

Underprivileged Conditions Influencing Youths' Participation in Sports for Future Employment

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ABSTRACT

The beauty of sports is that it cuts across gender, race, educational background and socio-economic status to benefit those who have the resilience, rigour and discipline to brave the odds. The varieties of sporting events and different human resources needed are an indication of how broad the platform could be, to accommodate different interest groups for self-development. This study examined the nexus of how underprivileged conditions such as birth place (rural/urban), loss of parent(s), among others could influence the choice of sports for self-development and employment. A cross-sectional multistage sampling method was used to select 400 youths who participated in the March, 2022 Nigerian University Games Association hosted by the University of Lagos, Nigeria. The questionnaire administered to the respondents consists of structured self-report inventory. Data obtained was analysed with the use of frequency tables, chi-square and logistic regression. The results show that underprivileged conditions could be a catalyst for youths' involvement in sports for the purpose of future employment opportunities. In view of this, there should be concerted efforts by stakeholders in sports to expand and maintain facilities and sports festivals to accommodate different interest groups of youths who utilise this avenue for self-development and future employment. This could go a long way in redirecting the energy of our teeming youths away from being recruited into social vices and focus on meaningful self-development sporting programmes that could create viable future employment roles in sports.

Keywords: Future Employment, Nigeria, Self-Development, Sport, Underprivileged, Youth

1. INTRODUCTION

Sports had been seen as a youth friendly industry and had been in the forefront of providing entertainment, fitness and employment for different categories of people. A lot of these employment opportunities in sports are usually geared towards youths who have the right energy for the games. Sports clubs usually engage in regular scouting or surveillance of both formal and informal sporting events as a means of recruiting youths with expected skills for future development and employment. These expected skills are mostly physical and could be less of intellectual and social skills, therefore, youths of different educational and socio-economic backgrounds could be enlisted for training and development. However, when recruited, sports present veritable platform for youths training, discipline and development in physical, psychological and social skills among others.

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Seemingly, sports could provide a unifying factor between the rich and the poor and could provide leverage to jumpstart good employment for the skillful youths, even among those with vulnerable background. Poverty is an essential part of the vulnerable background limiting youths' development. Globally, among youths engaged in employment, a little above one-tenth (12.8%) live below US\$2 per day, a situation classified as extreme poverty (ILO, 2020).

This implies that young people are less likely to connect to decent employment that could guarantee impressive wellbeing (UNDESA, 2018). Even youths' employment climate looks gloomy as those within 15 to 24 years have 3 times less likelihood of securing jobs than the older populace (ILO, 2019). These unimpressive figures could be worse in Africa where 60% of youths are unemployed and about 10 million of them joining the unemployment queue each year (Ighobor, 2017). This perhaps, suggests some structural anomalies around the world of works in youth (ILO, 2015; UNDESA, 2018). This could explain the high migrants (27%) of youths from African region, usually within the age bracket of 15 to 29 years (UNDESA, 2019) in search of better living condition. The sub-Saharan Africa posted a high unemployment rate of youths in 2023, with 21.9% or 53 million youths (world average 20.4%) representing youths that are not in employment, training or education (ILO Brief, 2024). In Nigeria, youth unemployment was 8.4% in the first quarter of 2024 for age range of 15 to 24 years, and 14.4% of the youths are not in employment, training or education (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024).

Establishing a link between school attendance and participation in sports is essential for stakeholders and policy formulation. There is a general decline in participation in sports during adolescence age (Eime et al., 2019). Research findings have shown that attending school was a motivator for adolescence engagement in sporting activities (Eime et al., 2015). The sub-Saharan African has a good representation of out-of-schoolchildren – 98 million out of 244 million children and youths globally, and Nigeria with close to 20 million out of school children could have a good number of adolescences not participating in sporting activities (Ndanusa et al., 2021; UNESCO, 2023). Thinking about youth employment through sports, therefore, could imply thinking about how to initiate children and youths into school programmes.

The employment opportunities in sports varies, ranging from the active participation in the field for the players, to managerial roles, research and development roles, marketing and branding roles among others. Presumably, recruitment into sports is neutral to gender, sexual orientation and socio-economic backgrounds. The study, therefore, examined how underprivileged conditions such as birth place, separation/death(s) of parent(s), poor academic performance could influence the choice of sports as means of employment. The study, therefore, examined the following four hypotheses:

- H₁:** There is a relationship between nature of place of birth (Urban/Rural) and youths' participation in sports for future employment in Nigeria.
- H₂:** There is a relationship between parental family structure and youths' participation in sports for future employment in Nigeria.
- H₃:** There is a relationship between parental sponsorship of education and youths' participation in sports for future employment in Nigeria.
- H₄:** There is relationship between academic performance and youths' participation in sports for future employment in Nigeria.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Sports provide lots of opportunities to the populace. Some of the opportunities include fitness and wellbeing, networking, and social interaction (Downward & Rasciute, 2011; Tonts, 2005).

However, for the youths, defined as people within the transitional spectrum of adolescence to adulthood who are beginning to be conscious of their position and duties within their community (UNESCO, 2017), sports perhaps, could provide a veritable means for future employment. Youths with deep interest and involvement in sports could be implicated less often in social vices; hence, sports could be used as a diversion programme to minimise youths' restiveness (Nelson & Gordon-Larsen, 2006). More so, previous studies had emphasised that the quality of life of children who lack appropriate parental care can be enhanced through participation in sports (Kuntz, 2009; Nashwa & Nagla, 2011).

In examining the factors that determine choice of sports as future employment, place of birth could be an area of interest. Some studies see sports as an urban event (European Union, 2017). Eurostat data, 2021, corroborated the urban nature of sports by citing urban-rural discrepancies in sports participation in Europe. In Nigeria, with increasing urbanisation, playgrounds in urban schools are sometimes converted into school building to accommodate more students, this reduced sports arena could reduce the student's participation in sports (Ajibola, 2020). The conversion is worse with private schools in the cities. In Lagos city, Nigeria, there is a guideline to cluster private schools around some public schools so as to share sports facilities such as playgrounds. Perhaps, this is what schools in rural areas enjoy, lots of open grounds for plays, less disturbance from vehicular traffics, among others.

However, in South America, the Brazilian street football (*pelada*) is an informal and rural, self-organised activity with lots of improvisation, and had been shown to be a workshop for creativity and skill acquisition in football (Freire, 2011), in the midst of 13.5 million Brazilians experiencing extreme poverty (IBGE, 2019). Skills are developed in the natural but rather tasking environment (Araújo et al., 2010; Uehara et al., 2018, 2019). Nevertheless, football greats and world cup heroes such as Pele and Zico played *pelada*, bare footed in a non-grassed environment (Araújo et al., 2010; Pimenta, 2009, 2013) and presumably, made a decent living through employment in sports. Some authors believe in this rural model, while agreeing that, intentional training only explains less than one-fifth (18%) of high successes in sports (Macnamara et al., 2016) that could yield meaningful youth employment. In Nigeria however, such natural harvest of talents could be hampered by societal expectations of focusing solely on education (Elumaro et al., 2016). The harvest of natural talents is further compounded by non-sports actors (such as politicians) being appointed into sports ministries who would be interested in traveling for competitions rather than local development of sports for youth employment (Elumaro, 2016).

The youths' consideration of meaningful employment through sporting activities could be heavily influenced by family inputs, especially the parents (Elliott & Drummond, 2016; Schwebel et al., 2016; Yesu & Harwood, 2015). In the developed world, the interest of parents in their children's sporting activities is growing by the day, though parents would rather not be viewed as having undue interference (Burgess et al., 2015; Holt & Knight, 2014). Parental positive involvement in youths' sporting activities, motivates them, and could facilitate their professionalism in sports (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). Such support could involve financial and, therefore, frees youth sports personnel, from the struggles of financial management in their early careers. Hopefully, such parental support could arise from the understanding that sports help to equip students and youths with valuable skills in leadership and communications which could be utilised at other spheres of life (Maslen, 2015).

There is need to understand the factors that influence young people to choosing sports as their possible future employment. However, there is paucity of research on how youths negotiate their professionalism in sports through underprivileged family conditions, such as parental separation/divorce, or death of the parent(s). However, sports provide a deep sense of belonging to participating members and sometimes sports community transforms into a second family especially for the underprivileged, such as orphans (Maglica, 2020). The underprivileged, therefore, could use sports to build resilience through social support system among the team, and

this could help build appropriate emotional regulation by enhancing the social skills of the team members (Li et al., 2024; Martín-Rodríguez et al., 2024). The psychological; strength developed from such interactions could help transform people from position of vulnerability to become effective managers of people and resources. Also, examining who is behind sponsorship of education of youths participating in sports, and how it influences the youths' sports professionalism (choice of sports for employment), have not received adequate attention. The study will, therefore, help to fill this gap in literature.

A study involving 662 9th grade students which considered students of different ethnicity showed that young black students (41%) and young Latino students (25%) with less educational grades desired to be professional athletes than young white men (21%) (Davis, 2013). Previous studies had shown different outcomes of the influence of sports or physical activity on academic performance. A cross-sectional study in Brazil among school children between ages 12-17 years, demonstrated that children who were physically active, were at least 2 times more likely to have better grades than those that were rather sedentary (Ezequias et al., 2018).

However, a longitudinal study in Spain that involved 1778 young people aged 6 to 18 years conducted within 3 years showed that physical activity had a negative relationship with grade achievement (Esteban-Cornejo et al., 2014). Other opposing outcomes from different studies on physical activity and academic performance include; negative relationship between the two variables that examined 255 children in grades 7 and 9 (Van Dijk et al., 2014), a neutral relationship between physical activity and academic performance with sample size drawn from 970 young people between 9 to 15 years (Syväoja et al., 2018), and a positive relationship between physical activity and academic performance that involved 285 children between 9 to 11 years (Maher et al., 2016).

The different sample sizes of the study that involved children at different stages of development, perhaps, could explain these variations in outcomes between physical activity and academic performance. However, the role of grades in determining youths' choice of sports as future career has not been fully examined, hence, the need to include it in this study. This study focuses on the university students participating actively in sports who presumably, understand the stakes of leveraging on the platform to make an all-important decision of future employment in sports.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored in the Trait and Factor Theory by Frank Parson, 1909, which was highlighted in his book *Choosing a Vocation*. The emphasis of this theory is that we are attracted to a particular occupation based on what we know about ourselves (personality) – like skills, values, interests, career goals and limitations (e.g., underprivileged conditions) and then chose an occupation that will match the traits. This theory is apt in developing countries with high unemployment where few rewarding jobs might need referrals from prominent citizens to achieve. This poses a limitation to lots of youths. Resilience youths from disadvantaged background (underprivileged conditions), therefore, see professionalism in sports as an open platform for a rewarding employment opportunity to achieve their life goals. It is not strange therefore, that South American footballers from low socio-economic status (especially from Brazil and Argentina) dominate the world of football. Perhaps, this also could account for the dominance of sporting activities by blacks in the US.

The field of play could be seen as a form of classroom where coaches deploy instructions and engage in character building of youths (such as leadership, teamwork, self-esteem, among others) to enhance their chances of success in life (Cale, 2021; Schmidt et al., 2020). The Trait and Factor theory clarifies how understanding of your strengths, interest and capacity could motivate the youths who might not be doing well in academics to transfer their concentration to sports for future employment. In this study, perhaps, interest must have been established simply by the

voluntary participation of students in the highest university games in the country – the Nigerian University Games Association. Underprivileged conditions or the limitations of the students examined in the study include the rural/urban place of birth, separation/divorce/loss of parent (s), sponsorship of education other than by parents or through scholarship and low academic performance. Nevertheless, to make success in sports, there must be an appropriate self-inventory on the individual personality traits which will help determine the suitable sporting world of work that could maximise their attributes.

3. METHODOLOGY

In response, population of the study comprised of university students who participated in the in the 26th edition of the Nigerian University Games Association which was the last game and hosted by University of Lagos from 16th to 26th March, 2022. The sample size was determined as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where n is the sample size, N is the population size, and e is the level of precision. When this formula is applied to the above sample,

$$N = 4, 772 \text{ (total number of athletes), } e = 5\% (= 0.05)$$

Applying the formula,

$$n = \frac{4772}{1 + 4772(0.05)^2} \\ = 369 \approx 400$$

The study utilised cross-sectional survey design. Federal and state universities were chosen because they have a diverse mix of students from different socio-economic conditions and accounted for nearly to 90% of the universities in attendance at the Nigerian University Games 2022 (Federal 35, State 34, Private 8). Data from organising committee showed that total population of athletes was 4772, with 4, 252 (89.1%) of them coming from federal and state universities. Nigeria is made up of six (6) geo-political zones, three from the northern part and three from the southern part of Nigeria. The geo-political zones have become a convenient way for researchers to draw their samples. A multistage sampling technique was used and involves the following stages:

Stage. 1 The participating states were grouped into 6 geopolitical zones that make up the country (North Central, North East, North West, South East, South South and South West). The federal and state universities within the 6 geopolitical zones were identified.

Stage. 2 Two universities were selected (one state and one federal) in each zone using simple random sampling method. This produced 12 universities for the study.

Stage. 3. For each university selected, the number of respondents to be included in the survey was determined by applying the proportionate sampling.

Table 1 Proportionate Sampling of The Federal and State Universities that Participated in NUGA, 2022

Zone/University	Total Number of Athletes	Proportionate Calculation	Sample Size
North central			
Kwara state university	49	49/1065*400	18
University of Jos	117	117/1065*400	44
North East			

Zone/University	Total Number of Athletes	Proportionate Calculation	Sample Size
Adamawa state university, Mubi	54	54/1065*400	20
Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Bauchi	99	99/1065*400	37
North West			
Kaduna state university	65	65/1065*400	24
Bayero university, Kano	30	30/1065*400	11
South East			
Imo state university, Owerri	58	58/1065*400	22
Nnamdi Azikiwe University	114	114/1065*400	43
South South			
Ambrose Ali university, Ekpoma	66	66/1065*400	25
University of Port Harcourt	168	168/1065*400	63
South West			
Lagos state university, Ojo	60	60/1065*400	23
Obafemi Awolowo University	185	185/1065*400	70
TOTAL	1065		400

Source: University of Lagos, NUGA Local Organising Committee (2022)

Interviewing of the athletes took place during their trainings at different centres for the games. A suitable time for the interview was given by each university's official. Introduction of the study was made and athletes aged 18 and above were purposively identified. With the prospective respondent identified, informed consent was obtained and questionnaire administered. Items on the questionnaire include age, place of birth (rural/urban), educational level of parents, form of marriage of father (monogamy/polygyny), family structure of parents, athletes' birth position, number of parents alive, sponsorship of education, students' assessment of their economic situation (indigent/not), academic performance (CGPA), and future sporting ambition (fitness/fun vs professional [employment]). Data obtained was analysed using frequency tables, chi-square, and logistic regression.

The study was non-invasive and there was no expectation of harm. Prospective respondents were given enough time to go through the questionnaire and decide whether to be part of the study or not. Consent was then obtained from interested athletes and the questionnaire administered. Confidentiality was assured and personal identifiers that could lead to deductive disclosure were not collected.

Experts in in sociology, human resources and employment relations and sports psychology were consulted for the content and face validity and corrections were carried out to improve the questionnaire. University of Lagos athletes were used for the pilot study. Fifty of such students were involved in the pilot study. The outcome of the pilot study helped in rephrasing some of the ambiguous statements and correcting some missing options. The Cronbach's Alpha was 0.630.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 2 shows that close to three-quarters (73%) of the respondents had place of birth as urban with their parents still in marital union and alive (72.8%). However, a little above three-quarters (79%) of the respondents have their education being sponsored by their parent(s) and close to half of the respondents (51.5%) have very good academic standing of at least second-class upper division. Most of the respondents (69.5%) aim to earn a living by pursuing a professional career in future.

Table 2 Frequency Distribution of Underprivileged Conditions Influencing Participation in Sports

Birthplace	Frequency	Percent
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	Frequency	Percent
Rural	108	27.0
Urban	292	73.0
Parental Family Structure		
Married	291	72.8
Separated/Divorced/Widowed	109	27.2
Sponsorship of Education		
Parents	316	79.0
Self/Others	84	21.0
CGPA		
<3.5	194	48.5
≥3.5	206	51.5
Sports Future Ambition		
Fitness and Fun	122	30.5
Professional (future employment)	278	69.5

4.1 Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis H₁: There is no relationship between nature of place of birth (Urban/Rural) and youths' participation in sports for future employment in Nigeria.

Table 3 shows that, the respondents with rural birth place are more likely to use sports for future employment than those of urban birth. However, this is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 3.772$, $df = 1$, $sig. = 0.048$). The Null hypothesis is therefore rejected, implying that rural birthplace could influence students to choose sports for future employment.

Table 3 Bivariate Analysis of the Nature of Birthplace and Sports Ambition

	Sports Ambition		Total	
	Fitness and Fun	Professionalism (Youth Employment)	N	%
Birthplace				
Rural	25 (23.1)	83 (76.9)	108	100
Urban	97 (33.2)	195 (66.8)	292	100
Total	122 (30.5)	278 (69.5)	400	100

$\chi^2 = 3.772$, $df = 1$, $sig. = 0.048$

Hypothesis H₂: There is no relationship between parental family structure and youths' participation in sports for future employment in Nigeria.

Table 4 Bivariate Analysis of The Family Structure of Students' Parents and Sports Ambition

	Sports Ambition		Total	
	Fitness and Fun	Professionalism (Youth Employment)	N	%
Family Structure of Parents				
Married	94 (32.3)	197 (67.7)	291	100
Separated/Divorced/Widowed	28 (25.7)	81 (74.3)	109	100
Total	122 (30.5)	278 (69.5)	400	100

$\chi^2 = 1.637$, $df = 1$, $sig. = 0.201$

Table 4 shows that students whose parents are separated, divorced or widowed are more likely to participate in sports as means of future employment than those their parents are still married and living together. However, this is not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 1.637, df = 1, sig. = 0.201$), which shows that family structure of students' parents has no impact on sports ambition.

Hypothesis H₃: There is no relationship between sponsorship of education and youths' participation in sports for future employment in Nigeria.

Table 5 Bivariate Analysis of the Sponsorship of Education and Sports Ambition

	Sports Ambition		N	Total %
	Fitness and fun	Professionalism (Youth Employment)		
Sponsorship of Education				
Parents	97 (30.7)	219 (69.3)	316	100
Self/Others	25 (29.8)	59 (70.2)	84	100
Total	122 (30.5)	278 (69.5)	400	100
$\chi^2 = 0.027, df = 1, sig. = 0.869$				

In Table 5, when sponsorship of education is not by parents, students are more likely to engage in sports as means of future employment, but the difference is not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 0.027, df = 1, sig. = 0.869$). Hence, choice of sports ambition is not influenced by who sponsors the student's education.

Hypothesis H₄: There is no relationship between CGPA and youths' participation in sports for future employment in Nigeria.

Table 6 Bivariate Analysis of the CGPA and Sports Ambition

	Sports Ambition		N	Total %
	Fitness and Fun	Professionalism (Youth Employment)		
CGPA				
<3.5	46 (23.7)	148 (76.3)	194	100
≥3.5	76 (36.9)	130 (63.1)	206	100
Total	122 (30.5)	278 (69.5)	400	100
$\chi^2 = 8.19, df = 1, sig. = 0.004$				

Table 6 shows that students with lower grades (CGPA < 3.5) are more likely to consider sports as a means of employment than those with CGPA ≥ 3.5. This is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 8.19, df = 1, sig. = 0.004$), therefore, the Null hypothesis is rejected. Hence, students' lower academic grades influence choice of going professional in sports.

Table 7 Logistic Regression Coefficient and Odds Ratio of Youths' Underprivileged Conditions and Choice of Sports for Youths' Employment

	β	S.E.	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I. for EXP(B)	
					Lower	Upper
Birth Place (Urban) Reference Category				1.000		
Birthplace (Rural)	0.459	0.262	0.08	1.583	0.947	2.648

	β	S.E.	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I. for EXP(B)	
					Lower	Upper
CGPA \geq 3.5 Reference category				1.000		
CGPA < 3.5	0.608	0.223	0.006	1.836	1.185	2.844
Constant	0.433	0.155	0.005	1.542		

Table 7 shows that university students participating in sports are 1.6 times more likely to choose sports as means of future employment if their birthplace is rural rather than urban, though this is not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$, 95% CI: 0.947, 2.648). However, for the sports students who have lower academic grades (CGPA < 3.5 – maximum of second class lower), they are 1.8 times more likely to choose sports as means of youth employment than those with higher grades and this is statistically significant ($p < 0.01$, 95% CI: 1.185, 2.844).

4.2 Discussions

The study examined how underprivileged conditions of athletes influenced youths' choice of sports for future employment. Four hypotheses were examined on the relationships between birthplace (rural/urban), absence of parents through separation/divorce or death, sponsorship of education other than by parents and low academic performance and the choice of sports for future employment. The results show that youths underprivileged conditions such as rural birthplace, separation/divorce/death of parents, sponsorship of education other than by parents and low academic grades have more likelihood of choosing sports for future employment than those without underprivileged conditions. The higher percentage of youths that indicated interest in sports for future employment might not be unconnected with less likelihood of youths securing decent jobs (UNDESA, 2018; ILO, 2019). Sports, therefore, became an outlet for physically skilful youths to latch on for possible decent youth employment.

At the univariate level, the lower proportion of students with rural birthplace perhaps, implies that urbanisation is rapidly increasing and sports seemingly, in line with the views of European Union (2017) and Eurostat data, (2021), is fast becoming an urban event. However, more youths from rural background are more likely to endorse sports for future employment than those of urban birth. This corroborated studies in South America, where natural skills were developed in rural football within unconventional playgrounds (*pelada*), which nevertheless had produced football greats (Araújo et al., 2010; Pimenta, 2009, 2013; Uehara et al., 2018, 2019).

High unemployment among youths could influence university students to tilt their energy towards sports rather than academics and this imbalance could lower their grades. This seemingly explains why students with low grades (CGPA < 3.5) are more likely to choose sports for future employment than those with high grades. Youths with underprivileged conditions arising from parental separation/divorce or deaths could be propelled into choosing sports for future employment. This choice, serves two purposes: for youth employment and, as a second family for this vulnerable sub-population (Maglica, 2020). Perhaps, the outcome of this study would help the stakeholders to understand how to utilise sports for effective youth employment.

5. CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Youth employment has been a source of concern because high unemployment among youths distorts social order and magnifies complexities of crime. However, a lot of youths in the developing countries might not have the requisite academic skills and qualifications to compete both locally and globally. Such youths presumably, might have underprivileged factors like rural

birthplace, impaired family structure such as parental separation/divorce/deaths, which could be a burden in their educational financing and possibly producing lower academic grades.

The study has shown that such underprivileged conditions could motivate interest towards choice of sports for future employment especially in developing countries where good job offers could require referrals from prominent citizens which might not be accessible to this group of youths. The outcome of the study could pave way to consciously create a platform in sports geared towards stimulating youths of vulnerable socio-economic background towards enhancing their well-being through active participation in sports especially as a future employment opportunity. It is important to note that stakeholders in the education and sports ministries given the right political will, could facilitate an effective administrative system, where youths' interests and capacities in diverse areas could be segregated and properly utilised. If the right attitude is achieved in sports administration, it could serve as a social vaccine to youths' restiveness and criminality, offering employment to the youths, especially the underprivileged sub-population who are more vulnerable to social vices.

The study sample size was limited to 400 students only, due to the limited time (11 days – opening and closing ceremonies inclusive) the athletes have to stay at the host institution. Larger sample size could have caused more disruptions to their trainings and programmes. Perhaps, a mixed-method approach that could have incorporated both quantitative and qualitative methods, would have been more rewarding. Interesting future research could focus on prospective study that could examine the mid and long-term successes of the athletes from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Arising from study findings, the following recommendations are therefore proposed:

- There is need for sports scouts to take a recruitment drive towards sporting activities in the rural areas, and form partnerships with schools or community organisations, to find talent in rural areas.
- Existing programmes or efforts that offer chances for pupils to participate in sports or vocational training should be brought to the knowledge of students who have received low grades.
- There is need for mentorship programmes for young people who have experienced the dislocation of their families. These programmes should include both athletic training and emotional assistance from coaches.

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