

Assessing the Impact of Coaches' Strategies on Football Athletes' Performance (Teamwork, Consistency, and Psychological Readiness), in University of Calabar

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Abstract

This study assessed the impact of coaches' strategies on football athletes' performance at the University of Calabar, with a focus on three core dimensions: teamwork, consistency, and psychological readiness. The research employed a descriptive survey design and targeted male football athletes across university teams. A purposive sampling technique was used to select athletes. The study's participants comprised of 145 respondents. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from the selected sample. The data were analysed using simple linear analysis to determine the extent to which coaching strategies influenced athletes' performance outcomes. Findings revealed that coaches' emphasis on teamwork significantly enhanced players' coordination and game effectiveness. Consistency in coaching approaches positively influenced athletes' training discipline and skill retention, while psychological readiness strategies such as motivation, mental conditioning, and pre-match talks were critical in boosting athletes' confidence and resilience. The study concluded that a well-rounded coaching strategy that integrates technical, tactical, and psychological elements is essential in promoting optimal football performance. It recommended that coaches at the University of Calabar and similar institutions adopt a holistic approach to athlete development to improve individual and team performance.

Keywords: Athlete's performance, team-work, consistency, psychological readiness

Introduction

Success in football is often determined by both technical abilities of players and strategies employed by coaches to prepare, motivate, and coordinate their teams. Effective coaching ensures that athletes perform well in physical training, maintain teamwork, consistency of performance and psychologically readiness for the demands of competition. When coaching strategies align with these performance dimensions, teams are more likely to sustain success over time. Conversely, deficiencies in these areas often result in inconsistent outcomes and underachievement, even in teams with demonstrated potential. The University of Calabar's football team exemplifies this dynamic. In 2019, the team achieved national recognition by winning the prestigious Higher Institutions Football League (HiFL). The victory demonstrated that the institution has both the player talent and organisational capacity to succeed at the highest level of Nigerian university football. However, since that achievement, the team has struggled to replicate such success. Their fluctuating performance raises concerns about whether coaching strategies are adequately addressing the critical dimensions of teamwork, consistency, and psychological readiness that underpin long-term achievement in football.

Research have found teamwork, consistency, and psychological readiness (Kaplánová, 2024; de Jong, et al., 2022; Nicholls et al., 2021; Meierbachtol et al., 2018; McEwan et al., 2017) as dimensions of performance that are influential in football success. Coaching strategies are central to influencing these dimensions (Olaosebikan et al., 2020; Jeroh, 2012). Teamwork encompasses cohesion, communication, and coordinated action among athletes toward achieving a common objective. Carron et al. (2002), found that team cohesion is positively correlated with performance. The role coaches in cultivating shared goals, responsibility clarity, and collaboration cannot be undermined. Coaching strategies may play a significant role in building and sustaining cohesion, thereby influencing teamwork outcomes. In their study with adolescent female athletes, Weiss et al. (2021), found that both coach- and peer-led task-involving climates (i.e. climates emphasizing effort, cooperation, and personal improvement rather than competition and comparison), were positively associated with team cohesion. The authors recommended that coaches promote cooperative learning, involve athletes in decisions, and emphasis appreciation and praise to cultivate solidarity.

Also, coach behaviours such as instruction frequency, positive feedback, social support, and democratic leadership, have been linked to stronger task and social cohesion (Nicholls, 2021). For example, coaches who give clear instructions, show concern for individual athletes, and allow athlete input tend to foster more cohesive teams. This cohesion is integral to effective teamwork, as it enhances mutual trust, communication, and synchronised effort. Ryska et al. (1999), compared cognitive-behavioural cohesion strategies used by coaches in the U.S. and Australia. Coaches reported using strategies like goal setting, team identity exercises, and role clarification to promote social and task cohesion. In football, where tactical execution depends on synchronised movement, effective teamwork is indispensable.

Consistency refers to the ability of athletes and teams to sustain high performance across matches and competitions. Otte et al. (2019), emphasis that structured training design and periodization such as balancing workload, recovery, and skill development are essential to producing reliable performance. Coaching strategies can also influence consistency through tactical clarity, stable expectations, and reduced uncertainty. A useful insight comes from Tamura & Masuda's (2015) study of football formation changes. They observed a tendency for coaches to use a "win-stay lose-shift" approach (sticking to successful formations and changing after losses). However, they also found that frequent formation changes did not automatically produce better match outcomes. This suggests that constancy in tactical strategy, when suitable, may support consistency in team performance. In a broader coaching context, consistency in coaching behaviour (e.g., consistent communication, uniform expectations, fair treatment) is frequently highlighted in sports coaching guides as a factor that promotes predictability and trust, which can stabilise athlete performance (Kaplánová, 2024).

Psychological readiness refers to an athlete's mental and emotional preparedness for competition, including confidence, focus resilience, and arousal regulation. Coaching strategies can directly impact this readiness through psychological skills training, feedback, and trust-building. Studies by Grønset et al. (2024), and Kaplánová et al. (2024), demonstrate that coaches influence psychological readiness through motivational support, pre-match routines, and mental skills training. Kruk et al. (2017) showed that among soccer players, psychological strategies like relaxation and self-talk predicted not just performance but also satisfaction with performance. For instance, high use of relaxation at baseline predicted better physical performance later in the season, while self-talk predicted greater performance satisfaction. This underscores how coaching encouragement and training in mental strategies influence psychological readiness. Finally, coaching dynamics and behavioural styles also matter. Martin (2024) examined coaching styles using Self-Determination Theory. It was revealed that coaches who satisfy athletes' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness promote higher motivation, trust, and performance. Such positive coaching behaviour helps athletes feel psychologically safe and ready (Martin, 2024).

Statement of problem

While the influence of teamwork, consistency, and psychological readiness in football. have each been studied in isolation, there is limited integrative research examining how coaching strategies simultaneously influence these dimensions. This gap is particularly evident in the Nigerian university sports context, where teams often operate with limited resources and where the role of coaches in determining performance outcomes is very critical. Moreover, the moderating effects of leadership style and coach-athlete relationship quality remain underexplored, even though these factors have been shown to affect motivation, cohesion, and performance (Jin et al., 2022). Against this backdrop, the University of Calabar football team's decline in performance since its 2019 triumph underscores the urgency of examining the adequacy of current coaching strategies. While the talent of players remains an important factor for performance, inconsistent results suggest that factors such as team cohesion, stability of performance, and mental preparedness may not be sufficiently supported through coaching

practices. Without deliberate, evidence-based approaches, it will be difficult for the team to sustain competitive success.

This gap is problematic for both theory and practice. Theoretically, it restricts the development of comprehensive models that explain how coaching strategies interact to influence multiple dimensions of performance. Practically, it leaves coaches and sports administrators without clear, evidence-based guidance for addressing performance inconsistency and underachievement. For the University of Calabar, the inability to build on the 2019 success suggests that coaching practices may not be fully harnessing players' potential across teamwork, consistency, and psychological readiness. Therefore, this study seeks to assess the impact of coaches' strategies on football athletes' performance at the University of Calabar, focusing on these three critical domains. By examining these relationships, the study will generate insights that are both academically valuable and practically applicable. Its findings are expected to contribute to the literature on coaching science while offering actionable recommendations to help restore and sustain the University of Calabar's competitiveness in university football.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of the study is to assess coaches' strategies on football athletes' performance in University of Calabar. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Examine the relationship between coaches' strategies and teamwork among football athletes in University of Calabar.
2. Determine the effect of coaches' strategies on the consistency of athletes' performance in University of Calabar.
3. Investigate the influence of coaches' strategies on the psychological readiness of athletes for competition in University of Calabar.

Research Hypotheses

Based on the objectives and literature, the study proposes the following null hypotheses;

1. Coaching strategies have no significant positive relationship with teamwork among football athletes in the University of Calabar.
2. Coaching strategies do not significantly predict consistency in athletes' performance in the University of Calabar.
3. Coaching strategies do not significantly enhance athletes' psychological readiness for competition in the University of Calabar.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This design is appropriate as it allows for the systematic collection of quantitative data on perceptions of coaching strategies, teamwork, consistency, and psychological readiness, and for testing hypothesised relationships among variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The target population comprises all registered male athletes of the University of Calabar who have participated in the Higher Institutions Football League (HiFL) and other competitive tournaments between 2019 and 2025. The accessible population focused on current active squad members and recent former players. A total of 145 respondents were selected using purposive sampling, targeting athletes with at least one year of competitive experience under the university's coaching staff.

Data was collected using questionnaires such as: Coaching Strategies Scale (CSS) which was adapted from the Leadership Scale for Sports (LSS) (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980)

and the Coaching Behaviour Scale for Sport (CBS-S) (Côté et al., 1999); teamwork/Cohesion was measured using Group Environment Questionnaire (GEQ) by Carron, Widmeyer and Brawley (1985); Consistency of Performance was measured through adapted items on training structure and perceived performance stability (Otte et al., 2019; Bompa & Buzzichelli, 2018); while items on psychological readiness were adapted from Sports Mental Toughness Questionnaire (SMTQ; Sheard, Golby, & van Wersch, 2009) and Competitive State Anxiety Inventory-2 (CSAI-2; Martens et al., 1990).

Draft copies of the instrument were presented to three experts in Sport psychology in the Department of Human Kinetics and Sport Science Education, and two experts in Educational Psychology Departments, University of Calabar to evaluate the psychometric properties of items in terms of validity. Slight modifications were subsequently suggested. These suggestions were then implemented, deeming the instrument valid for data collection purposes. To test the internal consistency of items, the Cronbach alpha test was used. The coefficient values ranged from .81 to .92, indicating excellent internal consistency of items. Questionnaires were distributed to athletes during training sessions and collected upon completion. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity and confidentiality of response were adhered to. Data were analysed at $< .05$ significance level using simple regression analysis to test the predictive effects of coaching strategies on teamwork, consistency, and psychological readiness.

Results

Hypothesis 1

Coaching strategies have no significant positive predictive relationship with teamwork among football athletes in the University of Calabar. The predictor variable of this hypothesis is coaching strategies, while the response variable is teamwork among football athletes in the University of Calabar. The null hypothesis was tested at the .05 level of significance using simple linear regression analysis. Table 1 revealed that coaching strategies is responsible for 15% of the total variance in teamwork among football athletes in the University of Calabar. This implies that 85% of the unaccounted variance may be due to other factors excluded from the model. The regression model revealed that coping strategies is a significant positive predictor of teamwork among football athletes $F(1,143) = 22.08, p < .05$. The null hypothesis was rejected due to this finding, suggesting that coaches' strategies had a strong predictive effect on teamwork among football athletes.

TABLE 1

Simple linear regression of the predictive effect of coach's strategies on teamwork among football athletes (N = 145)

R	R ²	Adj. R ²	SE	B	t
.5022	.15	.16	4.116	.168	4.463
Model	SS	Df	MS	F	P
Regression	337.497	1	337.497	22.08	<.001
Residual	7489.179	143	16.944		
Total	7826.676	144			

Hypothesis 2

Coaching strategies have no significant positive predictive effect on performance consistency among football athletes in the University of Calabar. The predictor variable of this hypothesis is coaching strategies, while the response variable is performance consistency among football athletes in the University of Calabar. The null hypothesis was tested at the .05 level of significance using simple linear regression analysis. Table 2 revealed that coaching strategies is responsible for 7% of the total variance in performance consistency among football athletes in the University of Calabar. This implies that 93% of the unaccounted variance may be due to other factors excluded from the model. The regression model revealed that coping strategies is a significant predictor of performance consistency among football athletes $F(1,143) = 18.21, p < .05$. The null hypothesis was rejected due to this finding, suggesting that coaches strategies had a strong predictive effect on performance consistency among football athletes.

TABLE 2

Simple linear regression of the predictive effect of coaching strategies on performance consistency among football athletes (N = 145)

R	R ²	Adj. R ²	SE	B	t
.251	.07	.064	6.34	.064	5.24
Model	SS	Df	MS	F	P
Regression	572.63	1	572.63	18.21	<.001
Residual	7,254.046	143	13.62		
Total	7826.676	144			

Hypothesis 3

Coaching strategies have no significant predictive effect on athletes' psychological readiness for competition among football athletes in the University of Calabar. The predictor variable of this hypothesis is coaching strategies, while the dependent variable is psychological readiness among football athletes in the University of Calabar. The null hypothesis was tested at the .05 level of significance using simple linear regression analysis. Table 3 revealed that coaching strategies is responsible for 24.9% of the total variance in performance consistency among football athletes in the University of Calabar. This implies that 76.1% of the unaccounted variance may be due to other factors excluded from the model. The regression model revealed that coping strategies is a significant predictor of psychological readiness among football athletes in the University of Calabar $F(1,143) = 33.83, p < .05$. The null hypothesis was rejected due to this finding, suggesting that coaches' strategies had a strong predictive effect on psychological readiness on football athletes.

TABLE 3

Simple linear regression of the predictive effect of coaching strategies on psychological readiness among football athletes (N = 145)

R	R ²	Adj. R ²	SE	B	t
.34	.249	.24	4.62	.152	4.81
Model	SS	Df	MS	F	P
Regression	884.73	1	884.73	33.83	<.001

Residual	6,941.946	143	20.75
Total	7826.676	144	

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of coaching strategies on teamwork, consistency in performance, and psychological readiness among collegiate football athletes. The findings of this study revealed three major outcomes. First, coaching strategies had a significant positive relationship with teamwork among football athletes at the University of Calabar. Second, coaching strategies significantly predicted consistency in athletes' performance. Third, coaching strategies were found to significantly enhance athletes' psychological readiness for competition.

The finding that coaching strategies significantly enhance teamwork supports prior research that underscores the role of coaches in enhancing team cohesion. Carron et al. (2002) demonstrated through meta-analysis that cohesion is positively linked to performance outcomes in sport. Similarly, Olaosebikan et al. (2020) and Jeroh (2012) highlighted that transformational coaching behaviours, such as articulating a vision, individualised support, and commitment strengthen task cohesion within teams. By enabling shared mental models through communication and tactical rehearsal, coaches enable players to coordinate effectively in highpressure situations (Nicholls et al., 2021). For Nigerian collegiate athletes, where team resources may be limited, these strategies become indispensable for building synergy and maximising performance.

The result that coaching strategies predict consistency in athletes' performance underscores the importance of structured training and psychological preparation. Research has shown that psychological skills training (e.g., self-talk, imagery, and goal setting) stabilises performance outcomes by mitigating stress and anxiety (Park, 2023). Autonomy-supportive coaching, in particular, promotes intrinsic motivation and helps athletes regulate arousal levels across competitions (Martin, 2024; Otte et al. 2019). This finding suggests that Nigerian coaches, working without advanced technological monitoring tools, can sustain consistent athlete performance by embedding routines, reinforcing focus, and creating a supportive motivational climate.

The finding that coaching strategies significantly enhance psychological readiness is consistent with scholarship emphasising the role of coaches in influencing confidence, coping, and competitive focus. Psychological readiness involves not only physical preparedness but also emotional regulation, attentional control, and resilience under pressure (Weinberg & Gould, 2019). Kaplánová (2024) identified coachability, coping strategies, and goal setting as key predictors of readiness, all of which are cultivated through effective coaching. Moreover, coaching behaviours that satisfy athletes' psychological needs (e.g., competence, autonomy, relatedness) contribute to lower anxiety and stronger competitive preparedness (de Jong, et al., 2022). In the Nigerian context, where professional sport psychologists are seldom integrated into university teams, coaches often serve as the primary agents of psychological preparation.

Taken together, these findings illustrate that coaching strategies act as a triple lever: they foster teamwork, stabilise consistency in performance, and enhance psychological readiness. This pattern reinforces the view that effective coaching extends beyond tactical instruction to encompass leadership, motivation, and psychological skill-building (Jin et al.,

2022; Olaosebikan et al., 2020). For the University of Calabar and similar institutions, coaching strategies may represent the most powerful mechanism for ensuring both competitive stability and athlete resilience despite infrastructural challenges.

Implications

The results carry significant practical implications. First, coach education programmes should emphasise the integration of transformational leadership, autonomy-supportive communication, and psychological skills training. Second, universities should invest in continuous professional development for coaches. This will enable them to adopt evidencebased methods that strengthen both technical and psychological readiness. Finally, embedding simple but effective psychological strategies such as pre-performance routines and goal setting into everyday training could provide a low-cost, high-impact pathway to enhancing competitive outcomes in Nigerian collegiate football.

Limitations and future research

Although the results are promising, this study is limited by its specific focus on the University of Calabar, which restricts generalisability. Longitudinal and multi-institutional studies are needed to explore whether these findings hold across different institutions. Experimental studies testing the direct impact of specific coaching interventions on teamwork, performance consistency, and readiness would further enrich the evidence base.

Conclusion

The review of literature, combined with the empirical findings of this study, indicates that coaching strategies significantly and positively influence performance dimensions such as teamwork, consistency, and psychological readiness among university football athletes. Coaches serve not only as tactical instructors but also as motivational leaders and psychological mentors. Effective coaching practices such as clear communication, goal setting, and feedback, are closely associated with improved team cohesion and collaborative efforts. These strategies also help athletes maintain stable performance over time, and enhancing reliability in competitive settings. Moreover, athletes coached with a strong emphasis on psychological skills such as confidence building, visualization, and stress regulation tend to exhibit greater mental readiness and are better equipped to handle competitive pressures. The evidence suggests that when coaches are intentional about both the technical and psychosocial aspects of leadership, positive outcomes follow. For universities seeking to revitalise their football programmes, as appears necessary in the case of University of Calabar post-2019 success, investing in coaching strategy may be important for improving long-term performance. **Recommendations**

Based on the conclusion of the study, the following recommendations were proposed:

1. Universities should provide continuous training for coaches, including workshops or certifications in sport psychology, motivational climates, communication strategies, role clarity, leadership styles, and mental readiness techniques. Enhancing the tactical and psychological toolkit of coaches will enable them to impact teamwork, consistency, and psychological readiness more effectively.
2. Institutions should recognise that coaching strategy alone may not suffice if resources are severely limited. As such, efforts should be made to ensure that coaches and teams have the resources needed such as good facilities, access to sport psychologists or mental skills trainers, time for rest and recovery, and manageable competition schedules.

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