

PERCEIVED BIASED REFEREEING, SELF-EFFICACY AND MOOD STATES OF PLAYERS OF VISITOR TEAMS OF THE NIGERIAN AMATEUR FOOTBALL LEAGUE

Fabian O. Ugwu¹, Ike E. Onyishi²

¹Department of Psychology, Benue State University, Makurdi,

²Department of Psychology, University of Nigeria, Nsukka,
NIGERIA.

¹ fabian.ugwu@gmail.com, ² ernest.onyishi@unn.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

Perceived biased refereeing, self-efficacy and mood states of players of visitor teams of the Nigerian amateur football league was explored among 116 players of 8 amateur football clubs in Southeast Nigeria. Results of the hierarchical regression analysis showed that perceived biased refereeing is significantly and positively related with depressed mood states of the players. The results of the study equally showed that self-efficacy was negatively related with depressed mood states of the players. The study suggests that lack of fairness of game officials could truncate the development of Nigerian football, but high efficacy of the players could ameliorate this negative impact of biased refereeing.

Keywords: Biased refereeing, self-efficacy, mood states

INTRODUCTION

There has been a surge of interest in the psychology of mood and how it affects performance in sporting activities for quite some time now. Researchers (e.g., Hardy, Jones, & Gould, 1996) asserted that emotional state of individuals has become one of the key factors in determining performance in every level of sporting activity. Participation in sport can lead to negative psychological and physical consequences, especially when such individuals experience pressure from significant others in the social environment (Duda, 2001). The presence of these significant others may also impact on the mood of athletes during competitions. Authority figures in charge of sport competitions can also induce some form of positive or negative mood in individual athletes.

Sport referees are some of such figures in the game of football and they occupy a sensitive position for the smooth functioning of sport at all levels of competitions. Beside the players and coaches that occupy the most essential dimension of a sport contest, the match official is also very important in all sports. But Groot (2005) expressed a different opinion when he stated that referees are among the most important players in tournaments on equal footing with the star players entering the field of play.

One critical social environmental factor assumed to nurture the fundamental needs of players is the decisions of the referee in the field of play. Referees' position and their decisions in sport competitions are decisive. As critical as their position is, they have long been a contentious figure in the realm of professional sport (Baldwin, 2008), causing some financial and psychological damage to various clubs, their proprietors, fans and individual players. In sporting terms, only a thin line separate winning from losing and this often depend ultimately on split-second decisions taken by referees, which often determine the ultimate winner. (Groot, 2005)

There are numerous occasions during a match that the referee or his assistants can decide to favour one team over the other (e.g., to award offside when a goal is scored or not, to award a penalty or not, to give a second yellow or red card or not) (Sutter & Kocher, 2004; Dawson, Dobson, Gobbard & Wilson, 2007). Although there is lack of documented data on the performance of Nigerian referees, observations from match venues endorse that the problem is grievous and a commonplace.

To authenticate this is the fact that till date, Nigerian referees are not prominent in officiating at international football tournaments. This point to bad reputation Nigerian referees has earned for themselves for the numerous and often heinous injustices and/or partiality exhibited against a team during competitions, especially against teams playing away from home. This bias against one team over the other could impact negatively on the morale or mood states of such players, which in turn may affect their team performance adversely. The objectives of the present study is therefore to establish if perceived biased refereeing and self-efficacy could impact on mood states of players of visitor teams of the Nigerian amateur football league.

The players' confidence, which is weighed on a balance by this factor, may stem from the insufficient supply or deprivation of the basic needs necessary for enhancement of the human psyche. Thus, the Basic Needs Theory (BNT) (Ryan & Deci, 2002) which stipulates that three needs: psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness are fundamental for the nurturance and growth of the human psyche could explain this process. According to BNT, variations in need satisfaction will directly predict variations in indices of psychological and physical well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2002). Applied to the domain of sport, satisfaction of players' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness via their sport environment should lead to higher levels of confidence. Conversely, deprivation of these basic needs may lead to low levels of confidence. Referees' decisions could make any team lose matches despite their quality of play, and the worry of every team before any game is whether they would get a fair officiating from the referees that would handle the game.

Among the three most researched aspects of perceived justice: distributive, procedural and transactional; procedural justice best fits the present study. Procedural justice entails an individual's assessment of the extent to which decisions are based on fair methods and guidelines. Individuals evaluate the extent to which they feel processes used to make decisions that influence them are just (Niehoff & Moorman, 1993). Referees' decision which the players may perceive as fair or unfair is a process of achieving an outcome. Thus, this process of referee decision is within the ambit of procedural justice.

Fair process effect has been regarded as one of the most robust findings in social and organizational psychology (Collie, Bradley, & Sparks, 2002). This model posits that people react more positively when they perceive that they have experienced fair treatment, and more negatively when they perceive they have experienced injustice (van den Bos et al., 2005). Perceptions of injustice have been linked to a wide range of antisocial cognitions and behaviours in the workplace (Lind, 2001). When the fair process effect is applied in football matches, players may be more accepting of the referee decisions that go against their team if they feel that they have been treated fairly. Two different findings have been observed to be consistent in procedural justice research: that allowing people an opinion about a decision enhances their judgements of the fairness of the procedure and that deviations from expected procedure reduce perceived fairness (van den Bos, Vermunt, & Wilke, 1996).

Due to pressure the environment exerts on the referees, they are likely to treat more favourably the home team (Nevil et al., 1997). Support for the existence of the home team-

referee bias was measured in terms of the number of free kicks awarded to the home team as compared to those given to the teams playing away (Mohr & Larsen, 1998); are more inclined to add extra time when the home team is not leading the match (Sutter & Kocher, 2004). More recently, Dawson et al. (2007) found that football matches in the English Premier League from 1996 to 2003, the team playing away is more likely to face higher punishments from the referees than the home team. Although there seems to be considerable homogeneity in the reported magnitude of home advantage, but there is exception in the Netherlands professional football where Ridder, Cramer and Hopstaken (1994) provided empirical evidence that referees are not biased against the visiting teams. In Nigeria, referees have been observed to favour the home team during football matches. This has led to most teams winning most of their home games, which implies that most teams lose most of their away games.

Another attribute associated with participation in physical activity is self-efficacy. It can be defined as a person's belief in their ability and capacity to enact goal-directed behaviours within an activity context (Frederick-Recascino, 2004). Self-efficacy has been examined as a predictor of physical activity (Luszczynska et al., 2010). It is regarded as a positive resistance factor (Schwarzer, 1992) may also be critical in determining the self-confidence of football players especially when confronted with difficult challenges of playing under hostile crowd, and other forces that could induce anxiety. It could adjust the potentially negative impact of adverse conditions on work outcomes, and as well buffer the effect of any negative stimuli within the work context.

It has been observed that exposure to stressors such as the ones that emanate from social environmental factors during away games without self-efficacy to exercise adequate control can have adverse health implication (Shavit & Martin, 1987). Moreover, perceived self-efficacy can boost the negative biological reactions to short-term environmental stressors (Bandura, 1997) by eliciting an individual's emotional reactions and initiating coping behaviours (Haney & Long, 1995), buffers the negative effects of work stressors on employee psychological wellbeing (Jex & Bliese, 1999). Studies have also showed that self-efficacy is an important factor in reducing levels of distress (e.g., McCammon, Durham, Allison, & Williamson, 1988) and is associated with lower levels of traumatic stress symptoms and depression (e.g., Heinrichs et al., 2005; Regehr, Hill, Knott, & Sault, 2003). It is expected that individuals with high self-efficacy may not be adversely affected by any difficult situation the individuals may encounter in away games.

However, studies that explored factors that could alter the mood of players of visitor teams have been very scarce in literature and need to be given more empirical attention. It is hypothesized therefore that: Players' perception of biased refereeing will be positively related to mood states; self-efficacy will be negatively related to depressed mood states of players.

METHOD

Participants

The participants for the study consisted of 116 players drawn from 8 amateur football clubs in the 2010/2011 football season of the Nigeria amateur league located in the south-eastern Nigeria. Their ages ranged from 18 to 31 years, with a mean age of 24.8 years. The average tenure (years with the club) was 2.37 years, while their average job tenure is 5.82 years. Out of these 116 players that participated, 63 have their West African School Certificate (WAEC), 33 have their Ordinary National Diploma certificate (OND), and 14 have their

Higher National Diploma (HND), while only 6 of the players have their Bachelor of Science/Arts degree.

Instruments

An 8-item scale used to measure perceived biased refereeing was modified from the procedural justice subscale of the organizational justice measure developed by Colquitt (2001) to suit sport setting, where respondents were asked to rate the procedures used by the referees to arrive at their outcome in their judgement during away games. It is a 5-point Likert-type response scale that ranged from 1) to a small extent to 5) to a large extent. A Cronbach alpha of .86 was obtained for the present study. Sample item include: "To what extent have the referees applied the rules of the game consistently during away games?"

Self-efficacy was assessed with the English version of the General Self-efficacy Scale (GES) developed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995). The scale was created to assess a general sense of perceived self-efficacy with the aim of predicting coping with daily hassles as well as adaptation after experiencing all kinds of stressful life events (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). Responses for the scale are made on a 4-point scale ranging from 1) not at all true to 4) exactly true. Cronbach's alpha of .88 was obtained for the current study. Sample item include: "I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough,"

Mood states of the players was assessed with the shortened version of the Profile of Mood States - Adults (POMS-A) developed by McNair, Lorr and Droppleman (1971) to measure the mood states of adults in sports environment. The POMS-A describes six sub-components of the overall mood construct: Anger, Confusion, Depression, Fatigue, Tension and vigour. The scale is a set of 24 adjectives designed in a 5 point Likert-type response format ranging from 0) not at all to 5) extremely. Cronbach alpha of .83 of the instrument was obtained for the present study. Sample adjectives include: "Panicky," "Worried".

Procedure

The instruments were administered to 169 players from 8 football clubs at their various training venues. Participation in the study was voluntary. Anonymity was promised and adhered to. Out of 169 players only 116 players indicated interest to participate in the study, which was conducted 3 hours to the teams' engagement in away games. A total of 116 questionnaires were administered and 100% return rate was achieved, and all were used for data analysis.

RESULTS

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and inter-correlations among studied variables

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>
1 Mood states	12.71	1.80	1						
2 Age	21.89	1.91	.06	1					
3 Education	1.22	.41	-.01	.17*	1				
4 Team tenure	2.41	.84	-.02	.06	.32**	1			
5 Job tenure	2.15	.92	.01	-.14*	-.38**	-.42**	1		
6 Biased Refereeing	4.84	.88	.42**	.04	-.09	.10	.12	1	
7 Self-efficacy	6.03	1.03	-.38**	-.08	-.18*	.05	.23*	.19*	1

Key: * = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .001$

Note: A total of 116 football players completed the questionnaires. Age (1 = young, 2 = old); organizational tenure (1 = short, 2 = long); Job tenure (1= short, 2 = long); Education (1 = low, 2 = high). Perceived biased refereeing and self-efficacy are coded so that higher scores indicated higher perceptions of biased refereeing and self-efficacy.

The results of the correlation analyses show that age ($r = .06$), education ($r = -.01$), team tenure ($r = -.02$), and job tenure ($r = .01$) were not significantly related to mood states of the participants. Perceived biased refereeing was positively related to mood states ($r = .42$, $p < .001$). The results also showed that self-efficacy was negatively related to mood states of the respondents ($r = -.38$, $p < .001$).

Table 2. Hierarchical regression results

Variables	Steps		
	1	2	3
Age	0.06	0.03	0.01
Education	-0.01	0.04	-0.03
Team tenure	-0.02	-0.11	-0.02
Job tenure	0.01	-0.07	0.05
Biased Refereeing		0.45***	0.51***
Self-efficacy			-0.48***
R ²	0.00	0.19	0.40
R ² Change	0.00	0.19	0.21
F Change	F (4,111)= 0.12	F (1,110)= 25.53	F (1,109)= 37.46
F Value	F (4,111)= 0.12	F (5,110)= 5.22	F (6,109)= 12.04

Key: *** = $P < .001$

The results of the hierarchical regression analysis showed that none of the control variables tested in the study had a statistically significant relationship with mood states of players. The results show that perceived biased refereeing predicted mood states of the participants ($\beta = .45$, $p < .001$). Perceived biased refereeing contributed 19% to the variance in mood states of the players. Consistent with hypothesis 2, self-efficacy predicted mood states of the participants ($\beta = -.48$, $p < .001$). Self-efficacy contributed 40% to the unique variance in mood states of the participants.

DISCUSSION

Perception of biased refereeing was positively related with depressed mood states of football players. These results might be due to the fact that biased refereeing is strongly entrenched in the Nigeria amateur football league to the extent that it impacted adversely on their mood, especially before away games. This finding seems to be consistent with previous findings (Snyder & Purdy, 1985; Courneya, 1990), which linked poor refereeing with games outcome. These results also corroborate Nevill et al. (1997) who found significant impact of biased officiating with performances in sport contests.

The result of the study also showed that self-efficacy significantly and negatively impacted on the players' depressed mood states. The role of self-efficacy as a buffer in times of difficulty has long been established and this finding has further strengthened that fact. The result agrees with Bandura (1982) who found that perceived self-efficacy helps to account for a wide variety of individual behaviours, including: changes in coping behaviour produced by different modes of influence, levels of physiological stress reactions, self-regulation, achievement strivings, growth of intrinsic interest, and choice of career pursuits. It is also consistent with Lent, Brown and Larkin (1987) who showed that employees who report perceptions of personal efficacy cope better when faced with change and persist at performing tasks longer, even in the face of adversity.

The result also seems to be consistent with that of Jex and Bliese (1999) that self-efficacy buffers the negative effects of work stressors on employee psychological wellbeing; and also with (McCammon, Durham, Allison, & Williamson, 1988; Heinrichs et al., 2005; Regehr, Hill, Knott, & Sault, 2003) which showed that self-efficacy is an important factor in reducing levels of distress and is associated with lower levels of traumatic stress symptoms and depression. It is also in agreement with the study of Bandura and Schunk (1981) who found that people with strong self-efficacy beliefs exert greater efforts to master a challenge while those with weak self-efficacy beliefs are likely to reduce their efforts or even quit.

The results of the present study imply that because referees' biased officiating impact on the emotions of the players it consequently affect match outcomes through diminishing a team's quality of play. Such biased behaviour of match officials could also lead to the underdevelopment of football in Nigeria. This practice has become so pervasive that spectators have turned their back against the country's local league in preference to foreign football. This also might have been responsible for the mass exodus of Nigeria players to other countries in search of justice and fair play. This may have made Nigeria league less attractive to the detriment of football development in Nigeria. It also has led to financial losses on the side of football club's proprietors and various governments that often sponsor football clubs.

Despite the various contributions of the present study, to football development in Nigeria, it has some shortcomings. First is the problem associated with survey research, lack of ability to establish causation. Experimental or longitudinal studies could be adopted in future studies to establish this. Also associated with the present study is the problem of common method bias, which often resulted from single source of data. Multiple sources of data should be considered in future studies such as reports from colleagues or from team official. This will cushion any bogus scores from participants.

It can therefore be concluded that effectiveness of every football league in the world is a function of the excellent performance of the officials in the field of play. Although the situations under which referees apply these rules are often difficult to attain perfection, average performance can make a significant impact in the development of football in Nigeria.

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