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The Place of Leadership Quality and Role of Coaches in Sports Performance by Nigerian University Students

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Abstract

The study examined the place of leadership quality and role of coaches in sports performance by Nigerian university students. Participants were made up of 153 sports officials and 270 students from nine universities in Southern Nigeria. A validated self – structured questionnaire with a test – retest reliability co – efficient of 0.90 was the instrument used. Frequency counts, simple percentages and chi – square (X^2) were the descriptive and inferential statistics used to analyze the data obtained at 0.05 level of significance. The computed chi – square value of 4.67 is less than the table value of 7.82 suggesting that leadership quality of coaches does not play any significant role in sports performance by Nigerian university students. It was recommended among others that Nigerian universities should employ many qualified coaches to oversee sports as against the current position where one coach oversees up to five sports.

Key words: Influence, Envision, Cheerfulness, Enthusiasm, Technique, Democratic, Autocratic.

Introduction

Universities all over the world are regarded as centres of excellence in all human endeavours, sports inclusive. According to Ubeku (1986), universities the world over are centres of sporting activities. Many athletes who win medals for their countries are usually either students or those who have just graduated. The reasons are not farfetched because the university is an assemblage of a country's healthy and intelligent youths who learn easily the techniques of sports and when motivated they are ready to give their best at all times.

The university environment constitutes an ideal place for sports excellence because of boarding facilities and a great number of youths aggregate yearly at the universities. In the 60's to late 80's, Nigerian universities produced the likes of late A.K.O. Amu, Dr. George Ogan, late Major Taiwo Ogunjobi, Tony Urhobo, Gloria Obajinmi, Adokie Amasiemaka, Patrick Ekeji etc who represented the country in track and field athletics as well as football. These illustrious Nigerians were products of the Nigeria University Games Association (NUGA) competition. This position has taken a downward plunge.

Despite all the advantages of the boarding system and the yearly influx of youths into the universities, the Nigerian universities have failed to meet the Nigerian expectations and aspirations in sports (Amuchie, 2003). The universities have come under sharp criticisms in this regard. Andah (1986) berated the universities for having failed Nigeria in sports. Amuchie (2003) stated categorically that the poor performance of Nigerian athletes at the World Universities Games (FISU) validates the statement by many Nigerian sports analysts that Nigerian universities lack commitment to sports excellence within their programmes.

For the Nigerian university student to excel and achieve excellence in sports, a number of variables are necessary. These could include availability of standard sports facilities and equipment to enhance training, goal setting, rewards and constant exposure to competitions. One other important variable is the leadership quality and role of coaches.

Leadership has been described as the "process of social influence in which one person can elicit the support of others in the accomplishment of a common task" (Chemers, 1997). Leadership is ultimately about creating a way for people to make something extraordinary happen. Thus, effective

leadership is the ability to successfully integrate and maximize available resources within the internal and external environment for the attainment of organizational or societal goals (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leadership> 9/28/2011). As a social influencing process for the attainment of goals, a leader becomes the most influential person in an organization. He provides direction, guides group activities and ensures that group objectives are attained. Leadership is an important aspect of managing and the essence of leadership is followership (Heller and Van Til, 1982; Kotter, 1990). Wehrich and Kootz (1993) defined leadership as influence, that is, the art or process of influencing people so that they will strive willingly and enthusiastically towards the achievement of group goals.

Leaders envision the future; they inspire organization. Leaders must instill values – whether they be concern for quality, honesty or calculated risk taking or concern for employees (Main, 1987). According to Wehrich and Koontz (1993), every group of people that performs near its total capacity has some person as its head who is skilled in the art of leadership. To them, this skill seems to be a compound of at least four major ingredients.

- a. The ability to use power effectively and in a responsible manner,
- b. The ability to comprehend that human beings have different motivation forces at different times and in different situations,
- c. The ability to inspire, and
- d. The ability to act in a manner that will develop a climate conducive to responding to and arousing motivation.

Researchers attempting to assess the behaviour most characteristic of leaders in sport and physical activity have identified task – and – person – orientations. However, because of the unique nature of sport and physical activity and its specific leadership demands, a greater number and type of coaching behaviours have been identified. A very good example is the Leadership Scale for Sports (LSS) presented by Chelladurai and Saleh (1980) and Chelladurai and Carron (1981). This scale presents five kinds of coaching behaviours preferred by athletes.

Training behaviour represents the task – oriented responses of coaches, social support and rewarding behaviours, the person – oriented ones, and

democratic and autocratic behaviours reflect decision styles. The leadership style adopted by a coach could determine the overall performance of his athletes. According to Chelladurai (1990), all coaches engage in these behaviours while carrying out their leadership function. Each behaviour has a different impact upon motivation, performance and satisfaction.

Leadership style is a critical variable underlying team success (Onifade, Ayodabo & Omidiran, 1990). Leadership in a sport setting could be explained to mean the amount of influence a coach has on his athletes (Straub, 1980). A good coach must provide effective leadership for his team because when things go wrong with a team, the coach cannot always escape some of the blames.

The methods adopted by the coach in his training will have positive or negative influence on the participant. Some investigators are studying the role of the coach in providing emotional support for athletes and the effect of this support in winning. According to Nixon and Jewett (1980) preliminary evidence suggested that coaches of very successful teams emphasize personal attention and individual emotional support. Another phenomenon which is of interest, they observed, was the extent to which long and varied experience by the coaches both as former athletes and as coaches, contributed directly to the success of their athletes. It has generally been assumed that there is a direct relationship between coaches' experience in participating and coaching and the success of their teams. Apparently, there is little or no research finding to uphold this contention.

Bucher and Krotee (2002) listed some attributes of an outstanding coach to include desirable personality and character, patience, understanding, kindness, honesty, sportsmanship, sense of right and wrong, courage, cheerfulness, affection, humour, energy and enthusiasm. To them, these are imperative and application of these attributes will go a long way to motivating his athletes to greater heights in sports. Apart from these attributes, they averred that the coach must have an ability to teach the fundamentals and strategies of the sport; the coach must be able to understand his athlete's functions at a particular level of development with full appreciation of skeletal growth, muscular development and physical and emotional limitations. He must understand the game coached. Thorough knowledge of techniques, rules and similar information is necessary.

The five kinds of coaching behaviours have some implications. There is little doubt that participants are most satisfied, most motivated and most productive in an environment which is characterized by warmth, positivism, respect and support from their coach or teacher and in which the opportunity for personal growth and skill learning is maximized (Carron, 1984). An active, involved coach, according to him, serves as a strong motivation for the group.

While there is some evidence that athletes show a preference for a more autocratic approach, this is by no means an either/or situation. Decision style would vary with the situation because there are advantages and disadvantages to any style adopted. For example, Chelladurai (1981) affirmed that four advantages are present if a participative style of decision making is utilized. Firstly, a decision arrived at by the group generally, has greater group acceptance and therefore, is implemented with less resistance.

Secondly, participation in decision making contributes to feelings of responsibility and self-determination which form the basis for intrinsic motivation. Thirdly, the information base is broader. Finally, the quality of group members is also improved because the divergent orientations of group members contribute to the increased likelihood that original and creative situations will be generated.

In spite of these advantages, Carron (1984) spotted some inherent disadvantages. One obvious demerit is the time required and, often, time is not available in sports situations. A second disadvantage arises if the problem is complex and a series of interrelated decisions are required. This would be the case when a swimming coach with a large team is permitted to enter each athlete in only limited number of events.

This study was embarked upon to ascertain whether the leadership quality and role of coaches have any effect in sports performance among Nigerian University Students.

Material and Methods

The study employed the ex-post facto study design which is undertaken after the events had taken place and the data are already in existence. In this design, the researcher, according to Asika (2004), does not in any way control or manipulate the independent variable (leadership quality and role of

coaches) because the situation for the study already existed or had already taken place.

Participants

The balloting technique was used to select nine universities from the three geo-political zones in Southern Nigeria. The participants were made up of 153 sports officials (coaches and directors of sport) and 270 students, ie male and female captains of 15 sports in the Nigerian Universities Games Association (NUGA) competition.

Instrumentation

A self-developed structured questionnaire with a modified four-point Likert Scale was used for data collection. The questionnaire consisted of two sections, "A" and "B". Section A sought information on the demographic data of respondents which included name of institution, sport participated in and the status of respondents. Section B sought information on the independent variable (leadership quality and role of coaches) of the study.

This instrument was validated by colleagues and the test-retest method was used to establish the reliability using 30 students and 4 staff of the Delta State University, Abraka who were not part of the study. The correlation of the scores yielded a correlation co-efficient of 0.90 which was considered high enough for the study.

Procedure

The researcher personally administered the questionnaire with the assistance of the directors of sports of the universities used and retrieved all of them resulting in a 100% return rate.

Statistical Analysis

Five questions were used to test the null hypothesis. The responses for each of "strongly agree" and "agree" and those for "strongly disagree" and "disagree" were added for the two categories of respondents (athletes and sports officials) after which simple statistical tools of frequencies and percentages were used. The non-parametric tool of chi-square (X^2) was used to test the null hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

The data analysis was based on the hypothesis formulated to guide the study. The hypothesis was tested from the responses of both athletes and sports officials.

Ho: There is no significant role played by the leadership quality and role of coaches in sports performance among Nigerian university students.

Table 1 shows the frequency, percentage and chi-square computation of responses on the role of leadership quality and role of coaches in sports performance among Nigerian university students. The combined percentage response of “strongly agree” and “agreed” for officials was 41.2%. The combined percentage of “strongly agreed” and “agreed” for athletes was 38.5% while that of “disagreed” and “strongly disagreed” was 61.5%. Combining both categories, the percentage for “strongly agreed” and “agreed” was 39.5% while that of “disagreed” and “strongly disagree” was 60.5%.

To test the hypothesis, the calculated chi-square value of 4.67 was matched against the critical value of 7.82. Since the calculated value is less than the critical value, the null hypothesis was retained.

Discussion

The data presented in Table 1 returned a verdict of no significance on the role played by leadership quality and role of coaches in sports performance by Nigerian university students. This finding is at variance with the reasoning of Nixon and Jewett (1980), who averred that coaches of successful teams emphasize personal attention and individual support. One cannot comprehend the success of an athlete without the input of a coach or coaches. Leadership style of a coach is a critical variable underlying team success (Onifade et al, 1990).

A finding of no significant role indicated a less embracing attitude of coaches towards the performance of athletes’ training. When coaches and athletes are adequately motivated, they become highly committed to their training, giving credence to Jeroh’s (2005) postulation that coaches and athletes in competitive sports exhibit undesirable behaviours when sports administrators show ineptitude and lack vision. An active and involved coach serves as strong motivation for his athletes (Carron, 1984).

The importance of coaching behaviour in the success of an athlete’s performance cannot be over – emphasized. The coach must have the knowledge and ability to handle his sport. A thorough knowledge of techniques, rules and similar information is necessary. There is little doubt

that athletes are most satisfied, most motivated and most productive in an environment characterized by warmth, positivism, respect and support from their coach and in which the opportunity for personal growth and skill learning is maximized (Carron, 1984). A coach is a strategist and his wealth of experience and expert knowledge are called to play in producing elite performance in athletes.

The researcher believes in a participative style of decision making by the coach because a decision arrived at by the team generally has greater team acceptance and therefore is implemented with less assistance.

Conclusion

Based on the finding, the conclusion is that there is no significant part played by leadership quality and role of coaches in sports performance among Nigerian university students.

Recommendations / implications / applications

From the study, the following recommendations are made. It is the author's belief that if properly and religiously implemented; Nigerian universities would wake up from slumber to produce elite athletes who would don the national colours in international sports competitions.

- (i) The universities should as a matter of urgency employ qualified coaches to oversee sports. The idea of having one or two coaches for all sports cannot awaken the nation's hope on universities to produce elite athletes.
- (ii) The university coaches and honorary coaches should be adequately and appropriately rewarded, particularly if they are academic staff which implies that they work in excess in terms of workload and work hours compared to some of their other colleagues in the university.
- (iii) There should be a government policy that clearly defines the position of sports in the universities. The situation as it exists now, where university sports are left to the whims and caprices of each university should not be allowed to continue. A policy statement where each university makes appropriate budgetary allocation to sports should emanate from the Committee of Vice chancellors (CVC) of Nigerian universities and enforced through the NUGA council in member universities.

- (iv) University coaches should constantly be sponsored to seminars and workshops on coaching to enable them to be abreast with current trends in their sports.

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Table 1: Frequency and chi-square (X^2) Analysis of Leadership Quality and Role of Coaches and Sports Performance Among Nigerian University Students.

Respondents	SA	A	% (SA+A)	D	SD	% D+SD	TOTAL	%
Officials	35 (35.45)	28 (24.96)	41.2	53 (43.66)	37 (46.66)	58.8	153	100
Athletes	63 (62.55)	41 (44.04)	38.5	76 (82.34)	90 (81.06)	61.5	270	100
Total	98	69	39.5	129	127	60.5	423	100

Source: Field work

NB: Expected frequencies are in parenthesis
 Calculated X^2 value = 4.67
 Degree of freedom (df) = 3
 Level of significance = 0.05
 Critical value = 7.82
 Decision = Hypothesis Retained