

IMPACT OF EMOTION REGULATION STRATEGIES ON AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR OF AMATEUR FOOTBALLERS

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Abstract

This study investigated impact of emotion regulation strategies on aggressive behaviour of amateur footballers. Research design adopted was quasi-experimental design. Multi -stage sampling process was used to select forty-seven male football players in Lagos state soccer academies for the study. Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ) was the instrument used to collect relevant data. The test-retest reliability value obtained for the instrument using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient was 0.85. Data collected for this study were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The hypothesis was analyzed using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) statistics at 0.05 level of significance. Findings of the study revealed emotion regulation strategies had significant impact on aggressive behaviour of amateur footballers. Based on the findings, it was recommended that all players should be exposed to emotion regulation strategies particularly during developmental stages in order to prevent growing their prowess with bad habits.

Keywords: Aggression, Direct attention, Emotion regulation strategies, Progressive relaxation, Self-talk

Introduction

Emotions are subjective feelings experienced in response to events either in the environment or in the mind. Emotions experienced before and during sports competition influence performance (Hanin, 2010). Lane, Beedie, Jones, Uphill and Devonport (2011) averred that appropriate emotional responses might be beneficial to an athlete by improving the economy of movement, improving the quality of interaction with teammates, reducing the risk of disciplinary action, and reducing the risk of injury. Emotions usually incorporate three types of response; physiological (e.g. increased heart rate), cognitive (e.g. change in perception and attention) or behavioural (e.g. aggression towards another player. Lazarus, 2000). Properly channeled emotions may provide responses to many adaptive problems and constitute athlete well-being.

Emotion regulation is regarded by sport psychologists as an important psychological skill (Lane et al, 2011). Dennehy (2014) defined emotion regulation as a process where individuals consciously or unconsciously monitor the emotions experienced and develop

strategies to maintain or change emotions to desired levels. Athletes differ in their capacity to perceive, understand and regulate emotions. The underlying thought of most athletes at competitive stage is the initiation of superior techniques to emerge winner at the expense of the opponent. This often led some to adopt approaches that attract sanctions and at times indelible injury on fellow athletes. One approach that is prominent and negative is aggressive behaviour.

Aggression is a serious phenomenon of insensitive behaviour by which athlete has a direct intention to cause harm to other and has the most vigorous effects for both. According to Jarvis (2006) aggression is behaviour of any kind that is carried out with the intention of harming another person. It involves actively doing something unpleasant to someone. Aggressive behaviour may come in many forms, ranging from verbal abuse—designed to cause psychological harm—to physical violence. Aggression is often displayed in sport and sometimes boils over into unmitigated displays of violence. Often implicitly or explicitly, aggression is advocated by spectators, coaches etc. and actor (athletes) intuitively cite reasonable provocation or justification.

Research into player aggression (Wann, 2005 & Wann, Melnick, Russell & Pease, 2001) has identified several factors that might promote violence. Heat is an example; as temperatures rise, tempers flare. In baseball, this association leads to more batters being hit by pitches on hot match days than on cold days. A second situational determinant of player aggression is the point differential between two teams, with the highest degrees of aggression arising when teams are separated by a wide scoring margin. Furthermore, players on winning and losing teams exhibit different patterns of aggression as game progresses. Finally, possibly because of frustration, a team's position in the overall league table affects the degree of individual player's aggression. Indeed, teams that come first tend to exhibit lower amount of aggression than the frustrated teams who have to be content with second place and those who come last and who find it hard to justify to themselves their overall poor performance.

The unique status that football has attained among other contact sports cannot be over-emphasized. Some countries with regular success at elite competition have gained prominence among comity of Nations; most players' fortunes have metamorphosed from state of obscurity to being a global brand. These status among others are being bedeviled by spontaneous inappropriate emotional responses by players and co-actors of the game. Aggression in football have resulted to lifelong problems and unerased thoughts. Aggressive act often lead to penalties, misdirected attention, reduce concentration and severe injury. Some players with bright prospect of attaining excellence in the game have seen their hope dashed from nagging injuries inflicted on them by aggressive players. Moreover, football which is classified as a noble game is observed to be marred by litigation resulting from incapacitated players against an alleged cause of the problem (Dailytrust, 2018; Thesun, 2018). Fans of the game at country and club levels have also been sanctioned by governing bodies for hostility demonstrated towards players and counterparts from other team.

The emergence of aggression as an emotional response requires regulation to forestall consequences that come with it. Gross and Thompson (2007) opined that athletes are more likely to try to regulate an emotion if they believe that doing so will facilitate performance. Athletes develop beliefs about emotions associated with optimal performance, and these beliefs play a role in emotion regulation in competition. In view of the aforementioned, it

was suffice to investigate impact of emotion regulation strategies on aggressive behaviour of amateur footballers.

Methodology

The research design for this study was quasi-experimental, pre- test, post- test control group design. Multi -stage sampling process was used to select eighty-eight (88) male football players in Lagos state soccer academies for the study. The first stage of the multi- stage sampling process was the selection of four academies from sixteen accredited academies by Lagos State Football Association using purposive sampling. The academies are Damilola Taylor Football Academy, Fortune Football Academy, Muric Football Academy and Ultimate Football Academy. The second stage involved the identification of aggressive players using Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ) which was divided into two sections, section A and B. A total number of eighty-eight players who scored 70% of total score on aggression were identified as aggressive players from two hundred and seventy-eight age-grade players in all the sample academies. The third stage involved selection of academies into experimental groups using simple random sampling. Damilola Taylor Football Academy comprised of twenty-three (23) participants belonged to Group A were given Direct Attention Training, Muric Football Academy with twenty (20) participants were in Self-talk Group B, Fortune Football Academy comprised of twenty-one (21) participants belonged to Group C were given Progressive Relaxation Training while Ultimate Football Academy with twenty-four (24) participants belonged to Group D (control group) , the control group were not given any treatment during the study.

Table 1: Distribution of sample in pre-assessment selection for baseline data.

Team	Number of Participants	Pre-Assessment Scores	
		Low Score	High Score
A	71	48	23
B	68	48	20
C	65	44	21
D	74	50	24
Total	278	190	88

Table 1 above shows the players that have low and high scores from the test assessment conducted by the researcher so as to identify the students that will participate in the study. The sample of 278 players were administered Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ) and only 88 players were identified as having high scores, that is, they exhibited aggressive behaviour. These 88 players formed the participants for the experimental study while those who had low scores were dropped.

Table 2: Number of players who participated in the study and their training group

Team	Type of Intervention	Type of group	Total number of participants
A	Direct Attention Training	Training I	23
B	Self-talk Training	Training II	20
C	Progressive Relaxation Training	Training III	21
D	Control Group	Control group	24
	Total		88

Table 2 shows that selected participants were 23, 20, 21 and 24 respectively for team A, B, C and D, making a total of 88 participants in the study.

A pilot study using test-retest method was used to determine the local reliability of the instrument. The instrument was administered twice on Strong Hold Football Academy, Lagos using a sample of 20 players. The scores were correlated and a reliability co-efficient of 0.85 was obtained with the use of Pearson Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient.

Administration of Research Instrument

The administration of the instrument was in three phases and they were administered to the participants by the researchers. The phases are as follows:

Phase 1: Pre- treatment session

Phase 2: Treatment session

Phase 3: Post – treatment session

Phase 1: Pre-treatment Assessment:

The researchers administered Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ) to the participants as pre- test two weeks before the treatment session.

Phase 2: Treatment Phase:

There were three treatment groups and one control group. The selected academies were randomly assigned to treatment and control group. Group one was exposed to Direct Attention Training, Group two was exposed to Self-talk Training, Group three was exposed to Progressive Relaxation Training, while Group four, the control group did not receive any intervention. The treatment groups met once a week for eight weeks.

Phase 3: Post –test Assessment:

At the end of the treatment which lasted for eight weeks, Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ) was re-administered to the same treatment and control groups.

Treatment Procedure

Group One: Direct Attention Training

The goal of Direct Attention Training was to train the aggressive footballers techniques to help them understand their emotions particularly the internal and external stimuli that spur aggressive traits and in turn help them to dissociate or detach their attention from them.

Session 1. The researcher established rapport with the participants and also created an atmosphere of warmth and confidentiality. The objectives of the training were explained to the participants and their full cooperation was sought. The researcher encouraged the participants to share their thoughts, feelings and concerns as regards aggression. The meaning and forms of aggression were explained to the participants.

Session 2. The researcher revised concept and forms of aggression with the participants. The participants were guided to review the situations that can cause aggression and likely consequences on the player and team. These among others are playing below expectations, perceived unfair officiating, playing below expectations, physical pain etc.

Session 3. The previous session was reviewed in this session. The participants were exposed to internal and external distractions that form their thought prior or during game situation. They were encouraged to reveal how these distracters have affected their feeling and spur them to carry-out illegal act. Emphasis was made on discouraging inflicting injury or harming opponent as this has far reaching consequences citing the examples of ex-players that retired before their time.

Session 4. The researcher introduced two direct attention skills to the participants. These were watching the clock face and Grid exercises. These exercises were developed to help eliminate negative thoughts by “parking them” or mentally setting them apart. Watching the clock face was focused on in this session. This is a three minutes exercise that requires several repetition and exposure to distracting situations for perfection. It begins with the participants focusing on the second hand of a clock as they lightly tap their foot at every five second interval for one minute. During the next minute the participants lightly tap their foot on every ten-second interval. Finally, the participants tap on every five-second interval and then again on every ten-second interval, continuing to alternate until the last minute is complete.

Session 5. The previous session was reviewed with the participants. Watching the clock face was continued with the introduction of distracting situations. A transistor radio was increased in volume and non-participating players were encouraged to hang around while the participants demonstrate the exercise.

Session 6. This session focused on Grid exercise. This exercise required a block grid containing two-digit numbers from 00 to 99. The participants were guided to scan and cross off as many numbers as possible in one minute in order beginning with 00. A score in the high 20's and into 30's demonstrate exceptional concentration.

Session 7. The previous session was reviewed with the participants. Grid exercise continued with the introduction of distracting situation. Background noise from music was introduced while participants carried out the exercise.

Session 8. There was a review of all previous sessions. The participants were encouraged to reflect on the changes they had made and the understanding they had gained from the intervention. The researcher expressed his appreciation to the participants for their cooperation in the course of the sessions and thereafter terminated the sessions. The post test administration of the questionnaire- Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire was done immediately after the treatment.

Group Two: Self-talk Training

Self-talk is a type of mental training skill that aid athletes in learning skills, correcting bad habits, preparing for performance, focusing attention and creating the best mood for performance.

Session 1. The researcher established rapport with the participants to gain their confidence. The objectives of the intervention were made known to the participants in order to secure their attention and full cooperation. The meaning and forms of aggression were explained to the participants.

Session 2. The researcher revised concept and forms of aggression with the participants. The participants were guided to review the situations that can cause aggression and likely consequences on the player and team.

Session 3. The previous session was reviewed in this session. The participants were exposed to the concept of self-talk. They were made to understand how self-talk training can stop bad habit like aggression.

Session 4: The participants were assisted to identify some cues or words they express to themselves in different types of situations prior or during performance. This facilitated awareness of thought that are harmful and situations or events associated with this talk.

Session 5. The previous session was reviewed with the participants. Self-talk log or daily diary as a tool for better identifying thoughts and performance situations was introduced to the participants. When keeping a log, the participants were to address the following: when I talk to myself, what do I say? When playing poorly, do I deprecate myself as a person?, Do I unnecessary get angry? Does word of harming form my thought? etc.

Session 6. The researcher introduced two techniques for controlling self-talk to the participants. These were thought stoppage and changing negative thoughts to positive thoughts. Thought stoppage was focused on in this session. The technique begins with awareness of the unwanted thought and using a trigger (word) to interrupt or stop the undesirable thought that leads to negative feelings and behaviours. The participants were guided to choose trigger they are comfortable with and emphasis was made on the need to be consistent with the chosen trigger for better efficiency.

Session 7. This session focused on changing negative thoughts to positive thoughts. This technique is used along with thought stoppage. Researcher encouraged participants to

extinguish unwanted thought as soon as it is recognized and then immediately practice switching to a positive or more appropriate thought. If for example, a participant finds himself saying, "If a player hits me, I hit back." He should learn to follow this phrase immediately with "I don't need to hit anyone because the Referee is there to sanction misconduct."

Session 8. The previous sessions were reviewed. Questions, comments and observations were entertained by the researcher. The researcher appreciated the participants for their cooperation during the course of the sessions and terminates sessions. The post –test administration of the research instrument was done.

Group Three: Progressive Relaxation Training

The goal of Progressive Relaxation Training (PRT) was to assist the aggressive players train their muscles to become sensitive to any level of tension and to be able to release that tension.

Session 1. The researcher established rapport with the participants and also created an atmosphere of warmth and confidentiality. The objectives of the training were explained to the participants and their full cooperation was sought. The researcher encouraged the participants to share their thoughts, feelings and concerns as regards aggression.

Session 2. The researcher reviewed concept and forms of aggression with the participants. The participants were guided to review the situations that can cause aggression and likely consequences on the player and team.

Session 3. The participants were assisted in discovering combination of physiological, psychological and behavioural responses that may occur when they are worried or disturbed concerning any area of performance. Learning to relax helps in regulating these responses in order to avoid any detrimental effects on performance. Progressive Relaxation and process of executing it were explained to the participants.

Session 4. The participants were guided in sitting comfortably with the legs separated and relax properly. They were instructed to close their eyes and take a long, slow, deep breath through the nose, inhaling as much air as possible. Then exhale slowly and completely, feeling the tension leaving the body as they exhale. These processes require two repetitions. The researcher focused on muscles of upper extremities starting with the arms for the tensing and relaxation. The participants were checked regularly to ensure they are doing the right thing.

Session 5. The previous session was reviewed with the participants. The researcher continued the relaxation training with the participants by focusing on the lower extremities starting with the right thigh to the foot for the tensing and relaxation. After the PRT, the participants were ask to express their reactions which were deliberated upon. The researcher also reminded them on the need to practice regularly.

Session 6. The researcher focused on correcting difficulties in relaxing. The participants that exhibited signs such as wrinkled forehead, frowning, darting eyes, exaggerated or rapid breathing and fidgeting were specifically addressed with other participants.

Session 7. The researcher introduced the participants to abbreviated active PRT which require a shorter procedure to achieve deep muscle relaxation. This requires combining some of the muscles groups.

Session 8. The previous sessions were reviewed. Questions, comments and observations were entertained by the researcher. The researcher appreciated the participants for their cooperation during the course of the sessions and terminates sessions. The post –test administration of the research instrument was done.

Group Four: Control Group

The participants in this group were not exposed to any treatment during the study but were later guided on ways of managing aggression after the study.

Data collected for this study were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The hypothesis was analyzed using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) statistics at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Test of Hypothesis: The hypothesis states that emotion regulation strategies will have no significant impact on aggressive behaviour of amateur footballers. The mean scores and standard deviation of respondents were computed and the result is presented in Table 3

Table 3: Descriptive data on footballers' aggressiveness in direct attention, self-talk, progressive relaxation and control groups

Group	N	Pretest		Posttest		Mean diff
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Direct attention	23	93.08	5.58	51.62	5.72	-41.46
Self-talk	20	95.67	5.77	50.33	4.99	-45.34
Progressive relaxation	21	93.53	4.45	47.33	5.29	-46.2
Control Group	24	90.65	8.21	87.65	7.43	-3.00

Table 3 shows that footballers exposed to direct attention, self-talk, progressive relaxation strategies and those in the control group had mean scores of 93.08, 95.67, 93.53 and 90.65 respectively on aggressiveness prior to treatment. On exposure to treatment, those in the progressive relaxation group had least mean score of 47.33 on aggressiveness, closely followed by self-talk (posttest mean=50.33) and direct attention (posttest mean=51.62) while those in the control group had the highest posttest mean score of 87.65. This implies that direct attention, self-talk and progressive relaxation had combined effect on footballers' aggressiveness. To determine whether significant difference exists in aggressiveness among the participants due to combined strategies, analysis of covariance was computed. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4: ANCOVA showing the effect of combined direct attention, self-talk and progressive relaxation on footballers' aggressiveness

<i>Source</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Partial Eta Squared</i>
Corrected Model	17383.347	4	4345.837	116.331	.000	.899
Covariate(Pretest)	.376	1	.376	.010	.920	.000
Group	16323.748	3	5441.249	145.654*	.000	.894
Error	1942.583	52	37.357			
Corrected Total	19325.930	56				
Total	231179.000	57				

* $p < 0.05$

Table 4 above reveals that combined direct attention, self-talk and progressive relaxation had significant effect on footballers' aggressiveness in the experimental and control groups ($F_{3,52}=145.654$, $p < 0.05$). The null hypothesis is thus rejected. The treatment accounted for about 89.4% ($\eta^2=0.894$) of the observed variance in footballers' aggressiveness. The mean difference among the estimated marginal means of the groups after correcting for the other effects in the model are presented in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5: Mean scores by treatment

Group	N	Mean	SD	Estimated Marginal Mean
Control	24	87.65	7.43	87.62
Direct attention	23	51.62	5.72	51.62
Progressive relaxation	21	47.33	5.29	47.34
Self-talk	20	50.33	50.33	50.37

Table 5 shows that control group had the higher estimated marginal mean of 87.62 on footballers' aggressiveness. This was closely followed by those exposed to direct attention (51.62) and self-talk (50.37) while those in the progressive relaxation group (47.34) had the least estimated marginal mean. This implies that the use of progressive relaxation, self-talk and direct attention constitute veritable emotion regulation strategies for reducing aggressiveness among footballers.

Table 6: Adjustment for multiple comparisons of estimated marginal means

(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval for Difference	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Control Group	Direct Attention	35.999*	2.275	.000	29.758	42.240
	Progressive Relaxation	40.275*	2.199	.000	34.243	46.307
	Self-talk	37.246*	2.400	.000	30.663	43.829
Direct Attention	Control Group	-35.999*	2.275	.000	-42.240	-29.758

	Progressive Relaxation	4.276	2.317	.424	-2.079	10.631
	Self-talk	1.247	2.471	1.000	-5.531	8.025
Progressive Relaxation	Control Group	-40.275*	2.199	.000	-46.307	-34.243
	Direct Attention	-4.276	2.317	.424	-10.631	2.079
	Self-talk	-3.029	2.384	1.000	-9.569	3.511
	Control Group	-37.246*	2.400	.000	-43.829	-30.663
Self-talk	Direct Attention	-1.247	2.471	1.000	-8.025	5.531
	Progressive Relaxation	3.029	2.384	1.000	-3.511	9.569

* $p < 0.05$

The result in Table 6 shows that there was significant mean difference between the aggressiveness of footballers in the control group and those exposed to direct attention, progressive relaxation and self-talk emotion regulation strategies at 0.05 level in each case.

Discussion of Findings

The study hypothesized that emotion regulation strategies will have no significant impact on aggressive behaviour of amateur footballers. The result of the analysis indicated that emotion regulation strategies had significant impact on aggressive behaviour of amateur footballers. The hypothesis is therefore rejected. The finding established the efficacy of emotion regulation in modifying athletes behaviour. In a related study Lane, Beedie, Devonport and Stanley (2011) examined emotion and emotion regulation strategies in 305 runners. They found that 15% of runners reported emotion beliefs that strategies aimed at increasing anxiety or anger would help performance and used strategies to increase these emotions. That is, they attempted to make themselves feel more angry or anxious with a view to enhancing performance. In contrast 85% of runners reported beliefs that strategies intended to reduce the same emotions would help performance.

Wagstaff (2013) carried out a study on emotion regulation and sport performance. The study used a single blind, within-participant, counterbalanced, repeated measures design to examine the relationship between emotional self-regulation and sport performance. Twenty competitive athletes completed four laboratory-based conditions; familiarization, control, emotion suppression, and non-suppression. The findings suggest that emotional self-regulation resource impairment affects perceived exertion, pacing and sport performance. In a similar vein, Scherbatykh (2000) carried out a study on emotion regulation in school setting. Emotional stress in situations like school examinations can be reduced by engaging in self-regulating activities prior to the task being performed. To study the influence of self-regulation on mental and physiological processes under exam stress, Shcherbatykh conducted a test with an experimental group of 28 students (of both sexes) and a control group of 102 students (also of both sexes).

In the moments before the examination, situational stress levels were raised in both groups from what they were in quiet states. In the experimental group, participants engaged in three self-regulating techniques (concentration on respiration, general body relaxation, and the creation of a mental image of successfully passing the examination). During the examination, the anxiety levels of the experimental group were lower than that of the control

group. Also, the percent of unsatisfactory marks in the experimental group was 1.7 times less than in the control group. From this data, Scherbatykh concluded that the application of self-regulating actions before examinations helps to significantly reduce levels of emotional strain, which can help lead to better performance results.

Conclusion

Aggression has become more common in modern day sporting events, especially those that have high emotional content. Acts of aggression on the part of an athlete will constitute a distraction and result in a poor performance. These acts are likely to be distracting to the team also as a whole. Whatever the degree of aggression, it can be minimized by adopting a systematic approach at the psychological and sociological levels. The use of emotion regulation strategies as established in this study will help to reduce this growing trend.

Recommendations

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

1. All players should be exposed to emotion regulation strategies particularly during developmental stages in order to prevent growing their prowess with bad habits.
2. The services of a sport psychologist should be embraced by administrators of academies so as to facilitate better understanding and application of various psychological skills by the players and coaches.
3. All managers of football academies should see it as a priority to establish the aggressive profile of their players.
4. The regulating bodies of Football locally and internationally should come up with stiffer penalty on aggressive act during matches.

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