



Research Article

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An assessment of the state of sport infrastructural facilities in Universities in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This study was on challenges related to inadequate sports infrastructural facilities in Zimbabwean universities. The study was influenced by the desire to improve university sports through the provision of adequate sports facilities, which will consequently contribute to the success of sports programmes. In this study, the researcher employed both qualitative and quantitative paradigms, making it a mixed methods approach, which was a subscription to pragmatism. One hundred (100) Sports Team Captains, chosen by purposive sampling, were part of the population, and they were questionnaire respondents. Fifteen (15) Team Coaches chosen by convenient sampling were involved and were participants in focus group discussions. The researcher also made observations of sports facilities so as to establish the availability and state of the various facilities and noted comments by participants about facilities during university games. The study found out that universities in Zimbabwe were faced by challenges related to inadequate sports infrastructural facilities for cricket, rugby, swimming, athletics, hockey, tennis and gym. The challenges were due to lack of funding for the development of the sports facilities due to the cash flow challenges affecting the country in general. The study also found out that, in some cases, it was a matter of prioritization, where authorities would give first preference to provision of academic learning facilities rather than sports infrastructure. The study concluded that the challenges in the provision of sports facilities in Zimbabwean universities could be alleviated by the involvement of various stakeholders who were the university management, the corporate world, national sports associations, alumni, the students themselves and the government through various relevant departments. There was need for aggressive fundraising activities by the universities management assisted by the alumni. Partnerships needed to be struck between the corporate world and local authorities so that space and resources would be provided for the construction of sports facilities. National Sports Associations could provide the necessary information about the facilities.

Keywords: challenges, sports, sports facilities.

INTRODUCTION

Sports in universities in Zimbabwe is part of a wider national programme of sports that includes colleges (Sports and Recreation Commission, 2001), and has a number of advantages. If sport is taught well and made more enjoyable and interesting it promotes positive attitudes in young people (Bizley, 1996) [3]. ZTISU (2010) emphasizes that sports programmes in universities and colleges are there to achieve an effective level of participation that enables individuals to derive physiological benefits (from sport). In the same view, the Sports Council of the University of Ibadan (2010) [20] says that sport ensures that the student maintains a sound body which is an asset for advanced thinking and rigorous academic activity. In this respect, Wuest and Bucher (2009) [23] say that individuals who engage in physical activity on regular basis reduce the risk for many chronic diseases and increase their chances for a long, healthy life. According to the Student Welfare Department of the University of Botswana (2010) a student should be active physically, have a social life and enjoy in a variety of recreational activities.

Sport is believed to build character, provide essential training for success in the modern world, and develop the individual value of teamwork; self-sacrifice, discipline and achievement (Lombardi *et al*, 2003). Also sport has a drawing power for college alumni and friends that exceeded almost any other activity the universities could generate (Lombardi *et. al*, 2003). In fact, some universities have made sport so important that it has become a major part of their programme. An example is the University of Sterling that believes that by using sport in innovative and transformative ways, individuals, communities and partner organizations can fulfil their potential, achieve their goals and enrich their lives (University of Sterling, 2013-2016).

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Success of sports programmes depends on a number of factors, one of which is availability of sports facilities. Londhe (2013) ^[8] argues that lack of sports facilities is a major detrimental factor in the development of sports culture in colleges. Also, Lindsey *et al* (2009) ^[9] argue that the availability of recreational sports facilities and programs has an impact on students' decisions to attend and remain at an institution. In the same vein, Gohil (2003) in his study concurs that lack of sports facilities affected sports in universities. In order for students to be adequately prepared for various sports tournaments, there is need for adequate sports facilities for all disciplines in which they participate. Lack of adequate facilities compromises the quality of preparation in sports, and also deny students the opportunities to enjoy sports. Having the right sporting facilities in the right places is critical to increasing participation (Sports New Zealand, 2016) ^[21]. According to Njororai and Gathua (1997) ^[10] the availability of sporting facilities and equipment greatly influences the choice and eventually involvement of the learners in sporting activities. Therefore, sports facilities play a critical role in determining participation of students in sports.

There are a number of factors that affect provision of sports facilities in universities. One of these is lack of financing for the construction of sports facilities. Sometimes failure to avail funds for the construction of sports facilities is due to the priorities of the university authorities. According to Londhe (2013) ^[8] sports and sports facilities take a back seat when it comes to budgetary provision in the majority of higher academic institutions. Emphasis of most universities is on provision of facilities for academic learning purposes as this is said to be the core business of educational institutions. This situation is different from universities like Auckland University that invests as much as approximately twelve million dollars in sports, including development of facilities (Auckland Council, 2016) ^[2].

This study sought to investigate the state of sports facilities in Zimbabwean universities, and how the situation can be alleviated through the cooperative effort of stakeholders working with university authorities. The aim was to contribute towards the provision of adequate sports facilities which is a pre-requisite for successful sports programmes, which would, consequently, improve the students' performance.

METHODOLOGY

In this study a descriptive survey design was used. Mhlanga and Ncube (2003) ^[14] say that a survey is suitable for describing opinions, feelings and perceptions of a well-defined group. It focuses on contemporary events and does not have control over behaviour or event (Nicholas, 2009) ^[16]. A survey was appropriate in this study which sought to assess the state of sports facilities in universities in Zimbabwe.

The researcher used both quantitative and qualitative methods of data generation leading to triangulation of methods. According to Byrne and Humble (2007) ^[5] mixed methods research incorporates techniques from qualitative and quantitative methods to answer research questions. In the same vein, Abraham (2013) ^[1] says that a mixed research design is a procedure for collecting, analyzing and mixing both quantitative and qualitative research methods in a single study to understand a research problem. Use of quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection in a single study led to methodological triangulation. Wellington and Szczerbinski (2007) ^[26] say methodological triangulation is when a variety of methods are used to study the same issue. This approach was a subscription to pragmatism (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009) ^[24].

In this study, the researcher believed that a pragmatic approach would give him better results than use of a single method of data collection. Use of quantitative methods allowed quantification of data. According to Walliman (2009) ^[25] quantitative methods belong to the positivist paradigm. Questionnaires were used to gather quantitative data. This

was quite important as this would provide the much needed facts. Closed questions would produce data that was easy to analyze. Closed questions, because they provided ready-made categories within which respondents replied to questions asked by the researcher, helped to ensure that the information needed by the researcher was obtained and the responses were also easier to analyze (Kumar, 2011) ^[13].

Qualitative methods of data collection were also employed in the study. Qualitatively oriented social and behavioural scientists (QUAL) primarily work within the constructivists' paradigm and principally interested in narrative data (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009) ^[24]. This was done by way of observations, focus group and open-ended questions.

Observation

In this research observation was done to generate data, as already been alluded to. William (2009) says that observation is a method of recording conditions, events and activities through the non-inquisitorial involvement of the researcher, and that descriptive research relies on observation as a means of collecting data. Observation as a method of data generation allowed the researcher to generate data on the state and availability of sports facilities. Bryman (2000) says one justification for the use of such unobtrusive methods lies in the methodological weaknesses of interviews and questionnaire. The observations in this study were done during practical sports activities. The researcher wanted to take advantage of the university games to assess the state of facilities during the games as he would note availability and short falls of sports facilities.

The Focus Group

In this study, a focus group method was employed, as already alluded to. A focus group is a carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009) ^[24]. In this study, the focus groups, comprising of sports team coaches, focused on the challenges related to sports facilities in universities in Zimbabwe and how these could be overcome.

The researcher used the focus group method because of various reasons. According to Nachmias and Nachmias (2008), in focus groups, there is access to more personally articulated accounts of feelings and experiences. This was considered an important advantage because the researcher felt that the coaches would make contributions based on their practical experiences which would give the real picture of the challenges related to sports facilities in universities in Zimbabwe. Also, in focus group method, there is an egalitarian atmosphere in which participants can raise issues that are truly of concern to them in a straight forward way (Nachmias and Nachmias, 2008). This openness would provide this study with vital information that would be used in an attempt to find solutions to the challenges in the provision of sports facilities in universities in Zimbabwe.

The other advantage is that focus group discussions provide evidence about similarities and differences in the participants' opinions and experiences as opposed to reaching such conclusions from *post hoc* analysis of separate statements from each interviewee (Mouton, 2001). In other words, focus group discussions would enable the researcher to draw conclusions after the coaches had expressed their views, and these having been compared and contrasted during the discussion.

The other advantage is on time. In this respect, Mouton (2001) says that the focus group method offers the opportunity to observe a large amount of interaction on a topic in a limited period of time based on the researcher's ability to assemble and direct focus groups. In other words, the researcher would get quite vital information in less than an

hour of focus group discussions and would not delay in processing the generated data.

Population

The study population included one hundred (100) sports Team Captains of various sports disciplines from the eleven (11) universities affiliated to the Zimbabwe Universities Sports Association (ZUSA). They were chosen because they represented the students and would provide vital information since they were directly affected by the challenges encountered in the management of sports in universities. These were also active players and main stake holders who were part of university sports administration structures, so their views and contributions in the quest to improve sport in universities were vital. The Team Captains were questionnaire respondents. For focus group discussions three (3) groups with five (5) coaches each were involved, totaling to fifteen (15) participants.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

In this study judgmental/purposive sampling was employed to select questionnaire respondents. According to Kumar (2005) [12] judgmental sampling is the judgment of the researcher as to who can provide the best information to achieve the objectives of the study. The total number of team captains (100) was reached after establishing the number of clubs at each one of the eleven (11) universities that were members of the Zimbabwe Universities Sports Association. However at the end seventy-five (75) questionnaires were returned. For focus group discussions the fifteen (15) coaches were selected through judgmental sampling also.

Instruments

A questionnaire was produced for sports Team Captains. A questionnaire (which is self-completion) is said to be a cost effective way of collecting data from a large, spaced population (Somekh and Lewin, 2005) [17]. The potential respondents in this study were scattered all over the country. Kumar (2005) [12] says that if potential respondents are scattered over a wide geographical area and literate, as was the case with the Team Captains, one has no choice but to use a questionnaire. Respondents completed the questionnaire at a time convenient to them (Gilbert, 2003) [7]. This was an advantage in that they would take their time to fill in the questionnaire instead of hurrying. This gave them ample time to express their opinions. The other advantage of a questionnaire was that it offered greater anonymity as there was no face-to-face interaction, and respondents would give accurate information on sensitive questions (Kumar, 2005) [12].

The questionnaire had closed-ended questions (where possible answers were provided) and the respondents simply ticked or chose the responses (Kumar, 2005) [12]. It also had open-ended questions, where possible responses were not given and so the respondents wrote the responses in their own words (Kumar, 2005) [12]. Gilbert (2003) [7] says that designing a questionnaire with closed and open questions allows for a within-method type of triangulation.

Some of the challenges of using the questionnaire that the researcher experienced in this study included delayed return, low rate of return and incomplete answers (Gilbert, 2003) [7]. To reduce situations of delayed or zero return the researcher employed collective administration of the questionnaire where necessary (Kumar, 2005) [12]. This was done in person during sports meetings and games. When the questionnaire copies were posted to some of the respondents, return stamps and envelopes were enclosed to avoid giving the respondents the burden of buying postage stamps and envelopes or in case they had network challenges. The researcher also travelled and collected the completed copies in person. It was hoped that the

respondents would give honest responses especially after getting an emphasis on the value of their contributions and assurance of anonymity.

Observation Guide

An observation guide was used to collect qualitative data as already been explained. The observation guide was divided into columns for venue, descriptions and field notes. The guide was used to generate qualitative data during the university games.

Pre-Testing the Instruments

According to Kumar (2005) [12] pre-testing of the questionnaire is an important exercise. This was done so as to make sure that there was removal of ambiguity and poor wording, to ensure that there was clarity of questions and instructions. The questionnaire testing was done at one university that was selected by convenient sampling out of the eleven universities that were members of the Zimbabwe Universities Sports Association. In this respect, Walliman (2009) [25] says that a questionnaire should be pre-tested on a small number of people. He adds that it is best to test it on a population of a type similar to that of the intended sample so as to discover any problems of comprehension or other sources of confusion. A sample that is similar to the study population was used so as to make sure that this would assist the researcher in correcting the questionnaire in case of any unclear questions, unnecessary repetitions or any other problems the researcher might overlook.

Data collection and analysis

The preferred sequence was to collect both qualitative and quantitative data at the same time. By so doing the researcher did what Creswell and Clark (2011) [6] refer to as concurrent timing. They say in this procedure the researcher implements both quantitative and qualitative strands in a single phase of the study. Thus, the researcher administered the questionnaire and carried out observations during the same period. This made this design a fixed mixed method design, that is, use of quantitative and qualitative methods as predetermined and planned at the start of the research process (Creswell and Clark, 2011) [6]. The questionnaire copies were delivered in person and by post and collected in the same way. Some respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire during sports meetings and competitions. Meanwhile the researcher made observations personally. He collected field notes during university games guided by the observation guide. The researcher recorded the descriptions of what he observed in his own words making brief notes about the sports facilities and any related comments from players coaches and officials. Soon after the observations he made detailed notes in narrative form. Also notes were written for the qualitative data gathered through focus groups. Narrative recording was done because the researcher wanted to make detailed descriptions of the sports facilities and also the opinions of the participants.

Quantitative data was presented in frequency tables expressed in percentages. Description and interpretation was done immediately after the presentation. Qualitative data was presented in narrative form in a separate section. The quantitative and qualitative data was discussed in relation to the information from the literature review. Creswell and Clark (2011) [6] in this respect, say that mixing of methods during interpretation is done during the final step of the research process after the researcher has collected and analyzed both sets of data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 is a composite presentation of the responses by the team captains on the state of sports facilities at their institutions. They were requested to indicate facilities as good, sub-standard or not available.

Table 1: Rating of the State /Standard of Sport Fields and Facilities at Institutions (N=75)

Sports field/courts	Good		Sub-standard		Not available	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Equipped Gym	7	9.33%	21	28%	47	62.67%
Football pitch	27	36%	35	46.67%	13	17.38%
Athletics track	15	20%	37	49.33%	23	30.67%
Athletics field	14	18.67%	38	50.67%	23	30.67%
Swimming pool	11	14.67%	10	13.33%	54	72%
Tennis court(s)	25	33.33%	27	36%	23	30.67%
Volleyball court(s)	26	34.67%	36	48%	13	17.33%
Basketball court(s)	26	34.67%	33	44%	16	21.33%
Netball court(s)	17	22.67%	38	50.67%	20	26.67%
Cricket field(s)	2	2.67%	8	10.67%	65	86.67%
Rugby field(s)	2	2.67%	7	9.33%	66	88%

The data collected from team captains showed that most facilities in universities were of sub-standard quality, if they were available at all. A football pitch is one of the most basic facilities which is not difficult to construct or maintain. Every university is expected to have at least a good football pitch. However, during the observation exercise, the researcher established that most institutions had a single soccer pitch each, which confirmed the captains' responses where only 36% said their football fields were of good standard, 46.67% indicating sub-standard while 17.33% indicated that they had no football pitches at their institutions.

Sports facilities were quite critical in the successful implementation of sport programmes. According to Bizley (1996) ^[3], an institution with good facilities may be able to offer far more activities at higher standard. Gohil (2003) says that lack of sports facilities affected sports in universities. Universities held huge numbers of students who wanted to use the football grounds for recreation or competition purposes, and one pitch was not adequate. During the preliminary university games the researcher observed that there were complaints from football officials, coaches and players about the use of only one soccer field for men and women. This actually led to the reduction of play time from the standard 90 minutes a game to 40 minutes in order to accommodate all the teams. The half-time break was also reduced to 2 minutes in some instances. In such circumstances, where games should be played without considering the adverse conditions, it was like the games were done for formality's sake because it appeared standards did not matter. This consequently compromised the quality and standard of the university games. Inadequate facilities was also confirmed by the focus group participants across the three groups, who revealed that challenges did exist in universities in terms of provision of sports facilities.

The table shows that 18.67% of the Team Captains indicated that they had good athletics tracks. The remaining 49.33% and 30.67% said the tracks at their universities were sub-standard or not available at all. The same prevailed for athletics field facilities. Only 18.67% of the team captains indicated that they had good facilities. The rest said that their facilities were sub-standard and not even available. Standard tartan athletics and field facilities were found only at two universities. This left universities with no option but to have their athletics tournaments the two institutions that had quality tartan tracks. Athletes from visiting teams always cited home advantage to the hosts as a factor in winning. Possibly this could be the explanation to the fact that athletics was dominated by the two institutions that had standard athletics facilities. Poor facilities compromised preparation for tournaments, and affected sports in universities (Gohil, 2003). Teams might not perform well especially considering that most athletes

trained on sub-standard tracks and then competed on standard facilities which they were not familiar with.

Data collected indicated that only 14.67% indicated that they had a good swimming pool, while 13.33% indicated that their swimming pools were sub-standard. The majority, that is 72%, indicated that they did not have a swimming pool at all. This being the case, it meant that students had limited opportunities for swimming. University students were competing in swimming and those without a pool would have problems and might not perform better than those students whose institutions had swimming pools. The challenge to sports management was to come up with a winning team of swimmers when there was no swimming pool. Use of council or schools' swimming pools could be a better option, but these were said to be in bad state or too small for university swimmers. Absence of the swimming pool meant that students participation in swimming was compromised since the availability of facilities had an influence on choice of activities to partake in (Njororai and Gathua, 1997) ^[10].

Tennis was one of the most common games played in universities in Zimbabwe. However, the data collected from sports team captains indicated none availability of tennis courts in the majority of cases. Only 33.33% of the team captains indicated that they had good courts, while the rest indicated that the courts they had at their institutions were sub-standard. The remaining 30.67% indicated that they did not have tennis courts at their institutions. This was confirmed by the researcher's observations at some of the university tournament venues. Observations made at the zonal games were that the tennis courts that were at the university that was supposed to be the games venue were not in a usable state. The teams were, therefore, made to play at hired venues, which was quite expensive (to hire) and to transport the players from the games' village. The same was observed during the Zimbabwe Universities Sports Association (ZUSA) Finals. The university that was hosting the games did not have tennis courts and hired courts were used instead. It was expensive to hire courts and to transport the teams to the venues. What should be borne in mind is that during that period universities were struggling to meet costs, just like any other institutions in Zimbabwe. All the three transcripts of the focus group discussions revealed the challenges caused by limited sports facilities.

The same problems of inadequate facilities applied to volleyball courts. The data collected showed that 34.67% of the respondents said they had good volleyball courts, 48% said that their volleyball courts were sub-standard, while 17.33% did not have any courts at all. Netball had almost a similar challenge in terms of availability of courts. The data showed that 22.67% of the respondents said that their netball courts

were good, 10.67% said that their courts were sub-standard while 86.67% said they did not have any courts at their institutions. Results of the observations confirmed that there were challenges related to volleyball and netball courts where most universities had only one courts each. This scenario is not very good for universities as they are expected to be exemplary in the provision of sports facilities. Those universities that did not have volleyball and netball courts had challenges in preparing for games as they were forced to look for courts elsewhere or even hire. This compromised the adequacy of preparations for tournaments as revealed during focus group discussions.

The situation seemed to be worse with cricket and rugby fields. The data collected from the Team Captains indicated that only 2.67% of the respondents said their cricket fields were good, 9.33% said their cricket fields were sub-standard, while 86.67% did not have any cricket fields at all. As far as rugby was concerned, the data indicated that 2.67% of the respondents had rugby fields which were good, 9.33% said their rugby fields were sub-standard, while 88% said there were no rugby fields at all at their institutions. The percentage of those who indicated that they did not have cricket and rugby fields was high. The three transcripts of the focus groups confirm that the majority of universities had no cricket and rugby fields. It showed that most universities did not have these necessary facilities and relied on hiring outside facilities. Sometimes players and coaches were discouraged by lack of facilities. What the researcher observed confirmed the opinions of the respondents. Contrary to the response, no university had a cricket field. The available cricket fields were improvised for training purposes. During tournaments universities used hired fields for cricket and rugby.

The gym was quite essential in training athletes for fitness. Players valued gym workouts as they appreciated the essence of a gym. However, availability of this facility seemed to be quite a challenge in most educational institutions in Zimbabwe. The data collected from the Team Captains showed that 30.67% of the respondents had a gym hall with standard gym equipment, 14.33% had a gym hall, but with sub-standard equipment, while 54.67% did not have a gym at all. More than half of the respondents indicated that they had no gym facilities. It meant that there were ineffective training methods, if institutions were serious with training their players at all. The high cost of constructing and equipping a gym was quite prohibitive and most universities could not afford the money needed. From the above discussion, it was clear that universities had challenges of inadequate sports facilities, which affected university sport development (Gohil, 2003, Farzal *et al*, 2013)

The respondents suggested that there be aggressive efforts towards the development of sports facilities, even if it meant increasing the sports levy a bit and do more in terms of fundraising to that effect. This did not mean to say that nothing was happening in terms of sports facilities development. There were some few universities that were making efforts in terms of construction of sports facilities, but some were still lagging behind and had a pathetic situation regarding facilities. Some were failing to improve the quality of the existing facilities which had become a risk to the players, as the researcher noted during the field work. There were indications of neglect of sports facilities due to lack of funds or merely failure to prioritize development of sports facilities by the university authorities. One participant in focus group discussions remarked that expansion of the existing sports facilities was not moving with the general expansion of the universities infrastructure like hostels and lecture rooms. The numbers of students were increasing and university authorities concentrated on the provision of accommodation, and little or nothing was done on the increase of sports facilities. The few existing facilities would deteriorate due to overuse and little attention. Renovation and construction of sports facilities was, therefore, of paramount importance in ensuring quality in sports development.

In an effort to overcome the challenges affecting Tirunesh Athletics Centre at Jimma University in Ethiopia, the Department of Sports Science (2013) recommended a number of interventions. One of which was construction of indoor gymnasium and partnering with local engineering companies in the improvisation or modification of gym equipment. This could also be done in Zimbabwean universities, as suggested by the Team Captains.

Conclusions and recommendations

The study established that universities faced challenges related to certain sports facilities. This was mainly in such disciplines like cricket, rugby, tennis, athletics, and swimming and well equipped gym halls. The common disciplines like netball, basketball, volleyball and football did not pose challenges in terms of provision of sports facilities although the majority of the universities had one pitch each for football, netball, basketball and volleyball. Only two universities out of eleven had tartan tracks. These challenges were as a result of inadequate funding. The study also found out that some challenges were as a result of negative attitudes caused by lack of appreciation of the value of sport to the student, the university and the community at large by some university authorities. This had an effect when it came to prioritization of projects. Sport was never among top of their list of priorities. The academic aspect was said to be the core business of universities and so sport was secondary, hence its trivialization by authorities. This was why, even where the sports levy was paid, in some cases, the money that was supposed to be used specifically for the development of sports facilities, was reportedly easily diverted to fund other projects. Also some challenges were as a result of lack of strong policies which supported sport at universities and as a nation. Some challenges were caused by the absence of committees that represented the interest of sport at universities and lack of time tables for sport. This led to the sentiments that sport was not supported much in some universities. The study then found out that these challenges were not insurmountable. They could be overcome if the university authorities put in place policies and committees that supported sport. These would ensure strong support for sport which would lead to facilitation of construction of sports facilities. The challenges could also be overcome if funds or levies were introduced in those universities that did not have them yet. In those that already had the levy Sports Directors should have some authority on the use of the levy as it is intended for sports development not something else.

A number of stakeholders had a role to play in alleviating challenges related to provision of sports facilities in universities in Zimbabwe. These included the alumni, the corporate world, national sports associations, the Government through relevant departments, local authorities and the students themselves.

Contribution of the study

The study will add onto the existing knowledge information about the state of sports facilities in universities in Zimbabwe. Studies had been carried out in other countries about the challenges related to facilities affecting sport in universities, but the researcher had not come across any in Zimbabwe focusing specifically on the state of facilities in universities.

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