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Enhancing Kenya University Undergraduate Employability  
Through Team Sports Participation. A Case of University  
Students Athletes



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## Enhancing Kenya University Undergraduate Employability Through Team Sports Participation. A Case of University Students Athletes

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** Employability is a major issue worldwide, and Kenya is increasingly looking to universities to develop employable undergraduate students. A low undergraduate unemployment rate is considered as a sign of a thriving economy, while a high unemployment rate is seen as a waste of national resources. The aim of this study was to examine how undergraduate participating in team sports in Kenya university can enhance employ ability

**Methodology:** The study used a desktop approach where literature was sought from different sources. The research was carried out with consideration given to previous theoretical literature, both published and unpublished.

**Findings:** Most employers look for specific skills and attributes in job prospects in addition to academic requirements. These attributes, known as employability skills, aren't job-specific, yet they can boost undergraduate student athletes' employability since they increase productivity and value at work also have an impact on ability to grow career wise.

**Unique contribution to theory, practice and policy:** Team sports has the potential to provide marginalized and underprivileged undergraduate athletes with adequate abilities, skills, and pathways to job or social enterprise-based possibilities. Participation in team sports can bring young people together in the pursuit of universal peace and a desire to improve themselves. Hence, university management should have good organization, facilitation, and oversight should be provided by university sports management.

**Keywords:** *Employability, team sports, Undergraduate students-athletes*

## Introduction

According to estimates, Africa will be home to 29 percent of the world's youth by 2050, according to estimates. This will, and already has, put enormous pressure on African countries to address young unemployment, particularly among undergraduates. Undergraduate youth constitute a difficulty as well as a great opportunity for African countries, particularly at a time when populations in other areas of the world are aging (Griffiths, Bullough, Shibli, & Wilson, 2017).

According to British Council (2015), The job environment for graduates' students has evolved substantially. More and more university graduates are having difficulty finding work after graduation. In today's world, getting a job is the biggest challenge for graduates. There is now national and worldwide evidence showing persons with higher educational credentials are more likely to participate in sports today and in the future. (Brookings Institute, 2014; Sunday, 2017) This can boost institution webranking, where academic reputation, coupled with employer reputation, is one of the criteria used to rank universities globally. Muchemi, Muchemi, Muchemi, Muchemi (2019).

Sport can be exploited by university students' athletes as a mean of employment for both career and personal development. Conversely, sport participation provides the students athletes with opportunities for socialization and embracing an entirely new culture from their diverse team mates.

This research is important because the unemployment rate is a key macroeconomic indicator, with a low rate indicating a healthy economy; unemployment is a waste of resources because unused labor could be used to boost output growth; unemployment is linked to economic hardships such as loss of income and reduced opportunities for future employment for individuals and families; and finally, unemployment is linked to various social problems such as criminology.

Graduate employability refers to the ability of higher education graduates to find and/or create work. Furthermore, employability refers to how institutions and employers have supported students' knowledge, skills, qualities, reflective disposition, and identity in order for them to be successful in the workplace (Hinchliffe & Jolly, 2011).

There is a scarcity of empirical study on the topic that looks at the advantages that collegiate athletes get from their experiences that are different from those of their non-athlete peers. There appears to be a link between engagement in athletics and the life skills required after graduation. College players self-reported that being a college athlete gave value to their college experience that their nonathlete peers did not, according to Potuto and O'Hanlon (2007).

One can arguably say that sport in one of important strategies of developing soft skills among university students and these skills cannot be easily acquired in the classroom environment. Students who are able to balance between classroom experiences and experiences from extracurricular activities have a double advantage over those who put more emphasis on classroom



based knowledge only. Whether engaging in sport should just remain an optional that students have to choose or being examined and be part and parcel of students' assessment in colleges and universities is one of fundamental areas of discussion.

### **Problem Statement**

Kenya's public and private Universities are expected to graduate roughly 50,000 students per year, much exceeding the formal sector's capability for employment. Kenya has a workforce of 24 million people and 20% unemployment rate due to its rising youth population. Education, especially higher education, has two functions: it gives students the knowledge and skills they need to meet the labor demands of their local and wider communities, as well as training them for ethical responsibilities in this area. The age of 14–24 years old presents a challenge and an opportunity to nations worldwide. By 2030, there will be 1.3 billion young people in this age bracket, up from an expected 1.2 billion in 2023, predicts. Majority of whom are university graduate the most crucial issue facing academics and decision-makers for these reason is how to make the rapidly expanding Generation Z workforce employable.

### **Objectives**

The objective of the study was to examine how undergraduate participating in team sports in Kenya university can enhance employ ability.

### **Research Methodology**

The study used a desktop approach where literature was sought from different sources. The research was carried out with consideration given to previous theoretical literature, both published and unpublished. This study focused most on conducting a literature review, specifically, one that examines previous research on how team sports participation can enhance Kenya Universities undergraduate employ-ability. This conclusion was reached after doing an in-depth search using a mix of keywords such as employ-ability skills, student athletes and team sports in different databases. The authors conducted basic and advanced searches, respectively, on Google and the other database engines. The phrase "Employ ability skills" was what was utilized as the search term when looking through the data and was the subject of the initial search and the Google search that followed.

### **Literature Review**

Employability involves displaying the practical abilities and mindsets needed in the workplace, which are essential for career progress (Overtoom, 2000). Employability competencies go beyond technical competence. They encompass but are not restricted to fundamental academic aptitudes, higher-order thinking abilities, and personal qualities with more detailed skill sets. These are necessary across all occupation levels (Robinson, 2000). Employability skills are frequently categorized into two types: transferable or generic capabilities, which can be applied across a large

number of different professions, and vocational or technical skills, which are specific, occupational abilities required to work within a certain field or occupational group (Robinson, 2000). Sport, according to previous study, also provides individuals with opportunity to gain social capital. While this may be advantageous for some, athletics also promotes elitism and acts as a potent tool for exclusion.

The literature review strongly suggests that employability is dependent on more than education qualification. Graduates must also be able to draw upon specific skills and attributes they will need that are relevant to their specific workplace. Performance is related to the ability of the graduates to use their skills and attributes to deliver results. Engagement relates to employers' desires for graduates to demonstrate evidence that they have engaged in extracurricular activities and made the most of out of their student experience. In short, employers want graduates who have the ability to face challenges and deal with pressure situations, and understand the importance to learn outside the normal methods of education (Coffee, & Lavalley, 2014; Thirunavukarasu, Chandrasekaran, Subhash Betageri, & Long, 2020).

A primary research that was done in the United Kingdom by Griffiths, Bullough, Shibli & Wilson (2017) through which data was collected from 5838 graduates, 112 employers and 13 university senior executives as part of a mixed-methods approach. The research found that engagement in sport was viewed as a sound investment from the perspectives of all three groups, with examples highlighting how sport provided 'added value' beyond subject-specific qualifications. The triangulation of results from the different stakeholder groups showed that the skills that graduates described that they had gained from sport were the same skills that employers said that they were looking for in employees (Mahajan, Gupta, & Misra, 2022).

On the other hand, the study of Lowden, Hall, Elliot, and Lewin (2011) which was done in the UK identified graduate skills and attributes that are valued by employers. These are, team working, problem solving, self-management, knowledge of the business, literacy and numeracy relevant to the post, ICT knowledge, good interpersonal and communication skills, ability to use own initiative but also to follow instructions, and leadership skills where necessary. It can be observed that majority of the employability skills can be learned through sports hence this puts students engaging themselves in sports to be in a better position of being employable than those who don't

### **Team Sports Skills that Enhance Student Athletes' Employability**

That team sports participation experience, as well as all that goes along with it, translates into the number one soft talent that employers are looking for. The majority of student-athletes succeed in their careers, and this is assumed to be due to the fact that they haven't just learnt these abilities, but have developed and exercised them with the kind of zeal that propels teams to victory. They decided to learn these abilities, they expected themselves to learn them, and they competed for spots on teams based on their ability to do so.

Furthermore, most soft skills characteristics such as teamwork, communication, and leadership have become engrained in their personalities; it is who they are, not what they wear when they have to. Being a part of a team is second nature to student-athletes, who have spent at least half of their life doing so (Mahajan, Gupta, & Misra, 2022).

In 2018, Center for Career Development and Talent Acquisition carried study and established that in the list of employers of new graduates, team building topped the list of in-demand attributes among others transferable skills learned from sports and graduate employability Samuels (2002) studied transferable life skills learned through sports participation by University athletes committed to their sport and also identified team work as top on list.

The employability of an undergraduate comprises three essential components. Firstly, it involves the capability to secure initial employment. Secondly, it entails the ability to sustain employment by transitioning between various jobs and roles within the same organization. Lastly, it encompasses the aptitude to secure new employment in different organizations (Hillage and Pollard, 1998). According to Gomez and Peter (2017), these elements are crucial in determining an individual's employability.

### **Team Work/Team Building in Team Sport Participation**

Team work can be defined as a dynamic process involving a collaborative effort by team members to effectively carry out the independent and interdependent behaviors that are required to maximize a team's likelihood of achieving its purposes McEwan, & Beauchamp (2014).

More ever, teamwork can also be specifically defined as individuals working together to achieve a common goal. When working as a team, a member who is "weaker" compared to the rest, may still be able to step-up in times of need and become great at that moment. In sports, teamwork is essential to achieving a victory as it requires the effort of every member on the team.

Team sports participation will always call for exceptional teamwork to increase the chances of win/loss record that put once team at the bottom or top of the ladder. No body preferred to be at the bottom. Team sports athletes are winning individuals. Comparatively, good teamwork is immediately obvious from the outside.

### **Leadership Skills in Team Sport Participation**

Sport is a hot house for leadership, it nurtures, feeds and grows leaders. Student-athletes have seen and developed an understanding of the leadership role. Student-athletes have been part of leadership groups, they've experienced when strategies worked and when they didn't. They've led and been led, they've had role models, they know how to rally people behind a set of common goals.

Within a workplace people might need different things from the same leader, it's the same in sport, and former student-athletes have experienced and responded to this. They also understand that

leaders don't always direct from the top, any team member can show leadership or inspire their team with their work ethic or approach to a specific task. Student-athletes understand the importance of strong leadership, they know that successful projects result from strong direction and leadership groups attend to details daily, make regular interventions and keep the team on track, so that small problems don't become insurmountable issues at a later date.

Leadership behaviors developed through sports may not be transferable to classroom, much less the boardroom. Just as the classroom teaching of abstract leadership constructs is criticized for its lack of transferability to in the workplace, so too the skills learned in a competitive athletic contest may not transfer to a corporate setting. McKenna (2004) argues that managerial skills "cannot be developed in isolation of context". Athletes may only see their field- developed skills as applicable to sports, and therefore do not use or practice them in the workplace.

Brunton, et al. (2020). In sports, leadership behaviour is not just important for individual players; it is important for the team as a whole as it establishes an interpersonal environment characterized by support, respect, trust and appreciation of staff and players which ultimately have a positive influence on team cohesion and performance König, S. (2013) Leadership styles that promote back up behaviour were suggested to enhance team cohesion. Highly cohesive teams worked together more efficiently and, consequently, performed better than less cohesive teams. It is well established that leadership serves as a critical input for influencing group processes and output, and that leaders can shape team members' attitudes, beliefs, and values König, S. (2013). Sports psychology research supports the view that leadership behaviours are associated Salcinovic, Drew, Dijkstra, Waddington, & Serpell (2022).

### **Communication in Team Sport Participation**

The communication skills factor encompasses various abilities such as listening and speaking, reading and writing persuasively, and the capacity to effectively communicate with all parties involved; team mates, umpires, and opponents. In order to collaborate, maintain productive interactions, and establish and nurture relationships with different sports teams, strong interpersonal and communication skills are essential when engaging with peers and other stakeholders, especially in virtual settings. With the current changes, active listening becomes even more crucial to productive winning, as does the ability to formulate and articulate points clearly, both verbally and in written form for instance when making formal invites and complains or even when looking for sponsorship, to multiple stakeholders such as organizations, betting companies, other clients, or suppliers (Beqiri, 2017).

Communication is an essential part of life, and being able to do it effectively is a key skill that makes life much easier. Communication is critical in effective teams. Without clear, concise and regular communication there's lots of mistakes. In competition, this amounts to a high error rate and confusion. Not a winning landscape.

Everyone must understand the ultimate goal of communication in the same way and pathways have to be clear so skill transfer and project learning can take place, not to mention team culture and chemistry. Stating outcomes is not enough, it's imperative that every team member hears the messages and understands the part they play in creating a successful outcome, just like in sport.

Former student-athletes can draw on examples of when they got communication right and the results that stemmed from those exchanges. They can talk about communicating in different environments, the training facility and the sporting field. They can talk about communicating with coaches, teammates and the opposition. They've been under pressure and rallied teammates to assist them stage a come-back or secure a victory. A team does things more effectively and faster than an individual, one of the reasons for this is that a team uses everyone's strengths. To do that, you have to know what everyone's strength are and be confident to call on individuals to use that strength through precise communication

### **Findings**

The attributes, skills and knowledge desired by employers have been highlighted and not limited to; leadership, team working, problem solving, communication, application of information technology. This study therefore, set the agenda for subsequent studies in this critical area of sports as a vehicle to employability of our university graduate youths.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

This research investigated methods for improving the employability of undergraduate students in Kenyan universities through participation in team sports. The literature review revealed that very few studies have specifically addressed the issue of graduate unemployment and employability in relation to university sports. In response to external pressures and the need to produce globally competitive graduates who are also relevant to the domestic job market, universities should prioritize and allocate sufficient budgets for team sports. Furthermore, in this era of Competency Based curriculum, employability skills should be integrated into Physical Education curricula to further support this objective. It is crucial for the government at all levels to incorporate team sports programs and policies to enhance the development of employability skills. Lastly, there should be efforts to promote team sports opportunities in both private and public schools through adequate support and budget allocation.

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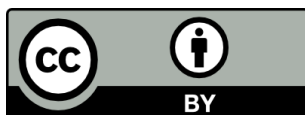
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