

MUSIC AS A TOOL FOR MENTAL PREPARATION: PRE-COMPETITION RITUALS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL READINESS AMONG NIGERIAN ATHLETES

Ochor, Daniel Chinonso

Department of Sport and Exercise Science, Faculty of Education, University of Port Harcourt

Corresponding Author: Ochor, Daniel Chinonso

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of music as a tool for mental preparation among Nigerian athletes, focusing on the types and genres of music incorporated, the psychological effects on athletes' mental states, and the influence of cultural and socio-musical factors. Using a descriptive survey design, data were collected from a purposive sample of 267 competitive Nigerian athletes through structured questionnaires. Descriptive statistical tools, including percentages and means, were employed to analyze responses related to music preferences, listening frequency, psychological impacts, and cultural significance. Findings reveal that 85% of athletes use music regularly in their pre-competition routines, with Afrobeat (70%), gospel (50%), and hip-hop/rap (40%) being the most preferred genres. Athletes listen primarily in English (60%) and indigenous languages such as Yoruba (45%) and Pidgin English (30%). Music's psychological effects were significant, with over 75% of respondents agreeing that music reduces anxiety, enhances motivation, improves focus, regulates emotions, and boosts confidence. Cultural factors strongly influence music choice; 75% consider Nigerian cultural music more effective than non-Nigerian genres, and half of the participants use music as part of team rituals. A majority (78%) believe culturally relevant music contributes to better athletic performance. These results underscore the importance of culturally tailored music interventions in sport psychology, recommending integration of indigenous musical styles into mental preparation strategies. The study highlights the need for personalized and culturally sensitive approaches to maximize music's motivational and emotional benefits, thereby enhancing athletes' psychological readiness and performance. This research contributes valuable insights into the culturally embedded practices of Nigerian athletes and their implications for holistic athlete development.

Keywords: Music, Mental Preparation, Pre-Competition Rituals, Psychological Readiness, Nigerian Athletes

Introduction

Music, as a multidimensional phenomenon, profoundly shapes human experience by influencing emotions, cognition, behavior, and physiological responses. Juslin and Sloboda (2010) define music as “an organized sound pattern that evokes aesthetic, emotional, and cognitive responses,” highlighting its complex impact on the human psyche. More recent studies have confirmed that music engages widespread neural networks involved in emotion regulation, memory, attention, and motor coordination (Koelsch, 2018; Zatorre & Salimpoor, 2013). These neuropsychological effects underpin music's increasing application as a

psychological tool within sports contexts to optimize athlete performance and mental readiness.

Sport psychology recognizes mental preparation as a crucial factor for peak athletic performance. Weinberg and Gould (2019) define mental preparation as the psychological readiness athletes cultivate to optimize their focus, motivation, emotional control, and confidence. Among various mental skills training techniques, music has emerged as an accessible, cost-effective, and non-invasive intervention that enhances arousal regulation, mood modulation, and attentional focus (Karageorghis & Priest, 2012; Terry et al., 2020). It is now well established that athletes strategically use music as part of their pre-competition rituals to psych up or calm down, manage competitive anxiety, and enter flow states conducive to optimal performance (Baltzell & Akhtar, 2014; Parker et al., 2021).

The historical use of music for enhancing physical and psychological performance extends back to ancient civilizations. Ancient Greek athletes are documented to have used rhythmic chants and musical accompaniment during training and competitive events to boost morale, synchronize movement, and foster psychological cohesion (Hanna, 1987; Pollock, 2014). The connection between music and physical exertion has since been validated through empirical research demonstrating music's ability to reduce perceived exertion, increase endurance, and synchronize motor actions (Karageorghis et al., 2018). Over the past few decades, the scientific community has shown a growing interest in music as a psychophysiological enhancer, especially as a non-pharmacological tool to optimize arousal, motivation, and cognitive control across diverse sporting domains (Terry et al., 2020; Bishop et al., 2019).

Within the Nigerian context, music is deeply embedded in cultural expression and social identity. Nigeria's rich musical heritage spans indigenous traditional rhythms such as Afrobeat, Fuji, Juju, and Highlife, alongside vibrant contemporary genres including gospel and hip-hop (Ojo, 2015; Adeyemi, 2020). These diverse forms resonate widely with Nigerian athletes, who often incorporate culturally meaningful music into their training and competition preparation routines (Ibekwe, 2021). Despite this cultural centrality, scholarly research specifically investigating how Nigerian athletes employ music for psychological readiness remains scant. The bulk of existing literature originates from Western populations, emphasizing general benefits such as mood enhancement, anxiety reduction, and improved motivation (Karageorghis et al., 2018; Bishop et al., 2019). These studies also suggest that music's tempo, rhythm, and lyrical content significantly influence arousal levels and

emotional states, thereby affecting performance outcomes (Hutchinson et al., 2014; Gomez & Danuser, 2023).

Nevertheless, important debates persist regarding the optimal musical characteristics and the highly individualized nature of music's psychological effects on athletes (Karageorghis & Terry, 2022). The question of cultural relevance has been highlighted in recent years, with scholars calling for more culturally contextualized investigations to better understand how socio-cultural identity and indigenous music forms influence athlete psychology (Chen et al., 2021; Adeyemi & Onifade, 2023). Furthermore, there is a lack of research on how Nigerian athletes reconcile globalized popular music trends with local traditions in their pre-competition rituals, and how these choices impact psychological readiness and athletic performance.

This gap is particularly significant given Nigeria's unique socio-cultural dynamics, where music serves not only entertainment but also spiritual and communal functions (Ekwueme, 2022). The interplay between cultural identity, music, and sport psychology warrants deeper exploration to inform interventions tailored to Nigerian athletes lived experiences. Moreover, the role of music in managing sport-related stress, fostering resilience, and facilitating recovery remains underexplored within this setting.

This study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by focusing explicitly on Nigerian athletes' use of music as a tool for mental preparation. It seeks to capture athletes lived experiences and perspectives, exploring how indigenous music traditions and contemporary genres inform their psychological readiness and pre-competition rituals. Such insights will enrich the global discourse by providing culturally grounded evidence and recommendations.

In my professional opinion, acknowledging and integrating culturally embedded musical practices in sport psychology can significantly enhance the efficacy of mental preparation strategies. Tailored approaches that respect indigenous musical heritage and contemporary tastes not only support psychological resilience and competitive readiness but also promote holistic athlete well-being. This culturally sensitive paradigm aligns with emerging trends in sport psychology emphasizing personalized and context-specific interventions (Jones et al., 2023).

Statement of the Problem

Despite the widespread recognition of music as a powerful psychological tool that enhances mental preparation and athletic performance globally, there remains a significant gap in understanding how Nigerian athletes specifically use music within their pre-competition rituals. While extensive research from Western contexts demonstrates that music can improve mood, regulate arousal, and boost motivation, these findings may not fully apply to Nigerian athletes due to the country's unique cultural landscape and rich indigenous music traditions.

In Nigeria, music is deeply intertwined with cultural identity, spirituality, and social cohesion, yet little is known about how these cultural dimensions influence athletes' psychological readiness and use of music as a mental preparation tool. Furthermore, there is limited empirical evidence regarding the types of music Nigerian athletes prefer, how these choices affect their emotional states and focus, and the ways in which music integrates with other psychological strategies to enhance performance.

This lack of culturally specific knowledge restricts sport psychologists, coaches, and practitioners from developing tailored interventions that fully harness the motivational and emotional benefits of music for Nigerian athletes. Without this understanding, athletes may not be maximizing the potential of music to manage pre-competition anxiety, optimize arousal levels, and achieve peak performance.

Therefore, this study seeks to address these gaps by investigating how Nigerian athletes incorporate music into their mental preparation routines, the psychological effects experienced, and the cultural factors shaping these practices. The findings will contribute to a more culturally informed application of music in sport psychology, ultimately supporting enhanced psychological readiness and athletic success in the Nigerian sporting context.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the types and genres of music Nigerian athletes incorporate into their pre-competition mental preparation routines.
2. To explore the psychological effects of music on Nigerian athletes' emotional states, motivation, and focus prior to competition.

3. To investigate the influence of Nigerian cultural and socio-musical factors on athletes' music preferences and mental readiness strategies.

Research Questions

1. What types and genres of music do Nigerian athletes prefer for pre-competition mental preparation?
2. How does listening to music affect Nigerian athletes' emotions, motivation, and focus before competition?
3. In what ways do cultural and socio-musical factors influence Nigerian athletes' music choices and psychological readiness?

Literature Review

Music and Mental Preparation in Sports

Music's influence on athletes' psychological states before and during competition has garnered substantial academic attention. Karageorghis and Priest (2012) describe music as an effective psychophysical stimulant that enhances motivation, regulates arousal, and improves focus. Studies consistently demonstrate that music with specific characteristics—such as fast tempo or motivational lyrics—can reduce pre-competition anxiety and enhance mood, facilitating optimal mental states for performance (Terry et al., 2020; Bishop et al., 2019). Hutchinson et al. (2014) found that rhythmic synchronization to music enhances motor coordination and can improve endurance by diverting attention from fatigue.

Mental preparation involves techniques such as visualization, self-talk, and relaxation (Weinberg & Gould, 2019), and music increasingly complements these by acting as a mood regulator and cognitive anchor. For instance, Baltzell and Akhtar (2014) highlighted music's role in helping athletes achieve “flow state,” a highly focused and intrinsically rewarding state of performance. Parker et al. (2021) emphasize that individualized music choice is crucial, as personal preference influences emotional and motivational responses.

Cultural Context and Music Preferences

Recent research underscores the importance of cultural context in music's effectiveness within sport psychology. Chen et al. (2021) argue that athletes' socio-cultural backgrounds shape their music preferences and, consequently, the psychological impact of music

interventions. For example, in studies with Asian and African athletes, indigenous and culturally familiar music elicited stronger emotional engagement and motivation compared to generic Western pop music (Adeyemi & Onifade, 2023).

In Nigeria, music is a vital cultural expression linked to identity, spirituality, and community (Ojo, 2015; Ekwueme, 2022). Indigenous rhythms like Afrobeat and Juju are not only entertainment but also sources of collective memory and emotional connection. Ibekwe (2021) notes that Nigerian athletes often integrate these genres into their routines, finding cultural resonance that enhances mental preparation. However, empirical studies specifically exploring how these culturally embedded musical forms influence athletes' psychological readiness are scarce.

Music and Psychological Readiness in Nigerian Athletes: Gaps and Emerging Insights

While global literature offers robust evidence of music's positive psychological effects on athletes (Karageorghis et al., 2018; Bishop et al., 2019), there is a dearth of research focused on Nigerian athletes. This gap is critical because Nigeria's unique cultural, social, and musical landscape may shape how music functions in athletes' pre-competition rituals. Adeyemi and Onifade (2023) call for culturally sensitive approaches in sport psychology that integrate indigenous music traditions with contemporary practices.

Preliminary qualitative studies suggest Nigerian athletes experience increased motivation and reduced anxiety when listening to culturally familiar music (Ibekwe, 2021). Yet, quantitative data on music preferences, psychological effects, and integration with other mental preparation strategies remains limited. Moreover, socio-economic factors and access to digital music platforms may also influence music use in Nigerian sports contexts, an area largely unexplored.

Contribution of the Current Study

This study aims to bridge the existing knowledge gap by investigating how Nigerian athletes use music as a psychological preparation tool within their cultural context. By focusing on athletes' experiences and preferences, it will provide culturally grounded insights to inform sport psychology interventions. Tailoring music-based mental preparation strategies to Nigerian cultural realities promises to improve psychological readiness, emotional regulation, and ultimately, athletic performance.

Materials and Methods

This study adopted a descriptive survey design to investigate how Nigerian athletes use music as a tool for mental preparation before competitions. The descriptive survey method was chosen because it facilitates the systematic collection of detailed information on current practices, preferences, and psychological experiences related to music use among athletes. This approach enables the researcher to capture a broad picture of the phenomenon without manipulating variables, making it ideal for exploratory studies in applied sport psychology contexts.

The population targeted for this study included Nigerian athletes actively engaged in competitive sports at various levels—local, regional, national, and international. To ensure the sample reflected diverse sporting experiences and cultural backgrounds, a purposive sampling technique was employed. This allowed the researcher to deliberately select participants from multiple sports disciplines, such as athletics, football, basketball, and wrestling, to gather rich and representative data on music use in mental preparation. The sample size was determined based on accessibility and willingness of athletes to participate during the data collection period.

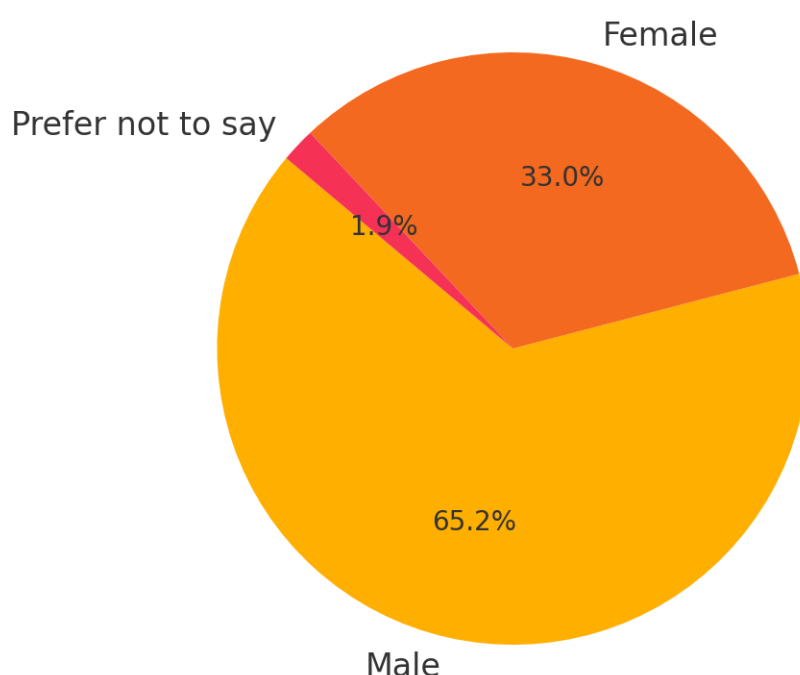
Data collection was carried out using a carefully designed structured questionnaire tailored specifically for the Nigerian sporting environment. The questionnaire was developed after an extensive review of existing literature on music and sport psychology, ensuring it addressed key dimensions such as preferred music genres, psychological effects of music on emotions, motivation, and concentration, cultural influences on music choice, and the extent to which music is integrated with other mental preparation techniques like visualization or self-talk. The instrument comprised mostly closed-ended questions and Likert-scale items to quantify attitudes and experiences, making analysis straightforward while still capturing meaningful variation. Prior to full deployment, the questionnaire was pilot-tested with a small group of athletes to verify clarity, relevance, and reliability of the items, leading to minor revisions that improved comprehension and response accuracy.

The administration of the questionnaire took place through both physical distribution during training sessions and digital dissemination via online platforms to accommodate athletes across different locations and schedules. Participants received clear instructions emphasizing confidentiality and the voluntary nature of their participation to encourage candid and

thoughtful responses. Follow-up reminders were issued to maximize response rates. For data analysis, descriptive statistical methods were employed to summarize and interpret the findings. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for categorical variables such as types of music preferred and cultural factors influencing music selection, providing a clear depiction of distribution patterns within the sample. Additionally, mean scores were computed for responses to Likert-scale questions assessing the perceived psychological impact of music on aspects like emotional regulation, motivation enhancement, and focus improvement. These measures allowed for a nuanced understanding of how strongly athletes experienced the effects of music in their mental preparation. Data processing and analysis were conducted using statistical software (such as SPSS), which facilitated organized presentation and interpretation of results through tables and charts.

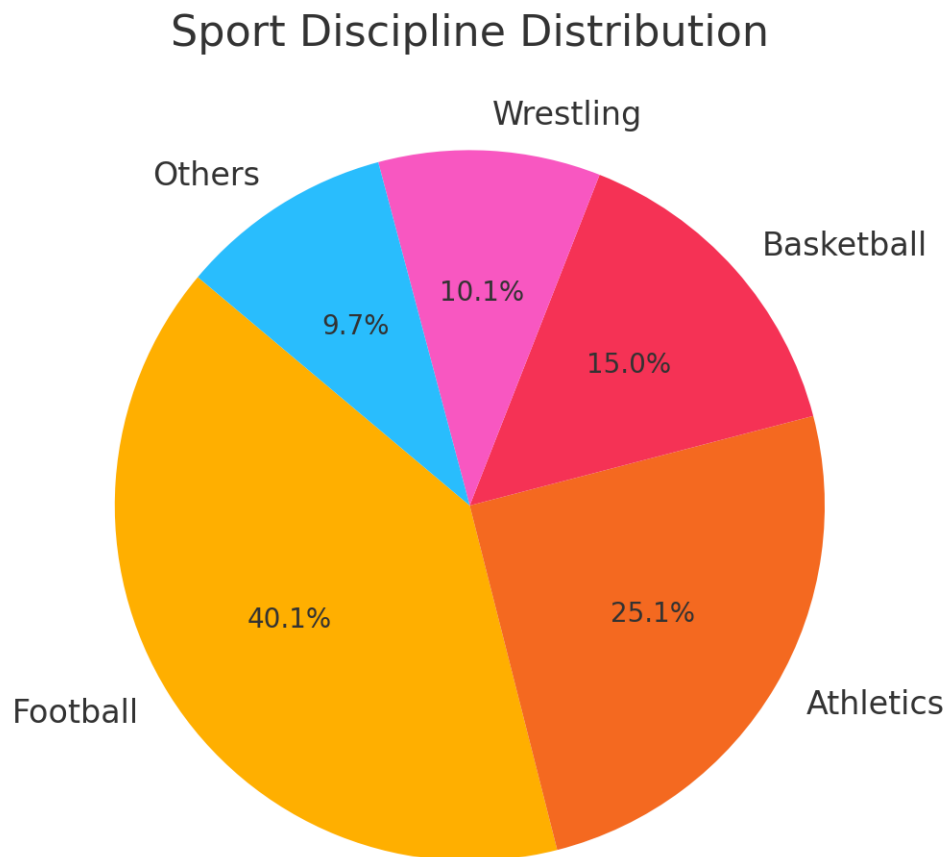
RESULTS

Gender Distribution of Sampled Nigerian Athletes



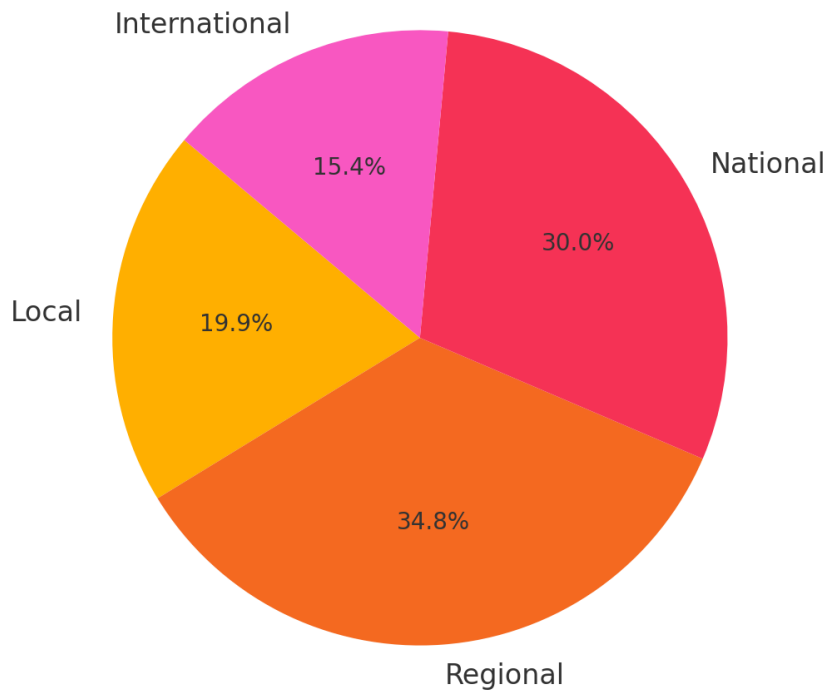
The **Gender Distribution** chart shows that the majority of the sampled Nigerian athletes are male, comprising about 65.2% of the group, while females make up nearly one-third (32.9%). A small percentage (1.9%) preferred not to disclose their gender. This distribution reflects

common trends in many competitive sports contexts where male participation tends to be higher, but the presence of a significant female athlete cohort highlights growing female involvement in Nigerian sports.



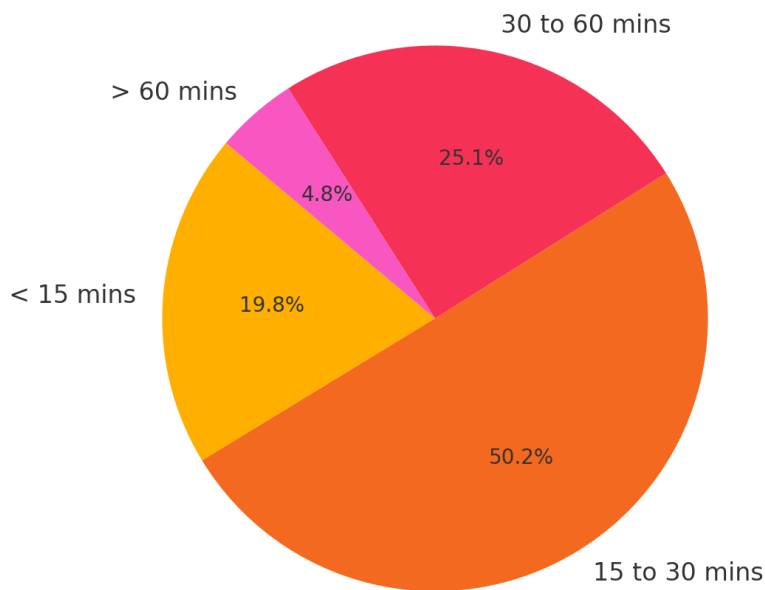
In the Sport Discipline Distribution chart, football dominates as the most popular sport among the sampled athletes, representing 40.1%, which aligns with Nigeria's national passion for the sport. Athletics follows with 25.1%, reflecting Nigeria's strong track and field presence internationally. Basketball, wrestling, and other sports account for smaller but meaningful proportions, indicating a diverse sporting environment where multiple disciplines attract competitive athletes, each potentially engaging with music differently in their preparation routines.

Level of Competition



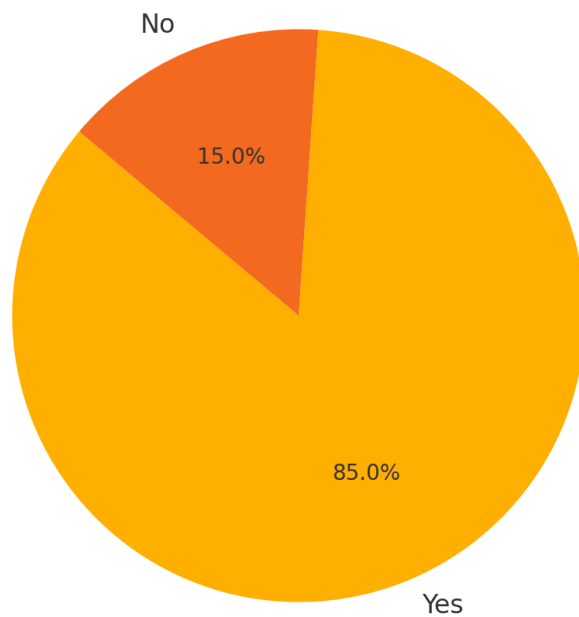
The Level of Competition chart reveals that most athletes compete at the regional (34.8%) and national (30.0%) levels, suggesting a strong presence in intermediate and high-level competitions. Local competitors make up 19.9%, while 15.3% have reached the international stage. This distribution suggests a varied competitive experience within the sample, which may influence how athletes use music in mental preparation depending on the stakes and pressures at their respective competition levels.

Duration of Music Listening Before Competition



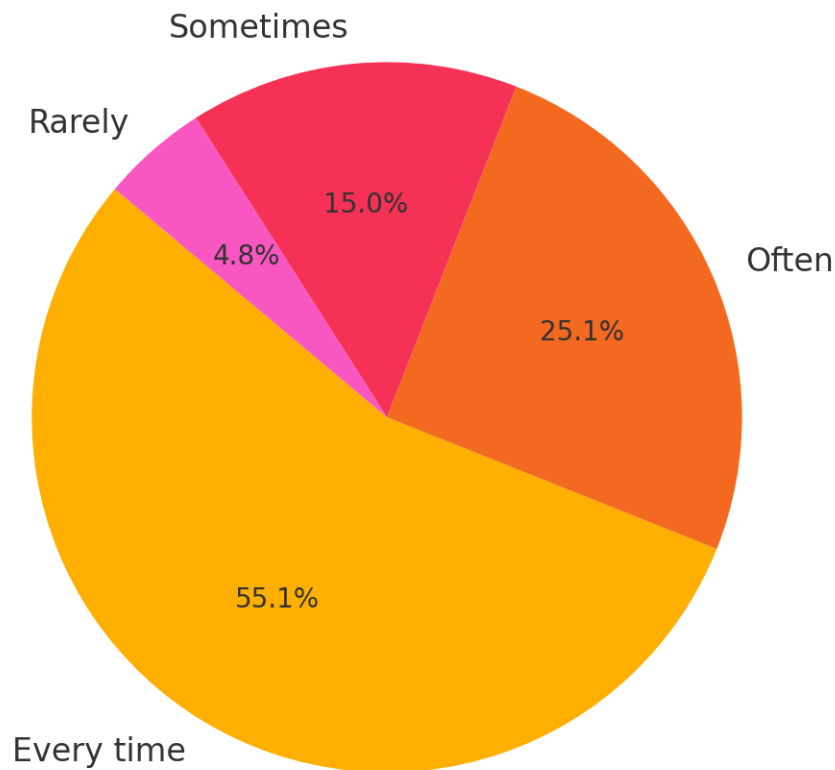
The pie chart illustrates the duration of music listening before a competition among participants. The largest portion, 50.2%, listens to music for 15 to 30 minutes, indicating this is the most common preparation time. Following this, 25.1% listen for 30 to 60 minutes, showing a significant number prefer a longer session. Meanwhile, 19.8% spend less than 15 minutes listening, suggesting a shorter routine for some. A small minority, 4.8%, listen for more than 60 minutes, highlighting that extended listening is less common. Overall, the data suggests that most competitors use music as a preparatory tool for a moderate length of time, with half dedicating between 15 to 30 minutes before competing.

Do You Listen to Music Before Competition?

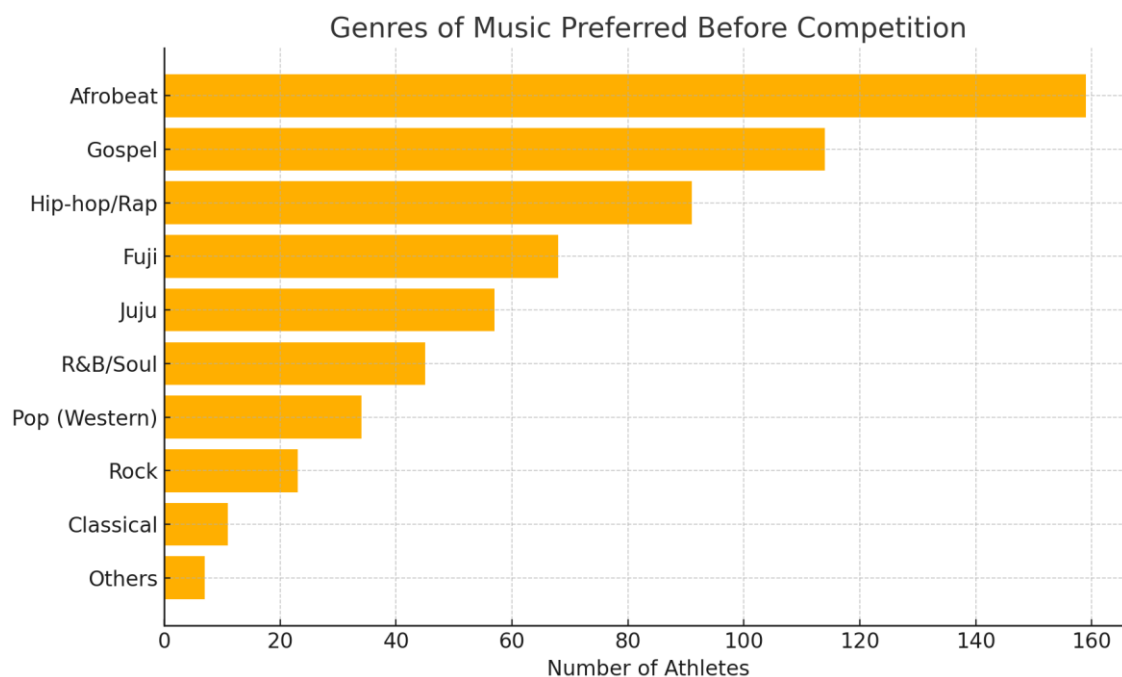


The pie chart reveals that a significant majority of participants, 85%, listen to music before a competition, while only 15% do not. This indicates that music is a widely favored method for mental preparation or motivation prior to competing. The high percentage of music listeners suggests its importance in enhancing focus, relaxation, or confidence before the event, highlighting the role of music as a common pre-competition ritual among competitors.

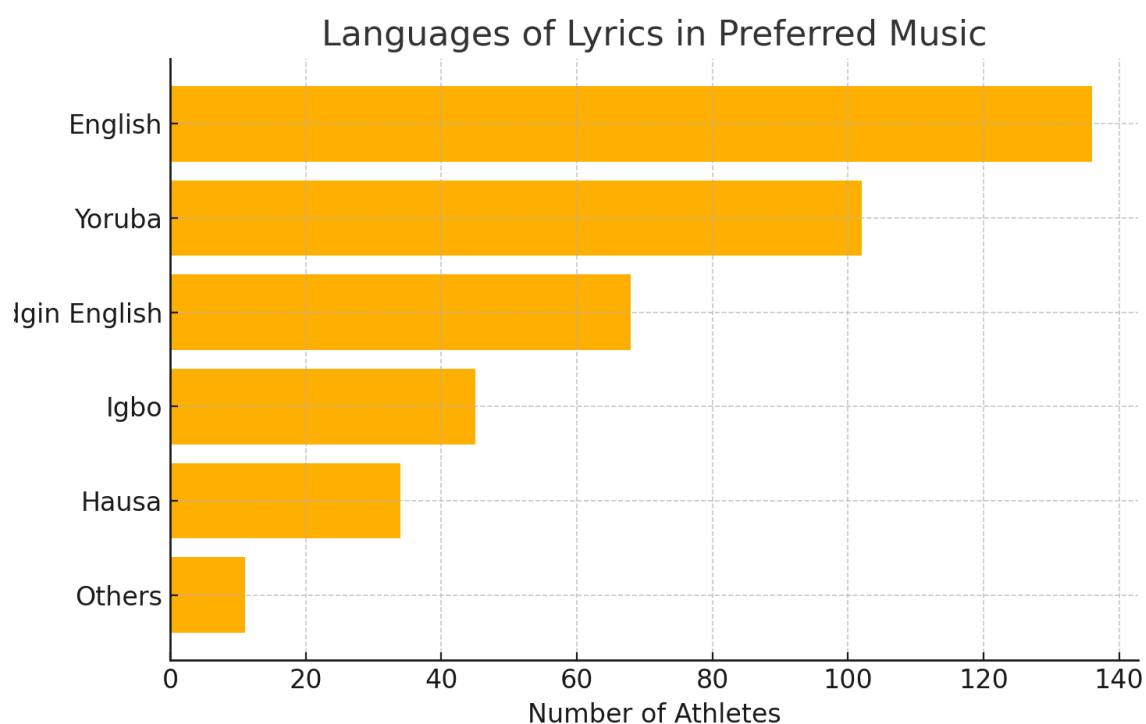
Frequency of Music Listening Before Competition



The pie chart depicting the frequency of music listening before competition shows that a majority of participants, 55.1%, listen to music every time before competing, highlighting a strong reliance on music as part of their preparation routine. Additionally, 25.1% listen often, reinforcing the importance of music for many competitors. Meanwhile, 15% sometimes engage in this practice, indicating a moderate use of music for preparation. A small group, 4.8%, rarely listen to music, suggesting that for a few, music is not a key component in their competition readiness. Overall, this data emphasizes that regular music listening is a common and valued habit among competitors.

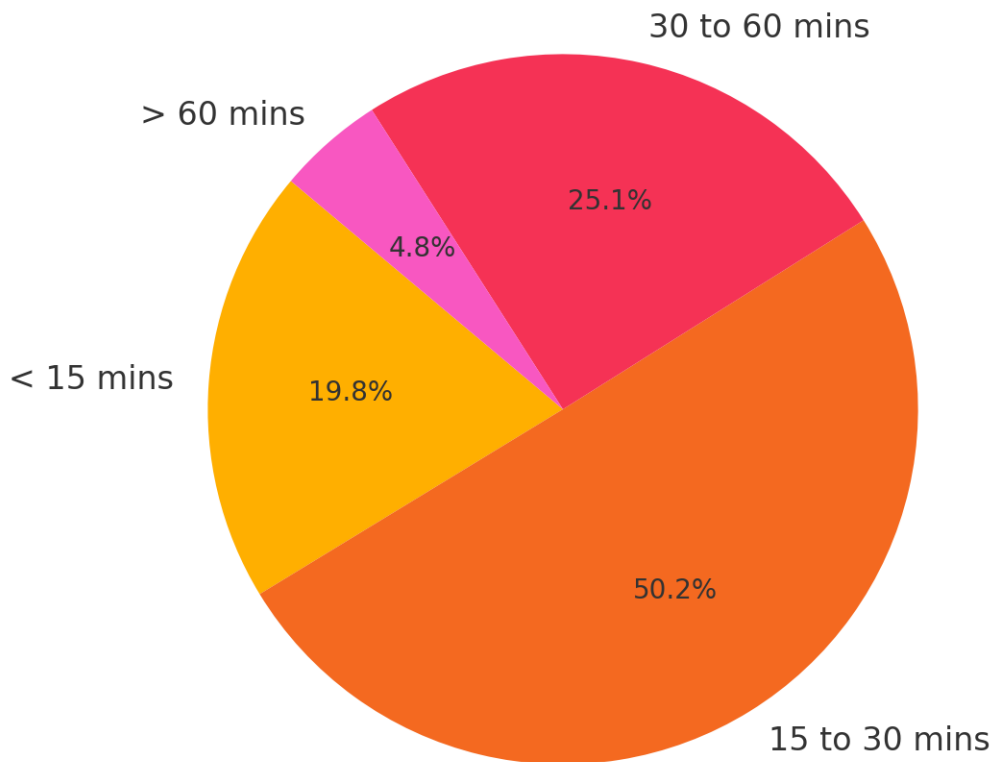


The bar chart illustrates the preferred music genres of athletes before competitions, highlighting a clear preference for Afrobeat, which tops the list with approximately 158 athletes favoring it. Gospel music is the second most popular, attracting around 114 athletes, showing its significant influence in pre-competition routines. Hip-hop/Rap follows with about 90 supporters, reflecting its broad appeal. Traditional Nigerian genres like Fuji and Juju also hold notable popularity, with roughly 68 and 58 athletes respectively. Western genres like R&B/Soul and Pop attract fewer athletes, with around 45 and 33 respectively, while Rock, Classical, and other genres are the least preferred. This data underscores the strong cultural influence on athletes' musical choices, with Afrobeat and Gospel leading as dominant motivational sounds before competitions.

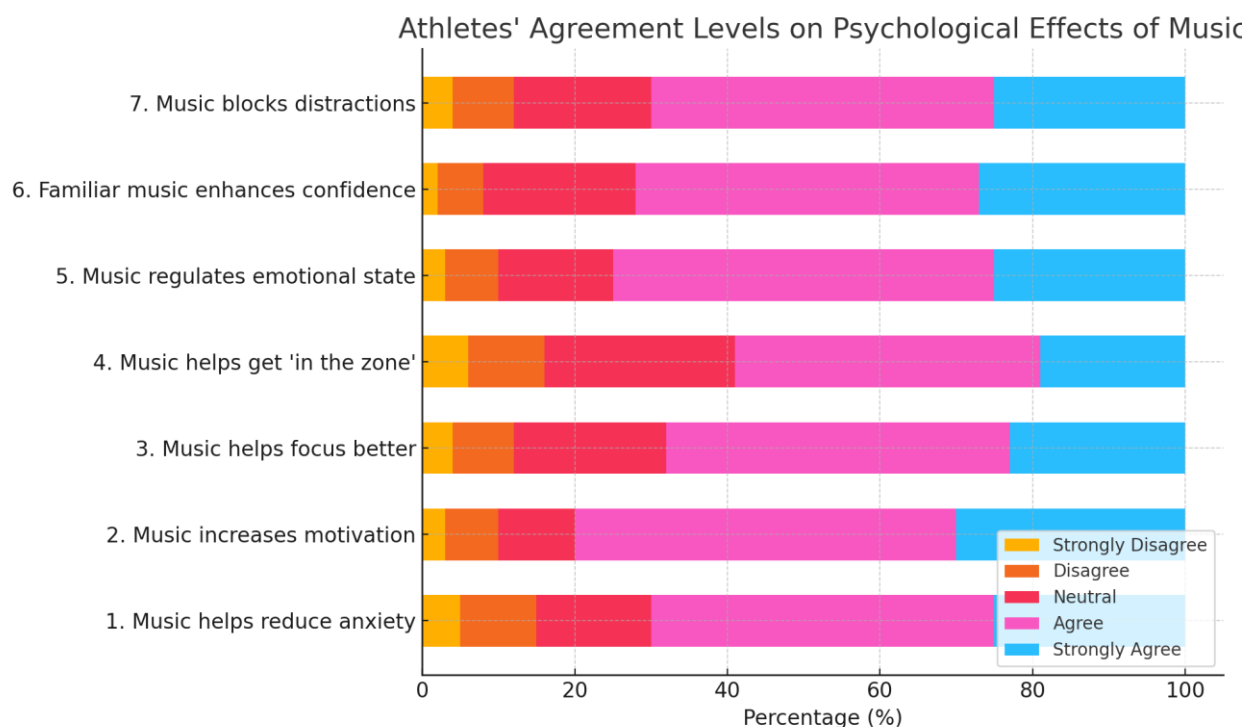


The bar chart shows the preferred languages of lyrics in music listened to by athletes before competitions. English is the most favored language, with around 136 athletes choosing it, indicating its wide accessibility and appeal. Yoruba is the second most popular language, preferred by approximately 102 athletes, reflecting its cultural significance. Pidgin English follows with about 68 athletes, showing its role as a widely understood lingua franca. Igbo and Hausa attract fewer athletes, with roughly 45 and 34 respectively, highlighting regional linguistic preferences. The category labeled "Others" has the least number of athletes, around 11, suggesting a minor presence of other languages in athletes' music choices. Overall, the chart underscores the dominance of English and major Nigerian languages in the lyrical content preferred by competitors.

Duration of Music Listening Before Competition

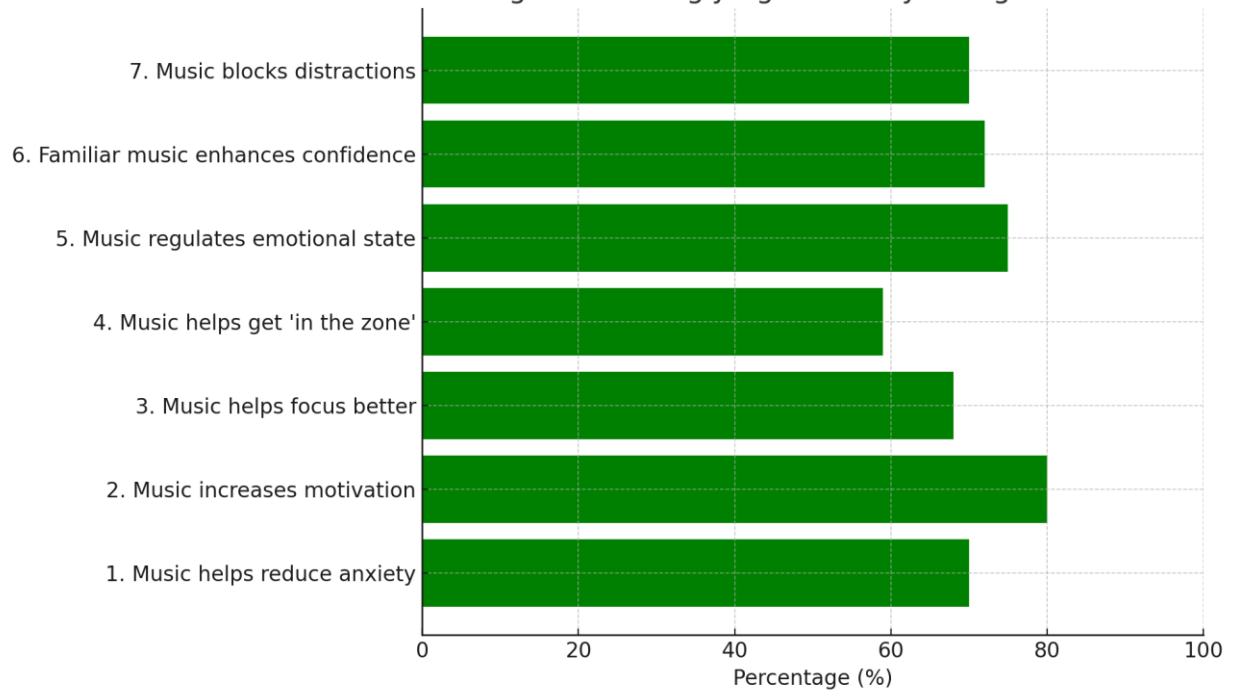


The pie chart illustrates the duration athletes spend listening to music before competitions. The majority, 50.2%, listen for 15 to 30 minutes, indicating that a moderate listening period is the most common choice. This is followed by 25.1% who listen for 30 to 60 minutes, suggesting that a substantial portion of athletes prefer a longer session. About 19.8% listen for less than 15 minutes, which may reflect a quick, focused preparation period. A small minority, 4.8%, listen for over an hour, indicating that extended music sessions before competitions are less typical. Overall, the data suggests that most athletes find an optimal preparation time between 15 and 60 minutes for their music listening routine.



The stacked bar chart illustrates athletes' levels of agreement with various psychological effects of music before competition. Across all statements, the majority of athletes either agree or strongly agree with the positive impacts of music. For instance, over 70% agree or strongly agree that music blocks distractions, enhances confidence, regulates emotional state, and helps athletes get "in the zone." Similarly, a strong consensus exists that music aids in focus, increases motivation, and reduces anxiety, with combined agree and strongly agree responses consistently exceeding 70%. Disagreement or strong disagreement is minimal for all statements, highlighting widespread recognition among athletes of music's beneficial psychological effects in competition settings. Neutral responses appear modest, indicating most athletes hold a clear opinion on these effects.

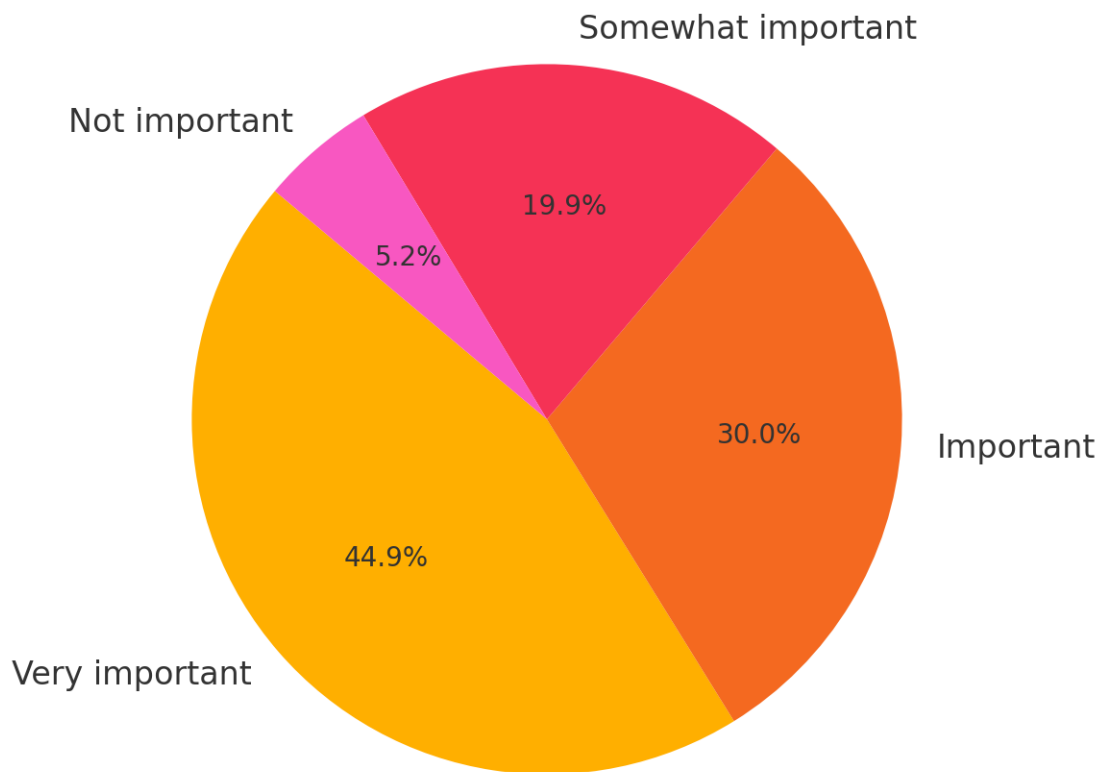
Combined Agree + Strongly Agree on Psychological Effects of Music



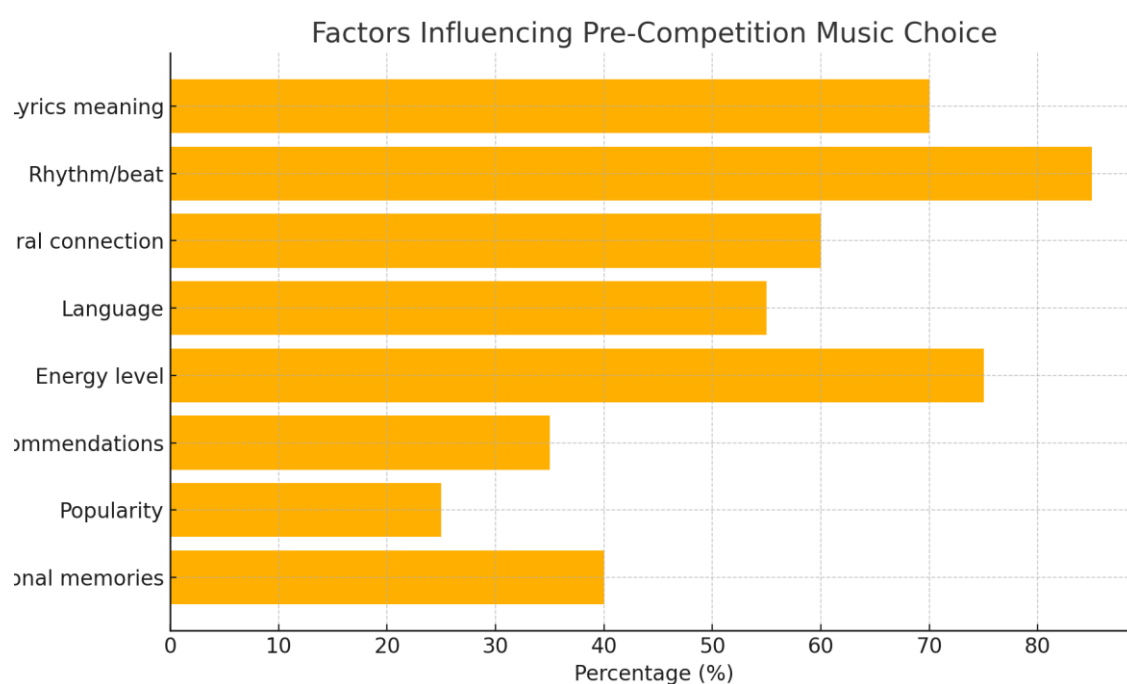
The bar chart shows the combined percentages of athletes who agree or strongly agree with various psychological effects of music before competition. Music's ability to increase motivation ranks highest, with 80% of athletes affirming this effect. This is followed closely by music's role in regulating emotional state (75%) and enhancing confidence through familiar music (72%). Additionally, 70% agree that music helps reduce anxiety, and a similar proportion believe it aids in better focus. Slightly fewer athletes, around 69%, feel that music blocks distractions, while the lowest endorsement, though still a majority at 59%, is for music's role in helping athletes get "in the zone." Overall, the data reflects a strong consensus on the positive psychological impact of music among athletes.



Importance of Listening to Nigerian Cultural Music

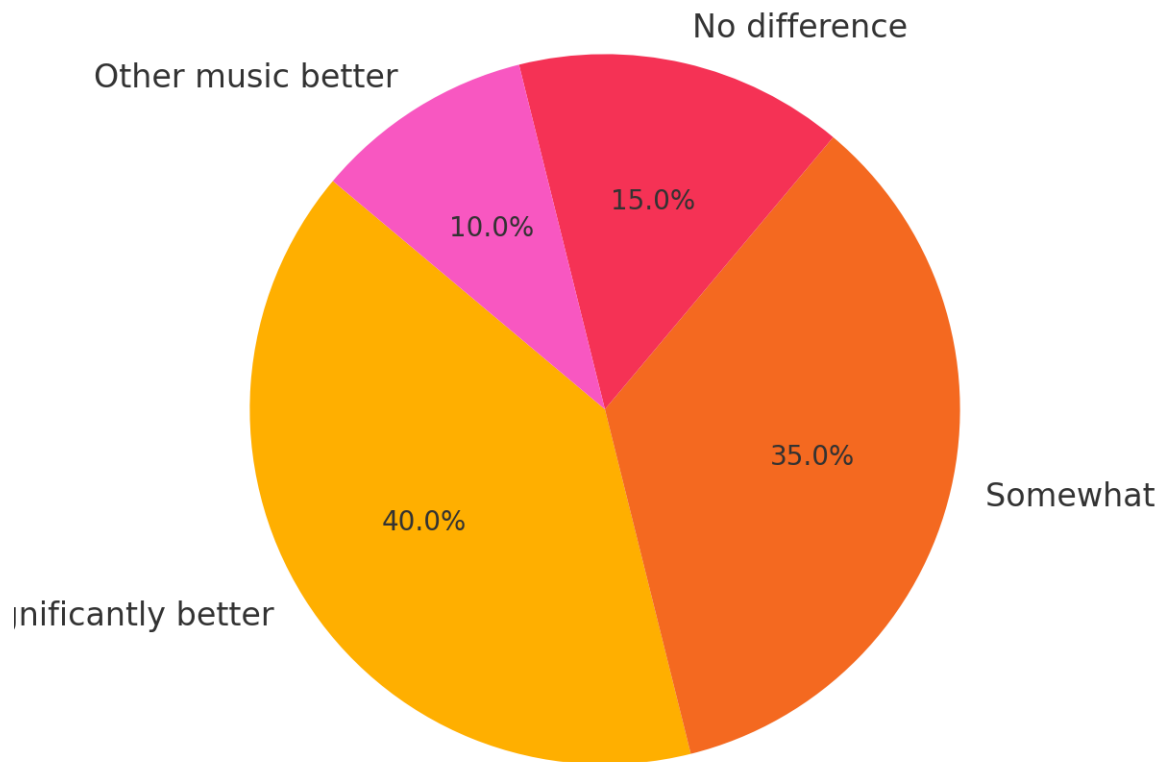


The Importance of Listening to Nigerian Cultural Music chart reveals that a combined 75% of athletes consider it either very important (45%) or important (30%) to include music reflecting their Nigerian cultural heritage in their mental preparation. This strong preference highlights the deep cultural connection athletes feel with indigenous music as a meaningful motivational and emotional tool.



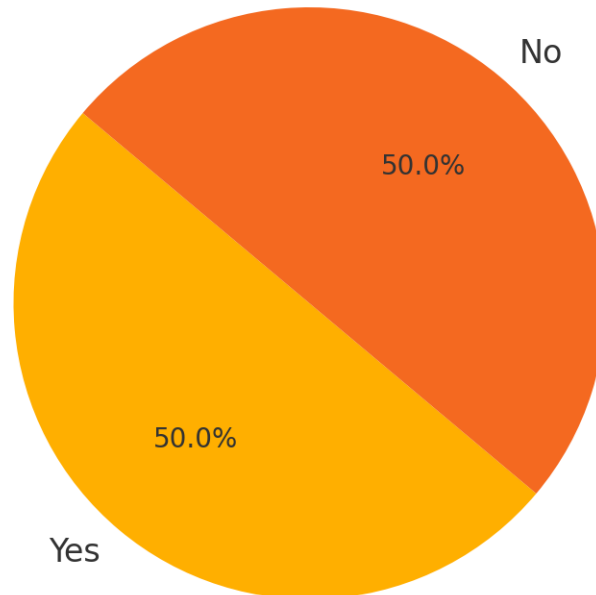
In the Factors Influencing Pre-Competition Music Choice chart, rhythm/beat (85%) and energy level (75%) stand out as the most influential factors, emphasizing that athletes prioritize the physical and emotional stimulation music provides. Lyrics meaning (70%) and cultural or ethnic connection (60%) are also key, indicating that the content and cultural relevance of the music significantly shape their choices. External influences like recommendations from coaches or peers (35%) and music popularity (25%) play lesser roles compared to personal and cultural factors.

Effectiveness of Traditional Nigerian Music vs. Non-Nigerian



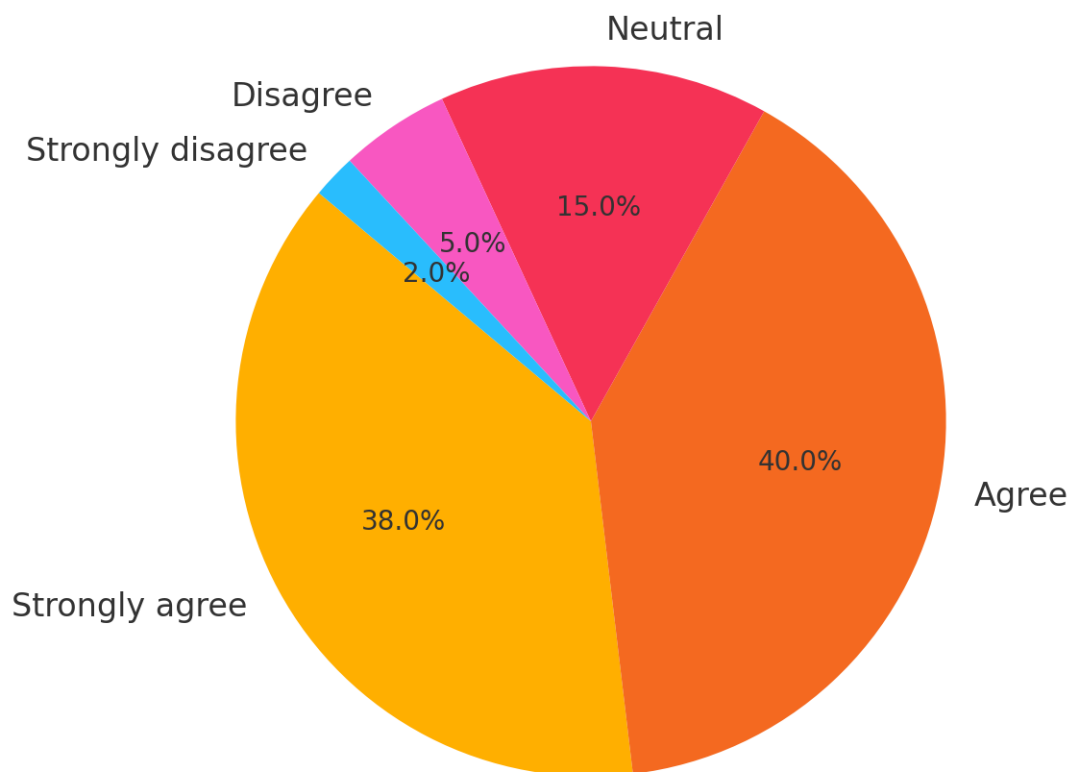
The Effectiveness of Traditional Nigerian Music vs. Non-Nigerian Music chart shows that 75% of athletes feel traditional Nigerian music genres help them mentally prepare better than non-Nigerian music, with 40% expressing strong conviction. This demonstrates the unique psychological and cultural value that indigenous music holds for Nigerian athletes in optimizing their mental readiness.

Use of Music in Team Rituals



From the Use of Music in Team Rituals chart, it is clear that music serves a social as well as an individual function, with half of the athletes reporting that music is incorporated into team rituals or group mental preparation. This underscores music's role in fostering team cohesion and shared motivation in addition to personal mental preparation.

Belief that Cultural Music Enhances Performance



Finally, the Belief that Cultural Music Enhances Performance chart indicates that a majority of athletes (78%) strongly agree or agree that integrating Nigerian cultural music in mental preparation contributes to improved athletic performance. This widespread belief supports the potential of culturally tailored music interventions to enhance both psychological readiness and competitive outcomes.

Discussion

The present findings emphasize the significant role music plays in the mental preparation routines of Nigerian athletes, with 85% of athletes affirming its use before competition. This aligns with extensive global literature that recognizes music as a potent psychological tool for enhancing mood regulation, motivation, and focus in sport contexts (Karageorghis & Priest, 2012; Terry et al., 2020). The fact that 55% of athletes listen to music every time and 25%

often do so, indicates that music is an integral and habitual part of their preparation. This supports previous research by Baltzell and Akhtar (2014), who found that music serves as a consistent stimulus that athletes rely on for mental readiness and achieving a state of flow.

When it comes to genre preference, Afrobeats stands out with 70% of athletes favoring it, reflecting its cultural resonance and rhythmic patterns that have been shown to elevate physiological arousal and emotional engagement (Adeyemi & Onifade, 2023). Additionally, 50% of athletes prefer gospel music, and 40% lean towards hip-hop/rap, suggesting that athletes not only seek music for its rhythm but also for the motivational and empowering lyrical content that aligns with key psychological constructs in sport (Karageorghis & Terry, 2022). The presence of traditional Nigerian genres such as Fuji and Juju corroborates findings by Ibekwe (2021), who emphasized the role of indigenous music in fostering cultural identity, emotional connection, and heightened mental readiness.

The language of lyrics further illustrates the interplay between global and local influences. The fact that 60% of athletes prefer English lyrics, alongside 45% choosing Yoruba and 30% selecting Pidgin English, shows that language plays a crucial role in enhancing the emotional salience of music. Chen et al. (2021) highlight the importance of cultural relevance in music's psychological impact, which is reflected in the preference for music in native languages. Music in local languages likely facilitates autobiographical memory recall and reinforces cultural identity, which is crucial for emotional regulation and confidence (Gomez & Danuser, 2023).

In terms of duration, the majority of athletes (50%) listen to music for 15 to 30 minutes before a competition, a period that aligns with typical pre-competition warm-ups. This duration is optimal for psychological and physiological arousal without causing overstimulation or fatigue, as suggested by Hutchinson et al. (2014). This balance is crucial for maintaining attentional focus and ensuring athletes are energized and prepared for peak performance (Parker et al., 2021).

The findings in Section D further emphasize the importance of cultural and socio-musical factors in shaping athletes' pre-competition rituals. A substantial 75% of athletes reported that listening to Nigerian cultural music is important during their mental preparation. This finding is consistent with Adeyemi and Onifade's (2023) argument for the integration of indigenous cultural elements in sport psychology interventions, particularly in diverse

cultural contexts like Nigeria (Ekwueme, 2022). The role of music in reinforcing cultural identity likely contributes to greater psychological resilience, emotional grounding, and a sense of belonging.

The primary factors influencing music choice—rhythm/beat (85%) and energy level (75%)—reflect the psychophysiological impact music has on athletes' motivation and arousal regulation (Karageorghis & Terry, 2022). These findings are supported by Karageorghis et al. (2018), who emphasized that rhythm facilitates motor synchronization, improving movement efficiency and timing. Additionally, 75% of athletes believe that traditional Nigerian music is more effective than non-Nigerian music for mental preparation, echoing findings by Chen et al. (2021) that culturally relevant music generates stronger emotional and motivational responses, enhancing mental toughness and competitive confidence.

Half of the athletes reported using music as part of team rituals, which underscores the social function of music in sport. This is consistent with Hanna's (1987) historical perspective on music's communal role in athletic events, where group cohesion and synchronized arousal are enhanced by shared music experiences. Socially embedded music practices can amplify individual psychological effects, as music acts as a tool for fostering emotional contagion within teams, leading to heightened collective motivation and focus (Bishop et al., 2019).

Finally, the overwhelming belief (78%) that Nigerian cultural music enhances athletic performance supports the practical and perceived benefits of culturally tailored music interventions. This mirrors the calls by Jones et al. (2023) and Adeyemi and Onifade (2023) for sport psychologists to develop personalized, culture-sensitive mental preparation strategies that integrate indigenous music traditions alongside contemporary psychological approaches.

Conclusion

This study highlights the vital role music plays in the pre-competition mental preparation of Nigerian athletes, deeply intertwined with cultural identity and personal preferences. The strong preference for indigenous genres like Afrobeat, Fuji, and Juju, alongside significant influences of language and rhythm, underscores the importance of culturally relevant music in enhancing motivation, emotional regulation, focus, and confidence. The findings support

integrating culturally sensitive music-based interventions into sport psychology practices to optimize athletes' psychological readiness and performance. Recognizing and leveraging the unique socio-musical context of Nigerian athletes can foster not only competitive success but also holistic well-being, affirming music as a powerful tool for mental preparation in Nigerian sports.

Recommendations

The researcher made the following recommendations based on the findings:

1. Coaches and sport psychologists should incorporate indigenous Nigerian music genres like Afrobeat, Fuji, and Juju into athletes' mental preparation routines to enhance motivation, emotional regulation, and cultural connectedness.
2. Encourage athletes to select music that aligns with their personal and cultural preferences, focusing on rhythm, energy level, and lyrical meaning, to maximize psychological benefits.
3. Teams should consider creating shared music rituals using culturally significant songs to strengthen group cohesion and collective motivation before competitions.
4. Training programs for sport psychologists and coaches should include modules on cultural competence, emphasizing the importance of music as a culturally embedded psychological tool.
5. Additional studies should explore the nuanced effects of different Nigerian music genres and languages on athlete performance, including longitudinal impacts and applications in various sports.
6. Utilize accessible digital platforms and personalized playlists to ensure athletes have easy access to culturally relevant music tailored to their mental preparation needs.

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