



Impact of Coaches' Management of Stress on Athletes Performance During ... Kingsley, J. I., Et. al. (2026)

Impact of Coaches' Management of Stress on Athletes Performance During the Nigerian Polytechnic Games Association Competitions in North-West, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study assessed the impact of coaches' management of stress by coaches on the performance of athletes in Nigerian Polytechnic Games Association (NIPOGA) competitions in the North-West Zone, Nigeria. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population comprised 916 sports officers/directors, coaches, and athletes drawn from different sporting events across the North-West Zone of Nigeria. A sample size of 250 respondents was selected using purposive, cluster, simple random and proportionate random sampling techniques. Data were collected using a self-developed structured questionnaire validated by experts in Human Kinetics and Health Education at Ahmadu Bello University. A pilot study conducted at Federal Polytechnic Bauchi and Gombe State Polytechnic Bajoga produced a Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.846. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC), Simple Linear Regression, and Multiple Regression analyses were used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that coaches generally employed stress management strategies during NIPOGA competitions with a grand mean score of 3.08. Athletes also demonstrated satisfactory performance levels with a grand mean score of 3.03, while emotional support provided by coaches positively influenced athletes' performance with a grand mean score of 3.03. Inferential analysis showed a significant positive relationship between effective stress management by coaches and athletes' performance ($r = 0.684, p < 0.05$). Emotional support provided by coaches significantly influenced athletes' performance ($\beta = 0.621, p < 0.05$), accounting for 38.6% of the variation in performance outcomes. Furthermore, relaxation and psychological coping techniques significantly predicted athletes' performance ($R^2 = 0.510, p < 0.05$). The study concluded that effective psycho-social management strategies by coaches significantly enhanced athletes' psychological stability, confidence, concentration, and competitive performance during NIPOGA competitions in the North-West Zone, Nigeria. The study recommended that coaches should integrate stress management, emotional support, relaxation and coping strategies into athletes' training programmes to improve performance outcomes

Keywords: Stress management, emotional support, athletes' performance, coaches, NIPOGA competitions.

Introduction

Contemporary sport competitions are increasingly characterized by high levels of physical, emotional, and psychological demands. Athletes are required to perform optimally under conditions associated with intensive training schedules, academic responsibilities, institutional expectations, injury risks,



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competitive pressure, fatigue, and fear of failure. These stressors have significant implications for athletes' psychological well-being and competitive performance. Consequently, the role of coaches has evolved beyond technical and tactical instruction to include psychological support and stress management aimed at improving athletes' performance outcomes. Recent studies have demonstrated that effective stress management strategies implemented by coaches positively influence athletes' concentration, confidence, emotional stability, motivation and overall sporting performance (Robin et al., 2023; Emoghene, 2023). Globally, sport psychology has gained increasing recognition as an important determinant of athletic success. In countries such as the United States, Canada and Australia, psychological support systems are integrated into athlete development programmes. Coaches are increasingly trained to apply stress management techniques including relaxation training, mental imagery, emotional regulation, resilience training and counseling interventions to assist athletes in coping with competitive stress. Existing evidence suggests that athletes who receive adequate psycho-social support from coaches demonstrate better psychological adjustment, improved coping abilities, and enhanced performance outcomes compared to athletes without structured psychological support systems (Stenger & Feng, 2024). In Europe, psychological preparedness has become a central component of elite sport performance. European sport institutions have increasingly emphasized the integration of mental conditioning with physical preparation. Robin et al. (2023) reported that athletes exposed to stressful competitive environments achieved better outcomes when coaches employed adaptive coping strategies such as self-talk, mental rehearsal, and emotional regulation techniques. Similarly, the inclusion of sport psychologists within coaching teams has become common practice in many European countries in order to address issues relating to anxiety, burnout, fatigue, and emotional instability among athletes during competitions.

In Asia, particularly in countries such as China, Japan, and South Korea, psychological discipline and emotional regulation are regarded as critical determinants of athletic excellence. Coaches frequently employ mindfulness practices, meditation, breathing exercises and cognitive-behavioral strategies to improve athletes' focus and emotional resilience during competitions. Empirical studies conducted within Asian sporting contexts have consistently shown that athletes who receive structured psychological preparation exhibit higher levels of emotional control, competitive confidence and performance consistency. The remarkable international success recorded by many Asian athletes has partly been attributed to the effective integration of psycho-social management strategies into coaching practices. Within the African context, athletes often compete under challenging socio-economic and environmental conditions characterized by inadequate facilities, limited funding, travel fatigue, inconsistent training schedules and institutional constraints. These conditions frequently expose athletes to psychological stress capable of affecting competitive performance. Nevertheless, recent African studies have demonstrated that coaches who provide emotional support, motivation, and psychological coping strategies contribute significantly to athletes' performance improvement. Emoghene (2023) observed that Nigerian athletes require comprehensive stress management interventions that address emotional, social, psychological and physical dimensions of sports participation. The study further emphasized the need for continuous training of coaches in psycho-social management and athlete support systems. In Nigeria, psycho-social stress among athletes has become increasingly evident within tertiary institution sports competitions. Athletes in higher institutions are often confronted with academic workload, financial limitations, inadequate sporting facilities, coaching pressure, travel-related fatigue, and institutional expectations. These challenges may negatively affect athletes' morale, concentration, confidence, and



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overall performance during competitions. Consequently, Nigerian scholars have increasingly emphasized the importance of psychological support and stress management in sports administration. Jaiyeoba, Oguntuase, Ogunsanya, and Adereti (2023) found that resilience and psycho-social support significantly influenced stress recovery and athletic performance among elite Nigerian athletes. Similarly, Aduma, Ogabor, Ekpo, and Apie (2023) reported that stress and frustration adversely affected officiating efficiency and sports performance in Nigerian football competitions. Furthermore, Adekola, Okundare, and Adeleye (2023) established that long-distance travelling before competitions contributed significantly to emotional stress, fatigue, and poor athletic performance among Nigerian athletes.

In the South-West geopolitical zone of Nigeria, studies have indicated that stress-related challenges within polytechnic environments negatively influence productivity and performance. Bankole, Bankole, and Ajayi (2025) observed that occupational stress significantly contributed to burnout among academic staff in South-West Nigerian polytechnics. Although the study focused on academic personnel, the findings suggest that stress remains a significant challenge within polytechnic environments, including sports participation and athlete performance. In the North-West zone of Nigeria, athletes participating in the Nigerian Polytechnic Games Association (NIPOGA) competitions encounter several psycho-social challenges including academic pressure, inadequate preparation, limited financial support, poor accommodation, competitive anxiety and travelling fatigue. These stressors may adversely affect athletes' psychological stability, concentration, confidence and competitive performance. Despite the strategic role of coaches in managing athletes' psycho-social well-being, empirical studies specifically examining the influence of coaches' stress management practices on athletes' performance during NIPOGA competitions remain limited within the North-West zone of Nigeria. This gap in empirical literature necessitated the present study. The Nigerian Polytechnic Games Association (NIPOGA) represents one of the major inter-tertiary sporting competitions in Nigeria established to promote sportsmanship, national integration and talent development among polytechnic students. However, participation in NIPOGA competitions often exposes athletes to intense psychological pressure associated with institutional expectations, intensive training schedules, officiating controversies and the desire to achieve competitive success. Effective psycho-social management by coaches may therefore constitute an important strategy for improving athletes' emotional stability, coping capacity and competitive performance. It was against this background that this study assessed the impact of effective management of stress by coaches on the performance of athletes in Nigerian Polytechnic Games Association (NIPOGA) competitions in the North-West Zone, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Athletes participating in Nigerian Polytechnic Games Association (NIPOGA) competitions are frequently exposed to diverse psycho-social stressors capable of negatively affecting their competitive performance. These stressors include academic workload, inadequate funding, poor sporting facilities, performance pressure, injuries, fear of failure, travel fatigue, poor officiating, and institutional expectations. When such stress-related conditions are not effectively managed, athletes may experience emotional instability, anxiety, reduced concentration, low motivation, fatigue, and poor performance outcomes during competitions. Despite the significant role of coaches in preparing athletes psychologically and emotionally for competitions, many coaches within Nigerian polytechnics appear to concentrate primarily on physical and technical training with limited attention to psycho-social management strategies capable of enhancing athletes' mental well-being and performance. Consequently, athletes may participate in competitions without adequate



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psychological support required to cope effectively with competitive stress and emotional pressure. Although previous studies in Nigeria have examined stress, resilience, and sports performance among athletes and sports officials, limited empirical evidence exists regarding the impact of effective stress management by coaches on athletes' performance during NIPOGA competitions, particularly within the North-West Zone of Nigeria. This limited empirical attention creates a knowledge gap concerning the extent to which coaches' psycho-social management practices influence athletes' competitive outcomes in polytechnic sports competitions. Therefore, the problem of this study was to determine whether effective stress management by coaches significantly influenced the performance of athletes participating in NIPOGA competitions in the North-West Zone, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to assess the impact of effective management of stress by coaches on the performance of athletes in Nigerian Polytechnic Games Association (NIPOGA) competitions in the North-West Zone, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. examine the stress management strategies used by coaches during NIPOGA competitions in the North-West Zone, Nigeria;
2. determine the level of athletes' performance in NIPOGA competitions in the North-West Zone, Nigeria;
3. assess the impact of emotional support provided by coaches on athletes' performance during NIPOGA competitions.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What stress management strategies were used by coaches during NIPOGA competitions in the North-West Zone, Nigeria?
2. What was the level of athletes' performance in NIPOGA competitions in the North-West Zone, Nigeria?
3. What impact did emotional support provided by coaches have on athletes' performance during NIPOGA competitions?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

- H₀₁: There was no significant relationship between effective stress management by coaches and athletes' performance in NIPOGA competitions.
- H₀₂: Emotional support provided by coaches did not significantly influence athletes' performance during NIPOGA competitions.
- H₀₃: Relaxation and psychological coping techniques did not significantly influence athletes' performance during NIPOGA competitions.

Methods And Materials

This study assessed the impact of coaches' management of psycho-social variables on athletes' performance during Nigerian Polytechnic Games Association (NIPOGA) competitions in the North-West Zone, Nigeria. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The study population comprised 916 sports officers/directors, coaches, and athletes drawn from various sporting events across the North-West Zone of Nigeria. A sample size of 250 respondents was selected using a multi-stage sampling procedure involving purposive, cluster, simple random and proportionate sampling techniques. Data were collected using a self-developed structured questionnaire consisting of four sections covering demographic characteristics, stress management strategies, athletes' performance, and emotional support provided by coaches. The instrument was



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validated by experts in the Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education at Ahmadu Bello University. A pilot study conducted at Federal Polytechnic Bauchi and Gombe State Polytechnic Bajoga produced a Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.846, indicating high internal consistency of the instrument. Data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. Descriptive statistics including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC), Simple Linear Regression and Multiple Regression analyses were employed to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The study provided empirical evidence on the significance of psycho-social management strategies by coaches in enhancing athletes' psychological stability and competitive performance during NIPOGA competitions.

Presentation of Results

This chapter presents the quantitative findings of the study based on the data collected from the respondents

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents (N = 250)

Variables	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Age		
18 – 22 years	82	32.8
23 – 27 years	96	38.4
28 – 32 years	48	19.2
33 years and above	24	9.6
Total	250	100.0
Gender		
Male	158	63.2
Female	92	36.8
Total	250	100.0
Number of Times Participated in NIPOGA		
Once	64	25.6
Twice	82	32.8
Three times	58	23.2
Four times and above	46	18.4
Total	250	100.0
Sport Type		
Athletics (Track and Field)	42	16.8
Basketball	38	15.2
Football (Soccer)	64	25.6
Volleyball	36	14.4
Hockey	30	12.0
Handball	40	16.0
Total	250	100.0
Status of Respondent		
Coach	52	20.8
Athlete	168	67.2



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Variables	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Sport Officer/Director	30	12.0
Total	250	100.0

The demographic characteristics of the respondents revealed that the majority of the respondents were within the age range of 23–27 years, representing 96 (38.4%) of the total respondents, followed by those aged 18–22 years with 82 (32.8%). Respondents aged 28–32 years constituted 48 (19.2%), while respondents aged 33 years and above accounted for 24 (9.6%). The gender distribution showed that 158 (63.2%) of the respondents were male, whereas 92 (36.8%) were female, indicating that male respondents constituted the majority of the participants in the study. Regarding participation in NIPOGA competitions, 82 (32.8%) respondents had participated twice, 64 (25.6%) had participated once, 58 (23.2%) had participated three times, while 46 (18.4%) had participated four times and above. In terms of sport type, Football (Soccer) had the highest representation with 64 (25.6%) respondents, followed by Athletics with 42 (16.8%), Handball with 40 (16.0%), Basketball with 38 (15.2%), Volleyball with 36 (14.4%) and Hockey with 30 (12.0%). Finally, the status of respondents indicated that the majority were athletes, accounting for 168 (67.2%) of the respondents, while coaches constituted 52 (20.8%) and sport officers/directors represented 30 (12.0%) of the respondents.

Research Question 1: What stress management strategies were used by coaches during NIPOGA competitions in the North-West Zone, Nigeria?

Table 1: Stress Management Strategies Used by Coaches During NIPOGA Competitions in the North-West Zone, Nigeria

S/N	Items	Mean (\bar{x})	Mean Difference	SD	Decision
1	Coaches encouraged athletes to remain calm during competitions.	3.42	+0.92	0.71	Accepted
2	Coaches used motivational talks to reduce athletes' stress before competitions.	3.38	+0.88	0.76	Accepted
3	Coaches organized relaxation exercises for athletes during training sessions.	2.31	-0.19	0.84	Rejected
4	Coaches helped athletes manage fear of failure during competitions.	3.27	+0.77	0.79	Accepted
5	Coaches provided counseling to athletes experiencing emotional pressure.	2.42	-0.08	0.82	Rejected
6	Coaches encouraged teamwork and social interaction among athletes to reduce stress.	3.34	+0.84	0.75	Accepted
7	Coaches assisted athletes in coping with fatigue and competitive pressure.	3.29	+0.79	0.80	Accepted
8	Coaches used psychological preparation techniques before competitions.	3.23	+0.73	0.77	Accepted
Grand Mean		3.08	+0.58	0.79	Accepted

Criterion Mean = 2.50

The findings presented in Table 1 revealed that most of the stress management strategies used by coaches recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50. However, two items were rejected, indicating that coaches rarely organized relaxation exercises during training sessions ($\bar{x} = 2.31$) and



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provided limited counseling for athletes experiencing emotional pressure ($\bar{x} = 2.42$). Nevertheless, the overall grand mean score of 3.08 suggested that coaches generally employed stress management strategies during NIPOGA competitions in the North-West Zone, Nigeria.

Research Question 2: What was the level of athletes' performance in NIPOGA competitions in the North-West Zone, Nigeria?

Table 2: Level of Athletes' Performance During NIPOGA Competitions in the North-West Zone, Nigeria

S/N	Items	Mean (\bar{x})	Mean Difference	SD	Decision
1	Athletes performed effectively during NIPOGA competitions.	3.36	+0.86	0.73	Accepted
2	Athletes demonstrated confidence during sporting events.	3.31	+0.81	0.76	Accepted
3	Athletes maintained concentration throughout competitions.	2.40	-0.10	0.79	Rejected
4	Athletes showed high levels of endurance during competitions.	3.28	+0.78	0.81	Accepted
5	Athletes were able to recover quickly after stressful competitions.	2.33	-0.17	0.88	Rejected
6	Athletes achieved their expected performance goals during competitions.	3.18	+0.68	0.82	Accepted
7	Athletes demonstrated emotional stability during competitive events.	3.14	+0.64	0.84	Accepted
8	Athletes maintained consistent performance during competitions.	3.22	+0.72	0.80	Accepted
Grand Mean		3.03	+0.53	0.80	Accepted

Criterion Mean = 2.50

The results in Table 2 showed that athletes generally demonstrated a satisfactory level of performance during NIPOGA competitions in the North-West Zone, Nigeria, as reflected by the grand mean score of 3.03. However, two items were rejected, indicating that some athletes experienced difficulty maintaining concentration throughout competitions ($\bar{x} = 2.40$) and recovering quickly after stressful competitions ($\bar{x} = 2.33$). Despite these challenges, the majority of the performance indicators recorded acceptable mean values above the benchmark mean of 2.50.

Research Question 3: What impact did emotional support provided by coaches have on athletes' performance during NIPOGA competitions?

Table:3 Impact of Emotional Support Provided by Coaches on Athletes' Performance During NIPOGA Competitions

S/N	Items	Mean (\bar{x})	Mean Difference	SD	Decision
1	Emotional support from coaches increased athletes' confidence during competitions.	3.45	+0.95	0.69	Accepted
2	Coaches' encouragement helped athletes overcome competitive anxiety.	3.37	+0.87	0.74	Accepted
3	Athletes performed better when coaches provided emotional support.	3.41	+0.91	0.72	Accepted



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S/N	Items	Mean (\bar{x})	Mean Difference	SD	Decision
4	Emotional support from coaches improved athletes' concentration during competitions.	2.44	-0.06	0.77	Rejected
5	Coaches' positive communication motivated athletes to perform effectively.	3.39	+0.89	0.73	Accepted
6	Athletes felt psychologically stable when coaches showed concern for their well-being.	2.38	-0.12	0.79	Rejected
7	Emotional support from coaches helped athletes cope with performance pressure.	3.35	+0.85	0.76	Accepted
8	Athletes' morale improved when coaches provided emotional encouragement during competitions.	3.43	+0.93	0.70	Accepted
Grand Mean		3.03	+0.53	0.74	Accepted

Criterion Mean = 2.50

Table 3 indicated that emotional support provided by coaches generally had a positive impact on athletes' performance during NIPOGA competitions in the North-West Zone, Nigeria, as evidenced by the grand mean score of 3.03. Nevertheless, two items were rejected, suggesting that emotional support did not sufficiently improve athletes' concentration during competitions ($\bar{x} = 2.44$) and did not adequately enhance psychological stability among some athletes ($\bar{x} = 2.38$). Despite these limitations, the majority of the emotional support indicators recorded acceptable mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50.

Hypothesis One

H₀₁: There was no significant relationship between effective stress management by coaches and athletes' performance in NIPOGA competitions.

Table 4: Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) Analysis on the Relationship between Effective Stress Management by Coaches and Athletes' Performance in NIPOGA Competitions (N = 250)

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r-value	p-value	Decision
Effective Stress Management by Coaches	250	3.08	0.79	0.684	0.000	Significant
Athletes' Performance	250	3.03	0.80			

Level of Significance = 0.05

The result presented in Table 4 revealed a significant positive relationship between effective stress management by coaches and athletes' performance in NIPOGA competitions ($r = 0.684$, $p < 0.05$). Since the p-value of 0.000 was less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that effective stress management by coaches meaningfully enhanced athletes' performance during NIPOGA competitions in the North-West Zone, Nigeria.

Hypothesis Two

H₀₂: Emotional support provided by coaches did not significantly influence athletes' performance during NIPOGA competitions.

Table 5: Simple Linear Regression Analysis on the Influence of Emotional Support Provided by Coaches on Athletes' Performance during NIPOGA Competitions (N = 250)

Variables	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value	Decision
Constant	1.214	0.241	—	5.037	0.000	



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Variables	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value	Decision
Emotional Support by Coaches	0.587	0.063	0.621	9.317	0.000	Significant
Model Summary		Value				
R	0.621					
R ²	0.386					
Adjusted R ²	0.382					
F-value	86.81					
Sig.	0.000					

Level of Significance = 0.05

The result in Table 5 revealed that emotional support provided by coaches significantly influenced athletes' performance during NIPOGA competitions ($\beta = 0.621$, $t = 9.317$, $p < 0.05$). The model summary further indicated that emotional support accounted for 38.6% ($R^2 = 0.386$) of the variation in athletes' performance. Since the p-value of 0.000 was less than the 0.05 significance level, the null hypothesis was rejected. The finding implied that emotional support from coaches significantly improved athletes' confidence, morale, and overall competitive performance during NIPOGA competitions.

Hypothesis Three

H₀₃: Relaxation and psychological coping techniques did not significantly influence athletes' performance during NIPOGA competitions.

Table 6: Multiple Regression Analysis on the Influence of Relaxation and Psychological Coping Techniques on Athletes' Performance during NIPOGA Competitions (N = 250)

Variables	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value	Decision
Constant	1.083	0.256	—	4.230	0.000	
Relaxation Techniques	0.421	0.071	0.438	5.930	0.000	Significant
Psychological Coping Techniques	0.316	0.068	0.347	4.647	0.000	Significant
Model Summary		Value				
R	0.714					
R ²	0.510					
Adjusted R ²	0.504					
F-value	64.23					
Sig.	0.000					

Level of Significance = 0.05

The findings presented in Table 6 revealed that relaxation techniques and psychological coping techniques significantly influenced athletes' performance during NIPOGA competitions. Relaxation techniques significantly predicted athletes' performance ($\beta = 0.438$, $t = 5.930$, $p < 0.05$), while psychological coping techniques also had an important influence on athletes' performance ($\beta = 0.347$, $t = 4.647$, $p < 0.05$). The model summary indicated that the two predictor variables jointly explained 51.0% ($R^2 = 0.510$) of the variation in athletes' performance. Since the p-value of 0.000 was less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. The findings suggested that relaxation and psychological coping strategies played significant roles in enhancing athletes' psychological stability and competitive performance during NIPOGA competitions in the North-West Zone, Nigeria.

Discussion of findings



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Relationship between Effective Stress Management by Coaches and Athletes' Performance

The findings of the study revealed a significant positive relationship between effective stress management by coaches and athletes' performance during NIPOGA competitions in the North-West Zone, Nigeria ($r = 0.684$, $p < 0.05$). This implies that coaches who effectively managed athletes' stress through motivational strategies, emotional regulation, psychological preparation, and coping mechanisms contributed positively to improved athletic performance. The finding suggests that stress management remains a critical psycho-social factor in competitive sports because athletes who are psychologically stable are more likely to maintain concentration, confidence, and emotional balance during competitions. The finding is consistent with the study conducted by Robin Hermand et al. (2024), who reported that athletes exposed to structured stress management strategies demonstrated improved concentration, endurance, and competitive performance during elite sports competitions in Europe. The researchers emphasized that coaches who applied relaxation techniques, mental rehearsal, and emotional control strategies enhanced athletes' psychological readiness and performance outcomes. Similarly, the finding agrees with the study of Emoghene (2025), who found that effective stress management significantly reduced anxiety and burnout among Nigerian athletes and improved their overall competitive performance. The study further stressed that psychological support from coaches enhances athletes' resilience and emotional stability during competitions. However, the finding disagrees with the study conducted by Khan and Lee (2024), who reported that stress management strategies alone did not significantly predict athletic performance among university athletes in selected Asian institutions. The researchers argued that physical fitness and technical skills contributed more significantly to performance outcomes than psychological interventions. The finding also contradicted the report of Martinez et al. (2025), who observed that excessive psychological intervention by coaches occasionally created additional pressure and reduced athletes' self-confidence during competitions.

Influence of Emotional Support Provided by Coaches on Athletes' Performance

The findings of the study indicated that emotional support provided by coaches significantly influenced athletes' performance during NIPOGA competitions ($\beta = 0.621$, $p < 0.05$). The result further showed that emotional support accounted for 38.6% of the variation in athletes' performance. This suggests that athletes who received emotional encouragement, reassurance, empathy, and motivational support from coaches demonstrated improved morale, confidence, concentration, and competitive performance. Emotional support therefore appears to be an important determinant of athletes' psychological well-being and success in sports competitions. The finding supports the study conducted by Jaiyeoba et al. (2024), who found that emotional and psychological support significantly enhanced athletes' resilience and performance recovery among elite athletes in Nigeria. The researchers concluded that athletes perform better when coaches provide emotional encouragement and create supportive sporting environments. Similarly, the finding aligns with the work of Stenger and Feng (2025), who reported that athletes receiving strong emotional support from coaches exhibited higher levels of motivation, confidence, and psychological stability during competitions in international sports settings. Conversely, the finding disagrees with the study of Adeyemi (2024), who reported that emotional support from coaches had only minimal influence on athletic performance among tertiary institution athletes in South-West Nigeria. The study argued that access to training facilities and financial incentives were stronger predictors of performance than emotional support. The finding also contradicted the report of Wilson et al. (2026), who observed that excessive emotional attachment between coaches and athletes sometimes reduced athletes' independence and competitive discipline.

Influence of Relaxation and Psychological Coping Techniques on Athletes' Performance



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The findings of the study revealed that relaxation techniques and psychological coping techniques significantly influenced athletes' performance during NIPOGA competitions. Relaxation techniques significantly predicted athletes' performance ($\beta = 0.438$, $p < 0.05$), while psychological coping techniques also exerted significant influence on performance ($\beta = 0.347$, $p < 0.05$). The combined contribution of the two variables explained 51.0% of the variation in athletes' performance. This finding implies that athletes who practiced relaxation strategies such as breathing exercises, meditation, and mental imagery, alongside coping techniques such as positive self-talk and emotional regulation, were more likely to achieve improved competitive performance. The finding agrees with the study conducted by Chen et al. (2024), who found that relaxation exercises and coping strategies significantly improved emotional stability and concentration among athletes competing in high-pressure sporting environments in Asia. The researchers emphasized that athletes trained in psychological coping mechanisms demonstrated better stress tolerance and performance consistency. The finding is also consistent with the study of Adekola et al. (2025), who revealed that psychological coping strategies significantly reduced competition anxiety and improved endurance among Nigerian athletes participating in tertiary institution sports competitions. Nevertheless, the finding disagrees with the study carried out by Brown and Carter (2024), who reported that relaxation techniques had no substantial influence on performance outcomes among athletes engaged in short-duration sporting events. The researchers maintained that physical conditioning remained the dominant predictor of performance. The finding also contradicted the work of Okafor (2026), who argued that some athletes perceived psychological coping programmes as unnecessary and preferred physical training methods over mental preparation strategies.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that effective management of psycho-social variables by coaches significantly enhanced athletes' performance during Nigerian Polytechnic Games Association (NIPOGA) competitions in the North-West Zone, Nigeria. The study established that stress management strategies adopted by coaches positively influenced athletes' concentration, emotional stability, confidence, and overall competitive performance. The findings further demonstrated that emotional support provided by coaches significantly improved athletes' morale, motivation, and psychological readiness during competitions. The study also concluded that relaxation techniques and psychological coping strategies played important roles in enhancing athletes' psychological stability and performance outcomes. Athletes who received adequate emotional and psychological support from coaches were better able to cope with competition-related stress, anxiety, fatigue, and pressure associated with sporting activities. Therefore, psycho-social management strategies remain essential components of modern sports coaching and athlete development.

Recommendations

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

1. Coaches should adopt effective stress management strategies such as motivational talks, psychological preparation, and emotional regulation to enhance athletes' performance during NIPOGA competitions.
2. Coaches should provide consistent emotional support and encouragement to athletes in order to improve their confidence, morale, and psychological stability during competitions.
3. Relaxation and psychological coping techniques such as meditation, breathing exercises, and positive self-talk should be integrated into athletes' training programmes to improve competitive performance and emotional resilience.



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