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Curriculum Development and Review in Sports Academy Setting: Proposing Models and Methodologies

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Abstract: In recent years, the curriculum has become a widely appealing construct within the global discourses of quality assessment and continual improvement. However, the literature in this field reveals a lack of clarity and consensus regarding its meaning and other technical issues related to its development and review, particularly in the sports academy setting. This review article provides a comprehensive overview of current knowledge in this area through broadly exploring a range of dimensions underpinning the concept of curriculum, including its definitions, elements, processes, and the resultant pedagogical implications. Besides, this review article proposes a model to facilitate the development and review of the curriculum in Ethiopian sports academy programs and provides designers, youth coaches, and administrators with a practical approach for designing and implementing the curriculum. This proposed model seeks to support the Ethiopian sports academies in systematically developing and reviewing curriculum, and using that assessment data to trigger further improvement of the program. Moreover, a systemic view of sports academy is suggested to create broader insights about key ingredients of quality, and identify issues that impinge on curriculum decision-making. The article concludes by summarizing the results of the analyses and offering implications for practices.

Key Words: Curriculum development, Sports academy, Models, Methodologies

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1. Introduction

Over the last two decades or so, there has been a growing interest in many countries around the globe, in effectively identifying and developing sports talent among the youth [1, 2]. For example, the experience in Australia, Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom (UK), South Africa, and the United States of America (USA) provide the premium of international experiences [3-5]. The driving force triggering this interest is the need to excel during important

sporting events like the Olympics or World Championships [6, 7].

In order to develop a strong desire and positive attachment to pursue sport or activity at any level, mental skills that enable a youth athlete to acquire and consolidate sports skills are essential [8]. The development of such skills is facilitated through appropriate sports skills instruction, coaching and authentic assessment [9]. Additionally, the youngsters must be motivated to put in the many hours of deliberate practice required to excel in any field and to be able to keep progressing when times are hard [10, 11]. Many studies have shown that the psychological factors can distinguish performance levels [12], and staying in power at an elite level [1, 11].

Sports Academy is a unique educational platform afforded by the facilities and resources of the sports, fitness and leisure centers [13]. Accordingly, it offers a range of courses for youth athletes catering for the different interests and ability levels. The key to any sports academy is the identification and development of talented youngsters into senior champions [4]. As today's talented, youth athletes are tomorrows super stars in sports [14], the development and review of curriculum in sports academy needs careful considerations both from the sport skills and academic learning perspectives [15]. Also, exemplars of current worldwide practice highlighted the need for a broader education and skills acquisition in sports [10, 16]. Regardless of this, there is a scarcity of research on how to guide the optimization of talent development and to highlight broader education.

Sports academies provide sport specific options for youth athletes to develop performance in the transition to elite athletes [17, 18]. In practice, these academies are most commonly appear in the form of official curriculum or co-curriculum, implemented out-of-school hours [13, 19]. In terms of purpose, sports academies play key roles for general skills development [20, 21], sport specific excellence [10, 14], and elite development [15]. Youth athletes may choose to attend these sports academies either in the formal school or in the nonformal companion because of several reasons [22]. According to Nasey and Massey [13] and Phillips, David [15], some of the major reasons include seeking post-secondary scholarships, skill development, coaching (professional or paid), motivation, and gaining education and develop athletically.

Sports academies have been found very successful in terms of developing the required mental skills and sporting talent, and in producing excellent athletes. For example, school-based physical activity and fitness promotion programs were found effective intervention strategies for the development of sports talent among the youth athletes in different levels of schooling [19, 23]. Also, from 2001-2004, current or former sport school athletes won 82% of the German Olympic medals [6]. The same author further noted that 10% of Canadian Olympic team in the year 2006 had or were attending a sport school.

Sport academies are also commonplace in Africa. The African sports academies centrally focus on the developmental potential of sports. This means development of athleticism and maximizing the potential contributions of sports in development [24]. In relation to this, there are published works from South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, and Ethiopia that provide an overview of the existing empirical evidence [25-27]. However, pertaining to football academies, there are published works testifying the distractive roles of these forms of academies in Africa by facilitating a form of neo-colonial exploitation and impoverishment of the developing world [25, 26].

1.1. Rationale

Despite increased recognition of the importance of sport talent, its preparation and development, and a resulting increase in the number of sports academy programs being implemented worldwide, the matter that is arguably at the heart of sports academy, the curriculum, has received little attention in the literature on this field. In this respect, one can argue that our understanding of a sports academy curriculum and its nexus with effective

educational practice, and desired outcomes lacks a clear conceptual base. A further issue associated with the need for a clear conceptual framework is that the literature available in this area has arguably suffered from a lack of definitional clarity on what is included in a sports academy curriculum. In addition, it appears that little attention has been paid to integrated multi-dimensional sport talent development [15], and this has distorted how to guide practice and research within sport academies. Under this condition, it is not surprising that most youth athletes and their coaches felt dissatisfied with the academy environment [28]. Moreover, the majority of male youth athletes as well as female youth athletes studied had below average scores in agility tests, for example [29].

Although a few scholars have studied the sports academy curriculum and the experiences and positive outcomes in youth, little is known about the level of participation and identified conditions under which particular outcomes are likely to occur [30]. There remains a need for critical research and theory that identifies the processes through which the participation of youths in sports academy curriculum linked with effective sports educational practices, and positive outcomes in sports performance, and other developmental outcomes [31]. Central to the rationale for this article was the idea that effective curriculum development and review contribute to deeper processing, and more sophisticated strategies for learning in sports academies [32]. It is believed that efforts to produce progressive changes in developing and reviewing a curriculum transcend the lives of particular youths involved [33].

This article critically examines relevant issues of curriculum development and review in sports academy setting. In addition to this, it offers an overview of important themes, frameworks, and models of curriculum development through exploring the literature that has significance to effectively, develop mental skills and sports skills among youth athletes of sports academy. This article also discusses recommendations for the curricular elements in a sports academy curriculum. Moreover, it describes the essential variables related to sports academy curriculum and the associated factors and

conditions.

1.2. The Context

The need for the sports academies and becoming competitive in international sports competitions is one of the central issues in the sports policy of any nation [38]. Also, numerous children strive to attain excellence in sports believing that sports provide possible avenues to develop advanced skills, knowledge and understanding of a particular sport [22]. Moreover, talent identification and development has gained greater recognition by the Ethiopian sports professionals and the political leaders in recent years. However, there remains a lack of consensus concerning to how sports talent identified and developed, and there is no uniformly accepted theoretical framework to guide current practice. The experience in launching sports academies has emerged after understanding the multitude of potential benefits obtained in establishing sports academies, particularly the East Germany and Australian excellent examples of the 1970s and the 2000s, respectively [39].

This article offers conceptual definitions, scientific reasons for the importance of the curriculum, and the contextual constraints hindering its success by considering anecdotal records and systematic observations to the Ethiopian Youth Sports Academy curriculum. In addition, the model components and implementation strategies for better future curriculum development and review are identified.

2. Methods

2.1. A Critical Social Theory (CST) Approach

This article uses a critical social theory (CST) approach to sports academy curriculum. The validity of this approach and its usefulness for curriculum studies has been well-examined [34]. The CST is a multidisciplinary knowledge base, which is primarily targeted at developing the emancipatory function of knowledge [35]. For this to happen, both criticism and transcendence play key roles in the search for a

proactive approach to supporting transitions [36]. Applying CST in sports academy curriculum development and review means quality is proportional to the depth of analysis made to the phenomenon under study. The CST affirms the role of criticism as it bounds up in the definition of sports academy curriculum, its implementation and evaluation [36]. Through the applications of CST, this article focuses on criticizing the systemic and institutional arrangements; how people in the sports academy created them; and how practitioners intensified their harmful effects [37].

The article built upon the contextual realities of the sports academies and their operations through a systematic review of literature, consulting published and unpublished sources, anecdotal records, and the author's professional view working with internal stakeholders of sports academy over the years.

2.2. Data Sources and Analysis Methods

The version of critical theory approach presented in this article is based on secondary information found in documents (policies, official frameworks & guidelines, & research reports) and professional insights of the author working as a curriculum expert, teacher, researcher, staff developer, and education quality expert at various levels. Thus, the key ingredients include a critical review of the literature and the practical experiences on this field following an informal, critical, self-study [34]. Through the application of a critical theory approach, the current article presents "a higher-order synthesis which allocates the empirical-analytic and the historical-hermeneutic sciences to their own, mutually exclusive, object domains" [40].

3. Sports Academy Curriculum

3.1. The Nature of Curriculum in Sports Academy Setting

Curriculum has several definitions, which makes understanding the concept a bit ambiguous. The dimensionalities of the definitions range between narrower and broader conceptualizations,

as well as, between traditional and modern conceptions. In its narrower sense, a curriculum is a plan for action [41]. In its broadest sense, a curriculum may refer to all the learning experiences of a youth athlete [42]. This is particularly true of learning at the sports academy, where the diversity of a curriculum might be an attractive point to a potential youth-athlete [43]. While the narrower definition falls short of capturing all the necessary components of a curriculum, the broader definition wipes out the existing strata among several learning experiences, thus there may be nothing to be left out of a curriculum. From a different point of analysis, a curriculum can be defined either from the traditional or contemporary perspective.

Traditionally, a curriculum refers to a collection of courses to be offered for youth athletes. In this sense, a curriculum is the sum of courses a youth athlete has to attend toward the completion of a particular program. Thus, expertise preparation and prescription of courses is mandatory. Seen from a contemporary perspective a curriculum is beyond the sum of the courses as it encompasses a more holistic, integrated, and systematic understanding of curriculum in its totality and developmental process [44]. Under this influence, the evolving nature of curriculum is emphasized both by policy and by practice instead of the prescriptive nature of the curriculum [45].

In the context of sports academy, narrowly defined, a curriculum is the plan of action for the different programs at the different levels and youth-athlete needs. In addition, broadly speaking, a curriculum is the sum total of all the experiences a youth-athlete undergoes with the guidance of the institution or sports academy center.

3.2. Types and Levels of Curriculum

Curriculum can be categorized into core curriculum, co-curriculum, and hidden curriculum. In terms of level, there are about four levels, including supra-national curriculum, macro curriculum, meso curriculum, and nano curriculum [46]. There are numerous types of curriculum, however, only three types are presented here in this manuscript for the purpose of simplicity and page limits.

The specific and formal knowledge and skills that the youth athletes acquire from a sports academy course or program constitute a "core curriculum". Core implies that each aspect of the course or the program is basic or fundamental, thus every participant youth athlete must learn [43]. However, the course participants should acquire many other things either formally or informally. These include things such as participation in clubs and voluntary groups through membership. In terms of curriculum, this is termed as co-curriculum [47]. These kinds of participations are interest-driven and group specific, but they are organized. Thus, such participations are different for different groups.

Besides, the hidden curriculum includes those unintended, and yet, are important skills, values, or even knowledge in the life of youth athletes enrolled in a sports academy. There are numerous examples of hidden curriculum. These can include; academic rules and regulations, communication skills, organizational skills as in organizing article, rooms, lab works, or documents, moral and social manners etc. All these elements of hidden curriculum and the process of acquiring and practicing happen in an informal learning episode. Research shows that the hidden curriculum is what youth athletes considered meaningful and relevant to their sports academy experiences [13, 48]. Research on sports coaches learning reveals that "… coaches learn from a wide range of sources, but formalized (i.e., formal and nonformal) learning episodes were found to be relatively low impact endeavors when compared to informal, self-directed modes of learning" [49].

By way of dealing with the curriculum, it is not only issues of formal learning that are considered, but also other possible learning opportunities available for youth athletes during their stay in the sports academy. The sports academy must therefore be organized with a well-enriched learning environment to provide youth athletes the opportunity to experience formal, nonformal, and informal learning [50]. The interpretation is that effective development of sporting talent needs a broader, integrated sports and education development, including essential educational processes and practices [8]. The five key generic features of such processes and practices include long-term aims and methods; wide ranging coherent messages and support; emphasis on appropriate development rather than early selection; individualized and ongoing development; and finally, integrated, holistic, and systematic development [1].

3.3. Approaches to curriculum development

There are two broader approaches to curriculum development. These are the technical scientific approach and the non-rational approach [51]. The technical scientific approach applies scientific methods and principles to the task of curriculum development. Advocates of this approach assume that reality is definable and the goals of education are knowable. In addition, they believe that a linear, objective process will yield a useful documents and high quality plans.

The other approach is non-technical, non-rational approach to curriculum development. Unlike to the technical scientific approach, the non-technical, non-rational approach follows a naturalistic approach to curriculum development. Naturalistic approach emphasizes on the dynamic and complex relationships that exist among the variables influencing the successful attainment of desired outcomes. Hence, it discourages a prescriptive approach to curriculum development. In addition, it gives the contextual nature of curriculum development as it evolves and shapes up through the process. It follows a bottom up approach to curriculum development. In general, this approach represents a homegrown nature of curriculum development and provides room for flexibility [32].

There are several models of curriculum development in the literature under the two broader approaches. Each model has its own strengths and weaknesses as the model components and assumptions may vary to one another. A review of the different curriculum models is beyond the scope of this article; however, brief descriptions of a proposed model for use in the sports academy setting is presented. Based on its pragmatic orientation and a focus on the practical, the Hunkins model is proposed.

3.4. Francis Hunkins: Decision-Making Model

Hunkins developed a model of curriculum development in the 1990s. The Hunkins Model of curriculum development has seven stages of implementation. Those stages are:

1. Curriculum conceptualization and legitimization,
2. Curriculum Diagnosis,
3. Content selection,
4. Experience selection,
5. Implementation,
6. Evaluation; and
7. Maintenance.

This model is different from the other models, particularly in its recommended first stage of curricular decision-making. This model addresses the concerns of conceptualists, of putting stress on understanding the nature and power of curriculum. This article proposes Hunkin's (1997) model as a framework for the development and review of a sport academy curriculum. The seven interrelated components of the model collectively provide the building blocks of curriculum development and review. According to this model, the process of curriculum development starts with conceptualization and legitimization and it ends with monitoring and maintenance of the curriculum [52].

After completing the stages, the curriculum team produces curricular documents. These documents guide how the department will conduct the sport academy program, and how a particular coaching or other staff conduct each course. A department curriculum guide might include several components, including the department name, its objectives and programs, the rationale, summary of needs assessment, program components, and detailed breakdown of courses etc.

At the course level, separate curriculum guides can be assembled for each course. Materials for the course curriculum guides might include course codes and requisites, course description and objectives, course content, teaching and learning methods, assessment strategies, and reference materials. In addition, included are samples of unit plans, lesson plans, learning activities, resources, materials, and common assessment tasks and scoring rubrics. Course curriculum guides not only help new teachers/coaches navigate courses to get familiar with, but also help all teachers/coaches share best practices [53].

3.5. Curriculum Implementation

This stage is about piloting (mini-trialing) the curriculum for the first time and modifying where necessary. The refined program is then, disseminated to the appropriate institutions for a full-scale implementation and delivered to all the target learners at a particular level. This is sometimes called full scale trying out which precedes institutionalization [54]. Monitoring and evaluation activities are conducted to provide further refinement [55].

Piloting is primarily about a controlled mini or small-scale implementation of the designed program and materials. It is about putting the curriculum in action. This helps to establish its viability and feasibility, strengths and weaknesses. These will be reflected in the comments and reports received from the trial evaluation. These comments will guide in making adjustments e.g. subtraction and addition of content. In summary, piloting helps to refine the program in question. After collecting empirical evidence on the lived experience of those involved in the implementation process, the extracted valuable comments and recommendations would be used for the improvement of the program before the actual implementation.

Issues raised in examining the implementation might include the following. A) How the senior managers, administrators, and academic members (instructors and coaches) and the community of learners (youth-athletes) did receive it. B) The extent to which the curriculum meets the needs of the different stakeholders. C) Areas where the curriculum meets the anticipated needs of the stakeholders. D) Areas where the curriculum requires modification. E) Whether the curriculum can be easily interpreted and used within the given conditions and resources. F) Alignment: How well the programs focus on curriculum aims, objectives, the

national goals and educational policy of the country at large.

3.6. Curriculum Evaluation

This includes determining if the curriculum is taught as written and recommended. At this stage of the curriculum development process, furnish data so decisions can be made to continue, modify or discontinue program. After collecting the necessary data, standards should be established to gauge the extent of achieving program objectives. Besides, it is important to give expert advice on the implementation process.

3.7. Curriculum Maintenance

This includes monitoring the curriculum and maintaining it through refining the parts based up on evidence. Among the most important maintenance functions is serving as a channel for information about course sessions, skills instructions, and coaching practices. It is believed that getting this information to the coaches/teachers is vital for any modern curriculum. Another very important maintenance task is to ensure compliance with changing rules and regulations that govern education within the sports academy curriculum. Such rules and regulations address the courses offered in the academy, monitoring youth athlete achievement, class size requirements, or even the required teaching and learning resources. Still another maintenance function is keeping the academy supplied with adopted texts and appropriate instructional materials.

3.8. Department Curriculum and Course Curriculum Guides

The process of curriculum development results in a curriculum product that can be complied at the department level for use by all teachers, administrators, registrar officers, and academic program officers. The development of a complied curriculum document needs a particular framework prepared by the development team members. In addition, a curriculum development guide will be prepared for each course.

3.9. Stakeholders of Curriculum Development and Review

Who should get involved in the curriculum development and review process is a common question usually appears at the very start of any curriculum development and review. There are different stakeholders of curriculum development and review in sports academy [38]. It is quite common to include, for example, educational administrators like department heads, teachers, current and previous youth athletes, sports education experts, coaches and sports trainers, parents, and community representatives.

In fact, research shows that a curriculum development and review process that is characterized by open and participatory process provides all stakeholders with the opportunity to share curriculum ideas [54]. According to Carl (2009), teachers who are empowered (i.e., actively involved in decision-making) are more likely to be motivated and to embrace change [55]. In addition, research reveals the needs and benefits of youth athletes' participation in the development and review of curriculum in the context of New Zealand sports academy [13].

4. A Systemic View at the Sports Academy Curriculum

The context through which the sport occurs matters more than anything else does. This is because "the developmental potential of sport does not depend on what is done, but on how it is done" [56]. That means sport can be a beneficial experience when it occurs in the appropriate context, offered by qualified and well-experienced staff, resourced appropriately and practiced in a safe and enjoyable environment. Although numerous hours of training are needed at the elite level, attainment of an expert level of skill is not accomplished by hours of deliberate practice alone [57].
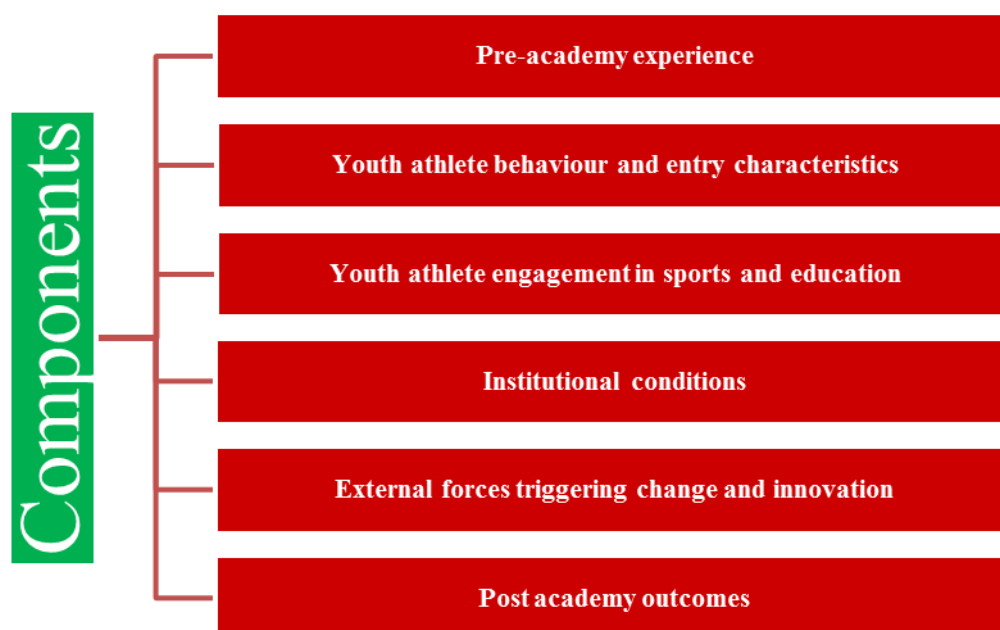
Figure 1. A systematic view at the sports academies curriculum. Source: modified from Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, & Hayek (2006)

In recent years, sport performance research has encompassed a move toward multidimensional models of performance and learning in sport, with significant implications for understanding processes of expertise and talent development [15, 58, 59].

A systemic view is proposed for the curriculum development and review in the Ethiopian sports academy context. A systemic view provides a holistic interpretation and representation of variables included, and how they interact to one another in the process of shaping the curriculum. The proposed framework is a research informed and evidence-based conceptual framework adapted from the work of Kuh and his colleagues [59]. This framework, as modified and adapted within the sport academy context, consists of six essential components. Figure 1 illustrates the entire elements of the multidimensional-dynamic model of curriculum development and review, and the relationship between the different components.

4.1. Components

As shown in Figure 1, the entire developmental pathway of a sport academy youth athlete, from entry to exist include internal forces such as the youth athlete behavior and institutional conditions, and external forces. The entire framework for understanding variables that matters most for the youth athletes success in sports academy curriculum include six broader components that extend from the youth athlete pre-academy experience up to the final post academy outcomes.

1. Pre-academy experience: This includes enrollment choices, academic preparation, aptitude and college readiness, family and peer support, motivation to learn, and demographics, including race, gender, SES.
2. Youth athlete behavior and entry characteristics: These involve article habit, peer involvement, youth athlete -coach interaction, time on task, motivation, and others.
3. Youth athlete engagement in sports and education – This is what the youth athlete does when he/she is in the sport academy. Some of its characteristics reflect any of the following sub-themes, such as active and collaborative learning, youth athlete-staff interaction, academic and sporting challenge, enriching educational and sports experiences, and interpersonal relationships in sports and education
4. Institutional condition. This refers to the sports academy context, including First year experience, academic support, campus

environment, peer support, teaching and learning approaches, and other. These sub-themes are also compounded with financial aids available for the youth athletes and some remedial works as a sort of support mechanisms to remediate youth athletes' academic and personal problems.

5. External forces triggering changes and innovations within the sports academy include demographics, accountability, Federal and Regional administration sports policies, globalization, economic forces, and post academy outcomes.

Every semester or course progress is measured by a regular learning assessment tasks and other engagement measures like attendance and transfer rates. At the time of completing their education, youth athletes receive grades and graduate. Based on his/her achievement level, a youth athlete not only gains academic learning, but also obtain various sporting abilities [18]. The youth athlete is then ready for the post academy outcomes such as employment, graduate and professional schools, and lifelong learning [17].

4.2. The Nature of the Proposed Framework

This proposed model is a multi-dimensional model as each component of the model entails a wider spectrum. In addition, the model is overarching as it encompasses those relevant variables that current research has given supporting evidence and theoretical base. Thus, the focus in addressing the curriculum, within this model, is impartial and inclusive of wider spectrum of issues related to the individual (youth athlete), the classroom, the academy, and the larger context at the system and global levels. It is inevitable that these variables would interact in so many ways in the youth athlete's academic trajectory. Moreover, the model is dynamic so that the interactive effects of the different influencing factors can be studied as a whole, rather than, articulating them in isolated bits. Also, the model provides contextual flavor for the development and review of sports academy curriculum through providing opportunities for the

curriculum to evolve from within the prevailing realities of the sports academy context [41].

It is clear that the Ethiopian sports academies are in their early stages of development as centers of sports and education (learning). Hence, critical considerations for the variables that can affect success in sports and education are very much needed. It is true that expert coaches are not only highly capable of designing deliberate practice and play, but they do so in an environment of emotional warmth while communicating expectations for high standards [27].

5. Conclusions

A sports academy curriculum is a technical guide that shapes up the entire sports education program beginning from entry to graduation. Such a sports academy curriculum is grounded in the curriculum theory and sports education model. The proposed curriculum development and review model provides leadership opportunities, involvement by all stakeholders, and shared decision-making among those working in the sector. Most importantly, this model can enhance the idea that the determination of a curriculum requires a number of steps and strategies and collective decision-making by those affected. By keeping this process simple and more inclusive, it is much easier to produce a shared curriculum, which is updated, agreed upon, and responsive to change.

This broad literature review highlights the importance of youth athlete engagement in sports and education as causative drivers of success. In addition, it describes the contextual nature of curriculum development and review and the different forces that put the greatest influence on the success and failure of a sports academy curriculum. Collectively, this review helps to provide a scientific foundation for the development and review of the sports academy curriculum, and future research and practice on sports academy experiences.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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