The Dichotomy Between Preparation and Outcome Expectations; Athletes' Perceptions of the Nature of Talent Development in Nigeria

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Abstract: *Expertise development in sports requires a network of consistent and coherent supports to facilitate the process of turning latent potentials into successful international performance. Apart from supports, it is also important that the talent development environment is well structured to aid a methodical development of the future stars. Certain features of the Nigerian society, economy and culture suggest that athletes may need to swim against an ocean of several challenges if their goals of becoming champions in their sports are to be realised. However, Nigerian athletes and teams have recorded some notable achievement on the international stage in recent times, hence the need to examine how athletes perceive the nature of talent development in Nigeria in order to understand the challenges as well as success factors. Eight national athletes were interviewed on the topic, a qualitative analysis revealed the dichotomy between preparation and outcomes expectations in Nigerian sports.*
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I. Introduction

Nigerian athletes and national teams have achieved remarkable feats at various international competitions in the recent past. At the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow for example, Team Nigeria emerged 8th position in the overall medals table having won a total of thirty-six medals, including eleven gold, eleven silver and fourteen bronze medals. Similar achievements in the past include, winning the 2013 Africa Nation's Cup in South Africa and lifting the 2013 FIFA Under-17 World Cup in the United Arab Emirates for a record fourth-time in the history of the competition. However, there have been concerns over the extent to which Nigeria's sport performances reflect her level of sports development (Toriola, Adetoro, Toriola, & Igbokwe, 1997; Duru, 2001; Kulayo; 1994; Morakinyo, 2000; Busari, 2014; Oputah, 2014).

Interestingly, it has been observed that Nigeria's performances on the international stage contrast the status of Talent Identification and Development (TID) processes in the country (i.e. Morakinyo, 2000; Busari, 2014). For instance, Amusa (2004) argued that though the Nigerian authorities have shown continued interests in sports development by drawing up policies and procedures to guide practice in sports, and setting up sports management structures, implementation of successive sports development plans has been plagued by a plateau of social, political and economic problems. Consequently, the Talent Development Environments (TDEs) in Nigeria are characterized by deficits in infrastructure, lack of funding, and lack of support for research and development (e.g. Andreff, 2001). Despite the poor state of TDEs however, Nigerian athletes have recorded many exploits at the international stage. Therefore, it would be of interest to examine the nature of talent development in Nigeria to unearth the success factors of TID in the Nigerian context.

Previous research across different cultures highlight staged approach to development (i.e. Bloom, 1985; Balyi & Hamilton, 2004). Bloom (1985) emphasized long-term development plan, and age related stage-by-stage approach among essential elements of effective TID. Similarly, the social and cultural context within which TID is pursued is among key factors of effective development. For example, Collins and Bailey (2013) highlighted the harmful impacts of importing features of TID systems from foreign cultures (i.e. Australia) on talent development in the United Kingdom to illustrate the cultural specificity of TID. The stage model equally promotes the commitment of developing athletes to deliberate play and deliberate practice within the various stages of development (e.g. Cote, 1999; Balyi, & Hamilton, 2004). However, further studies revealed that individualised pathways with focus on key transitions are more important to talent development than merely 'graduating' developing athletes from one stage to the other (e.g. Abbott & Collins, 2004; Martindale, Collins and & Abraham, 2007).

Considering the dynamic and multidimensional nature of talent, Abbott and Collins (2004) acknowledged the influence of psychological variables over the Talent Development process. The authors highlight psychological factors such as goal setting, imagery, realistic performance evaluation and commitment

among key determinants of the ability to turn potentials into successful performance. Furthermore, research in other performance domains (i.e. music) acknowledged the role of psycho-behavioural factors in recognizing and optimizing potential. MacNamara, Holmes and Collins (2008) documented the development and deployment of psychological characteristics of developing excellence (PCDEs) as mediating factors of successful negotiation of the transitions between stages of development. Examples of the PCDEs that aid successful transition from one stage of development to another included determination, commitment, self-belief, coping under pressure, competitiveness and ability to work on weaknesses.

On an environmental level, Martindale, Collins and Abraham (2007) highlight the importance of effective TDEs to sport development. The authors identified five key features of an effective TDE to include Long-term aims and methods; Wide-ranging coherent messages and support; Emphasis on appropriate development vs. early success; Individualised and ongoing development; and Integrated, holistic and systematic development. The role of significant others (i.e. parents, siblings, teachers, peers) has also been emphasized in the talent development process (e.g. Martindale, Holmes & Collins, 2007; MacNamara *et al.*, 2008; Abbott &Collins, 2004). Hence, researchers like practitioners, agree on the need for a network of consistent and coherent supports to aid effective development of the future stars (e.g. Martindale *et al.*, 2007).

By implication, it is crucial to consider the effect of cultural differences on the processes and prospects of TID, because socio-cultural influences may have impacts on the perception of the significant others about sports development (e.g. Berry, 1997; Ali & Shen, 2012; Khaleque & Rohner, 2014). While most research efforts in TID have concentrated on certain societies/cultures (i.e. North Americas, Australia, Europe), it is needful to pay attention to the consequences of social expectations and culturally defined opportunities for TID. In the Nigeria context for instance, where many obstacles to effective development have been identified, such as lack of infrastructure (e.g. Busari, *et al.,* 2010), and poor implementation of sport development policies and programmes (e.g. Aluko, 2011), as well as wider social problems (i.e. poverty and poor management of resources etc.), it would be of interest to know how athletes were able to navigate through such barriers to become elite performers. To this end, the current study is intended to examine the culturally specific context of TID in Nigeria, to understand the challenges and factors of effective TID in sports.

II. Method

Participants

The sample consisted of eight elite athletes from various events within the track and field discipline including, sprint and relay races as well as jumping events. Participants were identified as successful elites through three criteria. First, all participants represented Nigeria in their various events at the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, and secondly, all participants have developed their career in Nigeria and did not participate in any sporting activity abroad until they became members of the Nigerian National Teams. This was necessary to ensure that participants have experienced the influence of the Nigerian socio-cultural context on TID and that there were no external influences on their development. Finally, participants have all won medals both in local and, or international competitions and are considered the best in their events. Also, all participants were current members of the Nigerian National Teams in their events at the time of the study.

Design

A qualitative research design was adopted to advance a deeper understanding of the socio-cultural context of TID in Nigeria, and the challenges posed to developing athletes as well as how athletes were able to navigate through those challenges to become successful in their sporting career. The qualitative method was considered appropriate for the study for its potential to generate focused data that would reveal a clear picture of the phenomenon under study (e.g. Neuman, 1997). A semi-structured interview was developed for the study with the aim of creating in-depth understanding of the challenges of TID in Nigeria. The interview schedule consisted of eleven open-ended questions purposefully structured to generate open-ended responses from participants (e.g. Neuman, 1997; Patton, 1990).

Pilot interviews were conducted with two members of Team Nigeria (i.e. the Nigerian contingents at the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow). The researcher carried out a rigorous appraisal of the pilot interview, feedback was used to evaluate and moderate the interview guide. Following the recommendation of Watson (1997), the feedback was also used to ensure response to probing questions was not biased by interviewer's opinions. The pilot interview were included in the final analysis because they were considered to be of sufficient qualities, and also because the interviewees satisfied the inclusion criteria.

Procedure

Ten prospective participants were contacted prior to the Commonwealth Games to discuss suitability and interest in the study; they were given assurance ofanonymity and confidentiality, before they were asked for consent. Out of the ten athletes contacted, eight agreed to take part in the study while two declined sighting

'personal reasons'. The main interview questions were given to participants two weeks prior to the interview so that they could familiarize themselves with the questions. At the actual interview, all interviewees were asked the same questions in the same sequence, however, while and when necessary, the interviewer asked probing questions (e.g. Patton, 1987) to create an in-depth understanding of responses and to capture a true representation of the socio-cultural context of TID in Nigeria. All interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes and were tape recorded for later transcription.

Data Analysis

The interview data were analyzed using inductive content analysis according to the recommendation of Edwards, Kingston, Hardy and Gould (2002). Data analysis followed the three stages outlined by Cote (1993) including coding experience; inductive inference; and similarity processes. Themes and categories were presented hierarchically to represent their order of emergence (Shaw 1999), and were supported by quotes in the result section (Bejaoui *et al.*, 2009).

Credibility

Several measures were taken to guarantee credibility of findings of the study. As earlier mentioned, the researchers ensured that interview questions were truly open-ended and that responses were not biased by the opinion of the interviewer. Similarly, raw transcripts and analyzed data (i.e. researchers' interpretation of the raw data) were sent to the participants to ascertain credibility (Patton, 1990); all participants agreed that they (i.e. analyzed data) accurately represented their views. Likewise, the data were subjected to a thorough (independent) reliability checks by other researchers who were experts in the field of study (Scanlan, Ravizza & Stein, 1989; Morse, *et al.*, 2002) to validate the procedure and findings of the investigation.

III.   Results

The findings revealed a dichotomy between how athletes were prepared and the performance expectations by the society. A broad description of this general theme through the sub-themes is presented in this section with example quotes to support their pattern of emergence.

Sport Success at a High-Elite Level is celebrated. The data revealed that athletes who achieve success at high elite level of their events are highly celebrated in the society. For example, winning a medal at any international competition (i.e. the Olympics and the Commonwealth Games) comes with national reception, high social recognition and national awards.Such athletes are projected as symbols of national pride; companies feature them on national TV to promote their brand. Hence, children who develop strong interest in their sports see such athletes as role models.

"The best encouragement I have at the moment is that I have just been given a national award by the president of the federal republic of Nigeria as a Member of the Order of Niger (MON). Definitely, this is a lot of motivation for me. Also the president will be hosting us (the awardees) to a dinner by next week; this has been a great boost to my inspiration and I'm really ready to put in all the efforts necessary so that I can take my performance to the next level" (A6)

"If you talk about people like Okagbare, the country is now running after her because she is a very successful athlete. Many of our athletes made it without any support. Therefore, I believe that when we get to the top the society will recognize us. But now I do all I can to support myself and believe that I can achieve greater feats and then there will be rewards for all my efforts" (A2)

The prospect of national recognition and fame, is a key attraction to sport participation in Nigeria. Participants reported that seeing how high elite athletes were celebrated on TV, as well as the pride that comes with sporting success, they developed the passion for sport participation from a very young age. And when they got to school, children take advantage of Physical Education (P.E.) sessions to experiment their love and passion for sports. Though the primary aim of P.E. was not TID but mainly to promote healthy living among pupils, P.E. was important to talent discovery and development among Nigerian athletes.

"When I was young, I used to watch athletics on the television because my father loved sports channels. I see how people compete on the tracks and how the winners were celebrated and always wished I were the one. So since then I have wanted to be the one winning medals. When I started going to school, I was introduced to P.E. (Physical Education) and the P.E. teacher would take us out to the filed to do exercises which always included running, this was an opportunity for me to experiment with what I have seen on the TV and love to do. I think the dream was motivated by how I saw people celebrated athletes who won medals and how people talk about them- this made me form an image of success in my mind" (A3).

Apart from social recognition, fame and national awards, athletic success at high elite level attracts considerable financial reward. The prospect of earning money through sporting success served as a motivation for potential athletes' involvement in sport participation. Similarly, success at high elite level meant that athletes would be representing Nigeria at the various international competitions such as the Olympics and the Commonwealth Games, and thus, offer the opportunity of travelling to different countries, make international friends and build relationship that may help further their development.

"Before I started running, I have a brother that was the director of sport in his school (the Niger Delta University). He called and told me about the NUGA (Nigeria Universities Games) and said I would be paid if I can run very well. When I asked him about the amount and he said N40, 000; I was amazed that one could be paid that much just for running. So the next morning I went to my university's sport complex and saw a lot of people training there, I saw the coach and told him I would like to train, and that I can run very well because I have been running from my primary school" (A8)

"I only became serious about it after one of my juniors in the secondary school called me one day and told me he was at the airport on his way to France. I was surprised and asked what he was going for, and he said he was going to represent Nigeria in long jump; I was like "just for jumping?" I remembered that I was far better than him in sports and so I said to myself that if he could travel to France for jumping then there is a lot I can achieve if I took my athletic career more seriously. That was when I started training and became committed to developing my sporting talent" (A2).

Sports Development is Poorly Valued. Unemployment and poverty ranked high among the major factors of social and cultural behaviours of the Nigerian society. With an estimate of over 80 per cent of the population living below the poverty line, the struggle to break out of poverty typified most Nigerian families. The economy is dependent on the formal sector and as a result, only people who are eligible for the highly competitive white-collar-jobs have the real prospect of getting a job. Consequently, education is seen as the only means of crossing over the poverty line. Children are expected to be serious with their studies and avoid whatever could be a distraction to education. Unfortunately, the sport sector has no real prospect for job and wealth creation in Nigeria; in fact, the club structure (which would be an income earner in sports) is non-existent. Thus, athletes only take part in sports for pleasure and other personal reasons, except the very few who could breakthrough to the high elite level. Hence, families viewed sport as a waste of time.

"In Nigeria, there is a lot of emphasis on education, because education is seen as the only way to break out of poverty. My parents believed that the only way they can secure a better future for me was education; therefore, any other thing (including sports) was seen as unnecessary distraction. Because of this, we (myself and my siblings) were not allowed to do sport" (A4)

"I did not have any support while I was growing up apart from the one I gave to myself. Nobody even believed in me, the expectation of my parents was that I focus on my studies; sport was not given the deserved attention" (A1)

"My parents believed that athletics would reduce the commitment I have towards my studies and all they wanted was that I faced my studies" (A6)

"I realized that I have the potential since I was in primary school, but my father didn't believe in me even for one day. He was just looking at it as a waste of time because he believed that it was only when you go to school that you can make it in life, my parent believed sport was a waste of time" (A5)

Similarly, the data showed a pervasive scepticism about the possibility that an average child can develop to the high elite level of sport performance (which is the only way sports participation is rewarded in Nigeria). Parents doubted the ability of their children to achieve high-level success in sports; and so, TID in sport is discouraged. The society supposed that allowing children get involved in TID would amount to a waste of time, especially because the dream of sporting success is an elusive one. Participants expressed their frustrations with the fact that sporting success was celebrated by every section of the society, while sport participation was discouraged. Children who got round this obstruction and develop their athletic career only did so by becoming resilient against the social disapproval for TID in sports. For example, young athletes trained secretly without the knowledge of their parents to avoid being punished for taking part in sport.

"One thing that kept me going was the desire to prove everyone who had doubted me wrong, I wanted to show

that taking part in sport is not a waste of time. It was a puzzle to me that people celebrated successful athletes and watched them on the television, and they applauded their performance. Yet any child that shows interest in sports is highly reprimanded. I was determined to achieving my dreams so I was ready to give it whatever it would take including starvation and other forms of self-deprivation". (A1)

"*In 2010, I attended the national trials; I did very well and was selected to represent Nigeria in the 2010 Commonwealth Games in India. I travelled to India without telling my father because he was not aware that I was training behind him. So, while I was at the Commonwealth Games, a family friend saw my name in a national daily and told my dad. My father read the paper and couldn't believe it. I begged for his forgiveness and pleaded that I had to be secretive about my sporting career because he was never going to support it. To God be the glory, my father had no option than to support me, he began to give money for training materials, feeding, and transportation, and he also supported me emotionally. From this point forward, my dad became a pillar of support; I only needed to ask, and he would do anything for me" (A8)*

The data further indicated that athletes' families constituted a strong barrier to TID. Parents strongly opposed the idea of their children taking part in sports. Instead of being supported, aspiring athletes were punished for participation. Though, there were other challenges to TID in sports in the Nigerian context, parents' disapproval of sport participation was viewed as a major stumbling block to sport development in Nigeria. This is because, athletes who disobeyed their parents to get involved in TID would lack the supports they needed from the family. Children's aspirations to become elite athletes face serious financial as well as emotional burdens. For instance, athletes lacked money to support their development, and are also seen as disobedient children. The quotes below demonstrate the effects of parental disapproval of TID in sport on athletes progress:

"It was so difficult for me, apart from not having financial supports, and training without the necessary kits, there was huge emotional barrier coming from my parents" (A3)

"People like me, who went behind their parents to take part in sports, were seen as disobedient. While those who gave all their attention to their studies were the good ones. The entire setting was not supportive of sport development. However, I kept on hoping that one day I would be celebrated because everybody would turn around to celebrate successful athletes, including the society, the government and even the parents who were against you taking part in sport will come to say they are proud of your achievements. So I believed that one day this would be my story" (A5)

There appeared to be a negative social perception of sports participation across every sector of the Nigerian society. Sport development is seen as an unprofitable endeavour for the child, this is more so because spending time on TID would mean having less time for education. According to the participants, the environment was 'hash' to TID in sports, not only was the family a barrier, but the entire society including the school, and the government reportedly offered no support for athletes' development. Teachers treated pupils who participated in sports as 'unserious elements'. Athletes were seen as deviants, not only in school, but also in the society. This negative social perception of sports participation was borne out of the view that the sports sector has no real potential for job creation, and the fears that the average child would not be able to achieve a high-elite status in sports. In the following quotes, participants spoke about the hostility to TID in sports:

"The way people talked about sports was not very good. Every parent wants the best for his/her children and therefore would not want to allow them go into sports because the perception was that sport men and women were wayward and easily corrupted. But then, that does not mean that anyone who goes into sport will become bad, it depends on your dreams and how serious you are about them. Again, the way you present yourself to the people is very important. Even if there are rough guys around, they will not come to you except they see that you are their kind" (A8)

"The problem of education must be addressed; schooling should be friendly to athletic development. The school environment in Nigeria is hostile to sport development; pupils who take part in sports are seen as unserious by teachers, instead of encouraging the athletes and support their commitment to sports development" (A5)

"And again, the Nigerian society was not friendly to sport development; there was no support from any source. There was no financial support, we lacked good facilities and equipment, no good coaches, you know, it was a very difficult situation. But I thank God for seeing me through; I have to strive hard to become who I dream to be" (A2)

The government, like the family, school and the society, does not encourage TID in sports. The Nigerian government lacked the will and interest to invest in sports development. This was evident from the acute shortage of sporting facilities across communities. Similarly, the government provided no form of financial incentives for TID, neither was there any sponsorship or funding programme for sport development. Athletes described the environment as 'not conducive' for TID in sports. Even for athletes who already demonstrated talent by representing the country at international competitions, there is no support for further development. In contrast however, successful athletes at the high elite level are celebrated and highly rewarded by the government. The following quotes by the participants demonstrate that developing athletes did not receive enough support, encouragement or reward for their efforts towards sport development:

"You need financial supports. You also need facilities, because here in Nigeria, there are no facilities to support sport development. There are good coaches in Nigeria and that is the major thing we have going well for us as athletes. Similarly, we need parental supports, because the reality in Nigeria is that many parents do not really like their children taking part in sports" (A4)

"There was no support from the government at any level; during primary and secondary schools the government showed no concerns at all. Even till now, there is no form of support coming from the government- I train on my own and have to rely on whatever help I can achieve by myself" (A1)

"I have achieved a lot, but with so many challenges. In Nigeria we lack many things, no facility, no training facility, no encouragement, a lot, a lot of challenges. You can imagine you go to represent your country in an international competition and when you come back you have nothing to show for it - you cannot even recharge your phone, nothing good is coming out of the achievement." (A3)

"We need to learn from other sporting nations where the environment is conducive for the development of athletes; where their governments provide all the facilities needed for sport development; where there is encouragement from the family and friends; where sport is seen as a good profession and athletes are respected and treasured; where there are sponsorship and funding programmes for talent development" (A7)

With the population of about one hundred and seventy million people, it is reasonable to expect that there would be huge potential for sporting excellence. However, the government would need to set the pace by promoting sport development programmes, and creating the effective environment for TID and investing into building the infrastructure to support TID. If the perceived sporting potentials of Nigeria are to be realised, the government need not to hide under the cynicism in the society but lead the way in dispelling the negative perception of sports development within the society, and build the enabling structure for TID. Only through deliberate intervention form the government can Nigeria reduce the apparent loss of talents in sports. The following quotes from some of the participants highlight the need for government to invest in sport development, promote TID, and support athletes' development:

"My advice is that the government should go to the grassroots and begin from there, we should pick up young athletes, because there are talented people from all over the place but there is no encouragement, no support for them, so if we create the good environment Nigeria can produce good athletes" (A2)

"We need to go down to the grassroots to identify talents and provide the necessary environment for growth. We need to start from the very basic: primary and secondary school levels. Then we need to provide facilities so that children will be motivated to take part in sports. Nigerians are naturally strong, so if we provide the right environment; there are lots of talents among us" (A5)

"The major problem I encountered was the lack of facilities. There are many talents in Nigeria, but because the environment is very hash, people just dropped their sporting ambitions and looked for an alternative in other professions. If the supports were there, and the facilities were available, Nigeria would be among the greatest sporting nations of the world. We have to train on the street instead of the tracks, because there were just no tracks" (A4)

The nature of Nigerian societies presents athletes with multiple barriers to development; athletes were reportedly left alone to face the onerous task of talent development without any form of assistance. The widespread opposition to sports development prevents children at the grassroots level to get involved in TID; the family, the school, the government and the entire society resisted sport development. This social apathy is responsible for the lack of investment in sport infrastructure, leaving athletes and their coaches with no other

option than to improvise (where possible) for the facilities needed for training. The quotes below reflect the rejection, abandonment, and other barriers athletes are faced with:

"Under normal condition, an athlete should be supported by the system to develop his career. If he is a student, he should have scholarship to take care of his education. In other countries there are facilities to train; athletes have access to coaches who are professionals, but all that is not available in Nigeria. Everything here is a problem, ranging from accommodation to medical, to school fees, to feeding; it's just a different ball game" (A3)

"I look at it like there are different types of challenges; as a growing athlete, there were no good facilities to train, there were no good tracks and there was no gym, what we did was improvisation. But now, though we don't have access to very good facilities but it is better than what we used to have as growing athletes; this is one of the issues with sports in Nigeria, when we go to international competitions, we are made to compete with athletes that have it all, but in our own case we barely have the very basic facilities for training" (A2)

"Either you are a developing athlete or an elite athlete the challenges are the same. It is the same issues with facilities, sponsors, and finance. These are the major challenges to athletes' development in Nigeria. Every athlete in Nigeria, both developing and senior athlete faces the same problem and that is why many ambitions are never fulfilled" (A6)

Athletes believed that the challenges of development in Nigeria deny them a level playing ground with their counterparts from other countries. At international competitions (i.e. Commonwealth Games and the Olympics), Nigerian athletes perceived that their opponents from the developed countries where TID is supported have advantage over them. Athletes a feeling of being let down particularly by the failure of the government to articulate sport development plans and programmes for the country. In the following quotes, participants express their displeasure with the poor development environment in the country:

"Here at the Commonwealth Games, we are competing against athletes from the developed nations who have access to good facilities, training programmes, and good coaches and are well supported by their government. But in Nigeria the reverse is the case; we have to improvise for almost everything because the government does not show interest in providing the resources to support athletes' development" (A4)

"We have a situation where we do track and field without tracks, this gives our opponents from other countries where the environment is conducive, the advantage over us. So there is need to create all the necessary supports in the system. So many people drop out of sport because they are not supported" (A2)

Similarly, athletes were exposed to financial constraints. Since the family was opposed to TID, and there were no funding or sponsorship programmes for sport development, athletes lacked the necessary financial supports for their development. Athletes helped themselves (through menial jobs or petty trades) to buy their training kits otherwise they would be handicapped. And for athletes who did not live with their parents, the problem was not limited to the inability to acquire training kits, but also, getting their basic daily needs (i.e. food, transportation, shelter) was a difficult task. In the quotes below, participants reported lack of funding as being a major barrier to their development:

"There is need for supports most especially, financial supports. We also need to have a talent identification system where young athletes will be identified and assisted through the various stages of development. As it is now, we rely on athletes who were able to discover themselves and go through very difficult experience to develop their potential" (A7)

"My major problem was finance, I couldn't afford decent feeding, I was training without the very basic materials such as track shoes, I was having problem with transport fare to and from training, and so the major challenge was finance. Though, there are other problems such as lack of facilities and standard training programme, but the major issue was money" (A5)

"The most difficult challenge I have faced so far was finance. Sometimes I wake up as early as 5am so that I could walk or run to training because I couldn't afford the transport money. After training, I would not be able to transport myself home and would have to beg or walk back home. There were so many challenges, no financial supports, no encouragements, even the government will not do anything to support or encourage you. After making the senior team it is the same; you will go to competitions and come back with nothing to show for

it" (A1)

"...Nobody was supporting me, it was hard for me to cope with the demands of training. Many times I would have no food after training, I could not afford ordinary fruits and so I was unable to fulfil the nutritional needs of my sport" (A4)

IV. Discussion And Conclusion

The objective of this study was to examine the perceptions of athletes on the process of TID in the Nigerian context in order to develop an understanding of the nature of talent development environment and its impacts on successful development. The findings indicated that Nigerian athletes faced some tough environmental challenges that made successful TID more difficult in comparison with other cultures (i.e. U.K., Canada, U.S.A and Australia). There was a dichotomy between athletes' preparation and the expectations of the society. Successful performance at high-elite level was highly celebrated, whereby successful athletes received high social recognition, national awards and financial rewards. The high reward for success was a key motivating factor of effective development among Nigerian athletes. Successful athletes were popular features on national television stations and commercial advertisements (i.e. billboards, flyers, posters) such that children, through them develop the love and interest in sport participation. The prospect for high rewards has been previously reported as a motivation for sport participation and talent development (Gillet, Vallerand, Amoura & Baldes, 2010).

In contrast however, sport participation at the beginner level and talent development were poorly valued. There was a pervasive skepticism about the likelihood that the average child can successfully develop a career in sports based on the absence of effective TDEs (i.e. poor facilities, lack of funding, unavailability of coaches). TID was discouraged because the society perceived that regular participation in sporting activities would distract the child's education. Education was seen, as the only means of securing the future of the child, thus it is a priority to the average Nigerian family; this negative perception of sport is a major barrier to TID in Nigeria. Previous research identified the socio-cultural factors e.g. place of birth as determinants of sport participation (e.g. Côté, Macdonald, Baker & Abernethy, 2006). Also, most parents do not believe that the child has the potentials to develop elite level of performance in which case the child can earn reasonable income from sports, and so they consider TID as a waste of time. Whereas, in other cultures, like the United Kingdom and Australia parents provided significant supports for talent development (e.g. Bloom, 1985; Till *et al.*, 2011; Cote, 1999;; Martindale, Collins & Abraham, 2007).

The current finding has made significant contributions to knowledge about TID that will promote best practices among practitioners and researchers in sports. For instance, previous studies emphasized the role of supports from family, and other significant persons in the life of aspiring athletes if successful development is to be achieved (e.g. Bloom, 1985; Cote, 1999; Abbott & Collins, 2004; Martindale *et al.*, 2007). Martindale and colleagues (2007) not only highlight the importance of family supports, but also stressed the need for a network of coherent supports from home (i.e. parents and siblings), school (i.e. teachers) and from the community in order to create an effective talent development environment that will aid the nurturing of latent potentials into world class successful performance. Since the reality of the Nigerian context showed that all the potential sources of support were even themselves barriers to TID in sports, it might mean that some factors of effective development (e.g. the role of the family) is context specific; this is more so because some of the participants reported the drive to prove their parents wrong for not believing in them as a major motivation for hard word and perseverance needed for success.

Finally, it is important to highlight some limitations of the study so that readers are well guided in interpreting the finding. To start with the small sample size (n=8) should be considered as well as the fact that all participants belonged to one discipline (i.e. athletics); it might be that a larger multi-sport sample may vary the finding. However, as it the case of qualitative enquiries, the nature of the current study required that the sample size is manageable to achieve the objective of an in depth investigation. Secondly, it will be interesting to know how successful athletes were able to develop in the 'hostile' environment highlighted in this finding and the factors that contributed to such success. In fact, a follow up study is being conducted to unearth the factors, process, and opportunities for successful TID in a Nigerian context.

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