

STAKEHOLDERS' IDEOLOGICAL PREFERENCE AS SPORTS POLICY-DRIVER TO BIRTH A HIGH-PERFORMANCE SPORTS SYSTEM IN NIGERIA.

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Abstract

A high-performance sports system is a deliberate, calculated, and scientific objective that can only be borne by a well-thought-out sports policy. Its absence captures Nigeria's approach to international sports competition as unarguably unsystematic. Founded on the elements of agency theory, therefore, this study postulates that the inaction of successive Nigerian governments (the principal) to halt and reverse the recurrent "agency loss" of her national sports teams as led by their coaches (the agent) is tantamount to satisfaction or perception of "optimal performance". Therefore, to lay the foundation for an evidence-based policy input, the present study is designed to investigate Stakeholders' ideological preference as sports policy drivers to birth a high-performance sports system in Nigeria. Five hundred and twenty-eight conveniently sampled stakeholders: human kinetics/sports science lecturers, postgraduate students, coaches, sports journalists, and writers as well as sports sponsors/cooperate partners responded to a validated self-developed 10-item questionnaire with a five-options Likert format, $r=.84$. Result of the descriptive statistics of simple frequencies and mean revealed that stakeholders preferred the socialist/welfarist ideology will birth a high-performance sports system in Nigeria. Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, it is therefore recommended among others that a high-performance sports system will require a policy process that is all-inclusive, encompassing, and all-embracing by following procedures that are democratically legitimate, and not just technically competent; all actors should be involved. Sports should be regarded by the government as a public service requiring comprehensive attention.

Keywords: high-performance sport, ideological preference, sports policy, stakeholders, sports system, Nigeria.

Introduction

Sports in the twenty-first century have expanded beyond the traditional functions of physical fitness and military preparation to become major instruments of socio-economic, political, and national development. International sporting competitions such as the Olympic Games and FIFA World Cup have increasingly evolved into high-performance events that require scientific athlete preparation, institutional coordination, and strategic policy frameworks (De Bosscher et al., 2016).

Globally, nations continue to invest heavily in elite sports development systems in pursuit of international success. According to Houlihan and Green (2009), elite sports development has become characterized by increased institutionalization, government intervention, and policy-driven systems aimed at achieving sustained international competitiveness. Countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom, and China have established centralized sports institutes and strategic funding mechanisms to improve international sporting success (Grix & Carmichael, 2012).

Nigeria, despite its large population and abundant sporting talents, has struggled to maintain consistent success in international sports competitions. Since its debut at the Olympic Games in 1952, the country has experienced fluctuating and largely unsustainable performances. Nigeria's best Olympic outing remains the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games, where the country won two gold medals, one silver medal, and three bronze medals. However, subsequent Olympic performances have shown a steady decline (Umeifekwem, 2013).

Studies have attributed the poor performance of Nigerian sports teams to inadequate planning, weak institutional structures, inconsistent policies, and poor athlete development systems

(Oyewumi & Adenusi, 2012). De Bosscher et al. (2016) further argued that there is no universal model for achieving international sporting success, as policy effectiveness is often influenced by social, cultural, and political factors unique to each country.

Sports policy therefore becomes a critical determinant in the development of a high-performance sports system. Public policies shape the distribution of resources, institutional priorities, and developmental opportunities within society (OECD, 2021). In the context of sports, policy direction determines the level of government involvement, funding structures, athlete support systems, and stakeholder participation.

Contemporary policy discussions often revolve around two dominant ideological orientations: neo-liberalism and socialist/welfarist ideology. Neo-liberalism emphasizes market-driven systems, privatization, and reduced government intervention, whereas socialist/welfarist ideology supports extensive government participation in social services, equitable distribution of resources, and public responsibility for citizens' welfare (Rodrik, 2017).

The present study is anchored on agency theory, which explains the relationship between principals (government) and agents (sports administrators and coaches). Agency theory suggests that persistent poor performance without corrective policy intervention may indicate institutional tolerance or acceptance of underperformance. In Nigeria, the continuous poor performance of national sports teams and the absence of systematic reforms raise concerns regarding the ideological orientation of sports policymaking.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria's participation in international sports competitions has continued to produce inconsistent and unsatisfactory results despite the country's enormous human and material resources. Successive governments have introduced sports policies and programmes; however, these efforts have not translated into a sustainable high-performance sports system. Existing approaches to sports administration in Nigeria appear largely reactive, fragmented, and insufficiently institutionalized.

Countries that have achieved sustained success in international sports competitions often operate under policy systems that emphasize strategic planning, stakeholder participation, institutional support, and government commitment. In Nigeria, however, limited empirical attention has been given to stakeholders' ideological preferences regarding the type of sports policy framework capable of producing a sustainable high-performance sports system.

This study therefore investigated stakeholders' ideological preference as a sports policy driver for the development of a high-performance sports system in Nigeria.

Research Question

What ideological preference do stakeholders consider appropriate for the development of a high-performance sports system in Nigeria?

Methods and Materials

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population comprised stakeholders in the Nigerian sports sector, including Human Kinetics/Sports Science lecturers, postgraduate students, coaches, athletes, sports journalists/writers, and sports sponsors/cooperate partners

A total of five hundred and twenty-eight (528) respondents were conveniently sampled across Nigeria. Data were collected using a self-developed questionnaire structured on a five-point Likert scale format of Strongly Agree (SA = 4), Agree (A = 3), Disagree (D = 2), Strongly Disagree (SD = 1), and Undecided (U = 0).

The instrument was validated by experts in sports policy and research methodology. Reliability testing using Cronbach Alpha yielded a coefficient of 0.84, indicating that the instrument was reliable for data collection.

Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency counts, percentages, and mean scores with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). A criterion mean of 2.50 was used as the benchmark for decision-making.

Results

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 528)

Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Stakeholder Group	Lecturers	92	17.4
	Postgraduate Students	93	17.6
	Coaches	96	18.2
	Athletes	100	19.0
	Sponsors/cooperate partners	52	9.9
	Sports Journalist/Writers	95	17.9
Total		528	100

Table 1 presents the demographic distribution of respondents according to stakeholder categories. A total of 528 stakeholders participated in the research across different categories within the sports sector in Nigeria. The distribution of respondents revealed that athletes constituted the highest proportion of the participants with 100 respondents representing 19.0% of the total sample. This was followed by coaches with 96 respondents representing 18.2%.

Sports journalists/writers accounted for 95 respondents representing 17.9%, while postgraduate students comprised 93 respondents representing 17.6% of the sample population. Human Kinetics/Sports Science lecturers made up 92 respondents representing 17.4% of the respondents. Sponsors/corporate partners constituted the least represented group with 52 respondents accounting for 9.9% of the total participants.

The distribution indicates that the study sampled respondents from diverse stakeholder groups within the Nigerian sports sector, thereby ensuring broad representation of opinions regarding ideological preference and the development of a high-performance sports system in Nigeria.

Table 2: Analysis of Stakeholders' Ideological Preference as Sports Policy Driver for the Development of a High-Performance Sports System in Nigeria.

S/N	Question Item	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	U (%)	Mean	Remark
1	Sports should be regarded by the government as a public service requiring comprehensive attention.	362 (68.6)	106 (20.1)	28 (5.3)	7 (1.3)	25 (4.7)	3.4640	Accepted
2	The benefit and praise of medal-winning performance of national sports teams in international sports competitions should accrue to the government.	177 (33.5)	201 (38.1)	55 (10.4)	26 (4.9)	69 (13.1)	2.7405	Accepted

3	The government should be responsible for funding school sports.	311 (58.9)	130 (24.6)	37 (7)		50 (9.5)	3.2348	Accepted
4	Coaches and sports officials should be treated at par with other officials in the civil service.	218 (41.3)	188 (35.8)	45 (8.7)	34 (6.4)	42 (8)	2.9583	Accepted
5	An all-inclusive mindset of government hierarchy will predicate the evolution of sports professionals in all phases of sports policy formulation through its review.	171 (32.4)	174 (33)	61 (11.6)	8 (1.5)	114 (21.6)	2.5303	Accepted
6	Physical exercise promotes the health of the individual.	301 (57)	210 (39.8)	45 (8.5)	23 (4.4)	88 (16.7)	3.1818	Accepted
7	An all-inclusive political philosophy will most likely make the government create an enabling environment for mass exercise and mass sports.	162 (30.7)	210 (39.8)	45 (8.5)	23 (4.4)	88 (18.7)	2.6345	Accepted
8	A holistic educational system that recognises the integral import of sports can be achieved with a regime driven by an all-inclusive mind-set.	164 (31.1)	205 (38.8)	27 (5.1)	8 (1.5)	124 (23.5)	2.5246	Accepted
9	An all-inclusive ideology can turn the performance of Nigerian national sports teams around.	262 (49.6)	172 (32.6)	20 (3.8)	15 (2.8)	59 (11.2)	3.0663	Accepted
10	Nigerians reserve the right to peoples' oriented national sports policy.	225 (42.6)	139 (26.3)	75 (14.2)	31 (5.9)	58 (11)	2.8371	Accepted

Results from the table 2 above revealed that most respondents agreed with the questions raised regarding their opinions on their preference for an ideology on sports policy-driver that they believe can strongly birth a High-Performance sports system in Nigeria. This result is reflected in the fact that all questions raised had an acceptance mean of 2.5 and above.

The respondents believe that sports should be regarded by the government as public service requiring comprehensive attention (Mean= 3.4640), it could be deduced from the table that, on average, the respondents believe that the benefit and praise of medal-winning performance of national sports teams in international sports competition should accrue to government (Mean= 2.7405), the respondents are of the view that government should be responsible for funding school sports (Mean= 3.2348). They agreed that coaches and sports officials should be treated at par with other officials in the civil service (Mean= 2.9583), it was also accepted that an all-inclusive mindset of government hierarchy will predicate the evolution of sports professionals in all phases of sports policy formulation through its review (Mean= 2.5303). Respondents agree with experts in the health profession's submission that physical exercise promotes the health of the individual and as such should be strongly encouraged by the government (Mean= 3.1818), they are also of the opinion that an all-inclusive political philosophy will most likely make government create enabling environment for mass exercise and mass sports (Mean= 2.6345), the respondents believe that a holistic educational system that recognises the integral import of sports can be achieved with a regime driven by an all-inclusive mindset (Mean= 2.5246) and they also believe that an all-inclusive ideology can turn the performance of Nigerian national sports teams around (Mean= 3.0663). On average it could be deduced from the table that the respondents subscribe to the assertion that Nigerians reserve the right to peoples' oriented national sports policy (Mean= 2.8371).

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study revealed that stakeholders strongly support an all-inclusive and welfare-oriented sports policy ideology for the development of a high-performance sports system

in Nigeria. Respondents agreed that sports should be regarded as a public service deserving substantial government attention and investment.

The findings align with De Bosscher et al. (2016), who emphasized that successful elite sports systems are largely driven by strong institutional support and deliberate government involvement. Similarly, Houlihan and Green (2009) observed that countries achieving sustained international sporting success often operate centralized and policy-driven sports development systems.

Respondents also supported government responsibility for funding school sports and creating enabling environments for mass participation in sports. This finding corroborates Grix and Carmichael (2012), who noted that public investment and state coordination remain essential components of successful elite sports systems globally.

The study further revealed stakeholders' preference for inclusive policymaking involving athletes, coaches, sports scientists, and other professionals. This supports Rose-Ackerman's (2013) argument that effective policymaking requires democratic legitimacy, public participation, and institutional accountability.

The implication of these findings is that Nigeria's sports development challenges may not be resolved through fragmented or market-driven approaches alone. Rather, there is a need for comprehensive policy reforms rooted in stakeholder inclusion, institutional support, and long-term strategic planning.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the result of this study is a wake-up call on the part of government to review her actions and inactions by threading the ideological part of socialist/welfarist state that will promote a high-performance sports system in Nigeria. Respondents believe that government participation, institutional support, public funding, and stakeholder involvement are necessary conditions for the development of a sustainable high-performance sports system in Nigeria.

The study also concludes that a scientifically structured and democratically legitimate sports policy process is essential for improving Nigeria's international sporting performance.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, it is therefore recommended that the sports policy process should be systematically and scientifically done. Also, the policy process should involve all segments of the polity involved. The policy process should be all-encompassing and all-embracing by following procedures that are democratically legitimate, and not just technically competent; all actors should be involved. Sports should be regarded by the government as a public service requiring comprehensive attention.

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