 92 (38.01%) of the family members did not participate in soccer. Among the participants 113 (46.69%) rated soccer as popular in their universities followed by

103 (42.50%) very popular and 26 (10.74%) rated soccer as not popular.

Measures

A self-administered questionnaire was for data collection. The questionnaire had three sections where items in Section A sought demographic information of the participants such as age, birth rank, level of study, and playing experience, while Section B sought information on participation motives or reasons for taking part in soccer. These were nine items derived from Sport Motivation Scale (SMS) (Pelletier et al., 1995; Martens and Weber, 2002) with subscales that scored motivation on a continuum of self-determination ranging from. These items were weighted in a likert scale of strongly agree to strongly intrinsic motivation to disagree. Section C sought information on their extent of connection to soccer activities. This represents an individual's personal attachment or connection to an activity or product. Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed with statements related to each dimension of connection. These were 15 items which were scored on a 5point likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree). The instrument had been used in previous studies (Kyle et al., 2007; Wood, 2011). Higher mean scores reflected higher levels of connection to soccer. The instruments were piloted among 23 University volleyball players returning a reliability of 0.78 which was considered adequate for the study.

Data analysis

Data was coded for means, standard deviations and percentages under IBMSS. Data was analyzed through one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and post hoc test of Tukey Honestly Significant Differences (HSD) to trace the sources of significant differences at 0.05 level of significance. Correlation of coefficient was computed to establish the relationship between participation motivation and connection to soccer.

RESULTS

The means and standard deviations on motives and connection to soccer are presented in Tables 1 and 2, respectively. Result in Table 1 shows that the highest ranked motives were development of physical skills and abilities, keeping in shape physically, interacting with others, building friendship and meeting with new and different people. Conversely, the least ranked motives were getting away from everyday life, enhancement of overall mood, renewing energy levels and challenging ones' abilities. The study was interested is establishing whether the motives for soccer participation were mediated by level of study and birth ranks. ANOVA on universities athlete's birth ranks and motives for soccer participation did not yield any significant differences. Under the level of study, it is only the motive on *developing physical skills and abilities* on returned significant differences $F(4,239) = 3.39 \rho < 0.01$. Post hoc Tukey HSD reveals that students in their second level of study differed from the other year groups. They had the lowest mean of 3.97 in comparison to students who were

in their fifth level of study who had a mean of 4.75 which meant they perceived to have developed physical skills and abilities.

Results in Table 2 show that the first ranked connection to soccer was, *soccer is one of the most enjoyable things I do* (attraction), followed by *soccer is very important to me* (attraction), *soccer is the most satisfying thing that I do* (attraction). The least ranked reasons for connection to soccer were identity expression. To test for differences between connection to soccer and participants' level of study ANOVA returned significant differences on the item that *find a lot of my life is organized around soccer (centrality)* $F(4,239) = 2.73 \rho < 0.03$. Post hoc tests of Tukey HSD revealed that students who were in their first level of study and those in their fifth level of study differed from the other groups. The first level students had a mean of 4.10, while fifth level had a mean of 4.75. Regrettably there were no significant differences in connection to soccer based on the birth ranks of the respondents. The study sought to determine whether participation motivation was related to connection of soccer of the university athletes and the correlation between participation motivation and connection to soccer was ($r = 0.62 \rho > 0.00$) indicating that participation motivation correlated positively with connection to soccer.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between participation motives and connection to soccer of university soccer players. Soccer player's motives for participation in sport were mainly for development of physical skills and abilities, keeping in shape physically, interaction and building friendships with others. These motives were mainly intrinsic and they have been reported in previous studies (Gitonga et al., 2003; Gaston-Gayles, 2005; Zaharidis et al., 2006; Waldron and Dieser, 2010; Ipinmoroti, 2011; Kondric et al., 2013; Ajowi et al., 2016). However, the first ranked motive of improving skills and physical abilities adds credence to the observation that universities are well placed to enhance the skills level of universities athletes as there are available resources and facilities (Suminski et al., 2002; Diehl et al., 2018). Secondly, it has been reported that intrinsic motivation has to do with commitment than extrinsic motivation (Garcia-Mas et al., 2010).

It had been hypothesized that participation motives for participation in soccer would differ based on the level of study of the university soccer players. From the nine motives, it is only the motive on developing physical skills and abilities that returned significant differences with students in their second level of study having the lowest scores. This is contrary to Ajowi et al. (2016) assertions that participation motives among soccer female players varied based on their level of study. This is fairly interesting where the student-athletes in the second level

Table 1. Means and standard deviation on motives for participation in soccer (n=242).

One of my reasons for participating in soccer is.....	\bar{x}	SD	Rank
To develop physical skills and abilities	4.25	0.82	1
To keep in shape physically	4.21	0.78	2
To interact with others	4.11	0.76	3
To build friendships with others	4.10	0.78	4
To meet new and different people	4.01	0.90	5
To challenge my abilities	3.90	1.04	6
To renew energy levels	3.81	1.00	7
To enhance my overall mood	3.59	1.00	8
To get away from my everyday life	3.45	0.50	9

Table 2. Means and standard deviations on connection to soccer of university athletes (n=242).

One of my reasons for participating in soccer is.....	\bar{x}	SD	Rank
Soccer is one of the most enjoyable things I do	4.17	4.17	1
Soccer is very important to me	4.09	0.89	2
Soccer is one of most satisfying things I do	3.98	0.94	3
I find a lot of my life is organized around soccer	3.72	1.01	4
Soccer occupies a central role in my life	3.62	1.04	5
To change my preference from soccer to another recreation activity will require major rethinking.	3.72	1.04	6
I enjoy discussing soccer with my friends	3.91	0.93	7
Most of my friends are in some way connected with soccer	3.77	1.03	8
Participating in soccer provides me with an opportunity to be with friends	3.98	0.92	9
When I participate in soccer I can really be myself	3.79	0.97	10
I identify with the people and image associated with soccer	3.79	0.93	11
When I'm participating in soccer I don't have to be concerned with the way I look	3.55	1.15	12
You can tell a lot about a person by seeing them participate in soccer	3.58	1.66	13
Participating in soccer says a lot about me	3.60	1.06	14
When I participate in soccer others see me the way they I want them to see me	3.61	1.10	15

of study perceive themselves to be developing physical skills and abilities. Participation in sport seems to increase with educational attainment both as a result of the longer period of time in which one has familiarized with sports (Cerin and Leslie, 2008). In related findings, Rintaugu et al. (2014) reported that first level students need to be guided, encouraged, supported and insulated from bullying by older students in order for them to continue participating in soccer. On the other hand, student-athletes in their final level of study had higher scores on the motive of developing physical skills and abilities. This could be attributed to the fact that the finalist may have developed a strong soccer identity. Therefore, it is imperative that university soccer administrators need to link up the finalists' players with soccer clubs so that they can continue participating in soccer upon exit from university.

Findings reveal that the soccer players are highly connected to soccer based on the five facets of connection. As seen in Table 2, the soccer player's had

high scores on attraction and centrality. Attraction to soccer is a combination of pleasure and importance attached to participation and perceived importance of their activity to the individual (Kyle et al., 2007). The facet of centrality insinuates that as people get connected to an activity they will organize their lives around soccer (Iwasaki and Havitz, 2004). This was expected as soccer was reported to be very popular in their universities. It appears that the soccer players have already formed strong athletic identities around soccer. This is supported by the fact that they had played competitive soccer for a relatively long period of time. In terms of connection to soccer there were no significant differences based on the level of study with the exception of *I find my life organized around soccer* (centrality). In this scenario, the first years had the lowest scores compared to the other groups. This is not remote as Njororai (2010) opines that the first year in the university is concerned by issues of settling down and experiencing freedom from parents. It is possible that first year students may not overtly commit themselves for

soccer participation as they have to attend to lectures, tutorials and laboratory work.

The findings indicated that there a positive correlation between participation motivation and connection to soccer. This is supported in Wood (2011) findings that students who take part in intramurals provide them with an opportunity to affirm their identity and continue with the social bonds with others.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There are remarkable differences in the motives of participation and connection to soccer among university players. Therefore, coaches and trainers should be keen on the participation motives of the soccer athletes. This will be important, while scheduling training and competition. They need to operate at a higher level of coaching/instruction to ensure that players improve their skill level. Soccer players are highly connected to soccer and it will be important for universities to create conducive environments for soccer participation. University sport administration needs to create room for soccer players' growth and connection to elite soccer. Future studies can compare motivation and connection to soccer based on other demographic variables and the role of coaches and trainers in heightening both motivation and connectedness to soccer.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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