



# Dynamics of Incentives and Awards in Kenyan Sports: Perspective of Competitive Swimming in Kenya

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## Abstract

The study investigated the extent to which respondents liked awards they received during swimming competitions in Kenya and in retrospect if the awards motivated them to continue competing in swimming. Mann-Whitney test revealed a significant difference between active swimmers and coaches; between former swimmers and coaches and no significant difference between active and former swimmers on their liking of the awards. More former swimmers (Male-70.7%; Female-77.3%) did not like the awards and proposed that the awards be more appropriate with the age of the swimmers to motivate them to continue competing.

## Subject Areas

Sports Science

## Keywords

Awards, Incentives, Competitive Swimmers

## 1. Introduction

Motivation to participate, remain, and excel in sports stimulates behavior in a direction that drives the athlete to do their best [1] [2] [3]. Motivation factors have been largely categorized as internal (such as enjoyment and skill development) and external (such as health and rewards) [4] [5]. Every athlete engages themselves in a sport with the intention to excel and win as they better their performance, the athlete expects to be rewarded for their achievement, with awards commensurate to their performance [1] [4] [6]. Sport is now considered a lucrative professional career, as athletes make a living, as they get paid to play

and for their performance. They earn huge sums of money as a monthly income from the teams they play for and are also paid by various corporate sponsors. In some championships like athletics, athletes are paid an appearance fee when they show up for those events and paid for breaking records. Hence the reason why professional athletes in various sports choose the events to compete in [6]. Some of the well-paid individuals are athletes from different sports, with most being in soccer, basketball, and American football [7]. Athletes have also been known to move to teams where they feel they will get better financial perks.

With this background, it is evident that now more than ever, incentives that athletes receive play a significant role in determining their stay in a team and by extension in a sport. Athletes have changed citizenship as they perceive the adopted countries that will give them better rewards [8]. Kenya is renowned for its dominance in middle and long-distance running and over the years has produced many elite runners as athletics is one of the sports that are professional as athletes are awarded cash prizes when they win in various sponsored competitions. It was however in 2019 that all athletes who had represented Kenya in continental (Africa Games), Commonwealth, Olympics, and other sporting events since 2010, the government started awarding the athletes with cash prizes for each medal won in these games [9] [10].

Most sports in Kenya are not yet fully professional as teams and clubs have financial constraints to be able to pay their players consistently. However, some of the teams and clubs that have some form of professionalism (players being paid when funds are available) include soccer and rugby [11]. Swimming in Kenya is still an amateur sport and athletes do not get cash allowance for swimming for their teams or clubs. In Kenya, the awards swimmers receive include team trophies, individual medals per event, and individual victrix and victor ludrom trophies per age group, where the age groups are categorized as 8 - 9 years, 10 - 11 years, 12 - 13 years, 14 - 15 years, and 16 and over age group. A few of the internal swimming competitions (county) have occasionally included prize money, though having limiting criteria of those who can participate in the event and the amount to be won is generally not much considering that athletes have to pay to participate, paying per event.

The study, therefore, sought to find out the influence of the awards and incentives on participation among competitive swimmers in Kenya by collecting the views of coaches, former and active swimmers. Further, the study also sought to find out the views on incentives and awards in competitive swimming in Kenya, across gender among the three groups of respondents.

## 2. Method

The study targeted former swimmers through snowballing, while active swimmers and coaches were sampled from the clubs/institutions in the Kenya swimming federation (KSF) database. There were a total of 586 respondents who included, 44 swimming coaches, 148 former swimmers, and 394 former swimmers.

The coaches were to give their views on the extent to which the swimmers they coached and had stopped competing liked or did not like the awards they received. The former and active swimmers were to respond extent to which they liked the awards they received during swimming competitions for the duration they had competed in Kenya. One of the items on the questionnaires required the respondents to respond to the extent to which they liked the awards they received on a scale of 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). The questionnaires were administered physically and via email to former swimmers and coaches who were all above 18 years. For active swimmers, the questionnaires were administered physically to allow for the structured interview, for those above 14 years, permission was sought from the parents before proceeding with issuing them the questionnaires and a follow-up interview. For the active swimmers under 14 years, the questionnaire was administered orally by research assistants after getting consent from the parents. This was done to allow for simplification and clarification of the questionnaire and to avoid getting “pleasing answers” when filling out the questionnaire, as may be the case for children when responding to Likert questionnaires [12].

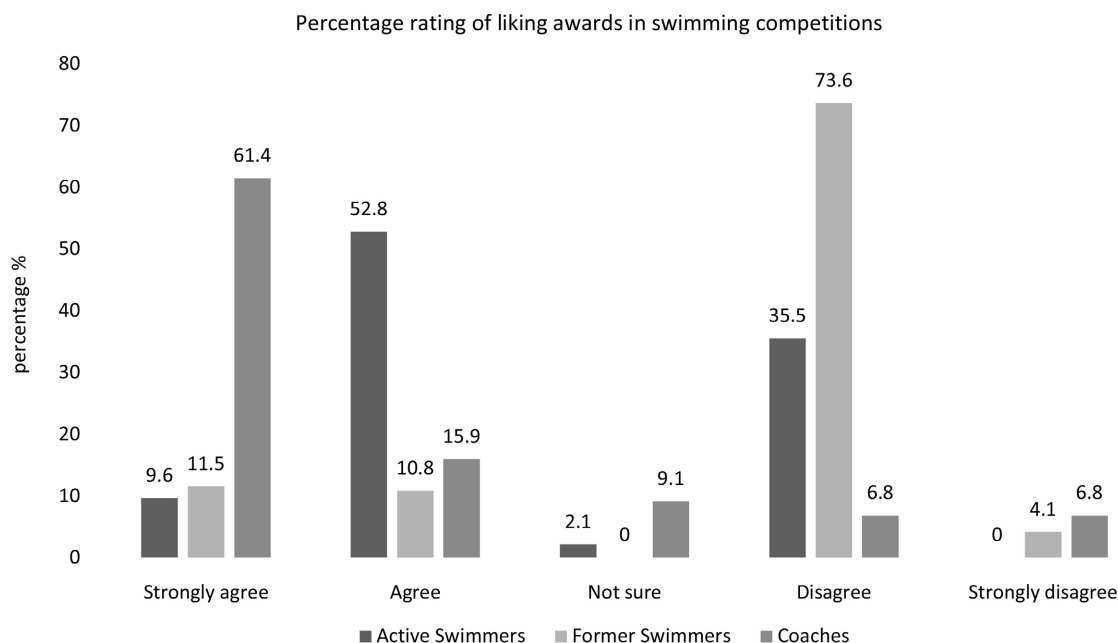
### 3. Results

**Table 1** shows the descriptive on ratings of liking the awards by the respondents. Though the majority (61.5%) of the swimmers (combined active and former) liked the awards they received compared to those who stated they did not like the awards they received, the larger majority of former swimmers (77.7%) did not like the awards, compared to 35.5% of the active swimmers who did not like the awards they received. However, a large percentage of the coaches (77.3%) felt that the swimmers they had coached and stopped swimming, liked the awards they received. **Figure 1** shows the percentage rating of liking awards in swimming competitions.

**Table 1.** Rating of liking awards in swimming competitions.

|                   | Category                            | SA         | A           | NS       | D           | SD       | Total (n) |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------|------------|-------------|----------|-------------|----------|-----------|
| I like the awards | Combined (Active + Former Swimmers) | 55 (10.2%) | 224 (41.3%) | 8 (1.5%) | 249 (45.9%) | 6 (1.1%) | 52        |
|                   | Active swimmers                     | 38 (9.6%)  | 208 (52.8%) | 8 (2.1%) | 140 (35.5%) | 0        | 394       |
|                   | Former swimmers                     | 17 (11.5%) | 16 (10.8%)  | 0        | 109 (73.6%) | 6 (4.1%) | 148       |
|                   | Coaches                             | 27 (61.4%) | 7 (15.9%)   | 4 (9.1%) | 3 (6.8%)    | 3 (6.8%) | 44        |

KEY: SA-Strongly Agree; A-Agree; NS-Not Sure; D-Disagree; SD-Strongly Disagree.



**Figure 1.** Percentage rating of liking awards in swimming competitions.

To establish if there was a statistically significant difference between the three groups, Kruskal Wallis test was performed, where the results indicated there was a significant difference  $H(2) = 64.089$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . Mann-Whitney test was performed to establish between the three groups which had significant difference. The results of which indicated that the significant difference was between the former swimmers and the coaches at  $U(N_{\text{former swimmers}} = 148, N_{\text{coaches}} = 44) = 1234.00$ ,  $z = -7.040$ ,  $p < 0.001$  and between the active swimmers and the coaches at  $U(N_{\text{active swimmers}} = 394, N_{\text{coaches}} = 44) = 2947.00$ ,  $z = -7.795$ ,  $p < 0.001$  There was, however, no significant difference between the active and former swimmers at  $U(N_{\text{active swimmers}} = 394, N_{\text{former swimmers}} = 148) = 27474.00$ ,  $z = -1.176$ ,  $p = 0.240$ .

#### Rating of liking awards across gender

**Table 2** shows the views of the respondents across gender on their ratings of liking awards. Among the active swimmers, more females (64.3%) liked the awards compared to their male counterparts (60.2%). In contrast, a larger percentage (81.7%) of the former female did not like the awards they received, compared to their male counterparts (74.3%). A larger percentage of the male coaches (78.8%) felt that the swimmers liked the awards they received, compared to female coaches (72.8%) who felt that the swimmers they had coached liked the awards they received.

Further analysis to establish if there was significant difference on views of the respondents across gender was done using Mann-Whitney tests, which found no significant difference between male and female respondents at: Active Swimmers-  $U(N_{\text{males}} = 176, N_{\text{females}} = 218) = 18019.000$ ,  $z = -1.154$ ,  $p = 0.249$ ; Former Swimmers-  $U(N_{\text{males}} = 82, N_{\text{females}} = 66) = 2458.500$ ,  $z = -1.235$ ,  $p = 0.217$ ; Coaches-  $U(N_{\text{males}} = 33, N_{\text{females}} = 11) = 149.500$ ,  $z = -0.992$ ,  $p = 0.321$ .

**Table 2.** Ratings of liking awards across gender.

| Category          |                 | SA     | A             | NS             | D            | SD            |             |
|-------------------|-----------------|--------|---------------|----------------|--------------|---------------|-------------|
| I like the awards | Active swimmers | Male   | 13<br>(7.4%)  | 93<br>(52.8%)  | 4<br>(2.3%)  | 66<br>(37.5%) | 0           |
|                   |                 | Female | 25<br>(11.5%) | 115<br>(52.8%) | 4<br>(1.8%)  | 74<br>(33.9%) | 0           |
|                   | Former swimmers | Male   | 13<br>(15.9%) | 8<br>(9.8%)    | 0            | 58<br>(70.7%) | 3<br>(3.6%) |
|                   |                 | Female | 4<br>(6.1%)   | 8<br>(12.2%)   | 0            | 51<br>(77.3%) | 3<br>(4.4%) |
|                   | Coaches         | Male   | 22<br>(66.7%) | 4<br>(12.1%)   | 2<br>(6.1%)  | 2<br>(6.1%)   | 3<br>(9.1%) |
|                   |                 | Female | 5<br>(45.5%)  | 3<br>(27.3%)   | 2<br>(18.1%) | 1<br>(9.1%)   | 0           |

KEY: SA-Strongly Agree; A-Agree; NS-Not Sure; D-Disagree; SD-Strongly D.

#### 4. Discussion

Slightly below half (45.07%) of the female swimmer respondents (active and former n = 284) did not like the awards they received and similarly, slightly below half (49.22%) of the male swimmer respondents (active and former n = 258) did not like the awards they received. Though no significant difference was found between these two groups of respondents, clearly there was a large percentage that did not like the awards they received.

This higher percentage view among the coaches of swimmers liking awards may have been more biased as their swimmers getting awards (medals) translated to them being viewed as successful coaches and also the fact that they were responding about athletes whom they may have coached when they were younger and were no longer competing.

All the former swimmers who responded were above 18 years, in addition to the questionnaire that was sent online or given physically, there was the semi-structured interview part for those who had the time to be interviewed. Below is an excerpt of some of those responses when asked what they would like to see improvement in competitive swimming in Kenya.

Carol (not her real name) aged 23

*“I would rather they had some other forms of awards other than medals, like book vouchers, swimming equipment, sponsor to a swim camp outside the country, and other more relevant awards, I had been getting the same medals since I started competing at age 9 till I stopped at age 16 years.”*

Samuel (not his real name) aged 26

*“I wish they had cash awards, or more serious rewards like laptops after a certain age, getting medals gets boring, I have more than 100 medals just in a box somewhere in the house.”*

John (not his real name) aged 21

“I stopped swimming, since all I kept getting were the same medals, I had hoped to get a scholarship to do my University education.”

A study [13] on the perception of parents and children in participating in a community-based swim-team programme found that lower-level motivators like medals and ribbons were adequate incentives for children, particularly young ones (6 - 12 years), this being consistent with Piaget’s theory of development where young children being at the concrete operational stage are content with any tangible award. In contrast, the young adolescent and young adult (13 years and above) who begin to synthesize information and think more abstractly, begin to prefer tangible awards that are practical to use including non-tangible like getting more media coverage. The findings of this study found similar results, as most athletes above 16 years preferred more tangible and “appropriate rewards like academic scholarships, and media recognition, which was also replicated” [14] [15]. However, some studies [16] [17] [18] have found that participation in sports for intrinsic purposes like improvement in performance, socialization, health (fitness), and other virtues should be encouraged and not competing majorly for extrinsic rewards.

## 5. Recommendations

Get more sponsors in the sport of swimming so as to get more “appropriate and practical” rewards for the athletes, especially for those above 13 years, who prefer other awards in addition to the medals.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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