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EDITORIAL

Journal of Science Education and Research (JSER) is a peer-reviewed published Bimonthly. It aimed at advancing knowledge and professionalism in all aspects of educational research, including but not limited to innovations in science education, educational technology, guidance and counselling psychology, childhood studies and early years, curriculum studies, evaluation, vocational training, planning, policy, pedagogy, human kinetics, health education and so on. JSER publish different types of research outputs including monographs, field articles, brief notes, comments on published articles and book reviews.

We are grateful to the contributors and hope that our readers will enjoy reading these contributions.

Prof. Patrick C. Igbojinwaekwu
Editor-in-Chief

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**GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION AS COMPONENT OF
HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AMONG ATHLETES IN SPORTS COMMISSION,
CALABAR**

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Abstract

The study employed survey research design. The study was carried out in Cross River Sports Commission, Calabar. The purpose of this study was to examine gender equality and social inclusion, as component of human development among athletes of Cross River State Sports Commission Calabar, Nigeria. To achieve the purpose of the study, two null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. Survey research design was considered most suitable for the study. The population of the study comprised all athletes of the Cross River State Sports Commission. A sample size of one hundred and four (104) respondents was used for the study using census sampling approach. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire. The instrument was validated by relevant experts. Cronbach alpha method was employed to establish the reliability and the coefficient obtained is .82 which confirmed that the instrument is reliable in achieving the objective of the study. Data gathered was analysed using simple linear regression statistical tool. The result revealed that there was a significant influence of gender equality and social inclusion on human development among athletes of Cross River State Sports Commission, Calabar. Based on the findings, it was partly recommended that relevant sports administrators should ensure that both male and female athletes are given equal access to fully develop their talents without any form of gender bias in order to promote the development of sports in the state.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Social inclusion, Human Development

Introduction

Humans are the most important resource for social and economic development of any nation, state or community. It is often asserted that no nation can grow above the quality of its manpower. This emphasizes the relevance of a trained and skilled human resource in an organization, community, state or country at large. The development of a nation's human resources can be achieved through training and provision of a conducive environment that is free of gender discrimination and barriers. In the area of sports, the development of skilled athletes can be achieved through the provision of equitable opportunities and incentives for both male and female athletes. It will be difficult to develop sports holistically without adequate integration of both males and females in the planning and implementation of sports development programmes at various levels (Odok, Osaji, Dan, Ahueansebhor, & Odey, 2023).

Gender equality and social inclusion are indispensable components of human development that are essential for creation of a free and equitable society. Despite progress, gender disparities and social exclusion persist, hindering economic growth, social cohesion and human well-being (Bhattachanya, 2020; Anam, & Ahueansebhor, 2017a). Sen (2019) opined that gender equality is a fundamental human right, yet gender – based dissemination and violence remain pervasive, perpetuating unequal access to education, healthcare, economic opportunities and political representation in various aspects in life, mostly among athletes and workers in sports commission. The author further stated that, women and girls bear the brunt of those disparities, facing structural and systemic barriers that limit their potential and agency.

Social inclusion is a critical dimension of human development encompassing the ability of individuals and groups to participate fully in society, exercising their rights and accessing resources and opportunities. Marginalized communities, including racial and ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, often face intersecting forms of discrimination, exacerbating their exclusion and vulnerability even amongst athletes and sports workers/staff (Silver, 2018). Kabeer (2020) asserted that equality is a core principle of human development, requiring the redistribution of resources, opportunities, and privileges to address historical and systemic inequalities. Equality promotes fairness, justice and equal access, enabling individuals and communities to reach their full potential.

According to the World Bank (2019), gender equality is a critical component of economic development, and closing gender gaps can lead to significant economic growth. The World Health Organization (2019) also stressed that gender equality is essential to achieving health equality and improving health outcomes on athletes, sports staff and workers in various aspect of life. The organization further stated that social inclusion is a vital aspect of human development and that marginalization can have severe consequences for individuals, communities and various working environments including the sporting environment such as sports commission.

The problem of this study is that the development of athletes for various sports within the Cross River State Sports Commission has not lived up to the expectation of various stakeholders in sports. There seem to be more attention paid to the development of able-bodied male athletes as compared to female and disabled athletes. This approach tends to limit the opportunities provided for athletes to develop their talents into useful skills. It is pertinent to note that the development of athletes has not been effective as the scope of such development programs is limited and does not include all categories of athletes (Akah, Emeribe, & Ahueansebhor, 2013; Anam & Ahueansebhor, 2017). The call for those in authority to expand the program and make it more comprehensive has not been achieved and this has left many talented athletes out in the dark. The need for a review in this program has become imminent and this motivated the researchers to investigate gender equality and social inclusion as component of human development among athletes in sports commission, Calabar, Cross River State - Nigeria

The gender pay gap persists with women earning approximately 60% of what men earn globally (Mckinsen, 2020). The author further stated that women are underrepresented in leadership positions, holding only 26% of executive and senior - level positions in the workforce. Gender – based violence affects 1 in 3 women worldwide with severe physical and mental health consequences (WHO, 2019). Gender equality in sports has become critical topics of discussion in recent years. The history of sports has often been characterized by gender disparities and social inclusion, which have hindered the full participation of various groups, including women, ethnic minorities and individuals with some form of disabilities (Ahueansebhor, Emeribe & Odok, 2023).

According to Hargreaves (2018), the evolution of societal norms and the push for inclusivity have led to significant changes yet many challenges remain. Historically, sport has been a male dominated field, with women and marginalized groups facing significant barriers to participation looking messered. Musto, (2015), further stressed

that in the 19th and early 20th centuries, societal norms dictated that sports were inappropriate for women, limiting their involvement to less physically demanding activities. This exclusion was rooted in gender stereotypes. That portrayed women as weaker and less capable than men. Additionally, racial segregation and discrimination were prevalent in sports. Particularly in United States, where African Americans were often excluded from mainstream sporting events (Wilggins, 2019).

Carpenter and Acostar (2015) revealed that the feminist movements of the 20th century played a crucial role in challenging gender norms and advocating for women right in various spheres, including sports. Title IX of Education Amendments of 1972 was a landmark U.S. Federal Law that prohibited gender discrimination in educational programs, including athletics. This legislation significantly increased opportunities for women and girls in sports leading to greater participation and success at all levels. In recent decades, international organizations such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC) have implemented policies to promote gender equality. The inclusion of more women's events in the Olympic games and the introduction of gender quotas for leadership positions within sporting organizations are examples of these efforts (IOC, 2018). Anamand Ahueansebhor (2017), observed that gender inequality is another critical factor contributing to social exclusion, women and gender minorities often face discrimination and unequal treatment in the work place, education, sports and broader society.

Coalter (2017) viewed social inclusion in sport to extend beyond gender equality to encompass the participation of marginalized groups such as ethnic minorities, individuals with disabilities and athletes in different sports activities. The concept of social inclusion involves creating an environment where everyone, regardless of their background or identity has equal access to opportunities and resources in sports. The Paralympic Games have provided a platform for disabled athletes to compete at the highest level, challenging stereotypes and raising awareness about disability issues (Brittarson, 2016). Similarly, initiatives aimed at increasing the participation of ethnic minorities and individuals in sports have gained momentum, although these groups continue to face unique challenges such as discrimination and lack of representation (Ahueansebhor, Ogabor & Apie, 2015). Despite significant progress, numerous challenges remain in achieving true gender equality in sport. Structural inequality, cultural barriers, and discrimination continue to impede the full participation of women and marginalized groups. Efforts to address these issues require comprehensive

strategies that include policy changes, education, and grass root initiative (Cumingham, 2022).

According to Carrington (2020), future directions in promoting gender equality and social inclusion in sport should focus on increasing visibility and representation, providing equitable resources and support, and fostering inclusive environments. He also stressed that collaboration among governments, sporting organizations, and communities is essential to drive meaningful change and ensure that sport becomes a platform. For empowerment and inclusion for all. Stiglitz (2018) submitted that the journey toward social inclusion in sport is ongoing and multifaceted. Understanding the historical context and the progress made thus far provides a foundation for addressing the remaining challenges, by continuing to advocate for inclusive practices and policies, society can move closer to a future where everyone has the opportunity to participate and thrive in the world of sports.

Statement of the Problem

In Nigeria, efforts to make sports more inclusive, especially for marginalized groups like persons with disabilities, women, females and low-income communities, are often not based on real data. Many programs are created without first studying who exactly is being left out, why they are excluded, or what their real needs are, as a result, many well meaning projects failed to reach the right people or solve the real problems. This leads to wasted resources and missed opportunities to truly grow sports participation across all groups in Nigeria, mostly affected are the women and the individuals living with disabilities. There is also a decline in participation rate in sports amongst women because most times they are relegated to the background due to their being looked at as weaker sex and not capable of getting involved in vigorous/rigorous activities as sports. Women participation in sports is often overlooked or discouraged due to cultural norms in some instances. Most sports historically celebrate male strength and warrior virtues, leaving little room for female athletes, and this is the gap the study aims to bridge.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to examine the gender equality and social inclusion as component of human development among athletes and staff of Sports Commission Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically the study aimed to examine how:

1. gender equality influence human development among athletes of Sports Commission, Calabar, Cross River State.
2. social inclusion influence human development among athletes of Sports Commission, Calabar, Cross River State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study;

1. How does gender equality influence on human development among athletes of Sports Commission, Calabar, Cross River State?
2. How does social inclusion influence on human development among athletes in Sports commission, Calabar, Cross River State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study;

1. There is no significant influence of gender equality on human development among athletes of Sports Commission, Calabar, Cross River State
2. Social inclusion does not significantly influence human development among athletes of Sports Commission, Calabar, Cross River State

Method

The study employed survey research design. The study was carried out in Cross River Sports Commission, Calabar. The population of the study is made of one hundred and four (104) athletes in the sports commission. The study population is small enough for the researchers to cover every subject of the study population. As a result, census sampling approach was adopted to select a sample of one hundred and four (104) respondents

The instrument used for data collection was a twenty item questionnaire titled “Gender Equality Social Inclusion and Human Development Questionnaire” (GESIHDQ). The questionnaire was constructed on a four point scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagreed (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). Items 1=5 measured gender equality. Items 6-10 measured social inclusion, while items 11-20 measured human development among athletes. The instrument was validated by experts in Test and Measurement unit and Human Kinetics and Sports Science in the University of Calabar. The reliability was established using Cronbach alpha method and the coefficient obtained is .82 which confirmed that the instrument is reliable in achieving the objective of the study.

Results

Research Question 1: How does gender equality influence on human development among athletes of Sports Commission, Calabar, Cross River State

Table 1: Gender equality and human development

Variable			Standard Deviation (SD)	Minimum	Maximum
	N	Mean			
Gender equality	104	38.6	7.4	34	70
Human Development	104	35.4	6.6	30	74

The mean gender equality score of 38.6 (SD = 7.4) in table 1 suggest a moderately high level of gender equality among athletes. The corresponding human development mean of 35.4 (SD = 6.6) show a moderate development, possible impacted by gender equality. The linear regression analysis results $F(1,102) = 70.673$; $p < 0.05$) confirms a statistically significant influence.

Research Question 2: How does social inclusion influence human development among athletes of Calabar sport commission

Table 2: Social inclusion and human development

Variable			Standard Deviation (SD)	Minimum	Maximum
	N	Mean			
Social Inclusion	104	39.8	6.8	32	70
Human Development	104	35.4	5.4	26	74

The mean gender equality score 39.8 (SD = 6.8) in table 2 indicates that athletes reported fairly high level of social inclusion. The human development mean remains 35.4 the story positive correlation $F(1,102) = 42.987$; $P < 0.05$) suggest that as social inclusion increases, human development is significantly negatively impacted.

H0₁: There is no significant influence of gender equality on human development among athletes of Sports Commission, Calabar, Cross River State. The independent variable in this hypothesis is gender quality while the dependent variable is human development among athletes. Simple linear regression statistical tools was employed for analysis if data. The result obtained from the analysis is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Simple linear regression analysis of the influence of gender equality on human development among athletes in Sports Commission, Calabar, Cross River State (104)

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients B	Standardized Coefficients Beta	T	Sig.
(Constant)	36.178		37.509	.000
¹ Gender equality	-.676	.640	-8.407	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Human development

Note: $R = .640$; $R^2 = .409$; $F(1, 102) = 70.673$; $P = 0.000$

The result of analysis of data presented in Table 3 shows that the independent or predictor variable (gender inequality) has a significant influence on the dependent or predicted variable (human development) among athletes in Sports Commission, Cross River State. This implied that gender equality accounted for 40.9% of human development among athletes in the study area.

Secondly, the result of regression ANOVA presented in Table 3 revealed that there was a significant influence of gender equality on human development among athletes, $F(1, 102) = 70.673$; $p < .05$. The result of this analysis indicated that there is moderate contribution of gender equality to human development. This showed that gender equality is positively influencing human development among athletes in the study area.

The regression coefficient shows that the independent or predictor variable gender equality ($\beta = .640$; $t = 8.407$; $p < .05$) is significantly influencing human development among athletes in Sports Commission, Calabar, Cross River State.

H0₂: Social inclusion does not significantly influence human development among athletes in Sports Commission, Calabar, Cross River State. The independent variable in this hypothesis is social inclusion while the dependent variable is human development among athletes. Simple linear regression statistical tool was utilized for analysis of data. The result obtained from analysis of data is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Simple linear regression analysis of the influence of social inclusion on human development among athletes in Sports Commission, Calabar, Cross River State (104)

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients B	Standardized Coefficients Beta	T	Sig.
(Constant)	36.178		21.907	.000
¹ Social inclusion	-.790	.545	-6.556	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Human development

Note: R = .545; R² .296; F (1, 102) = 42.987; P = 0.000

The result of analysis of data presented in Table 4 shows that the independent or predictor variable (social inclusion) has a significant influence on the dependent or predicted variable (human development) among athletes in Sports Commission, Cross River State. This implied that social inclusion accounted for 29.6% of human development among athletes in the study area.

Secondly, the result of regression ANOVA presented in Table 4 revealed that there was a significant influence of social inclusion on human development among athletes, F (1, 102) = 42.987; p<.05. The result of this analysis indicated that there is moderate contribution of social inclusion to human development. This showed that social inclusion is positively influencing human development among athletes in the study area.

The regression coefficient shows that the independent or predictor variable social inclusion ($\beta = .545$; $t = 6.556$; $p < .05$) is significantly influencing human development among athletes in Sports Commission, Calabar, Cross River State.

Discussion

The finding obtained from analysis of data and testing of hypothesis one in the study revealed that the null hypothesis was rejected. The implication of this finding is that there was a significant influence of gender equality on human development among athletes in the Sports Commission, Calabar, Cross River State. The reason for this finding could be that human development among athletes in the study area is mostly gender biased. The provisions made for male and female athletes are usually different, which makes this development initiative to be gender bias. The treatment given to and the opportunities provided for male athletes to develop is not as compared to those available to female athletes. This has continued to discourage female athletes from fully developing their talents into full capacity. This has continued to impinge negatively on the human development program provided for athletes in the Sports Commission in the State.

The finding of this study is in agreement with that of WHO (2019) who stressed that women are underrepresented in the leadership positions, holding only 26% of executives and senior – level positions in the workforce and that gender based violence affects 1 in 3 women worldwide with severe physical and mental consequences. The finding was also in line with the view of Ahueansehbor et al (2023). That gender equality in sport has become critical topic of discussion in recent years. The history of sports has often been characterized by gender disparities and social inclusion which have hindered the full participation of various groups including women, ethnic minority and individuals with some forms of disabilities.

The finding of this study also supported that of Cooky et al (2015) who asserted that in the 19th century and early 20th centuries, societal norms dictated that sports were inappropriate for women, limiting their involvement to less physically demanding activities. This exclusion was rooted in gender stereotype that portrayed women as weaker and less capable than men. Additional racial segregation and dissemination were prevalent in sports particularly in United States where African American were often excluded from mainstream sporting events (Wiggins, 2019).

The finding obtained from analysis of data and testing of hypothesis two in the study revealed that the null hypothesis was rejected. The implication of this finding is that there was a significant influence of social inclusion on human development among athletes in the Sports Commission, Calabar, Cross River State. The finding of this study could be attributed to the fact that social inclusion is supposed to be considered

when planning the development of athletes. It has been observed that in most cases, the selection of athletes those not include persons from various tribes, social status, religion, educational qualification among others. This has given advantage to some groups at the expense of those who may be considered less privileged. The poor implementation of social inclusion in human development among athletes has continued to hinder the growth and development sports within the study area.

The finding of this study is in agreement with that of Coalter (2017) who viewed social inclusion in sports to extend beyond gender equality to encompass the participation of marginalized groups such as ethnic minorities, individuals with disabilities and athletes in different sport activities. The author said that the concept of social inclusion involves in creating an environment where everyone regardless of their background or identity has equal access to opportunities and resources in sports. In agreement Brittain (2016) opined that the Paralympics movement has been instrumental in promoting the inclusion of athletes with disabilities since its inception in 1960. The Paralympics games have provided a platform for disabled athletes to compete at the higher level, challenging stereotypes and raising awareness about disability issues.

The finding of this study also supported that of Wiggins (2019) who disclosed that promoting equity and social inclusion requires continuous effort innovative policies and collaboration among stakeholders to create environments where everyone has the opportunity to thrive. By understanding and addressing these complex dynamics, societies can move closer to achieving true justice and inclusively, ensuring that all individuals can fully participant and benefit from societal progress.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the following conclusion were drawn gender equality and social inclusion are fundamental principles for building a fair and just society where every individual has the opportunity to thrive regardless of their background or circumstances. Addressing systemic inequalities and fostering inclusive environments is crucial for the social economic, sports and political well being of communities. Through inclusion policies, equitable practices, and active engagement from institutions, significant progress can be made towards achieving these goals.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions, the following recommendations were made such as:

1. Relevant sports administrators should ensure that both male and female athletes are given equal access to fully develop their talents without any form of gender bias in order to promote the development of sports in the state
2. The Chairman of the Cross River State Sports Commission should ensure that the principle of social inclusion is strictly adhered to in order to ensure that talented athletes irrespective of their social class, tribe or other disadvantaged variables are given even opportunity to development themselves

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