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RESEARCH ARTICLE

STRATEGIC REVIEW OF FLORA DISTRICT'S SPORTS PROGRAM: FOUNDATION FOR A COMPREHENSIVE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

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Abstract

School-based sports programs play a crucial role in promoting holistic learner development, physical wellness, leadership formation, and community engagement. Despite their recognized contributions, many rural educational districts continue to encounter significant challenges in sustaining effective sports development initiatives due to limited resources, inadequate facilities, insufficient technical expertise, and inconsistent institutional support. This study evaluated the Sports Program of Flora District, Apayao, Philippines, as a basis for designing a comprehensive sports development framework. Utilizing an evaluative-developmental research design, the study employed document analysis, SWOT analysis, inventories, surveys, interviews, focus group discussions, and observations involving district administrators, sports coordinators, school heads, coaches, athletes, parents, and community stakeholders. Findings revealed that Flora District offers twenty-one sports disciplines supported by a structured administrative hierarchy and strong local government collaboration. However, major deficiencies were identified in sports infrastructure, equipment availability, coaching competency, financial sustainability, and stakeholder engagement mechanisms. SWOT analysis further indicated that while substantial opportunities exist through local government support, alumni involvement, and external partnerships, the program remains vulnerable to funding dependence and resource constraints. Based on the findings, a three-year Comprehensive Sports Development Framework was developed focusing on governance enhancement, coaching professionalization, infrastructure modernization, and sustainable financing. The study underscores the necessity of evidence-based planning and collaborative governance in strengthening grassroots sports development in rural educational settings.

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INTRODUCTION

Sports have long been recognized as an essential component of quality education due to their contribution to physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development. Participation in sports enables learners to develop discipline, perseverance, teamwork, leadership, and resilience while promoting healthy lifestyles and psychological well-being (UNESCO, 2015). Educational institutions worldwide increasingly view sports programs not merely as extracurricular activities but as strategic mechanisms for learner development and community engagement.

The role of school sports extends beyond physical fitness. Research indicates that student-athletes often demonstrate improved academic performance, enhanced self-esteem, stronger interpersonal relationships, and greater civic participation compared to their non-participating peers (Bailey et al., 2013). Sports participation has likewise been associated with improved concentration, time management skills, and emotional regulation, all of which contribute to academic success.

In the Philippines, sports development forms an integral component of the Department of Education's commitment to holistic learner formation. Through programs such as the Palarong Pambansa, regional athletic meets, and district-level competitions, the government seeks to identify athletic talent while fostering values of excellence, discipline, and sportsmanship. These initiatives align with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities).

Despite these national efforts, substantial disparities remain between urban and rural sports programs. Rural districts frequently encounter challenges involving inadequate facilities, insufficient equipment, limited financial resources, and shortages of qualified coaches. Such challenges significantly affect the quality and sustainability of sports programs.

Flora District, located within the Schools Division of Apayao in the Cordillera Administrative Region, represents one such rural educational context. While the district has maintained an active sports program for many years, concerns regarding funding, coaching competence, infrastructure adequacy, and program sustainability continue to emerge. Moreover, no comprehensive evaluation has previously been conducted to systematically examine the program's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and developmental needs.

This study therefore aimed to conduct a strategic evaluation of the Flora District Sports Program and develop a comprehensive framework to strengthen its implementation. Specifically, the study sought to assess program administration, financial resources, facilities and equipment, sports offerings, stakeholder perceptions, operational challenges, and strategic opportunities for future development.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

School Sports and Holistic Development

The educational value of sports extends beyond athletic achievement. According to Bailey et al. (2013), participation in organized sports contributes significantly to physical development, social competence, emotional stability, and academic engagement. Sports environments provide opportunities for experiential learning where students acquire teamwork, communication, and leadership skills.

Research by Eime et al. (2013) further demonstrated that sports participation positively influences mental health outcomes by reducing anxiety, stress, and social isolation among young

people. These findings reinforce the role of sports as a protective factor against various psychosocial challenges facing adolescents.

Sports Infrastructure and Program Effectiveness

Facilities and equipment represent critical determinants of sports program quality. Adequate infrastructure supports athlete development, promotes safety, and enhances participation rates. Studies indicate that schools possessing well-maintained sports facilities demonstrate higher student participation and better athletic outcomes than those with inadequate resources (Howie et al., 2014).

Conversely, limited access to sports infrastructure restricts training opportunities and contributes to learner disengagement. Rural schools are particularly disadvantaged due to financial limitations and geographic isolation.

Coaching Competence and Athlete Development

Coaches serve as central agents in sports development. Effective coaching requires technical expertise, pedagogical knowledge, leadership skills, and athlete-centered approaches. Research consistently shows that coach competence significantly influences athlete motivation, skill acquisition, and long-term participation (Côté & Gilbert, 2009).

Professional development opportunities, certification programs, and continuous training are therefore essential components of sustainable sports development systems.

Community Partnerships and Sports Sustainability

Contemporary sports management literature emphasizes the importance of community involvement and stakeholder collaboration. Sustainable sports programs often rely on partnerships involving schools, local governments, parents, alumni, businesses, and civil society organizations (Misener & Doherty, 2013).

Such partnerships facilitate resource mobilization, infrastructure development, volunteer engagement, and program expansion.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was anchored on Program Theory, Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD), and Ecological Systems Theory.

Program Theory provides a framework for understanding how program inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes interact to achieve intended goals. This perspective guided the evaluation of the sports program's effectiveness.

Asset-Based Community Development emphasizes leveraging existing community strengths and resources rather than focusing exclusively on deficiencies. This framework informed the identification of community assets capable of supporting sports development.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory recognizes that learner development is influenced by multiple environmental systems, including schools, families, communities, and policy environments. This framework facilitated understanding of the broader contextual factors affecting sports program implementation.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed an Evaluative-Developmental Research Design consisting of two phases. The first phase focused on evaluating the current status of the sports program, while the second phase involved designing a development framework based on evaluation findings.

The study was conducted in Flora District, Schools Division of Apayao. Participants included district administrators, sports coordinators, coaches, school heads, athletes, parents, and community stakeholders.

Data collection methods included:

- Surveys
- Semi-structured interviews
- Focus group discussions
- Document analysis
- Facility and equipment inventories
- SWOT analysis
- Direct observations

Quantitative data were analyzed using frequencies, percentages, and descriptive statistics. Qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Status of Program Administration

The Flora District Sports Program demonstrates a structured leadership hierarchy involving district coordinators, school heads, coaches, and administrators. This organizational arrangement facilitates coordination and accountability.

However, leadership fragmentation between elementary and secondary sectors creates operational inefficiencies. Similar findings were reported by Green (2017), who noted that leadership silos often hinder sports program effectiveness.

Financial Resources

The district's sports budget increased significantly to Php 860,000 in 2025–2026. Despite this improvement, approximately 70% of funding originates from the Municipal Local Government Unit.

Such dependence poses sustainability concerns. Research suggests that diversified funding mechanisms are essential for long-term sports program viability (Misener & Doherty, 2013).

Facilities and Equipment

The inventory assessment revealed severe shortages across numerous sports disciplines, particularly archery, billiards, weightlifting, gymnastics, boxing, swimming, and combat sports.

The lack of protective equipment represents a critical safety concern. These findings support previous research emphasizing that equipment adequacy directly influences athlete safety and participation rates.

Sports Activities and Participation

The district offers twenty-one sports disciplines, reflecting substantial diversity and inclusivity. Activities range from traditional sports such as basketball and volleyball to indigenous sports such as Arnis and Pencak Silat.

This diversity aligns with UNESCO's advocacy for inclusive physical education and cultural preservation through sports.

SWOT Analysis

Major strengths include:

- Structured leadership
- Dedicated coaching workforce
- Teacher support
- MLGU collaboration

Weaknesses include:

- Insufficient facilities
- Inadequate equipment
- Limited funding diversification
- Undertrained coaches

Opportunities include:

- Alumni engagement
- NGO partnerships
- Private sponsorships
- Expanded LGU support

Threats include:

- Funding dependency
- Leadership barriers
- Facility scheduling conflicts
- Geographic isolation

Operational Challenges

Five major challenge categories emerged:

1. Infrastructure constraints
2. Financial limitations
3. Coaching competency gaps
4. Administrative issues
5. Geographic and environmental barriers

These findings demonstrate that sports development challenges are systemic rather than isolated concerns.

Proposed Comprehensive Sports Development Framework (2027–2029)

Strategic Pillar 1: Governance and Leadership

- Establish District Sports Management Committee
- Develop sports policies and monitoring systems
- Strengthen stakeholder participation

Strategic Pillar 2: Coaching Development

- Annual coaching certification
- Sports science seminars
- Mentorship programs

Strategic Pillar 3: Infrastructure Enhancement

- Procurement of safety equipment
- Construction of covered training facilities
- Modernization of sports venues

Strategic Pillar 4: Sustainable Financing

- Alumni engagement programs
- Corporate sponsorship initiatives
- Community fundraising mechanisms

Implications for Educational Leadership

Educational leaders must recognize sports programs as integral components of learner development rather than optional extracurricular activities. Strategic planning, resource mobilization, and collaborative governance are essential for sustaining sports initiatives in rural contexts.

Local government units likewise play critical roles in supporting educational sports through infrastructure investments and policy support.

CONCLUSION

The Flora District Sports Program possesses a strong organizational foundation and a diverse portfolio of athletic activities. Nevertheless, significant challenges involving infrastructure, coaching competence, financial sustainability, and stakeholder engagement limit its effectiveness. The study demonstrates that successful sports development requires more than increased funding. It necessitates coordinated leadership, evidence-based planning, stakeholder collaboration, and systematic capacity building. The proposed Comprehensive Sports Development Framework provides a practical roadmap for strengthening grassroots sports development and enhancing learner outcomes across Flora District.

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