Reasons for Youth Sport Dropout from Organized Sport: The Case Of Ethiopian Youth Sport Academy Athlete Tirunesh Dibaba Sport Training Center

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Abstract
Athlete Tirunesh Dibaba Sports Training Centre was established in 2009 at Asela (Arsi) under Ethiopian Sports Commission’s Sports Academy, establishing programs intending to supply young competitive athletes to the national federations. But trainees with promising performance have been observed leaving from the training centre before they have reached their top performance. From the personal experience of the author, who has been working in this institution as a coach for five years, a high number of trainees are leaving the Centre before they finish their training years and no longer continue their training. What are the main causes leading young Ethiopian promising athletes to drop out from organized sport involvement? In this paper, number of possible factors for dropout has been evaluated, following a comprehensive fieldwork collection of data which include interviews with coaches, with the training centers’ medical team and the trainees, but also questionnaires and analysis of secondary data organized by the registrar of the training centre about the trainees.

Introduction

Running is the most popular sport activity for Ethiopians, especially people who live around Assela town where most of Ethiopia’s Olympic champions came from such as Haile Gebrselassie, Kenenisa Bekele, Derartu Tulu, Tirunesh Dibaba, and many more. Assela town is 175 kilometers far from Addis Ababa, with an elevation of 2,430 meters and categorized as having a subtropical highland climate. Monthly temperature variation is low, due to its elevation and closeness to the Equator. But in recent years youths prefer to participate in education and in other non-sporting activities rather than in long-time-consuming athletics sport involvement. As a result, there is a lack of emerging new young champions able to substitute former super stars in the World Athletics Championship and Olympic Games. In order to overcome the problem, the Ethiopian Sport Commission established the Athlete Tirunesh Dibaba athletics training center at Assela in 2009, now named Ethiopian Youth Sport Academy Athlete Tirunesh Dibaba (EYSAATD). The sports training center has introduced a new well-organized and scientific sport training system since 2009 for youth sport talent and performance development, receiving young talented ‘potential athletes’ from different regions of the country.

But in the course of work in the training centre from 2009 up to 2014, I have observed that numerous trainees were leaving the training centre before completion of the courses. The training center could admit 307 talented trainees through sport talent identification tests in 2009 from different regions of the country to let them develop their talent through a well-structured 4 years sport training system. But 51 (16.6%) trainees were reported missing in the middle of the first year.

Youth sport dropout has been an issue for researchers since the early 1970s. Gould & Petlichoff estimated that around 35% of children drop out of sport each year.2 Different researchers have

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discussed a number of reasons for youth dropout in different domains. Peter Carlmanet al. believed “More time for school”, “More time for other sports” and “Did not like the coach” are dominant factors for youth dropout. Klint & Weiss reported that dropout was the result of having other things to do, not liking pressure, lack of fun, taking too much time, not being as good as they wanted, not liking coaches, not being able to be with friends, injuries, training being too hard and anxiety. Conflicts of interest, lack of fun and low perception of ability were also pointed to as major reasons for withdrawal. The purpose of this study is to identify the leading factors for dropout from the EYSAATD sport training centre.

Method

Participants
This study targeted all former trainees who were members of the training center and left the center for different reasons before completion of the course, except those who were made to leave the center because they failed to achieve the expected performance development goal of the training year. As all dropped out trainees were no longer reachable, this research used Snowball sampling techniques to select the participants. As a result 83 participants were selected, 61.4% male and 38.6% female.

Instruments
For this study the combination of primary and secondary data sources were used to increase the credibility of the research findings and minimize the risk of erroneous conclusion. Accordingly, three kinds of data collection instruments, i.e. document analysis, questionnaire and semi-structured interview, were employed to obtain enough breadth and variety of information for the study.

The data were gathered by conducting document analysis available in the Training Center registrar office and physiotherapist center (in which athlete profiles were registered), delivering the questionnaire to reachable respondents and conducting interviews with former trainees and their coaches.

After collecting data, the process of tabulation was carried out based on the available data. The analysis was made with frequency and percentage based on the results obtained from the database used i.e. Microsoft Excel and Statistical Package for Social Sciences /Spss/ version 20.

Analysis and Findings

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A descriptive statistical method such as frequency and percentage was employed to analyze and summarize the data on youth athletics sport dropout from organized sport involvement in EYSAAT sport training center.

**Duration of the subjects’ stay in the center**
The training centre provides 4 years of structured training. At the end of each year there is performance development assessment up until the 4th (graduating) year. In order to get promotion to the next training year, trainees need to achieve performance development requirements for the training year. After completion of the course, trainees are transferred to different athletics sport clubs. But subjects are reported leaving the center at any time and any level of the training years. Figure 1 illustrates the duration of time subjects spent in the training center. As in the training center one official training year lasts for ten months, the training year was divided into ten for the purpose of illustration. The amount of time the subject stayed in the center was stated in years. The average duration of subject in the training center was 1.122 years (1.065 years for male and 1.212 years for female)

![Figure 1. The duration of subjects’ stay in the training center before leaving the center in years.](image)

The figure illustrates the duration of the stay of the subject in the training center before they leave the center. According to the data one subject who takes 1.2% of the total population, has left the center just after being recruited in the training center, i.e just after qualifying in the training center admittance test. Other subjects were known leaving the training year from the first month of recruitment to the end of the third year of involvement in the center.

Out of 20 distributed reported times of leaving, the maximum frequency of dropout occurred after 1 (one) year stay in the center (19.3%). 2 (two) subjects (2.4%) quitted the training center after taking 2.8 years of athletics sport training which is the maximum duration of the leaving subjects.

**The chronological age of the subject**
The training center recruits trainees who can qualify through sport talent identification and performance tests. But the candidates should not be older than 20 years except for long distance running events in which trainees up to 25 years old are accepted. But since 2014 the training center has been accepting trainees with less than 18 years of age. The mean chronological age of the subjects, when they left the center, was 19.45 with Standard Deviation ±SD 1.908 (for male
19.80 and for female 18.88 with ± SD 1.950 and 1.718 respectively). Distribution of chronological age of the subject is illustrated in figure 2.

Figure 2. The illustration of chronological age distribution of the subjects. (in years)

![Figure 2](image)

Figure 2 illustrates the chronological age of the subjects when they leave the training center. According to the data the former trainees’ minimum age level found was 14 and maximum 24 years of age when they leave the center. Among them maximum dropout occurred at the age of 19, 18 and 20, in which 25.3%, 21.7% and 16.9% dropout occurred respectively.

**Sporting event of the subject**

In this research some general information about the subjects are provided to help to understand about youth sport dropout behavior. Athletics sport event of the subjects in which they were participating in was:

- Middle and long distance N = 35
- Sprint and hurdle N = 16
- Field events N = 32

**Reasons for youth sport dropout**

Many researchers have postulated reasons for youth sport dropout from organized sport involvement. There are common youth sport dropout reasons across all situations, but it is true that youth sport dropout reasons vary in different environmental, personal, social etc conditions. Some youth sport dropout reasons that became a headache for one country or/and trainer could be insignificant reasons for other. Based on existing environmental, economical, social and other conditions, this research work tried to identify major reasons for youth sport dropout from organized sport involvement in Ethiopia in the case of EYSTAADT sport training center. According to the data, collected through interviews and questionnaires, reasons identified for youth sport dropout were the following:

1. **Educational requirement**

The trainees in the center are young and most of them are attending high school or lower level classes. They train and attend their class simultaneously. Young trainees with promising athletic performance, after completing high school classes, were being seen to leave the training center to join university. They were 10 (5 male and 5 female) in number (12% of the total subject). Among them, only 3 female and 1 male subjects continued their athletics training by joining athletics clubs nearby their Universities and participating in different national athletics
competitions. 1 female and 2 male subjects continued athletic involvement but only in university sport festivals. 1 female and 2 male former athletic sport trainees were not participating in any kind of athletics sport competition or/and organized athletics sport training.

2. **Sport-related injuries**
Out of 83 subjects, 8 (9.6%) subjects dropped out from the training center because of sport-related injuries. Among them 6 were male and 2 female. From the subjects who dropped out because of injury, 6 were from long middle and long distance running event, 1 from sprint and hurdle event, and 1 from field events.

3. **Interest in other sports**
One of the variables found as a reason for youth sport dropout in this research work was trainees’ interest in other sports. The information gathered from all sources indentified 7 (8.4% of all subjects) subjects leaving the training center because of interest in other sport. They dropped out from the center to train in other sport or athletics event. The 7 subjects are distributed 3 female and 4 male.

Two 800m, one 10,000m and one steeplechase runner left the center to participate in marathon running and other road races outside EYSAATD sport training center. One subject dropped out from marathon training to join 5k training outside EYSAATD sport training center. One former sprinter left the center to train for the 5k. One year after, this subject burned out and quit athletics training entirely. And one subject was a field-event athlete and wanted to participate in football outside EYSAATD sport training center.

4. **The Economic factor**
Economics plays a considerable role in youth sport participation and dropout. In this study the greater number of the youth sport dropout reason from organized sport involvement were identified as economic factors. 28 subjects (19 male and 9 female) confirmed that they left the center to help their family and themselves financially by involving themselves in some income generating activities (this took a 33.7% share of total dropout).

*Economic factors in dropout and athletics sport event*

Economic factors for youth dropout were seen as a problem for every event.

- 15 former trainees dropped out from middle and long distance running events.
- 8 subjects were from sprint and hurdle events
- 5 were from field events.

Economic factor includes individuals who dropped out from the training center to:

- Help their family and themselves by involving themselves in other non sport activities or
- Participate in some sponsored races, especially for long distance runners. As the training center doesn’t allow its trainees to participate in heavy races to prevent them from possible injuries and burnout, these runners drop out from the Centre.

5. **Socio-cultural factors**
Social factors influence young trainees deciding to quit sport training and involvement. Trainees in EYSAATD sport training center are from different regions of the country with different cultures, languages and ethnic group origin. In some ethnic groups, young females are forced to marry someone based on their family’s decision. 3 (3.6 %) of former female trainees confirmed that they left the center to fulfill their family’s interest according to their culture.
Some “disadvantaged” ethnic groups were seen isolating themselves from others and this resulted in 17 trainees (20.48% of the total dropout) leaving the training center because of disagreement with other groups. Among them all trainees from one specific ethnic group left the training center on one occasion. They were 15 in number.

In some athletics events, no Ethiopian athlete ever reached a top-level performance. As a result, according to the subjects, the value given by the society for the events is disappointing and no one, including their family, motivated them to continue in a training as they considered this to be humiliating. 2 (2.6%) former trainees left the center because they were disappointed by social reactions to the sporting event they were involved in.

6. Migration

In Ethiopia, a great number of athletes train in athletics clubs and under athlete managers, but some athletes migrate to developed countries and among them some participate in different athletics competition representing the hosting country. The rate and reasons for Ethiopian athletes migration is poorly identified and need to be researched.

Young trainees also migrate from the athletics training center to places where good athletics training facilities are available. 8 (9.6%) former trainees of the training center migrated to developed countries. Among them two (2) subjects disappeared in the county where they were travelling to participate in international youth athletics championships. Four (4) subjects left the center and their country after receiving invitations from abroad through athletes’ managers. Moreover, two (2) subjects were travelled to abroad by private traveling agencies.

Conclusion

Youth sport dropout behavior is scarcely investigated in Ethiopia. This study was conducted to identify the major reasons for youth sport dropout in Ethiopia. EYSAATD Training Center was used to conduct the research. To conclude the findings are:

- More male trainees tended to leave the training center than female trainees, while the recruitment was proportional.
- Most drop out occurs after a one year stay in the center.
- Young athletes’ termination from organized sport involvement was high at the age of 18, 19 and 20. Those ages are the age stages when young people are going to join universities or/and start to take responsibility for themselves and their parents.
- Middle and long distance trainees leaving rate was high because they want to work with private athlete managers or race organizers.
- The leading youth dropout reason from the training center was the economic factor. The dropout rate for economic reasons accounted for 33.7% of the population. Young trainees with promising performances terminate their sport training to help their families by involving in non-sport activity such as laboring and some young athletes who tried to work with private athlete managers and participate in road races prematurely injured seriously and can no longer run.
- The second highest dropout rate was observed to be social factors due to which 26.5% of the subjects left the center. As the data shows, there was the feeling of isolation in some ethnic groups.
- Educational requirement (to join university) stood third by 12% of dropouts.
- Sport-related injury created 9.6% dropouts. There was a knowledge gap among trainees about sport-related injuries.
- 9.6% dropout occurred because trainees migrate to developed countries.
- Interest in other sports was investigated as a dropout reason and 8.4% of dropouts occurred because of event switching: athletes shifting to other athletics event that they thought to be beneficiary rather than training in the event for which their talent has been identified.