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Gender differences on motivation of Kenyan primary school pupils towards participation in school sports

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Abstract

Children participation in school sports is very important because of the benefits they derive from physical activity. However, there are times when there is reduced participation in school sports because of several motives. Some of these reasons have been cited as gender based. The current study on Gender differences on motivation of pupils towards participation in Kenyan school sports sought to find out if there are any gender based reasons for participation in school sports. The study based on competence motivation theory involved a total of 180 boys and girls with the mean age for boys at 12.9 years and 13 years for girls. The study sought to establish children responses on three main issues namely reasons for participating in school sports, improvement of sports skills and setbacks to participating in school sports. Gender differences were established on a limited number of items on setbacks to participating in school sports. Furthermore, majority of the respondents showed need for skill improvement with physiological factors being the greatest impediment to participation in sports. The study recommended that emphasis be laid on attracting more children to sports through increased facilitation of physical education and sports in schools and community centers at an early age so as to gain from the benefits of participation in sports. Further studies need also to be carried out on drop out from sports in order to find ways of reducing this trend.

Key Words: Competence, Motivation, School Sports, Gender.

Introduction

One of the prominent issues within children sports is motivation towards participation. Several scholars (Harter, 1978; Klint & Weiss, 1986; Weinberg & Gould, 2015) have tried to explain this phenomenon through various motivational theories. The initial studies on children participation in sports was initiated by Hull in 1930s where he emphasized on reducing uncomfortable drive or tension states with emphasis on biological motives. This perception was later conceived by White (1952) with a prominence on competence. White brought up the concept of effectance motivation which was described as a tendency to explore and influence the environment with personal competence as the motivational drive.

Children participation in school sports is very significant in Kenya because of prevalence of lifestyle diseases at an early age (Kamau, Mwangi, Njororai & Wamukoya, 2011). This new trend where a large number of children are exposed to obesity and other hypokinetic conditions is an indication that children are not engaged in physical

activity and sports as in earlier times. Kenyan school curriculum has physical education as one of the teaching subjects on the timetable, while sport is considered as a co curricular activity within the school sports (KIE, 2015). Unfortunately, emphasis in school learning in Kenya has been placed on examinable subjects where languages, mathematics, humanities and sciences are given prominence. The idea that sports is very valuable at school level because of its importance on growth and development of children on cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of learning (Rintaungu, 1998) has been relegated by majority of school managers in Kenya (Akiiki, 2009)

Several theories have tried to explain children participation in sports through theories of achievement motivation. Among these include competence motivation theory (Harter, 1978; Weiss & Chaumeton, 1992; Weiss & Ambrose, 2008), attribution theory (Heider, 1958; Weiner, 1985, 1986), need achievement theory (Atkinson, 1974; McCleland, 1961) and achievement goal theory (Duda & Hall, 2001; Dweck, 1986, Maehr & Nicholls, 1984; Nicholls, 1984; Roberts, 1993). The major factors that are consistence in these theories are reasons why people engage in sports. They include improving skills, having fun, being with friends, experiencing thrills and excitement, achieving success and developing fitness (Weinberg & Gould, 2015). Competence motivation theory explains well reasons for children participation in sports. This is because its development was children based unlike the other achievement theories.

According to the Oxford dictionary of Sports Science and Medicine (2015), competence motivation theory is a theory of motivation based on a person's feelings of personal competence. According to this theory, competence motivation increases when a person successfully masters a task (Weinberg & Gould, 2015). This encourages the person to master more tasks. Harter (1978) conceptualized competence motivation theory on the tenets that mastery of skills leads to ones desire to engage more in the skill being executed. Harter developed competence motivation theory from the foundations of White (1952) where it was argued that people desire to have a lasting effect upon the environment, especially through competency. According to White (1959), this competency is motivated by self-rewarding behaviors induced by a desire for challenge, curiosity, mastery and playfulness. Harter (1978) elaborated on White's research by including the development of children. Harter specifically combined internalization of self-regulated skills like self-judgment, self-reinforcement, self-set mastery goals and the impact of emotions and psychology on children's socialization history.

Harter also introduced the element of feedback as reinforcement in competence motivation theory among children. This is where appropriate praise and feedback by significant others especially parents and guardians promotes a sense of freedom. Consequently, feedback leads to increase of self defined goals and exclusion from adult intervention. Children driven by competence motivation obtain means of monitoring their own mastery, have the ability to judge personal competency using their own internal criteria and gain knowledge of how to buttress successful attempts.

Studies on competence motivation (Harter, 1981; 1982; Weiss & Ambrose, 2008) showed that reinforcement serves several purposes. Initially, it provides incentive behavior to children leading to excitement in anticipation of reward. Additionally, it promotes affectionate between the child and significant others leading to feelings of satisfaction as a sense of reward. Feedback also serves as an element of information which determines self mastery of skills and how to gauge appropriate bahaviour and outcome. Feedback therefore is a good measure of providing evaluation on the performance of tasks. As children become older, an element of motivational orientation sets in. This is where they determine on their own how they are performing and evaluate self (Deci and Ryan, 1988). Internal sources of assessment are utilized to achieve self determined goals and interests. This is done together with elements of external sources of assessment. At times, children fail to internalize motivation due to non approval of their mastery skills by significant others leading to decline in perceived competence. This normally happens when parents and guardians fail to reinforce improvement and mastery of skills leading to a sense of incompetency and resentment. As a result, instead of the progress being positive, it leads to self punishment system. If this situation occurs early in a child's development like years preceding adolescent, it leads to dependence on external rewards system into adolescent years (Weinberg & Gould, 2015).

The foregoing explanation leads to a more critical question where sports practitioners need to know whether achievement motivation is learned. According to Scanlan (1988), achievement motivation and competiveness are believed to develop in three stages namely autonomous competence stage – where children focus on mastering their environment and self testing, social comparison stage which focus on directly comparing performance with that of others and finally integrated stage – where both social comparison and autonomous achievement strategies are applied. Weinberg and Gould (2015) explain further that these stages are sequential, thus one stage leads to another. However, not everyone

makes it to the final stage, and the age at which people reach each stage varies.

In a similar endavour, Harter devised a quantitative scale to assess the component measures across three specific domains namely cognitive competence, social or interpersonal competence and physical competence - primarily in athletic skill development and one general domain – feelings of worth or esteem independent of any skill. As a tool for measure, Harter (1982) came up with Perceived Competence Scale based on physical, social and cognitive domains. This opened up the study of motivation among children in sports leading to numerous studies based primarily on competence motivation theory.

Klint and Weiss (2014) used Harters competence motivation theory in studying Perceived Competence and Motives for Participating in Sports. The purpose of the study was to test the notions based on Harter's (1978, 1981) competence motivation theory, that perceptions of competence are related to particular motives children have for sport participation. Sixty-seven children involved in youth gymnastic programs were administered the physical, social, and cognitive subscales of Harter's (1982) Perceived Competence Scale and a motives for gymnastic participation questionnaire. Discriminant function analyses revealed support for competence motivation theory as a viable explanation for the relationship between competence perceptions and motives for participation in sport. Specifically, children high in perceived physical competence were more motivated by skill development reasons, and those high in perceived social competence were more motivated by the affiliation aspects of sport when compared to their low perceived competence counterparts. The study by Klint and Weiss (2014) therefore support the basis of competence motivation theory as conceptualized by Harter (1981).

Gillet and Rosnet (2014) studied basic need satisfaction and motivation in sport among French University athletes. Two hundred and eighty-eight athletes (83 females and 205 males; *M* age = 19.4 years, *SD* = 1.47) participated in this study. Participants were enrolled at two French universities. One hundred and fifty students were involved in team sports and 138 in individual sports. The sample was made up of 232 competitive athletes, including 52 females and 180 males, and 56 recreational athletes, including 31 females and 25 males. Sixty-six competitive athletes were ranked at the district level, 114 were at the regional level, and 52 were at the national level. Athletes at district level trained on average 4.22 hours (*SD* = 1.72) per week, athletes at regional level trained on average 5.35 hours (*SD* = 2.54) per week, and athletes at national level trained on average 8.53 hours (*SD* = 4.53) per week. The purpose of the study was to examine the relationships between competitive and recreational sport structures, gender, individual and team sports, level of competition, sport motivation and athletes' perceptions of autonomy, competence and relatedness in order to enhance knowledge of the motivational processes in sport. Respondents completed the French version of the Sport Motivation Scale and the Basic Psychological Needs in Sport Scale. Results revealed that female athletes felt less competent and demonstrated less external regulation than males, while exhibiting more intrinsic motivation. In addition, the study showed that recreational athletes felt more autonomous and had fewer scores on external regulation than competitive athletes. Differences in the levels of competition also emerged. Specifically, athletes at the district level displayed less intrinsic motivation and less external regulation than athletes at the regional level. District level athletes also exhibited less intrinsic motivation, less introjected regulation, and less external regulation than national level athletes. The study concluded that there is need to consider motivational differences in the sport domain as a function of sport structures, gender, nature of sport activities, and level of competition. The present study sought to establish gender differences among school children in order to ascertain whether there is a significant difference at this level. Furthermore, it inquired about salient issues determining participation in school sports.

Wong and Bridges (1995) carried out a study on feedback and reinforcement from others and various motivational orientations. The study comprised of 108 youth soccer players and their coaches, where perceived competence, perceived control, trait anxiety and motivation and other coaching behaviours were examined. The study found that trait anxiety and coaching behaviours predicted perceived competence and control, which in turn were related to the players' motivation levels. The study concluded that young athletes' perceptions of competence and control are critical determinants of whether they will strive towards achievement. This finding is supported by Weinberg and Gould (2015) where they recommended that perceived competence and control should be primary goals of professionals in exercise and sports science.

Two other studies examined feedback and competence motivation at two different levels, children sports (Gershgoren , Tenenbaum, Gerhgoren and Eklund, 2011) and the Olympics (Pensgaard and Roberts, 2000). Gershgoren *et al*, (2011) studied youth soccer players and their parents randomly assigned to different parental feedback conditions where the effects of parental feedback on players' goal orientations and

performance on a penalty kick task was observed. Findings revealed that players who received task oriented feedback from their parents perceived the motivational climate to be more mastery oriented and became more task oriented and less ego oriented while performing. In a related study, Pensgaard and Roberts (2000) examined the relationship between motivational climate and stress in Olympic soccer players and found that a perception of a mastery climate was related to reduced stress. Weinberg and Gould (2015) made an observation from these two studies and noted that motivational climate created by parents, teachers and coaches influences achievement motivation and other important psychological states.

Materials and Methods

The above situation led to a descriptive survey study on gender differences on motivation of pupils towards participation in Kenyan school sports. Children between ages 12 and 14 years participated in the study where their views on participation on school sports were sought. Sampling of the respondents was done randomly from one district in Kakamega County Kenya to obtain schools and pupils for the study. The ages under study were purposely chosen because of the developmental stage of these pupils. Furthermore, pupils at this age have mastered the basics of language and could easily respond to questionnaires which were instruments for the study. A researcher designed questionnaire with a three point Likert scale sought to establish significant issues towards participation in sports. They included reasons for participating in school sports, improvement of sports skills and setbacks to participating in school sports.

Data collected from the respondent were analyzed using descriptive statistics of percentages and means. Furthermore, gender differences were observed by use of chi square test of independence with 0.05 level of significance, degree of freedom at 2 and critical value of 5.99. A total of 180 pupils from fifteen schools participated in the study. Among these were 90 girls and a similar number of boys. The mean age for boys was 12.9 years while the girls mean was 13 years.

Results

The first section of the questionnaire sought to establish reasons for pupils' participation in school sports. Pupils responded to six questions designed by the researchers that sought their views on this issue. The stem of the question was "why I participate in school sports". Details of the questions and responses are as follows;

Table 1: Pupils response on reasons for participating in school sports.

	Reasons for Participating in school sports	Respondents	Agree %	Not Sure %	Disagree %	Mean	Chi Square
1.	Play with friends	Boys	75.6	14.4	10.0	2.64	0.360
		Girls	75.8	22.2	22.2		
2.	Benefit from teachers instructions	Boys	77.8	22.2	10.0	2.68	3.394
		Girls	73.3	21.1	5.6		
3.	Competition	Boys	74.4	13.3	22.2	2.64	4.090
		Girls	73.3	20.0	5.6		
4.	Improve on talent	Boys	78.9	16.7	4.4	2.74	0.753
		Girls	77.8	20.0	2.2		
5.	Career in sports	Boys	63.3	16.7	6.2	2.54	0.440
		Girls	60.0	33.3	7.8		
6.	Enjoy and have fun	Boys	73.3	13.3	13.3	2.62	0.104
		Girls	75.6	13.3	11.1		

N=180, df =2, p=0.05,CV=5.99,

The chi-square values obtained showed that pupils' responses did not differ according to gender. Study findings showed that 78.3% of pupils suggested that improvement on talent is a major reason for participating in sports. The high percentage (78.3%) might be because mastery of skill is a major component of children to participation in sports. The need to improve on sport skills was supported by pupils' response on the other factors that contribute to mastery of skills. They include; benefit from teachers' instruction, play with friends and enjoy and have fun. Making a career in sports ranked low (61.7%) compared to the other factors.

The role played by significant others was very critical in this study, considering the responses on benefit from teachers' instruction (75.6%) and responses on influence from friends and peers during competitions and play time (75.6%). In an

earlier study, Horn (1985) found that athletes who received higher frequencies of criticism in responses to performance errors had higher perception of competence in relation to their counterparts. In the current study, a high percentage (75.6%) of pupils agreed that they benefit from teachers' instructions. This may be because they accept criticism from their teachers about their performance in the process of instruction. As in Horn's (1985) study, the current study assumes that corrections and positive criticisms from teachers enhance performance in the activities being offered. The study by Gershgoren *et al*, (2011) and Pensgaard and Roberts (2000) where positive feedback led to task orientation and increased performance were observed. Furthermore, Gillet and Rosnet (2014), Wong and Bridges (1995) and Klint and Weiss (2014) found that positive feedback leads to improved performance.

In an earlier study, White (1959) stated that if mastery attempts result in efficacy, feelings of inherent pleasure are experienced and in turn maintain or enhance one's mastery of skills. In the current study, children accepted that they participate in sports to play with friends, enjoy and have fun. The concept of pleasure that leads to mastery of skills is attained. Therefore, according to theoretical predictions, children's desire to improve on talent and master sports skills may be achieved, and will serve to increase participation. These are the same ideals that were propagated by Harter (1987) in the initial stages of competence motivation theory.

The second part of the study sought to establish reasons for pupils' improvement on sport skills. They responded to six different questions related to this issue. The responses were as shown on Table 2.

Table 2: Pupils response on improvement of sports skills

	Improvement of sports skills	Respondents	Agree %	Not Sure %	Disagree %	Mean	Chi Square
1.	Participate in sports at schools	Boys	70.0	13.3	16.9	2.5	2.40
		Girls	63.3	18.9	17.8		
2.	Try to improve my sports skills	Boys	75.6	15.6	8.9	2.57	3.338
		Girls	65.6	16.7	17.8		
3.	Being part of the school team	Boys	76.7	15.6	7.8	2.67	0.648
		Girls	73.3	20.0	6.7		
4.	I train for selection in the school team	Boys	85.6	16.7	13.3	2.48	1.948
		Girls	77.8	24.4	17.8		
5.	If I am left out of the school team, I will drop from school sports	Boys	34.4	35.5	30.0	2.13	2.246
		Girls	44.4	33.3	22.2		
6.	I aim to be selected in the school team when I join secondary school	Boys	87.8	11.1	1.1	2.78	6.070*
		Girls	73.3	13.3	3.3		

N=180, df =2, p=0.05,CV=5.99, * - Significant

Out of six items on interest in sport, one item dealing with selection in the school team at secondary school was significant (Chi-square value of 6.090). This is partly because of the higher percentage of boys who agreed to this item (87.8%) than the girls (73.3%). Boys at this age are greatly influenced by their peers and will want to show off by engaging in sport, while seeking for identification (Bucher, 1982), an issue related to achievement and competitiveness. This is also evident in the finding of Scanlan (1988); Veroff (1969) and later by Weinberg and Gould (2015) where achievement motivation and competitiveness are explained in relation to developmental stages. The studies showed that the three stages that influence achievement motivation and competitiveness are autonomous competence stage (around age 4), social comparison stage (around age 5 and above) and integrated stage where the two initial stages interact. From the findings of the present study, it can be observed that the age of the participants (adolescents) is where social comparison and integrated stage are prominent. Therefore, pupils' response on skill improvement can be explained on the basis of developmental stage in achievement motivation and competitiveness.

The study findings also showed that many pupils participate in sports at school (66.7%). The percentage of pupils who aspired to make up the school team was very high (75.0%). However, responses suggested that more than a third of the pupils (39.5%) indicated that they might withdraw from school sports when dropped from school team. It can be assumed that the primary purpose in children`s sports is not making up the school team, but participating in sporting activities. These findings support earlier studies by Bucher (1982)

and Hottinger (1992) where it was established that children participate in sports, despite winning or losing.

Ewing (1981) in his Achievement Orientation Questionnaire identified participation as a primary objective in children`s sports. Making up the school team may be a good reason for children to participate in school sports, not with the idea of winning, but to be involved in the activities being offered. Petlichkoff (1988) in a study on persistence in sports activities found that "survivors" who had minimal playing time had higher levels of satisfaction than "dropouts". It may be assumed that "survivors", because they had minimal playing time, felt more satisfied than did "dropouts". Getting an opportunity to play is very important in children`s sports even if the time allocated is minimal.

Earlier writings of achievement motivation can also help explain the issue of improvement of sports skills. Achievement motivation has been explained as a state that is a person's efforts to master a task, achieve excellence, overcome obstacles, perform better than others and take pride in exercising talent (Murray, 1939). Gill (2000) refers to motivation as a person's orientation to strive for task success, persist in the face of failure and have pride in accomplishments. This is what trainers, coaches and teachers desire among students and athletes because it leads to success and achievement. Achievement motivation is therefore what coaches and trainers refer to as competitiveness (Weinberg and Gould, 2015). In such a scenario, comparison and evaluation is necessary to determine success. Martens (1976) referred to these as a disposition to strive for satisfaction when making comparison with set standards in the presence of evaluative others. In the current study, it is observed where responses on skill improvement were high on participation, being in the school team, training and desire to be selected in the secondary school team. Therefore, it is concluded that participation and competition are significant parameters on skill improvement in children sports.

The third aspect of the study was to find out setbacks to participating in sports. Pupils responded to eleven questions related to this issue. Table 3 shows details of these findings.

Table 3: Pupils response on setbacks to participating in school sports

	Setbacks to participating in school sports	Respondents	Agree %	Not Sure %	Disagree %	Mean	Chi Square
1.	Never win	Boys	34.4	35.6	30.0	1.96	7.852*
		Girls	34.4	18.9	46.7		
2.	Have no partner	Boys	16.7	36.7	46.7	1.76	4.284
		Girls	27.8	25.6	46.7		
3.	Teacher gives much practice	Boys	26.7	23.3	50.0	1.83	1.748
		Girls	35.6	18.9	45.6		
4.	Feel shy	Boys	35.6	23.3	41.1	1.97	0.964
		Girls	42.2	15.6	42.2		
5.	Get tired	Boys	61.1	21.1	25.6	2.42	7.012*
		Girls	66.7	7.8	25.6		
6.	Time wasting	Boys	44.4	24.4	31.1	2.00	2.326
		Girls	45.6	14.4	40.0		
7.	Injuries	Boys	68.9	14.4	16.7	2.39	4.276
		Girls	55.6	13.3	28.9		
8.	Feel hungry	Boys	40.0	22.2	37.8	2.14	4.566
		Girls	55.6	14.4	30.0		
9.	Fighting on play field	Boys	27.8	22.2	50.0	1.82	0.452
		Girls	32.2	21.1	46.7		
10.	Team captain not co operative	Boys	31.1	34.4	34.4	1.97	0.652
		Girls	34.4	28.9	36.7		
11.	Teacher too strict	Boys	34.4	25.6	40.0	1.94	0.120
		Girls	35.6	23.3	41.1		

N=180, df =2, p=0.05,CV=5.99, * - Significant

The chi-square values obtained show that pupils' responses were varied by gender on two items, that is, "never win" and "get tired". However, the percentage of pupils who agreed on the two items were almost similar, (34.4%) for both boys and girls on "Never win" and 61.1% for boys, 66.7% for girls on "Get tired". Responses on both items were more varied on those who tallied "Not sure" and "Disagree". Many girls than boys indicated that they were either not sure or disagreed on these two items. Many studies have shown that girls

usually participate in sports for other reasons but not mainly winning (Bucher, 1982). Also, studies have shown that getting tired while participating in sports is a reason raised mainly by boys than girls for attrition from sports (Bucher, 1982; Orlick, 1974). Therefore, there was a significant difference between boys and girls regarding the extent of participation in organized sports on failure to win and exhaustion.

Factors that hinder pupils` participation in sports had mixed responses. The study by Orlick (1974) provides a guide to understand this, where it was noted that; majority of children who indicated that they would not continue their participation the following year cited negative experiences such as lack of playing time, the competitive emphasis of the programme, and dislike for the coach. Also, according to Orlick (1974), children reported lack of playing time and lack of successful experiences or conflict of interest such as other extra-curricular activities or responsibility with work as other factors that lead to withdrawal from sports. In the current study, factors that clearly affect participation in sports include injuries sustained during play (62.2%) and getting tired after play (63.9%). Another factor on which many pupils agreed to was feeling hungry (47.7%). Physiological reasons seem to be key factors as hindrance to pupils' participation in sports.

Two factors which had a low percentage were "Never win" (34.4%) and "having no partner" (22.2%). However, sports being viewed as a time-wasting activity slightly showed significance with a high percentage (45.0%). "The teacher giving much practice" was also not rated highly (31.1%), same to feeling shy (38.9%), fighting (30.0%), captain being harsh (32.8%) and the teacher being very strict (35.0%). Factors that do not directly affect children's improvement on sports skills did not feature as prominent, while those directly linked to performance (injuries and get tired) had higher percentage of pupils agreeing that they affect their participation in sports. Results suggest that children are interested on factors that affect their performance in sports skills. Other factors that are secondary to performance were viewed as less important. It may be assumed that children perceived competence is based on factors that will make them perform better in sports through participation.

The study on gender differences on motivation of pupils towards participation in Kenyan school sports showed that there is variance between boys and girls on a few issues among children of ages under study. The study found no gender differences on factors under participating in school sports. The second issue under study was improvement of sports skills where gender differences were observed on selection for school team when the pupils join secondary schools. The third factor under study was setbacks to participating in school sports where gender differences were observed on exhaustion and not winning. Generally, it may be observed that gender differences between boys and girls were minimal. Probably, the physiological differences between boys and girls are not very prominent at this age thus the similarity between the two groups under study. The most prominent finding of the study was desire to improve on sports skills. This adds credence to the study predictions where ideals of competence motivation were supported. Furthermore, the study shows that both boys and girls can be handled in a similar way during physical education and sports activities.

The present study and other previous research on children motivation to sports helps to understand effect of competence on participation in sports. The studies show that competence and participation in sports are correlated. Furthermore, this leads to intrinsic motivation among children in sports. Despite all these positive findings among children on participation in sports, the most worrying factor is children dropping out of sports. It is necessary that emphasis be laid on attracting more children to sports at an early age so as to gain from the benefits of participation in sports. This can be done through increased facilitation of physical education and sports in schools and community centers. Further studies need also to be carried out on drop out from sports in order to find ways of reducing this trend.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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