

Influence of sport facilities and professional qualification on sport participation among secondary school students in Region II, The Gambia

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Abstract

This study investigated the influence of sport facilities and professional qualification on sport participation among secondary school students in Region II, The Gambia. It examined the independent and combined influence of these variables on students' participation in sports. The study utilised correlational research design; participants were selected using a multistage cluster sampling technique and total enumeration from 2797 physical education students and 32 physical education teachers respectively, yielding a final sample size of N=370. Data were collected using two research instruments. The findings indicate that both the availability of sporting facilities and physical education teacher professional qualifications significantly influenced students' sport participation. Schools with well-equipped sports infrastructure and qualified teachers showed higher student involvement in sports. It is concluded that sport facilities and professional qualifications positively influence students' participation in sports; a low level of professional qualifications among physical education teachers in Region II, and recommends the introduction of physical education degree programs at the University of The Gambia.

Key Words: Physical education, Professional qualification, School sports, Sports infrastructure, Sports participation

Introduction

The actual inception of sports is uncertain, nonetheless, historical artifacts suggest that gymnastics may have evolved in China as far back as 4000 years ago. Structures celebrating Egypt's pharaohs that included sports like wrestling, javelin, high jump, and swimming also had additional art related to sports. The Ancient Olympics held in Greece between 776 BC to 393 AD, are recognised as the birthplace of official competitive sports (Sports in Society, 2005). The Marathon event marked the beginning of this sporting festival. It has broadened to include a range of additional sports, including discus, spear throwing, horse racing, and boxing. Sports are "any physical event that seeks to utilise, preserve, or enhance one's physique and provide individuals with amusement through recreational or structured participation," as defined by the International Olympic Committee (IOC, 2020).

During the 1959 global conference on "Sport, Work, and Health," the initial concepts regarding the importance of sport in education were introduced by UNESCO (Hüfner, 2010). The Surgeon General asserts that all attempts should be made to persuade authorities of academic institutions to give daily physical education in

every class to improve physical exercise among pupils that can be cherished over a lifetime (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999). Involvement in athletics and physical exercise is a worthwhile human endeavour that provides substantial instant and future health advantages. Saba and Agbeko (2009) define school sport as programs administered in learning institutions which comprise various sporting disciplines. Fredricks et al. (2018) describe school sports as organised sports undertaken in school settings, typically as part of physical education sessions or as an extracurricular activity. They also emphasised that physical education teachers or coaches regularly plan and supervise these activities when students compete against their peers or represent their school in interscholastic championships.

Ancient Greece hosted the Olympic Games, which originated the notion of sports venues. In these games, athletes competed and showcased their physical abilities. The ancient Greeks constructed sports infrastructures, such as stadia and gymnasiums, to facilitate sporting events (Jerram Falkus, 2023). Organised sports emerged in the 19th century, which in turn led to the construction of specialised sporting venues.

These sporting venues not only provide competitors with a location to practice and compete but also allow spectators to watch alongside. It is believed that Crystal Palace, built for the Great Exhibition of Britain in 1851 and later transformed for sporting competitions, was the earliest professional sporting arena (Horne, 2012). The 20th century brought a boom in building sporting infrastructures, particularly with the increase in elite sport. As sports became more popular and lucrative, organisations and sports clubs invested in cutting-edge venues to attract audiences and create income. As such, better stadiums, venues, and training infrastructures were built (Miles, 2014). Sports facilities have been modified since the emergence of television and other devices to handle coverage by the media and transmission. Indoor venues are increasingly being created utilising particular lighting provisions and camera positions to enhance the audience of television viewers. Sports venues typically include media hubs and press booths for commentators and journalists covering the activities (Braun, 2018).

In the early 20th century, school sports facilities were either limited or non-existent. Until the turn of the century, there were almost no physical education curricula in schools (Flint 2015). Schools began to make investments in sports stadiums and fitness centres as they acknowledged the significance of physical activity. Throughout World War II, numerous school athletic fields were transformed into military training sites (Grimsley & Rogers, 2002). Sports infrastructures, such as fitness centres and athletic fields, have been converted into combat readiness grounds (National Park Service, 2020). This temporary modification had a lasting impact on school athletics and amenities. In the 1950s and 1960s, there was a greater emphasis on secondary school sports, which led to the building of improved sports infrastructures. Furthermore, educational institutions across the country began investing in modern sports infrastructure to support their growing sports teams (Gutierrez, 2008). During this period, larger stadiums and indoor sports venues were constructed. Title IX, implemented in 1972, requires federally funded schools to provide equal chances for female athletes. Sports infrastructure for females has grown

significantly as a result of this. Title IX helped ensure that schools provide equal sports facilities for both boys and girls (Locker, 2012). Schools invested in building additional venues, fitness centres, and restrooms to take care of the expanding number of female athletes. Recently, there has been interest in building accessible sports facilities that can be used by differently-abled children. Schools now include stairs, elevators, and flexible equipment to aid students with physical challenges. Schools are also making initiatives to develop inclusive sports infrastructure to promote engagement by children with impairments (Baynton, 2014). These modifications demonstrate an enhanced awareness of the relevance of diversification in school sports.

The establishment of professional standards for physical education teachers did not occur until the beginning of the 19th century. When schools realised how crucial physical education was to students' upbringing, they sought individuals with specific expertise and experience in physical education and sports. Consequently, several qualifications and criteria for teachers in physical education were enacted (Graham et al., 2013). The growth of global connections towards the advancement of physical education positively affected the emergence of formal accreditation of physical education teachers. The institutions, particularly the United States of America Physical Education Association, led the formulation of standards and regulations for the certification of physical education teachers (Dowling, 2004). The evolution in kinesiology corresponded with the advent of professional qualifications for physical education teachers. The science of human motion and exercise, known as kinesiology, comprises physical education. Acknowledging that exercise science has influenced the establishment of qualifications for physical education professionals as an independent discipline (Williams, 2016).

The formalisation of the teaching profession resulted in the establishment of formalised academic programs with certifications in physical education. Tertiary and higher education institutions offered degree programs in physical education, with specific instructions and hands-on practical. These efforts

contributed to harmonising the prerequisites for physical education professionals (Ingle & Robbins, 2015). Recently, the significance of continuous professional growth for the physical education profession has significantly increased. In ensuring physical education professionals stay up-to-date with the latest research findings and formal standards, various institutions provide ongoing training and certificates (Shape America, 2020). Professional qualifications for physical education teachers include a mix of academic background, certification, and continued professional development (Metzler, 2011). Such certifications are the basis for guaranteeing practitioners' acquisition of the expertise and abilities required to design and implement effective physical education curricula. Competing in more than one sport, also known as multiple sports participation, is the act of involvement in numerous sport sequentially or on fixed schedules (Malina, 2010). This includes athletes who participate in physical training, competitions, and multiple sports from many areas (Myer et al., 2015). Involvement in various sporting events can be considered an approach to preventing boredom and injury caused by overuse, given that it enables participants to take part in several physical activities while lowering the danger of exerting too much strain on certain joints and muscle groups (DiFiori et al., 2014). Sports participation can be characterised as athletes' involvement in various sports to ensure the development of a range of skills, physique, and expertise pertinent to career growth (Baker et al., 2017). Jayanthi et al. (2013) also stated that participating in various sports permits students to grasp the particular opportunities and challenges that each sport presents at different stages of their growth as athletes. Practising different sports until adulthood can boost a young athlete's potential to become an exceptional star in a certain sport (Cheatham & Little, 2015). According to Güllich et al. (2013), Participation across numerous sports promotes the growth of adaptable traits and skills, such as versatility, teamwork, discipline, and a broad variety of sport-specific expertise, all of which can improve an individual's overall athletic abilities and lifelong dedication to sports. Sports facilities and equipment have a significant influence on students' participation levels in secondary schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria

(Bolarinwa, 2021). The lack of sports facilities and unsafe environments were major deterrents to physical activity among students in rural Limpopo Province, South Africa (Kubayi, 2021). According to Mvula (2024), the access and condition of sports facilities in Serenje District, Zambia, were found to be inadequate, affecting the delivery of physical education and student engagement in sports. Teachers' professional qualifications and training in physical education play a pivotal role in motivating student participation in sports, as highlighted across multiple African contexts (Adeyeye, Vipene, & Asak, 2013, as cited in Bolarinwa, 2021).

Football and athletics (track and field events) have historically been the two most popular school sports in The Gambia, owing largely to the availability of facilities. (The Gambia Annual Inter-School Sports Championship). School athletics, as part of a school's co-curricular goal, seek to improve students' school experience (Encyclopedia of Education, 2009). In the Gambia, the most popular school sports are football/soccer and athletics are conducted on open sandy grounds with an outline of a football field. Athletic lanes or tracks are marked out on the open-sandy football grounds/fields for athletics while utilising limestone paint, heavy oil, white paint, wood ash, sawdust, etc. These mapped-out tracks/lanes only last for a day or two during track events and require remarking of the lanes/tracks for sustainability. These circumstances for football and as well as athletics went on steadily nationwide. The inauguration of a multifaceted National Independent Stadium in 1984, with a 28,000 capacity (StadiumDB.com). The stadium, which has athletic tracks, Bahama grass playing surface, volleyball and basketball courts, among other things. Provides for the national inter-school football and athletics finals. Games like basketball, handball, tennis, gymnastics, etc., are not very popular in secondary schools in general due to the lack of adequate facilities and equipment to facilitate participation. As a result, these sporting disciplines are not competed for at national inter-school championships in The Gambia. As stated by the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (2013), Students can engage in physical exercise in many ways while attending school; however, three primary

categories can be generally identified: (a) Physical education lessons, (b) sporting events at school, and (c) leisure-time activities.

The study is grounded on the following theories: Urie Bronfenbrenner's Social-Ecological Model of 1979 and Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (SDT) of 1985. Bronfenbrenner's 1979 Social-ecological model provides an extensive foundation for understanding the multiple impacts on human behaviour within a variety of social settings. This framework emphasises the dynamic relationship between humans and their environment, emphasising the importance of considering a range of layers of influence when studying participation in sports (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The social-ecological paradigm is made up of four interwoven systems such as the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem. The microsystem, comprising the immediate environment in which humans interact directly, constitutes the very core of the paradigm. In the context of sporting activities, the concept of "microsystem" means family members, friends, trainers/coaches, and teammates. Positive support from relatives and close friends can significantly influence an individual's motivation and commitment to sports (Holt et al., 2017). The mesosystem represents the relationships and exchanges between different microsystems. In the realm of practising sports, the mesosystem could relate to the collaboration between parents and trainers/coaches or the relationships connecting the home and school settings. Young children's enthusiasm for sports participation can be boosted whenever there exists an established connection involving communal sports clubs and school sporting initiatives (Casey et al., 2020). When these microsystems align and collaborate, they provide an encouraging and reinforcing atmosphere that promotes sports participation in general. When one progresses outwards, the exosystem encompasses settings that impact the interest of learners in sports, regardless of whether they are not explicitly participating. The Exosystem features various communal sporting infrastructures, such as community-based sports teams or associations and venues, as well as policies regulating sports involvement in educational institutions and neighbourhoods. Misener et al. (2015) found that having access to elite sporting facilities and

programs can positively benefit both adult and youth sporting engagement statistics. Government inputs that promote physical activity and sporting events are also likely to increase the rate of sporting participation (Misener et al., 2012). Ultimately, the macrosystem depicts influencing factors that are historically, culturally, and economically grounded in people's views and attitudes regarding practising sports. Cultural norms, societal perceptions, and financial status all have a bearing on individual as well as community sports involvement. Distinct ethnic communities participate in various sporting events at varying rates because distinct societies value certain sports more than others (Renson and Vanreusel, 2004). Financial factors, such as the cost of equipment or payment for registration, can potentially help or inhibit engagement in sports (Eime et al., 2013).

In 1985, Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan promulgated the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which provides a comprehensive framework for understanding why people engage in specific activities, including participation in sports. According to Self Determination Theory, intrinsic motivation is influenced by three basic psychological needs: relatedness, competence, and autonomy (Deci et al., 2000). Students' level of involvement and sustained participation in sporting activities may be significantly impacted by the aforementioned psychological needs. Autonomy is the desire for individuals to feel in charge of and responsible for the things they do. When students believe they have some influence over the activity, they are more inclined to willingly participate in sports and engage in events that align with their passions (Li et al., 2019). People are motivated by a desire to partake in activities that provide them with a sense of control over the choices they make. Competence is a prerequisite for people to believe they are talented and successful in their hobbies. When students feel they are good at a sport, they are more inclined to stick with it and continue playing (Ames et al., 2012). This motivation stems from their drive to gain new skills, attain personal goals, and experience a sense of satisfaction. The concept of "relatedness" refers to the desire for individuals to form close ties and interactions with others. Close relationships with fellow

students, trainers, and teammates increase students' sense of belonging and motivation to participate in sports (Bartholomew et al., 2011). Positive social ties and encouraging peers may boost students' enthusiasm to play sports. The effects of SDT on young people's participation in sports have been the subject of numerous studies. For example, Li et al. (2019) found that students' level of fulfilment with autonomy, competence, and relatedness requirements was positively connected to their continued involvement in sports. Additionally, Ames et al. (2012) proved that when students' psychological needs were met, they expressed greater levels of intrinsic drive to participate in sports.

Based on the aforementioned discourse, it became obvious that The Gambian context has not been sufficiently captured in the existing literature as regards students' participation in secondary school sports with the related factors. Therefore, this study will examine the influence of sport facilities and professional qualification on sports participation among secondary school students in Region II, The Gambia. The research sought to examine the influence of sports participation among secondary school students in Region II, The Gambia. To evaluate the influence of professional qualification on students' sports participation in secondary schools in Region II, The Gambia. Assess the joint influence of sport facilities and professional qualification on sports participation among secondary school students in Region II, Gambia.

Research Questions

1. How do sport facilities influence sport participation among secondary school students in Region II, The Gambia?
2. How does professional qualification influence sport participation among secondary school students in Region II, The Gambia?
3. What influence do sport facilities and professional qualification have on secondary school students' sport participation in Region II, Gambia?

Method

This study implemented correlational research design that investigates the statistical relationship between two or more variables without manipulating them. The population consists of 2,797 physical education teachers and students (32 physical education teachers and 2,765 students). From Krejcie and Morgan's Sampling Formula (1970), the sample size for the study was determined. A multi-stage cluster sampling strategy and total enumeration were used to establish the sample size for the study. In the first stage, five clusters in Region II, The Gambia, were randomly chosen. In the second stage, two public secondary schools were selected at random from each of the 5 clusters, making a total of 10 secondary schools. In the final stage, a simple random selection method was used to determine the number of students in grades 11 and 12 in the selected schools as respondents for the study, while total enumeration was used to select the physical education teachers.

Two instruments, the Teachers Questionnaire (TQ) and the Students Participation in Sports Questionnaire (SPSQ), were used to collect the data. TQ, with 22 items, was administered to physical education teachers, while SPSQ, with 17 items, was administered to students offering physical education. To ensure face and content validity, the researcher created the instruments and reviewed by the supervisor and other experts. The final draft of the instruments was created after correcting the observations in the expert feedback. The test-retest technique was used to establish the reliability of the instruments. Cronbach Alpha was used to test the findings. The results of Cronbach Alpha on TQ and SPSQ were found to be $\alpha = 0.87$ and $\alpha = 0.92$, respectively. Multiple regression was adopted for data analysis.

Results

The physical education teachers' level of education is reflected in the data collected on their educational background, as represented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Physical Education Teachers by Educational Qualification

Teacher Educational_Qualification		
Variables	Frequencies (n).	Percentages (%).
HTC/HND	31	96.9
BSc/BA	1	3.1
Total	32	100.0

Source: Fieldwork 2024.

According to Table 1, only 3.1% of physical education teachers held a bachelor's degree, and none had a master's or doctoral degree. The vast majority (96.9%) held a Higher Teachers' Certificate or a Higher National Diploma. This data reveals a large difference in academic degrees among physical education instructors in Region II, The Gambia, emphasising the critical need for investment in their professional development. Physical education, often

underestimated, plays a critical role in promoting health, teamwork, discipline, and lifelong fitness habits. Teachers with higher qualifications are better equipped to design inclusive, developmentally appropriate, and engaging curricula.

Research Question 1. How do sport facilities influence sport participation among secondary school students in Region II, The Gambia?

Table 2: Influence of sport facilities on students' sporting participation in Region II, The Gambia.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Std. Error	Standardised Coefficients (Beta)	t	Sig.
(Constant)	9.711	1.082	—	8.971	.000
Sports facilities	0.691	0.049	0.591	14.033	.000

Table 2 suggests that sport facilities have a significant positive contribution to secondary school students' participation in sports. This suggests that when a school has adequate sporting facilities, it encourages students to participate in sports. Additionally, the statistical significance of the Beta value ($\beta = 0.591$) as suggested by the probability ($p = 0.00$) for sports facilities shown in Table 2. Thus, the researcher concluded that students' involvement in sports in Region II, The Gambia, has been significantly influenced by the availability of sport facilities. In other words, the study concluded that the presence of sporting facilities could be responsible for roughly a 59.1% rise in student involvement in sports. Furthermore, adequate

sport facilities may serve as a motivational factor, encouraging students to engage in physical activities due to improved access, safety, and enjoyment. Schools with better sports infrastructure reveal institutional commitment to physical education, which can foster a culture of sport participation among students. The availability of sport facilities may reduce barriers for students who might otherwise lack access to organised sports, promoting inclusivity across gender, socioeconomic status, and ability levels.

Research Question 2. How does professional qualification influence sport participation amongst secondary school students in Region II, The Gambia?

Model	Predictor	B	Std. Error	β (Beta)	t	p (Sig.)
1	(Constant)	4.504	0.673	—	6.690	< .001
	Professional qualification	1.155	0.038	0.846	30.408	< .001

Table 3 above indicates a positive relationship between professional qualification and participation in sports. Additionally, Table 3 shows that the probability ($p = 0.00$) for professional qualification demonstrated that the beta ($\beta = 0.846$) is statistically significant. Thus, the researcher concluded that professional qualification significantly influenced secondary school students' participation in sport in Region II, The Gambia.

Research Question 3. What influence do sport facilities and professional qualifications have on secondary school students' sport participation in Region II, Gambia?

Table 4. Joint influence of sport facilities and professional qualification on sport participation among secondary school students' in Region II, The Gambia

- **Regression Summary:**
- **R** = .855
- **R²** = .730
- **Adjusted R²** = .729
- **Standard Error of Estimate** = 1.84619

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Regression	3380.566	2	1690.283	495.913	< .001
Residual	1247.483	315	3.408		
Total	4628.049	317			

Table 4 above shows that the independent or explanatory variables jointly correlated with the dependent variable ($R = 0.855$, $P < .05$). The table further indicates that a linear combination of the independent or explanatory variables explain approximately 73% of the variance in sports participation across senior secondary school students ($\text{Adj. } R^2 = 0.729$). The regression analysis revealed a significant influence of the independent variables on the dependent variable: $F_{(2,315)} = 495.913$, $P < .05$.

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that sports facilities had a significant influence on the participation of students in sports in Region II, The Gambia. Therefore, approximately 59.1% rise in students' sports participation may be linked to the presence of sporting facilities. These findings support Smith et al. (2019), who found that the number and quality of sports

facilities in schools had a significant impact on student engagement in sports. Students' involvement in many kinds of sports was found to be greater in schools with well-maintained sporting facilities. Metzler (2017) states that establishing sporting venues at schools, including exercise facilities, playing fields, basketball courts, and athletic tracks, in addition to the supplies and equipment required to promote many sporting events and physical activities, encourages learners to take part in various sporting categories. According to Hayes et al. (2018), students' physical activity levels are positively connected with their access to sports venues. Students have the chance to use sports venues and apparatus in schools, allowing them to develop their sporting skills. According to Metzler (2017), students can take part in scheduled sporting workouts and friendly matches to improve their fitness levels and skills by routinely accessing sports venues such as gymnasiums and playgrounds. Hall (2008) concluded that maintaining sports venues in schools allows kids to take part in sporting events that can relieve stress, enhance mental state, and promote happiness.

The study also showed that 31 teachers, or 96.87% of the sample size, held a Higher Teacher Certificate or Higher National Diploma in physical education. In contrast, only one teacher, or 3.125% of the sample, had a bachelor's degree. This finding suggested that a higher proportion of respondents lacked a first degree. These results support the findings of Metzler's (2020) study, which found a strong relationship between students' involvement in sports and the professional expertise of physical education teachers. Gao et al. (2018) noted that it could be difficult for teachers with less expertise or training to successfully integrate technology into their instruction to increase student participation and promote the development of sporting skills.

According to research question 3, the study showed that professional qualification and sport facilities had a significant influence on students' sport involvement in Region II, The Gambia. Additionally, it was demonstrated that the independent variables significantly influenced the dependent variable among students in secondary schools. The linear combination of

the explanatory variables explained approximately 73% of the variation in sport participation among students. These results supported the argument made by Alderman et al. (2020) that a teacher with an undergraduate degree in physical education may demonstrate proficiency in a range of sporting activities and have an extensive understanding of relevant sports, which can motivate students to take up sports. According to Metzler (2020), there is a beneficial relationship between students' involvement in sports and the educational background of physical education trainers. Physical education teachers without the appropriate experience and qualifications may find it challenging to assess student achievement and provide personalised observations, which might hinder the progression of their pupils in both sports and physical literacy (Halas, 2018).

Conclusion

Students' participation in school sporting events brings about joy, unity, skill acquisition, and talent discovery, among other things. The presence and utilisation of sporting grounds/facilities together with teacher qualifications play an important role in the attainment of both intramural and extramural sporting objectives of a school. The following conclusions were reached after determining the relationship between the variables and the level to which public senior secondary school student's participation in sports in Region II, The Gambia, was influenced by sport facilities and the professional qualification of physical education teachers: most physical education teachers in Region II, do not acquire their first degree, and sports facilities and professional qualifications are variables that positively influence students' sport involvement in Region II, The Gambia.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are derived from the study's findings:

1. The Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education to introduce a school sports funding policy to cater for the construction of multi-purpose sporting venues and the acquisition of sporting equipment across secondary schools nationwide. This will significantly boost student involvement in

various sporting disciplines such as aquatics, ball games, racket games, and specific track and field events, among others.

2. Principals of public schools need to be educated on the values of sports and physical education as integral components of the school system and should receive the same consideration and opportunities as all other subject disciplines in the curriculum.
3. Through the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS), community sporting venues/infrastructures should be established countrywide. This will certainly provide early and easy access for children to be involved in various sports, thereby increasing their chances of taking part in school sports.
4. To improve the performance and safety of students, physical education teachers and sports coaches should be proactive in keeping an eye on the children before, during, and after they participate in sports to enhance their safety.

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