NATIONAL ATHLETE'S PERCEIVED IMAGE OF THE GOVERNMENT IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPORTS IN MALAYSIA

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BACKGROUND

- In a research conducted by Mohamed Fiah, Mazlan, and Osman (2012), the poor quality of sports in Malaysia is due to five main reasons. These are lack of management skills, incompetency of sports administrators, lack of financial aids, corruption, and involvement of politicians in sports.
- Other issues that exist in Malaysia include the scarcity of availability and accessibility of venues and facilities, especially in towns and rural areas. The lack of facilities and equipment for the public are jogging and biking tracks, physical exercise equipment as well as facilities for competitive athletes.
- These include badminton courts, squash courts, sepak takraw courts, basketball courts, martial art halls and swimming pools.
- In this paper, two policies were identified which relate to sports. They are the 2009 National Sports Policy and the One Student One Sport Policy, developed in 2011.
- Hashim (2012) provided some recommendations to improve the quality of the football (soccer) scene as well as other sports in Malaysia. To improve the quality of football (and other sports) in Malaysia, the government of Malaysia should encourage private capital investments into the domestic leagues as well as the national teams.
- The FAM should also be disallowed from having unqualified presidents leading the organization as there was an abuse of power for the presidential position in FAM, Malaysia should create a plan to attract the best players, managers, coaches, and administrators, and Malaysia should revitalize the infrastructure to create a platform for young talents to improve.

OBJECTIVES

Although the government is working to improve the quality of sports in Malaysia, the development of sports, and the country’s global competitiveness, scant scholarly work has been done to address the issues faced by Malaysian athletes, arguably the most important stakeholder group when it comes to improving the quality of sport in Malaysia.

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of the Malaysian government’s sport development efforts through the lens of the national athletes and provide recommendations that could lead to better sports development and improved quality of sports in Malaysia.

RQ 1 = How do Malaysian national athletes perceive the resources and opportunities provided by the Malaysian government to support their athletic career?

RQ 2 = What can the Malaysian government do in order to improve the quality of sports and sports development in Malaysia?

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative, cross-sectional methodology were used to address the research questions.

Participants:
11 current and former Malaysian national athletes from seven different sports. To ensure reliability of the study, any-ex-Malaysian national athletes that were let go or stepped down before 2010 were not interviewed.

The requirements were:
- 18 years old or above
- must be part of the national team at the start of 2010 or current national athletes

Data Collection:
11 semi-structured, virtual phone interviews through Zoom were conducted consisting of national athletes of different ages and gender to avoid bias. Participants were contacted through Instagram, Twitter, and e-mail.

Sampling: Convenience and snowball sampling were used due to the different locations of the participants and researcher and the limited amount of time to conduct interviews. Some of the participants were athletes that the researcher knows personally. After an interview, the study was then conveyed to other national athletes with pre-existing relationships.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The questions for the interview were created based on a framework of nine pillars that was used in a paper by De Bosscher, De Knop, and van Bottenburg, (2007). The nine pillars or nine policy areas were identified as crucial factors that lead to international sporting success (Bosscher, et al., 2007). Questions that were based on this framework allowed this study to obtain findings and data that will lead to a better understanding of where the Malaysian government needs to maintain or improve on in order to improve the quality of sports and sports development in Malaysia. These nine pillars make the Sport Policy Factors Leading to International Sporting Success or SPLISS Model. The results of this study will be compared to the SPLISS Model, the main issues in Malaysian sports, and the recommendations provided by Hashim’s study.

The nine pillars are:
- financial support
- integrated approach to policy development
- sport participation
- talent identification and development system
- athletic and post career support
- training facilities
- coaching provision and coach development
- national and international competitions
- scientific research and sports medicine support

CONCLUSIONS

The information provided by this study could prove useful for both scholars and practitioners in the sport industry. There is a lack of data and information on sports development and sports quality across the national team. The information provided could provide insight on what it is like for the the national athletes and what they go through, and practitioners and policy makers could use this study to understand what is needed and which areas to improve to increase sports development and improve quality of sports in Malaysia. A limitation of this study is it does not involve a sample of athletes from all the national sport organizations. Different sports might receive more or less support from the government therefore this is only a small representation of the support the national athletes receive. Future research could be done on a wider scale to get a better representation of the support.

RESULTS

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the interview transcripts. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis method is used to identify, analyze, and report patterns within the qualitative data. A variety of themes were revealed through perceived government support (RQ1). The theme “adequate competition opportunities” shows that the government provides competition opportunities for the athletes, which are the SEA Games, Asian Games, and Commonwealth Games. The government provides some “financial incentives” for the athletes and the opportunity to earn other incentives depending on performance, but a subtheme is “insecure financial support” indicating the current level of support is not enough. Respondents agreed that the government provided “adequate physical resources” in the form of quality facilities, equipment, and accessibility. Another noted theme was “high quality coaching” indicating that the government is doing a good job of providing quality coaching to the athletes.

When athletes were asked about recommendations for improving the national athletes’ experience (RQ2), some key themes were “post career support”, “improved communication” which relates to better communication between the NSC’s and the NSC, and finally, “increased funding/exposure” meaning an increase in funding which will help lead to an increase in overseas exposure for training and competition.