

ASSESSMENT OF THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE PERFORMANCES OF THE UNDER-17 NATIONAL MALE FOOTBALL TEAM TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF FOOTBALL IN NIGERIA

BY

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Abstract

The remarkable performances of the Under-17 National Male football Team can bring about several development and growth of the game in any nation. It is against this background that research of this nature aimed at assessing the contributions of the performances of the Under-17 National Male Football Team to the development of football in Nigeria was carried out. The study was guided by seven (7) research objectives, questions and hypotheses. Aspects of football development where the significant contributions of the Team's performances were researched, are adequate football facilities and equipment, revitalization of the nation's economy, adequate sponsorship and marketing of football, modern information and communication technology and establishment of football academies in Nigeria. The researcher adopted the ex-post facto research design on a population of 1200 sports administrators from 10 sports organizations in Nigeria. The sample size for the study was 292. The instrument that was used was a self-developed questionnaire which made use of a 5-point Likert scale and was administered to the football administrators. From the analysis of the data gathered from the instrument. The test of hypothesis using the Chi-Square χ^2 at alpha level of 0.05 was used. The hypotheses were all rejected because the calculated p-value of 0.000 were all less than the alpha level of 0.05 ($p < 0.05$). Hence, the researcher concludes that the under-17 National Male Football Team contributed significantly to the various sectors of football development in Nigeria. It was also recommended that there is the need for coaches and other personnel to go for more training to improve their coaching skills as well as keeping them abreast with modern football techniques.

Keywords: Assessment, Development, Football team, Performances

Introduction

In the world of sport, one of the most popular game is 'Football'. Although it is widely referred to as football in most countries (except for the USA and Canada). It is regarded as a universal game that brings the whole world together. It is being used as an instrument for promoting international understanding, peace, prestige, economic, political, and social wellbeing of nations of the world (Ojeagbase, 2019). According to Akinyode (2014) sports including football is a veritable tool in building national unity and development. Football engages and excites people across the vast divides of national, regional, racial, religious, ethnic, gender, age, ability, social, economic differences. It is a universal language which when given the chance, most people speak freely, one of the few times when they can understand each other (Ojeagbase, 2019).

The game of football has provided empowerment opportunities for teeming talented youths especially in the developing economies has also succeeded in breaking hitherto inhibiting barriers (Ekejiuba, 2015). The differences in religion, social status, language and creed among other divisive tendencies, became insignificant whenever a football match takes the centre stage. The true origin of the game is controversial. Obaseki (2019) noted that many people claimed that the game originated from Greece where it was called Harposter, while others claimed that the Egyptians played a type of football before the Greece and Romans. Its governing body, Federation International Football Association (FIFA) was founded in 1904 including the fact that its official rule was documented in the late 18th century. FIFA also reported that it has about 250 million players, 1.3 billion fans and 28 billion television audiences around the world. The population of players documented are the 'Registered' excluding unregistered players who are also passionate and enthusiastic about the game. The basic rule of the game is to put the ball at the back of the opposition's net

with any part of the body except the hand. It consists of eleven players among which a goalkeeper (who can use hands on the ball during play) is required. The game is played at various levels and divisions giving room for both genders and various age groups. Many countries have embraced it with a sense of commitment and provide opportunities for youth participation (Sumonu, 2014). The youthfulness simply refers to that period of time between childhood and maturity, so in a straightforward manner, youth football is described as the level of football that accommodates players coming up from their 'Feeder-age' to the level of a mature, standard and professional football (Sumonu, 2014).

FIFA gives room for youth development and as a result organizes competitions from grass-root levels to world cup games such as the Olympics, the under-17, and under-20 FIFA world cup. Youths are allowed to display their talents and show the world how passionate they are about the game (Ross, 2018). Most professional football players passed through youth football and they developed gradually to reach their greatest potentials. Nigeria, which is often referred to as 'Giant of Africa' has about one-seventh of the population of the continent. She is one of the most popular and successful countries in African football (Ross, 2018). Nigeria occupies an area of 923,768.64 km² in the West African sub-region. It is bordered by the Gulf of Guinea in the South, Cameroon in the East, Republic of Benin in the West and the Chad and Niger Republic in the North. Formerly a British Colony, Nigeria gained independence in 1960. It has an estimated population of 174.5 million people, (Czula, 2018).

Nigeria is a culturally diverse nation with many ethnic groups, languages and dialects. Although there is an alarming rate of unemployment and poverty, the people embrace football as a comforter and a great gift of humanity. World football history can never be complete without Nigeria, because of her exploits in the soccer world (Efoghor, 2016). Here in Nigeria, the first organized and recorded football match took place in Lagos in 1916, although football had been played in Calabar and Port Harcourt before that period. On the 8th of October 1949, Nigeria national team played their first international match against Sierra Leone in Freetown and won 2-0. Their biggest win recorded was 10-1 against Benin Republic. At the initial stage, most of the modern competitive amateur sports were governed by associations. For instance, Nigerian Football Federation (NFF), which was formed in 1945, governs the football activities in the country. Now each state of the Federation has a branch of Nigeria Football Federation, which deals with the administration and organization of football competitions and activities at state level. Nigerian youths went into the record books in 1996 at the Olympic Games where the U-23 national team won the Gold medal in Atlanta, Georgia. The under-17 male team (The U-17 national male football team) has also recorded a tremendous success since founded in 1985.

According to Okosun (2017), the U-17 national male football team have won FIFA under-17 world cup five times, in 1985, 1993, 2007, 2013, 2015 and runners up three times in 1987, 2001 and 2009 to be the most successful in the world. The U-17 national male football team had been successful throughout their competitions as a result of competent coaches, regular training and determination. Youth football varies in categories. Starting from the streets, football is now gaining a lot of popularity and sponsorship. Football brings youth from various streets in a local government together to play for medals and trophies. The schools also contribute to youth football by organizing inter-school competitions such as the principal's cup which cuts across various states of the federation. Corporate bodies, in addition contribute their quota in youth football, as they organize competitions across the federation such as the SHELL cup, Coca-Cola cup and Challenge cup (Ojeagbase, 2019).

In fact, the Nigerian premier league accommodates professional footballers. Clubs also give room for youth clubs to participate in some organized football matches, national and international competitions. Renowned players like Kanu Nwankwo, Austin Okocha, Peter Rufai, Samson Siasia. Daniel Amokachi, Mikel Obi and host of others came to limelight through league matches and youth competitions like the school's sports and the under-17 world cup (Ojeagbase 2019). Generally, in the Nigeria football history, youth football has been particularly more successful considering the fact that Nigeria performs better in youth football over the years. Some remarkable memories like the 2005 FIFA under-20 Male championship in Netherland where Nigeria was at the finals, 2008 Olympics where Nigeria was also in the finals against Argentina, 2010 FIFA under-20 Women Championship finals between Nigeria and Germany, can never be forgotten (Ojeagbase, 2019).

Statement of the Problem

Nigerian youth football players have been battling with some problems such as illiteracy and poverty which made most of the youth footballers who cannot afford school fees to drop out of schools or consider education as a burden. There is also a very low level of sponsorship resulting in inadequate playing kits, poor First-Aid and standard treatments for injured players. Others are inadequate sports facilities, inefficient personnel, poor funding, lack of adequate ICT facilities for coaching and learning, and genuine football academies where younger ones can be groomed. The U-17 national male football team, have won the FIFA Under-17 world cup five times, 1985 in China, 1993 in Japan, 2007 in South Korea, 2013 in United Arab Emirate, 2015 in Chile and runners up three times 1987 in Canada, 2001 in Trinidad and Tobago and 2009 in Nigeria to be the most successful in this cadre of the game in the world. Other honours and awards are (1) Fair play award for the team with the best disciplinary record four times (1993, 2001, 2009, 2013). (2) Golden ball award for the most valuable player four times (1987, 2009, 2013, 2015). (3) Golden boot award for the highest goal scorers three times (1993, 2007, 2015) and golden glove award for the most valuable goalkeeper. However, despite their brilliant or excellent performances, the researcher observed that the team seems to be facing certain challenges. Prominent among such challenges include; poor facilities and equipment, dwindling economy of the nation, inadequate Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities, inadequate sponsorship and marketing, poor funding of the team by the government, incompetent personnel and lack of genuine football academies.

The numerous achievements and success stories of this team, the U-17 national male football Team, despite their challenges, prompted the researcher to carry out a research work on this National Team, to ascertain if their achievements and successes have in any way contributed to the development of football in Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess the contributions of the performances of the Under-17 National Male Team to the development of football in Nigeria. Specifically, the study was designed:

1. To ascertain the contributions of the U-17 national male football team's Performances to the provisions of adequate football facilities and equipment in Nigeria.
2. To identify the contributions of the U-17 national male football team's Performances to the improvement and attraction of more football sponsorship and marketing in Nigeria.
3. To identify the contributions of the U-17 national male football team's Performances to the provisions of adequate funding of football in Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised for the purpose of this study:

1. What are the contributions of the U-17 national male football team's Performances to the provisions of adequate football facilities and equipment in Nigeria?
2. What are the contributions of the U-17 national male football team's Performances to the improvement and attraction of more football sponsorship and marketing in Nigeria?
3. What are the contributions of the U-17 national male football team's Performances to the provisions of adequate funding of football in Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

Based on the purpose of this study and research questions, three (3) sub-hypotheses were formulated for the purpose of this study:

1. U-17 National Male Football team's Performances have no significant contribution to the provisions of adequate football facilities and equipment in Nigeria
2. U-17 National Male Football team's Performances have no significant contribution to the improvement and attraction of more football sponsorship and marketing in Nigeria.
3. U-17 National Male Football team's Performances have no significant contribution to the improvement of funding of football in Nigeria

Methodology

Ex-post facto research design was adopted by the researcher in this study because the information required were already available with the respondents (Nworgu, 2014). The population of this study comprised of the National Sports Commission (NSC), National Institute of Sports (NIS), Nigeria Football Federation (NFF),

National Football Supporter Club (NFSC), National Football Coaches Association (NFCA), National Football Referees Association (NFRA), Sports Writers Association of Nigeria (SWAN), Association of Proprietors of Football Academics of Nigeria (APFAN), State Sports Council (SSC) and State Football Association (SFA) totaling one thousand two hundred (1,200). The sample size for this study was 292. This is in respect of the assertion of research advisor, that for a population of 1200, that two hundred and ninety-two (292) respondents could be used as minimum. Based on the confidence level of 95% with a marginal error of 0.05. A self-developed questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection for this study. Questionnaire was chosen because it ensures the confidentiality of responses and saves time. For the purpose of data collection, a total of two hundred and ninety-two (292) copies of the questionnaire were administered by the researcher and research assistants who were trained for the purpose of this study. The data collected were analyzed with the use of mean and standard deviation to analyse the responses to the research questions while inferential statistics of Chi-square (χ^2) was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

The total response and return rate for the population was 97.6% that is two hundred and eight-five (285) out of two hundred and ninety-two (292) copies of the questionnaire administered were retrieved and used for analysis. The aggregate mean score of 3.5 was used to either agree or disagree with the Respondents' views on the questions being answered.

Table 1

Analysis of the Respondents' views on the Provision of Adequate Football Facilities and Equipment in Nigeria

S.N	Statement	Mn	SD	Rmk
1.	The Team's performances provided the opportunities for football facilities like stadiums, gymnasium etc. to be constructed and old ones renovated and upgraded before the FIFA U 17 championship in Nigeria.			Agree
2.	The Team's performances have attracted more modern facilities and equipment from FIFA and other cooperate bodies than any other team in Nigeria			Agree
3.	The Team's performances have made possible for provision of standard and FIFA approved equipment and supplies for use in their matches.		0.74684	Agree
4.	The facilities equipment and supplies provided during the FIFA U17 championship in Nigeria are being used now by various teams, clubs, and organizations thereby improving the standard of the game in the country		0.62854	Agree
5.	The FIFA U17 championship made Nigeria to upgrade and improve the social infrastructure like roads, street lights, water facilities, hotels and public buildings.		0.59733	Agree
Aggregate Mean			4.10	Agree
Decision Mean= 3.5				

Table 1 reveals that the Respondents' agreed that the U-17 national male football team performances over the years have created the opportunity for Nigeria as a nation to provide adequate and standard football facilities across the nation. Hence, the mean aggregate was found to be 4.10, which is greater than the decision mean of 3.5. ($4.10 > 3.5$).

Table 2*Analyses of the Respondents' views on the Football Sponsorship and Marketing in Nigeria*

S.N	Statement	Mn	SD	Rmk
1.	The Team's performances over the years have attracted many rewards in form of cash, land, house, scholarship and other materials from the government.	4.37	0.56393	Agree
2.	The Team's performances over the years have attracted many opportunities for the players to feature in many good paid adverts for big companies.		0.61927	Agree
3.	The Team's performances over the years have attracted many sponsorships from FIFA in form of Cup grants that enabled NFF to execute various football activities for the country		0.76981	Agree
4.	Corporate bodies like Coca-Cola, Tom Tom, Pepsi, First Bank etc. have come intermittently to donate and appreciate the excellent performance of the Team.	4.55	0.60663	S. Agree
5.	The Team's impressive performances have made the team a massive brand that could give desirable benefits to goods and services of their sponsors.	3.98	0.53033	Agree
Aggregate Mean			4.20	Agree
Decision Mean= 3.5				

Table 2 above shows the decision mean of 3.5 which is less than the mean aggregate of 4.20 ($3.5 < 4.20$). This implies that the respondents agreed that the U-17 national male football team of Nigeria through their impressive or excellent performances over the years attracted more sponsorship as well as improvement in their marketing strategies.

Table 3*Analyses of the Respondents' view on Improvement of Funding of Football in Nigeria.*

S.N	Statement	Mn	SD	Rmk
1.	The U-17 national male football team's Performances have rekindled the 2.79 interest of the government in funding of football in Nigeria.	2.79	1.20144	Undecided
2.	The U-17 national male football team's Performances have prompted the early release of fund for the team's training, camping and competition by the Nigeria Football Federation.	2.48	1.24060	Disagree
3.	The U-17 national male football team's Performances have made it possible for the team to receive more funding than other national football teams in Nigeria	2.30	1.32427	Disagree
4.	The U-17 national male football team's Performances have attracted extra funding from individuals and cooperate bodies in Nigeria.	3.54	0.90519	Agree
5.	Funding of certain football projects in Nigeria by FIFA like the Goal Project Centre in Abuja and Football Made in Anambra were probably influenced by the excellence performances of the U-17 national male football.	3.21	1.00138	Undecided
Aggregate Mean			2.86	Disagree
Decision Mean= 3.5				

Table 4.6 above revealed the decision mean of 3.5, which is greater than the mean aggregate of 2.86 ($3.5 > 2.86$). This analysis implies that the respondents disagreed that the excellences performances of the Golden Eaglet has brought any improvement in the funding of football in Nigeria. This in turn implies that much improvement in terms of funding is required for adequate development of football in Nigeria.

Test of Hypotheses

Ho1: U-17 National Male Football team's Performances have no significant contribution to the Provision of Adequate Football Facilities and Equipment in Nigeria

Table 4

Summary of Chi-square (χ^2) analysis on the contribution of U-17 National Male Football team's performances to the provision of adequate Facilities and Equipment for the development of Football in Nigeria.

Variable	χ^2 Cal	χ^2 Cri	df	P-value	Decision
Contribution of U-17 national football team's performances to the provision of football facilities and equipment	216.092	16.919	9	.000	Null H_0 Rejected
χ^2 Cal = 216.092		P-value (0.000) < 0.05.			
χ^2 Cri = 16.919					

Table 4 shows the chi-square analysis on the contributions of the performances of the Under-17 National Male Team towards provision of adequate facilities and equipment towards the development of football in Nigeria. This analysis revealed a chi-square calculated value of 216.092, which is greater than a Critical value of 16.919 ($216.092 > 16.919$). Furthermore, the analysis revealed a P-value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05 level of significance ($P < 0.05$). This analysis depicts that the performances of the U-17 national male football team have significantly contributed towards provision of adequate facilities and equipment for football in Nigeria. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that the Performances of the U-17 national male football team's performance have no significant contributions towards provision of adequate facilities and equipment for football in Nigeria is rejected.

Ho2: U-17 National Male Football Team's Performances have no significant contribution to the Attraction of Adequate Sponsorship and Marketing for the Development of football in Nigeria.

Table 5

Summary of Chi-square (χ^2) analysis on the contribution of U-17 National Male Football team's Performances to the attraction of Adequate Sponsorship and Marketing for the Development of Football in Nigeria.

Variable	χ^2 Cal	χ^2 Cri	Df	P-value	Decision
Contribution of U-17 national male football team's Performances and Sponsorship and marketing for football development in Nigeria	37.129	12.592	6	.000	Null H_0 Rejected
χ^2 Cal = 37.129		P-value (0.000) < 0.05.			
χ^2 Cri = 12.592					

Table 5 shows the Chi-Square analysis on the contribution of the performances of the U-17 national male football team towards the attraction of adequate Sponsorship and Marketing for the development of football in Nigeria. This analysis revealed a calculated χ^2 value of 37.129, which is far greater than the χ^2 Critical value of 12.592 ($37.129 > 12.592$). Furthermore, this analysis revealed a calculated P-value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05 level of significance ($P < 0.05$). This analysis depicts that the U-17 national male football team performances have significantly attracted adequate Sponsorship and Marketing towards the development of football in Nigeria. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that "The U-17 national male football team performances have no significant contributions towards attraction of adequate Sponsorship and Marketing for the development of football in Nigeria" is hereby rejected.

Ho3: U-17 National Male Football team's Performances have no significant contribution to the improvement of funding of football in Nigeria

Table 6

Summary of Chi-Square (χ^2) analysis on the contribution of U-17 National Male Football team's performances towards the improvement of funding for the development of football in Nigeria

Variable	χ^2 Cal	χ^2 Cri	df	P-value	Decision
Contribution of U-17 national male football team team's Performances on the provision of Funding for development of football in Nigeria	265.846	26.296	16	.000	Ho Rejected

χ^2 Cal =265.846
 χ^2 Cri=26.296

P-value (0.000) <0.05.

Table 6 shows the Chi-Square analysis on the contribution of the U-17 national male football team performances towards improvement of funding for the development of football in Nigeria. The analysis revealed a χ^2 calculated value of 265.846, which is greater than a χ^2 Critical value of 26.296 ($265.846 > 26.296$). Furthermore, the analysis revealed a P- value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05 level of significance ($P < 0.05$). This analysis implies that the performances of the U-17 national male football team have significant contributions towards the improvement of funding for football development in Nigeria. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that "The U-17 national male football team performances have no significant contributions towards improvement of funding for football development in Nigeria" is rejected.

Discussion on the Findings

This study assessed the contributions of the Nigerian U-17 National Male Team's Performances to the development of football in Nigeria. Three (3) null hypotheses were tested based on the relationship between the Team's performances and the development of football in Nigeria. Areas where quantitative data were gathered in line with the research objectives as well as the hypotheses formulated were funding, facilities and equipment and sports sponsorship and marketing. The discussion of the findings drawn from the data analyses and the results from the test of the hypotheses were done in line with the research objectives.

Sport facilities like stadium, training pitches, kits and equipment goes a long way in assisting players and their handlers to prepare adequately for competitions. The facilities can also be used when they are off seasons for self-training and experimentation of playing patterns. Quality equipment provides quality learning and understanding of skills needed by players in attaining high performances. The participation of the National Under-17 Teams in International competition as well as the eventual Hosting of FIFA's youth competition in 1999 and FIFA U-17 championship in 2009, afforded the country the opportunities to acquire newer sports facilities and upgraded existing ones. Furthermore, the U-17 national male football team outstanding performances over the years, made the provision of modern sport kits and training facilities an imperative. It was in this regard that this study found that the Team's performances contributed to a large extent in the provision of adequate football facilities and equipment as revealed by respondents. The finding was supported by the result of the test on the first hypothesis which was rejected and also the opinion that stated that the performances of the U-17 national male football team, significantly contributed to the provision of adequate football facilities in Nigeria, Obaseki (2019). It also led to the upgrade of sport facilities such as stadium which provided jobs for the contractors and their employees.

Football marketing and sponsorship is one of the important programmes in which the game gets significant amount of fund used in running football businesses and activities. As most football engagements and activities cannot be adequately funded by the government alone, she has to therefore, partnership with individuals and private organizations to market and sponsor the game of football in the country. Similarly, training, purchase of sport kits and playing of friendly matches among local and international teams were sponsored through public, private, partnership. In Nigeria, football sponsorship and marketing are spiking up as more local firms like First Bank, Union Bank, Padmozi, Tom Tom and IGI have at one time or the other, sponsored the National Team. International brands have also been involved in the marketing and sponsorship of the U-17 national male football team over the years. Brands like Adidas, Nike, Coca-Cola, Cadbury, Pepsi, Seven-up are renowned brands that have sponsored the team at one time or the other. In this study, respondents agreed

that the U-17 national male football team's impressive performances in various competitions have continually attracted sponsorship and marketing of the Team's activities. This is also supported by the rejection of the fourth null hypothesis which agreed that the Team's performances have significantly attracted sponsorship and marketing. This finding was supported by Ojeagbase (2019) WHO affirmed that the Team's performances contributed significantly to the attraction of sponsorship and marketing opportunities for football development.

The provision of adequate funding and financing of any project is crucial to its execution, implementation and overall success. Where funds are adequately provided, it goes a long way in making the implementation of the team plans possible. It also has a considerable impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of Team's management. In sport parlance, the provision of adequate fund means that Team's early preparations is attainable, camping is possible, logistics are wellhandled and contingent allowances as well as handler's remuneration are timely paid. The adequate provision of fund has far reached consequence on the overall Team's performances. One of the effects is that it allows proper planning and the execution of the plans. Secondly, it motivates the handlers and players to develop a more positive team spirit. Funding for sport most likely comes from individuals, corporate bodies and government. In this study, it was revealed that the issue of funding the National U-17 Team was a precarious one even in the event of the U-17 national male football team's impressive performances over the years. The finding here is in line with the view of Akinyode (2014) where they noted that the football teams were not adequately funded by the government and that this posed a challenge to football administration and overall performance of teams in Nigeria. Though the finding was not supported by the rejection of the fifth null hypothesis which stated that the team's performance has contributed significantly to the improvement of funding of football in Nigeria since the funds from individuals and cooperate bodies supplemented that of the government.

Conclusion

Based on the outcome of the study, it was concluded that the U-17 national male football team high and impressive performances since inception can be good instrument of football development in Nigeria. Furthermore, all the indices of sports development identified in this research such as funding, facilities and equipment and sponsorship and marketing can continue to be improved upon, if the U-17 national male football team are properly handled and taken care of, as to continue with their impressive and excellent performances.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher recommended the following:

1. Government through the NFF, should make it as a matter of priority, the release of adequate funds to the team for their planning, preparations, training, remuneration and rewards.
2. It is imperative for the cooperate organizations and philanthropists to be encouraged by the football body to cue into building more football facilities and the provision of football equipment sports as project already started by FIFA in some states.
3. There is the need for all the state governments to establish football academies that would not only take the youth off the street, reduce crime but also serve as avenues for their education and football development.
4. Further sponsorship and marketing should be revitalized so as to build more teams and also sponsor athletes.

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