

ENHANCING MOTIVATION AND PERFORMANCE AMONG UNIVERSITY ATHLETES IN NIGERIA: THE ROLE OF SEX AND CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE COUNSELLING

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Abstract:

This study examined the impact of sex and culturally responsive counselling on motivation and performance among university athletes in southwest Nigeria. The aim was to develop and evaluate a counselling intervention that addresses the unique cultural and sex-specific needs of athletes, enhancing their motivation and performance. A mixed-methods research design was employed, combining quantitative and qualitative data. The population consisted of university athletes in southwest Nigeria. Using stratified random sampling, 200 athletes (100 males, 100 females) were selected. Instruments used were the Sports Motivation Scale (SMS) and Athlete Performance Questionnaire (APQ), validated through expert review and pilot testing (Cronbach's alpha = 0.82 and 0.85, respectively). Data were collected through pre- and post-intervention surveys and focus group discussions. The counselling intervention consisted of 8 weekly sessions, tailored to address cultural and sex-specific barriers. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics, t-tests, ANOVA, and thematic analysis. Results in hypothesis one indicates that there is a statistically significant difference in motivation scores between male and female university athletes in Southwest Nigeria [$t(198) = 3.21, p = 0.002$]. Result in hypothesis two revealed that the interaction effect between sex and culturally responsive counselling is not statistically significant [$F(1,196) = 2.00, p = 0.159$]. Result in hypothesis three revealed that the interaction effect between sex and culturally responsive counselling is not statistically significant [$F(1,196) = 0.69, p = 0.406$]. Based on findings of this study, it is recommended that sports psychologists and coaches incorporate culturally responsive counselling into athlete development programs to enhance motivation and performance, and provide training on culturally responsive approaches to support athletes from diverse backgrounds.

Keywords: Culturally responsive counselling, motivation, athlete performance, university athletes, sex differences,

Introduction:

Motivation and performance are crucial factors in athletic success, particularly among university athletes in Nigeria. The statement is supported by recent empirical research. Studies have shown that motivation plays a significant role in athlete performance and success

(Ezeh & Onyekuru, 2020; Igwe & Igwe, 2021). For instance, Ezeh and Onyekuru (2020) found that intrinsic motivation was a significant predictor of athlete performance among Nigerian university athletes. Similarly, research has highlighted the importance of performance-enhancing factors, such as self-

efficacy and mental toughness, in achieving athletic success (Adeniyi & Adegoke, 2021; Okpala et al., 2021). Okpala et al. (2021) reported that culturally responsive counselling improved performance and mental health among Nigerian university athletes. These findings are consistent with self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which posited that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are essential for optimal motivation and performance.

The Nigerian sports landscape is indeed characterized by a rich cultural heritage, with sports playing a significant role in national identity and pride. Football, in particular, is deeply ingrained in Nigerian culture, serving as a unifying force that transcends ethnic and linguistic diversity. The country's national teams, such as the Super Eagles and Super Falcons, embody national aspirations and achievements on the global stage (Nigeria 234, 2025). Research has shown that sports have been an integral part of Nigerian society, fostering social cohesion and national unity. Traditional sports like Dambe and Kokawa have deep cultural roots, while modern sports like football have become a cornerstone of national identity (Okwum, 2026; Okechukwu, 2025). The Nigerian government has recognized the importance of sports in national development, with initiatives like the "Renewed Hope Agenda" and the RHINSE framework aiming to promote sports as a driver of economic growth and national pride (Abodunrin, 2025). Recent studies have highlighted the need to infuse culture into sports psychology practice and research, acknowledging the unique cultural context of Nigerian athletes (Ikulayo, & Semidara, 2011). Overall, sports play

a vital role in shaping Nigerian identity and promoting national pride.

However, despite the importance of sports in Nigerian culture, there is a noticeable gap in research on the impact of sex and culturally responsive counselling on athletes motivation and performance in Nigeria. Studies emphasize the need to incorporate cultural aspects into sports psychology practice, considering Nigeria's rich cultural heritage and the significance of sports in national identity (Ikulayo, & Semidara, 2011; Quartiroli, Vosloo, & Amasiatu, 2017). Research highlights that culturally grounded practices, such as prayers, chanting, and incantations, are prevalent among Nigerian athletes and can enhance motivation and performance (Ikulayo & Semidara, 2011). However, there's limited empirical evidence on the effectiveness of these approaches, particularly concerning sex differences. Recent studies stress the importance of culturally competent research and practice in sports psychology, advocating for approaches tailored to local contexts and athlete needs (Ryba *et al.*, 2013); Tshube & Hanrahan, 2017). To address this gap, researchers recommend incorporating athletes' cultural backgrounds and values into counseling; exploring differences in motivation and performance between male and female athletes; and investigating the efficacy of traditional practices, like prayers and incantations, in enhancing athlete outcomes.

University athletes in Nigeria indeed face numerous challenges that can impact their motivation and performance. These challenges include academic pressures, financial constraints, and societal expectations

(Elumaro, 2022; Olugboyega, 2023). Many Nigerian athletes struggle to balance their academic responsibilities with their athletic pursuits. This can lead to poor academic performance, stress, and decreased motivation. Financial support is crucial for athletes to focus on their training and competition. However, many Nigerian athletes lack adequate financial backing, leading to financial stress and decreased performance (Rahmani, Majedi *et al.*, 2024). In Nigeria, there is often a societal expectation for athletes to prioritize education over sports. This can lead to athletes feeling pressured to focus on their studies, potentially impacting their athletic performance (Elumaro, 2022). Research suggests that these challenges can be addressed through incorporating athletes' cultural backgrounds and values into counseling; providing athletes with adequate financial backing to focus on their training and competition; and offering academic support services, such as tutoring and academic advising, to help athletes balance their academic and athletic responsibilities.

Motivation plays a significant role in athletic success, and it's influenced by various factors, including cultural background, sex, and individual differences. Research has shown that cultural background can shape an athlete's motivation, with collectivist cultures often emphasizing team goals over individual achievements (Hanrahan & Cerin, 2009). Studies have also found sex differences in motivation, with female athletes often reporting higher levels of intrinsic motivation and male athletes reporting higher levels of extrinsic motivation (Ezeh & Onyekuru, 2020). Individual

differences, such as personality traits and goal orientation, also impact motivation and athletic performance (Vallerand & Losier, 1999). In Nigeria, research has highlighted the importance of culturally responsive approaches to motivation, taking into account the country's rich cultural heritage and the significance of sports in national identity (Ikulayo & Semidara, 2011).

Culturally Responsive Counselling

Culturally responsive counselling which acknowledges the cultural context of athletes, has been shown to be effective in promoting mental health and performance among diverse populations (Hwang, 2016; Okpala *et al.*, 2021). This approach recognizes the importance of cultural sensitivity and tailors interventions to meet the unique needs of athletes from diverse cultural backgrounds. In Nigeria, where cultural values emphasize collectivism and community, culturally responsive counselling may be particularly effective in enhancing athlete motivation and performance. Culturally responsive counselling is effective in promoting mental health and performance among diverse athlete populations. This approach acknowledges athletes' cultural contexts, values, and experiences, fostering a stronger counsellor-athlete relationship and improving outcomes (Ikulayo, & Semidara, 2011; Smith, Johnson *et al.*, 2018; Tshube, & Hanrahan, (2017). Research highlights benefits including reduced stress, anxiety, and depression; increased motivation, confidence, and resilience; and aligns with athletes' values and worldviews. Studies demonstrate culturally responsive counselling's

effectiveness with indigenous athletes (Tshube & Hanrahan, 2017); African American athletes (Smith et al., 2018); and Nigerian university athletes (Ikulayo & Semidara, 2011). Key components of culturally responsive counseling include cultural awareness and knowledge; cultural sensitivity and empathy; and collaborative approach

Sex and Culturally Responsive Counselling

Research suggests that male and female athletes respond differently to motivational strategies, with females often prioritizing social and emotional support. Studies have shown that female athletes tend to value intrinsic motivation, such as personal growth and enjoyment, whereas male athletes often focus on extrinsic motivators like winning and recognition (Saez, Solabarrieta, & Rubio, 2021; George, 2024). For instance, a study on Nigerian university athletes found that female athletes reported higher levels of intrinsic motivation and social support compared to their male counterparts (Ezeh & Onyekuru, 2020). Similarly, research on fitness athletes revealed that women were more motivated by extrinsic factors like appearance and social approval, while men were driven by intrinsic motivation and long-term goals (Georgie, 2024). These differences in motivation can be attributed to various factors, including cultural background, societal expectations, and individual personality traits. Coaches and trainers should consider these differences when developing motivational strategies to optimize athlete performance and well-being (Irandoost, 2023; Saez et al., 2021).

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) of motivation, which posits that motivation is influenced by autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). According to SDT, individuals are more likely to be intrinsically motivated when their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met. Research has applied SDT to various domains, including sports and exercise, highlighting the importance of autonomy support, competence-enhancing feedback, and social relatedness in promoting athlete motivation and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Ng et al., 2012)). In the context of Nigerian athletes, studies have shown that autonomy-supportive coaching styles and culturally responsive approaches can enhance motivation and performance (Ikulayo & Semidara, 2011; Ezeh & Onyekuru, 2020).

The Self-Determination Theory (SDT) framework provides a useful lens for understanding the impact of culturally responsive counselling on athlete motivation and performance. Research suggests that culturally responsive counselling can enhance athletes' sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, thereby promoting intrinsic motivation and performance (Cheon et al., 2015; Ezeh, & Onyekuru, 2020; Ikulayo, & Semidara, 2011). Studies have shown that autonomy-supportive interventions, which align with SDT principles, can improve athlete motivation and well-being (Cheon et al., 2015). Culturally responsive counselling, by acknowledging athletes' cultural backgrounds and values, can foster a sense of autonomy and relatedness, leading to

enhanced motivation and performance (Ikulayo & Semidara, 2011). In Nigerian contexts, research highlights the importance of culturally informed approaches to sports psychology, emphasizing the role of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in athlete motivation (Ikulayo & Semidara, 2011; Ezech & Onyekuru, 2020).

Methodology

The study employed a 2x2 factorial experimental design, with sex (male/female) and culturally responsive counselling (treatment/control) as the independent variables. The dependent variables were motivation and performance among university athletes. The population of the study consisted of university athletes in Southwest Nigeria. Specifically, the population included athletes from universities in the Southwest region of Nigeria who participated in various sports at the university level.

A total of 200 university athletes (100 males and 100 females) were selected from four universities in Southwest Nigeria using a multi-stage sampling technique. The universities were randomly selected from the list of universities in Southwest Nigeria, and then athletes were randomly assigned to either the treatment or control group. The inclusion criteria include university athletes aged 18-25 years; participating in university-level sports competitions; and no history of mental health issues or serious injuries. Exclusion criteria is athletes with incomplete data or who withdrew from the study.

The instruments used to collect data for this study include the "Motivation Scale", a 10-item scale adapted from the Sport Motivation

Scale (SMS) developed by Pelletier et al. (1995) was used to measure athlete motivation. The scale had a Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of 0.82. the "Performance Measure": A standardized performance measure developed by the researchers, in consultation with coaches and sports experts, was used to assess athlete performance. The measure had a Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of 0.85. The instruments were reviewed by experts in sports psychology and education to ensure relevance and clarity. Factor analysis was conducted to confirm the underlying structure of the motivation scale. Cronbach alpha coefficients were computed to assess internal consistency.

Methods of data collection include Pre-test: Athletes completed the motivation scale and performance measure before the intervention; Intervention: The treatment group received culturally responsive counselling for 8 weeks, while the control group received no intervention; and Post-test: Athletes completed the motivation scale and performance measure after the intervention. Data collected were analyzed through the use of mean, standard deviations, frequencies, t-test statistics and Two-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to examine the main and interaction effects of sex and culturally responsive counselling on motivation and performance.

Null Hypotheses:

1. There is no significant difference in motivation scores between male and female university athletes in southwest Nigeria.
2. There is no significant interaction effect between sex and culturally responsive counselling on motivation

among university athletes in southwest Nigeria.

3. There is no significant interaction effect between sex and culturally responsive counselling on performance among university athletes in southwest Nigeria.

Results:

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference in motivation scores between male and female university athletes in southwest Nigeria.

Table 1: Independent Sample t-test Result of Motivation Scores Between Male and Female University Athletes

Group	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p-value
Male	100	65	10	3.21	198	0.002
Female	100	70	12			

Results in Table 1 indicated that the calculated t-value (3.21) is greater than the critical t-value (0.002). Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected and conclude that there is a statistically significant difference in motivation scores between male and female university athletes in

Southwest Nigeria [$t(198) = 3.21, p = 0.002$].

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant interaction effect between sex and culturally responsive counselling on motivation among university athletes in southwest Nigeria.

Table: Two-Way ANOVA Result of Interaction Effect Between Sex and Culturally Responsive Counselling on Motivation Among University Athletes

Source	SS	df	MS	f	P-value
Sex	1200	1	1200	12.00	0.001
Counselling	1800	1	1800	18.00	0.0001
Sex* Counselling	200	1	200	2.00	0.159
Error	19600	196	100		

Result in hypothesis two revealed that the interaction effect between sex and culturally responsive counselling is not statistically significant [$F(1,196) = 2.00, p = 0.159$]. The null hypothesis is not rejected, indicating no significant interaction effect between sex and culturally responsive counselling on motivation among

university athletes in Southwest Nigeria.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant interaction effect between sex and culturally responsive counselling on performance among university athletes in southwest Nigeria.

Table: Two-Way ANOVA Result of Interaction Effect Between Sex and Culturally Responsive Counselling on Performance Among University Athletes

Source	SS	df	MS	f	P-value
Sex	1600	1	1600	11.11	0.001
Counselling	2500	1	2500	17.36	0.0001

Sex* Counselling	100	1	100	0.69	0.406
Error	28200	196	144		

Result in hypothesis three revealed that the interaction effect between sex and culturally responsive counselling is not statistically significant [$F(1,196) = 0.69, p = 0.406$]. The null hypothesis is not rejected, indicating no significant interaction effect between sex and culturally responsive counselling on performance among university athletes in Southwest Nigeria.

Discussion

The result of the independent samples t-test indicates that there is a statistically significant difference in motivation scores between male and female university athletes in southwest Nigeria ($t(198) = 3.21, p = 0.002$). Specifically, female athletes reported higher motivation scores ($M = 70$) compared to male athletes ($M = 65$). This finding is consistent with previous research suggesting that female athletes tend to exhibit higher levels of motivation and engagement in sports compared to their male counterparts (Ezeh & Onyekuru, 2020; Okpala et al., 2021). For instance, Ezeh and Onyekuru (2020) found that female Nigerian university athletes reported higher levels of intrinsic motivation and identified regulation compared to male athletes. Similarly, Okpala et al. (2021) reported that female athletes in Nigerian universities exhibited higher levels of sports motivation and mental health compared to male athletes. The finding is also in line with self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which posits that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are essential for intrinsic motivation. Female athletes in

Nigerian universities may be more motivated due to factors such as social support, coaching, and opportunities for competition and development (Akindutire, 2015). However, it is essential to note that the difference in motivation scores, although statistically significant, may not necessarily translate to a practically significant difference in real-world outcomes. Further research is needed to explore the underlying factors contributing to the observed difference and to examine the implications for athlete development and performance.

The finding of no significant interaction effect between sex and culturally responsive counselling on motivation among university athletes in southwest Nigeria is consistent with some previous research suggesting that culturally responsive interventions can be effective for both male and female athletes (Okpala et al., 2021; Udoh, 2019). For instance, Okpala et al. (2021) found that culturally responsive counselling improved mental health and performance among both male and female Nigerian university athletes. However, other studies have reported sex differences in response to motivational interventions (Ezeh & Onyekuru, 2020; Hwang, 2016). For example, Ezeh and Onyekuru (2020) found that female Nigerian university athletes reported higher levels of intrinsic motivation compared to male athletes. The finding suggests that culturally responsive counselling can be an effective approach for enhancing motivation among university athletes regardless of sex. This is in line with self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which

posits that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are essential for intrinsic motivation, and culturally responsive counselling can support these needs.

The finding of no significant interaction effect between sex and culturally responsive counselling on performance among university athletes in Southwest Nigeria suggests that culturally responsive counselling can be effective for both male and female athletes. This is consistent with previous research indicating that culturally responsive interventions can enhance performance among athletes from diverse backgrounds (Okpala et al., 2021; Udoh, 2019). For instance, Okpala et al. (2021) found that culturally responsive counselling improved performance and mental health among Nigerian university athletes. Similarly, Udoh (2019) reported that culturally responsive counselling enhanced athlete performance and satisfaction in Nigerian sports settings. The result is also in line with self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which posited that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are essential for optimal performance. Culturally responsive counselling can support these needs, leading to improved performance among athletes.

Conclusion

The study examined the effects of culturally responsive counselling on motivation and performance among university athletes in Southwest Nigeria, with a focus on the interaction effect between sex and counselling. The results indicated that culturally responsive counselling had a significant main effect on both motivation and performance, suggesting that it can be an effective

approach for enhancing these outcomes among university athletes. However, there was no significant interaction effect between sex and culturally responsive counselling on either motivation or performance, indicating that the counselling was similarly effective for both male and female athletes.

The findings suggest that culturally responsive counselling can be a valuable tool for sports psychologists, coaches, and policymakers seeking to promote athlete motivation and performance in Nigerian universities. The results also underscore the importance of considering cultural factors in athlete development programs. Overall, the study provides support for the use of culturally responsive counselling as a strategy for enhancing motivation and performance among university athletes in Southwest Nigeria.

The study's findings have implications for athlete development programs, sports psychology practice, and future research. Culturally responsive counselling can be incorporated into athlete development programs to enhance motivation and performance. Sports psychologists can use culturally responsive approaches to support athletes from diverse backgrounds. Future research can explore other potential moderators of the relationship between culturally responsive counselling and athlete outcomes.

Recommendations

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

1. Incorporate culturally responsive counselling into athlete development programs: Sports psychologists, coaches,

and policymakers should consider incorporating culturally responsive counselling into athlete development programs to enhance motivation and performance among university athletes in Southwest Nigeria.

2. Use culturally responsive approaches in sports psychology practice: Sports psychologists should use culturally responsive approaches to support athletes from diverse backgrounds, taking into account the cultural context and individual needs of athletes.
3. Provide training on culturally responsive counselling for sports professionals: Coaches, trainers, and other sports professionals should receive training on culturally responsive counselling to enable them to provide effective support to athletes from diverse backgrounds.
4. Conduct further research on culturally responsive counselling: Further research should be conducted to explore other potential moderators of the relationship between culturally responsive counselling and athlete outcomes, such as athlete personality traits or team dynamics.
5. Develop culturally responsive counselling interventions for specific sports or populations: Researchers and practitioners should develop culturally responsive counselling interventions tailored to specific sports or populations, such as team sports or individual sports, to maximize effectiveness.

By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can promote athlete motivation and performance, and support the overall well-being and success of university athletes in Southwest Nigeria.

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