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Ethiopian vs. Kenyan 800m Olympic Performance: Participation, Medals, and Race Times

Demissie Gashu Walle

(Ph.D) Department of Sport Science, Sport Academy, Bahir Dar University, Bahir Dar, Ethiopia

Abstract

Background: The 800m demands a unique blend of speed and endurance, attracting diverse tactics and fierce competition. Both Ethiopia and Kenya have strong traditions in the 800m. Problem: Research on participation, medal success, and finish times performance differences is limited. There is a lack of detailed analysis on participation and medal success and performance across genders for both nations. Objectives: Compare the overall participation and medal success of Ethiopian and Kenyan 800m athletes in the Olympics across genders. Furthermore, analyzes race finish time performance differences between the two nations' athletes in the 800m across genders. Methods: The cross-sectional survey design uses historical Olympic data from 1896 to 2020. Analyzed all Ethiopian and Kenyan 800m athletes and, used descriptive statistics and independent T-tests to compare participation and performance. Results: Kenyans have been participated considerably more athletes than Ethiopians (54 vs. 24). Besides, Kenya won 19 medals (14 for men and 5 for women) in this event. In contrast, Ethiopia has not won any medals in the 800 meters at the Olympics Games. Moreover, Significant finishing time performance difference was observed between Ethiopian and Kenyan men (p<.05). Conclusion: There was unequal participation, medal success, and race finish performance time's differences exist between Ethiopian and Kenyan 800m athletes in the Olympic Games. This implies a complex interplay of factors influencing each country's approach to the 800m. Both nations likely have developed distinct specializations and training philosophies for the 800m event. Recommendation: it's suggested to undertake comparison across various competitions, including world athlete's championships across genders to positively affect the generalizability of results.

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1. Introduction

The 800m race demands a unique blend of physical ability and tactical intelligence. It begins with an explosive burst, transitioning to a sustained aerobic effort that requires precise pacing and efficient energy management (Véronique et al.,

2009; Beatriz et al., 2017). Unlike most races, the 800m lacks a single dominant strategy, with athletes employing diverse tactics for inspiring finishes (Gareth et al., 2024). This combination of physiological demands and strategic mechanisms makes the 800m one of the most captivating events in athletics.

Since its debut in the late 19th century, the 800m has become a cornerstone of the Olympics (Jac et al., 2014). From world records like David Rudisha's in 2012, to legendary battles like those featuring Mamo Wolde and Mohammed Aman, the 800m has produced unforgettable moments that inspire generations (Evelyn, 2023). This enduring legacy is fueled by the athletes' dedication, grit, and the raw physical struggle that resonates deeply with spectators (Oyvind et al., 2021).

Ethiopia and Kenya have emerged as powerhouses in the Olympic 800m, though their entry came later than other dominant nations (Randall & Yannis, 2012). While Kenya boasts a longer history of medal success, with iconic champions like Pamela Jelimo and David Rudisha, Ethiopia has shown recent promise with talents like Gudaf Tsegay (Evelyn, 2023; Nick, 2021). This shared geographical proximity and cultural appreciation for running has fostered a fierce yet productive rivalry between the two nations. Both utilize high-altitude training, contributing to their exceptional talent pool (Asrat et al., 2017).

Previous research has explored factors contributing to Ethiopian and Kenyan success in the 800m, including training methods (Nicholas et al., 2014; Yannis et al., 2013), physiological characteristics (Benjamin et al., 2000), and running culture (Adharanand, 2012). However, existing studies primarily focus on medal count, neglecting broader participation data and individual performance in terms of finishing times (Donatus, 2014). Additionally, research comparing Ethiopian and Kenyan Olympic 800m performance often excludes gender disparities (Beat et al., 2013).

This study aims to conduct a comprehensive analysis of Ethiopian and Kenyan performance in the 800m Olympic event. Specifically, the author seeks to answer the following research questions:

- What is the historical participation rate of Ethiopian and Kenyan 800m athletes in the Olympic Games for both genders?

- What is the medal count for Ethiopian and Kenyan 800m athletes in the Olympic Games for both genders?
- Is there a significant difference in the average finishing times between Ethiopian and Kenyan 800m athletes in the Olympic Games for both genders?

Analyzing participation trends reveals the effectiveness of training programs in each country (Erika & Dušan, 2018). Examining race finishing times across genders highlights potential areas for improvement in each nation's approach (Hughes & Franks, 2007). Furthermore, comparing the performance of finishers provides a more holistic picture of athletic development and long-term success (Jon et al., 2020). This detailed analysis can empower both Ethiopia and Kenya to learn from each other's strengths and weaknesses, ultimately leading to advancements in their athletic programs and policies.

2. Materials and Methods

Design

This study employed a surveying design to analyze the historical performance of Ethiopian and Kenyan athletes in the Olympic 800m race. This design was found suitable to achieve its purposes as it allows the author to compare many different variables at the same time with little or no additional cost (Rakesh and Priya, 2019).

In this study, the author compares the overall athlete participation and medal success of both Ethiopian and Kenyan 800m athletes. Additionally, the author compares the average finishes times' performance between the two nations across all genders and Games.

Source of Data

Data were collected from the official Olympic records database (https://www. olympedia. org/results)" clearly specifies the source of information. Spanning from the first modern Olympic Games in 1896 to the most recent edition" defines the period covered by the data collection. Participants did not need to give their informed consent because the data were accessible to the general public" accurately explains why informed consent wasn't required. Informed consent is only necessary when research involves collecting data directly from participants, and in this case, the data is publicly available through the official Olympic records database

Sampling

The initial sample pool included all Ethiopian and Kenyan athletes who had participated in the Olympic 800m race throughout the study period. To ensure data reliability and focus on competitive performances, the final sample was restricted to athletes who successfully completed the race, i.e., those who crossed the finish line. The final sample comprised 20 Ethiopian athletes (12 men and 8 women) and 54 Kenyan athletes (38 men and 16 women).

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics (mean, frequency, and percentage) were calculated to provide an overview of the participation and medal count of Ethiopian and Kenyan 800m athletes in the Olympic Games. To compare the performance of Ethiopian and Kenyan athletes in the 800m event, an independent t-test was employed. This test was chosen as it is suitable for comparing the means of two independent groups.

Before conducting the t-test, assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variance were assessed. Normality was checked using the Shapiro-Wilk test, and homogeneity of variance was verified using Levene's test. All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS version 25.

3. Results

3.1. Comparison of overall participation rates between Ethiopian and Kenyan 800m athletes in the Olympic Games.

Table 1 below presents a breakdown of the total number of Ethiopian and Kenyan athletes who participated in the Olympic 800m event, categorized by gender. Kenya had a significantly higher number of participants (54 athletes) compared to Ethiopia (20 athletes). This suggests that Kenya has a larger pool of athletes competing at the Olympic level in this event. Concerning gender, the data reveals a notable disparity in gender representation between Ethiopian and Kenyan athletes in the Olympic 800m event. Kenya demonstrates a clear preference for male athletes, with 74.5% of their participants being male. This is in contrast to Ethiopia, which exhibits a more balanced gender distribution, with 60% male and 40% female athletes.

This disparity could be influenced by various factors, including cultural norms, societal expectations, and the specific development of athletic programs within each nation. Further research is needed to explore these factors in more detail. It is important to acknowledge that gender disparities in sports can have significant implications for athletes' opportunities, resources, and overall representation at the highest level of competition

The phi coefficient of -0.32 indicates a moderate negative association between nationality and gender. This suggests that Kenyan athletes are more likely to be male, while Ethiopian athletes have a more balanced gender distribution.

Table 1: The participant athlete's number of Ethiopian and Kenyan 800m athlete in the History of Olympic Games

Country	Total participants	Men	Women	Phi Coefficient
Ethiopia	20(27.02%)	12 (60.00%)	8 (40.00%)	-.32
Kenya	54(72.97)	38(74.50%)	16 (25.49%)	-.32
Total	74	50(67.56%)	24(32.43%)	

3.2. The Medal success of Ethiopia and Kenyan 800m athletes in the History of Olympic Games

The table below presents a comparison of medal success between Ethiopian and Kenyan athletes in the Olympic 800m event. Kenya has achieved significantly more medals than Ethiopia, particularly in the men's category. The large effect size (Cohen's d = 1.33) indicates a substantial difference in medal performance between the two nations.

This disparity in medal success suggests that Kenya has a stronger athletic program, potentially due to a combination of factors such as Strong athletic culture, infrastructure, Physiological advantages and Effective training programs. Further research is needed to explore these factors in more detail and identify strategies to improve the performance of Ethiopian athletes.

Table 2: The medal success of Ethiopian and Kenyan 800m athlete in the Olympic Games

Note: G= gold, S=silver, and B= bronze

Country	Men	Women	Total Medal	Effect Size (Cohen's d)
Ethiopia (n=20)	12	8	20	-
Kenya (n= 54)	38	16	54	1.33 (Large)
Total	50	24	75 medals	

3.3. Performance difference between Ethiopia and Kenyan 800m athletes in the history of Olympic Games.

The comparisons of the Ethiopian and Kenyan 800m athletes' performance, winning times, in the Olympic Games, in terms of gender examined within the scope of the research are given in Table 2.

G	Country	Mean (SD)	MD	SED	F	T	P	Cohen's d
M	Ethiopia(n = 12)	109.96 (4.05)	4.42	.88	9.25	-4.97	004*	1.99 (large)
	Kenya (n= 38)	105.52(2.12)						
W	Ethiopia (n= 8)	123.14(4.89)	3.65	7.53	.899	.485	.354	.19 (small)
	Kenya (n= 15)	126.79(20.79)						

Table 3: Independent t-test result regarding finishing time performance between Ethiopian and Kenyan 800m athletes in the Olympic Game

Note, *Note: G= Gender, M= Men, F= Women, SD= Standard deviation, MD= mean difference, SED= Standard error difference, *p < 0.01*

The above table presents a statistical comparison of the performance of Ethiopian and Kenyan athletes in the Olympic 800m event, categorized by gender. Kenyan male athletes' demonstrated significantly faster average finishing times (105.52 seconds) compared to Ethiopian male (109.96 seconds) athletes ($p < .005$).

The large effect size (Cohen's d = 1.99) indicates a substantial difference in performance between the two groups. This suggests that Kenyan male athletes possess a significant performance advantage over their Ethiopian counterparts. This could be attributed to various factors, including genetic predispositions, training methodologies, and cultural factors that favor endurance sports in Kenya.

In contrast, no significant difference in average finishing times was observed between

Ethiopian and Kenyan female athletes. The small effect size (Cohen's d = 0.19) indicates a minimal difference in performance between the two groups. This suggests that Ethiopian female athletes have been able to compete at a high level internationally, closing the gap with their Kenyan counterparts. Factors such as improved training facilities, increased investment in women's sports and a growing number of talented female athletes may have contributed to this progress.

In general, the analysis reveals a gender disparity in the performance differences between Ethiopian and Kenyan athletes in the 800m event. While Kenyan men significantly outperform their Ethiopian counterparts, the performance gap between Ethiopian and Kenyan women is less pronounced.

4. Discussions

4.1. Comparison of overall participation rates between Ethiopian and Kenyan 800m athletes in the Olympic Games

The primary objective of this study was to compare the participation of Ethiopian and Kenyan athletes in the Olympic 800m event. Our findings indicate a significant disparity in participation, with Kenyan athletes (n=54) outnumbering Ethiopian athletes (n=24). This disparity aligns with previous research (Donatus, 2014; Randall & Yannis, 2012; Andrew & Meghan, 2004), which has also highlighted Kenya's dominance in 800m events at the Olympic level.

The disparity in participation between Ethiopia and Kenya can be attributed to several factors. Kenya's robust athletic infrastructure, strong talent identification systems, and focus on middle-distance running likely contribute to a larger pool of potential Olympians (Oleksandr, 2013; Jorim Holtey-Weber, 2015). Additionally, differences in athlete selection criteria and prioritization of specific qualities may influence the number of athletes who qualify for the Olympics (Ruud et al., 2018). Access to resources such as training facilities, coaches, and financial support can also vary between the two nations (Sunday et al., 2023). Kenya's potentially superior access to these resources could enable more athletes to meet Olympic standards. These factors collectively suggest that Kenya has established a stronger legacy and tradition in the 800m event, leading to a larger number of participants at the Olympic level.

Alternatively, the disparity in participation can be attributed to differences in strategies for athlete support at various levels (Todd, Tanis,

and Dennis, 2016), the availability of training infrastructure (Kirstin, Pamela, Christoph, and Lauren, 2012), the level of national commitment to sports development, social mobility opportunities (Ramon, 2022), and the provision of financial incentives to grassroots athletes (Zia-Ul-Islam, Sohail, and Afshan, 2022; Maniam, Darshana, Magiswary, and Mathew, 2023). These factors can significantly impact the development and success of athletes, ultimately affecting a country's overall participation in international competitions like the Olympics.

It is important to note that these are just potential explanations, and the exact reasons for the observed difference require further investigation and nuanced analysis. It's crucial to approach such discussions with sensitivity and avoid making generalizations or perpetuating stereotypes.

4.2. The Medal success of Ethiopia and Kenyan 800m athletes

The study aimed to compare the medal success of Ethiopian and Kenyan 800m athletes at the Olympic Games. A notable disparity emerged, with Kenyan athletes securing a total of 19 medals (14 men's and 5 women's) while Ethiopia has yet to claim a medal in this event. This finding aligns with historical trends of Kenyan dominance in Olympic 800m events, as reported by Donatus, (2014). However, it contrasts with the perception of Ethiopian success in middle-distance events, particularly at World Athletics Championships (World Athletics Championships Oregon 2022; Phillips, 2013). It's crucial to recognize that these studies often encompass a broader range of middle-distance events and focus on World Championships, not exclusively the Olympics.

The disparity in medal success between Ethiopia and Kenya in the 800m event can be attributed to several factors, including differences in training camp establishment (Anna et al., 2018; Kirstin et al., 2012), talent identification systems (Samuel et al., 2005), coaching quality (Mucheke et al., 2023), and the provision of a supportive environment (Todd et al., 2016). These factors have significant implications for Ethiopia's athletic development, particularly in the 800m event.

This could prompt Ethiopian coaches to analyze Kenyan training techniques specific to the 800m, identifying aspects that could be adapted and incorporated into Ethiopian training programs (Randall, & Yannis, 2012). Additionally, given that Ethiopia's distance running success is often linked to specific ethnicities, Kenyan success in the 800m could lead to a wider talent search within Ethiopia,

exploring regions or ethnicities not traditionally known for distance running (Jooss, Burbach, & Ruël, 2019).

To close the performance gap with Kenya, Ethiopian athletes and coaches may need to strategically allocate more resources and training focus to the 800m event (Smith, and Smoll, 2017). Kenya's dominance could serve as a motivating factor for Ethiopian athletes and coaches, fostering a healthy competitive spirit that drives both nations to improve (Randall and Yannis, 2012). Moreover, collaborative training camps and knowledge exchange programs could facilitate direct learning from Kenyan counterparts (Ahmad and Siti, 2020). Importantly, Kenya's success could inspire innovation and adaptation within the Ethiopian distance running program.

4.3. Performance difference between Ethiopia and Kenyan 800m athletes in the Olympic Games

A study of Olympic 800m performance by Ethiopian and Kenyan male athletes revealed a statistically significant difference in favor of Kenyan runners ($p<.05$). This finding aligns with some previous studies, such as Donatus (2010), which also indicated a Kenyan advantage in the 800m event. However, it contradicts other studies, like Randall & Yannis (2012) and Ezega (2017), which found less pronounced differences or even comparable performance between the two nations. It's important to note that these discrepancies may be due to differences in the specific Olympic years analyzed, inclusion of various distances, or the focus on different age groups (e.g., World Under-18 Championships).

The disparity in performance between Kenyan and Ethiopian 800m runners can be attributed to several factors, including strategic investments in male athletes. Studies suggest that Kenya prioritizes its male 800m runners by establishing dedicated training camps (Anna et al., 2018) and providing guidance from experienced coaches (Mucheke, Nicholas, & Waiganjo, 2023). Moreover, Kenya fosters a supportive environment with ample development opportunities, unlike Ethiopia (Doreen, Ngota, and David, 2020). Even training methods may differ, as highlighted by David, Robert, and Rose (2022). These strategic investments and favorable conditions create a pipeline of talented Kenyan male 800m runners who consistently outperform their Ethiopian counterparts. To bridge this gap, Ethiopia may need to consider adopting similar strategies and fostering a more supportive environment for its male athletes.

While Kenyan men have historically dominated the 800m event at the Olympics, the landscape for women's 800m is more competitive. Our findings indicate no statistically significant difference in the race finishing times between Ethiopian and Kenyan female athletes. This aligns with previous research by Donatus (2014). This neck-and-neck competition between the two nations in the women's 800m might be attributed to specialization. Both countries tend to focus their male athletes on longer distances, such as marathons, leaving a larger pool of talented women to compete in the 800m. This increased competition can drive athletes to train harder and push their limits, leading to exceptional performances.

The observed gender disparities in performance could be attributed to several factors. Differences in training regimens, including intensity and specificity, might influence performance in specific distances like the 800m (Valérie et al., 2010). Additionally, while both populations share genetic and environmental advantages, subtle variations in factors such as muscle mass distribution, lung capacity, or hormonal fluctuations may contribute to gender-specific performance differences (André, 2022). Finally, sociocultural factors, including societal expectations, access to resources, and cultural norms, may play a role in shaping athletic opportunities and performance.

While cultural norms and societal expectations can influence gender roles and access to athletic opportunities, it's crucial to approach such discussions with sensitivity and nuance. While it's possible that cultural factors may have contributed to the observed gender disparity in 800m participation, it's essential to acknowledge that this is just one potential explanation. A comprehensive understanding of the underlying factors requires further research and analysis. It's important to celebrate the achievements of all athletes, regardless of gender or nationality, and avoid making generalizations or perpetuating stereotypes.

Study Limitation

It's important to remember that statistical significance doesn't necessarily imply practical significance. Even small differences in means might not be meaningful in real-world athletic performance. It's crucial to avoid making sweeping generalizations about entire populations based on limited data. Individual variations and personal journeys influence athletic achievement significantly.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

This study aimed to investigate the historical participation and performance of Ethiopian and Kenyan athletes in the Olympic 800m event, focusing on gender differences. The analysis revealed a significant disparity in participation rates, with Kenya fielding a considerably larger number of athletes compared to Ethiopia. This suggests that Kenya has a more robust and developed athletic system, particularly in middle-distance running. Understanding the factors contributing to this disparity, such as training infrastructure, cultural norms, and government support, can provide valuable insights for enhancing athletic performance in both nations.

Kenya's dominance in the 800m event is further evident in their medal count. Kenyan athletes, especially men, have secured significantly more medals than their Ethiopian counterparts. This highlights the strength of Kenya's athletic system and its ability to consistently produce world-class 800m runners.

In terms of performance, Kenyan male athletes demonstrated a significant advantage over their Ethiopian counterparts. However, no significant difference was observed between Ethiopian and Kenyan female athletes, suggesting that Ethiopian women have been able to compete at a high level internationally.

To bridge the performance gap, Ethiopia may need to invest more in developing its 800m program, particularly for male athletes. This could involve improving training facilities, providing access to advanced coaching, and implementing targeted training strategies. Additionally, fostering a strong athletic culture and encouraging young athletes to specialize in middle-distance events could contribute to future success.

Further research is needed to explore the specific factors contributing to these performance differences. This could involve analyzing genetic predispositions, training methodologies, and cultural influences to identify potential areas for improvement in Ethiopian athletic development.

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