

APPRAISAL OF NEURO LINGUISTICS PROGRAMMING ON PEAK PERFORMANCE
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Abstract

The study appraised the awareness level and effectiveness of Neuro Linguistics Programming (NLP) on peak performance of collegiate athletes of a university, southwest, Nigeria. The descriptive survey research design was used for the study. Population consisted all individual and team sport athletes in the Nigeria University Games Association accredited sports (NUGA). The sample size comprised 100 respondents selected using sports type and gender as strata. Five (5) individual sports and five (5) team sports were randomly selected from the 16 accredited NUGA sports. From the selected sports 10 athletes were selected using convenient sampling technique. A self-designed research instrument titled "Neuro Linguistics Programming and sport performance Questionnaire (NLPSPQ)" was used to elicit information on the level of awareness and effectiveness of NLP in peak performance from respondents. Data collected were analysed using frequent counts and percentages. Results revealed that in respect of types of sports athletes indicated (100%) that they are aware of NLP and that it is an effective mental tool that enhances their performance during competitions. The study concluded that NLP is an effective tool that can collaborate the physical mode of preparing athletes for competitions and recommended that both athletes and coaches should embrace NLP for better performance outcomes.

Keywords: Neuro Linguistics Programming, Athletes, Physical training, Flow, Collegiate, Mental Training

Introduction

Sport have translated from mere leisure time activity to a means of economic emancipation, and translation from obscurity to limelight for the teeming youth of Nigeria. In view of this,

athletes, coaches and investors in the sport business are seeking for ways of having competitive edge over opponents. Winning in sport competitions is a combination of many factors notable, skills technical, tactical and mental processes. Mental skill which enhances psychological movement or sport skills have been accepted as effective. Hence the development of mental fortitude enables a greater sense of control to optimize peak performance through a set of psychological parameters.

Peak performance which is linked to 'flow state' or "being in the zone", which is described as a state of optimal performance which is reached by being completely immersed in a challenging activity. According to Cooper & Goodenough (2007), most athletes and coaches see flow state as elusive and something that happens by chance. However, the application of flow state or peak performance to sport and any other activity is based on trained skills. Attaining flow state, gives great deal of control and choice over reaching this mental state.

According to Wissal et. al (2022) among the most frequently encountered mental and psychological problems, those are related to the athlete's personality and mind are the most significant. Many techniques and methods of mental preparation, adapted for competition, have been used with sports to resolve these problems. Among these techniques, the neuro linguistic Programming (NLP) methodology is focused on fixing targets and improving the management of the athletes' mental state. athletes who have refined mental skills also have higher quality of preparation for performances. That preparation led to consistent peak performance in competitions. The mental skills that created the remainder of the wheel of excellence were: full

focus, positive images, mental readiness, distraction control, and constructive evaluation.

However, there are various kind of program that can enhance the peak performance of an athlete or a player. A program such as Neuro linguistic programming (NLP) is abounded in behaviour changing techniques which are rapidly adapted to the specific case of sport activity. Neuro Linguistic Programming is therefore a series of techniques utilizing the language of the mind (the Neuro linguistic element) to 'program' success or to change the patterns of behaviours so that individuals can achieve greater success. Neuro Linguistic Programming is seen as a set of tools and approaches of benefit to athletes in variety of area. Neuro Linguistic Programming has a real arsenal of effective techniques, capable of generating rapid changes in athletic performance and also creating a favourable behaviour (Grosu, 2012).

Oksana & Daniel (2022) maintain that in the world of sports neurolinguistic programming (NLP) techniques have been applied with success in a number of occasions at different skill levels to improve performance, the authors also examined what the applications of NLP in different spheres of sports and the way it is applied to real athletes with certain obstacles hindering their progress. NLP operates on the principle that human beings have the capacity to set and achieve their goals.

Confident athletes have made a choice to invest in quality training, believed they can and will succeed, and committed to doing so (Bull et al., 2005). The most successful athletes prepared extensively for training and competition, and that preparation gave them confidence in their ability. This was evident in the preparation strategies of the entire Italian modern pentathlon national team studied by Bertollo et al. (2009). Bertollo et al. (2009) interviewed all 14 men and women of the Italian team as they were preparing for the 2004 Olympic Games, and determined the following results from hierarchical content analysis. Twelve members of the team emphasized the importance of perseverance, consistency, and commitment in their training attitude, and elaborated on this by stating that quality simulation training would pay off in competition performance. Many of the

pentathletes trained mentally through visualization, recalling past successful performances, and self-talk. Emotional anticipation and rehearsal was also deemed critical for some. Commonly reported purposes of using these skills in preparation of competition were for the enhancement of motivation, confidence, and assertiveness (Bertollo, 2009).

However, innovative approaches such as Neuro Linguistic programming (NLP) can widen the conceptual understanding and also facilitate the growth of sport psychology. Neuro Linguistic Programming focuses on the individual's subjective interpretation and perceived reality. However, the limited research that is available is more of qualitative approach which can be challenged with the scientific field of psychology (Culver et. al, 2003).

In a study carried out by Boughattas et. al (2017) which examined the effectiveness of a 3-month intervention, that utilized NLP techniques on a mental skill. Young but elite Tunisian judokas were compared with another group. The result indicated that there was a significant improvement with the experimental groups mental skills. Newer research used the NLP techniques with six athletes. That study proved that neuro linguistic programming decrease athlete's sport anxiety (Sin et al., 2020). The first study described interventions for 30 Indian boxers who were divided into two equal groups. The results showed the NLP program's effectiveness based on the meta-model (distortion process taught to boxers for 7 days), which improved individuals boxers' self-confidence in the experimental group (Savardelavar & Bagheri, 2012).

Another study subsequently examined the importance of communication between coaches and athletes; the goal was to improve athletic performance through the NLP's dominant sensory representation system with Roman elite judokas who were 12–19 years old (Grosu et al., 2013). The results indicated that only auditory information present a significant relation with improvement of sport performance.

Neuro Linguistic Programming is therefore a series of techniques utilizing the language of the

mind (the Neuro linguistic element) to 'program' success or to change the patterns of behaviours so that individuals can achieve greater success. Neuro Linguistic Programming is seen as a set of tools and approaches of benefit to athletes in variety of area. Neuro Linguistic Programming has a real arsenal of effective techniques, capable of generating rapid changes in athletic performance and also creating a favourable behaviour (Grosu, 2012).

Statement of the Problem

There are many factors that influence sporting abilities and performances among athletes. These factors could be genetic inheritance, fitness levels, technical skills and our mental abilities. However, most attention have been focused on improving athlete's performance through various forms of physical training such as strength training and muscular training which only targets the physical component meant improve or enhance sport performance in athletes.

The approach of achieving peak performance in athletes by solely developing the physical fitness of athletes is a very common methods adopted by coaches and this method or knowledge is passed on to the athlete which makes them believes more on developing a stronger physical structure body as against developing the mental side. The over emphasis of the physical training and the neglects of mental preparation of athletes is very common in less developed climes. However, mental skill training is as important to the athlete as physical training, and in most sports, success comes from utilizing and maximizing a combination of technical, tactical, physical, and psychological abilities can contribute to their performance, (Hodge, 2007). Goal setting, self-talk, mental imagery and mental rehearsal, and relaxation are the four most prominent mental skill training methods used by athletes and coaches in developed nations. Like technical or tactical aspects of a sport, they must be learned, developed, and practiced by the athlete.

Each method enables the athlete to work on developing more than one psychological skill, so that they are also working on improving and maintaining their strengths, such as commitment, concentration/attention, and motivation, as they

build up their weak areas (Weinberg & Gould, 2018). The athlete has clear short and long-term goals for their performance, but they have no "process" goals - they either visualize or verbalize their goals, alone and with their coach, instead of writing them down. On the other hand, self-talk is an internal distracter, and is what we do whenever we talk to ourselves. It has cognitive and motivational functions. The motivational functions are concerned with a variety of things, amongst them being self-confidence, relaxation and arousal control, (Weinberg & Gould, 2018) and maintaining and increasing drive (Hardy, et. al., 2004). In a study done by Perkos et al. (2002), Johnson et. al. (2004) suggested that self-talk enhances performance by focusing on a desired thought. It was also found that a self-talk intervention program increased confidence and anxiety control Hatzigeorgiadis, Zourbanos & Theodorakis, 2007), which in turn enhances performance (Hamilton, Scott & MacDougall, 2007). It has also been shown that individual athletes utilize self-talk more than team athletes (Hamilton, et al., 2007). Furthermore, mental imagery, when used in conjunction with goal setting and positive self-talk, has been shown to enhance performance than when each method is used in isolation. (Hardy, et al., 2004).

Imagery can be used to improve both physical and psychological skills, including the latter skills of self-confidence, control activation, and arousal regulation. For example, visualizing a successful performance under any, especially stressful circumstances, can improve self- confidence; and visualizing such a situation with positive responses and self-talk, is more likely to result in an improved performance (Weinberg & Gould, 2018).

Athletes in in individual sports utilized mental imagery practice slightly higher than athletes in team sports. The perceived effect of mental imagery on sport performance by athletes however showed that individual sport was significantly greater than that of team sports athletes nonetheless, the use of mental imagery enhanced athletes' performances (Aderounmu 2007)

The benefits of NLP Eliminating may include

negative energy from self, helps individuals bring down their stress levels, resolve anxiety and incorporate positive feelings within themselves, helps individuals resolve fears and phobias using dissociation. Conventional methods usually take years to cure phobia, improved soft skills and greater confidence and command in activities such as public speaking, peace within self and with others, improved life style in general that involves changing behaviours and habits that can potentially harm one's mind and health, confidence in one's own abilities that will help individuals develop managerial and leadership skills, knowledge of techniques that will help reduce or release stress levels, the ability to listen effectively and grasp essentials, skills that are required to be able to work with a team at work or otherwise, enables individuals to build teams, maintain and run teams, and manage teams, creating long term relationships with peer groups, colleagues, family and other members of the society.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to ascertain the awareness level and effectiveness of Neuro Linguistic Programming to individual and team sports athletes' peak performance during competitions.

Research Questions

The following questions will guide the study:

- i. What is the level of awareness of Obafemi Awolowo University athletes about Neuro Linguistic Programming?

- ii. How effective is Neuro Linguistic Programming to athlete's peak performance?

Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive research design. The population of this research study consisted of individual and team athletes of Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife. The sample comprised 100 individual and team sports athletes with gender and sport types as selection criteria. From the sixteen (16) Nigerian University Games Association accredited sports, ten (10) sports were selected (5 individual sport and 5 team sport) using simple random sampling techniques. These sports included football, basketball, volleyball, handball, athletics, badminton, tennis, table tennis and squash. From each selected sports 10 respondents were selected using convenient sampling techniques. A self-designed and validated research instrument titled "Neuro Linguistics Programming and sport performance Questionnaire (NLPSPQ) designed to elicit information on the level of awareness and effectiveness of Neuro Linguistics Programming by university athletes to enhance peak performance during competitions was used to collect data for the study. The researcher sought and obtained the permission of all participants before administering the questionnaires. The questionnaires were filled on the field of play and collected immediately. with the help of trained research assistants. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency counts and percentage.

Results

Research Question 1: How aware are individual and team sport athletes of Neuro Linguistic Programming

Table I: Percentile (%) Analysis of Level of awareness of Individual and Team Sports Athletes of Neuro Linguistic Programming and Peak Performance

S/N	DESCRIPTION	SPORT TYPE	SA	A	D	SD
1.	I am aware of mental imagery and I use it	Team	30(60%)	12(24%)	8(16%)	0(0%)
		Individual	35(70%)	15(30%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
		TOTAL	65(65%)	27(27%)	8(8%)	0(0%)
2.	Am aware of the concept of self-talk and I use it	Team	40(80%)	10(20%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
		Individual	40(80%)	10(20%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
		TOTAL	80(80%)	20(20%)	0(0%)	0(0%)

S/N	DESCRIPTION	SPORT TYPE	SA	A	D	SD
3.	Am aware of the concept of goal setting and I use it	Team	40(80%)	10(20%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
		Individual	30(20%)	20(40%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
		TOTAL	70(70%)	30(30%)	0(0%)	0(0%)

From the table above, the result indicated that both individual and team sports athletes are awareness of Neuro Linguistic Programming as an additional mode of training athletes to attain peak performance. Respondents returned 100% score on the three items used. Mental imagery

used (individual sports (50%); Team sport (50%). The second item on self-talk (Individual sports 50%; Team sport 50%) respectively. Finally, on goal-settings (Individual sports 50%; Team sport 50%) respectively.

Research Question 2: How effective is the use of Neuro Linguistic Programming on peak performance

S/N	DESCRIPTION	SPORT TYPE	SA	A	D	SD
1.	Having a role model in sport helps to increase motivation	Team	16(32%)	34(68%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
		Individual	40(80%)	10(20%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
		TOTAL	56(56%)	44(44%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
2.	What I think in my mind controls my performance during competition	Team	22(44%)	28(56%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
		Individual	30(60%)	20(40%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
		TOTAL	52(52%)	48(48%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
3.	Making use of special signals increase the level of athletes' performance while in play	Team	30(60%)	20(40%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
		Individual	30(60%)	20(40%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
		TOTAL	60(60%)	40(40%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
4.	Through vigorous training, I have gained the ability to perform effectively under pressure	Team	26(52%)	24(48%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
		Individual	40(80%)	10(20%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
		TOTAL	66(66%)	34(34%)	0(0%)	0(0%)

The result revealed that both individual and team sport athletes acknowledged the effective role Neuro Linguistic Programming played on their performances. Respondents returned 100% score on the four items used. Role model in sport helps to increase motivation (individual sports (50%); Team sport (50%). The second item about what they think in their mind controlling their performance during competition (Individual sports 50%; Team sport 50%) respectively. Third item, was the use of special signal such as body languages, eye and face contacts during competitions (Individual sports 50%; Team sport 50%) and finally, investigating whether through

vigorous training, they gained the ability to performing effectively under pressure, (Individual sports,50%; Team sport 50%)

Discussion of Findings

From the study, finding reveal that individual and team sport athletes were aware of neurolinguistic programming and how it can enhance peak performances in athletes which is in support of the findings Bertollo et al. (2009), when they interviewed all 14 men and women of the Italian team as they were preparing for the 2004 Olympic Games, and determined the following results

from hierarchical content analysis. Twelve members of the team emphasized the importance of perseverance, consistency, and commitment in their training attitude, and elaborated on this by stating that quality simulation training would pay off in competition performance. Many of the pentathletes trained mentally through visualization, recalling past successful performances, and self-talk. (Bertollo, 2009). The finding of the study is also consistent with that of Grosu et al., 2013. The authors examined the importance of communication between coaches and athletes; the goal was to improve athletic performance through the NLP's dominant sensory representation system with Roman elite judokas. The results indicated that there was a significant effect of NLP on improvement of sport performance.

The study also revealed that NLP is very effective when properly unutilized as a mental skill for the improvement of athletes' performance. this is collaborated by the study of Savardelavar & Bagheri, (2012). The authors reported the sport-based interventions for 30 Indian boxers. Their result showed the effectiveness of NLP that it improved individuals boxers' self-confidence in the experimental group. This is also consistent with findings of Boughattas et. al (2017) which examined the effectiveness of a 3-month intervention, that utilized NLP techniques on a mental skill. Young but elite Tunisian judokas were compared with another group. The result indicated that there was a significant improvement with the experimental groups mental skills.

Conclusion

The study concluded that Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) is a very powerful tool, an additional training mode to build the mind of an athlete in attaining peak performance during training and competitions.

Recommendation

Based on the results and findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- i. an awareness should be carried out on the benefit of Neuro linguistic programming for athletes.

- ii. more attention should be given to developing the mind the same way the body is developed.
- iii. coaches should encourage athletes to use imagery to compliment physical exercise in order to attain peak performance, to continue to practice outside the field of play or when they sustain injury; and
- iv. the psychological aspect of sport shouldn't be neglected when preparing for competition. As coaches should try to deploy various measures which could help build the mental state of the athlete

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