

Assessing the Relationship among Students' Attitudes towards Sports, Learning and Academic Achievement in a Nigerian University

Abraham Adekunle Ayodele (Ph.D)

Department of Human Kinetics,
Federal University Oye-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria.
Abraham.ayodele@fuoye.edu.ng <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-8820-6119>

Abstract: *This study assessed the relationship among students' attitudes towards sports, learning, and achievement in a public university in Nigeria. Three research questions and a hypothesis were raised for the study, and the quantitative case study design was adopted. This study's population consists of all students at the Federal University Oye-Ekiti, Nigeria. The study sample which was purposively selected was 52 students of the Department of Health and Human Kinetics. Two instruments were used in collecting data from the study: Attitudes towards Sports and Learning Questionnaire ($\alpha = 0.86$) and an achievement score sheet. Mean and Standard deviation, and correlation analysis (at a 5% significance level) were used in analysing the data for the study. Findings indicate that students in the federal university Oye-Ekiti, Nigeria; possess positive attitudes towards sports and learning; there exists a positive relationship among students' attitudes toward sports, learning, and academic achievement, with no significant gender difference. The study concludes that university students' attitudes toward sports and learning can impact their academic achievement. Some recommendations were made.*

Keywords: Achievement; Attitudes; Gender; Learning; Sports; Students; University.

Introduction

Contemporary higher education entails a variety of the acquisition and consolidation of students' skills, knowledge, attitudes, and likes in goal-directed activities. These activities (sometimes referred to as extra-curricular activities) are necessary for the whole development of students. Students in tertiary institutions are expected to be groomed on the intricacies of the three educational domains, and their extent of learning and performance be evaluated based on these domains of learning. An extra-curricular activity that could boost students' general outcomes in schools is sports.

Alade et al. (2021) assert that sports are often seen as activities dependent on physical athleticism or dexterity, and they include all forms of physical activity that promote mental well-being, social interaction, and physical fitness, while providing entertainment for both participants and spectators (Burnett et al., 2016; Peter-Ajayi et al., 2019). Sports are vital ways through which students stay active and are essential in the system of education (Alade, Bamidele & Owoeye, 2021; Mollel & Otieno, 2022; Peter-Ajayi et al., 2019). Through sports, students spend their time more effectively and become responsible, disciplined, and accountable. It has been proved that sports improve the blood flow to the brain and foster the memory of the participant, which in turn encourages the individual's concentration, creativity, and thinking capacity (Ahmad & Sajid, 2020; Mollel & Otieno, 2022; Stucko, 2018).

Sports participation may offer students special growth possibilities that have a good effect on their social self-concept, social relationships, and mental alertness (Dawood, 2020; Khan et al., 2018; Robert, 2018; Wilson, 2019). When students integrate sports into their academic process, they have a larger chance to learn new skills and increase their knowledge in a variety of topic areas/curricula (Alade et al., 2021; Stucko, 2018). Playing sports could also help students apply their skills and knowledge in more creative ways (Mollel & Otieno, 2022).

Sports, especially the early morning sports, is essential for the general health and well-being of an individual. It enables the students to put their organisational and memory abilities to use. Additionally, the student's active involvement in sports promotes healthy cognitive development. Through sports, young people can discover new ways to use their brain's primary cognitive functions, such as creativity, memory, and problem-solving skills (Alade et al., 2021; Haroona et al., 2018). These benefits are linked to the emergence of brain-growth factors that aid in the generation of new brain cells, hence promoting learning capacity (Çiriş & Başkonuş, 2023; Mollel & Otieno, 2022).

Students' mental health is improved through sports (Mollel & Otieno, 2022). Compared to their fellow students who do not play sports, those who frequently participate in them get significant rewards (Moreno, 2022). Those who maintain a physical activity regimen feel comfortable and connected to the world and people around them. Students who engage in vigorous or adequate physical activity for more than three days a week report higher levels of life satisfaction than students who engage in no physical activity at all, according to OECD data published in 2017.

Students gain a sense of purpose through sports, which uplifts their mood (Padial-Ruz et al., 2020). They can learn stress-free and do better in class (Bamidele, 2016; Haroona et al., 2018; Stucko, 2018). Sports and education work together to equip students to build the necessary networks and skills to thrive in their academic programmes as well as in their communities, future careers,

and general attitudes toward learning (Çiriş & Başkonuş, 2023; Haroona et al., 2018; Hanief et al., 2022). It has also been shown that kids who actively participate in sports activities are less likely to engage in deviant behaviour such as school violence, delinquency, and gaming addiction, as well as less likely to experience depression (Gwon & Shin, 2023; Tofler, 2016).

According to İnceoğlu (2010) and Osiesi et al. (2022), attitude is the potential behaviour that a person might exhibit in response to a certain situation, event, or phenomenon. Attitude can affect students' educational performance (Keskin et al., 2017, Osiesi et al., 2022) Students' attitudes towards sports and participation in sports activities have a big impact on the university's athletic success and have helped students compete with pride and honour in a variety of sports events (Moreno, 2022). A positive attitude of students toward sporting activities will go a long way in determining their future interests and participation in the same sports, even after graduation (Moreno, 2022). Studies show that students with positive attitudes toward sports are active and physically fit in their life after school (Eraslan, 2015; McMorris, 2016). Students' attitudes toward sports could be connected to their attitude toward learning.

Students' attitudes towards learning could be termed as the overall willingness and interest in learning concerns within the school context. Attitude can significantly affect students' academic performance (Bradley & Greene, 2013, Sanni et al., 2023). Effective learning is dependent upon the attitudes students have toward the learning processes, and this impacts their academic performance (Topal, 2014). Zaman et al. (2018) assert that the negative attitude of students toward sports can lead to a decline in their general learning outcomes. Çiriş and Başkonuş (2023), and Kuo-Ming et al. (2012) in their researches reiterate that students' positive attitude and participation in sports increase their academic performance. Meanwhile, the study of Chuan et al. (2013) did reveal that students' participation in sports has a negative relationship with their academic performance.

Empirical studies regarding students' participation in sports and achievement abound in the literature. For instance, the views of university students towards e-learning in sports and academic performance were explored by Bozkurt and Erdogan (2022). According to study results, students' participation in sports and academic achievement are positively correlated. However, there were no discernible gender differences in the attitudes or academic performance of students. The study by Moreno (2022) has also revealed that students have a positive attitude toward sports, and this attitude affects their participation in sporting activities. Also, Zaman et al. (2018) study on the attitudes of Pakistani students towards sports indicates a positive attitude among the sampled students towards sports and participation in sports.

Alahmed, Yusof, and Shah (2016) looked into the connections between Saudi Arabian undergraduate students' attitudes, engagement in sports, and academic success. The findings indicate that competitive sports involvement and academic performance have a substantial association that is mediated by attitudes about participating in sports. According to the study, students who participate in sports more frequently perform better academically, especially if they have positive attitudes toward participating in such sports. According to Fung and Wong (2014), students who participate in sports and games perform better academically and are more likely to be accepted by their peers. In contrast, a study by Shepherd and Trudeau (2018) found that students' participation in sports causes a decline in their academic performance.

Hanief et al. (2022) and Díez-Palomar et al. (2020) conducted studies that ascertained the attitude of students toward learning. Findings show that students have a positive attitude towards learning or participating in learning activities. Georgakis (2018), Ahmad and Sajid (2020), and Çiriş and Başkonuş (2023) studies also indicate that students' attitudes towards sports were positive, but moderate in the latter. Moreover, the study by Zhong (2021) revealed that students' attitudes toward learning are both positive and negative, and that their gender played no significant role. Similarly, regarding students' gender and attitude toward sports, female students had more positive attitudes toward physical activity (Dacey et al., 2014).

Şentürk (2019), and Mollel and Otieno (2022) also reiterate that students have positive attitudes towards sports, and these were higher among the newly admitted students (freshmen). Orunaboka (2011) investigated how students' attitudes toward physical education in Nigerian secondary schools affected their performance in the subject. Findings show that while the majority of students have a negative attitude towards physical education (sports), there is a positive correlation between these attitudes and academic success. Ashwani (2023) found that students' attitudes toward sports were negatively connected to their academic performance. Kaya and Celeb (2020) indicate in their study that the positive attitude of male students toward sports was higher than females, although the sample of the study was secondary school students.

Given that there is a need to ascertain the attitudes of students towards sports in recent times (Kee et al., 2017), and a decline in positive attitudes towards sports and sporting activities/participation among students have been on the increase (Li, Chen, & Baker, 2014); and there exist no empirical work regarding university students' attitudes towards sports, learning, and relationship between these and academic achievement in the context of Nigeria. This study thus assessed the relationship among students' attitudes towards sports, learning and academic achievement in a Nigerian University.

Statement of the Problem

Education stakeholders and scholars alike perceive sports as an obstacle to students' academic performance. Many think that students' participation in sports hamper their academic participation and eventual achievement. Still, at the university level, anecdotal records depict a decline in students' attitudes toward learning and performance. Does this decline have any link with students' attitudes or participation in sports? It is against this background that this current study assessed the relationship among students' attitudes towards sports, learning, and academic achievement in a Nigerian University.

Research Questions

1. What are the attitudes of students toward sports at the university?
2. What are the attitudes of students toward learning at the university?
3. What relationship exists among students' attitudes toward sports, learning, and academic achievement in the university?

Research Hypothesis

H₁: There is no significant gender difference in students' attitudes toward sports, learning, and academic achievement in the university.

Methodology

Research Design

The quantitative case study design was adopted for the study. This design involves the in-depth study and data collection about a particular case (Johnson et al., 2014).

Population, Sampling Technique, and Sample

This study's population consists of all students at the Federal University Oye-Ekiti, Nigeria. The purposive sampling technique was used in selecting the faculty of education of the university, and the Department of Health Education and Human Kinetics of the faculty. The reason was that students always participate in sports, being an academic requirement for their graduation, and are enrolled in the faculty and Department. However, these students were admitted in the 2019/2020 to 2021/2022 academic session. There were 47 students for First-year stream A and 26 students for Stream B; 46 students in their second year, and 7 students in their third year. Since participating in the study was voluntary, only 52 students of the Department partook in the study.

Research Instruments

Two instruments were used in collecting data from the study. The first was tagged the Attitudes Towards Sports and Learning Questionnaire (ASLQ) which elicited students' attitudes towards sports and learning. The instrument was divided into two sections. Section A captured the respondents' bio-data such as gender, Matriculation number, and students' academic levels. Section B measured students' attitudes towards sports and consists of 10 items placed on a 4-Likert scale of Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (0). Section C measured students' attitudes towards learning, and consists of 14 items placed on a 4-Likert scale of Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (0).

This instrument was face and content validated by presenting to experts in the field of educational tests and measurement, to vet and make suggestions where necessary. Their views were adopted in drafting the final version of the instrument. The content validity and internal consistency of the instrument were done using the Cronbach alpha technique (Section B: students' attitude towards sports, $\alpha = 0.83$; Section C: students' attitude towards learning, $\alpha = 0.86$). The second instrument is the achievement score sheets of a sport-oriented course (HUK 105, HUK 205, and HUK 305) obtained from the Head of the Department of Human Kinetics, with an explanation that these achievement score sheets would be used only for the research and would be returned to the Head of Department upon completion of data coding and analysis.

Method of Data Collection

The research instrument was administered to the respondents by the researcher and was retrieved after the respondents had filled them out. however, there was a 97% return rate for the entire instrument administered.

Method of Data Analysis

Mean and Standard deviation, and correlation analysis (at a 5% significance level) were used in analysing the data for the study.

Results

Descriptive Statistics of the Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Statistics of the Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percent
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Gender	Male	18	34.6
	Female	34	65.4
Academic Level	100L	40	76.9
	200L	3	5.8
	300L	9	17.3

Table 1 indicates the respondents' demographic information. Regarding gender, 18 (34.6%) were males, while 34 (65.4%) were females. This depicts that the majority of the study's participants are females. Concerning respondents' academic levels, 40 (76.9%) were in their first year (100L), 3 (5%) were in the second year (200L), and 9 (17.3%) were in their 300L. Thus, most of the participants were in their first year (100L).

Research Question 1: What are the attitudes of students toward sports at the university?

Table 2: Respondents' Attitudes Towards Sports (N =52)

S/No	Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation	Remark
1	Sportsmen are doing very well in life	3.67	.513	Positive
2	My dream in life is to become a successful sports man/woman	3.33	.760	Positive
3	I love listening to sports news and commentaries	3.35	.789	Positive
4	I am happy being a human kinetics student	3.58	.572	Positive
5	Doing sports is good for health and wellbeing	3.87	.345	Positive
6	I wish all my academic courses were only sports inclined	3.13	.841	Positive
7	I am lively during sports	3.52	.610	Positive
8	Sports build character in young people	3.63	.627	Positive
9	I like to attend sports events with family or friends	3.50	.577	Positive
10	Participating in sports has had a positive impact on me	3.71	.457	Positive
Pooled Mean		3.52		

*Criterion Mean (CM) = 2.5; Positive Attitude = Mean > CM; Negative Attitude = Mean < CM.

Table 2 shows the attitudes of the respondents (students) towards sports. Students' responses regarding their attitudes towards sports had mean values > the criterion (2.5). It can thus be inferred that students sampled in this study have positive attitudes towards sports or sports participation.

Research Question 2: What are the attitudes of students toward learning at the university?

Table 3: Respondents' Attitude towards Learning (N =52)

S/No	Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation	Remark
1	Learning will help me in life.	3.87	.345	Positive
2	Learning helps improve my academic performance.	3.88	.323	Positive
3	Learning improves the growth of my mind.	3.75	.480	Positive
4	Learning improves my personality.	3.69	.544	Positive
5	Learning increases my self-esteem.	3.77	.425	Positive
6	Learning increases self-confidence.	3.81	.398	Positive
7	I am more knowledgeable because I love to learn	3.73	.448	Positive
8	Learning has helped my communication.	3.79	.412	Positive
9	I feel happy when I learn new things	3.77	.425	Positive
10	learning makes me proud	3.73	.448	Positive
11	learning makes me proud	3.77	.425	Positive

12	Learning something new can make life easy for me	3.67	.474	Positive
13	I am more relaxed when I am learning	3.54	.609	Positive
14	I am always interested in learning	3.77	.425	Positive
Pooled Mean		3.75		

*Criterion Mean (CM) = 2.5; Positive Attitude = Mean > CM; Negative Attitude = Mean < CM.

Table 3 shows the attitude of the respondents (students) towards learning. Based on the fact that the mean values of the students' responses are greater than the criterion, it is inferred that the attitudes of students as sampled in this study are positive.

Research 3: What relationship exists among students' attitudes toward sports, learning, and academic achievement in the university?

Table 4: Relationships exist among students' attitudes toward sports, learning, and academic achievement

Variables	Correlation	Attitude towards Sports	Attitude towards Learning	Academic Achievement
Attitude towards Sports	Pearson Correlation	1	.633**	.128
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.367
	N	52	52	52
Attitude towards Learning	Pearson Correlation	.633**	1	.094
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.508
	N	52	52	52
Academic Achievement	Pearson Correlation	.128	.094	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.367	.508	
	N	52	52	52

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 depicts the relationship that exists among students' attitudes toward sports, learning, and academic achievement in the sampled university. As revealed in the table, a significant and high positive relationship exists between students' attitudes toward sports and learning ($r = 0.633$; $p < 0.005$). Concerning attitudes towards sports and learning, and academic achievement; there exists a low non-significant relationship between students' attitudes toward sports and learning, and academic achievement ($r = 0.128$; $r = 0.094$; $p > 0.05$). Thus, it is inferred that a positive relationship exists between students' attitudes toward sports and learning, and academic achievement.

Hypothesis

H₁: There is no significant gender difference in students' attitudes toward sports, learning, and academic achievement in the university.

Table 5: T-test analysis of gender differences in students' attitudes toward sports, learning, and academic achievement

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	t	Sig.	Remark
Achievement	Male	18	70.11	13.35	49	-0.63	0.50	NS
	Female	33	72.55	11.49		-0.65	0.52	NS
Attitude towards Sports	Male	18	35.44	4.018	49	0.20	0.82	NS
	Female	33	35.21	3.95		0.20	0.34	NS
Attitude towards Learning	Male	18	51.89	5.14	49	-0.97	0.34	NS
	Female	33	53.06	3.44		-0.87	0.39	NS

*Significant at $p < 0.05$; NS =Not Significant.

Table 5 indicates the t-test analysis of gender differences in students' attitudes toward sports, learning, and academic achievement in the university under study. As evident from the table, there is no significant gender difference in students' attitudes toward sports, learning, and academic achievement: achievement ($t_m = -0.63$, $p(0.50) > 0.05$; $t_f = -0.65$, $p(0.52) > 0.05$); attitude

towards sports ($t_m = 0.20$, $p(0.82) > 0.05$; $t_f = 0.20$, $p(0.34) > 0.05$), and attitude towards learning ($t_m = -0.97$, $p(0.34) > 0.05$; $t_f = -0.87$, $p(0.39) > 0.05$). Thus, the null hypothesis is not rejected since $p > 0.05$. However, given the mean values, the achievement of female students was higher than males; the attitude of male students towards sports was higher than females, and female students had a higher attitude toward learning than males.

Discussion

The attitudes of students toward learning or learning activities are paramount for ensuring active engagement and academic performance. The finding of this present study has found that students of the sampled university (Federal University Oye-Ekiti, Nigeria) possess positive attitudes toward sports and learning. It is believed that since the students sampled in this study are all from a sports-oriented Department, they may have been trained as required by the curriculum, to accept the course contents and related activities of the Department. This could be linked to their positive attitudes towards sports and learning. Most of the courses offered by these students are both sports and academic-driven.

These findings support the findings of Zaman et al. (2018) that revealed a positive among the sampled students towards sports and participation in sports; Hanief et al. (2022) and Díez-Palomar et al. (2020) which showed that students have a positive attitude towards learning or participating in learning activities; Georgakis (2018), Moreno (2022), Ahmad and Sajid (2020) and Çiriş and Başkonuş (2023) studies which did indicate that students attitude towards sports were positive; Şentürk (2019) and Mollel and Otieno (2022) that also reiterates that students have a positive attitude towards sports, and these were higher among the newly admitted students (freshmen). However, the finding contradicts those of Orunaboka (2011) and Li et al. (2014) which indicated that students' attitudes toward sports or physical education were negative.

Concerning students' attitudes toward sports and learning, and academic achievement, Findings revealed a positive relationship (although low and non-significant). Students who participate or have positive attitudes toward sports are likely to learn better, and this can translate into better students' academic outcomes (achievement). This finding has been supported by the findings of Topal (2014), Çiriş and Başkonuş (2023), Kuo-Ming et al. (2012), Bozkurt and Erdogan (2022), Alahmed, Yusof, and Shah (2016), Wong (2014), Orunaboka (2011). Still, the study findings disagree with those of Chuan et al. (2013) and Trudeau (2018) that revealed that students' participation in sports has a negative relationship with their academic performance.

Findings also revealed that there is no significant gender difference in students' attitudes toward sports, learning, and academic achievement. However, given the mean values, the achievement of female students was higher than males; the attitude of male students towards sports was higher than females, and female students had a higher attitude toward learning than males. This supports the findings of Bozkurt and Erdogan (2022) and Zhong (2021) that found no discernible gender differences in the attitudes or academic performance of students, and Kaya and Celeb (2020) study that indicates higher positive attitudes among male students than the females. Yet, the finding disagrees with the findings of Dacey et al. (2014) that affirmed that female students had more positive attitudes towards sports.

Conclusion

University students' attitudes toward sports and learning can impact their academic achievement. Students' participation in sports boosts their mental well-being and health, leading to greater school/classroom participation and academic achievement, irrespective of their gender. A positive relationship has been found by the study to exist among students' attitudes toward sports, learning, and academic achievement.

Recommendation

- i. Sporting facilities should be adequately provided and maintained on various university campuses by governments, university management, and educational stakeholders;
- ii. University sports council and management should implement sports enlightenment programmes and symposiums that would impact positive attitudes among students;
- iii. Educational planners and curriculum designers should plan the curriculum to allow opportunities for more students' participation in sports.

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