

**** The impact of European perceptions of African footballers on Nigerian football talent****

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Aim. This research explores how expectations towards Black African footballers within European football influence the way young football players are identified and trained in Nigeria. The core question was whether a focus on specific physical attributes like height and strength – traits that are stereotypically associated with African players - is limiting the diversity of talent being developed in African football.

Methods. The researcher spoke with coaches and administrators at four different football academies in Nigeria. These academies varied in their resources and connections to European clubs. The interviews focused on how these academies decide which players to recruit and how they prioritize training, particularly in relation to the demands of the European football market.

Key findings. The study revealed that Nigerian football academies are increasingly prioritizing players who possess physical characteristics valued in European football, such as size, speed, and strength. This is largely driven by a desire to increase the chances of successfully transferring players to lucrative European leagues. However, this emphasis on physicality often comes at the expense of recognizing and developing players with exceptional technical skills, creativity, or tactical intelligence. Coaches have largely internalized stereotypes about African players being naturally strong and athletic, and are actively seeking to develop players who fit this mold. This isn't simply about improving player prospects; it reflects a historical pattern where African talent has been valued primarily for its physical capabilities. By focusing solely on these attributes, academies risk overlooking a wider range of potential talent and potentially weakening the development of a robust local football economy. The findings highlight how biases within the global and European football system can impact talent development even within the countries where players originate.

Limitations. The research focused specifically on football academies in Nigeria, so findings may not be representative of all talent development programs across West Africa, nor do they address the impact on local football clubs or national teams. The study also did not explore how gender dynamics might influence talent identification and development within these academies.