



## THE PLACE AND ROLE OF SPORT AND SOCIETY IN THE 21ST CENTURY NIGERIA

**Danjuma Moudu Momoh<sup>i</sup>**

Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education,  
Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Ako  
Ondo State, Nigeria

### **Abstract:**

The role of sport in contemporary society needs no emphasis. Sport has become an inexorable part of the modern society with influence being felt in all facets of national life. Sport has also become a symbol of national unity. Governments utilize sport to legitimate themselves. Sport in society is studied because they are closely linked with how people think about and see the world. The overwhelming influence of sports in nations has lent to the evolvement of extensive bureaucracy to support and develop sport. Sociology assists in analyzing and clarifying the different types of relationships within the society. Man has been able to reduce his tension and to divert a somewhat aggressive behavior to an object instead of towards a friend or a fellow man through participation in sport. This paper therefore, reviews the following: sport and society, the role of sport in the society, social control and sport, socialization and sport, Sport and Socializing Institutions.

**Keywords:** sport; socialization; culture; physical activity, institutions

### **1. Introduction**

Sport is activities played by people for internal and external rewards. This means that participation in sports involves a combination of two sets of motivations. One is based in the internal satisfactions associated with expression, spontaneity and the pure joy of participation. The other motivation is based in external satisfactions associated with displaying physical skills in public and receiving approval, status or material rewards in the process (Coakley and Pike, 2009). (Lowell, Kanen and Strenk, 1978) define sport

---

<sup>i</sup> Correspondence: email [dmmomoh@gmail.com](mailto:dmmomoh@gmail.com)

as a game occurrence, an institutionalize game, social institution, or a social system. (Adedoja and Mshelia, 1993) defined sport as an institutionalized type of competitive physical activity that is located on a continuum between play and work. Msheila (2000) also described sport as a highly organized physical activity of high human intensity regulated by accepted rules and regulations, which require maximum physical and mental exertion. He also went further to state that sport is a form of education which pervades the lives of people throughout the world, permeating through the process of knowledge starting from the rules of competition to the complex art of coaching, administration, research and nation building.

## **2. Sport and Society**

In order to understand the relationship of sport to the society it is important to explain what sport is. Various definitions have been presented especially because of the interchangeable use with such terms as play and games. Sport also has influence on almost all phases of our lives and this fact has made it to be qualified as a social phenomenon of modern times. Sport is explained by Resick and Hason (1975) as an institutionalize type of physical prowess or competition strategy engaged in for personal enjoyment and satisfaction. Omolawon and Olajide (2005) define sport as an institutionalized competitive activity that involves vigorous physical exertion or the use of relatively complex physical skills by individuals. Revins (1977) explained sport as an activity that may contain one or two elements of play and game but more importantly has the component of competition and prowess. From the above different definitions of sport, it can be stated that sport has a wide range of meanings and it means many things to many people.

Sociology on the other hand could be explained as the general science of society. It studies the many and varied relationships and activities of the social behavior of human beings. Human behaviors and their organizations and controls are also understood through the study of sociology. Sociology also focuses on social systems and sub-systems and the purpose each system serves. Culture as a whole as well as subculture with their variations and problems are understood through sociology also. Such relationships result in the formation of social associations through which behaviors are organized and controlled so that individual needs could be satisfied. Through the study of relationships, sociology assists in explaining the source of power and authority within a society and the reasons for the exhibition of certain values, customs, beliefs and practices. We are also able to explain the effect of changes in a part of the society on the whole society through sociology. Sociology is a good source of information needed for political, economic, social and other decisions; it also allows us

to have a critical look into our society and what bit could become. It is through sociology that those who guide and maintain the society have the necessary information. This information is used in planning the future societal activities. Sociology also serves as a means by which individuals interpret and understand their own existence in the society.

What then is sociology of sport? Sociology of sport can be regarded as the application of the social science mode of enquiry to the socio cultural characteristics of sport. That is, the application of the findings of sociology to sports and society. Sociology of sports also deals with those social organizations and institutions that are involved in the provision of sports experiences in the society.

With sociology of sport, it is possible to plan for better sports programmes through an analysis and diagnosis of the societal sport which in turn could lead to the overall development of the society. Although sociology of sport is a new discipline in physical education, it has developed as an academic discipline in the field, graduating from being just a topic or course to being a whole higher degree programme.

### **3. The Role of Sport in the Society**

The function of sport dates back to the early times. Early sport was part of man's desire to gain victory over foreseen and unforeseen mysteries as well as promoting fertility in crops and cattle. Man also used sport as a desire to compete with others and to defend himself, his tribe and his country. The desire to escape from danger also encouraged the early man to participate in sport. Sport like karate, judo and archery are aftermath of man's desire to avoid defeat or to subdue opponent. Some sport also evolved as a result of adapting to severe climatic condition.

Contemporary sport grew for the sake of excitement, amusement, strength and physical fitness. Sport has also grown in economic and political dimensions and countries now used it as a legitimate instrument of foreign policy and a vehicle to show a country's mood towards another. For example, in the 1976 Olympic Games Canada refused to grant visas to athletes from the Democratic Republic of China because the republic was attempting to annex the breakaway People's Republic of China. In the games, 28 African countries led by Nigeria withdrew their participation to support their foreign policy, which was opposed New Zealand's sport link with apartheid South Africa. Nigeria also boycotted the Edinburgh 1986 Commonwealth games because a British rugby team went on a playing tour of apartheid South Africa. At the period in question, Nigeria maintained a non-contact policy with any commonwealth country that related favourably with apartheid South Africa because of her racist policy against the blacks who own the land. The supreme council for sport in Africa led by Nigeria's

Ordia and Jean Glaude Ganga of Zaire successfully put pressure on the International Olympic committee to expel apartheid Rhodesia from the 1972 Munich Olympic Games (Onifade, 1986)

Sport is used as an avenue for the appreciation of the ethical values in a country and as a creator of beauty. Ideologically, propagating a nation's ideology through sport fights wars. The Germans disseminated their Nazim ideology through the 1936 Berlin Olympics, which they hosted. The Soviets also believed that any victory in sports was an indication of the superiority of the socialist ideology over any other ideology. Success in sport also has some national impact like prestige, respectability and status. A country whose athletes performed well in any international sport competition would be granted an extensive media coverage which in turn would throw such a country into world's limelight, especially if it a relatively unknown country. Nigeria experienced this prestige, status and respectability when her soccer team won the maiden edition of the Under-16 World Junior Soccer Championship in China in 1985 (Asagba, 2012).

The Nigerian government was directly involved in staging the boxing title fight between Nigeria's Dick Tiger and Gene Fullmer which was the first to be staged in Africa, in 1963. Aki-Bua also gave Uganda this same experience when he won the 400 meters hurdles gold medal at the 1972 Munich Olympic Games.

Individuals, especially from the multi-national countries could be merged through sport since it serves as a cohesive agent to bring about unity and national awareness. The annual national sports festival in Nigeria is an attempt by the government at using sports to unite the various ethnic groups together. Sport allows countries to raise their status as centers of tourism when they are awarded hosting right for sports competitions. By hosting a sports competition, many spectators would have the opportunity of visiting that country, apart from the sports facilities to be built which could later become tourist attractions. The Olympic park in Montreal in Canada where the 1976 Olympic Games were held is today a big tourist center. In 1967, Tunisia hosted the Mediterranean games also purposely to stimulate tourism in the country. Both Canada and Tunisia used the tourism advantage of sports to revive severed situation, strengthening existing ones or establishing new relationship with other countries. The all African games serve this purpose among the African countries. (Momoh, 2014) explained that sports competition serve as an opportunity for individuals from different countries to exchange knowledge, which in turn would assist in educating their peoples. Sport as a social institution teaches and reinforces societal beliefs, norms and values thereby assisting in socializing athletes into major cultural and social behavioral patterns of the various societies. Business and industrial world use sport to promote the development of achievement, motivation and the desirability of competitive activity in order to improve their products. Sports also serve as a safety valve to dissipate excess

energy, tensions and hostile feelings in a socially acceptable manner. Sport offers career opportunities for many and in different forms. There are some who are professional athletes, coaches, sports managers and administrators who earn their living from sport. Sport booms, especially in developed countries has resulted in tremendous industrial growth in the provision of sports facilities, equipment and supplies, and other sports accessories needed for adequate participation in sport. Business organization and industries use sport to promote and advertise their products as a way of maximizing their profits.

Some people participate in sport so as to improve their health and physical fitness levels. Individuals are provided the opportunity through sports to aspire for high levels of achievement through long, strenuous and often painful training and stiff competitions. From the angle of economics, a nation that invests in sports can realize huge dividends especially from big time sporting events. A pointer to this fact is the monetary gains of the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics in which a surplus of over twenty one (21) billion naira equivalents was declared by the organizers. The above analysis of the functions of sport points to the fact that sport contributes to the development, stability and future progress of the society.

#### **4. Social Control and Sport**

Social control is a means for promoting conformity with societal rules and regulations. Sport as a social control can either be internal or external. As internal social control, sport would make it possible for individuals to realize that some behaviors are wrong and unacceptable in the society while as an external social control, sport would provide opportunities for sanctions or punishments or rewards designed to control behaviour.

The sanctions or rewards could be either positive or negative. They are positive if they are in form of medal rewards, salary increase and smiles of approval all of which are used to encourage conformity with sport norms and values. Negative sanctions such as fines, suspension or ridicule are intended to prevent individuals from repeating unacceptable behaviours. When individuals exhibit acceptable behaviours they become internalized and the behaviours become part of them and these behaviours are carried to other spheres of life in the society, thus becoming a character.

Character building can be explained as the acquisition and acceptance of behaviour or mannerism and principles of life which an individual can follow and which can serve as a carry-over value to the larger society. In building character through sport, an individual is expected to behave in an orderly and predictable manner during and after participation in sports. Using sport as a vehicle character development can be viewed as intrinsically and extrinsically, molding the behaviours

through sport. Sport is a microcosm of the society thus confirming that it has a role to play, especially in the development of behavioural patterns that are acceptable or required in the society. As a social control, sport also ensures that the norms and values of the society are followed and when they are not followed, the individual concerned is regarded as a deviant. By acting as a social control, sport makes control to be internalized so that individuals are motivated always to do things that are acceptable in sport such as obeying sport's rules and regulation even if nobody is around them or watching what they are doing. Once the control is internalized, the individual will accept sport norms and values and integrate such into his own personality, which will in time become his character traits. Once these character traits are developed in sports and internalized, it is believed that they can be transferred to real life situations in the society with a lasting effect.

For a nation to aspire greatness, her youths especially must have conditioned character that will involve orderliness and self-control in the society. With conditioned character, individuals in the society will obey societal rules, regulations, norms and values, while those punished are expected not to repeat such behaviours. Whoever has conditioned characters will exhibit good discipline, which would in turn be transferred to other facet of life, thus reflecting the value and worth of a nation, and a larger society will surely benefit from it. In sport, there are rules and regulations, which are enforced, so as to infuse discipline. The discipline infused through sport makes athlete to change and adapt to each sport and such a discipline is hopefully carried into the society. There are also rewards and punishment in sports as earlier discussed. Rewards are to motivate athletes so as to continue to exhibit the rewarded behaviours. While those punished are expected not to repeat same behaviours and by this way, behaviours are regulated so that athletes can exhibit good characters. Cooperation is also needed in sport so as to be able to play with others as a team member, especially in team sports as a way of achieving team objectives. In addition to playing together with different without friction, this way, athletes learn the habit of cooperating with others.

To participate enjoyably in any sport, individuals need a reasonable level of skill, which requires a lot of repeated practice sessions, patience, endurance and ability to practice the skill in the required procedure to achieve. Once the self-discipline is achieved, it becomes a habit, which constitutes part of one's character. Sport provides opportunity for training as leaders since sport team must have captains, coaches and managers and these entire individual are to lead, motivate, manage and administer team members. The ability to discharge these responsibilities requires leadership qualities, which are manifestations of good character, which in turn can be transferred to other facets of life. Other character traits that could be developed through sport is gallantry. This is the action of giving assistance to opponents even when one's own

chances of winning could be affected. Another character that is developed through sport is composure, which is self-control and poise. Composure guarantees coolness and the ability to be gracious to a superior opponent and to calmly accept decisions even when one does not agree with such decisions. The spirit of sportsmanship is also developed through sport. Sport by its very nature connotes competition and when there is competition, there is bound to be losers and winners. That habit of accepting defeat is another character attribute that is developed through sport. Some sports have obvious danger inherent in them and yet sportsmen and sportswomen take courage to go ahead and participate in them despite their inherent dangers. Sport plays a vital role within the society in shaping the character of individuals through the interaction afforded for obedience and respect. Obedience and respect for constituted authority are also developed through participation in sport. This is possible because the decision of sport officials who control and direct sporting activities must be obeyed even when the decisions are unpopular.

## **5. Socialization and Sport**

Socialization is the process by which the culture of a group or society is instilled or internalized in the individual. Socialization includes the training of individuals to accept a given culture, to develop personality and to correctly play one's role in the society. Socialization is also a form of teaching all the aspects of cultural life of a society for continuity. Socialization is also a process of socially adjusting to the society and it is a continuous process of socializing her members so that they can learn to be part of the society. Socializing through sport involves the learning of behavioural patterns, principles, norms, values and beliefs of a society, which are transferred to other spheres of life so as to get fully integrated into the society for a full and worthy life. Sport as a dynamic social force guarantees social relations. For example, there are acceptable ways of dressing and moving in various sports. Sport also provides some learning situations in which athletes can learn various roles that could be transferred to other spheres of life. Different sport have different roles, and the socialization process centres on the teaching of different means, methods and mechanisms by which individuals become accepted into the larger society as a result adapting to the norms, values, practices and attitudes of the society. Through this learning, the norms, values and attitudes in sport become internalized which hopefully will motivate the individual to adjust and adopt desirable sport behaviours. Sport as an element of the socialization process also contributes to mental and social development. In some cases, the sports that individuals participate in are reflections of the cultural values of a given society. Wrestling for example is a very popular sport in eastern part of Nigeria because of their belief in a

strong man and this is a great sport through which sport can be exhibited. Socializing through sport results in the development of generalized and diffused behaviours as well as the development of specific roles. Through sport an individual is able to develop cognitive abilities; develop as a democratic citizen who will hold and practice the principle of equality of rights and opportunities. Sport by its nature entails discipline because it is an embodiment of rules and regulations, which must be obeyed. An individual that is socialized through sport will hopefully possess the ability to win and lose gracefully. As a socializing agent, sport serve as a catharsis, which is an avenue through which emotions can be released in socially acceptable way. By serving as a catharsis, sport provides a means of releasing aggression that would otherwise have been misdirected.

## 6. Sport and Socializing Institution

The socializing institutions are those that provide opportunity for learning of sport roles, which are transferred, to real life situations. In addition, the institutions inculcate values, norms and patterns of behaviour, which are acceptable to the larger society. This section presents an overview of how these institutions use sport to socialize individuals. Some of these institutions are the family, the school, and voluntary organizations.

**A. Family:** The family has been noted right in the socialization process especially of the child since the parents are the first group of people the child interacts with. This in essence means that the formative years of the child are spent with the family and within these formative years, aspects of the culture, knowledge, skills, attitude and dispositions are passed on to the child. The family thus lays the foundation on which the child builds on later. This means the family is regarded as the base and relevant social institution. The early interaction between the parents and the infant in the family is play-like in nature and the play is informal. Later, within the family the child is introduced to more formal play, games and sport in line with sex roles. However, the influence of the family in the use of sport to socialize the young ones is not very strong in our society. If parents have a positive attitude towards sport either through participation or through watching sport activities, the chances are that it will be the parents that will encourage their children to participate in sports pursuits. Parents will also be an instrument in the family to socialize the children if they or anyone of the parents was socialized through sport in the past and if they derived benefit from such socialization. Another influencing factor in socializing the children into sport is that adults, because of their experience could have realized what they missed by not socializing through sport and would therefore not want their children to miss same;



hence they encourage their children to participate in sport activities. Also, the presence of a role sports model in the family other than parents encourages socialization through sport since the children would want to exhibit similar patterns of behaviour as the role model. A first born who is into sport might serve as a role model and this goes a long way in assisting in the socialization process of the later siblings, since they would want to imitate him. In Nigeria society, most children are introduced to sports participation through role models and by watching parents who participate in sport and television programmes on sports. If either one or both parents are into sports, then they give support to their children participating in sport by assisting them materially and morally to develop interest, and this early interest in life might sustain the child's interest in sport in later life.

**B. Educational Institutions:** Educational institutions are to prepare children for adult life, and a major function of the school is to socialize the young ones. The school also assists in the transmission of the culture of the society from one generation to another. Educational institutions primarily are to provide skills and knowledge that will make an individual develop maturity so as to be independent in life. Sport provides the opportunity for children to develop cognitive abilities, to learn to interact with others in both cooperative and competitive manner and they are also indoctrinated into the culture of the society. Those actively involved in sport could easily establish contact and obtain information channels, which would help them in establishing careers. In educational institutions, sport has been helping in promoting health through fitness and in socializing youth into sport skills. It is also postulated that sport assist in academic achievement, which is viewed from the fact that there is a link between mental and physical abilities. Sport is introduced to institutions in form of both intramural and extramural competitions and physical education. In Nigeria physical education is now a compulsory subject at both the primary and junior secondary schools levels and an optional subject at the senior secondary school level. Regrettably, this new dispensation for physical education is more on paper than in practice as many schools have neither the facilities nor is a subject on the time table. At the university level, physical education is one of the courses offered in the faculty of education.

By having physical education in the educational curricular in Nigeria, it is intended to provide students the opportunity for participating in sports, which will in turn reflect cultural values, norms, ethics and standards of the society. The school is also expected to use physical education subject to provide the child with:

- a) Intellectual tools needed for personal enjoyment of life;
- b) Social, civic and vocational skills needed to function on the useful member of the adult community;
- c) Impact in the child a sense of moral values necessary for survival.

Soccer, table tennis and track and field athletics are the three most popular sports among many Nigeria youth and most socialization through sport are through the following sport activities: volleyball, basketball, and handball which are currently gaining grounds.

**C. Voluntary Organizations:** voluntary organizations have many functions some of which are intended to stimulate and induce social changes, encourage involvement in specific interest areas and provide support and assistance to group members. Voluntary organization especially those that set up clubs provide sporting opportunities. There are many sport clubs which provide opportunities for games like tennis, table tennis, billiard, swimming, soccer, darts, ayo, draught and squash racket among others. Clubs like youth clubs, Boys Brigade, Boys Scout, Red Cross, and Man 'O' War use sports as a vehicle for molding character and adjusting their member in the society so that they can become good and useful citizen in the society. It is notable that the sport of boxing was popularized in Nigeria through youth club activities and it is also through the sport of boxing that Nigeria gained her earliest publicity in the international community.

## 7. Conclusion

Sport, in conclusion, can be said to be a vehicle for socialization through which social goals can be established, social interaction between individuals can be effected and models for the society are visible. Sport should be used as a socializing agent through the organization of many sports competition and the annual sports festival which brings different people and different ethnic and cultural groups of all the states of the federation together testifies to this. By passing on norms, values and attitudes through sport, the society is viable, alive and functioning.

## 8. Recommendations

The government at the federal, state and local levels should include in their curriculum physical education so that the opportunity to be involved in sport will increase. The government should make provision for civic and vocational skills center for the usefulness of every member of the adult community to learn and socialize. The children should be trained to have a sense of belonging and moral values necessary for him to belong to his peers and community. The cultural values, norms and standard of the society will awaken the personal enjoyment of every individual in the society.

## References

1. Adedoja, T.A and Mshelia, B.S. (1993). *Psycho-Social Perspective of Sport*. Lagos: Vertex Publishers Ltd.
2. Asagba, B.O. (2012). *More than a match: The struggle for gender equity in sports*. A Faculty lecture delivered at the University of Ibadan. 16.
3. Bennett, B.L, Howell, M.L, and Simri, U. (1975). *Comparative Physical Education and Sport*. Philadelphia: Lea and Febiger.
4. Bucher, C.A. (1979). *Foundations of Physical Education*. St. Louis: The C.V. Mosby Company.
5. Coakley, J. and Pike, E. (2009). *Sports and Society. Issues and controversies*. McGraw Hill Companies.
6. Lowell, B., Kanen, D. B. & Strenk, A. (1978). *Sports and International Relations*. Champaign, Illinois STIPES Publishing Company
7. Momoh, D.M. (2014). *Administrative and Social Determinants of Students' Sport in Secondary Schools in Kwara State, Nigeria*. (Unpublished PhD Thesis University of Ibadan)
8. Mshelia, B.S. (2000). *Dimension of politics in sport. 21<sup>st</sup> Century and sports development in Nigeria*. Abuja: Federal Ministry of Sport and Social Development.
9. Omolawon, K. O. and Olajide, O. A. (2005). *Challenges for effective school sports management in the Universal Basic Education Programme*. *Journal of Sports Management and Educational Research*. 1.2. 67-74.
10. Onifade, A. (1986). *Physical Recreation and Character Development for Nigeria youths*. Proceedings of the 16<sup>th</sup> Nigerian Association for Physical, Health Education and Recreation Annual Conference.
11. Onifade, A. (2001). *Sports and society in Onifade, A and Dosunmu, S. (Eds). Emergent issues in the sociology of sports*. Sabo, Yaba. Lagos Virtuoso Consultancy.
12. Resick, M. C. and Mason, J. G. (1974). *Modern Administration Practices in Physical*
13. Rivens, R. S. (1978). *Foundations of Physical Education*. London: Houghton Nifflin Company.

Creative Commons licensing terms

Authors will retain the copyright of their published articles agreeing that a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0) terms will be applied to their work. Under the terms of this license, no permission is required from the author(s) or publisher for members of the community to copy, distribute, transmit or adapt the article content, providing a proper, prominent and unambiguous attribution to the authors in a manner that makes clear that the materials are being reused under permission of a Creative Commons License. Views, opinions and conclusions expressed in this research article are views, opinions and conclusions of the author(s). Open Access Publishing Group and European Journal of Physical Education and Sport Science shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability caused in relation to/arising out of conflict of interests, copyright violations and inappropriate or inaccurate use of any kind content related or integrated on the research work. All the published works are meeting the Open Access Publishing requirements and can be freely accessed, shared, modified, distributed and used in educational, commercial and non-commercial purposes under a [Creative Commons attribution 4.0 International License \(CC BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).