Gender Differences In Academic Performance Among University Athletes In Ghana: A Case Study Of University Of Cape Coast

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the academic performance records of student-athletes in the University of Cape Coast (UCC), Ghana, to find out if there were any gender differences, using a comparative descriptive research design. The population for the study comprised all UCC registered athletes from 2008 to 2013, which was 866. Purposive sampling technique was used to select all 239 athletes who had completed their undergraduate programmes in 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013 as the sample. Secondary data, comprising registration numbers of athletes, gender, type of degree obtained, Final Cumulative Grade Point Average (FCGPA) and year of completion, was used in the study. All data were collected by the researcher. Percentages were used to answer the research question whiles the t-test for two independent groups was used to test the research hypotheses formulated using a significance level of .05 alpha. Findings of this study revealed that both male and female UCC student-athletes have been obtaining degrees at very high rates for some years now; also the study further showed that there were no gender differences among UCC students-athletes in terms of academic performance, concluding that participation in university sports does not affect academic performance of male and female UCC student-athletes. Based on the findings, it was recommended that Management of UCC should continue to provide support for male and female students to continue to participate in university sports and also the Sports Section of UCC should, through orientation ceremonies for fresh students, inter-hall sports programmes and during sports discussions on campus radio, make the general student body aware that both male and female athletes perform well academically, as it could serve as motivation for more students to participate in sports.

Keywords: Degrees Obtained; Gender; Student-Athlete; Sports Participation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Similar to sports participation, academic performance has been defined in a wide variety of ways in the literature. According to Joel, Kpolovie, Osonwa and Iderima (2014) academic performance is the achievement of a student in terms of aggregates obtained in a test or examination in specific subjects that cover a given academic programme. Adeyemi (2011) describes academic performance as the scholastic standing of a student at a given moment that could be explained in terms of the grades obtained in a course or groups of courses, whiles Tope (2011) defined academic performance as a pedagogical terminology used in determining learners’ success in formal education, which is measured through reports, examinations, researches and ratings with numerous factors or variables exerting influence. As are the paucity of definitions for academic performance, so are its measures. Measurement variables such as Grade Point Averages (GPA), Graduation Rates, Progression Rates, American College Tests (ACT) scores, Student Assessment Test (SAT) scores, qualitative assessments of teachers’ reports on students, various examinations and continuous
assessment tests have appeared in the literature denoting student academic performance (Joel et. al., 2014; Sitkowski, 2008; Kobrin, Patterson, Shaw, Mattern, & Barbuti, 2008; Beem, 2006).

The importance of academic performance in education cannot be overemphasized. It is a sine qua non to any formal educational institution all over the world. As such numerous studies have been conducted to find out factors that influence academic performance. Some of the factors mentioned in recent literature include class attendance, age, learning styles or preferences, gender, class size, entry qualification, family income, extracurricular activities, peers influence and course assessment, parent’s education (Jayanthi, Balakrishnan, Ching, Latiff & Nasirudeen, 2014; Ali, Haider, Munir, Khan & Ahmed, 2013; Mlambo, 2011). Among the factors mentioned gender appears to attract a lot of attention in research currently. As noted by Goldin, Katz and Kuziemko (2006), there has been widespread concern over gender patterns in academic performance recently because of the belief that females are now ‘doing better’ than males in a number of academic key areas.

Studies reviewed on gender differences relating to academic performance of athletes using different measures appear to follow a similar pattern of females outperforming males on most of the academic performance measures. Using GPA as the measure of academic performance in a research, Amos (2013) found out that female student-athletes had slightly higher mean GPA (3.038) compared to male student-athletes (2.845). Dilley-Knoles, Burnett and Peak (2010) reported similar findings in a study when female student-athletes achieved a 0.511 point higher GPA than male student-athletes at a particular institution. Covington, Simons and Van Rheenen (1999) supporting this position of females outperforming males, stated that studies had consistently shown that female student-athletes were superior to male student-athletes in college GPA. Scott, Paskus, Miranda, Petr and McArdle (2008) who studied the academic performance of college student-athletes in-season and out-of-season noted that within some selected sports the average GPA for female student-athletes (3.17) was considerably higher than that for male student-athletes (2.78). Georgakis, Wilson and Ferguson (2014) examined the academic achievement of elite athletes at an Australia University and reported that a higher percentage of male student-athletes failed (5.84%) in their academic work compared to female student-athletes (2.32%). The researchers went further to state that within the elite athletes group it was also clear that females performed better than males, with higher proportions in credit (females-36.38%, males-34.31%), distinction (females-23.98%, males-19.12%) and high distinction grades (females-6.81%, males-3.76%). A research by Milton and Gottschalk (2010) involving 303 male and 155 female university athletes found out that there were statistically significant differences in the academic performance between female and male student-athletes, with female student-athletes having significantly higher cumulative GPA than male student-athletes. Contrarily to the general trend of female athletes out-performing male athletes in GPA, a study by the Bucknell University Committee on Athletics (2005) titled “The Effect of Varsity Athletic
Participation on Academic Performance: Evidence from the 2004 Graduating Class”, reported findings that suggested that male and female athletes did not differ significantly in cumulative GPA.

The National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCCA) in 1999, using graduation rate as the measure of academic performance, reported that 68% of female student-athletes graduated compared with 52% of male student-athletes, and that specifically, 62% of female basketball players graduated, whilst only 41% of male basketball players graduated. The report further stated that even in less demanding sports like cross-country, female student-athletes still graduated at a rate 10% higher than male student-athletes (63% versus 53%). This report by the NCCA prompted Gohl (2001) to state that female student-athletes, as a whole, were more likely than their male counterparts to graduate from college. The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sports (TIDES), University of Central Florida (2013) also reported that female student-athletes graduated at a rate of 90% compared to male student-athletes who graduated at a rate of 70%. Finley and Fountain (2007) found out that the graduation rate of Division I female student-athletes was 15% higher than that of all Division I male student-athletes (71% to 56%).

The literature is overwhelming in support of female athletes out-performing male athletes in academics. Rishe (2003) who also reported from a study that the graduation rates of female athletes were higher than those of male athletes attempted to provide some explanations for such female athlete dominance over male athletes in academic performance. Rishe argued that the significant differences in academic performance between male and female athletes could be due to the stringent demands made on male athletes to participate in very competitive sports. The intensity of the male athletes' competitions, according to Rishe, usually left them with little time to devote to their studies. Female athletes on the other hand had less intense demands on them competition wise, and therefore were able to spend enough time on their studies to achieve higher measures of academic performance than their male counterparts. Similar reasons have been advanced by Coakley (2008), Harrison and Lawrence (2004) to explain why female athletes usually do better than male athletes in academic performance.

Research relating to gender differences in academic performance carried out in Ghana are mostly outside the area of sports. Apam and Luguterah (2013) did a profile analysis of students’ academic performance in Ghanaian polytechnics and reported no significant difference between male and female students’ academic performance. Gyasi, Narthey and Coker (2011) researched into students’ knowledge of basic grammar at the University of Cape Coast and also reported that there were no statistically significant differences between male and female students’ performances, even though the former outperformed the latter. Kyei, Apam and Nokoe (2011) also investigated some gender differences in academic performance in senior high mathematics examinations in Ghanaian high schools and found out that there were gender differences with boys performing better than girls.
According to Boyd (2010) universities place a heavy burden on student-athletes because they expect them to meet the same academic demands as other students and also be successful in their respective sports domains. The pressure to perform academically, according to Boyd, is often compromised by spending time away from classes for sports competitions, satisfying demanding coaches whose livelihood depends upon the athletes’ performance. Researchers such as Parham (1993) argued that athletes’ attention may be drawn away from academics, as well as social aspects of the university experience. Diersen (2005) opined that research evidence has shown that time and energy needed to fulfill both academic and sports roles may hinder one another, suggesting that inter-university sports participation may be negatively associated with such outcomes as involvement and satisfaction with the overall university experience, career maturity, clarity in educational and occupational plans, and principled moral judgment. As a result, university athletes are often criticized for poor academic performance and failure to obtain a degree. A closer look however suggests this is not always the case although the issue of athletes successfully graduating is complicated (Denhart, Villwock & Vedder, 2009).

The pressure on athletes to perform well academically in the university coupled with the lack of research on gender differences in academic performance among athletes in Ghanaian tertiary institutions provided the rationale for the current study to be conducted. University of Cape Coast was chosen as a case study because it won back-to-back Ghana Universities Sports Association Games (GUSA) championships in 2012 and 2014 (GUSA, 2012; GUSA, 2014). Currently the University of Cape Coast can be said to be the best University in Ghana in terms of sports performance. It is also important to add that UCC is one of the two universities in Ghana running undergraduate and graduate programmes in the area of health, physical education, recreation and sports. Per their athletic performance, UCC student-athletes appear to be the best in Ghana.

The purpose of this study therefore was to examine academic performance records of past athletes of the University of Cape Coast, Ghana, from 2008 to 2013, to find out whether any gender differences existed in the performance of these athletes. Specifically the study sought to:

- Find out the types of degrees obtained by male and female athletes from 2008 to 2013.
- Find out whether there were any differences in Final Cumulative Grade Point Averages (FCGPA) of male and female athletes from 2008 to 2013.

1.1 RESEARCH QUESTION

This research question was generated to guide the study:

- What percentage of UCC male and female athletes obtained 1st Class, 2nd Class Upper, 2nd Class Lower, 3rd Class, Pass and failure from 2008 to 2013?

1.2 HYPOTHESIS

This hypothesis formulated, was tested in the study:
There will be no significant difference in FCGPA obtained between male and female UCC athletes from 2008 to 2013?

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

- The study will provide the University of Cape Coast with the needed empirical evidence on the gender of athletes who may or may not have performed academically well. This will enable the university come out with gender specific policies aimed at improving or maintaining academic performance of university athletes.
- This study can also serve as a basis for similar studies to be conducted in other Ghanaian public universities.
- The study will also add to the body of knowledge already existing in the area of gender differences in academic performance of athletes in universities.

2. METHODOLOGY

The research design used for this study was a comparative descriptive research design. The population comprised all UCC registered athletes from 2008 to 2013, which was 866 (Data on registered athletes obtained from Sports Section, UCC). Purposive sampling technique was used to select all 239 athletes who had completed their undergraduate programmes in 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013 as the sample. Secondary data, comprising registration numbers of athletes, gender, type of degree obtained, FCGPA and year of completion (obtained from the Sports Section and the Student Records and Information Management Section of UCC) was used in the study. The University of Cape Coast grades student academic performance as follows: FCGPA between 4.0 – 3.6 as First Class; FCGPA between 3.5 – 3.0 as Second Class Upper; FCGPA between 2.9 – 2.5 as Second Class Lower; FCGPA between 2.4 – 2.0 as Third Class; FCGPA between 1.9 – 1.5 as Pass; and FCGPA below 1.5 for Fail (UCC, 2013). The current study measured academic performance using type of degree obtained and FCGPA of athletes. All data were collected by the researcher. Percentages answered the research question whiles the t-test for two independent samples was used to test the research hypothesis formulated using a significance level of .05 alpha.

3. RESULTS

Out of the total number of 239 athletes selected for this study, 131 (54.8%) were males whilst 108 (45.2%) were females. Of the 239 athletes, 49 (20.5%) completed their undergraduate programmes in 2008, 43 (18.0%) in 2009, 39 (16.3%) in 2010, 33 (13.8%) in 2011, 36 (15.1%) in 2012, and 39 (16.3%) in 2013 respectively.
**Research Question One:** What percentage of UCC male and female athletes obtained 1st Class, 2nd Class Upper, 2nd Class Lower, 3rd Class, Pass and failure from 2008 to 2013?

*Table 1: Percentage of UCC Male and Female Athletes Who Obtained Undergraduate Degrees/Failure from 2008 to 2013*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Freq.</strong></td>
<td><strong>%</strong></td>
<td><strong>Freq.</strong></td>
<td><strong>%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st CLASS</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd UPPER</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd LOWER</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd CLASS</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PASS</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAIL</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>131</td>
<td>54.8</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows the percentage of male and female athletes who obtained 1st Class, 2nd Class Upper, 2nd Class Lower, 3rd Class, Pass and failure from 2008 to 2013. The results from Table 1 shows that 4 males, representing 1.7% and 2 females, representing 0.8% of the entire sample obtained 1st Class degrees from 2008 to 2009. The Table further revealed the following: 35 males, representing 14.6% and 43 females representing 18.0% obtained 2nd Class Upper degrees; 60 males, representing 25.1% and 42 females, representing 17.6% obtained 2nd Class Lower degrees; 23 males, representing 9.6% and 16 females, representing 6.7% obtained 3rd Class degrees; 8 males, representing 3.3% and 5 females, representing 2.1% obtained Passes; only 1 male athlete, representing 0.4% failed between 2008 to 2013.

**Hypothesis One:** There will be no significant difference in Final Cumulative Grade Point Average (FCGPA) Obtained between male and female UCC athletes from 2008 to 2013?

*Table 2: Independent Sample t-test Showing Final Cumulative Grade Point Average (FCGPA) Obtained by Male and Female Athletes from 2008 to 2013*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male Athlete</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>.485</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>.143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Athlete</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>.482</td>
<td>108</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

p<.05; (significant)
Table 2 shows that the t-test obtained was not significant \(t = 1.47, \text{df} = 237, p = .143\). Comparison of mean FCGPA for male athletes (Mean = 2.69, SD = .486, n = 131,) and female athletes (Mean = 2.78, SD = .482, n = 108)) indicated no significant difference between the two groups, thus the null hypothesis that stated that there will be no significant difference in FCGPA obtained between male and female athletes of UCC, was upheld. This means that although female athletes obtained slightly higher FCGPA (Mean = 2.78) than male athletes (Mean = 2.69), the difference in FCGPA was insignificant. In other words UCC male and female athletes from 2008 to 2013 obtained fairly similar FCGPA.

4. DISCUSSIONS

Research Question 1 looked at the percentage of UCC male and female athletes who obtained 1st Class, 2nd Class Upper, 2nd Class Lower, 3rd Class, Pass and failure from 2008 to 2013. Results from Table 1 revealed that more males than females obtained 1st Class, 2nd Class Lower, Pass and Fails, whilst more females than males obtained 2nd Class Upper. The results further revealed that from 2008 to 2013 no female athlete failed to obtain a degree.

Hypothesis 1 stated that there will be no significant difference in FCGPA obtained between UCC male and female athletes from 2008 to 2013. This was upheld, implying that male and female UCC athletes completed their programmes with similar FCGPA from 2008 to 2013. The findings of this study agree perfectly with the Bucknell University Committee on Athletics (2005) that suggested that male and female athletes did not differ significantly in cumulative GPA. Apam and Luguterah (2013), Gyasi, Nartey and Coker (2011) who all studied aspects of academic performance of students outside sports, reported similar findings of no statistically significant differences between male and female students’ performance. Majority of the studies reviewed however, contradicted the findings of the current study by reporting significant differences between male and female athletes and students in general (Georgakis, Wilson & Ferguson, 2014; Amos, 2013; University of Central Florida, 2013; Rishe, 2012; Kyei, Apam & Nokoe, 2011; Dilley-Knoles, Burnett & Peak, 2010; Scott, Paskus, Miranda, Petr & Mc Ardle, 2008; Gohl, 2001; NCCA, 1999; Covington, Simons & Van-Rheenen, 1999).

The findings of the current study seems to go against the general trend of female athletes performing better academically compared to male athletes. Reasons by Coakley (2008), Harrison and Lawrence (2004) and Rishe (2003) that male athletes are under immense pressure from the competitive nature of their sports compared to female athletes, hence their inability to perform as well as their females academically appears not to hold when it comes to male athletes in the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. Male athletes in Ghana may have found a way of dealing with the pressures that come with their competitive sports, hence their ability to perform just as well as their female counterparts academically.
The results of this study also showed that out of the 239 athletes who completed their undergraduate programmes from 2008 to 2013, only one male athlete failed to obtain a degree, meaning that generally both male and female athletes of UCC did well academically. The assertion by Diersen (2005) that inter-university sports participation may be negatively associated with such outcomes as involvement and satisfaction with overall university experience, career maturity, clarity in educational and occupational plans, and principled moral judgment, resulting in poor academic performance and failure to graduate, is at variance with the findings of this study. The findings have shown that students in UCC can fully participate in university sports and still obtain degrees. It appears UCC student-athletes have the right focus on campus by knowing that they are first and foremost ‘students’ before ‘athletes’. The performance of UCC athletes as shown by the type of degrees obtained also appear to refute Horton’s (2012) argument that athletic participation decreases the rate of student-athletes graduating, since these athletes spend little time and/or energy on their academic pursuits as a result of their athletic demands.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were arrived at:

- All UCC female athletes who completed their undergraduate programmes from 2008 to 2013 obtained degrees.
- Only one male UCC athlete failed to obtain a degree from 2008 to 2013.
- There were no gender differences among UCC athletes in terms of FCGPA.
- Participation in university sports does not affect academic performance of UCC student-athletes.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of this study:

- Management of UCC should continue to provide support for both male and female students to participate in university sports, since the findings show that both male and female athletes performed equally well academically.
- The Sports Section of UCC should find ways of making the general student body aware of the findings of this study as it could serve as motivation for more students to participate in sports. This can be done during orientation ceremonies for fresh students, opening and closing ceremonies of inter-hall sports programmes, during sports discussions on campus radio.
- It is recommended that similar studies on gender and academic performance relating to university student-athletes be conducted in the other public universities in Ghana to find out if findings will be same.
REFERENCES


