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**EFFECT OF CALENDAR ADHERENCE ON FOOTBALL CLUB PERFORMANCE AT
NATION AND CONTINENTAL COMPETITIONS**

**OKUNDARE AYOBAMI ALADE, ODUYALE OLUTOLA & ADEKOLA RIDWAN
ADEMOLA**

**Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education,
Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye**

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EFFECT OF CALENDAR ADHERENCE ON FOOTBALL CLUB PERFORMANCE AT NATION AND CONTINENTAL COMPETITIONS

OKUNDARE AYOBAMI ALADE, ODUYALE OLUTOLA & Adekola Ridwan Ademola

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Abstract

Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL) followership is fast declining which is worrisome to football enthusiasts. It is on record that NPFL organizers have unethically failed to comply with the proposed football timetable/calendar for decades, which has been said to distort the progress and administration of football in Nigeria. It is of note that NPFL clubs have failed to win continental competitions for several years running. Based on this premise, this study assessed the importance of calendar adherence by Nigerian football clubs for the improvement of performance at national and continental competitions. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design with Four hundred and twenty (n=420) samples, selected from football stakeholders in the Nigeria Premier Football League, using a multi-stage sampling procedure. Out of the (n=420) sample selected, (n=354) questionnaires were returned valid. Two research hypotheses were tested in this study. A self-structured instrument was used for data collection which was in two parts of A and B. The A part collected demographic information of the participants, while the B part was the questionnaire used to collect data for testing the hypotheses titled Calendar Adherence Questionnaire (CAQ, $r=0.83$). Data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics, involving simple frequency count (f), percentages (%), means (\bar{x}), and standard deviation (SD) scores which were used to describe the demographic characteristics of the respondents while Multiple Regression Analysis (MRA) were used to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 significance. The result shows a non-significant outcome ($F = 1.369, p > 0.05$), ($F = .020, p > 0.05$). The result implies that adherence to football season calendar does significance contribute to the club performance at both national and continental competitions respectively. The results of this study revealed that there is relationship between calendar adherence and football club performance at national and continental competitions despite the low-level significance. The study recommended that there is an urgent need for the Interim Management Committee to develop a calendar/timetable for NPFL that will be at variance with CAF/FIFA standards to improve NPFL club's performance at national and continental competitions.

Introduction

Football is the most recognized and followed sport by Nigerians. The country is blessed with young talents who have an interest in becoming football superstars, however many of these future stars are unable to achieve their innate potentials may be due to the maladministration of Nigeria football administrators. Effective football administration is a significant determinant of positive achievement in football organizations as seen in developed countries where football administration is effectively managed.

Federation of International Football Association (FIFA) is the world organizing body of football activities, while the Confederation of Africa Football (CAF) coordinates and manages the affairs of football in Africa continent, also Nigeria Football Federation (NFF) is the constituted body of the mandate to steer the football administration in Nigeria. Over the years, the Nigeria Football Leagues have been flawed with different irregularities such as lack of allocations of funds, funds mismanagement, inconsistency of calendar/timetable, changes in the timetable and poor adherence to the released plan. Also, for the past few years, there has been inconsistency in the commencement of the Nigeria Professional Football League (NPFL). On many occasions, the league's next season will not commence until 4 to 5 months after the stoppage of the previous season instead of two months after the last league, which is the global best practice that allows football clubs to prepare adequately for next season and also gives football players enough time to rest and regain their strength during vacations. It is a practice by NPFL administrators to make promises on the commencement date of the annual league events, which they often find difficult to keep. For instance, the 2018/2019 Nigeria Professional Football League season started on the 13th of January 2019, While the 2019/2020 NPFL season commenced on the 3rd of November 2019 but was canceled in July 2020 due to the effects of the [COVID-19 pandemic](#) lockdown.

The 2020/2021 season started on the 27th of December 2020 after much delay and concluded on the 5th of August 2021. Lastly, the 2021/2022 season began on 17 December 2021 and was concluded on 17th of July 2022. Furthermore, the 2022/2023 NPFL commenced in January 2023 and ended in May 2023 it was played in an abridged league format to enable the Nigeria Football Federation to catch up with the Confederation of Africa Football calendar and also to give enough room for the participating clubs at continental competitions to give enough time for adequate preparation for the continental football. The 2023/2024 football season was originally planned to kick start on August 26th, 2023 and was later shifted to September 9th, 2023 also it was further shifted to September 30th, 2023. The above calendar revealed that NPFL administrators cannot strictly adhere to promises made on the timetable, leading to several inconsistencies in the commencement of NPFL. Team Forum Sport, (2024) ranked Morocco Botola Pro League as the best league in Africa with 64.5 points and ranked Nigeria Premier Football League sixth best in Africa with 58.9 points, the methodology used for this rating was the value of each league and how football clubs from each league progresses at continental competitions from group stage to final. Similarly, Al-Ahly Football Club (FC) of Egypt best football club in Africa while Remo Stars FC is ranked the best football club in Nigeria staying in the twenty-seventh position in Africa.

The NPFL league faces seasonal challenges usually occasioned by unresolved issues that require the attention of stakeholders. According to Iwuala (2014), participating in any sport demands that people, especially fans and players, adhere to the standards and rules set by the organizing body. There is hardly any football season that does not end without some disputes or confrontations by players, football clubs,

and match officials. There are components of successful league administration which include: prompt and consistent timetable/calendar, Adequate welfare packages, constant paying of salaries, prompt settlement of sign-on-fees, adequate security on match venues, licensing of football clubs, adequate handling of players transfer, provision of excellent and adequate infrastructure stadia, good live media coverage, and high-quality officiating (Nnamdi, 2016). Also, Fasan (2009) and Iwuala (2016) observed that the cause of low productivity in professional football club sides in Nigeria is due to administrative challenges and that these challenges include: managerial skills attainment, poor remuneration, low morale, and finance/funding and obsolete skills, all these issues are most likely to lead to underperformance of the Nigeria football clubs. Domestic football club's performance will have a significant impact national team's performance. The poor performance of Nigeria Football Clubs at continental competitions could be traced to inconsistency in the administration of Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL) and inability to comply with the proposed timetable/calendar, most seasons when NPFL is yet to commence majority of other African countries usually will have commenced their football leagues and this commonly give other Africa football clubs an edge over Nigeria football clubs at continental competitions.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL) followership is fast declining which is worrisome to football enthusiasts. It is on record that NPFL organizers have unethically failed to comply with the proposed football timetable/calendar for decades, which in itself has been said to distort the progress and administration of football in Nigeria. It is of note that NPFL clubs have failed to win continental competitions for several years running. The level of performance of Nigerian football clubs in continental football competitions keeps declining. Despite their yearly representation, the majority of Nigeria football clubs failed to go beyond the group stages at continental competitions, as a result of lack of funds, poor remuneration, inconsistency in the calendar, lack of proper planning, low morale and obsolete administrative skills which are predominantly due to administrative incompetence. Regrettably, for the past nineteen years, no football club in Nigeria has been able to win a continental club cup competition. Based on this premise, this study assessed the importance of calendar adherence by Nigerian football clubs for the improvement of performance at national and continental competitions.

Objective of the Study

This study investigated the effect of calendar adherence on Nigeria Professional Football League club's performance at National and Continental competitions. Therefore, the specific objectives of the study include:

1. To investigate issues involving the calendar and its adherence by IMC and football clubs.

2. To investigate challenges of inconsistency and underperformance of Nigerian football clubs at national and continental competitions.

Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses were tested in this study:

1. Calendar adherence by the IMC and football clubs in Nigeria will not significantly determine the clubs' performance at national competitions.
2. Calendar adherence by the IMC and football clubs in Nigeria will not significantly determine the clubs' performance at continental competitions.

Literature Review

Nigeria has two major domestic competitions at the highest level, namely the Nigeria Premier Football League and Nigeria Confederation Cup. The Nigerian Premier Football League (NPFL) is the highest level of club football in the Nigerian football league system and was founded in 1972. It is organized by the Interim Management Committee. It was formerly known as Nigeria Professional League Football (NPFL) between 2013 to 2023. However, many problems are challenging the NPFL, and at the root of it all is the poor organization of the league. Specifically, the calendar, the poor and sometimes non-existent structure of the clubs, and the lack of professionalism with players' contracts. Apart from various ethnicity-related issues that threaten visiting clubs, lopsided home team victories and bad officiating are also a major source of dispute between clubs in Nigeria and contribute to their declining performance at competitions (Okolie-Osemene & Okoh 2014). Furthermore, according to Iwuala (2014), participating in any sport demands that people, especially fans and players, adhere to the standards and rules set by the organizing body. The literature reviewed showed that there is maladministration in Nigeria's football, and there is a need for urgent reforms in Nigeria's football system. The roles of football administrators cannot be overstretched in the management of Nigerian football.

Methodology

This was carried out under the following sub-headings:

Research Design: The descriptive survey research method was adopted for the study the population

Research Population: The target population for this study comprises all football stakeholders (Coaches, Club Officials, Football Administrators, Football Players, Football Fans, and Football Spectators) in the Nigeria Premier Football League.

Sample and Sampling Technique

Four hundred and twenty (420) football stakeholders were selected in this study using multi-stage sampling techniques.

Research Instrument: A self-structured questionnaire was used as an instrument to elicit information from the respondents on the effect of calendar adherence on football club performance at national and continental competitions.

Validity of Research Instrument: The instrument was validated by experts and scholars from the field of physical and health educational.

Reliability of Research Instrument: The reliability index of 0.83 (83%) was attained using test–re–test method.

Procedure for Data Collection: The questionnaires were distributed and retrieved via trained research assistants.

Method of Data Analysis: Descriptive statistics involving simple frequencies (f), percentages (%), means (\bar{x}), and standard deviation (SD) scores were used to describe the characteristics of the samples while Multiple Regression Analysis (MRA) at the 0.05 level of significance were used to test the research hypotheses.

Result

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the study Participants (N = 420)

Parameters	Frequency(f)	Percentage (%)
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	322	91.0
Female	32	9.0
Total	354	100
<i>Age Group</i>		
13-20 years	43	12.1
21-30	138	39.0
31-40	85	24.0
41 years and above	88	24.9
Total	354	100
<i>Tribe</i>		
Yoruba	183	51.7
Igbo	86	24.3
Hausa	56	15.8
Others	29	8.2
Total	354	100
<i>Marital Status</i>		
Single	178	50.3
Married	172	48.6
Divorced	4	1.1
Total	354	100
<i>Religion</i>		
Islam	161	48.5
Christian	186	52.5
Traditional	7	2.0
Total	354	100
<i>Education</i>		
Primary	3	0.8
Secondary	168	47.5

Tertiary	183	51.7
Total	354	100

Source: Field Survey; 2023

Hypothesis 1

Calendar adherence by the IMC and football clubs in Nigeria will not significantly determine the clubs' performance at national competitions.

Table 2: Regression of Adherence to Calendar on Clubs' Performance at National Competitions

Multiple R = 0.560					
Multiple R² = 0.313					
Adjusted R² = 0.084					
Std. Error of the Estimate = 48.06					
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig. of F
Regression	3162.158	1	3162.158	1.369	.327
Residual	6931.042	3	2310.347		
Total	10093.200	4			

* Indicate significant F at $\alpha = .05$

Table 2 shows the result of the regression of the predictor variable (calendar adherence) on NPFL clubs' performance at national competitions. The result shows a non-significant outcome ($F = 1.369$, $p > 0.05$). This implies that adherence to the football season calendar by the IMC and football clubs does not significantly contribute to the variance in the performance of the clubs at national competitions in Nigeria. The result shows a multiple correlation coefficient of 0.560 and R^2 value of 0.313 thus showing that the predictor variable accounted for 31.3% of the variance in the dependent variable (performance of NPFL clubs) at national competitions. As a result, the null hypothesis 3 is retained. Thus, there is no significant contribution of the predictor variable (calendar adherence) by the IMC and football clubs in the NPFL to the performance of the clubs at national competitions, though, it accounted for about 31% of the variance in the dependent variable. That is, calendar adherence does not significantly determine the performance of the clubs at national competitions.

Hypothesis 2

Calendar adherence by the IMC and football clubs in Nigeria will not significantly determine the clubs' performance at continental competitions.

Table 3: Regression of Adherence to Calendar on Clubs' Performance at Continental Competitions

Multiple R = 0.082
Multiple R² = 0.007
Adjusted R² = -0.324
Std. Error of the Estimate = 16.68

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig. of F
Regression	5.634	1	5.634	0.020	.896
Residual	835.566	3	278.522		
Total	841.200	4			

Table 3 shows the result of the regression of the predictor variable (calendar adherence) on NPFL clubs' performance at continental competitions. The result shows a non-significant outcome ($F = .020$, $p > 0.05$). This implies that adherence to the football season calendar by the IMC and football clubs does not significantly contribute to the variance in the performance of the clubs at continental competitions. The result shows a multiple correlation coefficient of 0.082 and R^2 value of 0.007 thus showing that the predictor variable accounted for 0.7% of the variance in the dependent variable (performance of NPFL clubs) at continental competitions. As a result, the null hypothesis 4 is retained. Thus, there is no significant contribution of the predictor variable (calendar adherence) by the IMC and football clubs to the performance of the clubs at continental competitions, accounting for less than 1% of the variance in the dependent variable. That is, calendar adherence does not significantly determine the performance of the clubs at continental competitions.

Discussion of the findings

The result of this study indicated that the league organizers have formed the habit of delaying and postponing the commencement of the league from season to season for several reasons. NPFL stakeholders strongly believe that NPFL organizers (i.e. LMC/IMC) do not adhere to football season calendars. The findings of this study revealed that some football administrators in Africa lack the required football administrative skills and knowledge. This submission is in line with the

work of Rukuni and Groenink (2010) who opined that most of the people employed in football in Africa are clients who are placed there in most cases without any proper qualifications or skills to perform the task. Additionally, the finding of this study is in line with the submission of Okolie-Osemene and Okoh (2014), who reported that one of the problems that the league has is that of inconsistency in calendar/timing, especially in terms of uniformity in the commencement of every football season, due to poor preparation, unresolved issues among football stakeholders, Irregularities in disputes management, nepotism, and primordial sentiments by the league organizers. Similarly, the study found that calendar adherence does not significantly determine the performance of the clubs at national competitions. The study discovered that even though there was inconsistency in the commencement of NPFL season the clubs still performed better after the commencement of the league. The study further revealed that there are other factors responsible for football club's performance at national competitions such as adherence to standard rules and regulations as well as adequate and well-structured sporting equipment and facilities. This finding of this study is also in agreement with the submission of Ezomoh & Okundare (2020) who opine that well-structured sports infrastructure equipped with adequate sporting equipment and facilities will aid and promote sports participation. Similarly, the study agrees with the submission of Mahaputra (2021) who stated that sports infrastructure plays an important role in developing interest in sports, increasing participation, and helping to create an environment that supports physical activity in sports participation. Finally, the finding of this study is in line with the work of Alla *et al.* (2015), who noted that football coaches' expertise is important in the development of football, specifically grassroots trained coaches in Nigeria. Coaches' competency and experience are important in football, especially high-performance football.

Conclusion

The importance of calendar adherence to the progress and development of the Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL) cannot be over-emphasized. One of the challenges facing the NPFL is the inconsistency of the calendar, which is a variance with the CAF calendar, this can be noticed in the NPFL club's performance at continental competitions. NPFL organizers should change their inconsistency and delay of NPFL season approach for the betterment of Nigeria football. Evidence from this study revealed the need for an upgrade of NPFL to CAF standard especially in timetable/calendar.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following were recommended.

1. There is an urgent need for interim management committee to develop a calendar/timetable for NPFL that will not be at variance with CAF/FIFA standards.
2. There should be training and retraining among football administrators and club officials in NPFL to give room for updates in knowledge about innovations and technology in football administration.
3. IMC should ensure proper punishment is put in place and enforced on football clubs found guilty of violating or breaching the code and conduct of NPFL to serve as a form of deterrent and caution to other football clubs.

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