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# Evaluation of Community-Based Youth Sports Programme in South Africa

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## Abstract

Sports is seen as a means to develop young people's social competence and promote a healthy lifestyle and personal development skills, especially values such as leadership, respect, and responsibility. In order to contribute to the development of youth in South Africa, a community-based sports programme, Shongi Soccer Programme (SSP), was implemented by the Philipp Lahm-Stiftung (PLF) in Soul City Township, Johannesburg, South Africa. The evaluation aimed to determine the perceived development outcomes derived from participation in the sports programme and identify strengths and challenges in implementing the sports programme. A survey was conducted with twelve sports programme participants selected through purposive sampling. This was followed by focus group discussions with the same participants, parents, coaches and programme coordinators. The results revealed that the sports programme provided overall positive experiences for youth development, learning and interaction. The participants attributed personal and social development experiences to supportive and positive relationships with the coaches and peers. Furthermore, the results indicate that 67% of participants strongly believed the sports programme was a positive turning point in their lives. These results illustrate that the SSP sports programme has positively impacted the participants' development.

## How to Cite

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## INTRODUCTION

Recent studies have given considerable attention to developmental experiences in youth sport that promote positive youth development and social change (Côté & Hancock, 2016; Eime, Casey, Harvey., Symons, & Payne, 2015). It is a widely held assumption that youth learn about leadership, respect, sportsmanship, teamwork and responsibility through participation in sports (Cairney, Clark, Kwan, Bruner & Tamminene, 2018. In essence, community-based sports programmes provide a breadth of experiences and have the potential to contribute to developmental outcomes in youth development. The aim of such programmes is to promote positive development and create opportunities for youth to participate in sport (Côté & Hancock, 2016).

The notion of sport for positive youth development has resulted in an influx of numerous sports organisations worldwide implementing community-based youth sports programmes, however, in the South African context, there is a lack of empirical evidence of sport programme outcomes, especially for programmes directed at the youth in disadvantaged communities. The sports organisations that implement sports programmes aiming to promote personal and social development need empirical evidence to assess sports programmes' effectiveness in contributing to youth development (Cairney et al., 2018). In 2008 the Philipp Lahm-Stiftung (PLF) initiated a community-based youth sports programme, Shongi Soccer Programme (SSP). The SSP was established to promote sport participation and enhance the South African youth's sporting skills, personal development and social development skills. The sports programme provides regular soccer activities to the youth in the Soul City community. Soul City informal settlement is located West of Johannesburg, Krugersdorp, Gauteng Province, was a selected community for implementing the sports programme.

The PLF invested a substantial amount of money and resources in the sports programme (SS), and despite the lack of empirical evidence on the impact and outcomes of the sports programme, PLF continues to provide support to the programme. Although the literature on the significance of youth sports programmes abounds, the outcome of sport programmes offered to youth in South African communities has not been sufficiently documented as a basis for empirical research. Therefore, the evaluation of the SSP was important to establish the extent at which the programme has contributed to the development of youth. The evaluation of SSP sports programme was guided by the logic model of the evaluation framework illustrated in **Figure 1.**

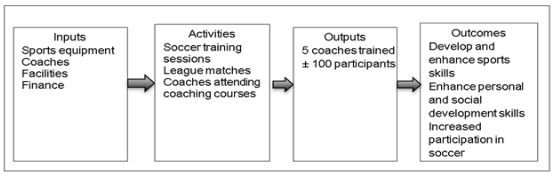



**Figure 1.** Shongi Soccer Programme Logic Model of Evaluation Framework

The logic model framework is a visual tool highlighting the relationship between the programme resources, activities, outputs, intended outcomes and impact (Knowlton & Phillips, 2012). The logic model framework is a valuable tool for sports programmes and provides an understanding of the context, implementation and effectiveness of the sports programme in achieving intended outcomes (Gadais & Bardocz-Bencsik, 2022). In the context of the SSP, the logic model framework was used to understand the change process (implementation) and evaluate the programme‘s impact on the achievement of the development outcomes. In terms of the development outcomes, the perceived social development and personal development outcomes were measured. Furthermore, the framework provided guidance on the context of the implementation. For example, the influence of the coaches, community and training programme in enhancing or hindering the accomplishment of the sports programmes outcomes. The present evaluation aimed to determine the perceived development outcomes derived from participation in the sports programme and identify strengths and challenges in implementing the sports programme.

## METHODS

The study followed a descriptive research design and mixed methods approach, which involved a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches were used to collect the data during the evaluation. The design is informed by several data collection methods: interviews and questionnaires (Creswell, 2015). Quantitative data were collected using a modified version of the Youth Experiences Survey (YES) 2.0 (Hansen & Larson, 2005). The YES questionnaires were used to evaluate the experiences of the participants in specific areas (personal development, social and physical development) related to their participation in the SSP. Qualitative data were

collected using focus group interviews with the SSP participants, parents, programme coordinators, and coaches. The discussion of the focus group with the participants included topics related to, participants' experiences of the SSP; perceptions about the coaches' contribution to their development skills; challenges in the sports programme; and perceived benefits of the sports programme. With parents, programme coordinators, and coaches, focus group discussions were conducted to understand the effectiveness, strengths and challenges in the implementation of the SSP. The mixed-methods research approach enhanced the accuracy and triangulation of the results, and further revealed multiple perspectives from both qualitative and quantitative data.

The purposive sampling approach was used to select the participants, namely SS sports programme participants (n = 12; 12 males), parents (n = 5), Programme Coordinators (n = 2), and coaches (n = 4). The participants were drawn from the SSP, participants' parents and the coaching staff. Parents of the participants were requested to complete informed consent forms on behalf of the participants, and in addition, the SSP participants completed assent forms. The selection of the participants was purposeful because of the view that the participants would provide relevant information related to the SSP.

The ethical approval (UP 19/04/01) to conduct the evaluation was obtained from the Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria. Quantitative data were collected using a modified version of the Youth Experiences Survey (YES) 2.0 (Hansen & Larson, 2005). The YES questionnaires were used to evaluate the experiences of the participants in specific areas (personal development, social and physical development) related to their participation in the SS sports programme.

The questionnaires were distributed to the 12 participants in the programme, ranging between the ages of 12 and 17 (the mean age of the participants was 12 years, SD = 1.97). Fifty sport-related experiences were measured according to a four-point Likert scale, and the questionnaires included biographical data (age, gender, and domains related to personal development, interpersonal development (teamwork and social skills), and negative experiences, such as negative influence, social exclusion, and negative group dynamics. Cronbach alpha was used to conduct reliability analysis (**Table 1**). The questionnaire reflected acceptable reliability, $\alpha = 0.78$, and all the items were retained (Bonett & Wright, 2015).

**Table 1.** Reliability statistics

| Cronbach's Alpha | Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items | N of Items |
|---|---|---|
| 0.72 | 0.78 | 36 |

Qualitative data were collected using focus group interviews with the SS participants, parents, programme coordinators, and coaches. The focus group discussion with the participants included topics related to participants' experiences of the SSP; perceptions about the coaches' contribution to their development skills; challenges in the sports programme; and perceived benefits of the sports programme.

The focus group discussions with the coaches, programme coordinators and parents were used to understand the perceived benefits of the SSP in the community and to identify challenges in the sports programme. To enhance the validity of the evaluation, vernacular (Setswana and Isizulu) of the coaches, parents, and SSP participants was used during the focus group discussion. The vernacular was used to clarify the interview questions set in English. A tape recorder was used to record the focus group discussions, and notes were also taken in addition to recording the group discussions to ensure that the data collected was credible and transparent.

The data for the evaluation was mostly qualitative, although some data were collected quantitatively to complement the qualitative methodologies. The qualitative data analysis was undertaken once all interviews were completed and all the interviews were prepared and transcribed verbatim by the evaluators. The evaluators analysed the data to ensure the findings' quality, trustworthiness and accuracy.

Qualitative data were analysed using a thematic analysis process. The data analysis process was aided by the use of a qualitative data analysis computer program called ATLAS.ti.8. This involved an open coding process, which implies reading word by word, engaging line-by-line with the transcripts and highlighting and writing notes. This process was followed to identify patterns and connections between the categories that emerged from the data. The themes were discussed and clarified by the evaluators before reaching a consensus.

Quantitative data were entered electronically and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 28.01). The descriptive statistics (percentages, mean values and Standard Deviation) were presented using

tables and graphs. The qualitative data and quantitative data were synthesised and integrated in order to address the aims of the evaluation

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Faculty of Education, Ethics Committee, University of Pretoria, UP 19/04/01. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Table 2** presents the participants in the evaluation, the data collection methods used to collect information from the respondents. The majority of the respondents in the evaluation consisted of the SS sports programme participants (n =12). The SSP participants completed questionnaires and participated in the focus group interviews. Parents participated in the focus group discussion and the data were collected using a focus group schedule. The programme coordinators and coaches participated in the focus group discussion, and data were collected through the focus group schedule.

**Table 2.** Participants

| Participants | Data collection methods |
|---|---|
| Shongi Soccer Programme participants (n =12) | Questionnaire (YES survey) Focus group interviews |
| Parents (n = 5) | Focus group interviews |
| Coaches (n =4) | Focus group interviews |
| Programme Coordinators (n = 2) | Focus group interviews |

### Interpersonal development outcomes

**Table 3** presents the results on interpersonal development experiences (positive relationships and social development skills) of the SSP. The items are ranked in terms of the mean scores from lowest (minimum = 1) to highest (maximum = 4). A low mean score reflects a greater level of agreeability with the statement. The results indicate that the majority (92%) of the respondents agree that the SS sports programme provided an opportunity for social interaction and to make new friends, and they learned to stand up for something they believed was morally right in the sports programme. The results show that Shongi Soccer Programme provided the participants with the opportunity to develop positive relationships with others in the sports programme. These findings correspond with views by Bonell, Hinds, Dickson, Thomas, Fletcher, Murphy, Melendez-Torres, Bonell & Campbell, 2015), who mentioned that sport could be used as a vehicle for social interaction and the development of interpersonal competence amongst young people.

The results showed that all respondents (100%) believed they learned that working together requires some compromise and patience with other group members. Most respondents (75%) indicated that they learned how their emotions and attitude affect others. The results suggest that the SSP provided participants with the opportunity to learn about teamwork and fostered social connections among participants.

**Table 3.** Interpersonal skills

| Positive relationships | Mean | SD | Yes definitely |
|---|---|---|---|
| Made new friends in the soccer programme | 1.17 | 0.58 | 92% |
| Learned about helping others | 1.50 | 1.00 | 75% |
| Learned to stand up for something I believed was morally right | 1.75 | 1.14 | 58% |
| **Social development skills** | **Mean** | **SD** | **Yes definitely** |
| Learned that working together requires some compromising | 1.00 | 0.00 | 100% |
| Learned to be patient with other group members | 1.25 | 0.45 | 50% |
| Learned how my emotions and attitude affect others in the group | 1.83 | 1.03 | 75% |

SD, Standard deviation.

During the focus group interview, participants mentioned that they learned to respect, develop self-discipline, and share and support one another. The programme has enabled participants to learn how to work together. It was clear from the responses that most participants acquired the personal values and skills necessary for working together as a group. Respondents highlighted the following:

*'I learned a lot about group work and strongly believe that if we work as a team and support one another, we can succeed.'* (Participant 4)

*'The coaches taught me to respect, they also taught us to support each other and share with our teammates, for example, we share food, soccer boots, and support our teammates during soccer matches, and also in the training practice'.* (Participant 2)

Sport is viewed as a mechanism that leads to personal development and social development outcomes. Therefore, sports participation is often perceived to contribute to social capital because sport can be used to encourage new friendships and social associations among young people

(Camiré & Trudel, 2013; Vosloo, 2014). The results of this evaluation revealed that teamwork and strong relationship appeared to be important for most of the participants in the sports programme.

**Coaching experiences and sports skills development outcomes**

**Figure 2** illustrates the responses of SSP participants regarding perceived improvements in sports skills. The findings revealed that the respondents believed that the sports programme had contributed to enhanced sports skills. The majority of respondents reported learning new soccer skills from the coaches in the SSP, and a significant 83% of respondents indicated that they feel their sports skills have improved. The indication is that SSP provides participants with opportunities to develop sports skills. The findings also reflect the significant role of coaches in enhancing sports skills within the sports programme.

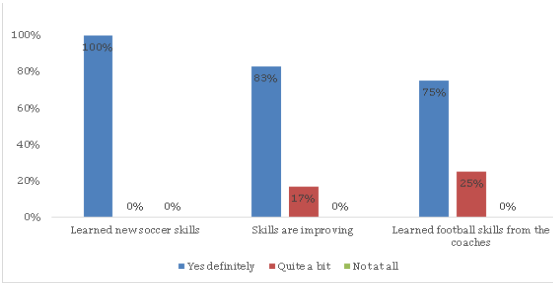



**Figure 2.** Soccer skills

The participants' responses are consistent with the Shongi Soccer Programme's objective of developing and improving individuals' sports skills. Sports participation is often linked to physical development outcomes, such as improved fundamental movements and sport-specific skills (Chinkov & Holt, 2016; Gumantan, Mahfud & Yuliandra, 2021; Holt & Kacey, 2011). According to Chinkov and Holt (2016), sports programmes facilitate improvement in sport-specific skills.

**Programme Coordinators and coaches' perspectives on the sports programme implementation**

The Programme Coordinators and coaches shared their overall perspectives and views of the SSP implementation and perceived benefits in the community. The results from the focus group discussion with the Programme Coordinators and coaches revealed that the programme had created opportunities for children in the community to participate in sports. The coaches also mentioned an improvement in the quality of soccer in the sports programme, feel that the participants are learning sports skills and are empowered by the coaches. Some of the views were:

*'The coaching workshops and coaching courses I attended made a huge difference in my coaching career, I learned how to coach, and in the past, I coached based on my previous experience as a soccer player, I feel my coaching skills have improved, and I have a soccer coaching qualification.'* (Coach 1)

*'Some of the children, when they started, could not perform basic soccer skills, but they are now able to perform most of the skills and have improved'*. (Programme Coordinator 2).

The results highlighted the contribution of coaches in enhancing and developing sports-specific skills. These results are in agreement with those from similar studies that have highlighted the role of coaches in enhancing individuals' sports-specific skills (Craike, Wiesner, Hilland, & Bengoechea, 2018; Lerner, Lerner, Bowers, & Geldhof, 2015). Coaches' influence and sports programmes appropriately designed and implemented may provide young people with opportunities for development in areas such as physical skills (Lerner et al., 2015).

During the focus group discussions, the coaches identified some of the challenges related to implementing the sports programme. The coaches expressed concern about safety and security. Some of the challenges related to the effects of poverty in the community and socio-economic issues, such as unemployment and crime rate. This was viewed in a wider context of the social system. In addition, the sports programme is perceived to be inclusive, but the lack of girls' participation in the programme could give the impression that the sports programme is not responsive and effective in ensuring that the programme is accessible to everyone in the community.

**Perspectives of the parents on the benefits of the programme**

Most parents highlighted the importance of sports programmes in the development of young people and contribution to addressing some of the social challenges in the community, such as delinquency and drug and alcohol abuse. Furthermore, parents mentioned that most of the children in the programme have respect and discipline. The findings indicate that Shongi Soccer has provided the opportunity for the children in the community to participate in soccer and learn about personal and social skills. These statements

are consistent with the participants' comments on personal and social development skills (discipline and respect). This is echoed by the response from one of the parents:

*'Shongi Soccer is very important for the development of our children, the programme has helped our children to stay away from crime, alcohol and drug abuse. These social ills are affecting our community, especially crime, and drug and alcohol abuse. Soccer is important in the community because our children can be able to make friends, soccer brings unity, and there is no discrimination based on cultural background. Our children are learning to work together and learn to love and respect each other'.* (Parent 3)

*'I think our children are enjoying participating in soccer, and the SS sports programme has made it possible for them [ SS participants] to do so and community can watch soccer and adults are using this facility for their matches as well, this is a community facility and we are grateful'.*

The results showed that the parents held positive views of the programme's contribution to the community. These findings correspond with the views by Robertson, Eime and Westerbeek (2019), who cited that sports can contribute to social integration and empowerment of young people and communities. Furthermore, the results in this evaluation support the historical view that sports could provide social benefits beyond the immediate experience of participation.

## CONCLUSION

These results highlight that the Shongi Soccer Programme has successfully impacted positively on the development of the participants. Regardless of the socio-economic challenges in the community, the sports programme has encouraged and promoted participation in soccer. The participants felt engaged and empowered. They enjoy the activities in the programme, and the results exemplify improved individual sports-specific skills and developed social and personal development skills (peer friendships, teamwork, respect, and discipline). The findings suggest that the soccer programme has effectively achieved interpersonal development outcomes derived from participation in the SSP. The results further highlight the coaches' role in facilitating SSP participants' physical, personal, and social development skills. In summary, the results of this evaluation advance community-based youth sport programme research by highlighting sport programmes as an important context for enhancing the development of young people in the community.

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