

# ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN FOOTBALL TRAINING CENTERS: A CASE STUDY OF IVOIRE ACADEMIE SPORT BOARDERS IN SONGON (ABIDJAN)

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**Abstract:** This research starts with the observation that football training centres boarders, whose schooling time is reduced, achieve good academic performance. The study aims at apprehending Ivoire Académie Sport boarders' school performance based on a mixed approach, quantitative and qualitative. The data analysis reveals that trainees and parents, administrators and instructors' opinions on school background and perceptions have an impact on the way young people construct their relationship with knowledge including efficient pedagogical guidance and the relationship between sport and performance.

**Keywords:** school performance, football, training center, boarders, knowledge.

## **Performance scolaire dans les centres de formation de football : cas des pensionnaires d'Ivoire Académie Sport à Songon (Abidjan)**

**Résumé :** Cette recherche part du constat que les pensionnaires des centres de formation de football, dont le temps de scolarisation est réduit, obtiennent de meilleurs résultats scolaires. L'étude vise à appréhender les performances scolaires des pensionnaires d'Ivoire Académie Sport selon une approche mixte, quantitative et qualitative. L'analyse des données révèle que les opinions des stagiaires et des parents, des administrateurs et des instructeurs sur le parcours scolaire et les perceptions ont un impact sur la façon dont les jeunes gens construisent leur rapport au savoir, y compris une orientation pédagogique efficace et la relation entre le sport et la performance.

**Mots clés :** Performance scolaire, centre de formation, football, académiciens, savoir.

## ***Rendimiento escolar de los niños en centros de formación futbolística: el caso de los internos de Ivoire Académie Sport de Songon (Abidjan)***

**Resumen:** Esta investigación se basa en la observación de que los alumnos internos de los centros de formación futbolística, que pese a su tiempo de escolarización es reducido, obtienen buenos resultados académicos. Con el objetivo de comprender el rendimiento académico de los alumnos de la IAS, utilizamos un enfoque mixto en el campo de estudio. Se invitó a alumnos, padres y partes interesadas en el sistema, administradores y profesores, a dar su punto de vista sobre el rendimiento. El estudio demostró que los antecedentes escolares y las percepciones influyen en la forma en que las personas construyen su relación con el conocimiento. Además de lo anterior, una orientación pedagógica eficaz y la relación entre deporte y rendimiento contribuyeron a mejorar los resultados académicos de los escolares.

**Palabras clave:** Rendimiento académico, centro de entrenamiento de fútbol, académicos, relación con el conocimiento.

## Introduction

Football is undoubtedly the most well-known and practiced sport worldwide. Football has evolved to become more technical and refined, whereas in the past it was only a professional with talent. The work dedicated to training makes all the difference, and for most players, training centres are a mandatory step on the road to becoming a professional footballer. According to the International Association Football Federation (FIFA), the future of national and world football is determined by the training of young players. Local federations and their clubs are responsible for developing their football by creating a training philosophy that is adapted to their country's characteristics.

In Côte d'Ivoire, the phenomenon of football centres came about as a result of the upheaval of the sports landscape by the football club Asec Mimosas. Asec Mimosas defeated Esperance de Tunis, a Tunisian club with a great reputation on February 7th, 1999, to win the African Super Cup. Sports fans discovered a new generation of footballers who graduated from MIMOSIFCOM academy, in addition to this victory, In 1993, a football training center was established at the Sol Béni sports complex (cf. R. Poli, 2003). Thanks to their success, the training centres have become a vital part of the football scene in Côte d'Ivoire. Since the 2000s, the number of training centres has increased throughout the country. According to the Department of Mass and Gender Sports in the Ministry of Sport Promotion and Sport Economy Development, Côte d'Ivoire has 1203 football training centers in 2021. In order to comply with the demands made by international organizations (UNESCO, FIFA) and to regulate the sector, Côte d'Ivoire has adopted measures for the monitoring and protection of residents of training centres. The purpose of these centers is to train and receive children and young people aged between eight (08) and eighteen (18) to become professional footballers, Law 2015-635 of September 17, 2015 on education is applicable to them, which amends the 1995 law that made schooling mandatory for children aged between six (06) and sixteen (16). In this regard, the conditions and modalities for creation are set forth in law 2016-695 of September 07, the Ministry in charge of Sports established the organization and operation of sports training centers as well. Chapter 2, Section 5 of this Act states that all training centres must enter into an educational partnership agreement with a general, technical or vocational school if a school unit is not available. The assessment of boarders at football training centers is similar to that of other ordinary school students throughout the country, as they are subject to a 'sport-study' system.

However, there is a fundamental difference between boarders attending football training centres and ordinary students. The academic perspective suggests that the 'sport-study' program

alternates between academic programmes and sporting training. Boarders spare time between sports and school learning at the football centre. The high level of professionalism justifies the intensification of training time and sports competitions. In such a context, school supervision is relegated to the background and is usually carried out in two or three hours per day, between sports workouts. This situation is not conducive to promoting academic achievements, as football's benefits are more appealing than those of ordinary school in a general context.

Even though some training centres are producing satisfactory academic performance, they are occasionally higher than the national average. The Baccalaureate and BEPC pass rates for the 2019-2020 school year at Ivoire Académie de Songon (IAS) were 94% and 96% respectively, compared with 40.08% at the baccalaureate and 53.17% at the BEPC nationwide exams. DRENA 3 is the name of the Abidjan 3 Regional Department of National Education and Literacy, as reported by the Ivorian Press Agency (AIP) that manages Yopougon, Attécoubé and Songon municipalities, achieved a completion rate of 34.60% at the baccalaureate, compared to 29.24% nationally for the 2020-21 school year. The pass rate at IAS is 41.27%, which surpasses the regional and national rates. In terms of hourly quantity, this football training center's education differs from public schooling in Côte d'Ivoire. At IAS, school takes 23 hours of time for young people (IAS Educator, 2023), while formal schools have 40 hours per week, depending on the grade. Football is given priority on every day except Sunday, which is a rest day, except for Mondays. Despite their limited time to devote to school, the boarders of the Ivoire Académie Sport achieve academic achievements that are above the national average. How do these football boarders improve their academic performance? The purpose of this study is to understand the academic performance of IAS boarders in an apparently unfavorable environment. We hypothesize that educational background, school-related perceptions, and an efficient approach to school content are linked to the academic success of IAS boarders.

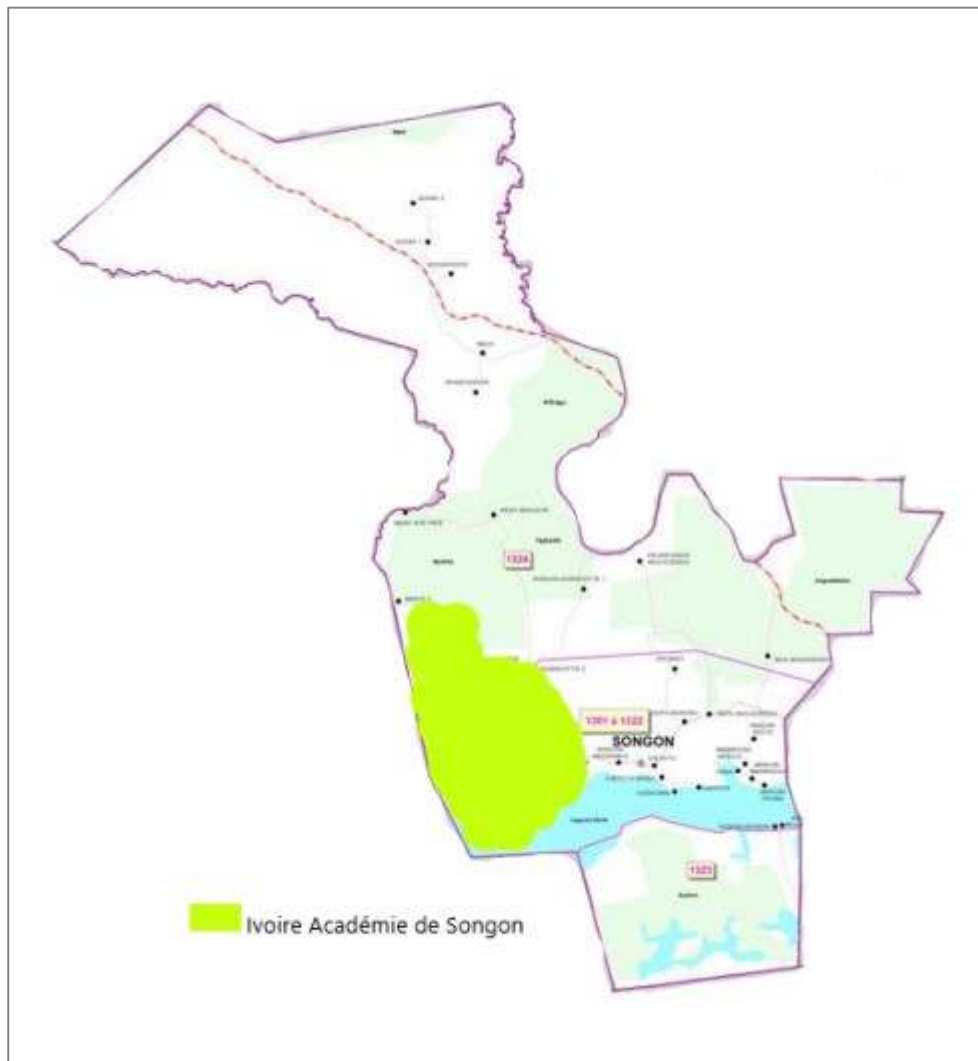
## **I. Methodological framework**

### **I.1 Scope of the study**

This study has been conducted in Songon, a township in the Autonomous District of Abidjan. Located west Yopougon, it is basically comprised of several Ebrié villages such as Songon-Kassemlé or Songon-Adjamé, Songon-Dagbé, Songon-Agban, Abiaté, Nonkouagon, Bago, Guebo, Djepote and many others villages. There are many public and private infrastructures in Songon, including Ivoire Académie Sport (IAS). IAS, established in 2002, is

located in Songon-Dagbé, on the road to Dabou, two kilometers from the Jacquville bridge of Jacquville and 20 kilometers from Abidjan. It is a training center that combines sport and studies. It has a surface area of over thirty (30) hectares. The facility features two international-standard grass pitches, four training pitches, a beach soccer pitch, a basketball court, a swimming pool, a gym, relaxation areas, and a television room. From an academic point of view, the training centre has an integrated school, an administration, a mini amphitheatre, a canteen and a boarding school with a capacity of over 150 people.

This map provides some geographical information about Songon



Source. Our survey, 2023.

## I.2 Sampling

Ivoire Académie's administrative staff, boarders, and teaching staff make up the essentially made up sample for the study. This survey is based on a mixed approach. 105

boarders were present in the IAS at the time of the study. The questionnaire was answered by 90 out of these. The group included 6 teachers, 3 parents, and 1 member of the administration.

Table I: Sampling

Quality	Sampling size	Approach
IAS School administration	01	Qualitative
Parents of Boarders	03	Qualitative
Teachers	06	Qualitative
Boarders	05	Qualitative
Boarders	90	Quantitative
Total number of interviewees	100	Mixed

Source: Our survey, 2023.

### I.3 Data collection technique

A number of techniques were used to gather information useful for understanding the social phenomenon under consideration. The literature review consisted of collecting information from past literature on the subject. Documentary sources came from registers and registration books, articles, scientific work, and written press productions. The interview technique was used to conduct the exchanges between the investigator and the interviewees. For this study, we chose a semi-structured interview. We gathered information on the following topics by utilizing an interview guide and a questionnaire:

- Background in education
- Perceptions of school
- Teaching approach and supervision
- Sport and school performance

### I.4 Method of analysis

Statistical analysis was conducted on the quantitative data to meet the study's objectives. Interpretation was made possible by the creation of descriptive tables and diagrams. Content analysis was used to process the qualitative data. The process involves the systematic and methodical processing of textual or visual documents, information, or testimonies that have a certain degree of depth and complexity (L. V. Campenhoudt, R. Quivy, 2011).

## I.5. Theoretical approach

This work is based on Charlot's (1997) theory of the relationship to knowledge as the reference theory. For B. Charlot, quoted by C. Lessard (1997), the relation to knowledge is the relationship between an individual and knowledge as a product or process. The objective of our task is to define the relationship between knowledge and observe its relevance.

This theory fits within the constructivistic paradigm of sociology. Before applying it to our study, we need to refer to the definition given by its creator. The relationship with knowledge is defined by Charlot as the child's attitude towards school, learning, and knowledge. The relationship to knowledge has a strong influence on the success of learning and, consequently, on the profile and career development of each boarder.

This theory is based on the individual and collective dispositions in the child's environment that motivate him or her to succeed. The relationship between knowledge and education can be seen as the child's approach to school, learning, and knowledge.

## II. RESULTS

### II.1 School's educational background and perceptions

#### II.1.1. Academic background and current performance of IAS boarders

The purpose of this part of the work is to examine the boarders' backgrounds and their relationship with school before they arrived at IAS. The boarders shared their experiences prior to arriving at the center. When asked whether they went to school before or after admission to the centre, IAS boarders responded as follows:

Table II: Distribution of boarders by educational status prior to their admission to IAS

Status	Absolute Value (AV)	Relative Value (RV %)
Children enrolled in school before their admission to IAS	78	97,5
Children not enrolled in school before their admission to IAS	02	2,5
Total	80	100

Source. Our survey, 2023

Table 2 shows that the majority of IAS boarders had attended school before joining the center: 78 out of 80, or 97.5%. Only 2 boarders (2.5%) attended school after their arrival at IAS.

These figures show that most of the boarders admitted to the centre have an educational background. To put it simply, IAS school is a continuation of what young people are used to doing at home. IAS boarders were questioned about school supervision they received before being admitted to the training centre.

The following histogram presents the replies to this question.

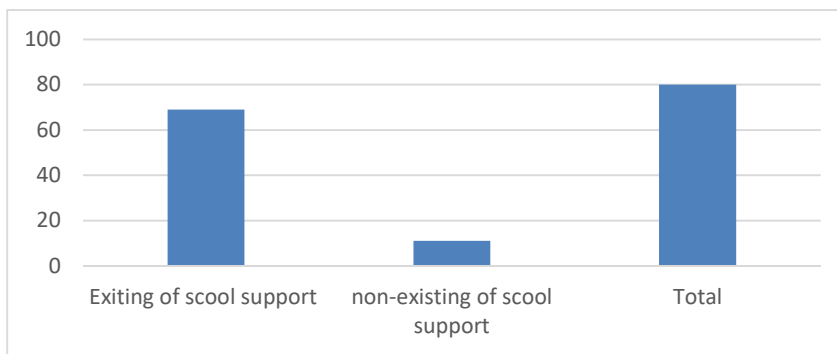


Figure 1: Distribution of boarders whether they were receiving educational support or not

Source: our survey, 2023.

The above figure illustrates the conditions for boarders to receive educational support before being admitted to IAS. It can be seen that 69 of the 80 boarders surveyed, or 86.25%, received home tutoring in addition to school lessons. Only 11, or 13.75%, had not yet received any tutoring.

The findings indicate that parents of boarders are also attached to the educational aspect, in addition to the sporting aspect. Many statements by parents and boarders confirm this pattern :

*"The condition for coming here was to work at school. That was our contract. Where I come from, we don't play around with school. The educational background is very important" (parent).*

*"At home, I made sure that the child was monitored and got good grades. He has his preceptor who comes round when he's available. We prepare him at all levels. Football is good, but school comes first" (parent).*

When questioned, some of the boarders also confirmed the importance of school in their progress.

*"My dad told me that if I did well in class, he would enroll me at the center. I studied well, I was second, and then he enrolled me here" (10<sup>th</sup> year football boarder).*

*"I had preceptors who brought me educational supports so that I would have a good level, I also had a good level, and we changed them often too. I had 3 preceptors in all. The first I had from CE1 to CMI. We got another one because he'd travelled" (7<sup>th</sup> year football boarder)*

The analysis of boarders' educational backgrounds reveals that they had strong connections with the school through their parents. A lot of them were already highly educated. IAS academic performance is largely dependent on the relationship between school and boarders.

### II.1.2. Perceptions of school

This part of the work introduces the school ideology prevalent at the Ivory Academy Sport. In this way, we will be able to assess the school's location and establish a link with the performance of the residents. In this regard, IAS schooling policy has a significant impact on the motivation of boarders. IAS perspective on the matter was provided by a senior administration member:

For us here, school is essential. The children are made aware of this as soon as they arrive at the center. We make them understand that school is the basis of everything, even football. No one becomes a great player if he doesn't know how to read and write. This awareness-raising pays off. You can see the results... And that's why parents trust us and entrust their children to us" (IAS staff member).

The parents of boarders subscribe to this ideology and enroll their children with a complete understanding of the facts:

*"The combination of sport and study was a major factor in my decision to enroll my child here. I didn't want him to neglect school or lose momentum because he wanted to become a footballer. These days, you never know" (a parent of IAS boarder).*

*"What really stands out for me here is the real opportunity for children to go to school while pursuing their passion. The school is included in the center. They make school a priority in their training" (another parent).*

Promoting the idea that success in football goes hand in hand with success in a context where football is making young boarders at IAS dream at training centre is an effective motivating strategy, taking into account results achievement.

To value oneself, it is essential to have an education and a clear vision when signing contracts offered to sportsmen and women. The idea of promoting career opportunities related to football economics is also a way of sensitizing people about the short-lived nature of a sporting career and motivating boarders to work hard at school.

*"You see, you have to tell the truth to children: they won't all become professional footballers. Those who will succeed must know that a footballer's career is short. So they have to be serious at school y" (an administration official).*



From this point of view, not becoming a professional footballer is not a given, as long as IAS boarders work hard at the training centre. This perception of school learning has undoubtedly helped to motivate IAS boarders.

The sports academy is also known as an education institution. At least, this is what emerges from the following statement:

*"There are also others who were too recalcitrant children so that their parents have sent them here, not because they want to play football, but to keep them under control" (a teacher).*

*"At least here we are sure he will not be doing anything else, apart from football and his studies. When the program is clear like that, it's good. If he was at home, we would not have control over him « (parent).*

The above statement reveals that the academy is considered an institution with discipline and also a well-structured boarding school. This perception is broader than football. IAS and local population, particularly parents, have built trust through all of these actions.

## **II.2 An effective approach to learning content and school-to-sport ratio**

### **II.2.2. Providing pedagogical guidance and supervision**

The survey data permits the establishment of a connection between the teaching arrangements and the academic performance of IAS boarders. Class sizes range from 10 to 20 boarders. In a learning context, this is quite different from the standard framework of the Ivorian school. Teachers acknowledge that this is a significant advantage:

*"Honestly, when you have small classes, you know all the school learner, you know their levels, you know their parents, and it is a real advantage. We are also more comfortable assessing without being afraid of mark a lot of copies" (a teacher).*

*"Here, we put them under gentle pressure and the school timetable is a bit relaxed. Apart from Mondays, we don't have classes lasting more than 2 hours. We try to ensure that 2 hours is enough time for them to understand the essentials. We get straight to the point, we prepare them for exams, we do everything here, but we insist on exam subjects" (another teacher).*

These data confirm the relationship between the number of boarders and school performance. According to teachers, the better their support receives, the smaller the number of boarders. Personalized supervision can be advantageous for every boarder. Furthermore, there is the lack of consistency between school and sports. Teachers tend to prioritize usual school programs and prepare young boarders for exams when they are forced to combine

teaching time with sports training. This implies putting more emphasis on school programs that are assessed in the end-of-year exams. In addition to these aspects, interviewees mentioned the supervision they receive every night.

"In the evenings, we can't be left like that. When we finish eating, it's like a free hour, we ring the bell as if we were going to class, but then everyone knows it's time to study. If someone isn't learning, we come and take him to the administration. From 9pm onwards you can go to bed, or you can study until as late as you like. There are people who look after that. And there are teachers at the academy who form groups to work" (a boarder from year 12).

"Each boarder has a tutor here, a teacher who has been entrusted with them by their parents and who studies with them. My history and geography teacher is like my father here. There are 4 or 5 of us who work with him. I think that's what makes the difference" (10<sup>th</sup> year football boarder).

The above statements are referring to personalized supervision through a form of tutoring at IAS. The constant presence of teachers has the merit of establishing a relationship of familiarity and confidence between boarders and teachers. This enables teachers to communicate with boarders more effectively and convey the school's message. The positive impact on school performance is attributed to curricula.

### **II.2.2. The ratio of educational performance to sport at IAS**

Increasingly, there is evidence that sport improves academic achievement. The interviewees were asked to give their opinions on the connection between sport and school performance.

The chart below illustrates the effects of sport on school performance, based on boarders' ability.



**Graph 2: The impact of sport on academic performance of IAS boarders**

**Source: our study, 2023**

The above graph indicates that young boarders view the positive effects of sport on their school performance positively. For 75 boarders (93.75%), football improves their academic capacity. A few (1.25%) did not perceive this impact and believed that sport had no impact on their academic abilities.

However, a boarder pointed out the exhaustion caused by physical activity, which hindered his performance at school. At first sight, football is viewed as a leisure activity, a way for boarders to engage in play.

The real advantage of these children, which people don't necessarily see, is sport. They combine their passions with school. It's a bit like saying, sometimes you're having fun, sometimes you're working" (an administration official).

"When you think a lot, you need to romp. That's what we offer here through the sport-study program" (teacher).

Sport, viewed as a leisure activity, can help alleviate professional and nervous fatigue caused by school stress. Boredom can be relieved by playing sports as a form of entertainment. In addition, sport enhances self-esteem. Sporting performance can be a source of motivation and confidence for boarders and can boost team spirit among players.

"When I play, it's to score. And when I score, I'm happy and I work well at school" (7<sup>th</sup> year football boarder).

"At school, people can tell you that you're no good, but on the pitch I'm confident. We're not judged, we do the same things. We're not necessarily in competition. Everyone has their own job" (9<sup>th</sup> year football boarder)

"We're all together. Everyone helps his friend. If my friend doesn't understand, I explain. We do the exercise together. If I don't understand either, he explains" (a football boarder).

Sport is a great way to develop one's personality. It releases practitioners from the automatism of everyday thought and action. It allows broader and freer social participation and a disinterested culture.

### III. DISCUSSION

This research has revealed that IAS boarders' academic performance is linked to their educational background and school perceptions. From this perspective, the relationship between boarders and school has been previously established in their families. Through IAS ideology, boarders' relationship with school learning is strengthened by common perceptions. D. Meuret and S. Morlaix (2006) also point out that an individual's social background is a predominant factor in academic performance.

The study has emphasized the socio-professional and economic status of parents while highlighting the importance of previous educational support in shaping children's school learning. IAS boarders' school performance is influenced by their individual characteristics, which include their well-being, perception of the learning environment and motivation. In this context, A. Konu and M. Rimpela (2002) refer to well-being at school as a phenomenon with four dimensions and define it as a phenomenon with four dimensions: school learning conditions, social relationships, personal development and health are all considered. As far as others are concerned, well-being at school depends on many factors, including learners' opinions about school rules and their relationships with teachers and classmates (R. Veenstra and H. Kuyper, 2004). The study has been able to determine players' perceptions of school. The current research has been focused on pedagogical orientation, supervision, and the relationship between sport and school performance. The supervision approach for young boarders, not just in terms of pedagogical approach, but also in terms of effectiveness, IAS boarders have a significant advantage in prioritizing subjects in preparation for exams.

T. Keith et al (1986) report that when school learners spend more time on homework, their grades improve. In this respect, N. Postlethwaite and D. Wiley (1992) reveal that in countries where school students declare spending a lot of time on homework, science performance is generally high on average, pointing out that the time spent on homework is also

linked to school learners' motivation (L. Steinberg et al., 1992). This study has demonstrated that long lasting homework does not guarantee performance, unlike authors mentioned earlier. Instead, it is linked to a methodical approach to acquiring the fundamentals.

As a whole, taking into account their level of practice and the sports-learning approach at IAS, boarders perceive sport as both a passion and a leisure activity that complements and reinforces their intellectual dispositions, it has been proven that it is necessary to break away from what is considered a demanding professional activity.

G. Friedmann (1960) highlighted the negative impact of the monotony of piecemeal work on the worker's personality. H. Lefebvre (1980) sketched an analysis of the alienations of modern man, provoking a feeling of deprivation and leading to the necessity of a break with the daily world. Substantially, training centres are seen as demanding and formal work. It is established within a global framework and goes beyond Ivoire Académie Sport. Football boarders' activities require training as a compulsory part. In this context, sport appears to be essentially a passion, a chosen activity.

## CONCLUSION

This study has explored the relationship between sport and academic achievement and places the importance of physical education and sport is central to the debate in the education system. The study has examined the performance of boarders at Ivoire Académie Sport football training center under school examination situations. The aim has been to comprehend a couple of factors that are linked to school performance at IAS, while the boarders are required to participate in football training. A mixed methodology approach involving boarders and parents, teachers and the administration of IAS has enabled to highlight the relationship to knowledge that underpins active parties. Despite sporting limitations, school's background and perceptions, as conveyed by the administration, emerged as the main issue, the academic performance of IAS boarders can be explained by the efficient approach and psychological impact of sport on young boarders. The relationship between sport and school and the relationship between sport and school learning are both important factors in shaping boarders' knowledge.

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