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Psychological skills and self-confidence among male soccer players in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi state

Ben Ngozi Ohuruogu [1], David Ifeanyi Nwigiji [1], Emeka Usman Mong [1], Raphael Ogbonna Nwodeh [2], Victor Chinedu Osuoha [1], Njoku Benjamin Onu [3], Jude Ikechukwu Ugwu [4], Frank Edwin Nwani [1] and Christian Okechukwu Aleke [1, *]

[1] Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, Nigeria.
[2] Department of Physical and Health Education, Ebonyi State University College of Education Ikwo, Ebonyi State, Nigeria.
[3] Department of Sports, Sports Directorate, University of Nigeria Nsukka, Nigeria.
[4] Department of Physical and Health Education, College of Education, Nsukka, Nigeria.

Abstract

This study determined the perceived impact of psychological Skills and self-confidence among male soccer players in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population for the study was one hundred and forty (140) respondents (38 Coaches and 102 Soccer players). The same number served as the sample for the study due to smallness of size. A structured questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. The instrument had a reliability coefficient of 0.89. Two research questions guided the study and two null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while t-test was used to test the hypotheses. The result of the study revealed that both self-talk and imagery training impact self-confidence of male soccer players in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State. The hypotheses tested were significant. Based on the findings, the study concluded that stakeholders in sports development in the tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State should facilitate the provision of environment that would encourage self-talk, and imagery training before and during soccer events.

1. Introduction

Performance enhancement in sports environments depends on athletes' self-confidence, motivation, and optimum performance (Gould, 2011). It is noteworthy that self-confidence is one of the most common mental factors, which results in sports achievements. The term self-confidence here refers to a successful implementation of a relatively specific action that can assess the optimism philosophy of that performance. One may have high confidence in driving, but low confidence in directing the golf ball toward the whole (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). In addition, past performance dependent on innate resources, mastery of skills, coach leadership style, ability display, and physiological and psychological readiness are considered as the most important self-confidence resources (Chapman & Mahoney, 2014). Numerous interventional methods are employed to improve self-confidence, sport skills performance, and satisfaction in athletes. This can be facilitated by the use of psychological skills.

Self-talk refers to those automatic statements reflective of deliberate techniques (example, thought stopping) athletes use to direct sports-related thinking (Hardy, 2006). In a more detailed definition, Hardy (2006) defined self-talk as

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* Corresponding author: Christian O Aleke
Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, Nigeria.

"verbalizations or statements addressed to the self, multidimensional in nature, having interpretive elements associated with the content of statements employed, is somewhat dynamic and serving at least two functions: instructional and motivational for the athlete". Athletes, however, do not report employing self-talk solely to enhance competitive performance. As reflected by the functions of self-talk (Hardy, Jones & Gould, 2016), self-talk may be used for a variety of reasons such as to build self-confidence, reduce anxiety and enhance skill learning-highly relevant to the practice setting. Hardy (2006) has suggested an extended definition of self-talk arguing that self-talk have been vague or insufficient and sometimes simplistic in operationalizing the term. He further contends that self-talk should be defined as: verbalizations or statements addressed to the self; multidimensional in nature; having interpretive elements associated with the content of statements employed; is somewhat dynamic; and serving at least two functions; instructional and motivational, for the athlete. Given the fact that self-talk is a relatively new area of research in sports, and considering the diversity of arguments regarding its comprising components, the existing literature suggests further investigations to provide insights into the nature of this phenomenon.

Recently, researchers combined self-talk with mental skills and reported positive outcomes in athletes' performances. Positive self-talk is referred to as internal conversation which can be done loudly or in silence though which the person teaches or strengthens him/ herself (Brawley, Carron and Widmeyer, 2012; Nideffer and Sagal, 2009). Self-talk can be performed during, before, and even after a sport performance, comes from thoughts, usually happens unconsciously and emotionally, and can affect athletes performance. The popularity of self-talk is because of its association with sport performance.

A study by Hardy (2006), showed that positive self-talk can increase self-confidence and anxiety control. On the other hand, there are some factors, which are believed may increase self-confidence and improve sport performance; for example, successful performance, emotional and physiological arousal, positive emotions, attention and concentration, targeting, and imagination of which sport imagination like physical exercises can establish a model of skills in the central nervous system, because imagination is the symbolic review of a physical activity without any clear muscular movement (Carron, Prapavessis and Grove, 2019). Nevertheless, neuroscience researches evaluated the activity of brain during the imagination procedure, which may provide useful knowledge about the imagination process. Imagination can be used to learn skills and techniques (specific-cognitive) as well as strategies or tactics (general-cognitive); in addition, it may be employed to manage motivations and emotional excitements. Sport Imagination is a common ability that athletes use at different levels in order to enhance different aspects of their performances such as refining and improvement of skills, regulation of excitements and levels of activation, management of cognitive aspects and motivations (Leary, 2012). In other words, Imagination is the visualization or cognitive review of a movement without physical performance.

Regarding the relationship between imagery and self-confidence, it has been reported in many studies that the factors play an important role in the performances of athletes (Mattie & Munroe-Chandler, 2012; Mamassis & Doganis, 2014). It is thought that the use of imagery during sporting activities will contribute positively to the physical and mental performance of football players and increase the self-confidence levels. Although there were many studies reporting that imagery and self-confidence contribute to the mental and physical development of the athletes in many sports branches including football (Short and Short, 2015; Munroe-Chandler et al., 2018; Adegbesan, 2010).

According to Murphy (2014), mental imagery refers to all those quasi-sensory or quasi-perceptual experiences of which we are self-consciously aware and which exist for us in the absence of those stimulus conditions that are known to produce their genuine sensory or perceptual counterparts. Simon (2000) added that the use of imagery as a psychological skill as a training technique facilitates the relationship between thought and movement. Athletes can provide development in both physical and mental skills with imagery. In addition to the physical corrections such as the development of skills learned and correction of errors by imagery use, psychological arrangements such as control of emotions and concentration can also be provided. It is very important for athletes to create positive imagery use in their minds in order to be successful (Kızıldag, 2017). Moreover, many studies especially about football have reported that the use of imagery in sports performance has a great importance (Hall and Haslam, 2014; De Sousa Fortes, Nideffer & Sagal, 2019).

For this reasons, psychological preparation should not be ignored when creating an effective preparatory program for football players. Besides the positive benefits of imagery practice, another psychological factor that plays an important role in the development of sportive performance is self-confidence. Self-confidence plays an active role on the mental status of athletes and it can change the reactions encountered by the athletes in training and competitions (Hanton, Lazarus & Folkman, 2014). Self-confidence, just as imagery use is an important factor for the footballers. It is an important factor that positively affects the thoughts and emotions of football players. Moreover, self-confidence can prompt the football players to focus on the goal by activating their belief.

The benefits of sport imagination are learning the skills, improving the injuries, rehabilitation activities, readiness for optimal sports performance, and self-confidence increase. It is very important to consider that there is no distance between imagination, and sport performance and self-confidence increase. Both refer to the cognitive processes that people build to judge their ability for the successful performance of a sport goal (Leary, 2012). Based on many benefits of mental skills training on motor function, the question is: "Does targeting, positive self-talking, and imagination practices affect state and trait confidences? Since a very few studies were conducted on the effects of mental skills training on state and particularly trait confidence, it is expected that the results of the current study be used as an important cognitive strategy in the promotion of athletes and sport activities in different competitions and sport fields.

To develop athletes with the potential to be resilient professional male soccer players, increasing emphasis has been placed on skill development in young players, to achieve excellence. Male athletes undertake elevated training volumes and intensities and face greater expectations from coaches or parents (or both), to ensure male soccer players reach their maximum potential and simultaneously avoid exposure-related injuries, medical staff continuously looks for the safest and most successful methods to help young players compete at the highest level. Male soccer players in tertiary institutions who are approaching the professional-league level of play are more susceptible to sustaining injuries. However, only a few prospective injury studies in youth soccer have been conducted. In addition, the definitions, diagnoses, and categorizations of injuries differ among studies, making comparison of results difficult. This complex of problems appears in both youth and adult soccer player studies. Therefore, it is on this backdrop that the researchers sought to investigate the perceived effects of psychological skills on self-confidence of male soccer players in Tertiary Institutions in Ebonyi State.

It is undisputed that low self-esteem among the soccer players in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State has a negative influence of their performance level. Also, low level of "3 'Es" (that is Energy, Emotion and Enthusiasm) among the soccer players in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State would influence their performance. University sports schedule as well as the academic work might be challenging and could cause fatigue during training. In light of this, players become extremely tired which of course affects their motivation. Lack of proper communication between the players and the coaches contributes to low self-confidence among the players. Therefore, it is imperative to investigate the perceived effects of psychological skills on self-confidence of male soccer players in Tertiary Institutions in Ebonyi State.

Specifically, the objectives of the study were to:

- Investigate the perceived effects of self-talk on self-confidence of male soccer players of Tertiary Institutions in Ebonyi State.
- Determine the perceived effects of imagery training on self-confidence of male soccer players of Tertiary Institutions in Ebonyi State

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

An institutional-based cross-sectional survey was conducted to assess self-confidence and psychological skills among male soccer players in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi state. The tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State include: Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike Ikwo, Akanu Ibiam Federal Polytechnic, Unwana, Afikpo, Ebonyi State College of Education Ikwo and College of Agriculture, Ishiagu. All the institutions have physical and health departments and facilities that promote soccer for the student's populace.

2.2. Population of the Study

The population of the study was one hundred and forty in number, made up of thirty-eight (38) coaches and one hundred and two (102) athletes (soccer players) in the five tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State (that is Ebonyi State University Abakaliki, Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike Ikwo, Akanu Ibiam Federal Polytechnic Unwana, Ebonyi State College of Education Ikwo and College of Agriculture Ishiagu). Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki has 12 coaches and 22 players; Alex Ekwueme Federal university, Ndufu-Alike, Ikwo, has 10 coaches and 22 players; Akanu Ibiam Federal Polytechnic, Unwana, Afikpo, has 8 coaches and 22 players; Ebonyi State Collesge of Education, Ikwo has 3 coaches and 18 players and College of Agriculture, Ishiagu has 5 coaches and 18 players (Source: Sport's Unit of the Institutions, 2021).

2.3. Sample and Sampling Technique

The entire population of the study was used as the sample due to manageable size. Therefore, there was no sampling.

2.4. Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument for data collection was questionnaire designed by the researcher, entitled: Perceived Effects of Psychological Skills on Self Confidence of Male Soccer Players Questionnaire (PEPSSCMSPQ), this was used to elicit information from the respondents based on their bio-data and research questions that will guide the study. The questionnaire contains two parts. Part 1 deals with bio-data of the respondents. Part 2 was used to elicit information from the respondents based on the five research questions that were formulated to guide the study. It contains 40 items divided into sections A, B, C D and E. section (A) sought information on the effects of self-talk on self-confidence of male soccer players of tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State; section (B) were structured to elicit information on the effects of goal setting on self-confidence of male soccer players of tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State, section (C) sought information on the effects of mental rehearsal on self-confidence of male soccer players of tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State, section (D) sought information on the effects of imagery training on self-confidence of male soccer players of tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State and section (E) sought information on the effects of concentration on self-confidence of male soccer players of tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State. The instrument was a 4-point scale of Strongly Agree (SA) = 4; Agree (A) = 3; Disagree (D) = 2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1. The options are weighted 4, 3, 2 and 1 for the positive items and the reverse for the negative items.

2.5. Method of Data Collection

Copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the 102 respondents in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State by the researcher. The respondents filled out the questionnaire by ticking (√) to show the extent they agree or disagree with the statement made. The researcher with the help of three research assistants (who were briefed and instructed on how to fill the questionnaire) administered and collected the completed copies of the questionnaire on the spot. This is to ensure that the copies of questionnaire are promptly returned to the researcher so as to ensure 100% return rate. By this method, no questionnaire was lost.

2.6. Method of Data Analysis

Data collected from respondents were analyzed using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation. For the acceptance and rejection of mean results for the interpretation of the research questions, any mean value of 2.50 and above was accepted as an effect while a mean value of below 2.50 was not accepted as an effect.

The hypotheses were tested using the t-test for Ho_1, Ho_2, Ho_3, Ho_4 and Ho_5 at 0.05 level of significance. The decision rule used for the study was to reject the hypothesis if the t-calculated value exceeded the table value, if otherwise, do not reject.

3. Results

This chapter contains the results of data analysis presented in tables according to the research questions and hypotheses:

3.1. Research Question 1

What is the effect of self-talk on self-confidence of male soccer players in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State?

Table 1 Mean Result on Effect of Self-talk on Self-Confidence of Male Soccer Players in Tertiary Institutions in Ebonyi State

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{x}$	S.D	Interpret
1	Anxiety affects self-confidence	44	69	19	8	3.06	0.82	High Effect
2	Level of arousal affects self-confidence	50	64	20	6	3.12	0.81	High Effect
3	Stress affects self-confidence	29	81	27	3	2.97	0.69	High Effect
4	Players' attitude affects self-confidence	74	49	5	12	3.32	0.90	High Effect
5	Coach's attitude affects self-confidence	86	4	18	32	3.02	1.29	High Effect

6	Shaping of focus affects self-confidence	35	50	21	34	2.61	1.11	High Effect
7	Determination affects self-confidence	36	35	35	34	2.52	1.12	High Effect
8	Control of emotion affects self-confidence	54	28	32	26	2.87	1.14	High Effect

HE= High Effect, LE =Low Effect

From the results in Table 1, all the items are considered the effect of self-talk on self-confidence of male soccer players because they have mean score above 2.50. This implies that the above items were the psychological determinants of Self-talk on self-confidence of male soccer players in Tertiary Institutions in Ebonyi State

3.2. Research Question 2

What is the effect of imagery training on self-confidence of male soccer players in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State?

Table 2 Mean Results on the Effect of Imagery Training on Self-confidence of Male soccer players in Tertiary Institutions in Ebonyi State

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{x}$	S.D	Interpret
1	It improves athlete's commitment during training	51	15	48	26	2.65	1.15	High Effect
2	It reduces the rate of frustration among the athletes	90	4	29	17	3.19	1.14	High Effect
3	It improves dedication of athletes	78	5	25	32	2.92	1.28	High Effect
4	It improves resentments among the athlete	40	43	49	8	2.82	0.91	High Effect
5	It improves the athletes morale	81	7	22	30	2.99	1.26	High Effect
6	It encourages athletes to greater performance	79	2	17	42	2.84	1.36	High Effect
7	It sharpens interest towards achieving set goal	81	8	23	28	3.01	1.24	High Effect
8	It guides athletes towards goal setting	50	18	38	34	2.60	1.20	High Effect
9	It improve insurance	48	16	40	36	2.54	1.20	High Effect
10	It improves athletes interest to soccer	51	29	42	18	2.80	1.07	High Effect

HE= High Effect, LE =Low Effect

The results in Table 2, show that all the items are accepted as the effect of psychological skill of imagery training on self-confidence on male soccer players, because they have mean score above 2.50

3.3. Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of coaches and athletes on the effect of self-talk on self-confidence of male soccer players in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State.

Table 3 T-test Result of Self-talk on Self-Confidence Based on Category of Study Subjects

S/No	Variable	No	$\bar{x}$	S.D	Df	T-val	P-val
1	Coaches	38	2.89	0.76	138	1.49	0.14
	Athletes	102	3.12	0.84			
2	Coaches	38	3.23	0.67	138	0.96	0.34
	Athletes	102	3.08	0.85			
3	Coaches	38	2.89	0.72	138	0.79	0.43
	Athletes	102	3.00	0.68			
4	Coaches	38	3.23	0.94	138	0.68	0.50

	Athletes	102	3.35	0.88			
5	Coaches	38	3.90	0.48	138	6.10*	0.00
	Athletes	102	2.60	1.34			
6	Coaches	38	2.50	1.13	138	0.74	0.46
	Athletes	102	2.65	1.10			
7	Coaches	38	2.39	1.17	138	0.81	0.42
	Athletes	102	2.56	1.10			
8	Coaches	38	3.30	0.80	138	9.97*	0.00
	Athletes	102	2.33	1.02			

*Significant at P <0.05

From the results in Table 3, the t-value of 6.10 and 9.97 is greater than 2.50 while item 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 and 7 were less 2.50. Also, the probability value of 0.00 and 0.00 were less than 0.05, hence, HO$_1$ is rejected. This means that there is a significant difference in the mean rating of coaches and athletes on the effect of self-talk on self-confidence of male soccer players in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State.

3.4. Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in the mean rating of coaches and athletes on the effect of imagery training on self-confidence of male soccer players of Ebonyi State University.

Table 4 T-test Results on the Effect of Imagery Training on Self-Confidence of Male Soccer Players based on Category

S/No	Variable	No	$\bar{x}$	S.D	Df	t-val	p-val
	Athletes	102	2.14	0.94			
2	Coaches	38	3.81	0.65	138	4.16*	0.00
	Athletes	102	2.96	1.20			
3	Coaches	38	4.00	0.00	138	7.03*	0.00
	Athletes	102	2.51	1.29			
4	Coaches	38	4.86	0.93	138	0.37	0.71
	Athletes	102	2.80	0.91			
5	Coaches	38	4.00	0.00	138	6.55*	0.00
	Athletes	102	2.61	1.29			
6	Coaches	38	4.00	0.00	138	7.11*	0.00
	Athletes	102	2.41	1.37			
7	Coaches	38	3.92	0.48	138	5.85*	0.00
	Athletes	102	2.67	1.27			
8	Coaches	38	4.00	0.00	138	11.91*	0.00
	Athletes	102	2.07	0.99			
	Coaches	38	1.84	0.85	138	4.47*	0.00
	Athletes	102	2.80	1.21			
	Coaches	38	2.36	0.91	138	3.04*	0.00
	Athletes	102	2.87	1.08			

*Significant at P <0.05

The results in Table 4, showed that the item; 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 8 were greater than the 2.50 with the probability value less than 0.05, hence; HO_4 is rejected. This means that, there is a significant difference in the mean rating of coaches and athletes on the effect of imagery training on self-confidence of male soccer players of tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State.

4. Discussion

The study was discussed under the following sub-headings based on the research questions as follows:

4.1. Effect of Self-Talk on Self-Confidence of Male Soccer Players

The findings obtained from this study as contained in Table 1 revealed that all the item statements were accepted indicating the effect of psychological skill of self-talk on the self-confidence of male soccer players in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State. The result shows that self-talk influences anxiety, arousal, stress, attitude of players and coaches, determination and control of emotions which in turn affect self-confidence of male players. Self-talk increases verbalizations or statements addressed to the self; has interpretive elements associated with the content of statements employed; is dynamic; instructional and motivational, for the athlete and enhances performance and skills in sport and influences vertical jump in male Rugby union players. The result is in line with the work of Burton & Raedeke (2018) who states that self-talk improves mental skills of athletes. Furthermore, Vealey (2017) suggested that creative self-talk is also effective for using strategy, psyching up emotion and effort, relaxation and calming down, attention focusing, maintaining self-confidence and self-assessment. It is believed that in this type of mental training, athletes make their feeling and perception clear, evaluate themselves, and give themselves instructions or reinforcement.

The result of the first hypothesis reveals that there is a significant difference in the mean rating of coaches and athletes on the effect of self-talk on self-confidence of male soccer players in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State.

4.2. Effect of Imagery Training on Self-Confidence of Male Soccer Players

Research question two sought to investigate the effects of imagery-training on self-confidence of male soccer players in Tertiary Institutions in Ebonyi State? The result as obtained from this study indicates that all the item statements were accepted as the effect of psychological skill of imagery training on the self-confidence of male soccer players in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State. The result of this research question is as seen because the researcher believes that in sports, imagery and self-confidence tend to enhance or improve athletes' skills. Most sporting programs consist of mental practice, which has been found to help the basic development of athletes at lower skill levels. Athletes need to mentally practice both imagery and self-confidence as imagery is influenced by many factors including somatic anxiety, motivation, emotions, and confidence. The result is good because self-confidence is relevant for good performance of athletes and coaches. The use of imagery on athlete's increases exercise and physical fitness as the imagery may have helped the success of their exercise (Hall, 2011).

Again, the athlete's enactment of performance using imagery is the normal procedure in training programs of athletes and imagery may have helped the athletes to build more self-confidence in relation to performance. Moreover, athletes who displayed high self-confidence and low anxiety were able to perform under more relaxing conditions thereby enhance their performances. The result is made better by use of imagery practice, involving modeling a picture in the mind based on visual and perspective domains. This is also what Mahoney and Avener (2007) found in his study that the majority of elite gymnasts are successful at such mental practice because they use internal imagery while few gymnasts depended more on external practice.

The result is in line with the study carried out by (Hall, 2011) who stated that many people and athletes use imagery to increase exercise and physical fitness as the imagery helps the success of their exercise. Athletes who displayed high self-confidence and low anxiety were able to perform under more relaxing conditions thereby enhance their performances (Covassin, 2014). The relationship between internal and external imagery used by athletes who participated in programs that incorporate mental practice has been studied (Lang, 2007). Lang maintained that internal and external imagery caused greater physiological arousal in participants trained in "response propositions" as compared to subjects instructed to respond perceptually.

Ploszay, Lavallee and Alfermann (2006) studied the effects of imagery in terms of dimension of imagery movement in golf putting. For this study, an intervention group was exposed to a stimulus by kinesthetic multisensory imagery.

Results showed that for some golf players, putting improved after training using imagery practice. This study suggests that imagery practice can be successful for individuals rather than for a group. Ploszay, Lavallee and Alfermann (2006) demonstrated that imagery in combination with relaxation and self-talk increases the utilization of specific defensive skills. The study further explained that imagery, in combination with relaxation and self-talk lead to successful performances such as in the case of a basketball player. In addition, Ploszay (2016) noted that some sports skills like physical practice is anterior to performance, depicting yet another activity that may be combined with imagery to enrich skill execution. These studies explored imagery involvement in several simulated examples which may not consider somatic nerve and kinesthetic sensory factors.

The result of the t-test analysis revealed that there is a significant difference in the mean rating of coaches and athletes on the effect of imagery training on self-confidence of male soccer players of tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State. This means that the null hypothesis was rejected indicating that the effect of imagery training on self-confidence of male soccer players could influence performance differently. According to Mahoney (2014), the external somatic imagery is negatively correlated to physical fitness level. In addition, in males, imagery practice has a stronger relationship with physical fitness level more so than in females. However, in females, the experimental group differed more than control group when incorporating imagery practice. The findings from this study suggested that males use imagery more effectively due to the strength of their mental practice. This result highlights the value of improving imagery practice through style and training due to its effectiveness. Mahoney (2014) also reported the effect of mental imagery practice based on high jumper Dick Fosbury and skier Jean-Claude, who have both used mental practice in competition and went on to receive gold medals. This study provides evidence that imagery practice can successfully influence athletic performance. Furthermore, subjects who engaged in kinesthetic attention and kinesthetic imagery showed greater somatic arousal and lower levels of visual activity compared to participants who used visual attention and imagery. This study concluded that the athletes' rehearsal with stimulant mental imagery often led to higher successful perspectives as compared to the absence of such a rehearsal

5. Conclusion

This study investigated the perceived effects of psychological skills on self-confidence of male soccer players in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State. Specifically, the study investigated the effects of self-talk, goal setting, mental rehearsal, imagery training and concentration on self-confidence of male soccer players of tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State. From the results of the study, all the items of the variables have effect on self-confidence of male soccer players in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State. Recommendations were made which the researcher believes that if implemented will further boost the self-confidence of male soccer players as well as their performances in soccer events in Ebonyi State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- Stakeholders in sports development in the tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State should facilitate the provision of environment that would encourage self-talk before and during soccer events.

- Stakeholders in sports development in the tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State should facilitate the provision of environment that would encourage imagery training before and during soccer events

Compliance with ethical standards

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